



PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE “JUSTICE” CONCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL GOVERNANCE IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



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Abstract: With growing social inequality, corruption political instability, the problem of justice in Kyrgyzstan becomes an urgent topic requiring measures to ensure the country’s stability and development through effective social governance. The study aims to identify variations, in the philosophical understanding of justice, in the context of social governance in Kyrgyzstan. The study employed a phenomenological approach in its theoretical and methodological basis. The empirical basis of the study was the focus group method, which involved activists in Kyrgyzstan. There are two dominant approaches to the perception of justice in the country. The liberal approach emphasizes the importance of individual rights, freedoms and market principles. The socialist approach emphasizes the importance of collective interests, social solidarity and state intervention in the economy. It is important to create mechanisms that are in line with liberal principles, but also consider the people’s needs, who are used to a more planned economy and state intervention. The results of the study have practical value for state structures involved in social and economic reform processes.


Keywords: Activism. Civil Society. Equality. Socialism.

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Resumo. Com a crescente desigualdade social, a corrupção e a instabilidade política, o problema da justiça no Quirguizistão torna-se um tema urgente, que exige medidas para assegurar a estabilidade e o desenvolvimento do país, através de uma governança social eficaz. O estudo visa a identificar variações na compreensão filosófica da justiça, no contexto da governança social, no Quirguizistão, utilizando uma abordagem fenomenológica, na sua base teórica e metodológica. A base empírica do trabalho foi o método do grupo de discussão, o qual envolveu ativistas no Quirguizistão. Existem duas abordagens dominantes na percepção da justiça, no país. A abordagem liberal sublinha a importância dos direitos individuais, das liberdades e dos princípios do mercado. A abordagem socialista enfatiza a importância dos interesses colectivos, da solidariedade social e da intervenção do Estado na economia. É importante criar mecanismos que estejam em conformidade com os princípios liberais, mas que também tenham em conta as necessidades das pessoas que estão habituadas a uma economia mais planificada e à intervenção do Estado. Os resultados do estudo têm valor prático para as estruturas estatais envolvidas em processos de reforma social e económica.

Palavras-chave: Ativismo. Sociedade civil. Igualdade. Socialismo.

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Abstract: With growing social inequality, corruption political instability, the problem of justice in Kyrgyzstan becomes an urgent topic requiring measures to ensure the country’s stability and development through effective social governance. The study aims to identify variations, in the philosophical understanding of justice, in the context of social governance in Kyrgyzstan. The study employed a phenomenological approach in its theoretical and methodological basis. The empirical basis of the study was the focus group method, which involved activists in Kyrgyzstan. There are two dominant approaches to the perception of justice in the country. The liberal approach emphasizes the importance of individual rights, freedoms and market principles. The socialist approach emphasizes the importance of collective interests, social solidarity and state intervention in the economy. It is important to create mechanisms that are in line with liberal principles, but also consider the people’s needs, who are used to a more planned economy and state intervention. The results of the study have practical value for state structures involved in social and economic reform processes.

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INTRODUCTION

Justice, on the one hand, is one of the fundamental principles of social governance, which means the correspondence between actions and their consequences, between rights and obligations. On the other hand, fairness is an important criterion for assessing the effectiveness of social governance, ensuring a harmonious relationship among the society’s elements. In Kyrgyzstan, the problem of justice is a very topical subject. The country is going through a period of transition with deep social, political and economic transformations, which are accompanied by negative trends. Under these conditions, equitable social governance becomes the most important condition for ensuring the country’s stability and development. Therefore, to ensure effective social governance, it is necessary to take several measures that require a deep understanding of the concept of “justice”. Thus, the problem of justice, within

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the framework of social governance, is in demand and relevant based on the country's current social, political and economic realities.

This article first defines justice as a basic social governance ideal, involving correspondence between actions and outcomes. Second, it presents justice as a crucial standard for evaluating efficient government that fosters social cohesion. Once these two aspects have been established, the conversation can move on to examine the relevance of justice in the modern era for social governance in Kyrgyzstan. Over the past three years, researchers in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in other Turkic countries, have theoretically and empirically comprehended the concept of "justice," highlighting various analytical findings on this issue.

