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In memoriam Prof. Dr. Dr.h.c.mult. György Jenei

WOLFGANG DRECHSLER, EDITOR IN CHIEF, HALDUSKULTUUR

Professor Dr. Dr.h.c.mult. György Jenei, the doyen of Central and Eastern European Public Administration, passed away peacefully on 4 February 2024; born in 1942, he was 82 years old. He was for many decades the leading figure of the field in our region; he personified it; he had preserved it during darker times; and he had led it again to prominence since 1989, with persistence, integrity, and style. He did so both in form and in contents – the former both at his home, Corvinus University of Budapest, and in his many leadership functions in professional and scholarly associations, including the NISPAcee Presidency during the crucial years of the Global Financial Crisis. And he truly did carry the torch of Public Administration during the times when its inefficiency was not an accident, but a core part of the local system; Professor Jenei's early work on Max Weber was undertaken at a time when this was a politically highly incorrect thing to do.

His direct merits for TalTech's Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance included an unwavering, active support of the best interests of the institution and its members, junior and senior. This entailed his much-valued aid in the smooth transfer of the department, in essence, from Tartu to Tallinn in 2006–2008, as regards networks and organizations, such as the European Master of Public Administration Program (EMPA). He visited Tallinn, TalTech, and the Nurkse Department many times, for instance as a keynote speaker of the legendary 1st EGPA-NISPAcee Trans-Atlantic Dialogue on the Neo-Weberian State in early 2008 (see Jenei, 2009).

György Jenei was an active and highly appreciated counsel in political and administrative matters as well. In fact, he had an historical impact that in the end affected all of our lives. As a principal advisor to Hungarian Prime Minister Miklos Németh during the fateful summer of 1989, and as one of a group of six men to finally decide on the issues of the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian border and on letting the East German refugees leave Hungary for the Federal Republic, he truly grabbed the coat of history. His personal resolve and courage, based on knowing what is right and what really matters, contributed directly to the triggering of the great revolution of the late 20th Century and the collapse of the Soviet Empire and its colonial system, including the Estonian Republic's regaining of independence. When receiving TalTech's Honorary Doctorate in 2011, he spoke about these moments for the first time, and this chapter of European history was first published inside the covers – as they then were – of this journal (Jenei, 2011 – the present obituary is based on the introductory note to this essay).

One may and should, add that György Jenei's diplomatic skills and unwavering courteousness, which never loses sight of the goal – *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* – were a joy to experience and a model for anyone's conduct. Indeed, Professor Jenei embodied not only the effective academic manager and modern researcher – which is not so rare after all – but also the intellectual, highly educated and genuinely cultivated scholar and indeed of the Central European Gentleman who represented a civilization, and a culture, that predates, and still serves as a counter-model against, the horrors of the 20th Century. He helped from his country

and his region to first navigate and then to overcome these horrors, even if not, as today it seems more so than a decade or two ago, for good.

Last but certainly not least, György Jenei served, for many years and until now, on the Advisory Board of this journal. This issue of *Halduskultuur*, 22.2, is dedicated to his memory. We shall not see his like again; may he rest in peace.

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Corruption and Country Size: Insights from Small State Studies

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Abstract

An elaborate body of academic debate deals with public sector corruption as a detrimental social problem. Considerable attention has been paid to the contextual factors of corruption and the role of wider societal norms and institutions in enhancing or deterring corrupt practices. However, there is only a limited amount of knowledge available on one factor – the size of countries. Are small or large countries more prone to corruption? There are a few studies that aim to clarify this issue, but the findings are contradictory. The aim of the article is to turn to a stream of social science research specifically interested in country size – small state studies – and to explore the relevance of this knowledge for understanding public sector corruption. The analysis shows that country size is a significant contextual characteristic that affects economic, political and socio-cultural factors of corruption. The article raises the need for further studies into causal mechanisms of size by including more small states into international comparative research, turning attention to qualitative comparative studies, and taking a closer look at the link between socio-cultural factors of corruption and country size.

