

## Forms of the corruption phenomenon in Greek local government: A theoretical approach

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 27(02), 237-249

Publication history: Received on 25 June 2025; revised on 02 August 2025; accepted on 04 August 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.27.2.2858>

### Abstract

This article, constitutes the first scholarly attempt to examine the institutional totality of a local government organization, in relation to the phenomenon of corruption and its forms, within the specific national context of Greece. It is addressed to public officials, elected representatives and researchers, without aiming to reproduce yet, another journalistic-style descriptive account of the forms of corruption and their consequences for Greek local authorities. The primary objective of the article, is to initiate the development among local government officials, elected leaders and prospective scholars of the necessary conditions for cultivating a personal "field perception" regarding the understanding and management of the forms of corruption affecting Greek municipalities. Such understanding and management are essential for strengthening their commitment to a framework of total quality management within the domain of Greek local governance.

**Keywords:** Corruption Phenomenon; Forms of Corruption; Greek Municipality; Ideotype of Corruption; Code of Corruption Forms; Homo Corruptus

### 1. Introduction

The popularity of the term "corruption" is indisputable. Many people use the term and even more invoke it in pursuit of personal or political gain. However, few truly understand what it refers to and even fewer grasp, what it scientifically encompasses. The dominant perception regarding the phenomenon of corruption and its various forms is that it is something inherently "bad," "legally punishable" and "socially unacceptable." But what is really going on? What perceptions have taken root globally about what corruption actually means? Who has shaped these perceptions? Why are people aware of only certain forms of the phenomenon? Why does public and academic interest tend to focus almost exclusively on particular manifestations (bribery or fraud)? And what are the relevant scientific responses to these questions?

Within this framework of inquiry, a critical question arises specifically for local government organizations in Greece: why should a local government executive whether elected or permanent have a concrete understanding of the phenomenon of corruption and its various forms? Why is it necessary to know, which forms of corruption are generated, instrumentalized, developed and deployed within the Greek local authorities?

In the context of Greek local governance, the phenomenon of corruption manifests through several distinct forms: the "local-interest group corruption form," the "political corruption form," the "form of corruption associated with legal overregulation and misregulation," the "bureaucratic corruption form" and the "feudal-mayoral corruption form." [1] These are not mere by products of individual laws, personalities, procedures or regulatory gaps. Rather, they are systemic configurations of corruption that shape the overall functionality and effectiveness of local government

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authorities. These forms are closely interlinked with the broader challenges of sustainable civic engagement and the sustainable management of human resources in municipalities and regions. In this light, within the field of local governance, sustainable citizenship, as both a philosophy and a practice for an elected official, is inextricably linked to: the ability to recognize the environmental, social and economic dimensions of the physical and human made environment within one's jurisdiction, the capacity to identify and manage the forms of corruption that develop and operate within a municipality and the competence to move from problem analysis to systematic action in response to evolving challenges in the economy, society and the environment.

The initial question, why a managerial executive of a Local Government Organization (LGO) in Greece, should possess an understanding of the phenomenon of corruption and its various forms, relates to a deeply practical issue. This is especially true given that it draws upon data derived from the application of analytical constructs such as the "ideal type of corruption", the "population profile of homo corruptus" and the "corruption footprint" of each local government entity. [2] These sources yield information that is transformed into operational data, which in turn strengthen, in a scientifically grounded and effective manner, the capacity of LGO officials to address a wide range of challenges. These include: developmental, spatial and urban planning, business licensing, local agricultural, social and environmental policy-making, needs-resources-objectives balancing, civil protection and procedural simplification.

The term corruption refers to a human phenomenon comprised of a set of forms that differ from country to country in terms of their origins, dimensions and effects. [3] The phenomenon of corruption is defined as a scientific field that studies these forms, their emergence, evolution and consequences. As such, the science of corruption is based on a dynamic phenomenon, with manifestations that vary significantly across social configurations worldwide and which may exhibit chaotic behavior in terms of intentions, developments and impacts. The professional domains directly linked to this science are, on the one hand, the researcher of the phenomenon and on the other, the manager of its forms.

But what does form of corruption mean, according to the definition provided above? The term form of corruption, refers, to a specific human act which, by expressing the intention or pursuit of an individual (the homo corruptus), produces an impact within a given context of social coexistence. This definition is schematically represented by the Fundamental Equation of a Corruption Form (F.E.C.F.), expressed as: Pursuit + Act = Impact. [4] Here, impact functions as the formal criterion that allows a researcher to classify a particular human act as a form of corruption and consequently to incorporate it into what I term the Code of Corruption Forms to which this article will return in subsequent sections. Beyond the formal criterion, a substantive criterion must also be considered: namely, the central interpretive role that the researcher assigns to the constituent elements of the act (the homo corruptus, the pursuit, the act, the impact) within a specific social collectivity. The notion of "central interpretive role" underscores the fact that it is the researcher who ultimately attributes the label form of corruption to a particular human action. Thus, the researcher constitutes the third condition for the existence of the phenomenon, alongside the existence of a social coexistence and a cultural framework. [5]

A critical observation must be made at this point: an individual living in isolation has no perception of the phenomenon of corruption or its various forms. This marks the starting point, of one of the fundamental prerequisites: a form of corruption necessarily requires at least two individuals in order to emerge. However, this binary structure alone does not give rise to the phenomenon. What does this mean? If a form of corruption remains confined to a dyadic interaction, it amounts merely to a personal conflict one that does not destabilize, influence, or generate an impact upon an organized social collective. Therefore, the Fundamental Equation of a Corruption Form (F.E.C.F.) is not sufficient merely to exist in abstraction: it must develop within a civilized social unit, surpassing the limits of its dyadic origin and producing broader impact. [6]

Accordingly, there are specific and scientifically rigorous conditions that must be fulfilled for a human action to be identified as a form of corruption, to be named as such by a researcher and to be included in the Code of Corruption Forms. Three core epistemological concerns, dictate the conditions, criteria and methodology for attributing the label form of corruption to a particular human act: the issue of managing corruption forms, a responsibility ultimately borne by the same population that generated them in the first place and which will be the one to experience the consequences of such management. Secondly, the imperative to critically assess the motivations behind classifying an act as a form of corruption, avoiding conceptual pitfalls such as reducing the phenomenon to one of its manifestations. Third, the identities of impact, or what might otherwise be described as the social resonance or repercussions of each corruption form.

