Ethical Choice Making and Social Equity:

A Pathway to Sustainable Governance?

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of ethical choice making in this time of societal complexities such as economic inequality and social equity. The discussion of ethical choice making emerges when competing values or interests of what is considered ethical are at stake. For guiding ethical choice making, the influence of market values on public administration raises the question of how to understand social equity as a dimension of the public interest. Social equity reflects fairness, justice and trust, which in a normative sense means that it is based on moral values and ethical considerations. The results of a citizen survey show that interpersonal trust correlates strongly with fairness and justice. This paper suggests a renewed perspective for citizen empowerment based on the conceptual learning of critical theory. Ethical choices should be made through the integrative social process of dealing with differing and ambiguous values to find a shared perspective of interests. Ethics are systems of values that guide action.

Keywords: society, ethics, inclusion, equity, sustainability, public, citizen, governance

INTRODUCTION

A polarized and diverse society raises the question of how sustainable governance incorporates concepts beyond efficiency and cost-effectiveness as core values. A shift from the neoliberal understanding of governance towards a more inclusive understanding of global problems and ethical responsibilities has emerged, and we are beginning to view our lifestyle and consumption choices as responsible for inequalities, conflicts and environmental problems. Moreover, an inclusive society means that we are concerned about the lives of the most disadvantaged people.

The present public philosophy has rested on neoliberalism to legitimize market values in this political and economic uncertainty. A critique of neoliberalism demands alternatives to the prevailing models of policy-making. Similarly, the rise of the post-truth world has compelled us to defend democratic values and to reconsider sustainability needs for the future generations in terms of intergenerational equity. What is needed is the creation of a participation infrastructure that supports and encourages citizens in the role of multi-stakeholders. For instance, social entrepreneurship is a form of a collaborative economy that can empower individuals and communities by turning citizens from passive consumers into active producers of social and ecological value.

In sustainable governance, the emphasis is on ethical integrity and the maximizing of social value rather than on private value or profit and on the implementation of ethical and democratic values such as respect for others, fairness and social equity in relation to the public interest. The concept of the public interest is valuable because of its character as a normative foundation for public purposes on the one hand and its pragmatic meaning as a counterbalance for private interests on the other.

Existing research literature suggests a critical re-examination of the normative foundations of public administration and the role of citizens in public policy-making. The broader and more complex question is the role of the modern state in achieving a reasonable balance between economic efficiency and social equity. Public engagement and citizen dialogue in fostering democratic citizenship contributes to reasoning about fundamental ethical questions. In this sense, a quest for ethical choice making is stated in the UN's sustainable development goals. To find implications to sustainable governance, this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

(1) Is ethical choice making in relation to the social equity at stake in the UN sustainable development goals?

(2) Can we form an integrative approach to public ethics as a guide for ethical choice making in sustainable governance?

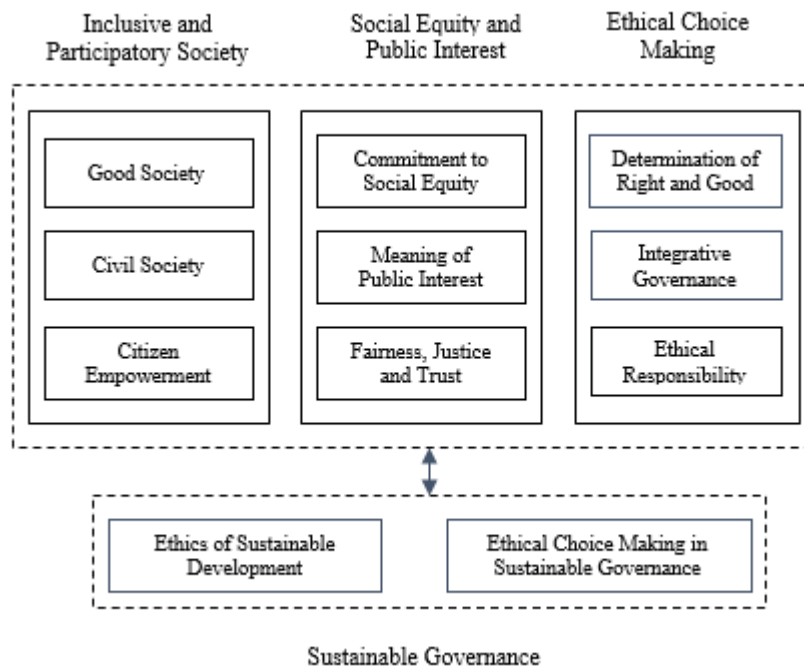Under these guiding questions, the research framework is described in Figure 1.

Figure 1.   Research framework

The paper comprises five parts. First, the question of inclusive and participatory society is considered from a critical perspective through the notions of a good society, civil society, and citizen empowerment. Second, social equity is examined as a complementary relationship to public interest. In this context, the correlation between interpersonal trust, fairness and justice is analysed based on the results of the Worlds Value Survey. Third, we examine the following: the idea of ethical choice making related to the determination of "right" and "good", an integrative model of creative and participatory governance, and ethical responsibility based on 'resilience ethics'. Fourth, sustainable governance is evaluated based on the ethical considerations of the sustainable development paradigm. Finally, some concluding reflections are presented.

INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY SOCIETY

Good society

According to Aristotle, a good society is the interest of all citizens, that is, the public interest. A good society requires institutions that promote the common interest and encourage collaboration, inclusiveness and sharing, as Jordan (1989) argues the following:

When we consider society, the common interests that people have in certain goods that stem from membership of that society are constituted in citizenship. Where citizens have a common interest in those aspects of social relations which they share together, then this represents the common good. (p. 17)

Therefore, the global objective must be the socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are also met, which implies, according to the UN resolution (2015), "peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence". Inclusion in deliberation, gender participation, and intersectionality are critical elements for the analysis of a democracy with deeper values and the common goal of designing more just and democratic societies.

The lives of the most disadvantaged people who experience complex forms of oppression and inequality should be a common concern. The intersections of these disadvantaged people occur with the conflation of gender, race, class, sexuality, and the environment. Intersectionality [1] means that "inequalities are best understood overlapping and mutually constitutive than isolated and distinct". The crucial idea to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups comes from Crenshaw (1989, p. 73) when she said that "when they (marginalized groups) enter, we all enter".

Jone (2016, pp. 360-361) demonstrates that democracies are facing the challenge of inclusion in at least two of its forms. First, vertical inclusion is the process by which states that are extending democracy seek to resolve the democratic malaise by means of inviting citizens and other economic and social agents to participate in the process of public decision making. Second, horizontal inclusion is the process by which these same states respond to the problems of oppression derived from the systemic concealment of the knowledge and life experiences of all non-normative agents, i.e., those people and social groups considered to be at the fringes of the social norms. The conceptual learnings of critical thoughts on the extension of democracy in which intersectional inequality is a fact requiring responses will arise in complex societies,

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[1] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality

whether stratified or multicultural ones. To democratize inclusively, there is a need for a conceptual development that facilitates the integration between the vertical and horizontal dialogue of inclusion.

Civil society

Individual freedom, its guarantees by the state, and market liberalism are imperative to civil society. Gellner (1994; cited in Macey, 2000, p. 63) defines civil society as being based on a plurality of institutions that place checks and balances on the state but which are also protected by the state.

Civil society prioritizes collective action. "Modern liberal democracy rests upon a platform of the pluralistic civil society" (Sievers, 2010, p. 380). In providing vital resources and playing an ambiguous role in democracy, philanthropy's role is an essential feature of that civil society. However, according to Sievers (2010, pp. 387-389), there are the following two dilemmas for democracy: (1) the problem of collective action, and (2) the problem of value pluralism. In particular, "the transformation of citizens into customers" has contrasted the traditional democratic citizenship role with collective interests to the modern customer role of citizens with their private needs in a market. There are common resources such as the air and oceans that are held in common by humanity and often abused, leading to global warming and pollution. Therefore, "individual rationality is not sufficient for collective action" (Sandler, 1992). The problem of value pluralism lies at the heart of contemporary democracy in finding a peaceful mediation for advancing the public interest among fundamentally conflicting worldviews.

A fundamental question of advancing civil society and philanthropy is how to find a nonfoundational framework for public discourse to increase substantive contribution to the society. Habermas' (1984; 1987) theory of communicative action describes the world of everyday action and beliefs as a 'lifeworld' (Lebenswelt) and broadly identifies it with the public sphere and civil society. Habermas considers the public sphere as an intersubjectively shared space reproduced through communicative rationality.

Dahlberg (2005, pp. 111-112) has demonstrated that the Habermasian public sphere can be read as maximizing "the inclusion of difference in deliberative exchange". Many theorists agree with Habermas concerning the importance of citizen debate for a strong democracy. The concept works to maximize inclusion, although it does rely upon the exclusion of coercion and domination. The Habermasian public sphere remains a legitimate democratic norm.

Civil society is the cornerstone of democracy in advancing the inclusive and participatory society. Castells (2008, pp. 78-79) views civil society from the point of view of the public sphere that lies between the state and society. The public sphere is "a network for communicating information and points of view", the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society. Castells also speaks about the global civil society and networked global governance as the relationship between globalization and the nation-states.

Citizen empowerment

The shift from government to governance is a call for more democracy. The emphasis is more on society rather than on the state. According to Chandler (2014, p. 164), "new forms of governance appear as ways of democratizing society itself 'through empowering' or 'capability building' the citizen".