Keywords: corruption, country size, context, population, small states

1. Introduction

Public sector corruption, most commonly defined as the abuse of public or entrusted power for private gain (Andersson and Anechiarico 2019, 117; Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016, 9) is condemned for its damaging effects on social relationships, economic development, and political stability. Shacklock et al. (2016, 1) argue that corruption "undermines the fairness, stability and efficiency of a society". Corruption has been shown to decrease wealth, investments and trading (Lambsdorff 2006) with the UN (2018) estimating the cost of corruption to be at least 5% of global GDP. Andersson and Anechiarico (2019, 7) emphasize corruption's detrimental effect on the "integrity of governance, to trust in democratic processes, and to effective decision making and administration".

Numerous recent books, research papers, and indices have aimed to identify the level of corruption in different countries, insisting that we must understand the causes and effects of corruption for an effective defense of public integrity (Andersson and Anechiarico 2019, xi). The debates have been characterized by the call to bring in a wider context into the studies. Several authors have emphasized the need for empirical analyses focusing on macro-level, systemic and contextual factors surrounding corruption (for example, Fernando and Bandara 2020; Persson et al. 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi 2006). In other words, next to the perspectives explaining

corruption as a function of “bad apples” (related to the characteristics of individuals) or “bad barrels” (deriving from the characteristics of organizations), there is a call for more empirical research that discusses the characteristics of “bad ladders”, i.e. the impact of the environment where the “apples” or “barrels” are located (Fernando and Bandara 2020, 2; Gonin et al. 2012). In this view, the factors for corruption go beyond personal and organizational traits and include wider societal norms and institutions. As Doig and McIvor (1999, 659) argue, corruption as an “activity motivated by self-interest, violating the binding rules of distribution”, always takes place in a specific context, and the “rules of distribution refer not only to the letter of the law, but also to norms recognized as binding by society and/or to the system’s official norms and operational codes.”

Research on corruption has taken considerable interest in these contextual variables – there are numerous empirical and theoretical studies on how factors such as economic development and openness to competition as well as democracy, culture, geography and history, regulatory quality, etc. relate to the level of (perceived) corruption (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012; Lambsdorff 2006; Seldadyo and de Haan 2006). However, there is one contextual factor that has escaped solid explanations thus far – the size of countries. Are small or large countries more prone to corruption? Why? There are a few studies that aim to shed light on this issue, but the findings are contradictory and raise several methodological questions. Theoretical conceptualizations revolving around the economies of scale allow to make arguments in both directions and the function of size has been put forward as an ultimately “empirical issue” (Amin and Soh 2019, 4; Knack and Azfar 2003, 5). While the respective empirical studies are still scarce, the ones exploring the issue tend to conclude that the occurrence of corruption seems to increase with the size of the country, i.e. to argue that larger countries are more disposed to being corrupt (Amin and Soh 2019; Root 1999; Treisman 2000).

At the same time, however, there exists another stream of social science research that takes an active interest in the impact of country size. This knowledge, which can be gathered under the label “small state studies”, directs attention to the increased corruption risks in smaller countries. The studies relying on the size of populations as the key variable (for example, Baldacchino and Wivel 2020; Briguglio 2018a; Corbett and Veenendaal 2018) show that a small population shapes the governance of countries through the shortage of resources, most of all human resources, and the special “social ecology” that comes with it (Jugl 2019; Sarapuu 2010). Corbett and Veenendaal (2018, 176) argue that “close connections and overlapping public and private relations between citizens and politicians in small states generally translate into particularistic politics, among which clientelism, patronage, and nepotism are common.”

Nevertheless, these two streams of research have evolved rather independently from each other. Drawing on the potential value of knowledge offered by the small state studies, the article at hand aims to take an in-depth look into the studies in order to explore their relevance for corruption research. Guided by the academic debate on the factors of public sector corruption, the article aspires to answer two questions:

- What do small state studies say on the impact of country size regarding the explanatory factors of corruption?
- What are the potential implications of this knowledge for the research on public sector corruption?