The case of Greece is particularly illustrative: in no legal text that employs the term corruption has the legislator begun as should be required from a scientifically grounded definition of the term or from the aforementioned prerequisites.

Each existing or potential future form of corruption given that the phenomenon is dynamic and evolves alongside the human agents who generate it belongs to a historically situated and geographically bounded reality. It is, fundamentally, a human and cultural construct specific to a given time and place.

Why then, is it so crucial, to understand the nature of the social unit the structure of coexistence within which we intend to study the forms of corruption?

Because the social relationships within that unit (such as a municipality) are the very mechanisms through which forms of corruption are produced and through which their impacts are experienced.

At the same time, we must not forget that what may appear to one researcher as a form of corruption within a particular social unit, may within a different coexistence structure elsewhere in the world be regarded instead as a cultural expression, or even as an active declaration of ethno-national or local distinctiveness. This observation highlights the importance of cultural and contextual relativism when interpreting human actions and social structures in the study of corruption.

Through the foundational definitions of *corruption* and *form of corruption*, we are introduced to the autonomous scientific field of corruption studies that is, the science grounded in the theory of the phenomenon. The core pillars of this theory include:

- The axioms of the ideal type of corruption,
- The *homo corruptus* and its population profile,
- The Code of Corruption Forms, and
- The impact assessment indicators associated with those forms.

For any given municipality or region Greek or otherwise that we wish to study and manage (rather than merely confront) in relation to the forms of corruption that are utilized and deployed within it, specific scientific tools and a defined methodology are employed to gather data on the corruption forms emerging in that context. What does this imply? First, it implies that the data sources are twofold

- The physical-geographical and human (population-based) environment of the municipality's jurisdiction—especially its population profile of *homo corruptus*;
- The municipality as an administrative unit, including its infrastructures, organizational structure, the *homo corruptus* profile of permanent and non-permanent staff, and the *homo corruptus* profile of its elected officials.

Second, it implies that, data are collected both for existing and potential forms of corruption, which may be activated due to the *homo corruptus* profile of the population and personnel, or due to the operational configuration of the administrative mechanisms themselves. This data collection process serves the fundamental scientific need to outline the ideal type of corruption and the population profile of *homo corruptus* for each municipality separately, both as a demographic and an administrative coexistence structure.

The "ideal type of corruption" functions as a scientific tool in the hands of the researcher. Through the analysis of the logic underlying pursuits, the rationality of actions, and the validity of impacts shaping the forms of corruption in the area under study, it serves as an epistemological orientation for identifying potential strategies for managing those forms in a specific social context. This ideal type, does not reflect the reality of the phenomenon in its totality within a given structure of coexistence. Rather, it maps out the dynamic points that, according to the researcher's judgment and necessary selection, determine the particular differentiations of the phenomenon within the specific structure under investigation. In this sense, the ideal type of corruption is a central scientific tool for approaching, understanding, and analyzing the specific characteristics of a given social formation—such as a municipality. That is, it reveals those particular features and parameters that shape its distinctive profile and define its differentiation in terms of outcomes. [7]

The ideal type is directly linked to the "population profile of *homo corruptus*". [8] Since corruption is a human phenomenon, we cannot speak of the corruption of "man" in an abstract sense, but rather of "humans" in their plural and social existence. Within this framework, a form of corruption of a person toward themselves does not exist, as there is no such need; that is, a person living in isolation has no perception of the phenomenon or its forms. Social scientists, now generally agree that, once humans entered into social formations, they simultaneously emerged as *homo politicus*, *homo economicus*, and *homo sociologicus*. In other words, humans are by nature political, economic and social beings,

meaning they act within rational, political and social frameworks, they are subject to processes of socialization, rational choice and goal-oriented behavior.

This gives rise to the following question: Who is *homo corruptus*? Who is the one that will either exploit an existing form of corruption or create a new one in order to achieve a goal, thereby generating consequences?

The dimension of *homo corruptus*, like those of *homo politicus*, *homo economicus*, and *homo sociologicus*, resides inherently in every person, regardless of origin, gender, religion, or level of cultural development. Whether this *homo corruptus* dimension manifests itself, and if so, how, to what extent, at what time, for how long, and with what outcome, depends on a complex set of factors. These include ethics, education, individual cultural background, and extend to the broader socio-economic, cultural, and political environment in which the individual lives. These very factors reflect both the complexity and the challenges of studying the phenomenon, as well as the peculiar nature of the philosophy underlying the various forms of corruption. This reflection constantly reminds us that a form of corruption is not merely the application of a technique to achieve a particular end, but rather the outward expression of a latent potential inherent in every person, refracted through the forces active within each structure of coexistence. In other words, the "nature" of the phenomenon of corruption, runs parallel to the "nature" of the human being. Just as no social formation can exist without some form of corruption, so too, the social human is, by definition, a potential *homo corruptus*. Therefore, the concept of *homo corruptus* does not refer to some imaginary utilitarian figure or anthropological monster. It is not, in its Protestant form, the entrepreneur of Benjamin Franklin the interpreter of utilitarian virtue through ascetic frugality nor is it an incorrigible scoundrel or a reformed honest person. *Homo corruptus* is not someone who dwells in darkness, who emerges into the light through acts of corruption, only to return into the shadows once their goal is achieved. Rather, *homo corruptus* is the logical extension of the pursuits and motivations of *homo sociologicus*, *homo politicus*, and *homo economicus*. [9]

