Integrity, Education, and Moral Renewal – International Insights and Lessons for Hungary

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ABSTRACT: The scandal that broke out in Brazil in 2014 came to be known in the media as "Lava Jato" – or "Car Wash". What began as a money laundering case centred around a small car wash quickly escalated into one of the largest corruption scandals on the continent. The investigation uncovered a multi-billion-dollar bribery network that had been operating for decades around Petrobras, a state-owned oil company. Politicians, state officials, as well as multinational companies and criminal networks were all involved.

The mechanism was deceptively simple – yet devastating: large corporations were awarded overpriced contracts by the state-owned oil company, with part of the surplus ending up in the pockets of political parties and decision-makers. The machinery of corruption served not only to enrich certain individuals, but also to finance the maintenance of the entire political system.

The consequences were staggering: Petrobras's share price collapsed, tens of thousands of jobs were lost, and Brazil's economy plunged into a deep recession. Ministers, members of government, party leaders and executives from the largest construction company were all imprisoned, and even Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the country's iconic former president, stood trial. The social fabric of the country was shaken, as millions of people took to the streets, having lost their trust in the political and economic elite.

Yet the true tragedy of the Lava Jato scandal went far beyond financial loss or the exposure of the political elite, as the people of Brazil came to realise that corruption is not the sin of a few "black sheep", but a systemic driving force that permeates everything. The erosion of trust has left a lasting wound on society that will affect generations to come.

One of the most shocking revelations of this scandal was the sheer scale of the bribes involved. Investigators found that construction companies had inflated project costs by up to 20%, not only funnelling billions of dollars into secret political funds, but also showering politicians and corporate executives with luxury beachfront apartments in Rio, yachts, Rolex watches, and suitcases full of cash. The blend of

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multi-billion-dollar contracts and extravagant personal gifts turned the scandal into a symbol of how systemic corruption can simultaneously rot institutions and corrode personal integrity – all while affording a life of luxury to a select few.
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Introduction

This study seeks to provide a clear yet professionally well-grounded presentation of the meaning of integrity at the level of the individual, the organisation, and society as a whole, and to explore the ways education can contribute to preventing and reducing corruption. Furthermore, the study also seeks to explore what path could lead to a society-wide catharsis and, ultimately, to the moral and social renewal of (the Hungarian) society. This reflection builds on the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers (Plato and Aristotle), the Hungarian intellectual tradition (represented by Béla Hamvas), Saint Augustine's Christian legacy, René Girard's mimetic theory, and Kant's categorical imperative (see Chapter 2), while also taking into consideration the peasant culture that long nourished Hungarian autonomy (see Chapter 5). Naturally, the study also draws on international academic literature (OECD, Basel Institute on Governance, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, UNODC, Eurobarometer). Based on all this, the study, on the one hand, describes the self-justifying spiral of corruption (see Chapter 3) and the pillars of a moral immune system capable of countering the distortions of a corrupt system (see Chapter 4); on the other hand, it also discusses the need for educational reform (see Chapter 6) and reviews best practices from international anti-corruption institutional models (see Chapter 7). Finally, the study summarises the diagnosis of the Hungarian reality (Chapters 8 and 9).

For the purposes of this study, and as part of its conceptual foundation, "material corruption" is defined as follows: Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain – whether by an individual, group, or institution – typically at the expense of the public interest, and involving violations of laws, regulations and/or integrity and moral standards. Corruption also occurs when someone offers or provides a private gain to an individual, group, or institution entrusted with power for the purpose of gaining an advantage. All such cases are considered corruption, even if they are carried out under the pretext of some perceived or actual public interest.

The study employs the concepts of spiritual and moral corruption in their traditional sense, meaning that corruption is understood as an internal distortion of the soul, whereby it loses its natural orientation toward the good and the true – a condition which, according to Christian teachings, corresponds to remaining in sin and justifying it. This is also why education plays a crucial role in countering corruption and in strengthening personal, community and institutional integrity (see Chapter 4).

Philosophical and Conceptual Frameworks

It is important to note that invoking ancient – yet, for their time, modern – thinkers such as Plato or Aristotle; authors who brought new insights in medieval Christianity, like Saint Augustine; and modern-era traditionalists such as Béla Hamvas, serves to underscore the timeless and universal nature of this issue. The fragments of thought employed in this study are not intended to reconstruct the entire intellectual framework of the authors referenced later on, but rather to reinforce a key message by arranging them in a shared interpretative framework: without a profound shift in social culture, no genuine fight against corruption can succeed. A nation stripped of its individual and collective integrity – whether by its own choice or out of ignorance – not only forfeits the chance to rise but even jeopardises its very survival.

As part of conceptual grounding, there are several points of reference worth highlighting. First, I will briefly list them, then elaborate on each in more detail in the pages that follow. According to Plato,[2] justice and order can be achieved when everyone fulfils their own roles, and when the three parts of the soul – desire, spirit and reason – are in harmony. Aristotle emphasises the importance of temperance and practical wisdom (*phronesis)* – virtue is found not in the extremes but in the golden mean, which means that the right decision is a balanced choice, adapted to a specific situation.

For Saint Augustine, right action does not arise from external pressure; rather, they are the results of internal decisions – meaning that the individual bears a responsibility by virtue of their conscience and free will. Kant's categorical imperative gives a simple example: let's act in a way that we would consider to be acceptable as a general law and never use other people as mere instruments. Hamvas considers integrity to be more than mere adherence to rules, he sees it as a sort of state of existence – the operation of the "inner standard". René Girard's mimetic theory tells us that our desires are shaped through imitation; therefore, corrupt behaviour can quickly spread within a community – as the old saying goes: bad examples are contagious.

The Ten Commandments are closely connected to these points of reference. Fundamental commandments such as "do not steal" or "do not lie" form the basis of our entire moral order. When these are violated, the integrity of the soul is inevitably lost. It first manifests as internal degradation – a corruption of the soul – and, over time, takes shape in the outside world, poisoning the functioning of society.

Taken together, these conceptual frameworks provide a clear and reliable moral compass: Plato's theory of justice, Aristotle's virtue ethics, Saint Augustine's teaching of conscience, Kant's categorical imperative, Hamvas's inner standard, Girard's

2 Platón: *Az állam* [Plato: *Republic*]. Hungarian translation by Kornél Steiger. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2005, Book IV., 441C–444A develops a parallel between the individual and the state, as well as the correct relationship between the thinking and the spirited part of man; Book VIII., 543A–544D on faulty forms of government; Book VII., 518C–519C on correct education. (Original: *Respublica*. In: Platonis Opera. Ed. John Burnet. Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford, 1902.)

discovery about the imitation of our desires, and the Ten Commandments all point in one direction. Together, they show that honour and the integrity of the soul are not only fundamental to individual well-being but also to the healthy functioning of the community.

Naturally, realising an ideal is never easy – especially when it touches on the very nature of human existence and our understanding of what is good and evil. Such an endeavour requires that we understand the extent to which human beings are imitative creatures – and how difficult it is for them to realise just how dangerous their own actions could become if those actions were to spread throughout society.

In his essay "Direkt morál és rossz lelkiismeret" [Direct Morality and Bad Conscience], Béla Hamvas[3] wrote the following in the second half of the 1940s – and yet it remains just as relevant to the Hungarian reality today: "One either lives, and the price of life is corruption, or one refuses to be corrupted, but then must forgo life itself".

Today, millions of Hungarians are faced with this existential dilemma – one that is almost impossible to avoid. Preserving one's integrity almost inevitably leads to social marginalisation and economic disadvantages, whereas surrender – i.e. adapting to a corrupt system – may ensure prosperity (or mere survival at least), but at the cost of one's moral autonomy. Morally intact individuals will become outcasts, while those who surrender will lose their moral identity.