In order to synthesize knowledge from two very wide academic debates, the analysis proceeds by, first, focusing on the stream of corruption literature that discusses the role of context in public sector corruption and, second, based on this overview, explores the key texts in small state governance to distil the knowledge relevant for understanding the function of states' size in public sector corruption. The article starts with a look into existing corruption research and gives an overview of the key contextual factors brought forward. Secondly, population size as a variable in corruption research is discussed. Third, small state studies are introduced and the portrayal of the contextual factors of corruption in small state studies is explored. The last section focuses on the implications of bringing the two streams of knowledge together and their potential synergy in the field of corruption research. The analysis shows that country size is a significant contextual factor affecting economic, political and socio-cultural factors of corruption, but its exact function is undecided. Thus, advancing research on the link between country size and corruption is both an empirical and a theoretical endeavor. In pursuing these aims, small state studies offer several seminal insights.

2. Contextual factors in corruption research

There is extensive international discussion on the factors that explain the existence and rate of corruption, ranging from single case studies to large N quantitative analyses. As the list of the factors analyzed is long, researchers have classified and grouped them in a number of ways. Some authors divide the factors that shape corruption into three or four principal groups (e.g. Ata and Arvas 2011; ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012; Seldadyo and de Haan 2006), others into as many as nine groups (e.g. Lambsdorff 2006). In this paper, similarly to Ata and Arvas (2011) and ElBahnasawy and Revier (2012), we rely on a division of explanatory factors into three core groups – economic, politico-administrative, and socio-cultural. The groups cover all the factors discussed under various categorizations and provide a functional analytical anchor for the study.

First, there are numerous theoretical and empirical analyses of *economic factors* as potential determinants of corruption. On a theoretical level, most of the explanations circle around the concept of competition: the more open the economy is and with fewer barriers it functions, the better in terms of corruption. Several factors have been shown to correlate with low levels of corruption and are proposed to reduce incentives for corruption. The most basic determinant has been argued to be the wealth of the country, determined by GDP per capita. Several authors (Damania et al. 2004; Serra 2006; Treisman 2000) have concluded that wealth is a good predictor of the level of corruption, with wealthier countries being less corrupt. One of the reasons behind it might be the ability of the country to invest more resources into anti-corruption policies; another may be related to better education and literacy in the society, which contribute to greater awareness and thus to a better likelihood of discovery (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012, 314). The same has been claimed about general economic freedom (Gurgur and Shah 2005; Park 2003; Treisman 2000), openness to trade (Ades and Di Tella 1999; Treisman 2000; Knack and Azfar 2003) and greater import share (Herzfeld and Weiss 2003; Treisman 2000). Income distribution, however, has not been shown to have an important effect on corruption (Park 2003; Brown et al. 2011).

On the other hand, low wages in the public sector (compared to the private sector) and an abundance of natural resources (especially oil and gas) have been suggested to increase the

likelihood of corruption. In case of public sector wages, several authors (Van Rijckeghem and Weder 1997; Alt and Lassen 2003; Rauch and Evans 2000) have suggested that comparatively lower wages may increase the motivation for bribes, as the cost of a bribe (losing a job) seems lower, while the benefit seems higher. However, not all empirical studies agree with this conclusion, stating that the relationships between wages and level of corruption are not always statistically significant (Gurgur and Shah 2005; Treisman 2000). Additionally, natural resources, their mining and export create opportunities for rent-seeking, thus increasing the potential level of corruption (Tornell and Lane 1998; Leite and Weidmann 1999).