There are thus specific factors to be considered in any structure of coexistence, such as a municipality. These factors whether internal to the municipality or external, arising from its interaction with surrounding structures relate to the data necessary for outlining the *homo corruptus* population profile of each local authority.

It was mentioned earlier that central pillars of corruption theory include the impact assessment indicators for the various forms of corruption and what I refer to as the *Code of Forms of Corruption*. [10] To the reasonable question, of whether a human phenomenon such as corruption can be transformed into a measurable quantity, the answer lies in the use of so-called corruption measurement indices. However, two critical epistemological clarifications are needed.

First, when we speak of corruption measurement indices, we are referring to indicators that assess the *impact* of specific or overall forms of corruption, in accordance with the methodology of each index. Second, transforming a phenomenon into a measurable quantity does not render it *comparable*. That is, it is not scientifically valid to use a corruption index to compare populations with different *homo corruptus* profiles, or to compare countries with different ideal types of corruption in terms of their forms and consequences. [11] The main international corruption indices include: the *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI, Transparency International, 1996), the *Corruption Footprint Index* (CFI) [12], the *Bribe Payers Index* (BPI, Transparency International, 1999), and the *Global Corruption Barometer* (GCB, Transparency International, 2003). Each of these indices does not merely represent a methodological tool for assessment and recording; it embodies an epistemological transposition translating the understanding of the phenomenological dimension of corruption (its forms) into a numerical construct.

A brief yet critical remark: over at least the past decade, the imposition of indicators has driven countries deeper into the deadlocks of generalized quantification. These deadlocks are exacerbated not so much by the expansion of governance through numbers, but by the enormous power acquired by those involved in the gathering and processing of data for the construction of these indicators. The transformation of indicators from analytical tools into instruments of quantified governability and thus numerical evaluation completes, alongside the legal guidance of *law shopping* and the economic impact, a fragile approach to the phenomenon of corruption.

The ranking of a nation-state in one of these corruption indicators, when detached from the theoretical framework and complementary qualitative parameters, ceases to serve its role as a research-assisting tool for scholars. It instead becomes yet another mechanism for directing public perception toward specific, selective expressions of corruption.

Now, the *Code of Corruption Forms*, always aligned with the dynamic nature of the phenomenon, is conceived as an open, adaptable system a guide for tracing the manifestations of corruption within a given social space. The necessity to tailor this code according to culture, modes of coexistence and the positionality of the researcher in each societal context across the globe is non-negotiable and forms an essential process for any manager of corruption forms. What

does this imply? First, no country, no form of human coexistence anywhere in the world constitutes either the center of the world or a legitimate scientific reference point for the interpretation of corruption. Nor is it scientifically permissible for what a particular country considers a form of corruption to be imposed as such on others. In one social collective, a human act may be meaningfully and empirically registered through sources and researcher interpretation as a particular corruption form (e.g., bribery or fraud) · in another social collective even within the same territorial state this same act may be difficult or even impossible to capture in the same way, due to a different corruption *ideal type*, a different *homo corruptus* profile and naturally, a different researcher. This, however, is the relatively simple part of the process. The truly difficult challenge lies in assessing whether a human act potentially recognizable as a form of corruption is also a social condition mandated by cultural imperatives, coexistence assumptions, or existential necessities, such as access to potable water, famine response, or disaster management.

Additional challenges for the researcher arise when dealing with the systemic embedding of powerful forms of corruption, such as

- The institutionalization of clientelism and favoritism within a social space,
- The design of institutions under corrupt logics and practices,
- The management of institutions by actors whose legitimacy is derived from their positional power,
- The reciprocal transactions and compromises between internal and external actors of political, economic and social systems. [13]

These realities present exceptional demands for any researcher attempting to manage and study them. Therefore, the imperative of specializing this tracing guide of corruption revelations is directly linked to the theoretical capabilities of interpretation, and to the design of appropriate management and evaluation strategies.

Within this framework of principles and scientific axioms, in the case of Greek local government, we can identify corruption forms such as form of political corruption, corruption form of fraud, corruption form of bribery, form of bureaucratic corruption, corruption form of tax evasion, corruption form of environmental degradation-related corruption, corruption form of lobbying (especially *local lobbying*, e.g., by specific population groups such as "roma", dominant professional categories like large hoteliers or livestock breeders, NGO personnel or even religious communities), corruption form of nepotism and patronage, corruption form of legal overproduction and legal ambiguity, corruption form of embezzlement and theft, corruption form of feudal-mayoral.

