



Anti-Corruption from the Grassroots in National and Transnational Settings: Imaginaries, Technologies and Outcomes

BIT-ACT Workshop – 12-14 December 2023

12th December, 15:00 – 16:00

Digital Technologies and Anti-Corruption from the Grassroots

Prof. Alice Mattoni, BIT-ACT Principal Investigator, University of Bologna

Abstract: This talk presents the concept of anti-corruption technologies as an heuristic to understand how digital media intertwine with the struggle against corruption in different contexts worldwide. Drawing on several examples of anti-corruption activism, it highlights how grassroots movements employ digital technologies to promote integrity. The talk proposes a typology of anti-corruption technologies, explores their potential, and examines the challenges civil society organisations face when engaging with them. It also discusses the profound implications that anti-corruption technologies have for democracy and civic engagement, highlighting the democratic ideals they embody and their transformative role in redefining citizenship while promoting active societal participation.

12th December, 16:30 – 17:30

Doing Fieldwork in Sensitive Contexts and Situations

Prof. Hasan Ashraf, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University

Abstract: *Can you fight someone else's fight?* – asks Sumi Akter, a coworker at Asha Garments wherein I conducted six-month long shopfloor ethnography in Dhaka. Sumi's question since 2010 has been shaping the contours of what has become 'sustained ethnographic research' (Prentice 2023) for me, how to conduct fieldwork in extremely sensitive sites that is also a home, and how/what to write about the situations entangled in 'deep state' and more. In this talk, I reflect on these concerns based on my research in Bangladesh from the past 15 years.





13th December, 9:00 – 10:00

Varieties of Anti-Corruption Perceptions and Democratic Imaginaries

Anwasha Chakraborty, University of Bologna

Oksana Huss, Anti-corruption research and education centre, Ukraine

Abstract: In the past decades, multiple grassroots actors across the world have addressed the issue of corruption to mobilize knowledge and action on this global problem. Research on corruption has yet to tap into the vast potential of these grassroots civic engagement initiatives that can redefine the field of (anti)corruption studies through new concepts, categories, and analytical tools. In this presentation, we delve into two key closely interlinked categories of anti-corruption and democracy, and engage with the diverse conceptualisations and imaginaries that evolve when considering bottom-up initiatives and their grassroots lenses. Going significantly beyond the traditional (canonical) definitions of corruption, we find grassroots initiatives rooting their understanding of corruption and therefore anti-corruption in the socio-cultural milieu in which they operate. We also find that technology and data-related discourses and practices are crucial in imagining and practising anti-corruption action, which for most of the initiatives under review, is monitoring. Finally, we note how most (if not all) of the studied initiatives see anti-corruption action as strengthening democracy and civic participation, and to this end, they use a wide spectrum of technologies and support open-data practices to communicate a wide range of issues of public interest to their citizens.

13th December, 10:00 – 11:00

Frontiers in Studying (Anti)Corruption and Integrity

Prof. Paul Heywood, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham

Abstract: Recent research on corruption has highlighted that we need to move away from top-down technical solutions and instead focus on feasible, contextually specific and problem-led approaches that are politically informed. This means challenging the status quo, as well as focusing on prioritisation and sustainability, whilst recognising the limits of our capacity to eliminate corruption.





13th December, 11:30 – 12:30

Decoding Outcomes (and Relationships) of Anti-Corruption Initiatives

Alice Fubini, University of Bologna

Fernanda Odilla Vasconcellos De Figueiredo, University of Bologna

Abstract: This panel focuses on empirical findings regarding the outcomes of anti-corruption initiatives under analysis by the BIT-ACT project, considering their broader contexts and relationships with other actors, such as peer activists, the media, and state actors. We aim to explore the goals of these initiatives and their expected and unexpected consequences in various domains, attempting to unpack and go beyond what many participants simply define as “success” and “failure.” Overall, we observed outcomes linked to a high level of dependency on the state, as many initiatives depend on public data for conducting monitoring activities, and on state action, such as (but not limited to) investigations into wrongdoings and the punishment of offenders, to follow up on their work of receiving reports and exposing corruption. The institutionalization of certain anti-corruption technologies, which have become part of the government's portfolio, has also emerged as a topic from the data, along with the perennial issue of sustainability. We try to understand why and how institutionalization differs from cooptation and which are its consequences for the initiatives studied. Additionally, we delve into the dilemmas in determining the best metrics to measure the impact of their initiatives and technologies in the fight against corruption.

