My comments on the article “A Cross-National Comparative Experiment on the Effect of Transparency on Trust in Government” by Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Gregory Porumbescu, Boram Hong, and Tobin Im aim to provide an international perspective in accordance with key developments at the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) regarding the different related topics: good governance principles, key reforms in the public sector, open government, leadership, and coproduction of public services.

Grimmelikhuijsen and his colleagues underline, in a comparative way, one of the most important themes addressed by the IIAS network: the relation between transparency policies and citizens’ trust in government. Transparency is one element of good governance principles, key
governance and decision-making processes. As the authors argue in the first part of the article, transparency helps prevent corruption, contributes to the legitimacy of actions, and enhances government performance by increasing efficiency.

The development of new technologies and the Internet is also perceived as bringing new possibilities for increasing transparency, as information on public policies is considered to be more accessible by citizens. This conception of new forms of transparency has limitations in regard to the limited access to the Internet by citizens. The two case studies and experiments chosen by the authors, the Netherlands and South Korea, are conceived with the prerequisite that the citizens of the panel all have access to the Internet. This condition influences the results of the link between transparency and trust/mistrust in government actions.

The cross-country comparison of the influence of national cultural characteristics on the relationship between transparency and trust is fundamental. We agree that cultural background influences citizens’ attitudes toward government and trust/distrust in government. We also agree with the authors that an important variable for considering the link between transparency and trust is grounded in a country’s cultural features. Cultural distance and citizens’ perceptions of government’s openness are essential to measuring the effects of transparency policies. The hypothesis tested by the authors is linked to the interrelations between transparency, trust, and cultural settings. The authors also take into account as parameters of the study the level of governance—local and national. We, at IIAS, can strongly underline this aspect of their study.

In the different regions of the world, there are main trends in developing open government and associating citizens and users of public services with the decision-making process and the evaluation of public policies. They are also involved in the coproduction of public services. This article gives us concrete parameters for testing the interrelation between the transparency of the process, the transparency of information, and the transparency of the results in specific cultural and technical contexts.

We would like also to highlight the other tools for increasing the transparency and the subsequent trust/mistrust in government and public institutions. We have to point out the important role of leaders (political and administrative leaders in this respect). Our partner, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has just published a Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making to be used by government officials. It offers a practical roadmap for building robust frameworks for informing, consulting, and engaging citizens during the whole policy process from the elaboration to the evaluation of public policies. It recognizes the great diversity of country contexts, objectives, and measures in strengthening government–citizen relations. The results of the study presented in this article will help us have a new vision of the interrelation between transparency efforts (decision making, policy transparency, policy outcome transparency) and the evaluation/revision of the selected public policy.

The IIAS recently established a new study group on the Coproduction of Public Services. Coproduction brings different challenges to the work of public service professionals, as it has an impact on professionals’ control over service delivery and the willingness of professionals to collaborate and share responsibilities with citizens. The IIAS study group will address the following questions: What types of interactions exist? How important is trust, both in terms of citizens’ trust in government and government officials’ trust in citizens? What skills are needed to work effectively with citizens? What challenges does coproduction bring to the way professionals work? This article in PAR also brings a new perspective on measuring the real impact of coproduction.

It will be very interesting, as mentioned by the authors, to carry out similar studies in different countries from different regions. Future research will provide us with analyses on how separate cultural dimensions (national and regional) affect transparency and trust. We also look forward to future studies on the various fields of action of government. This article opens very promising perspectives for further investigations that take into account the main lesson: there is no unique way to reinforce transparency and trust. The mechanisms and the tools for political and administrative leaders for improving them will be adapted to the contexts: timely (crisis periods), culturally (regional, national, and subnational cultures), and in accordance with policy matters.