A study of social justice, among students in Kyrgyzstan, was conducted by Y. E. Gül and R. Yeşil (2022). The empirical study revealed that students, in the country, generally express an average level of interest in social justice. The study also examined the differences in perceptions of social justice among males and females. While it was found that male students expressed more interest in the issue, no statistically significant differences were found. The study also focused on age differences in perceptions of social justice. Although there were insignificant differences, it was found that students, between the ages of 24-28, had a higher level of interest in social justice, compared to other age groups. Kyrgyz researchers T.T. Toromyrzaev and T.Zh. Boronbaev considered theoretical concepts of the definition of the concept of "justice" and its normative legal meaning at the present stage of the Kyrgyz society's development (2021). The authors note that the relevance of the issue of social justice, in modern Kyrgyz society, is confirmed by several factors. Firstly, scientists point out the violations of democratic rights and freedoms, associated with a sharp increase in social and economic inequality. This is one of the important reasons for emphasizing the need to pay attention to the issues of social justice. Secondly, the authors highlight the lack of fair and effective state policy as another important aspect that needs to be considered when considering the problem of social justice in Kyrgyzstan. Third, the researchers emphasize the need to revise the spiritual and value orientations in modern Kyrgyz society.

D. Nauruzbayev *et al.* conducted a philosophical analysis of the concept of "justice" in the work "Кутты билик" ("Kutti Bilik"), by Yusip Has Kajib Balasagun (Nauruzbayev *et al.*, 2023). As a result of a systematic analysis of the work "Благословенная доблесть" ("Blessed valour"), the concept of "justice" acts as a basic principle of ethical regulation of social relations. The work also emphasizes that justice is a ruler's key quality, who is capable of bringing prosperity and happiness to his people. Yusup Has Kajib wrote his work to form a new generation capable of creating a just and virtuous society and bringing happiness to his people. R. Ozodboev (2023) emphasizes the peoples' unique contribution from Central Asia in understanding the concept of "justice". In the author's opinion, medieval Central

Asian thinkers believed that the criteria of spirituality and social justice were interrelated. In their views, justice represents one of the universal characteristics of social relations. The researcher emphasizes that justice is perceived as a key element of social evaluation and, in this context, it is closely related to the concept of equality. Thus, in the medieval thinkers' views, in Central Asia, justice is an integral part of the social structure, playing an important role in the formation of values and norms.

Uzbek researcher S. Isroilova (2022) singles out justice as one of the most complex socio-moral categories, covering a wide range of human relations. The author notes that justice, being a category and moral principle, is directly influenced by the society's economic, political and legal conditions. This category determines a person's real position in society and is a social phenomenon that serves as a guarantee to prevent arbitrariness. The idea of justice, thus, belongs to both the individual and society. The Uzbekistan researcher M. Ahmadxojayev reveals the evolutionary philosophical foundations of the concept of social justice and emphasizes the importance of political leaders' activity in its achievement (2023). The presented facts show that, in the mankind's history, socialization and intellectual potential have always played a key role, and these factors carry not only the nation's spiritual character. It also emphasizes the importance of the political leaders' actions and the political path they choose. For example, the author refers to the updated constitution, where availability of employment, guaranteed educational procedures, direct implementation of the constitution and a procedure for automatic cancellation of controversial rules are seen as necessary foundations for social justice and stability in society.

Kyrgyz and other Central Asian researchers conducted predominantly theoretical studies that conceptualized the concept of “justice” in different ways. At the same time, studies related to social governance have been overlooked. Thus, there is a need for both theoretical and empirical analyzes of the problems of “justice”, within the framework of social governance, in Kyrgyzstan. The study aims to identify a variety of philosophical interpretations of the concept of justice in the context of social governance. The implementation of the goal implies the following tasks: to study how activists, involved in social governance, perceive justice; to conduct a cultural macroanalysis, based on the comparison of social governance models in different societies and their correlation with the concept of justice.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was a phenomenological approach. It was used to focus on people's subjective perceptions of justice and on how they understand and experience it. It was also used to analyze the problem of justice from the people's point of view, who live in Kyrgyzstan. The application of this approach was necessary for the activists' study, who are directly involved in activities related to social governance

to understand their subjective perception of justice and how it affects them. Firstly, the phenomenological approach focuses on people's subjective experiences. This is important because activists tend to have unique experiences that influence their perceptions of justice. Second, this approach does not make pre-determined assumptions or hypotheses. This allows the researcher to obtain more objective data on activists' perceptions of justice. Third, the phenomenological approach involves the use of qualitative research methods, such as focus groups. These allow for a deeper understanding of activists' perceptions of justice.

A cultural macroanalysis was used to investigate the concept of "justice" and social governance in different cultures. The various aspects of culture and society were considered. This analysis included consideration of values, social structure and historical context, which together form each society's unique mentality. This analysis highlighted the unique features of each culture, including those that may have influenced the understanding of justice and preferences for social governance. It provided a key tool for identifying the mentalities that form the basis for social justice and governance decisions in different societies. Cultural macroanalysis has, thus, become an indispensable tool for developing adaptive approaches to social governance that can accommodate the diversity of values and attitudes in the world's cultures.