This new specification of active citizenship in an active society is the most fundamental characteristic of the new rationalities of government. Regarding the future role of the modern citizen in advanced liberal democracies, Miller and Rose (2008) conclude as follows:

When strategies of welfare sought to govern through society, advanced liberal strategies of rule ask whether it is possible to govern without governing society, and can expertise still successfully transform many political problems of inequity and disparities of power merely into technical questions concerning the best way of organizing and managing regimes of security, enterprises and persons. (pp. 216-218)

Therefore, public participation and deliberation are important supplements to representational democracy and the demands for direct citizen participation, as Nabatchi (2010, p. S310) states. Similarly, Roberts (2004, p. 315) reminds us that citizenship participation is the cornerstone of democracy even though there has been a deep ambivalence about citizens directly participating in the government.

The very notion of democratic citizenship means that citizens are willing to maintain their duty towards society insofar as they trust the direction in which the society is moving. Ventriss (2012, p. 287) demands "revitalizing public administration with a renewed focus on democratic citizenship". Meaningful participatory practices require that citizens have influence on public affairs and not simply voice.

SOCIAL EQUITY AND PUBLIC INTEREST

Commitment to social equity

The origins of social equity are in the public interest debate between those who wish to promote equality and those who fear that this will occur at the expense of individual liberty. Morgan (2001) describes this ethical dilemma in the commitment to social equity as follows:

While there is nearly universal consensus that the public interest requires the protection of individual liberty, there is considerable disagreement whether this liberty consists of merely leaving citizens alone or providing them with some minimum threshold of economic or social equity. (p. 153)

Morgan (2001, p. 173) notes that "from the 1960s onward the debate of equality shifted to the language of equity, as defenders of compensatory policies argued that formal legal equality undermines fairness as equity". Guy and McCandless (2012, pp. 55-56) consider that the terms "equity" and "equality" are used interchangeably, and they have, to a large extent, similar meaning. However, equity is a more flexible measure that allows for equivalency while not demanding equality, and initiatives that advance simple equalities have proved less controversial than those designed to advance equity. "Social equity is not an explicit constitutional value, but rather a term that implies a calculation of fairness, right, and justice".

Advancing social equity is linked to the Minnowbrook tradition of the New Public Administration approach from the year 1968. The aim was to shift the focus onto social and economic equity as an appropriate goal for governance. Frederickson (1990; 2010) demanded the same value status for social equity as that for economy and efficiency in public administration. This tradition has led to a definition with multiple inclusive aspects of equity stated by the "Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance of the National Academy of Public Administration of the US", as described by Gooden and Portillo (2011):

The fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; and the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice and equity in the formation of public policy. (pp. i61-i62)

This definition reflects the ideas of "fairness" and "justness", which, in the normative meaning, are based on moral values and ethical considerations. Fairness and justice are at the heart of social equity. Treating citizens in an equitable way requires considering their individual needs. Social equity refers strongly to a deliberative democracy (Emerson, Nabatchi

& Balogh, 2012, p. 4) and an equitable society through the notions of distributive justice (Rawls 1999; Rawls & Kelly 2001) and equitable decision making in terms of procedural fairness.

Meaning of public interest

Bozeman (2007, pp. 90-91) suggests maintaining the ideal concept of the public interest and therefore asking why should it be less true of a public interest ideal than an ideal such as the perfectly competitive market? The significance of the ideal concept is "having the target in mind that keeps one on course even if it is not possible precisely to hit the target".

Ventriss (2001, p. 276) argues that "the public interest is a shared recognition of consequences and the substantive effects that those consequences can have on community life" to add value to the public sphere as a conceptual space for public discussion and deliberative issues. In addition, King (2015, p. 76) recalls that "engaged citizens have the potential to make public decisions based on their sense of the public interest, using phronesis, or practical wisdom, and experiential knowledge relevant to the circumstances".

The public interest as a reference to social equity is identified more widely in the literature of social capital. According to Johnston (2016, p. 125), there are three central theorists of social capital, Robert Putnam, James Coleman, and Pierre Bourdieu, who have provided important insights for a better understanding of the public interest.

Putnam (1993; 2000) has emphasized strong traditions of civic engagement as the hallmarks of successful societies and considered social capital as a public good that is not the private property of those who benefit from it but rather other public goods, such as clean air and safe streets. However, social inequalities may be embedded in social capital because norms and networks that serve some groups may obstruct others.

For Coleman (1981, p. 29), the public interest is central to his philosophy of education as he argued for the overriding public interest "in helping all children particularly those who are disadvantaged, receive a better education". This notion is a strong reference to a democratic and inclusive society.

Bourdieu (1986, pp. 248-251) argues that "social capital is never independent of other forms of capital". According to Johnston (2016, p. 13), in Bourdieu's view, actors are engaged in a "struggle in pursuit of individual goals and interest", whereas Putnam's idea of social capital addresses collective values, such as trust, reciprocity, and societal integration. Ruscio (1996, p. 475) states that "as citizens develop formal and informal networks, they come to trust each other in matters outside the networks – in a public policy dispute". Social capital plays an

important role in generating welfare and enabling the functioning of the economy (Hellström, Hämäläinen, Lahti, Cook & Jousilahti, 2015, p. 7).