According to Hamvas, the nature of existential corruption is such that it manifests not only in actions or intentions, but deeper – in the very being of the human person. In the same essay he writes: "The human being is corrupt not in their actions, nor in their intentions, emotions or character, but in their very being. I am always corrupt. I am now. I am. No evading the question. Those who beat around the bush are corrupt already."

Hopefully, the philosophical depth of Hamvas's thought helps to make it clear that the fight against corruption – especially in the Hungarian context – is not just a legal or institutional matter, but an ontological issue as well.

However, finding excuses, self-justification, and/or scapegoating are more common in the Hungarian society than repentance. According to Saint Augustine's moral philosophy, human beings can choose between good and evil. This freedom, however, comes with responsibility for all our choices. We are responsible for the decisions we make even under duress. (It is the author's own experience – and conviction – that there are always at least two possible choices; this is why the individual cannot absolve themselves with the simple and self-deceptive excuse: "I had no choice".) According to Saint Augustine's [4] fundamental thesis, morality is

3 Béla Hamvas: *Direkt morál és rossz lelkiismeret*. [Direct Morality and Bad Conscience] In: *Patmosz I.* Medio Kiadó, Budapest, 1995

4 Szent Ágoston: *A szabad akaratról* (*De libero arbitrio*) [St. Augustine: The Problem of Free Choice]. Hungarian Translation by Katalin Vidrányi. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1986, Book II., chap. 13.

grounded not in external law but in the recognition of and adherence to the inner truth of conscience.

Corruption, in Augustine's understanding, is not the result of external coercion but an internal choice – choosing the easier path of selfish gain over the more difficult, yet morally right, course of action. For Saint Augustine, the key to moral renewal is repentance – the sincere acknowledgement of one's wrongdoings and an intention to change. Real repentance means sincerely facing our past wrongdoings, taking responsibility for our actions and omissions, actively seeking to make amends and restore what was damaged, and changing both our behaviour and mindset – this is the only way that leads to true forgiveness.

According to René Girard,[5] human desires are not born autonomously, but through imitation (*mimesis*): beyond envy – where one longs for what others have – human imitation reaches even deeper layers of the human psyche, as many people want and desire what is also desired by others. In Hungary's culture of corruption, it means that corrupt behaviour is contagious – a culture of looking for loopholes and avoiding control (without consequences) legitimises and even promotes (!) similar forms of conduct.

The "everybody does it" mentality is a typical mimetic phenomenon: rather than making decisions based on their own moral judgement, individuals copy and align themselves with the desires of their immediate and broader (social) environment. In Hungary's reality of corruption, this takes place in the following way:

- An emerging and intensifying rivalry and scheming competition among members of the "elite" (e.g. doubling their wealth each year), then giving way to behaviour that does not even try to appear ethical or moral ("free for all"). A boasting display and idealisation of a lifestyle and social status built upon assets acquired through corrupt means ("your worth is determined by what you have").
- The Hungarian colloquialism mutyi—meaning backdoor deals or under-the-table schemes—and the widespread search for kiskapuk (loopholes) are not just words but encapsulate a culture where circumventing the rules is seen as cleverness. Since the 1950s, this kind of 'wheeler-dealing' has become an all-too-common, almost folkloric survival hobby, leading to a social environment where rule-bending is both normalized and rationalized, feeding into collective resignation and mistrust.
- Corruption becomes a mass phenomenon, a socially imitated survival strategy.

In Girard's theory,[6] mimetic desires can lead to rivalry, which ultimately culminates in scapegoating. In Hungarian public life, this pattern takes shape in the tendency to look for individual culprits in corruption scandals, thereby reducing systemic issues to individual failings. However, scapegoating is only one of the issues with corruption.

5 René Girard: *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. Grasset, Paris, 1961.

6 René Girard: *A bűnbak*. [The Scapegoat] Hungarian translation by Imre Jakabffy and Éva Jakabffy. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 2014 (Original: *Le Bouc émissaire*. Grasset, Paris, 1982.)

According to the ethics of Immanuel Kant, there is an unconditional and universal moral commandment: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.[7]" This imperative demands that we assess all our actions with a perspective on whether those actions could be adopted by everyone.

Corruption, in Kant's understanding, is morally unacceptable because it cannot be universalised. If everybody was corrupt, society would collapse. (Similarly to the tragedy of the commons, which demonstrates the tragic consequences of prioritising self-interests over the common good by providing a clear example.[8]) The categorical imperative is therefore a sort of moral litmus test: we may only perform actions that we would want others to perform as well.

According to Kant's other definition, the fundamental law of pure practical reason: "Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as means.[9]" This is particularly relevant to corruption cases, where large groups of people are often used merely as tools to serve private interests.

From Plato's perspective, this is the dissolution of the order of both the soul and the city order. According to the classical tripartite structure, *logos* (reason), *thumos* (spirit) and *epithymia* (desire) uphold order when reason leads, spirit safeguards the standard, and desire learns moderation. When desire and spirit break free from the control of *logos*, the community loses the inner harmony of justice: the state in which "loopholes" become the norm is no other than the city's spiritual disorder. Plato warns that the intemperance of freedom turns into arbitrariness and turns against itself. The cure lies in *paideia* – education directed toward the Good – which restores order to both the soul and the community[10].

7 Immanuel Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Translated by Allen W. Wood. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002, (Original: *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. In: Kant's gesammelte Schriften. Akademie-Ausgabe, Bd. IV. Berlin, 1903, 421.)

8 Garrett Hardin: The Tragedy of the Commons: The population problem has no technical solution; it requires a fundamental extension in morality. *Science*, 13 Dec 1968 Vol 162, Issue 3859, 1243-1248 0. DOI: 10.1126/science.162.3859.1243

9 Immanuel Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Translated by Allen W. Wood. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2022. (Original: *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. In: Kant's gesammelte Schriften. Akademie-Ausgabe, Bd. IV. Berlin, 1903. 429)

10 Platón: *Az állam* [Plato: Republic]. Hungarian translation by Kornél Steiger. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2005, Book IV., 441C–444A develops a parallel between the individual and the state, as well as the correct relationship between the thinking and the spirited part of man; Book VIII., 543A–544D on faulty forms of government; Book VII., 518C–519C on correct education. (Original: *Respublica*. In: Platonis Opera. Ed. John Burnet. Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford, 1902.)

Aristotle saw moral decay as the lack of virtues. The virtuous "mean" (*mesotes*)[11] – temperance, justice, generosity – keeps passions in balance; while *phronesis*[12] (practical wisdom) ensures the selection of means appropriate to right ends. Corruption is the rejection of the common good (*koinon agathon*)[13]: when private interests rise above the law and institutions. Constitutionally,[14] oligarchy is corrupt because it elevates wealth as the ruling principle; while unchecked democracy is corrupt because it distorts freedom by making it an unlimited demand. Good order is mixed in nature, sustained by the rule of law and a culture of moderation.

From the perspective of these two classics, the Hungarian reality can be read as the weakening of the control of *logos* and a lack of *phronesis* in the public and private sector: "shady deals" embody the culture of desire (*epithymia*); clientelism reflects the institutionalisation of an oligarchic tendency; while cynicism is the fatigue of freedom – a state no longer willing to accept the discipline of order. Today, Plato's *paideia* – meaning the harmonious, ethical and intellectual cultivation of the whole human being: personality, character, and soul – is the duty of education: to turn both reason and spirit toward the Good and toward justice; while Aristotle's virtue ethics presupposes the internalisation of organisational life, customary orders, good practices, and consequences.

Experiences with young people are particularly striking: while the vast majority of them recognise how widespread corruption is, only a small fraction report such cases – and those who do once often choose not to do it again because of negative experiences[15]. This is not just statistical data; it is a cultural indication. In the words of Aristotle: the virtue of courage is formed through habits; *phronesis* can be learnt if there is example and consequence. In Plato's words: the soul must see that the good is not naivety, but a force that creates order. The fear of retaliation can be alleviated if the community does not leave courage isolated but reinforces it through institutional protection and public recognition. The fact that this is not reflected in the current state of public life in Hungary is thought-provoking and highlights the need for a new beginning.