Several critical observations concerning these forms:

first, they vary from one unit of coexistence (e.g., municipality) to another, both in their structural components (*homo corruptus* profile, motivation, modus operandi, impact) and in the environments within which they develop. Second, for each of these forms, successful management demands the application of specific methodologies for data collection, modeling, and simulation of the relevant strategy and tactics. Third, for every form of corruption, the scientifically appropriate concept is not *combatting* but *management*. Attempting to "combat" the potential presence or utilization of a corruption form is akin to posing the misleading question of whether a meteor might strike Earth: in an unexplored, chaotic and unknown universe, it is impossible to calculate the movement of an unidentified asteroid. Similarly, within the chaotic and unknown human mind, it is impossible to predict the intentions or actions of an unidentified *homo corruptus*. Simultaneously, the utopia of "fighting corruption" without understanding its real-world impacts, does more than produce vague chains of criminological or punitive declarations. It undermines the very foundations of the rational and scientific approach required for the effective management of each corruption form.

Thus, management in practice entails two essential dimensions: the design and development of a strategy and the implementation of a specific tactical approach. At this point, we encounter one of the most critical epistemological issues namely, the question of the *impact identity* of a form of corruption.

With regard to this notion of impact identity, the first reason why a local government executive should be concerned with identifying the nature of the impacts of a particular form of corruption lies in the fact that these impacts may manifest across four distinct modalities. The term *impact* here refers to the *type* or *valence* (positive or negative) of the consequence produced by a given form of corruption. Specifically, there may be:

- Negative impact,
- Positive impact,
- An impact that produces or restores equilibrium,

- Or a complex scenario in which all three of the above coexist simultaneously.

Recognizing these impact identities is instrumental for enabling an executive to practically manage a broad range of issues they may encounter ranging from the need to resolve urgent matters, to navigating exceptional circumstances, borderline legality, the execution of orders, or the implementation of contradictory regulations.

The second reason for which a local government executive must engage with the identity of impacts arising from corruption is more demanding: once a human action is characterized as a form of corruption, one must address the normative and managerial question—what should be done about this form? How should it be managed? What is the objective of the intervention?

These two concerns are also inherently linked to the dimensions of the impact of a form of corruption. Such a form may have:

- A material dimension (e.g., monetary gain),
- An immaterial/intangible dimension (e.g., cultural or normative distortions),
- Or a combination of both.

In the material case, the outcome is concrete for instance, financial gain. In the immaterial dimension, however, what is produced is a reflection of intent, a shared social understanding about the form and function of corruption, and ultimately an issue of mentality, culture, and political ethos.

A brief excursus here is warranted on issues of political culture and mentality: we must critically question why, at the very same time that the Greek public is deliberately confined to perceiving corruption as merely the bribery of public officials, fraud, or tax evasion, other forms of the phenomenon as defined in the Code of Corruption Forms remain omitted from public and scientific discourse. These include clientelism, party-ocracy, legal overproduction and legal disorder (poly-nomia and kako-nomia), form of political corruption, corruption form of localized lobbying, corruption form of nepotism and patronage, form of bureaucratic corruption.

Far from being peripheral, these forms constitute core operational mechanisms of the country's social, political, administrative, and economic systems and they undoubtedly affect municipalities and regional governments (i.e., both tiers of local self-government in Greece).

A local government executive will thus encounter corruption in forms that are either newly emergent or pre-existing but institutionally entrenched. These forms manifest across five interrelated levels:

- Their own personality and professional identity (*personal homo corruptus* profile),
- That of their colleagues (each with their own *homo corruptus* profile),
- Their supervisors (again, individualized profiles),
- The local population (which, due to its scale, forms a corruption ideal-type reflecting a collective social disposition and demographic *homo corruptus* profile),
- And the regulatory/institutional framework governing their administrative work.
- These five levels are further linked to:
  - The relationships between local communities/populations and elected officials or senior staff,
  - The dynamics between central government and local elected authorities,
  - The interplay between permanent administrative staff and elected officials within municipalities and regions,
  - And finally, the specific profile and disposition of each elected official.

A common denominator across all five levels is, unfortunately, the systematic absence of a scientifically sound framework for understanding corruption in Greece. This includes:

- The lack of a normative or legal definition of what constitutes a *form* of corruption in statutory law,
- The chaotic, shifting legal and regulatory framework governing local government, and
- A cultural and normative void shaped by mentality, political culture, and administrative practices.

These levels and issues are intrinsically linked not only to the concerns highlighted above but also to the enduring structural challenges faced by municipalities that aim to achieve sustainable public administration.

The term local self-government, at the conceptual level within the Greek legal science, is situated alongside the issue of managing local affairs in the context of the needs of a specific and geographically defined population. According to this conceptualization, the administration of local affairs is entrusted to the first and second-tier local government entities. As a result, these entities enjoy the “presumption of competence” regarding the governance of their respective local matters.

Local self-government is defined as “a legal entity under public law, established within a specific territorial jurisdiction, with the objective and purpose of managing local affairs, in accordance with the principle of territorial competence.” This definition stems from the explicit constitutional recognition of local self-government in Greece as a form of administrative not political management of affairs.

The Greek state has existed for 200 years a relatively short span compared to the centuries-long continuous presence of cities like Athens, Argos, and Sparta, as well as countless Greek towns and villages, all of which have functioned as distinct structures of coexistence and culture (two of the three essential preconditions for the existence of the corruption phenomenon). Beyond the historical significance of this chronological precedence of self-governance, it becomes evident that the formation of communities and semi-urban or urban clusters is, at its core, a formative process: a village or city, through its very existence, represents for its inhabitants a defining pedagogical presence. Nature, together with the built environment, constitutes one of the fundamental components of civilized human existence. This fact generates a specific implication: the totality of obligations borne by local government authorities toward their populations.

Today, municipalities in Greece, perform a tripartite role. First, they hold a political role, since municipal authorities are directly elected by the citizens. Second, they exercise an administrative role, as they participate in the unified national administrative system. Third, they fulfill a developmental role, as they manage resources and play a decisive part in local and regional development.