However, the search for the "operational public" has been a central question of whether the public interest could serve as a guide for political and administrative action (JOS 1990, p. 232).

Fairness, justice and trust

The significance of fairness, justice and trust can be estimated by adapting two questions of the World Values Survey, WVS. First, to measure fairness and justice, the applicable survey question is as follows:

> *Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair? Please show your response on this, where 1 means that "people would try to take advantage of you", and 10 means that "people would try to be fair" (World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014).*

For the analysis of this paper, there are the following 11 countries in the comparison: Australia, South Korea, China, Russia, Turkey, Sweden, Spain, the United States, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. To identify the general impression from the different responses among the 11 countries selected in the above question, the percentage values of the responses on a scale of 1-10 are aggregated into the following two categories: responses of 1 to 5 represent the views in response to the statement that "people would try to take advantage of you", and responses of 6 to 10 represent the views in response to the statement that "people would try to be fair". These two categories are presented in Figure 2 as follows:
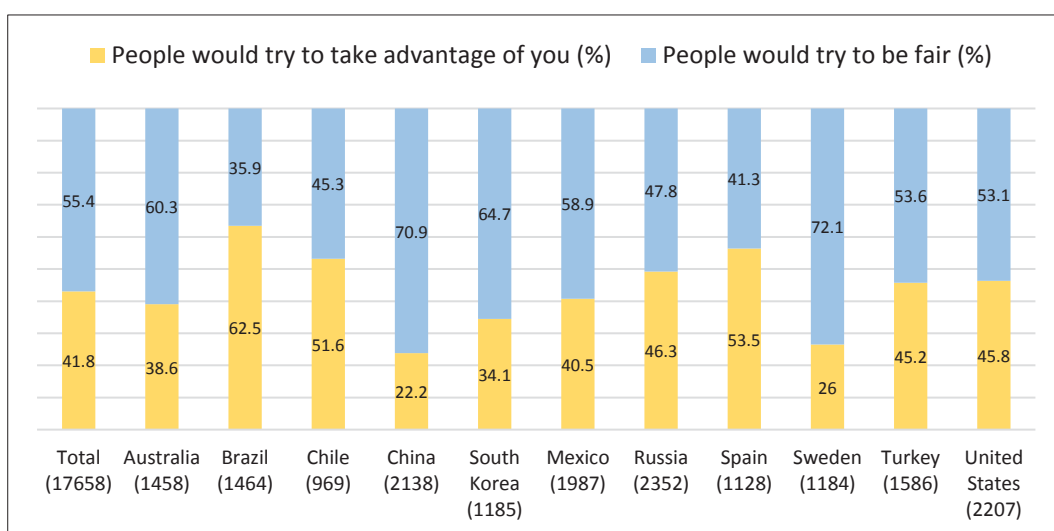

Figure 2. Fairness and justice. *Data source:* World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014 (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp)

According to the division of responses as shown in Figure 2, in different parts of the world, citizens estimate differently their mutual fairness and justice in terms of impartial and just treatment or behaviour. However, there must be profound trust among all members of the society that none of the members will use their expertise to take advantage of the others (Hart, 2001, p. 146). Together, these two dimensions of the WVS question represent the issues of fairness and justice as the most significant feature of social equity.

Consequently, the second question of the WVS adapted in this article measures the interpersonal trust between citizens. The question is as follows:

> *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? (World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014).*

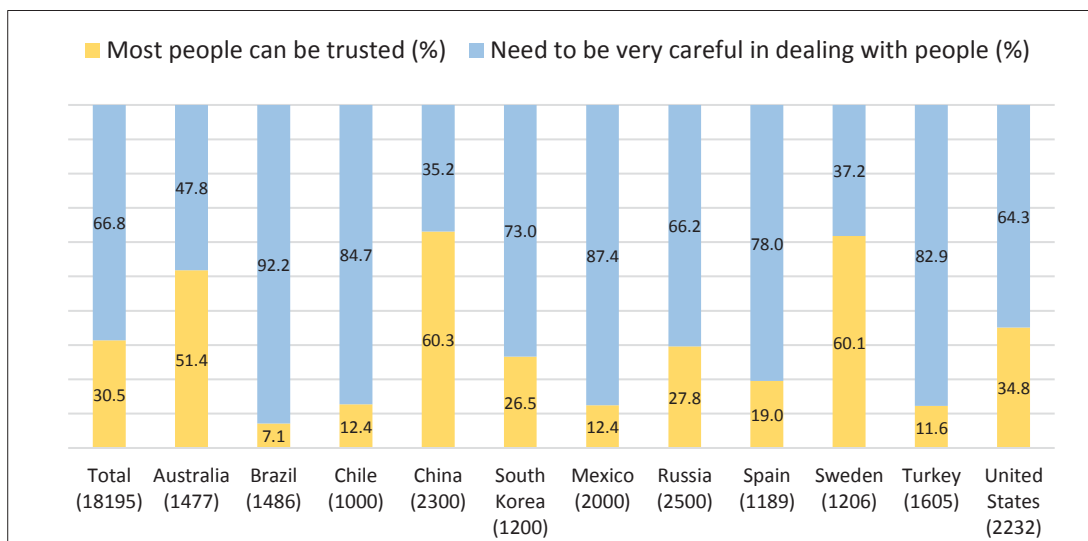There is a considerable variation in the answers to this question as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Interpersonal trust. *Data source:* World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014 (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp).