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11 Arisztotelész: *Nikomakhoszi etika*. [Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics] Hungarian translation by Kornél Steiger. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1997. Book II., 1106a–1109b discusses virtue in detail.

12 Arisztotelész: *Nikomakhoszi etika*. [Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics] Translated by Kornél Steiger. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1997. Book VI., 1140a–1140b Greek wordplay is difficult to translate, but *sophrosyne* – meaning temperance – is called as such because it "saves" wisdom (*sōsousa tēn phronēsin*):

13 Arisztotelész: *Politika*. [Aristotle: Politics] Hungarian translation by Miklós Szabó. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1994. Book III., 1279a–1281a confronts sins with noble deeds – societies' aim is the maximisation of the latter.

14 Arisztotelész: *Politika*. [Aristotle: Politics] Hungarian translation by Miklós Szabó. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1994. Book IV., 1293b–1295a discusses the mixing of oligarchic and democratic elements in detail.

15 Integrity Authority, Integrity Academy: KORR-KÉP kutatás – Fiatalok korrupció-észlelése [KORR-KÉP research – Young People's Perception of Corruption], 2025.

The bridge between today's reality and a desired future can be built through education and institution-building. The inner standard is collectively provided by Plato's *paideia*, Aristotle's virtue ethics, Hamvas's existential discipline from Hungarian intellectual tradition, Saint Augustine's penitential realism, and Kant's order-creating rationality. The external frameworks, in turn, are provided by international examples. This is the starting point of practical renewal, the success of which will be measurable in a lasting culture shift, rather than in quick victories.

Although this cultural shift must necessarily arise from, and take root in, specific individuals, it must – by its very nature, and in order to retain even the slightest chance of success – be embedded at the societal level. Therefore, the root causes of corruption must also be examined at the macro level.

Distortion Mechanisms and Stages of the Corrupt System – The Self-Justifying Spiral of Corruption

Corruption is not merely a chain of individual choices; it is also a collective logic of self-defence that gradually seeps into the workings of both society and institutions. The following mechanisms reveal how the system constructs its own self-justifying strategies – first normalising corruption, then sustaining it, – and finally bringing about its own collapse.

i. Relativisation and trivialisation (rationalisation)
   - Concealment: facts are relativised ("we cannot know for sure").
   - Trivialisation: damage is downplayed as "insignificant"

ii. Normalisation and rationalisation (self-justification)
   - Normalisation: "everyone does it"; "we do it because they do it".
   - Rationalisation: the goal justifies the means.

iii. Double standard and clientelist system (distortion of power)
   - Double standard: "what is forbidden to others is permitted to us".
   - Clientelist system: favour traded for loyalty

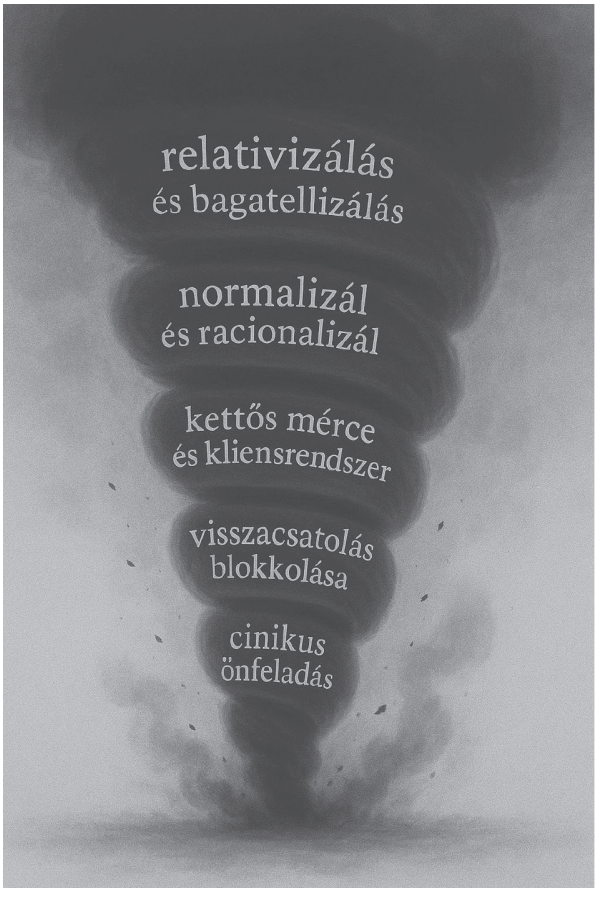
iv. Blocking feedback (silencing criticism)
   - Isolation: voices are shut out
   - Persecution reflex: critics are branded as enemies.

v. Cynical self-abandonment (self-destruction)
   - Cynical self-identity: integrity is dismissed as naivety.
   - Self-devouring: the system marginalises even the most talented, leading ultimately to its own collapse.

Reversing these stages points the way out: unconcealedness, a sense of proportion, leading by example, and consequences.

These distortion mechanisms parallel Donald Cressey's model known as the "fraud triangle" in multiple aspects. Cressey argued that fraudulent behaviour at the level of individuals arises from three concurrent elements: motivation (the hope of reward or coercion), opportunity, and rationalisation. Distortion mechanisms elevate this logic to a collective level: concealment, trivialisation and normalisation are all forms of social self-justification; the double standard and clientelist system serve as an indication for the institutionalisation of opportunities, while the persecution reflex and isolation create a protected space by disabling controls. Cynicism and self-consumption reach beyond Cressey's model, as they illustrate the self-destructive logic of the system. Thus, the classical micro-level explanation is reinterpreted from a social, macro-level perspective, demonstrating how individual self-justification turns into a collective norm and ultimately becomes the very force that brings the system down.

The spiral of corruption: image generated by ChatGpt 5



How to counter such a trend effectively? Is there any real solution?

Pillars of the Moral Immune System

i. Inner compass (our own resources)
   - Inner standard (conscience) – translating "what is right?" into lived action.
   - Knowledge – the clarification of concepts, the application of case lessons.

ii. Community support (social unity)
   - Examples – the presentation of living models.
   - Community norms – collectively established rules.

iii. Responsibility and safety (institutional guarantees)
   - Accountability – foreseeable consequences
   - Protection – protecting whistleblowers

iv. Positive confirmation (vision for the future)
   - Recognition – honouring the Good in public life.
   - Hope – knowing that change is possible.

Together, these pillars form the immune system of integrity – the "antibody" against corruption.

The Ten Commandments for the common good – "Do not steal" and "Do not lie"

The Ten Commandments are more than just a religious tradition – they embody the basic moral framework necessary for living together in community. The "Do not steal" and "Do not lie" commandments safeguard the integrity of public and private property, as well as a collective access to truth. Stealing destroys the order of material goods, while lying corrupts the order of truth; together, they undermine both the material and the epistemic (that is, the processes by which true knowledge is attained, validated, and shared) common good.

In a corrupt world, "stealing" extends far beyond the embezzlement of money, it also includes the privatisation of national wealth (private gains drawn from public funds), the capture of decisions of public interest (clientelism), the theft of opportunities (restriction of competition), the hijacking of time and attention (sham tasks and pseudo-projects), and on top of that, the destruction of equal opportunities, and the restriction of access to public – or commonly produced – goods. "Lying", in turn, is not merely the falsification of facts – it includes deceptive silence, looking the other way, wilful omission, statistical and methodological obfuscation, the concealment of real motives, and distortion through linguistic euphemisms.

Stealing erodes trust capital on a material level, while lying undermines it by destabilising its cognitive, intellectual, and knowledge-based foundations.