The empirical study is based on the focus group method. This method was chosen to identify various subjective constructs of fairness, which were derived both from a focus group participant's individual monologue and a general group discussion. Based on a questionnaire survey of 40 political activists, 10 individuals were selected, who are various civil society organizations' representatives or independent activists and have a variety of political positions. Thus, a focus group of 10 people was formulated (Table 1).

Table 1 - Composition of focus group participants

Responder	Gender	Age
1	Male	31
2	Female	27
3	Male	38
4	Male	24
5	Female	32
6	Female	43
7	Female	25
8	Male	33
9	Male	46
10	Female	41

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The focus group was audio-recorded and, then, transcribed in text format. The focus group transcript was processed, using an inductive method to identify specific categories that reveal the concept of “fairness”. The use of the focus group, in combination with a phenomenological approach, allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of activists’ subjective perceptions of justice in Kyrgyzstan and to highlight those aspects that may be important for their activities and impact on society. A focus group script was developed, consisting of a list of topics and questions covering key aspects of the perception of justice by Kyrgyzstani activists involved in the social governance process:

1. The notion of Justice:

1.1. Personal definition. How do you perceive the concept of “justice”? What is your definition of this concept? What aspects do you consider key?

1.2 Ways of achieving justice. What are the main ways to achieve justice for you in the Kyrgyz society’s context? What tools and measures do you consider the most effective?

2. Justice in the context of activism:

2.1. The activists’ role. How does the activists’ role relate to achieving justice in society? What activists’ specific acts and initiatives do you consider most important?

2.2 Areas requiring attention. What specific areas (human rights, environment, education) require special attention from a justice perspective in Kyrgyzstan? How can activists make an impact in these areas?

3. Factors affecting fairness in social governance:

3.1. Influencing factors. What factors, in your opinion, influence the violation of justice in social governance in Kyrgyzstan? Can political, economic, or socio-cultural factors influence equity?

3.2. Religious, cultural and historical specificities. How do religious, cultural and historical characteristics influence the functioning of justice in social governance in Kyrgyzstan? How can these aspects influence the norms and values that shape the understanding of justice in society?

3 PERCEPTIONS OF JUSTICE BY KYRGYZ ACTIVISTS

The results of the Kyrgyz activists' focus group study yielded generalized empirical data that are of significant value for analyzing the relationship between social governance and justice in this country. Given the specificity of the informants' choice, the focus was on analyzing non-state participation in social governance.

Firstly, the focus group participants were asked questions related to their general perception of justice. The majority of focus group participants were found to correlate justice with equality. However, the views on this correlation differed significantly among activists, which caused a dispute among the focus group participants. Four focus group participants agreed that they perceived justice as equality of opportunity rather than absolute equality in society. The main message was that they emphasized the importance of creating a society where everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve their goals. More specifically, this included access to education, health care, jobs and other resources that foster personal and professional development. They believed that everyone should be rewarded, according to their efforts and talents. Two focus group participants offered counterarguments to previous activists' perceptions of fairness. They believe that inequality in initial conditions, such as social status or family economic status, creates an unfair advantage or disadvantage. For them, justice requires active intervention to reduce these baseline inequalities. They pointed to systemic barriers, such as inequalities in education, access to resources and employment opportunities, that impede equal opportunity. To ensure equality, they suggested greater intervention in the society's structures, including by the state. Two female focus group participants emphasized gender equality in society. For them, justice was linked to eliminating gender inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender. An activist perceived justice not primarily as equality, but as freedom. He argued that each individual should have maximum freedom to make decisions about their own lives, property and goals. He pointed out that inequality is considered a consequence of the natural course of events and, therefore, it is not necessarily unjust. Consequently, the focus group participant indicated that there is no close connection between justice and equality. On the contrary, in his view, justice is fully defined by and relates to the notion of freedom. He stresses that the focus should be on individual freedom of decision-making, recognizing inequality as a natural phenomenon. This shows the diversity of perceptions of justice in society, where some see it in the context of equality, while others see it in the individual's freedom. Thus, it is possible to identify four approaches to justice among Kyrgyz activists (Table 2).