In total, only 30.5 % of the citizens in the 11 countries think that most people can be trusted, and 66.8 % consider that you need to be very careful in dealing with people.

When looking at Figure 3, we see that interpersonal trust correlates positively with the issues of fairness and justice. The quantity of the linear correlation is very strong ($r = 0.80$), and the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.64$) explains that 64 % of the total variation in y (trust) can be explained by the linear relationship between trust and fairness and justice. This result suggests that a relationship between interpersonal trust and fairness and justice is evident for social equity.

Next, the linear correlation between the interpersonal trust ("most people can be trusted") and the views of fairness and justice ("people would try to take advantage of you" vs. "people would try to be fair") is presented in Figure 4.
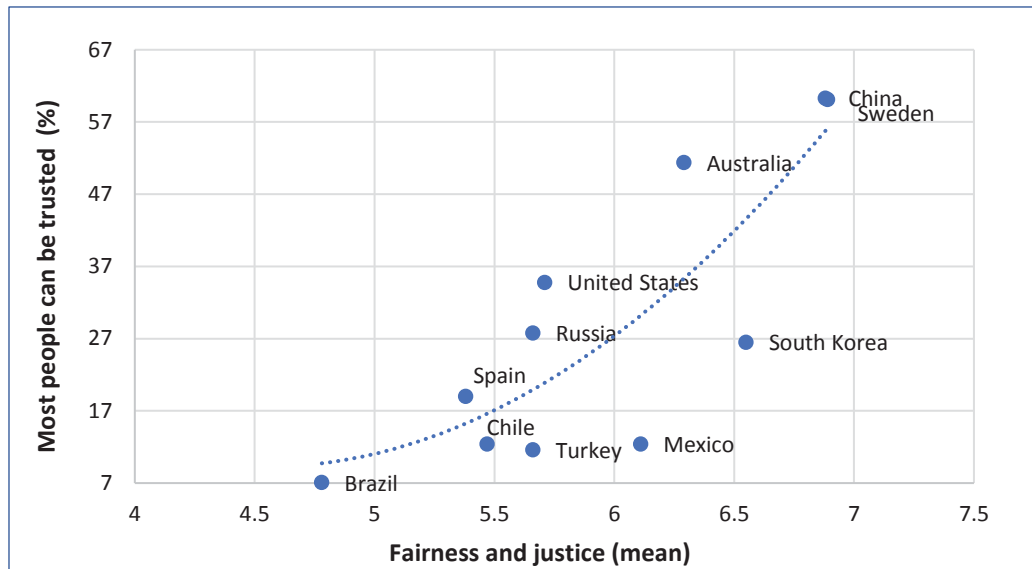

Figure 4. A correlation diagram of interpersonal trust and fairness and justice. *Notes*: In the figure, the mean values of "the question of fairness and justice" are plotted on the horizontal axis (x), and the percentage values of "the question of most people can be trusted" are plotted on the vertical axis (y). The pattern of their intersecting points can graphically show relationship patterns. While the diagram shows relationships, it does not by itself prove that one variable causes the other. The scatterplot diagram is a tool for analysing the relationships between two variables.

ETHICAL CHOICE MAKING

Determination of right and good

The discussion of ethical choices emerges when competing values or interests of what is considered ethical are at stake. Understanding ethics as a matter of right-versus-right captures the essence of ethical choice making as "Defending our version of right against other's version of right" (Stout & Love, 2013, p. 278).

Public administration exists to realize the governance of society – meaning the society at large. Therefore, the balancing of the different ethical commitments in public administration is a highly complex endeavour without any universally shared approach, as Waldo (1980) has noted. Ethical and moral standards and conduct for rulers will be the most important quality for public leadership (Maguad & Krone, 2009, p. 222; Dror, 2002). Integrative leadership with partners across organizational and sectorial boundaries is required in modern networked

governance (Getha-Taylor, Holmes, Jacobson, Morse & Sowa, 2011, p. 87). Consequently, "public servants, like other citizens, have a choice", as Stivers (2008, p. 120) concludes.

The study of ethics is at the heart of intellectual thought. For explicating the present state of governance, Stout and Love (2015) have presented a "governance typology" based on philosophical and practical elements found in dominant Western political theory. This typology is created through the Weberian ideal-type method (Weber, Shils & Finch, 1949) comprising four ideal-types with the following labels: the institutional, holographic, atomistic, and fragmented governance types.