There is no agreement on either the theoretical or the empirical level on how the size of the public sector (in terms of government expenditure and revenue relative to the GDP; e.g. Seldadyo and de Haan 2006) influences the level of corruption. Some authors assume that smaller public sectors create a deficit in providing public services, thereby creating temptation for bribes, whereas others argue that larger public sectors create more opportunities for corruption (Seldadyo and de Haan 2006, 14), especially through rent-seeking behavior as the public sector is a significant buyer of goods and services (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012, 315). Lambsdorff (2006, 5) points out that there is also the question of reverse causality, as “corrupt governments have difficulty obtaining funding, be it through taxation or loans. This lack of resources then forces them to operate on a rather small budget.”

Second, the literature brings forward *the politico-administrative factors*. Seldadyo and de Haan (2006, 20) divide them into two main groups. First, political and civil liberties associated with democracy, and second, administrative characteristics, including decentralization and federalization. When it comes to the democracy-related variables, there is a general agreement that democracy reduces corruption (Brunetti and Weder 2003). As Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman (2005) explain, political participation and competition, and democratic control mechanisms enable the public to monitor the elected officials’ activities and, if needed, remove them from the office. However, as Lambsdorff (2006, 10) points out, the effects of democracy on corruption are not immediate, nor are they present in “half-hearted” democracies. In addition, democracies are seen as more stable forms of government, and (political) stability as a factor has been shown to reduce the potential level of corruption (Leite and Weidmann 1999; Lederman et al. 2001; Serra 2006; Park 2003), as in an unstable political situation officials tend to behave more opportunistically to take advantage of their (possibly short) time in office. Contrary to the empirical findings, ElBahnasawy and Revier (2012, 317) propose that stability may also have the opposite effect, as it allows officials time to build up corrupt relationships.

Strong rule of law and well-defended political freedoms have been shown to decrease corruption (Kaufmann et al. 2006; Damania et al. 2004). In short, if politicians and public officials expect corrupt activities to be detected and sanctioned, they may be less tempted to engage in them. In addition, as Rauch and Evans (2000) point out, Weberian principles of public administration (especially meritocracy) lower corruption due to the higher quality of bureaucracy (see also Gurgur and Shah 2005; Brunetti and Weder 2003). Multiple analyses (Lederman et al. 2001; Ali and Isse 2003; Gurgur and Shah 2005; Fisman and Gatti 2002) have shown decentralization to have a reducing effect on corruption, whereas federalization has the opposite effect (Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman 2005; Damania et al. 2004; Treisman 2000; Goldsmith 1999).

Third, *socio-cultural factors* are the smallest group, but the most difficult to quantify. Furthermore, quite often the direction of causality is not clear (Lambsdorff 2006). The main cultural factors that have been shown to have a reducing effect on corruption include Protestantism (La Porta et al. 1999; Treisman 2000; Serra 2006; Chang and Golden 2007, a higher proportion of women in representative institutions and the work-force (Swamy et al. 2001), as well as secular-rational values in the society (Sandholtz and Taagepera 2005). Protestantism is seen as beneficial due to its focus on individualism and a clear separation of church and state, whereas secular-rational societies put more emphasis on impersonal values. Ethnic fragmentation and conflict, on the other hand, are seen as factors contributing to corruption (La Porta et al. 1999; Lederman et al. 2001) due to the bureaucrats’ potential loyalty to their ethnic group or family instead of public interest. Last, colonial heritage is seen as having mixed effects on corruption. Some authors claim that colonial heritage results in more corruption (Gurgur and Shah 2005; Tavares 2003), whereas others show differences between various backgrounds, arguing that former British colonies have lower corruption compared to the Spanish and Portuguese ones (Herzfeld and Weiss 2003).

It should be emphasized that there is a considerable overlap between the causes and effects of corruption (e.g. low socio-economic development), and on its own, no factor is a good indicator of corruption to be used in isolation from others. Furthermore, the lines between the groups of factors can be arbitrary. For example, the wage of civil servants has been classified as an economic (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012) or bureaucratic/regulatory determinant (Seldadyo and de Haan 2006); regulatory quality has been discussed as an economic factor (e.g. limits to economic freedom, ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012; Seldadyo and de Haan 2006) or as a bureaucratic factor (Lambsdorff 2006); natural resources have been grouped among the economic (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012; Seldadyo and de Haan 2006) and geographical/historical factors (Lambsdorff 2006). Nevertheless, the division of the factors into three groups provides a good framework for reviewing the literature on small states with regard to the potential impact of country size. This will be done after discussing the presence of size as a variable in corruption research.