At the same time, local self-government in Greece is among the least fiscally autonomous in the EU and the OECD, both in terms of expenditures and revenues. Moreover, it possesses among the fewest competencies, is heavily burdened by bureaucracy and operates under deliberately maintained procedural ambiguities conditions that reflect the forms of bureaucratic corruption and the corruption of legal overproduction and poor legislation (polynomy-kakonimy).

The operation and character of Greek municipalities have certainly evolved over time. One only needs to recall the at least ten fundamental Greek laws aimed at reforming the municipalities, from the 1828 circular of Ioannis Kapodistrias to the “Kallikratis” reform of 2010 and the more recent legislative changes post-2018. Nevertheless, these changes have consistently and deliberately marginalized (referring here to forms of central government corruption) issues such as: the harmonized cooperation among government levels (central, regional, local), the independence of local self-government from the central state (a complex issue involving conditions and capacities) and the redistribution of competencies changes which were not accompanied by corresponding resource reallocations or additional resources in cases of newly assigned responsibilities or structures of local governance.

Another such marginalized issue has been the demarcation of municipal zones of responsibility, often based on arbitrary, scientifically unfounded and politically motivated amalgamations of dissimilar territories, without taking into account the unique characteristics of each locality.

Each local government entity, therefore, as an “autonomous” structure of coexistence, local culture and institutionalized authority for the formulation and management of population policies within a clearly defined territorial jurisdiction, embodies a specific ideal type of corruption. It also shapes a particular population profile of homo corruptus, both developing and utilizing distinct forms of corruption, while simultaneously being affected by their respective consequences and impacts.

In such a specific “environment,” the permanent or elected official of a Local Government Authority (LGA) will inevitably come into contact with manifestations of the corruption phenomenon understood here as a phenomenon that far exceeds the narrow scope of specific forms (such as bribery or fraud), with which it is deliberately, misleadingly and above all, unscientifically equated. The LGA official, will encounter a set of corruption forms, such as those previously mentioned, which emerge and unfold through the relationships of local populations with elected officials- through the relationships of these populations with the human capital of the LGA’s administrative apparatus- through the interactions between central government and locally elected authorities and certainly, through the labyrinthine and often legally “indeterminate” normative-regulatory framework that governs their responsibilities and functions.

Within such a framework, the LGA official often faces a fundamental dilemma: that anyone who enters a system must resemble it otherwise, the system will reject them. Indicative and concise examples of this reality include

- The practical outcomes resulting from electoral system choices (e.g., mayors striving to gain the support of municipal council members by offering them deputy mayor positions or other roles as political exchange).
- The concentration of an excessive number of decision-making responsibilities in the plenary sessions of municipal or regional councils (as collective administrative bodies), which leads to gridlock, delays, and severe procedural bottlenecks.
- The fact that, the Greek legislator treats municipal councils primarily as the main collective administrative organs of LGAs invested with a presumption of competence and only secondarily as representative bodies of the local population and mechanisms of local democratic consultation.
- The persistence of direct ties between a segment of elected local officials and the political leadership of the central government. This same leadership often intervenes in key appointments, such as those of general or executive secretaries of LGAs (as politically appointed officials), and utilizes the full range of powers available under legislation, including the ability to assign managerial duties without oversight by official personnel councils or to place elected officials and civil servants in various posts across LGA structures and affiliated legal entities or enterprises.
- The reproduction of the “internal centralism” model (i.e., concentration of power at the apex of the politico-administrative hierarchy) and the hyper-partisanship that characterizes the central governance system.
- The deliberate confinement of local and regional administration to traditional, routine responsibilities such as bureaucratic processing (often on behalf of the central state), the construction and maintenance of basic infrastructure and utilities and waste management.
- While the “Kallikratis” reform expanded oversight and licensing functions, in crucial domains like public education and healthcare, LGAs are largely relegated to infrastructure-related duties and their role remains deeply marginalized.
- Similarly, LGAs’ role in local developmental planning remains limited despite the devolution of developmental planning responsibilities to the regions by the “Kallikratis” reform since they are deprived of key licensing competences essential to developmental policy. In the area of spatial and urban planning, Greek LGAs, unlike their counterparts in most other European countries, are excluded from major decision-making processes. The extreme centralization of such decisions in state bodies leads to a paralytic overload, with delays so significant that they often nullify the very concept and utility of planning. (Notably, in Greece, completing the urban planning process in an area absent major legal or other obstacles takes approximately a decade.)

Finally, these practical realities are further compounded by a deliberately maintained system: on one hand, Greek LGAs are subject to virtually all accountability and transparency mechanisms governing public administration (such as the “Diavgeia” transparency platform or the Public Contracts Registry). Additionally, they and their elected officials are subject to state oversight (limited by the Constitution to legality control and excluding expediency control) and to auditing from institutions like the Court of Audit and other bodies. On the other hand, these auditing mechanisms often follow divergent approaches and interpretations, meaning that actions deemed legal by one authority (e.g., the Decentralized Administration) may be deemed illegal by another (e.g., the Court of Audit or the Inspectorate for Public Administration). Coupled with the chronic slowness of the Greek judicial system, this sustained complexity not only exacerbates uncertainty but fosters (if not necessitates) informal arrangements and unofficial settlements. (A notable example is the recurring legislative practice of special provisions passed by Parliament, such as repeated regulations for lifting financial charges against elected local officials.)