The normative structure of each governance ideal-type is either prioritized "right" as a proper action or "good" as an end value (Stout & Love, 2013, p. 281). Each ideal-type approaches ethics in a substantively different manner. The basic properties of these governance ideal-types are described in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Ideal-Types of Governance

Ideal-Types	Determinants of Normative Structure	
	"Right" as a proper action	**"Good" as an end value**
Institutional	The law determines what is right Deontological ethics	The good is demanded by the right
Holographic	Right is determined introspectively Moral and intuitive ethical action	Right action is the path to the good Poor outcomes due to limited input to determinations of right action
Atomistic	Right is determined retrospectively Utilitarianism or ethical egoism	Individual choices to achieve the good The goodness of outcomes is used to assess the ethical standing of the action
Fragmented	Rightness is determined by the value of good action Moral scepticism/relativism	Good action must be determined by the individual
Integrative (Synthesis)	The individual determines what is right through interaction with the environment Mutual answerability	The individual determines what is good through interaction with the environment

First, institutional governance in the democratic context means the rule of law as "the One" (as opposed to God or King), and good outcomes can only come from law-abiding action. Administrators are expected to follow the rule of law as consistently as possible (Stout & Love 2013, p. 282). This type of governance represents the orthodox administration (Stout & Love, 2015, p. 462).

Second, holographic2 governance views the individual analogous to the "the One". In this type of governance, there is no meaningful distinction between what is right for the individual and what is right for the whole. According to Stout and Love (2013, p. 283), this type of governance was illustrated in the United States when President George W. Bush used ethical intuition to justify the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as necessary actions of good versus evil, and the Congress voted to entrust the determination for action solely to the President. This type of governance is best aligned with the New Public Administration model (Stout & Love, 2015, p. 462).

Third, atomistic3 governance delegates authority to the individual who makes individual choices about how best to achieve good. Right action is based on the goodness of external consequences. The goodness of outcomes is used to assess the ethical standing of the action. According to Stout & Love (2013, p. 283), many public policies are chosen based on their anticipated ability to achieve the most effective ends at the lowest cost or their ability to meet the preferences of the greatest number of interested parties. This type of governance fits in with the administrative theory of the New Public Service (Stout & Love, 2015, p. 463).

Fourth, fragmented governance provides no morally coherent social context, and ethical considerations of rightness are largely meaningless. According to Stout & Love (2013, p. 283), in both atomistic and fragmented governance types, considerations of right-versus-right begin to breakdown as there is no firm basis upon which to determine the best course of action. This type of governance represents the theory of New Public Management (Stout & Love, 2015, p. 463).

These four substantively different approaches on how to determine what is "right" and "good" are based on one system of ethics or morality as opposed to another system. Determining which value choices are right leads to the following question stated by Mingus &

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[2] The holograph refers to the pantheistic perspective that the whole is reflected in the individual and that the individual is merely a reflection of the whole (Stout & Love 2015, p. 473).

[3] Atomistic is defined as comprising many simple elements and *also is defined as follows*: characterized by or resulting from division into unconnected or antagonistic fragments – an *atomistic* society. Atomistic. (n.d.). Retrieved February 9, 2018, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/atomistic

Horiuchi (2012, p. 117): "What can public administrators do to ameliorate seemingly intractable value conflict?" For an answer to this question, Stout and Love (2013) have developed a synthesis ideal-type of integrative governance.

Integrative governance

Integrative governance assumes that the individual agency determines what is right and good through interaction with the environment. Stout and Love (2013, p. 285) argue that "the ontological and sociological assumptions of this position produce a public philosophy of community with an ethic of mutual care (not in the personalized sense)". Because people as human beings are naturally interconnected, they can carry a responsibility within their community as reasoning beings who can consider together what is good and what constitutes right action both individually and collectively. This co-creative process is multidimensional and because of the sense of relation, the ethic is based on mutual responsiveness in which all act with one another, synthesizing both external and internal motivation.

Based on these notions, the answer to resolving "intractable value conflicts" requires creating the venue, designing the process, and facilitating the actors in the affected situation in "making a shared ethical choice" based on Follett's (1926, p. 52) ethical teaching of the following aspects: "we do not follow the right, we create right, there is no private conscience, and my duty is never to "others" but to the whole". As Stout and Love (2013) consider,

If rightness is determined through a co-creative process, rather than through a conflict between intractable values, then we will find a very different response to right versus right than the choice between mandated social norms (Institutional and Holographic), adversarial debate (Atomistic), or mere statements of preference (Fragmented). We will seek right together; we will coproduce the good. (pp. 285-286)

The integrative, creative and participatory process of governance is based on Follett's explication of integration to find the appropriate response to the ethical dilemma of conflicting values and to find a method for ethics through which a different perspective can be synthetized rather than placed into a relationship of competition and compromise. Follett (1924, pp. 7, 156) recognized that "dealing with difference is the main part of the social process" and "when differing interests meet they need not oppose but only confront each other".