Institutional embodiment (institutionalisation): the "Do not steal" commandment demands transparent ownership structures in asset management and public

fund utilisation, open contract archives, robust and realistic conflict of interest regulations, as well as effective control and recovery mechanisms (audits, civil and criminal enforcement tools). The "Do not lie" commandment calls for authentic record-keeping, trackable decision preparation (decision logs), the broad definition and disclosure of public-interest data, the consistent sanctioning of false official declarations and document forgery, as well as protection for whistleblowers.

The philosophical parallel confirms the same truth: According to Kant's universalisability test, neither stealing nor lying can be made into universal law without impeding the functioning of the community. In Aristotle's virtue ethics, temperance and unconcealedness (*aletheia*) form the basis of living together; *phronesis* is the capacity that turns rules into action. And Plato's *paideia* reminds us that a community remains free only as long as it cherishes truth – wherever falsehood becomes a cultural norm, freedom ultimately undoes itself.

The vocabulary of shady deals, scheming, and loophole-seeking have gradually crept into Hungarian public discourse – partly as a result of the activities of political actors. Since the 1950s, circumventing regulations and norms have practically been a shared (sad and fateful) "hobby" for a significant fraction of the Hungarian society. This is no longer simply an economic or administrative problem; it has become a deep psychological issue. Society's normative order is not organised around the common good, but rather along distinctive survival strategies.

The slippery slope of moral decline:

- Acceptance, resignation: "Everyone does it, so I can do it too", ad absurdum "I need to do the same"
- Normalisation: "This is a natural part of life", "we know they steal; we do the same; it would be great if we didn't have to steal that much, but..."
- Indoctrination: "Those who do not play along are naive and losers – or simply just stupid"

In Hamvas's words: "Corruption is not just a series of bad deeds; it is a way of life that gradually seeps into one's entire worldview.[16]" [own translation]

The Force of Community and Setting an Example

As a brief historical reflection on Hungary – and even on Eastern Europe as a whole – it is important to understand why one of communism's greatest crimes, and at the same time one of its key goals, was the destruction of peasant society.

Self-sufficiency and independence were among the most important values of peasant society. Peasants produced their own food – such as wheat, vegetables, fruits, meat, and dairy products – made their own wine, *pálinka*, honey, and cheese; and built

16 Béla Hamvas: *Direkt morál és rossz lelkiismeret*. [Direct Morality and Bad Conscience] In: *Patmosz I.* Medio Kiadó, Budapest, 1995

their homes with their own hands, as a community. People in peasant households were well-versed in nearly everything, including repair, weaving, spinning, sewing, and the use of herbs. They purchased only the most important items in shops – such as petroleum or sugar. This lifestyle gave them strong economic and social independence. As our ancestors aptly put it: only the God and the weather could command a peasant.[17]

This lifestyle was not only independent but also healthy and sustainable. They barely used any chemicals – food was natural and homemade. Daily physical work strengthened both the body and the soul, while they lived in close harmony with nature.

Moral and community stability played an important role in the peasant world. To steal was shameful (and a sin), one's word served as the currency of trust – upheld by functional customary law and community oversight. Large families showed great togetherness, siblings and relatives supported each other.

Another hidden strength of peasant life was the diversity of its knowledge and practical experiences. Children learnt from an early age to work, live in harmony with nature, and acquire the skills necessary for daily survival on the family farm. This diverse body of knowledge laid the foundations for what is known today as "interdisciplinarity". Instead of excessive specialisation – the realm of narrow-minded experts – peasant life has proved that true independence lies in a wide-ranging, mutually complementary set of skills, from farming to healing to craftsmanship.

All this made peasant society (of course, within the boundaries that had already existed at the time) essentially autonomous– or, to use a more fashionable term: sovereign. Their lives were not completely at the mercy of external powers and market forces: they had existential security, the freedom to make their own decisions, and their lives were not dependent on the existence or functioning of the system. This sort of sovereignty is – or would be – essential in the modern world as well. At this point, one might well ask: what would we do if next week supermarket shelves ran empty?.

To sum up, idealised though it may be, the example of peasant society reveals that self-sufficiency, self-determination, and a diverse body of knowledge (interdisciplinarity) together form the true foundations of both individual and community independence. Fighting corruption effectively is possible not only through legal means, but also by rebuilding these patterns. This is not only an advantage but also an inevitable survival strategy for modern society.

Across the post-communist systems, the processes that (also) undermined these values reinforced one another. Society has now reached a point where patterns that make positive, real life and survival possible have crumbled: individualism, consumer compulsion, the desire to possess, ambition, and atomisation have all weakened communities.

17 This ethos supported a resilient, resourceful community, where trust and moral order were not enshrined in law, but lived through custom and mutual reliance.

To break this negative trend, rebuilding positive social patterns, as well as re-codifying and showcasing values, are all essential components[18]. What is needed is not new rules and sanctions, but the restoration of trust, respect for one's word, community accountability, and transparency. This is the only way to overcome corruption in the long run, as it in reality feeds on the absence of community morals and self-determination.

It follows almost naturally from the above aspects that the Hungarian society needs help to rebuild these positive patterns – support that can only be provided through the example set by families, parents and grandparents ("von Haus aus"), combined with taught theory and the exemplary conduct of educators.

Unfortunately, it also follows naturally from the aforementioned aspects that these preconditions are not in place for a large part of society. They are missing not only because parental and grandparental role models (examples) have faded, but also because of shortcomings in the curriculum and a lack of exemplary conduct from teachers. To sum up, all this leads to society lacking "authoritative figures", as well as the demonstration and promotion (idealisation) of positive examples and values, which in turn causes society's norms to break down and ultimately be lost and forgotten.

Taking these aspects into consideration, apart from the family and close-knit communities, substantial external influence comes through education – and sometimes even that fails.[19] At this point, education faces a twofold mission in the fight against corruption:

Prevention for young people:

- Nurturing and strengthening of the inner compass. Transmitting values that prevent corrupt conduct from emerging.

18 The Fourth Book of Moses (Numeri/Numbers), chapter 21, verses 4 to 9 talk about the story of the brazen serpent: in this story, the Jewish people are attacked by poisonous snakes in the desert as a punishment for their complaints, God instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Whoever looks at it will be healed. Just as the brazen serpent drew the attention of people whose lives were at risk to God, faith and self-reflection, the re-codification and showcasing of traditional values in modern society can likewise have healing power. The brazen serpent itself had no healing power; instead, it symbolised humanity's need to turn back to the divine order, morality, and a sense of belonging to a community.

19 Going back to the Brazilian example in the Prologue, fixing a flawed system "from the outside" is difficult: evaluators of the implementation of responsible research and innovation practice ("RRI-Practice") in Brazil found that a programme developed in the centres of science within the most advanced liberal democracies was not prepared for how differently Brazilians operate institutions. The scientific RRI ecosystem is difficult to fix from the outside, especially when even well-intentioned criticism is easily seen as an external attempt at interference. (Gábor Zemplén: A tények utáni korszak tudományképe: autonómia, szakértőiség, felelősség in Pléh Csaba, Nyíri Kristóf. *A tények utáni világ mítosza*. ["The Post-Truth Era View of Science: Autonomy, Expertise, Responsibility" in Csaba Pléh and Kristóf Nyíri. *The Myth of the Post-Truth World*] (2022).

- Building a moral immune system to counter future temptations – during a time when behavioural patterns that could eventually lead to abuse have not yet taken root.

Rehabilitation for adults

- Dismantling and transforming negative patterns that are deeply rooted in everyday life
- Genuine processing of past wrongdoings
- Developing and practicing new behavioural models

A Navigare necesse est, vivere non est necesse – adapting the words of Pompey to our time: Docere necesse est, ut vivere possimus – Teaching is necessary so that we may live.

Sacral Pedagogy: According to Béla Hamvas,[20] true education is more than just transmitting information, it is the universal Order, dedication, integrity, and the transmission of the inner light. This is not an administrative process but a rite of passage: teachers' duty is to lead by example – to show, through their way of life, what living morality means and how integrity can be preserved.