3. Country size as an explanatory factor

Country size as a variable is addressed in a handful of publications in the field of corruption research. The authoritative literature reviews (e.g. Lambsdorff 2006; Seldadyo and de Haan 2006; Enste and Heldman 2017) usually refer to a few key papers on the issue – Root (1999), Treisman (1999), Fisman and Gatti (2002), Knack and Azfar (2003), and, more lately, Mocan (2008). These are large N studies, based on the quantitative analysis of various factors of corruption, mostly using Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index. The size of population is included in several ways in these studies – as one of numerous variables being studied, a descriptive variable or a control variable. Quite often, the main research questions or hypotheses are not related to the effect of country size, but to other factors, such as (fiscal) decentralization, trade openness, etc. When the effects of size are explicitly addressed, the authors usually point out the potential positive as well as negative effects.

Most often, the overviews of the effects of population size on corruption refer to publications claiming that smaller countries are less corrupt (e.g. Root 1999; Treisman 1999; Fisman and Gatti 2002). For instance, one of the key texts by Fisman and Gatti (2002) focuses on

fiscal decentralization and its relationship to corruption. The authors conclude that “fiscal decentralization in government expenditure is strongly and significantly associated with lower corruption”, using population, civil liberties, GDP and government size as control variables. Similarly, Treisman (2000, 405) uses population as a control variable when analyzing such factors as the legal system, religion, colonial background, political freedom, economic and social development, public service salaries and political instability. Again, he does not link population directly to the level of corruption, but creates a longer causal chain. Treisman (2000, 432) argues that countries with larger populations and areas “are both more likely to be federal and to be relatively more corrupt (perhaps because their economies are less exposed to competition from imports)”. Wei (2000) discusses “a natural openness” of a country based on its population and distance from the world trading centers, concluding that bigger and far-away countries are less open and more corrupt, as smaller and more open countries are influenced by market discipline and are thus forced to have good governance. Using microdata to analyze the determinants of the probability of being asked for a bribe, Mocan (2008) concludes that the probability increases not only with population size but also with living in a large city (over 1 million inhabitants). The latest study by Amin and Soh (2019), which relies on survey data from 135 countries concerning firms’ experience with corruption, concludes that corruption is positively correlated with country size and is higher in larger countries.

Knack and Azfar’s (2000, 2003) research, however, reaches the opposite conclusion. Their main focus is on examining previous publications, which “conclude that larger [countries] tend to have governments that are more corrupt than governments in smaller nations” (again, referring to Root 1999; Treisman 1999; Fisman and Gatti 2002). Knack and Azfar (2003, 9) state that this is the result of sample bias: they claim that “only the well-governed countries among small nations are represented in the Transparency International index, and only the large nations among the poorly-governed ones are represented.” Thus, with the inclusion of more badly governed small countries the correlation between population size and corruption would disappear. Yet another group of authors concludes that population size is not significant in determining the level of corruption. Tavares (2003) analyzes the relationship between foreign aid and corruption, including population among the variables, but finds it insignificant. A later analysis by ElBahnasawy and Revier (2012) uses multiple variables, including GDP per capita, openness to trade, natural resource endowment, religion, etc., with population among them. Their “results provide strong evidence that a country’s population size does not seem to influence perceived corruption” (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012, 324).