13th December, 14:00 – 15:00

Frontiers in Researching Social Movements' Outcomes

Prof. Katrin Uba, Department of Government, Uppsala University

Abstract: The talk focuses on recent methodological and empirical advancements in social movement outcomes research, starting from the notion that no single recipe for success exists. Emphasizing the complexities in establishing causal links between activism and outcomes, it underscores the necessity of a robust theoretical foundation, meticulous research design, and rigorous empirical analysis. The potential outcomes of a social movement ranges from altering activist behaviour and public attitudes to influencing political agendas, legislation, or entire political systems. The presentation highlights the significance of interdisciplinary collaboration for refining methodologies and evolving theories in the study of collective action outcomes within the broader academic context.





13th December, 15:00 – 16:00

The Transnational Diffusion of Anti-Corruption Initiatives

Alessandra Lo Piccolo, University of Bologna

Abstract: While grassroots anti-corruption initiatives have increasingly captured the attention of scholars, their transnational diffusion remains a relatively unexplored area of investigation. To date, the focus has predominantly been on case studies and comparative designs, overshadowing a deeper exploration into how and why specific anti-corruption initiatives manage to traverse borders, either succeeding or failing to adapt to diverse contexts. The presentation seeks to address this gap by concentrating on the transnational diffusion of anti-corruption initiatives through insights from the cases of Transparency International, GlobaLeaks, and I Paid a Bribe. Through an examination of these cases, we aim to shed light on the exogenous and endogenous factors that facilitate or hinder the spread of anti-corruption initiatives and influence their sustainability over time. The discussion will delve into the intricate relationship between anti-corruption efforts, technology, and collective action, advocating for a situated approach that considers context-specific factors in the study of the diffusion of anti-corruption initiatives.

13th December, 16:30 – 17:30

Frontiers in Studying Social Movement Repression

Prof. Jennifer Earl, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of Delaware

Abstract: Social movement repression has been traditionally understood as a component on political opportunities within the political process tradition of studying social movements. In this talk, Professor Earl outlines a new layered model of political control that dramatically expands what falls within the scope of repression research and inverts the conceptual relationship between repression and political opportunities. In doing so, Earl shows that a wide variety of political and social characteristics can be thought of as related to repression and political control, including the level and structure of corruption in a government or society.





14th December, 11:00 – 12:00

Community Radio as Development Radio: A critical analysis of third-sector radio in South Asia

Prof. Vinod Pavarala, Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad

Abstract: In this presentation, I will offer a critical examination of the so-called third-sector radio (public and private radios being the other two) in South Asia. The evolution and growth of radio in the region, from about the 1920s during the colonial period, has been quite firmly embedded in a development paradigm. Community radio, whose history is about 20 years old in the subcontinent, has been predicated upon the development and social change imperative. This framework has not only defined community radio in this part of the world but also inhibited its evolution into a truly alternative medium based on communication rights. Using examples, primarily, from India and Bangladesh, and, secondarily, from Sri Lanka and Bhutan, we argue that both the state and civil society have been complicitous in framing community radio within a post-World War II discourse of development communication. While grassroots media initiatives such as community radio emerged globally as a challenge to the dominant paradigm of linear, top-down communication from the elites to the marginalized, in South Asia, even as the rhetoric is grafted on to a participatory communication perspective, community radio has been co-opted into an anodyne model of 'development radio'. There are thus limits to the extent to which these alternative/community media initiatives can assume a politically more engaged role on behalf of citizens to address issues of governance, state accountability, and corruption

14th December, 12:00 – 13:00

Political Institutions and Openness to Bottom-Up Inputs

Prof. Daniel Buquet, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de la Republica de Uruguay

Abstract: In Latin America political corruption is a pervasive practice. A way to increase transparency, reduce corruption, and improve institutional trust, is the enactment of access to information laws, used by specific groups such as journalists and NGO's with specific concerns. High levels of electoral competition, in a context of institutional distrust, favor the adoption of transparency laws, because it allows politicians to appear more reliable and improve their reputation. But transparency laws, contrary to expectations, could be associated with an increase in the perception of corruption since political competition stimulates the use of corruption accusations against electoral contenders.