This maintained system is founded upon various forms of the corruption phenomenon such as legislative overcomplexity and poor legal drafting, political corruption, and other manifestations previously outlined. These intersect with the ideal type of corruption as it exists within each local authority and with the local population profile of homo corruptus, within the area of its responsibility.

Moreover, real-world conditions have been shaped by the paradox whereby, although the Greek Constitution prohibits the imposition of taxes and the determination of tax rates by local authorities, Greek jurisprudence allows for the delegation via legislation of the power to set tax rates within a defined range (i.e., between an upper and lower limit set by law). In practice, however, the legislation rarely grants such tax-related discretion to OTAs, limiting them instead to imposing fees for services, which must correspond strictly to the cost of providing specific services (e.g., sanitation, street lighting) and prohibiting revenues from exceeding expenses.

As is widely known, a substantial portion of LGA revenue derives from the so-called “Central Autonomous Resources”, which are percentages of state-collected taxes (e.g., income tax, VAT) redistributed to LGAs. The principal criterion for

their allocation is the population count from the most recent census, regardless of the actual revenue generated in each municipality or region. This strictly formalist criterion creates significant inequalities in practice but is more readily accepted by elected officials, as it spares them from intra-municipal conflicts over distribution and absolves them from any responsibility for revenue amounts.

Other realities have emerged from the labyrinthine and frequently changing legal framework governing LGA operations. For example, the obligation imposed on the Municipal Treasurer to verify the legality of financial warrants (as stipulated in Article 175 of the Municipal Code) creates operational difficulties. This refers to an outdated provision of Law 3463/2006, which generates undue liabilities and dysfunction within the treasuries of local governments.

Additionally, real-world conditions have evolved from the assignment of responsibilities to municipalities regarding civil protection an increasingly salient issue due to accelerating climate change. Law 4662/2020 assigns these responsibilities through mechanisms such as the Local Operational Coordination Units of Civil Protection, Autonomous Civil Protection Offices for municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and Local Emergency Response and Disaster Management Plans. However, these responsibilities are limited to the preparation of required reports, the registration of often non-existent local volunteer groups, and the disbursement of funds without even the most basic scientific, operational, or evaluative procedures. Such responsibilities are truncated or deliberately entangled precisely at the point where substantive environmental management and accountability begin.

Within this context, which defines the ideal types of corruption in each local government authority in Greece, a brief reference must be made to the term “diaphthorologismos”. [14] This term captures various tendencies to perceive and approach the corruption phenomenon through an anti-scientific reduction of its full complexity to its more sensational or politically convenient forms typically for professional, academic, political or other interests. This occurs within analytical frameworks that examine individual or group behavior to uncover or conceal legislative loopholes or oversights.

In Greece, as in many other countries, a critical conceptual trap has been laid in the study of corruption: the deliberate or inadvertent conflation of this globally pervasive and simultaneously nation-state-bound phenomenon with only certain of its manifestations. This is reflected in a scientifically flawed definition that has become entrenched, often shaped by how domestic lawmakers perceive certain acts, without any underlying methodological rigor.

This misidentification misleads public understanding of both the phenomenon and its variants, distorting the development and implementation of relevant policies. Countries with western-style legal cultures, such as Greece, exemplify this issue. In a country with a specific corruption ideal type and a defined homo corruptus demographic profile, it is “comforting” to note that, according to the mission of institutions such as the National Coordinator for Combating Corruption (Article 1, Section IT of Law 4152/2013), the corruption phenomenon is officially reduced to one specific form fraud which is declared a national target requiring a “national coordinator.” In such regulatory patchworks, the obsessive conflation of corruption with another appealingly exploitable form bribery (Articles 235-236 of the Penal Code) has prevented any Greek legislator from seeking a definition of corruption, or any legal text from including such a definition. The first official reference to corruption in Greek legal documentation, appears in Article 263B of the Penal Code, titled “Leniency Measures for Those Who Contribute to the Disclosure of Acts of Corruption,” introduced by Article 15, Paragraph 1 of Law 3849/2010. A retrospective inquiry into the phenomenon within Greek historical and societal contexts before and after this legislative point appears to have been deemed unnecessary, as if corruption either did not previously exist or was irrelevant. Also absent is any effort to uphold the principle of legal positivism that is, whether the Greek legislature’s wording on corruption is at least minimally informed by historical research into Greek realities, so that its meaning is not rendered void. There is not even a hint of theoretical grounding: no ideal type of corruption specific to Greece, no demographic analysis of Greek homo corruptus, and no substantive scholarly elaboration or classification of corruption’s forms within the Greek context. [15]

This gives rise to a constant resonance of differing voices and writings—from politicians, entrepreneurs, lawyers, financial analysts, technocrats, criminologists, among others—offering interpretations and analyses of a phenomenon they do not truly understand: what it is, how it is defined, or what it concerns. A logical outcome of these distortions is that the treatment of the phenomenon of corruption in Greece is mostly limited to the domains of public procurement, disciplinary proceedings for civil servants, and the management of case law. Additional and remarkably persistent problematic parameters over time include: the overproduction of legislation (polynomia), the complexity of legal provisions and the flawed structure of laws, all of which fuel a vicious cycle of continuous legislative proliferation. This cycle is further exacerbated by the practice of introducing last-minute amendments, favorable provisions and interpretative circulars, in an effort to compensate for ambiguities, contradictions, overlaps or the legal uncertainty generated by existing regulations.