The above discussion shows that the existing literature on the relationship between the size of a country and corruption is not only limited but also controversial. The first and the most obvious of these controversies is the lack of agreement on the effect of population size on the level of corruption – whether smallness fosters corruption, discourages it or is insignificant. Second, there is a lack of discussion on the definition of country size – it is not clear what is meant by small or large in corruption research. If the thresholds exist, they are not thoroughly justified. Knack and Azfar (2003) explain that only two out of 30 countries with populations under one million are included in Transparency International data, and they use this line to show that excluding those countries from the dataset considerably alters the conclusions. However, no other explanation is given why the level of one million might be important in terms of corruption. Mocan (2008) uses 50,000 and 1 million as cut-off points for city sizes,

but does not define any threshold for the country size. Other studies do not define their cut-off points at all (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012).

Third, the factor of size is under-theorized – there is a superficial discussion on the function of size and how it influences the level of corruption. For example, one of the most often cited works by Knack and Azfar (2003, 4), whose theoretical discussion focuses mostly on the concept of optimal size, limits its discussion of smallness to citing Jalan’s (1982) claim that “smaller nations benefit from greater social cohesion and fewer vested interests.” In addition, they refer to the economies of scale and its possible influence on the provision of public services, rent-seeking as well as conflicts of interest (Knack and Azfar 2003, 5). Overall, the existing literature is centered around economic interpretations, concepts and variables of size: Root (1999) discusses the economies of scale (cited by Knack and Azfar 2000, 5), Fisman and Gatti (2002) focus on fiscal decentralization, Tavares (2003) on foreign aid, and Knack and Azfar (2000) on foreign investment and trade intensity.

Fourth, there is the problem of using decentralized units as proxies for small countries. For example, in the overview on determinants of corruption Lambsdorff (2006) discusses population size under the heading “decentralization”, together with such factors as the share of subnational expenditures, federalization, and unicameral vs. bicameral parliaments. The paper by Fisman and Gatti (2002) that is often used to demonstrate that smaller states are less corrupt (ElBahnasawy and Revier 2012; Lambsdorff 2006; Seldadyo and de Haan 2006), actually deals with fiscal decentralization. Decentralized units in a large state, however, do not equal small states, even though the basic statistics (population, area, budget, etc.) might be similar.

4. The impact of country size according to small state studies

Small state studies

The field of small state studies has seen considerable growth in recent decades. Numerous edited collections and empirical analyses have been published discussing the relevance of country size, the special characteristics of small states, and the challenges related to the limited scale of political and administrative systems (for example, Baldacchino and Wivel 2020; Briguglio 2018a; Corbett and Veenendaal 2018; Briguglio et al. 2021; Joensen and Taylor 2021). While the most common variable used to categorize countries is the size of their populations (Briguglio 2018b; Corbett and Veenendaal 2018; Jugl 2019), the applied definitions and thresholds have depended on the research interest. For instance, the discipline of international relations conceptualizes small states mostly as “small powers” – i.e. those with limited capabilities and not able to change the terms of policy-making on the international arena (Maass 2009; Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006). Size becomes relative in this perspective. However, in the governance discipline with its interest in the internal matters of governing, a more absolute stance is taken. In this perspective, the limited population size is the key defining feature of small countries (Sarapuu and Randma-Liiv 2020). Jugl (2019, 119) argues that for analyzing the impact of size on the performance of governments, the size of a population is the most appropriate characteristic, because “it is a proxy for the number of social relations in a society, the human resource pool, the heterogeneity of citizens’ and bureaucrats’ identities and preferences and the demand for public goods and services.”

Despite the growing interest in the impact of country size, no clear dividing line between small and large (or medium-scale) countries has emerged. In a number of studies, small states have been defined as those with a population of one million or less (Anckar 2020; Corbett and Veenendaal 2018; Raadschelders 1992). The Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank have employed a threshold of 1.5 million. Bräutigam and Woolcock (2001) use a threshold of five million. Even within the recent edited collections, different cut-off points have been applied in individual chapters (see e.g. Briguglio 2018a; Baldacchino and Wivel 2020). Due to the arbitrary nature of dividing lines, several scholars suggest conceptualizing the issue through “a continuum of size” (e.g. Bray 1991, 13; Bray and Packer 1993, 91) – the smaller the population gets, the more likely are the states to present specific characteristics.