The Need for Educational Reform

The Hungarian society has sunk into such a state of profound moral, institutional and psychological crisis, where corruption appears not merely as a flaw in legal, economic and political systems, but as a deeper ailment of the nation's spiritual fabric, collective soul and cultural identity.

According to the 2025 Eurobarometer survey, 74% of young people aged 15 to 29 think that paying bribes or relying on personal connections is often the easiest way to obtain public services[21]. However, these statistic only scratches the surface. The real problem lies in the moral climate itself — a social atmosphere, in which ethical trade-offs have become second nature. Looking for loopholes and circumventing rules and control are seen as ordinary survival skills, and the pursuit of the common good has yielded to the instinct to get by.

The mentality that is captured well by the definition from Hungarian stand-up comedian Géza Hofi[22], frequently quoted in public discourse, according to which

20 Béla Hamvas: *Scientia Sacra I.* Medio Kiadó, Budapest, 1988

21 Integrity Authority: *Youth's attitudes toward corruption in Hungary – Based on the Hungarian subsample of the 2025 Eurobarometer survey.* Integrity Authority, Budapest, 2025 Available at https://integritashatosag.hu

22 Géza Hofi, a household name in Hungary whose satirical monologues became a folk compass, once quipped: A korrupció az, amiből kihagynak ('Corruption is what I'm left out of'). This phrase embodies the everyday cynicism and existential confusion of Hungarian society— where even the definition of corruption is colored by bitter irony and a sense of exclusion,

"corruption is what I am left out of", reflects not only boundless cynicism but also a profound mental disorientation. Interestingly, it is this abyss that enables genuine change to take place. Just as a whirlpool releases what it has drawn to its deepest point, whenever society reaches the nadir of its crisis, it also finds the possibility of renewal – not through superficial reforms, but through a transformation that touches the deepest layers of human nature (cf. social catharsis).

Its peculiarities make Hungarian corruption unique also in an international comparison. According to the 2025 OECD reports, Hungary's situation has deteriorated further in the past decade. As a result, the country has been losing ground in global rankings.

According to the 2025 Eurobarometer survey, the situation among young Hungarians is particularly troubling: while 87% of them perceive corruption as widespread, only 29% know who to turn to when they encounter it. According to the similarly bleak picture painted by the Integrity Authority's KORR-KÉP research project, passivity runs deep among young people: 41.5% say they would do nothing if they encountered a suspected case of corruption, and only 27.7% would take action.

One of the key findings of the study is that only 4% of young people have ever reported or taken action in a corruption case. However, every other respondent from this group claimed that they would not report a corruption case again because of the circumstances they had experienced in a previous case. The most frequently cited reason was the fear of retaliation and retribution.

This suggests that young people recognise the problem, yet see no real path toward change.

Changing the situation will be extremely difficult without a transformation in education.

One possible direction for educational reforms is the development of the curriculum. The core of this development is the integration of philosophical ethics at all levels, to reinforce people's skills in thinking and forming moral judgement. The integration of the thinkers reviewed briefly in this study provides a complex value basis which combines classical philosophical tradition with modern approach. Learning can be brought to life through role-playing and dilemma-based teaching, enriched with age-appropriate moral exercises. In this way, students could gain not only theoretical knowledge, but also the moral insight and practical experience needed to navigate everyday life.

Teacher training and teachers' professional support are of key importance. Beyond cultivating genuine role models, education also calls for a spirit of compassion — an attitude that deepens understanding and empathy toward students. It is important to disseminate a reflective teaching practice whereby teachers consciously analyse and reflect on their own work and its impact. This requires continuous professional mentoring and support to enable teachers to grow personally and professionally , and to serves as good examples within their communities.

Reinforcing community involvement is one of the cornerstones of educational renewal. Within the framework of this effort, parents and students should be involved in decision-making, and through the cooperation of civil society organisations

and local authorities, giving school life a broader social foundation. A system of independent monitoring and/or regular evaluation should also be built to provide continuous feedback on the quality and impact of education. This fosters not only transparency but also trust.

At the level of social initiatives, it is important to introduce a culture of repentance. At the same time, however, forgiveness should also be learnt, as this can break the cycle of distrust and hostility. This means that people must work through mistakes at a community level, and responsibility must be reinforced in all social classes. Encouraging collective self-reflection contributes to the progress of communities, complemented by the expectation and fulfilment of active efforts to make amends, driven by a genuine intention of restoration.

Among institutional principles, strong rule of law, based upon the pillars of an independent judiciary and efficient and – where needed – independent oversight bodies, is the number one priority. Transparent decision-making is essential to preserving public trust.

Economic transparency is just as crucial. This involves the disclosure of public procurement information, monitoring asset declarations, and a transparent and efficient regulation of the use of common resources. Good examples must be codified, exhibited, rewarded and encouraged, while behavioural patterns that break the rules must be corrected – if necessary, through proportionate sanctions. Harmful or unlawful behavioural patterns that weaken the community's integrity must be repressed, stopped and eliminated from the system with stern measures.

In other words: if somebody keeps cheating, lying or abusing their power, simply asking them politely to stop is unlikely to be enough. There must be consequences strong enough to put an end to this behaviour and prevent it from becoming a model for others to follow.

This dual system ensures that the norms and institutions of the community continue to work reliably in the long term.

In practical terms, a successful integrity programme rests on four layers that build upon one another:

- values and norms – simple principles set out and followed collectively
- knowledge and skill – situational exercises, role play, case studies
- institutional background – transparent processes, clear description of responsibilities and powers
- feedback – measurement, self-evaluation, external evaluation (positive and negative motivation).

In the measurement, it is worth combining various research tools used to study attitudes and adherence to norms (questionnaires, dilemma tests), behavioural indicators (case reports, participation, feedback rates) and the outcome of education (complex project quality, community service).

International Frameworks and Anti-Corruption Models

International academic literature sees integrity as a key factor for the quality of governance and civil service, rather than as an isolated ethical issue. OECD's integrity indicators and summaries consistently point out that there is often an "implementation gap" between well-written rules and daily practice. This shows that creating rules alone is not enough. A culture must also be cultivated, emphasising role-model behaviour, accountability, transparency, and the professionalism of teachers and leaders. The Basel Institute's studies analyse the patterns and social costs of high-level corruption, facilitating a more targeted use of the resources intended to prevent and investigate corruption. At the same time, the thematic Eurobarometer surveys underline that the perceptions of the civic and the business sector often differ, but solid adherence to norms and the enforcement of repercussions are necessary conditions for restoring trust in both sectors. UNODC's (E4J/GRACE) modules offer concrete, integrable educational instruments for value-based instruction in public and higher education.

There are several ways to combat corruption.More successful models share some easily identifiable attributes.

The effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions is shaped by three fundamental factors: institutional independence, extensive powers, and social embeddedness. Sustainable results can only be achieved when all three conditions are present. International experience indicates that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution here: success always depends on the local political, economic, and cultural environment. The examples of Hong Kong, Bhutan, Lithuania, Latvia, South Africa, as well as the experiences of the Hungarian Integrity Authority clearly illustrate the advantages and limitations of the possible paths.

Across the world, numerous independent institutions have been established to fight corruption, each shaped by its own historical and political context. Hong Kong's ICAC, Lithuania's STT, Latvia's KNAB, and South Africa's SIU are particularly instructive examples of how to take action against corruption in diverse environments, through different institutional solutions. Established in 2022 in Hungary, the Integrity Authority is in a situation that is unique in comparison with the models referred to above: its mandate and scope for action are more limited, and its creation can be considered primarily to be a consequence of external – EU – requirements.

The purpose of the following section is not only to compare international models, but also to identify the factors that make anti-corruption authorities effective, and draw lessons that may be relevant to the Hungarian context.