Table 2 - Approaches to perceptions of justice by Kyrgyz activists

Approach	Interpretation
Liberal	The state creates the conditions for equality of opportunity, not imposes equal outcomes.
Socialistic	Government intervention to address economic inequalities and create a more equitable system of wealth distribution.
Feministic	Equality between the genders requires equal opportunities for men and women in education, labor, politics and other spheres of life.
Libertarian	The principle of individual liberty, limited government and the protection of private property.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The focus group participants were asked to answer a question about the main ways of achieving justice in the Kyrgyz society’s context. The answers were received in a variety of directions, as well as a discussion among the focus group participants, which had the character of a dispute. Discussing the ways, the focus group participants split into two opposing “camps.” The first group of activists argued that, to achieve a just society, one should focus on maximizing the common good or satisfaction. They believe that justice is about maximizing the benefits for the maximum number of people. In their understanding, an action is considered fair if it leads to the best social outcomes. Consequently, in their understanding, the assessment of the fairness of actions is based on consequences. The second group of activists believed that, in Kyrgyzstani society, there should be certain moral principles that should be observed regardless of the consequences to achieve a just society. The second group of activists’ views were strongly criticized by the first group. Activists pointed out that rigid adherence to the principles could lead to unjust or irrational outcomes. In their defence, however, the second group argued that adherence to universal moral principles promotes predictability and stability in society. People can expect a certain level of morality in others’ behavior and confidence that their rights and duties will be protected. Thus, the author identifies two main approaches to the way justice is realized in Kyrgyz society, according to activists (Table 3).

Table 3 - Approaches to achieving justice by Kyrgyz activists

Approach	Interpretation
Utilitarian	Different forms of justice exist depending on the situation. The main thing is to maximize the benefits to society.
Deontological	Certain moral principles exist that should be honored regardless of the consequences.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The next set of questions was about the perception of justice in the context of activism. When asked how the activists’ role is related to achieving justice in society, focus group participants pointed to activists’ specific functions:

- catalysts of positive social change;
- mediators between people and the authorities;
- “voice” of those who do not have opportunities to protect their interests;
- lobbyists for public consciousness.

In general terms, activists indicate that they promote justice from the civil society’s needs to the state apparatus. Consequently, activists self-identify as mediators between Kyrgyz citizens and the government. Focus group participants see the need to emphasise a variety of areas in the context of achieving justice in Kyrgyzstan. In the first place, there are human rights. Minority rights were also mentioned in this context. In the second place, there is economic justice. They pointed out that wealth distribution and access to economic opportunities also play a role in justice. In third place, there is health care. A focus group participant explained that access to quality health care and social protection are also areas where equity requires special attention. Less important areas identified were education, the environment, gender, and racial and ethnic discrimination. Thus, activists are mostly focused on legal and economic justice. Legal justice was interpreted as ensuring equal access to rights and fair treatment for all citizens before the law. Economic justice means distributing resources and opportunities in society in such a way as to minimize social inequalities. Consequently, this issue also traces the confrontation between liberal and socialist understandings of justice among activists. Thus, it is possible to rank the thematic types of justice by priority for activists (Table 4).

Table 4 - Hierarchy of thematic types of justice in the Kyrgyz activists’ perception

No.	Thematic type of justice	Interpretation
1	Legal justice	The principle of fairness within a legal system where laws are applied evenly and fairly.
2	Economic justice	A concept that seeks to ensure equality of opportunity and distribution of resources in an economy
3	Social justice	Guaranteed equality in education and health care, combating discrimination and creating inclusive social policies.
4	Gender justice	A concept aimed at achieving equal rights and equal opportunities between men and women in all spheres of social life
5	Racial and ethnic justice	Ensuring that all individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity, enjoy the same rights and freedoms.
6	Ecologic justice	Equitable distribution of surrounding resources and minimizing negative impacts on health and quality of life in vulnerable social groups.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

When asked about the factors influencing the violation of justice in social governance, in Kyrgyzstan, various answers were received, which predominantly relate to the activists' personal experiences and needs. In this regard, two women activists, who had personally experienced gender discrimination, were particularly intense. They pointed out that political and social governance processes are dominated by patriarchy. Men occupy leading administrative roles with access to power resources. Women do not have opportunities for political participation. They consider this gender order to be unfair. In addition, they faced obstacles and misunderstandings from religious organizations when advocating for women's rights. An activist, having spent time in Europe, returned to Kyrgyzstan and experienced the contrast in social welfare. He argued that the main factor of injustice, in the country, is the total inequality provoked by state policy. Yet, in most cases, activists are often motivated by a desire to see change in society. For them, the factors inhibiting a just society, in Kyrgyzstan, are primarily rudimentary traditional, religious and Soviet values that prevent the country from achieving optimal modern development. It is particularly characteristic that, among all the activists who took part in the discussion, there were no supporters of conservative views.

