

# Revolution Delayed? A study on the impact of Open Data on Corruption

Submitted on 08 Sep 2015 by Lorenzo Segato

The TACOD project has analysed more than a hundred judicial cases of corruption, and the most important ODI on transparency and accountability in four EU Countries. The results, presented in the report "REVOLUTION DELAYED", say that an impact of OD on prevention and detection of corruption has yet to come.

Corruption remains one of the biggest challenges for all societies, as it puts public money into private pockets, and cheats on market rules, becoming every day more sophisticated, organised, and transnational.

To date, no effective anti-corruption strategy exists, and increasing transparency is argued to be “the best way to fight corruption”. European Countries are moving to levels of transparency inconceivable until recent years, with significant differences in the legal frameworks, the political commitment, the public investments, and the civic engagement between Countries.

European citizens have limited rights to openness (proactive data disclosure), since existing Open Data provisions are driven by the judgement and discretion of public authorities themselves. Furthermore, public bodies cannot enforce openness on non-compliant bodies or audit and review data management policies.

The civil society and its organisations must play a role in monitoring public expenditures, but Open Data demand is largely immature, driven by small, active, and engaged communities of expert developers that play a leading propelling role, not only asking the opening of quality data, but also in re-using and combining it. The interest in Open Data for anti-corruption by law enforcement agencies, investigative journalists, citizens, and private sector, is in general scarce.

The number of Open Data Initiatives is growing, but the research has found no evident impact on detecting corruption, despite their potential as tools for flagging grey or suspicious areas, in particular in the initiatives monitoring local administrations. There are no Open Data initiatives that report corruption re-using Open Data.

The report and a concept map are available for download (see the PDF at the bottom of this post). Country reports for Austria, Italy, Spain, and United Kingdom can be asked at [info@rissc.it](mailto:info@rissc.it)

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The logo for TACOD, with 'TACOD' in white and 'OD' in a yellow circle.

# REVOLUTION DELAYED

THE IMPACT OF OPEN DATA  
ON THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

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The impact of Open Data in revealing misbehaviours has been assessed using a selection of 26 cases of alleged corruption, conflicts of interest or perceived misuse of power and public funds, insider fraud, and lobbying in four EU Countries. The most frequent forms of corruption detected are conflict of interests or misuse of public funds (54%), followed by bribery in the 42% of cases, insider fraud (15%) and lobbying in the 8% of cases. In most of the cases, law enforcement agents (42%) and investigative journalists (31%) have played a leading role in the disclosure of illegal activities, followed by citizens (15%), Civil Society Organisations (8%), and private companies (4%). Open Data was used as primary source of information in 12% of the cases, but Public Sector information was relevant in half of the cases.

No one has been convicted for corruption on the basis of Open Data, and no stolen assets have been recovered on the basis of Open Data.

Causes can be found in the nature of crime, the information disclosed, and the analytical skills necessary to detect corruption. To date, there is no robust methodology to measure the impact of openness on the prevention of corruption.

According to the information collected, the contribution that Open Data has made to tackling corruption differs

dramatically when considering whether the corrupt behaviour is illegal or not, but seems to date very limited. The project has identified those datasets that should be part of an “early warning information system” of various forms of corruption, but Open Data reuse requires other sources of information and analytical skills.

There are a lot of promising aspects: access of Open Data facilitates civic scrutiny, reduces information asymmetry on which corruption practices may be grounded, increases political commitment, public sector’s accountability and behavioural change, facilitate comparability of public sector performances, and contributes to shift in participatory mechanisms.

The main drivers to unlock the potential of Open Data are: the opening of data on beneficial owners and register of interests, supported by adequate right of information - on the supply side, and the growth of civic engagement, open data communities and digital skills by anti-corruption institutions on the demand side.

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 [TACOD REPORT](#)

 [2015 TACOD MAP.pdf](#)