Hong Kong – ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption), the model institution

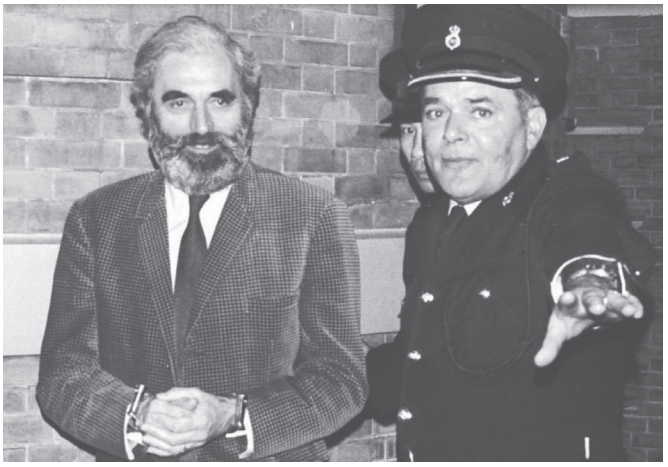
In the 1960s and '70s, corruption permeated virtually all areas of public life in Hong Kong, including public services, law enforcement and healthcare. Public trust had eroded to the point of disappearance, and bribery became the operative norm even in the case of ambulance and fire services. Peter Godber's landmark case in 1973 proved to be a turning point. The case of the apprehended police chief superintendent provoked such outrage that it enforced determined institutional action.

The most spectacular part of the Godber-case may have been that when in the course of the investigation, the police searched Godber's apartment and car and found three plastic writing cases, "bribe money logbooks", many documents relating to his finances, and two boxes containing dozens of silver bars. A financial investigation revealed that although Godber had officially earned less than 700,000 Hong Kong dollars in total since his employment in 1952, he had commanded over 4 million dollars – on offshore accounts, in cash, with money transfers to Canada, Australia and Singapore.

The turning point came when a former police officer, imprisoned at the time, testified that he had seen Godber accept a bribe of 25 thousand Hong Kong dollars in return for arranging a well-paid job for somebody. Godber later fled to escape justice.

In 1974, the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was established as an authority fully independent from the police and directly accountable to the Governor. Godber was eventually apprehended, thanks to the ICAC's investigation, witness testimonies, and assistance from the British authorities. Extradited from England, he was sentenced in Hong Kong to four years in prison, and his assets were confiscated.

Former police chief superintendent Peter Godber on his way to his court hearing in 1975 — Photo: South China Morning Post



In its fight against corruption, the ICAC adopted a strategy based on three pillars: investigation, prevention and education. Its broad investigative powers were balanced with strict internal controls to prevent the institution itself from becoming a source of abuse.

One of the greatest achievements of the Hong Kong authority was a substantial reduction of corruption and the restoration of public trust in state-run institutions within a few decades. Not only the cleansing of the police force, but also the prosecution of high-ranking politicians signalled the emergence of genuine zero tolerance toward corruption. To this day, Hong Kong's system is regarded as one of the most respected anti-corruption models in the world. Anti-corruption efforts and the ICAC have become one of Hong Kong's key brands and defining features, playing a crucial role in maintaining the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) and enhancing the appeal of the Hong Kong stock exchange.

Success stories from the Baltics

Following the democratic transition, the Baltic States – Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania – laid particular emphasis on aligning democratic and rule of law values with moral principles. Baltic countries integrated these principles into their institutional and community norms, and introduced monitoring systems, transparent decision-making processes, and forms of civic participation that provided both legal control and a common learning process. Members of society actively monitor the functioning of public institutions, and apart from legal aspects, legislation also gives weight to moral principles. In addition, school curricula in these countries include the subject of ethical decision-making, turning the fight against corruption into a matter of both institutional integrity and collective social responsibility.

After the collapse of communism, the Baltic states and Hungary faced broadly similar challenges in the 1990s. In terms of general welfare, Hungary might have even been ahead of the Baltic states. The Baltic states have achieved considerable economic growth since gaining their independence. In 2004, they joined the European Union, together with Hungary, which gave them considerable momentum through structural funds and the access to a substantially larger market. Estonia and Lithuania focused on technology and innovation, with the latter also recognising early on the need to achieve energy independence and reduce vulnerability resulting from reliance on a single country.

Predictable business environment, legal certainty and efficient public administration created a favourable economic context for both domestic and foreign investment. Openness to cutting-edge and support for domestic economic actors have helped transform the Baltic countries into a vibrant start-up hub, producing global success stories such as the Lithuanian fintech company Revolut. (In the meantime, Latvia has found its role as a transit hub.) At the same time, they launched state welfare programmes and rapidly developed their social safety nets. In spite of the differences between their political views, successive governments – following the example of Germany – did not veer off the planned path of economic development.

All these developments took place under the watchful oversight of effective anti-corruption authorities vested with appropriate powers.

Lithuania – STT (Specialiųjų Tyrimų Tarnybamint)

Lithuania's Special Investigation Service (STT), a criminal investigation authority, has played a key role in preventing corrupt practices from undermining public investments, welfare programmes, and, more broadly, the use of public funds. It has become a widely cited and respected model for combatting criminal offences such as corruption, influence peddling, and abuse of power, both nationally and internationally. Prior to the establishment of the STT in 1997, economic abuses had posed a significant barrier to Lithuania's GDP growth.

After the regime change, Lithuania suffered from massive corruption problems: the police, the customs authority, and privatisation were all heavily infested with corruption. However, preparations for the country's EU-accession necessitated the consolidation of independent institutions. Founded in 1997, the Special Investigation Service (STT) reports directly to the president and the parliament of Lithuania, ensuring its independence from the government.

STT performs three core functions: it investigates, prevents and organises awareness-raising programmes. It achieved significant breakthroughs in several areas, including combatting corruption in the healthcare sector and within the judiciary.

Thanks to its appropriate legal powers, theSTT was able to initiate criminal proceedings in major corruption cases. These proceedings eventually led to the country's public procurement and corporate governance reform. In the 2000s, Lithuania experienced annual economic growth of 7–8%, with only the 2008 financial crisis causing a temporary slowdown – the COVID-19 pandemic, however, had no significant impact.

The state's impressive commitment to fighting corruption led to a marked increase in business confidence and economic performance. Alongside Hongkong's ICAC, the STT provides some of the clearest evidence of the direct connection between corruption and economic performance.

The organisation's work also played a crucial role in the country's compliance with European Union standards on governance and anti-corruption efforts, supporting Lithuania's integration into the European Union.

Inside the EU, the Lithuanian institution is regarded as one of the most successful anti-corruption organisations of the post-Soviet region.

Latvia – KNAB (Korupcijas Novēršanas un Apkarošanas Birojs)

The Latvian Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) was established in 2002 with a unique mandate: in addition to conducting investigations and prevention measures, it directly oversees the financing of political parties. This function is considered a rarity in Europe. KNAB has regularly acted on corruption cases involving ministers, local governments, and political parties, although the

quality of its work has often been undermined by political pressure and scandals concerning the institution's management.

Perhaps the most prominent and internationally well-known case involving KNAB was the 2018 scandal surrounding the Governor of Latvia's Central Bank. The Governor of the Central Bank Ilmārs Rimšēvičs was accused of accepting a bribe in favour of a private bank, thereby influencing financial market decisions. KNAB conducted a swift investigation, the governor was arrested, and several coercive measures were applied against him, including a prohibition of performing his duties and a ban on leaving the country. Considering that it concerned an independent, high-ranking financial official, this case attracted large media attention and set a precedent in terms of the accountability of central bank governors.

At the same time, a notable outcome of the case was that the European Court of Justice annulled the Latvian authority's decision to suspend Rimšēvičs from his role as Governor of the Central Bank. The Court reasoned that Latvia had failed to provide credible evidence of severe infringements, and therefore the governor's suspension was deemed unjustified. The case thus set a precedent for upholding EU rule-of-law standards and safeguarding central bank independence. Rimšēvičs was reinstated in his position, while criminal proceedings over the alleged corruption continued. However, his removal from office was ruled unlawful.