In the context of the activist movement in Kyrgyzstan, two dominant approaches to the perception of justice can be identified – liberal and socialist. These differences create confrontation within society, reflecting the contradictions between right-wing and left-wing political forces. The liberal approach emphasizes the citizens' individual rights, economic status and social welfare. Here, the focus is on individual freedoms, market principles, the idea of private property and free enterprise (Akimzhanov *et al.*, 2014; Miethlich, 2022). This approach usually implies that a free society and an open economy create the best conditions for individuals to prosper. On the other hand, the socialist approach emphasizes the importance of collective interests and social solidarity. Activists adhering to this approach may advocate for greater state intervention in the economy, combating social inequalities and providing social protection for all citizens. It has also been observed that gender, race and environmental issues take a back seat in discussions about justice. This may reflect a lack of attention to aspects of justice related to differences in the treatment of people of different genders, races, or care for nature. In addition, an interesting aspect is the difference in the philosophy of achieving justice. A utilitarian understanding that focuses on maximizing social utility may clash with a deontological understanding that emphasizes the need to adhere to certain moral principles in the process of achieving justice. These differences, in approaches to justice, can serve as a basis for dialogue and debate, but they can also lead to political confrontation, requiring the search for compromises to resolve contradictions in society.

Having investigated and systematized the phenomenological perception of justice by activists involved in the processes of social governance in Kyrgyzstan, a need for further study of the problem, based on cultural macroanalysis, arises.

4 JUSTICE AND SOCIAL GOVERNANCE: CULTURAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL SPECIFICITY

Cultural macroanalysis should begin with the study of the specifics of the interaction between social structures and justice. Firstly, justice has a very close connection with the concept of morality. A. Buchanan and D. Mathieu (1986) note that societies can have different moral qualities, such as love, efficiency, prosperity, or kindness, and, at the same time, be just. However, they also emphasize that a society can be just without necessarily possessing other moral characteristics, such as benevolence, efficiency, or prosperity. Thus, the researchers point out that justice represents one of many moral values and does not exclude the societies' existence that can be just, but not possess certain other moral qualities. Another researcher, A. Baier (1987), argues that in recent decades, in North American social and moral philosophy, there have been emerging representatives who have challenged, in various ways, the supposed primacy of justice among moral and social virtues. Particularly prominent are representatives of those society's segments who, given their experiences, could be considered to be aware of the high status of justice. Such representatives include black people and women. On the other hand, there is a tradition of explaining justice as a rational response. J. Reiman reviewed the main theories of the history of moral philosophy from Hobbes to Rawls (1990). The researcher presents an alternative view, according to which those requirements that people consider necessary to protect themselves from enslavement form a complete set of principles of justice. In his interpretation, reason requires refraining from subjugating one another, and therefore principles of justice express these demands of reason. The author argues that the concept of justice, derived from the need to prevent subordination, serves as the foundation of the social contract tradition in moral philosophy. Thus, the researcher offers an interpretation of the history of contractual moral theory, where justice is perceived as a rational response to the need to protect against subordination.

Kyrgyz activists, in their statements about justice, demonstrated two philosophical views on its achievement – utilitarian and deontological approaches. This specificity correlates with the general philosophical dialectical opposition between universalism and contextualism. D. Miller (2002) distinguishes between a universalist approach to justice and a contextualist approach. Universalists believe that the basic principles of justice are invariant – they apply in any circumstances in which questions of justice arise. Contextualists believe that different principles apply in different contexts and that there is no basic core principle that applies to all. Based on the analysis of empirical data, there is another pronounced opposition – socialist and liberal understandings of justice. The distinction between these two prisms of perception of justice is shown by researcher J. Brodie (2007). The scholar argues that, by the end of the 19th century, the idea of social justice had become the central motive for social democratic parties in Europe. These parties gained political power as civil and democratic rights were extended to the working class and its organizations. The project of social justice included several key aspects, beginning with the liberal promise of equality for citizens. However,

the more fundamental idea of social justice was based on the belief that justice was a virtue applicable to both the collective and the individual. Moreover, it was assumed that social institutions and social positions could and should be judged as either just or unjust. In contrast to liberal promises of individual dignity, autonomy and rights, economic inequalities, caused by unregulated market forces, were perceived as unjust. Modern “just” societies were thought to remedy this through redistribution. Thus, the socialist understanding of justice implied society’s more radical transformation to create equality among people. The arbiter of equality, in their understanding, should be the state.