This leads to reasonable concerns, both theoretical and practical: to what extent can law produced and operating under such a framework constitute a reliable field not only for the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies related to corruption, but also for the conceptual and empirical grasp of the phenomenon itself, particularly in the Greek context? Furthermore, how do the transitional conditions experienced by Greek society and the concurrent legal recession shape the ways in which forms of corruption are managed through the legal system given that corruption in Greece is not a recent emergence, but rather a historical, cultural, social, economic and political reality embedded since the founding of the modern Greek state? This poses a critical question regarding mentality and institutional culture: the formation of connective tissue (such as the non-autonomous nature of the Greek public administration) between the citizen and the state. How else can we understand the legal culture in Greece, in parallel with the reality of Greek partitocracy, where the administrative apparatus is perceived both as a "spoils system" for the victorious party and as the perpetually fertile ground for Greece's prolific, often impulsive, legislative activity?

In a bidirectional relationship with political corruption, the forms of corruption rooted in legislative overproduction (polynomia) and legislative mismanagement (kakonomia) also affect local self-government. Polynomia, first and foremost, refers to the excessive proliferation of legal provisions whether primary (laws) or secondary (presidential decrees, ministerial decisions, etc.) within a nation-state, creating a toxic and legally oppressive environment. At its core lies the quantitative dimension of regulation. In certain countries, such as Greece, the prevailing norm is: the more laws, the better. What does this imply?

First, that it fulfills the existential desires and self-serving aims of politicians, lawyers, unionists, and others, alongside clientelist party pressures for legislative action. Such pressures often pertain to campaign promises by a governing party that cannot be fulfilled due to insufficient parliamentary support either for the party itself or for the specific provision. To avoid parliamentary scrutiny, the provision may be pushed through alternative institutional channels such as a Ministerial Decision or Legislative Act. Although the Constitution (Article 44, paragraph 1) requires that such acts be ratified by Parliament at a later stage, this barely mitigates the issue. By then, the legal effects of the Ministerial Decision or Legislative Act, may have already been realized to varying degrees, effectively bypassing Parliament.

Once the existential desires and clientelist pressures are satisfied, we encounter the second dimension of the "more laws is better" rule: the population is kept in a state of permanent "legal hostage". Without the existence and threat of a law, nothing can be governed, while simultaneously sustaining the systems of legalism and litigation. In other words, there is no room for the development of a culture based on substantive social contracts or the emergence of a related civic paradigm. But how is this accomplished in practice?

In countries such as Greece, with the collaboration of the "triangle of legislative overproduction" (politicians/lawmakers lawyers' bureaucrats), a system has been cultivated over decades whereby laws are drafted and enacted in such a way that their provisions are subject right from inception to successive replacements, additions, and amendments across paragraphs, clauses, sub-clauses, exceptions and provisos. These are compounded by references to other provisions, which themselves are also subject to amendments (e.g., a single Greek law on a given topic may contain an average of 80 articles and simultaneously reference thousands of provisions from unrelated laws).

On the other hand, kakonomia refers to the qualitative dimension: the complexity, linguistic obscurity, or ambiguity of legal provisions. The aforementioned "triangle of legislative overproduction" in Greece lends a systemic character to this form of corruption as well. It manifests in:

- Overly complicated administrative procedures embedded in legislation,
- Contradictory or even mutually negating legal provisions on the same issue,
- Conflicting rules across regulatory levels (e.g., a ministerial circular nullifying a law),
- Legal uncertainty, despite the principle that laws prevail over circulars,
- Blatant violations of the hierarchy of legal norms (e.g., the application of a circular over a corresponding law),
- Clear unconstitutionality,
- Inconsistency with the European *acquis* or international treaties,
- Legal gaps so significant that they render a regulation inoperative,
- Incorrect use of legal terminology,
- Grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic errors,
- Normative (i.e., executive) rather than parliamentary lawmaking, via Legislative Acts.

Even if we were to set aside the writings of Platon and Isocrates, who warned that legislative overproduction is a symptom of misgovernance and leads to the corruption of the polity, we must still ask: in the Greek case, does law

precede legislation? Clearly, we cannot bring back Solon, who, according to legend, left Athens for ten years after enacting his laws to avoid the temptation of amending them.

In matters of leadership at the level of a local government authority (LGA), encounters with forms of corruption such as political corruption or the feudal-mayoral form highlight how the utopia of law and the financialization of local politics leave little room for doubt: law is accepted primarily as a product, with its creation framed as a matter of technical expertise, rather than as the outcome of the politics of a social union. The transition from the *rule of law* to law *shopping*, becomes inevitable.

Within this operational context of Greek municipalities, we can offer a brief reference to the existing system of managing forms of corruption at the local level. As indicated earlier, such a system proves effective only in addressing certain types of corruption that relate to the day-to-day functioning of the LGA. For systemically embedded forms of corruption, different processes are required what we might term, using the language of computer science, system reboot procedures.

The issue of managing corruption in a local government setting is an extremely serious matter. Initiating any such process requires the cooperation of four local actors: the political class, the business community, civil society, and the academic/scientific community. A fundamental precondition for this cooperation is that political actors rise above their power- and party-driven ambitions; entrepreneurs transcend narrow, short-term interests; civil society confronts its own cultural paradigms; and the academic community overcomes its internal rivalries and hierarchical competitiveness. Naturally, such collaboration within the internal responsibility zone of a municipality does not necessarily imply equivalent alignment in its broader external environment especially in the contemporary era.

Managing a form of corruption is not merely a theoretical exercise; it is a practice governed by specific requirements a field-based application of theoretical principles. When a prospective corruption management practitioner is trained whether an individual or a group within an institution or authority the central difficulty lies in two areas: first, enabling them to perceive and manage the *homo corruptus* and second, requiring them to exercise self-control.