Regardless of various conceptualizations of size and the fact that small states differ in their development, histories, governance models, etc., the studies share a common conviction that the size matters. The explanations for the function of size revolve mostly around “the economies of scale” and, more specifically, lacking economies of scale in countries with small populations (Jugl 2019). Through missing economies of scale, the small population size has an impact on the functioning of the government, the private sector as well as the non-governmental sector. There are limits to specialization and a small client-base for various products and services. At the same time, small countries face the need to maintain the functions of a sovereign state and satisfy the needs of citizens for different public services (Sarapuu and Randma-Liiv 2020). Consequently, the size of the population is a core characteristic that has an impact on all spheres of life. In the next sections, the representation of the three groups of explanatory factors in the small state studies is explored.

Economic factors

Small countries are very diverse and geographically located all over the world. The World Bank, which has a special focus on the economic development of small states (it lists 42 countries with populations under 1.5 million), maintains that despite their diversity, small states share common economic challenges. “Due to their small population and economic base, these countries are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as economic shocks, natural disasters, and climate change. With limited economic opportunities and significant migration, they often face capacity constraints.” (World Bank 2022, 3). Many small states are islands and several of them archipelagos (20 of 39 countries with populations under one million in 2020; Baldacchino 2020, 71). In addition to smallness, these countries must also deal with islandness, territorial fragmentation, remoteness and insularity.

Different studies on small countries put forward similar arguments on their economic features. Small states are characterized by a small market size and a small client base, the absence of economies of scale, lacking competition in the domestic markets, limited natural resource endowments, limited diversification possibilities and small private sector elites (Briguglio 2018b; Baldacchino 2020). Small states tend to have proportionately larger governments (Bräutigam and Woolcock 2001, 4). The markets tend to concentrate around a narrow range of products and services that generate the majority of export sales (Baldacchino 2020, 74). These characteristics make small states dependent on international trade and vulnerable to the fluctuations beyond their borders. Briguglio (2018b, 11) concludes that “the main economic features shared by all small states is their limited human and physical capacity, their inability

to reap the benefits of economies of scale in certain forms of production, their relatively high degree of trade openness and their high exposure to external economic conditions beyond their control.” However, despite the constraints described above, many small states do economically remarkably well and are characterized by high levels of wealth. In terms of GDP per capita, several small states are in the top 10 and several more in the top 30 of the world (Anckar 2020, 48-49). At the same time, there are also a number of small states that lag behind and struggle economically, belonging among the states with the poorest scores. By reviewing four different measures of “political productivity” illuminating the performance of small states in economy, health, human development and education, Anckar (2020, 49) concludes that “small states are everywhere and at all levels.”

The core economic characteristics of small states link with the key factors put forward in corruption research. Some of the characteristics can be expected to have a mitigating effect on corruption – greater economic freedom, openness to trade and bigger reliance on imports should decrease corruption risks. To attract FDI and development assistance, small states may be forced to improve their governance structures and practices, especially control instruments and financial accountability, thus also enhancing anti-corruption measures (Bräutigam and Woolcock 2001; Larmour and Barcham 2006). However, the lack of diversification, small domestic markets and limited competition may result in large sections of economies being controlled by small business elites. Business interest groups assume “greater political clout and leverage in the corridors of local power” (Baldacchino 2020, 73-76). The lack of competition may enhance rent-seeking and thus result in a further decrease in economic efficiency and growth and an increase in misallocation of resources and loss of government revenue. The close connection between politics and commerce creates opportunities for corruption (Findlay 1997, 36).