Consequently, justice in Kyrgyzstan has polar perceptions. It is about the coexistence of both socialist and liberal perceptions of justice. It should also be noted that, in Central Asia, social governance and justice are at a developing stage. Various social security systems exist in these countries, but they do not always ensure equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. Especially in Kyrgyzstan, the social security system is underdeveloped. A high level of poverty and unemployment exists in this country, which leads to the growth of social inequality (Zhovtianska, 2023). E. W. Merry (2004) points out that all five Central Asian states are not post-Soviet, but neo-Soviet. The former leaders of the Communist Party retain a nomenclature system of centralized and hierarchical rule. These regimes also resemble the clan autocracies of post-colonial Africa, but with the mechanisms of a modern police state. These countries face all the problems common to the Third World, but are less receptive to positive external influences or the development of pluralistic politics and civil society. While these regimes have mixed prospects for staying in power, none are likely to succeed in economic development or in responding to social change. The lack of consensus in the understanding of justice and underdeveloped social governance lead to societies’ characteristic problems that are in the process of transformation. In Kyrgyzstan’s context, this is explained by the post-Soviet transformation (Auanassova *et al.*, 2018; Abykeeva-Sultanalieva *et al.*, 2022).

There are cultures and societies where either liberal or socialist understandings of justice prevail in the institutional framework. In the USA, for example, social governance and justice are primarily based on liberal principles. As G. Frederickson (2005) notes, public administrators, over the years, have contributed greatly to the creation of a more equal and just America. Nevertheless, as a core societal value, social justice is no longer a new thing. Still, the importance of social justice has increased in society at the present stage. Americans are becoming less equal in almost all aspects of social, economic and political life. In Europe, social governance and justice are also based on the liberal principles of democracy, equality and freedom (Golovko *et al.*, 2023). However, these principles have been realized in European countries in different ways. In some European countries, such as Sweden and Norway, social security is very well developed. These countries have high taxes, but in return, they provide their citizens with a wide range of social services, such as free education, health care and housing. In other European countries, like the UK and France, social security is not as well

developed as in Scandinavian countries. However, C. Joerges (2015) has been critical of the “European social model,” which has shown its inefficiency during the financial crisis. The researcher argues that the turn of “social Europe” to austerity policy has led not only to the introduction of harsh structural reforms in the countries of the European South, but also reflects a general departure from the commitment of the welfare state, which during the European Union’s formation was understood as a European heritage and doctrine. Thus, criticism of the liberal model of justice and social governance is present in both the US and Europe, given that justice is a very subjective concept.

In China, social governance and justice are based on the principles of the socialist understanding of justice. These principles are reflected in the Chinese Constitution, which guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all citizens, regardless of their social status. Within the framework of these principles, China has a social security system that is designed to provide all citizens with a basic standard of living. This system includes programmes, such as pensions, health insurance and education. China also has a system of social control which is designed to ensure that social justice is upheld. This system includes measures, such as restrictions on property inequality and discrimination, based on gender, race, or religion. Overall, social governance and justice, in China, are on the road to development. In recent years, China has seen an increase in social welfare, but there are still many problems in this area. J. Liu (2014) recorded the difference between social governance in China and governance in Western countries. In China’s current context, the strengthening and development of social governance is a holistic process, not market-centrism or state-centrism. Centrism is pursued, and pure social centrism is not the preferred development path. Rather, the chosen path is state-led social pluralism (Ladychenko *et al.*, 2020).

In reality, the idea of an ideal society is often utopian, as perceptions of justice and well-being are strongly influenced by cultural, historical and social contexts. Each model of social governance has its strengths and weaknesses, and what seems fair to some may be unfair to others. China, for example, strives for socialism with Chinese characteristics, which involves a combined approach that includes elements of a planned economy and elements of a market one. This model allows for political stability and economic growth, but it also raises questions about political freedoms and human rights. On the other hand, there are various social forces and movements in the US and Europe that seek to change the existing structures towards a more socialist model. This shows that, even in advanced capitalist societies, there is discontent with inequality and injustice. The problem of perceptions of fairness becomes particularly acute when considering macrostructural entities, such as the state and the economy (Kipane *et al.*, 2023; Adamkulova; Tynaliev, 2023). The question arises about how to balance freedom and equality, how to allocate resources and how to ensure the society’s sustainability. Addressing these issues requires considering the different population groups’ diverse needs and values. Thus, the challenge of creating a just society

remains complex and multifaceted, and the understanding of justice can vary significantly, depending on perspective and context.

Kyrgyzstan, like other Central Asian countries, is on the path of transformation towards liberal justice. However, the presence of the Soviet past reinforces the mental schemes of socialist perceptions of justice. This transition to liberal forms of justice is often accompanied by uncertainty and causes dilemmas for the population, which still has traces of the Soviet period in its minds. The Soviet model of social structure and social justice, based on the principles of socialism, instilled in people certain expectations about the state’s role, the distribution of resources and the provision of social protection. Therefore, the transition to liberal and market principles may cause some apprehension and resistance, especially among those who are used to a more planned economy and state intervention. The mental schemas of socialist perceptions of justice may manifest themselves in demands for social protection, support for vulnerable groups, and the state’s expectations in education and health care. At the same time, liberal principles emphasize the role of the market, individual responsibility and private initiative.