As of 2025, criminal proceedings in the Rimšēvičs corruption case are still ongoing; the trial and the final adjudication of the charges have not yet been concluded, and no final verdict has been delivered. Rimšēvičs remains a party to the litigation, although he has been reinstated in his position. Nevertheless, and perhaps in part because of this process, the Bureau managed to reinforce public trust.

South Africa – SIU (Special Investigation Unit)

South Africa's SIU (Special Investigating Unit) is an independent state anti-corruption investigating body, established in 1997 with the signature of President Nelson Mandela, in accordance with the Special Investigating Units and Special Tribunals Act of 1996. The decision was made in the initial period of South African democracy, with a view to consolidating public integrity after apartheid, at a time when restoring public trust, curbing widespread corruption in public institutions, and safeguarding public funds were of utmost importance.

The formation of the SIU was also driven by the major transformations in post-apartheid South Africa, the consolidation of the rule of law, as well as anti-corruption expectations from international organisations (UN, OECD). The SIU was originally intended as an interim solution, but the persistence of corruption vulnerabilities and social expectations made it a permanent institution. Its duties include investigating public matters involving major expenditures and enforcing civil legal claims (e.g. asset recovery).

Since its establishment, the institution has undergone numerous structural changes. Its legal status has been consolidated several times, and its powers have been consistently expanded.

A distinctive feature of the organisation is that it can only launch investigations with a presidential mandate, and that it primarily seeks to recover misappropriated public funds through civil proceedings. Although its lacks the authority to initiate criminal proceedings, its activity has a serious social impact: procurement abuses during the COVID-19 pandemic, corruption cases of South African public utility company Eskom, and the contract scandals of the Zuma-Gupta era all indicate that the SIU plays a crucial part in ensuring accountability. At the same time, its efficiency in curbing systemic corruption is limited due to political influence and its narrow mandate.

Bhutan – the odd one out

Bhutan chose a different approach: here, the main instrument of anti-corruption efforts is not an authority with extensive powers, but the promotion of norms at a community level. Through "Integrity Clubs" students, teachers, parents, and local leaders collectively uphold values that also serve to prevent corruption. The focus is not on punishment but on the reinforcement of a culture of integrity.

This model best demonstrates that social resilience plays a key role in preventing corruption – in fact, it is probably the cheapest and most efficient approach. At the same times, it also shows that embedding a value system is essential for the success of such a model. Indeed, Bhutan defines progress in moral, communal, and spiritual terms, rather than in material ones. The country consciously resists Western-type consumerist and individualistic models and does not place economic growth or consumption at the heart of its value system.

According to the Gross National Happiness (GNH[23]) principle, Bhutan prioritises harmony in the community, mental health, the preservation of cultural values, and environmental sustainability over material prosperity – yes, this really exists, and yes, this can be done.

The country strives for harmony with nature (over 60% of its territory is covered by forests; it has negative net carbon-dioxide emissions); the Buddhist value system deeply permeates politics, education, and daily life: inner peace, empathy (cf. mercy), and responsibility for the community are fundamental values. Political culture prioritises consensus over scapegoating. The society is built on self-sufficiency, and the community's welfare is considered more important than individual material gain.

This is also reflected in the four pillars of GNH: good governance, sustainable socio-economic growth, the preservation and advancement of culture, and the protection of the environment. The GNH Center for Bhutan measures (and publishes) the Gross National Happiness index across nine dimensions and 33 attributes.

It is worth noting how many parallels can be drawn with the peasant society described earlier.

23 GNH Centre Bhutan – A GNH organization in Bhutan

Although Bhutan and Hungary are worlds apart, they share some interesting similarities. Both are relatively small countries in their respective regions, striving to preserve their independence and identity while surrounded by larger neighbours. Bhutan is situated in the shadow of India and China, while Hungary navigates its path amid the influences of Germany, the Slavic countries, and – in the twenty-first century – the United States, China, leading member states of the European Union, and Russia.

Geographical characteristics are decisive for both countries: Both are rich in natural resources, Bhutan in the valleys of the Himalayas, Hungary in the middle of the Carpathian Basin. Bhutan exploits hydropower, while Hungary has great potential in geothermal and water reserves, although these resources are not being utilised to their full potential. As a matter of fact, the country manages them quite wastefully and irresponsibly.[24]

The protection of cultural identity is also a common feature. Bhutan consciously protects its Buddhist traditions and architecture, while Hungary has fought to preserve its language and culture for a thousand years. At the same time, Hungary is facing serious challenges: demographic decline, emigration, and economic inequalities are weakening its communities. Family and rural traditions are slowly fading into obscurity, and many talented young people are leaving the country, inevitably weakening community (life).[25]

Relevance to Hungary

Bhutan's example may serve as a guide by placing the value-based common good above the pursuit of material prosperity. For Hungary, the lesson is clear: the fight against corruption cannot rely exclusively on institutional reforms: it also requires the deliberate reinforcement of community norms, traditions, and social trust.

- Value choice: One can use its own autonomous value system to act against external pressure even if one is a small country.
- Community norms: reinforcing the family, the community, and local solidarity can make a successful model.
- Education: raising public awareness of what "good life" means – not only in the dimension of competitiveness but also in moral and community aspects – is key to preventing corruption.

Overall, Bhutan and Hungary are similar in that they are both small countries trying to find their balance against a backdrop of major powers while preserving their

24 I highly recommend to everyone the works of Bertalan Andrásfalvy, including the methods and advantages of water retention, with the caveat that it is not the imitation of the rituals or important figures of the past that is important, but the recognition of what gave life and truth to what our ancestors followed. Honouring our ancestors does not imply the rejection of change but the protection of the longevity of values.

25 Cf. the cynical self-destruction of the system in chapter 3

own cultural heritage. In these efforts, Bhutan builds on the conscious preservation of its traditions and sustainability, whereas Hungary is trying to keep its own identity through its rich history and cultural treasures – all while it must (and should) face its demographic, economic, and social challenges.

For the Hungarian society, Bhutan may serve as an inspiration – a reminder that strengthening integrity and the common good requires a conscious, value-based shift, in which spiritual, cultural, and community dimensions are just as important as economic and institutional solutions.

Hungary – the Integrity Authority as a new actor

Hungary's Integrity Authority was established in 2022, specifically to safeguard EU funds. Its mandate is primarily limited to overseeing the utilisation of EU funding, detecting irregularities, and issuing recommendations. Lacking investigative or prosecutorial powers, its room for manoeuvre is narrower than that of traditional anti-corruption institutions. Although it is formally independent, its effectiveness depends on how well it can bring about – or indeed enforce – real changes in the institutional environment. At an international level, it is regarded as a step forward, but its legitimacy and impact remain to be proven.

Lessons learnt from the comparison of models

International examples provide three great lessons.

I. Institutional independence is essential. Hong Kong's ICAC and Lithuania's STT achieved lasting results because their operations were free from government interference. By contrast, the political environment is a serious risk in the cases of South Africa's SIU and Hungary's Integrity Authority.

II. Extensive powers and triple mandate (investigation, prevention and education) are effective. Institutions that investigate, prevent and educate at the same time (ICAC, STT, KNAB) can achieve permanent social impact. By contrast, organisations with more limited powers will only achieve partial results.