Two primary forms of domination are voluntary submission and coerced subjugation. Neither of these forms of domination is acceptable in a democratic society. Compromise is not

much better because parties involved each lose something in the decision. All these methods offer only a "sham reconciliation" (Follett, 1924, p. 156; Stout & Love, 2013, pp. 286-287).

However, individual and collective discussion and the achievement of a specific method can be maintained through integration. Follett (1924, p. 172) speaks of "reciprocal dialogue" and of "a revaluation of interests". According to this, it is possible to find a new shared perspective because "values depend largely on relation".

When ethical choices are made through the integrative process based on mutual answerability, it leads to good outcomes for governance that are arguably better than those produced by the alternatives of deontological obligation, moral imperative, teleological agency, and moral scepticism/relativism (Stout & Love, 2013, p. 288). The integrative governance type utilizes the collaborative approach to administration (Stout & Love, 2015, p. 467).

Ethical responsibility

The shift from the neoliberal understandings of governance and citizen-state relations towards more inclusive understandings of global problems and ethical responsibilities can be viewed in terms of resilience ethics (Chandler, 2013). In this view, the ethical responsibility stems from the unintended outcomes of interactive and emergent processes in which different actors are embedded. Chandler (2014, pp. 120-124) speaks of the indirect ethical responsibility derived from self-reflexivity that can be understood neither as instrumental responses to outcomes nor as deontological ethics derived from external consequences.

Following the idea of resilience ethics to reformulate the ethical responsibility, we become embedded subjects who are responsible for the unintended and indirect consequences of our actions. The ethical demand for individual self-reflexivity is an integral part of responsible citizenship for citizens who are encouraged to become more ethical in their choices.

Due to the complexity and the rise of resilience thinking, it is problematic today to make the distinction between public ethics and private ethics. Chandler (2014, pp. 19-20) considers public ethics as the guide to the government of others, i.e., governance for governing institutions and considers private ethics as the guide to the ethical government of the self, i.e., governance for individual members of the public. Chandler (2014, pp. 120, 124-125) concludes that there is no clear distinction between the private ethical sphere and the public political sphere in the modernist understanding of "a new global ethic and the transformative power of the embedded subject". The growing self-awareness of citizens and the need for reflexive governance are requirements for the concept of ethical responsibility. "We are more likely to

see our lifestyle or consumption choices as responsible for inequalities, conflicts or environmental problems".

SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE

Ethics of sustainable development

A complex question is how to achieve a reasonable balance between economic efficiency and social equity. In this sense, a quest for ethical choice making is stated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The consultation process of these goals named "Toward Global Democratic Governance" has noted an ethical core in the following matter: "To emphasize outreach, inclusiveness, and the need to reflect the concerns of people living in poverty "whose voices often go unheard of unheeded" (Fox & Stoett, 2016, pp. 555-562).

A good society is a prerequisite for sustainable governance. The main challenge of sustainable development is to secure the environmental and social dimensions and ensure the integration of these two dimensions with economic growth. However, despite this, we understand our planetary boundaries better, and our belief in the present model of economic growth is the prevailing public agenda. The primary concern of all governments and policy-makers is a declining economic growth and a need to restore such growth. "An economic-based self-interest approach seems to fail to motivate stakeholders to incorporate the other two dimensions in their national and organizational development planning in an efficient and timely manner" (Salamat, 2016, p. 4).

The present imbalance between the interests of business corporations and the national governments is described by Beder (2010) as follows:

The corporate goal of free trade has been given precedence over other citizen goals such as environmental protection, improved working conditions, affordable and accessible electricity and water, universal health care and schooling. Each of these areas of social policy has been subject to commodification, marketization, privatization and deregulation in the name of free markets. (pp. 513-514)

The question of what the future may hold means that our main ethical concern is on the planetary boundaries such as climate change and the Earth's carrying capacity. When we seriously consider the future in terms of intergenerational equity, i.e., equality between one generation and another, we must trust in dynamic reciprocity in a highly competitive and interconnected world. There are issues, such as climate, refugees, resource-based immigration and geopolitical inequality, political conflicts and the scarcity of natural resources, such as

clean water, that are in the centre of these governances. Therefore, we should consider all 17 SDGs to be equally important; as Salamat (2016, p. 3) reminds,

None of these 17 goals could be achieved unless the goal 8 on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all, and the goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development are implemented in tandem.

Salamat (2016, p. 4) suggests an alternative discourse inspired by a universally shared and valued responsibility as the moral or ethical imperative for the advocates of the sustainable development paradigm. In other words, ethical choice making is the most significant prerequisite for sustainable governance.

Ethical choice making in sustainable governance

The people – society at large – are committed to environmental responsibility. They want to be part of a common concern to protect natural resources and the environment. It is a question of "social belonging" that can be translated into an active participation in institutions, such as business and civil society organizations, among others (Winsemius & Guntram, 2002, p. 184).