This process of transformation requires a balance between respect for the historical heritage and the modern society’s needs. It is important to create mechanisms that will ensure social justice in the new conditions, considering the population’s specific mentality and expectations. In addition, education and information campaigns can play a key role in explaining the principles of liberal justice and creating awareness of the need to adapt to new realities.

5 JUSTICE AND FACTORS OF ITS PERCEPTION

The study demonstrated the existence of polarization in the phenomenological perception of justice, which reflects different societal profiles of its realization. In general terms, justice has different forms of differentiation, depending on the context of perception. In addition, there are also sociodemographic differences that were poorly captured in the qualitative methodology, indicating a limitation of this study.

American researchers E. Martin *et al.* (2022) studied the perception of fairness by athlete-activists who were engaged in promoting positive social change in society. The participants of the study (a total of 4,473 people) filled out self-report scales, assessing their perceptions of social justice. It was found that activists, compared to non-activists, were more likely to see social problems as related to social injustice. In addition, activists rated most social agents as more approving of their activism. Among athletes, who identified as male, black, or of more than one race, they were noted to engage in activism more often than expected. Most of the participants, in the study, viewed all social issues as causes of social injustice. Thus, the

study shows a heightened sensitivity to social justice among activists. In contrast, this study recorded correlations, given the quantitative methodology. Whereas this study concentrated on the qualitative method, displaying more phenomenological experiences of the researched.

S. Deepak (2021) conducted an empirical study of perceptions of fairness and unfairness among women working in commercial organizations. The study analysed perceptions of organizational fairness, using four dimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational fairness. The results of the study show that working women experience satisfaction with distributive justice related to how resources and opportunities are distributed among society's members. However, procedural justice demonstrates inequality in decision-making processes, indicating gender discrimination. Procedural fairness focuses on honesty and fairness in decision-making processes. Women also express satisfaction with interpersonal fairness, indicating that they are treated with respect and dignity in the work environment. Interpersonal fairness addresses interactions between people in terms of fairness and equity. Information fairness also evokes favorable perceptions among the female participants in the study, except for the noted lack of candour in sharing information. Information justice refers to the fair and just treatment of information in various aspects, including communication, access to information and use of data (Vilks; Kipāne, 2018). The results of this study, in contrast to the one cited above, concentrate on the microsocial sphere. At the same time, as in the research among Kyrgyz activists, the issue of gender issues, in the context of fairness, was raised. However, this aspect of this study took a central place by analysing women's perceptions of justice. In addition, this study differentiated among types of justice, while, in this study, justice was presented as a generalized concept.

Chinese researchers D. Zhou *et al.* (2022) focused their attention on studying the problem of justice in the context of digital technology development. For this purpose, the scholars used household survey datasets to empirically assess the impact of Internet use on the perception of social justice in China. The study found that Internet use has a significant negative impact on perceptions of social justice. It is estimated that, by the end of 2021, the number of Internet users in China will have reached 1,032 billion, accounting for 73% of the total population. This suggests that about 3.65% of the population, or about 5 million people, might perceive today's society as unfair if all circumstances remained unchanged. In addition, the researchers found more pronounced negative effects among men and respondents from China's eastern provinces. These results indicate the importance of considering Internet usage factors when analyzing perceptions of social justice in modern society. The study, in the previous section, also recorded a greater sense of injustice among men. However, this is the only similarity in the results of the study as well as the methodology. This study, like the previous ones, uses quantitative methodology. In this study, the issue of digital technology, in the context of social justice, had a positive connotation as a means of improving the

effectiveness of social governance. This study focused on the mass internet user and their perceptions of justice.

Other Chinese scholars' research, like B. Ma *et al.* (2021), focuses on state redistributive justice as a key aspect of social justice. The authors analyze how Chinese people perceive and feel the outcomes and procedures of state redistributive justice and conducted an empirical study on public opinion and social justice. The main results of the study show that, when evaluating social justice, most people view social justice from the perspective of outcome, attaching less importance to procedural justice. Most of the respondents tend to stick to their beliefs rather than their perceptions based on everyday experiences, viewing social justice in the context of outcome and procedural justice. The researchers also examined the relationship between social justice and the views of different groups of people based on their location, gender, education, income and age. They found a strong correspondence between public opinion and justice outcomes among respondents in all groups. Unlike the above study, which was closely overlapping with social governance, this study emphasizes public governance in redistributive justice. Various sociodemographic indicators were also employed, which is characteristic of quantitative methodology.

