Intersecting Public Management and Social Equity: In Theory and Praxis
A call for papers for a special issue of Public Management Review

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Equity is an incredibly complex concept with a long, muddled history in government. There is a quizzical failure to embrace equity. Especially considering that the responsibility to do so lies at the heart of public administration, given it is one of its four pillars (economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity) (Frederickson, 2010). While it is born from the normative dimensions of equity, social equity emphasizes group considerations regarding economic fairness and advantage (Guy & McCandless, 2012, p. S6). This conception of social equity evolved substantially over time from Locke (1689), through Rawls (1971) and Frederickson (1971), and most recently Gooden (2015), Guy and McCandless (2020), and Berry-James et al. (2021). Conceptualizations of equity vary greatly and may refer to inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. Also, terminology varies and with policy documents using terms such as social inclusion or social justice (e.g. EU, WHO and UN documents).

The US National Academy of Public Administration, which created the Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance in 1997 (Frederickson, 2010), defines social equity as "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.” Social equity "involves determinations of how fairly administrative systems operate in the delivery of public services" (Guy & McCandless, 2012, p. S6). In short, it implies fairness, justice, and rights (Nalbandian, 1989) in terms of large groups of individuals based on their shared, diverse characteristics.

Paradoxically, social equity has been both prioritized and overlooked in much of the public administration and public management literature. Scholars have long advocated for the advancement of social equity within the fields of public administration (Fayol, 1949; Frederickson, 1990; Frederickson, 2005; Svara & Brunet, 2005; Gooden & Portillo, 2011; Blessett et al., 2019) and public management (Rainey, 1994; Andrews & Van de Walle, 2013; Mastracci & Bowman, 2015; Ford, 2021). In 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration classified social equity as one of the twelve grand challenges facing public administration.
Research on the recent global crises (2007/8 and 2020-onwards) shows that they exacerbated pre-existing inequities and created new vulnerabilities across a range of disadvantaged groups (Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Martin-Howard & Farmbry, 2020; Wright & Merritt, 2020; Agrawal, Cojocaru, Montalva & Narayan, 2021). Yet, widespread incorporation and reflection of social equity practices in government and the anticipated public benefits still seem like an elusive goal today. Though no validated social equity measures currently exist, there appears to be little anecdotal evidence of meaningful progress.

**Public Management: The Missing Piece to Achieving Social Equity in Theory & Praxis**

The field of public management is the necessary, missing catalyst to make tangible progress towards social equity. Social equity policy is meaningless if the implementation of the policy is not beneficial. The enduring dominance of the New Public Management has led to a product-dominant approach with a focus solely on efficiency rather than upon effectiveness and equity (Osborne, 2010; Osborne, Radnor & Nasi, 2013). We have a growing understanding of the public management factors causing or perpetuating inequity, such as: representative bureaucracy, administrative burden, horizontal and vertical decentralization, privatization, co-production and performance management (Cepiku & Mastrodascio, 2021).

Public management's roots stem from many fields, spanning economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, among many others. These expansive roots allow for a better foundation to grow the system-level change required to achieve social equity in theory and praxis (Kelman, Thompson, Jones & Schedler, 2003, p5). Social equity requires a system-level change, and the underpinnings of public management are the missing pieces towards achieving such change. *Prescription* can identify the critical mass of inputs needed and the best ways to support social equity reforms. *Implementation* plans and processes can detail the exact means by which government can turn social equity from a policy goal into a reality. *Strategic leadership* can help craft public value in social equity and lead agencies through the paradigm shift required to attain it. *Evaluation* is the fourth key component to public management and is necessary to ensure that equity initiatives make tangible improvements to systems. Multiple measures, including equity, should be used to assess performance; and context must be considered. Change, especially in government and its associated bureaucracy, does not occur simply through natural evolution or adaptation. For government to be the lever that progresses social equity for the greater public good, public management must be the change agent for government. In short, social equity is not a public management problem; it is a problem that only public management may be equipped to solve.

Thus, this call for paper seeks to shift the conversation in an entirely different direction. Perhaps the question is not how we should progress social equity within public management, as past scholars have noted (Berry-James et al., 2021), but how the interdisciplinary, system-oriented field of public management can progress social equity. Specifically, we ask, how can we use the foundations of public management to advance social equity principles, practices, and theories, across all forms of oppression? Yet, there are currently no meaningful measures for social equity. Ford (2021) recently identified one of the first ways to evaluate social equity analytically. The ability to assess social equity analytically is a first step towards prescribing social equity reforms.
More of this type of work and other work identifying successful implementation and strategic leadership approaches is needed.

Call for Papers

This call encourages submissions from papers pairing social equity theory with the foundational elements of public management. Papers may focus on any topical issue involving social equity. While the paper may address inequities faced by any class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, economic, region, political party, age, or mental and physical health, papers that incorporate an intersectionality lens and build on existing social equity and public management scholarship are especially encouraged. Papers may address any type of marginalization, oppression, perspective, or use any form of rigorous method, so long as the underlying focus remains on how public management foundations progress social equity theory, policy, or practice.

The list of questions below is not exhaustive but rather indicative of the types of research streams this special issue wishes to address.

1. Do social equity programmes create value at the individual and/or societal level? How do we measure it?
2. What are the critical inputs to supporting social equity? And, what is their best organization/arrangement?
3. How do we implement successful social equity programs? What are the organizational/delivery approaches used? What are the specific, detailed public management processes or practices?
4. What are the management and organizational issues that are impacted by or have an impact on social equity?
5. What types of strategic leadership can build/communicate/promote public value from social equity policy and programs?

We aim to include six to eight articles, including a geographic and demographic spread of authors and issues discussed. To submit a proposal for this edited collection, please email a 500-word abstract outlining the manuscript’s contents, including its methodology, application of theory, and fit within this special issue, alongside a 50-word author biographical statement, to the editors. All submissions must be received by April 15, 2022.

All submissions selected by the editors will be invited to submit a full article through the Public Management Review submission system, which will then be subject to the journal's usual double-blind peer review procedures. However, an invitation to submit a full article does not guarantee publication, and all decisions are ultimately those of the journal editors. If you have any questions about potential submissions or to discuss paper ideas before proposal submission, please contact the special issue editors, Sarah L. Young, Ph.D. Sarah.Young@Kennesaw.edu, Kimberly K. Wiley, Ph.D. at kimberlywiley@ufl.edu, or Denita Cepiku, Ph.D. at denita.cepiku@uniroma2.it.

Projected Timeline:

April 15, 2022       Deadline for proposals including a 500-word abstract (abstract only).
Feedback from editors – invitation to authors with successful abstracts to submit a full paper

Full paper submitted via PMR submission system

References


Locke, J. (1690). *Two Treatises of Government*, Oxford University Press.