People are motivated to maintain a positive self-concept by acting in line with their internal moral standards. "Owing to the motivation to maintain a moral self-image, people may prefer biospheric to economic appeals, rendering the latter less effective than commonly assumed" (Bolderdijk, Steg, Geller, Lehman & Postmes, 2013; Salamat 2016, p. 2).

Volunteering and social entrepreneurship are examples of taking care of the environment and of promoting ethical discourse in situations in which the benefits of life outweigh the costs of sustainable development. Social entrepreneurship is a form of collaborative economy that empowers individuals and communities (Hellström et al., 2015, p. 7). Social entrepreneurship is a way to implement the following ethical and democratic values: respect for others and fairness and social equity in relation to the public interest.

According to Elkington and Hartigan (2008, pp. 2-3), "social and environmental entrepreneurs lead by example and seek outlandish goals, such as economic and environmental sustainability and social equity". It is not doing the "deal" but achieving "the ideal". Social entrepreneurs are "individuals whose higher-minded impulses motivate them beyond narrowly-defined profits to seek out elegant solutions to locally-based social and environmental circumstances" (Schmaltz, 2010, p. 152).

Social innovations and ethical reactions go hand in hand. According to Ims and Zsolnai (2013, p. 188), "social innovations are needed when the ordinary market fails, and there is a huge need for creating social value, rather than creating private value for entrepreneurs, investors and ordinary consumers".

Citizens have become more aware of the environmental and social consequences of their choices and are motivated to avoid negative impacts. Recognizing consumers as citizens has made a contribution to sustainable and ethical consumption models. A renewed perspective of consumer empowerment links consumption to greater social issues such as human rights, environment and social well-being (McShane & Sabadoz, 2015).

Ethical choice making is a significant approach to fulfil sustainable development actions. When ethical choices are made through an integrative process based on mutual answerability and not in response to being asked to adhere to an externally imposed ethic, ethical choice making is being co-created and therefore self-enforced. The integrative approach based on mutual answerability stands to produce good outcomes for governance. According to Stout and Love (2013, p. 287), the resulting public ethic might today be framed as sustainable flourishing as follows: "Our new motto must be, Live in such a manner that the fulness of life may come to all" (Follett, 1926, p. 353).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article critically examines the normative foundations of public administration and the role of citizens in public policy by raising the question of how to protect the public interest for advancing ethical choice making and social equity. Unfortunately, neoliberal market fundamentalism has led to the inherently vexed relationship between markets, neoliberalism, citizens, and civil society. The increasingly inequitable distribution of economic growth has remained the prevailing situation.

The application of neoliberal policies in Europe, for instance, has led to social repercussions in the wake of the massive state intervention to socialize the risks of the private banking sector and the austerity measures of the public sector in much the same way as earlier structural adjustment programmes led to social repercussions, as Carroll and Jarvis (2015, pp. 278-279) prove.

A democratic and inclusive society means that we all must be concerned about the lives of the most disadvantaged people who experience complex forms of oppression and domination. When the market and social dynamics create problems that do not resolve on their own, it is

the government's responsibility to work in accordance with the public interest for social equity. In this regard, civil society is the public sphere for democracy to promote policy debate about issues such as public education, access to health care, housing, food, water, and environmental justice.

In public policy-making, the probability is high that the public agenda will be captured by narrow bands of self-interest. When seeking sustainable governance, democratic considerations have been underestimated in new governance reforms (cf. Bevir, 2010, pp. 246-247). "Narrow bands of self-interest creep into the decision-making processes of governance, markets are distorted, the public interest is obscured, and inequality grows" (Glaser, 2012, p. S12).

The citizen status in the business-society interface and the advancement of public policy is a critical issue, as proved by the marketization of higher education, the privatization of health care, and even the commercialization of child care (cf. Blomqvist, 2013) and the growing business of elderly care. Marketplace mechanisms that privilege one worldview over another result in a situation in which certain groups in society are subject to domination and oppression.

"The overarching project of critical theory then is one of emancipation – to offer the oppressed party freedom from constraints imposed by the dominant worldview such that they have the freedom to engage in reflective thought, collective action and self-realization". This critical perspective highlights that the marketization of public goods and services, in the absence of critical self-reflection by consumers, will make them subject to the marketplace distortions that privilege the profit-seeking corporations and frame individuals operating within the marketplace as primarily economic entities, irrespective of the diverse roles that individuals play in their daily lives (McShane & Sabadoz, 2015, pp. 547, 549).

The perspective of critical theory (Geuss, 1981) would provide an alternate way to research the integration of multiple citizenship interests in a democratic society. Recognizing consumers as citizens, we would empower citizens in their roles as multi-stakeholders (ref. Crane, Matten & Moon, 2004) and liberate them from the constraints of acting for the public interest and making ethical choices. This kind of emancipatory perspective provides an answer to the need to democratize society inclusively. A renewed perspective for citizenship is required to advance direct citizen participation in public policies and social change.

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