N. Bacchus (2023) argues that, in Muslim-majority countries, justice is closely linked to Islamic beliefs about diversity and human dignity. The author conducted a critical and systematic review of the researcher S. Ciftci's work, who used a combination of ethnography, in-depth interviews, survey data and content analysis to study how Muslims, in Turkey, seek ways to advocate for social justice and democracy through Islamic traditions. The researcher S. Ciftci analyzed 396 articles published in 43 Islamist journals and concluded that Islamic justice is built around social order and resistance to globalization after 1980. The interview data also showed that Turkish youth expresses a belief in a just ruler who upholds justice. However, N. Bacchus notes that it is not clear why the youth value secular democracy, even though their vision of social justice, is based on Islam. This scoping study addresses the issue of the influence of religious doctrines and attitudes on perceptions of justice. The study also recorded the mention of the religious component in the perception of justice.

K. Hvidberg *et al.* (2023) analyzed survey data on the Danish people's perception of their income position and their views on inequality in different reference groups. The study showed that, on average, people are well-informed about their reference groups' income levels. However, low-rank respondents, in all groups, are more likely to overestimate their position among others, thinking that others' incomes are lower than they are, while higher-status respondents tend to have the opposite perception. This misperception of their position is related to proximity to others, norms of transparency and visible income signals. As in the study above, the question of the relationship between fairness and equality is raised. But while in the activist study, based on the focus group participants' responses, equality was equated

with fairness, this study adds to the understanding of these two closely related concepts: the perception of unfairness in inequality is strongly related to a person's subjective perception and personal experience of interacting with people.

In general terms, other researchers' findings are consistent with the results of a study among Kyrgyz activists, which also showed that perceptions of justice are subjective and depend on various factors. In particular, this study found that people, who believe that they have personally experienced injustice, are more likely to perceive society as unfair. In addition, the study noted that perceptions of fairness may be related to religious beliefs and cultural norms. Overall, the above studies further confirm that the perception of fairness is a complex and multifaceted issue. It can be influenced by a variety of factors and have a significant impact on people's behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

The comprehension of justice is a complex and multifaceted topic that has different interpretations, depending on the cultural, historical, and social context. In Kyrgyzstan, as in other Central Asian countries, these differences are particularly pronounced. The liberal approach to justice emphasizes the importance of individual rights and freedoms as well as market principles. This approach is based on the belief that a free society and an open economy create the best conditions for individuals to flourish. Liberal Kyrgyz activists tend to favor the development of a market economy, the strengthening of market principles, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms. The socialist approach to justice emphasizes the importance of collective interests and social solidarity, as well as state intervention in the economy. This approach is based on the belief that the state should play an active role in ensuring social justice and protecting vulnerable groups. Socialist activists in Kyrgyzstan tend to favor greater state intervention in the economy, combating social inequalities and providing social protection for all citizens. The transition to liberal forms of justice in Kyrgyzstan, as in other Central Asian countries, is accompanied by several challenges. Firstly, this transition is often accompanied by uncertainty and causes dilemmas for a population that still has traces of the Soviet period in its consciousness. Second, the transition requires considering the population's mentality and expectations, which are used to a more planned economy and state intervention. To ensure social justice, it is necessary to take these challenges into account. It is important to create mechanisms that are consistent with liberal principles, but also consider the people's needs and values, who are used to a more planned economy and state intervention.

In the context of activism in Kyrgyzstan, there are also two philosophical views on achieving justice – utilitarian and deontological approaches. The utilitarian approach focuses on maximizing public benefit, while the deontological approach emphasizes the need to adhere

to certain moral principles in the pursuit of justice. These differences, in the philosophy of approaches to justice, are reflected in the activists’ statements and can become the basis for dialogue and discussion in society. Thus, the understanding of justice is a dynamic process that reflects changes in society. In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has witnessed the civil society’s growth and the activation of social movements. This leads to a broader discussion of justice and the development of new approaches to achieving it. The process of transitioning to liberal forms of justice, in Kyrgyzstan, faces several challenges, but also opens up new opportunities. The transition to a market economy and limited state intervention can lead to increased welfare and individual rights and freedoms. However, it can also lead to increased inequality and social instability. To ensure social justice in Kyrgyzstan, it is necessary to consider the interests of the population’s all segments. It is important to create mechanisms that promote equality of opportunity and protect the vulnerable groups’ rights. Further research should focus on the state’s role in promoting justice within the framework of social governance.

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