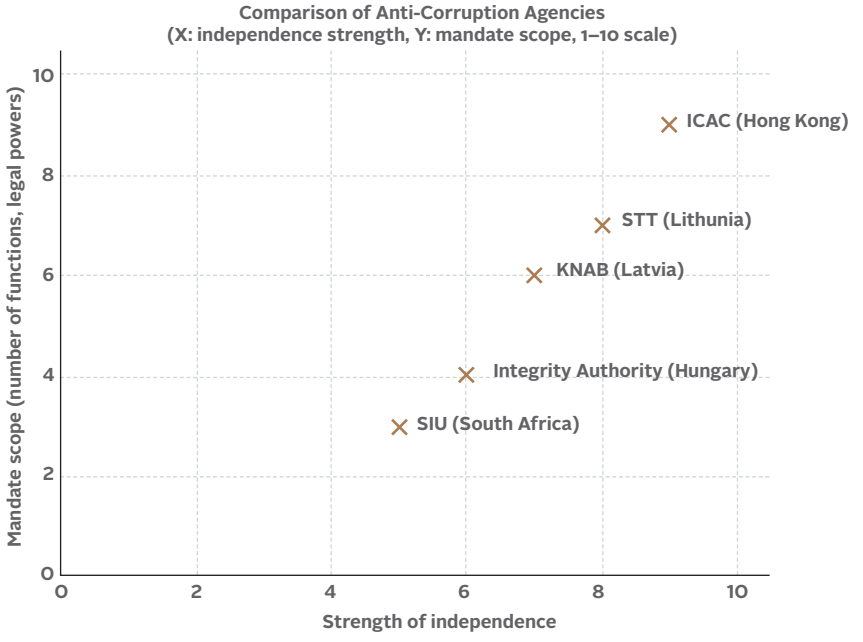
III. Social trust is a key factor. Bhutan's example shows that cultivating a culture of integrity can genuinely succeed. In the Baltic states, citizen oversight and transparency strengthened the work of anti-corruption institutions. However, in societies marked by distrust – as is the case in many post-Soviet and African countries –, institutions alone cannot break the structures of corruption.

All in all, the common features of successful anti-corruption models are genuine independence, broad authority, and societal support. Institutions that managed to combine these three factors have achieved lasting results.

Hungary's Integrity Authority is a young organisation with a limited mandate, and its effectiveness will have to be demonstrated in the coming years. However,

international experience clearly shows that real breakthrough can only be achieved if its independence is strengthened, its mandate broadened, and it succeeds in building public trust.

Comparison of the agencies presented, based on mandate and independence



The Hungarian Reality – Diagnosis and Lessons Learnt

In Hungary's reality, institutional and psychological processes reinforce each other in a negative cycle. Practical limitations of the freedom of information, the high share of non-competitive public procurement, the relative weakness of whistleblower protection, and the opacity of political party funding all undermine anti-corruption efforts. Beneath these structures lies a socio-psychological landscape: the cultural normalisation of looking for loopholes, the entrenchment of cynicism, and young people's reluctance to act for fear of retaliation.

From this perspective, psychological corruption can be seen as a collective — a failure to recognise that nation's future is at risk. Perhaps more intimately, it means that everybody is gambling with their children's and grandchildren's future, trading it for momentary gains — whether those gains are tangible such as money or other benefits or intangible like a temporary peace of mind born from self-delusion and numbing of one's conscience.

The widespread pursuit of loopholes in everyday life, combined with a mindset focused on short-term gains, undermines public trust and adherence to rules. Formal oversight alone is not enough; enforcing standards requires stable community expectations and authentic role models. In education and organisational development, the emphasis should be on cultivating integrity and reconstructing the "inner standard".

Hungarian society has entered a state of profound moral, institutional, and psychological crisis. Corruption may and should be understood not merely as a malfunction of the legal, economic, and political systems but also as a crisis of the mental framework, the collective psyche, and cultural identity.

The role of education in fostering integrity is built on two pillars. The first is prevention: at an early age – using age-appropriate methods – young people should develop inner resources (self-awareness, self-discipline, cooperation, conflict management) that make them more resilient to the lure of short-term gains (a less difficult path is seldom better) must be developed. The second pillar is rehabilitation: in adult education and organisational learning, ingrained behavioural patterns – such as the automatic "everyone does it this way" mindset – must be consciously addressed and dismantled. The key to success lies in consistent role modelling by teachers and leaders, clear norms, and meaningful, real-life curriculum content.

Hamvas understood integrity as the inner standard and pointed out an existential dilemma everyone must face: preserving purity often goes against social integration.

To preserve one's integrity, the harmony of the three dimensions of human life – body, spirit and soul – must be kept. Corruption emerges when this balance is upset:

At the level of the body: The dominance of material needs drives the individual to look for short-term gains, and survival instincts are given priority over moral considerations.

At the level of the spirit: The exploitation of intellectual abilities without moral considerations, looking for "smart" ways out, building rationalisation mechanisms to silence conscience.

At the level of the soul: Neglecting transcendent values, ignoring deep motivations, losing one's sense of the common good.

The impact of childhood socialisation is critical: Childhood socialisation and indoctrination lead to corruption and a high tolerance for it in adulthood. This process occurs in several ways:

At the family level: Parents teach "clever" ways of getting things done ("that's the way you do it"). Making use of personal connections is presented as a natural strategy, and moral trade-offs are passed down as practical life wisdom.

At the level of the school: Teachers are also part of the system – their impact as role models is ambivalent. Exploiting loopholes is rewarded, while adherence to rules appears as naivety.

At the societal level: The media normalises corruption: successful people advance through corrupt practices, while honest behaviour appears to lead to failure.

A common thread running through these phenomena is the absence of strong, positive, integrated individuals who live in harmony and lead by example.

In my opinion, only one path can break the downward spiral, and lead to true social catharsis: the recognition of wrongdoing, sincere repentance, active reparation and, finally, forgiveness.

The moment of recognition: The first step is collective awakening: sincerely facing the fact that we all – both individually and as a community – are complicit in the corrupt system. This is not self-flagellation but a prerequisite for healing.

The power of repentance: Real repentance is not about shame or excuses, but the painful acknowledgement that we have lost our moral integrity. Hungarian society must admit: "Yes, we have acquiesced to to corruption. Yes, we too have been part of this system."

The practice of reparation – genuine remorse bears fruit:

- In education, we start teaching genuine integrity
- In public life, we support transparency and accountability
- In family, we engage in honest discussions with our children
- We stand up for integrity in workplaces

The gift of forgiveness: In its truest sense, forgiveness is not about forgetting the past but about opening the possibility of a new beginning. Everyone deserves another chance if they honestly confront their mistakes, go through the process described above, and genuinely strive to change.

The long-term goal must be a society where integrity is the natural state, and not the exception.

This means that:

- Children are born into an environment where honesty, sincerity and reliability surround them – in other words, they do not have to lose their souls' innate integrity.
- Positive examples predominate, and
  - The rejection of corruption will be an automatic reflex (what is more, even the idea of it does not come up (so frequently))
  - Serving the common good is a priority

Nota bene: Based on almost thirty years of experience in the competitive market, I can state that even the best curriculum, the most advanced compliance system, the strongest regulatory framework, and most rigorous enforcement and accountability come up against a wall – a wall of understandable cynicism –, if top leaders fail to lead by example. It is often said that culture eats strategy for breakfast. In this context, this means that a negative organisational culture can neutralise even the most carefully designed controls and rules if they are underpinned by genuine, value-driven leadership commitment. As someone who has designed compliance systems, I have, unfortunately, seen this lesson confirmed time and again.

Summary

Integrity is the unity of thought, word and action. Corruption is not only a legal or economic problem; it roots lie deep within human nature – in the state of the human soul. Education is a key instrument, as, in addition to transferring knowledge, it can also shape human character and restore the purity of the soul. As I already stated in my application for the position of President of the Integrity Authority: "In addition to sanctioning uncovered cases, corruption can be countered through preventive programmes and education – that is, by promoting ethical conduct in economic activity."

For adults, it is not enough to transfer knowledge. We must create an environment in which they can safely confront their past mistakes. This often requires more intensive programmes and may be a much slower process.

Integrity is not merely about following rules but about inner strength and consistent action. Both philosophical tradition and international as well as national experience convey the same message: a value-based approach – grounded in measurable, transparent, and socially reinforced norms – within education and organisational culture is the key to lasting success.

James 1: 22. 25

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do.[26]

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