Thus, when addressing corruption management within a municipality, an additional scientific step must be introduced: the transition from the *population* profile of *homo corruptus* within the municipality's zone of responsibility to the individual profile of *homo corruptus*. That is, once the researcher has outlined the collective behavioral profile of corruption-prone populations, they must proceed to the micro-level the individual profile of the *homo corruptus*, who in each instance is capable of activating a particular form of corruption.

This constitutes a process of deducing the personality traits of the *homo corruptus* the individual responsible for transforming intention into corrupt action and producing impact through one or more forms of the corruption phenomenon.

Constructing a profile of the *homo corruptus* enables both the researcher and the corruption manager to understand the actor's original goals. At the same time, applying sociological and psychological assessment tools facilitates the behavioral synthesis of the *homo corruptus*. This profiling must incorporate the necessary information and data to uncover motives and drivers, thus enabling an accurate analysis and interpretation of the structural components of the specific form of corruption being examined. Such analysis and interpretation form the basis for developing a strategy for managing a specific utilized form of corruption, as well as a simulation model for assessing the probability of corruption form deployment.

The individual profile of a *homo corruptus*, is structured around two fundamental pillars: the actor's *modus operandi* and their *corruption strategy*. The *modus operandi* refers to the guiding philosophy behind their behavior—the action model through which they pursue their objectives. For the researcher, this involves collecting and processing data on the way the *homo corruptus* thinks, acts, and operates as the initiator or user of a form of corruption that becomes the subject of study.

Gathering such data is part of the process of deducing the operational model of the *homo corruptus*—the action model through which intention is transformed into execution, impact is triggered, and objectives are achieved via a specific manifestation of the corruption phenomenon. Three types of *modus operandi* can be identified, depending on the thinking and behavior patterns of the *homo corruptus*:

- Incidental *modus operandi*: referring to isolated, opportunistic, or exceptional goals pursued through the use of a corruption form.

- Systematic modus operandi: involving repeated use of corruption forms to achieve recurring or evolving objectives.
- Systemic modus operandi: where the use of corruption forms serves not merely to fulfill a personal objective, but to ensure the continuity and existence of a broader system be it an organization, a business, a public service, an authority, a municipality, or even a region.

The process of collecting data about these three types of *modus operandi* involves understanding both the decision-making framework in which a *homo corruptus* operates and how a researcher may perceive and interpret those decisions. As a rational actor, the *homo corruptus* chooses to activate a recognized form of corruption, thereby resolving a paradox that, to the external observer, may appear as a high-risk behavior. Yet, a discernible choice framework exists one that can be studied. Once this data has been gathered, the actual management of corruption forms can begin. As previously discussed, managing a corruption form entails design, the development of a strategy, and the implementation of a tactic. In practice, this translates into three possible actions: prevention, utilization and disruption. The core question becomes: What do we want to achieve? What state or condition are we aiming to create?

## 2. Conclusion

We must remember that, local communities are the very reason for the existence of municipalities as administrative structures. At the same time, in the case of Greek Local Government Authorities (LGAs), the municipal factions mirror the structure and logic of the national political system. In democratic regimes, local political groups exist as frameworks for coexistence, circulating ideas and collective aspirations. However, in Greece, municipal factions like their older siblings, the political parties are structured around two fundamental pillars: first, the demographic profile of the country's *homo corruptus* population and second, the cultural model of the Greek political system of recent decades, namely that of an electable monarchy and its monachically arranged feudal lords within public administration.

Within this dual framework, local representatives function both as mediators of local demands and as feeders of the central political system. In Greece as in other countries there is a degenerated version of the concept of the municipal faction, as these formations tend to behave like political parties, riding the system and gradually becoming the system themselves.

This reality pertains to the phenomenon of partitocracy, a central dimension of political corruption. The entrenchment of both political parties and municipal factions in local government and national administration, driven by the cultural logic and pressure of the country's *homo corruptus* profile, does not lead to the formation of public policies oriented toward collective goals. Instead, it perpetuates clientelist strategies that dismantle both local and national collectivity. This is the very definition of clientelism another key expression of political corruption.

As contemporary corruption studies increasingly emphasize, we are no longer expected to "combat corruption", but to "manage its forms". This shift suggests two imperatives: first, a clarification of the conceptual framework surrounding the phenomenon, based on scientific accuracy and second, the establishment of a social contract that defines which human behaviors, within the Greek context, fall under the Code of Forms of corruption i.e., what does and does not constitute corruption.

These are foundational issues. We must recall Thucydides' insight that whoever defines the terms of discourse also dominates the discourse itself. And we must also remember that fascism does not need to become a full-fledged regime; it suffices to impose uniform thinking, to instill fear in the population, and to drive people into internalized guilt.

The intentional conflation and reduction of the corruption phenomenon in Greece to certain select forms by criminologists, penal lawyers, journalists, and politicians—creates a monopoly of singular thinking for the population. Those who mislead the public about the nature of corruption in Greece are often the same ones pointing the way forward without possessing even the slightest understanding of, or concern for, the society they address.

We must therefore set aside hasty questions like "What should we do?" or "How do we change?" if we have not first answered the deeper questions: What constitutes a corrupt act? What are its consequences? And what exactly are we trying to achieve? Managing the forms of corruption particularly within a local government authority goes beyond the scope of legal reform or mere political will. It requires something much deeper.

In conclusion, managing corruption within a municipality is not only about generating specific, measurable and assessable benefits for the administration. More importantly, it will largely determine the municipality's capacity to

successfully address the challenges posed by contemporary transformations climate inertia, energy democracy, water governance, artificial intelligence, demographic decline and geopolitical change.

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