Politico-administrative factors

Politico-administrative factors can be divided into two sub-groups – political and administrative. First, with regard to the political factors, the small size of a country is expected to have an impact in two opposing directions, both to potentially foster democratic decision-making and to inhibit it. On the one hand, it is expected that the small scale of a country increases transparency and brings politico-administrative decision-makers closer to the people, making them more responsive and accountable (Veenendaal and Corbett 2015). People in small states are more or less known to each other so that ministers, high government officials, influential businesspersons or politicians may be more easily accessible, either formally or informally (Bray and Packer 1993; Sutton 1987). This context is expected to make politicians more representative of their electorates. However, evidence shows that small states’ reality is not necessarily so conducive to democratic governing and rather provides a “mixed blessing” (Larmour and Barcham 2006; Veenendaal and Corbett 2015, 543).

The same characteristics that are expected to make governing more responsive and accountable may lead to personality politics overriding other considerations and to patron-client relationships, corruption and nepotism (Baldacchino 2012; Corbett et al. 2021). Interest groups may have a high impact on policy-making, especially if there are few strong industrial sectors in the country or no critical mass of institutionalized interest groups that

could balance each other in the political discourse (Baldacchino 2020, 73–76; Larmour and Barcham 2006, 178–179). Power and influence tend to become concentrated in the hands of a few (Baldacchino 2020, 75; Corbett and Veenendaal 2018, 177). This may lead to the capture of the state and domination of those who are the loudest, the richest or the closest to the politicians. Despite the small state context allowing for more direct participation in the political process, minorities remain marginalized (Veenendaal and Corbett 2015, 539). All these problems may be aggravated by the weakness (or even absence) of independent media whose functioning is constrained by missing economies of scale (Ólafsson 2020; Larmour and Barcham 2006, 179; Veenendaal and Corbett 2015, 542). Nevertheless, “against all odds” (Corbett and Veenendaal 2018), the majority of small states are democratic and represent remarkably stable democratic regimes (Anckar 2020, 44–45). The forces emanating from the limited scale apparently balance each other and guide the states towards a compromise version of responsiveness and concentration of power.

The small size of a country has a direct impact also on its administrative organization and public service. There are two core implications of lacking economies of scale in this respect. First, the small size of public organizations puts limits on the division of labor by constraining specialization and pushing public institutions towards multi-functionality (Bray 1991; Bray and Packer 1993; Farrugia and Attard 1989; Randma-Liiv 2002). Since public service provision is gripped by diseconomies of scale, there is constant pressure towards a centralization of public functions. Consequently, small states are likely to have fewer government organizations, hierarchical levels and positions, and less distance between the executives and the lower levels of organizations. Multi-functionality occurs both on the level of individual officials and entire organizations. One small state official is often in charge of several policy issues or phases in the policy cycle, which in larger countries are catered for by separate units (Farrugia 1993; Thorhallsson 2000, 81).

Second, the classic values of public administration – such as transparency, predictability, neutrality and equality – assume formalization through rules and standardization. However, the everyday reality of small states – in the form of higher personalism, close social relationships, and multi-functionality – steers small administrations away from rigid rule-following and towards adopting informal working procedures and flexibility (Randma-Liiv and Sarapuu 2019; Raadschelders 1992, 28). A less institutionalized system allows for a higher degree of personal intervention and a corresponding *ad-hoc* approach to issues, but also makes public officials more easily personally identifiable in connection with the specific decisions and their consequences (Sutton 1987). The implications of the tendency towards informality are double-edged. On the one hand, informality and flexibility allow small states to cope with the constraints of scale and to prioritize on a running basis. On the other hand, the reliance on informal work arrangements makes it more difficult to apply hierarchical and standardized organizational practices and may result in problems of transparency, barriers to control and accountability (Sarapuu 2010).

Consequently, strong rule of law, Weberian values in public administration, and merit systems as deterrents of corruption may be difficult to achieve in small states (Bräutigam and Woolcock 2001, 5). Centralization, informal coordination and communication, limited expertise, multi-functionality and high personalism create a favorable environment for corruption. Due to these traits, governing systems can escape public, political and administrative control

(Warrington 1992, 228). Even when the formal anti-corruption institutions are in place, they may turn out to be “hollow” in practice and fail to do what is expected (Larmour and Barcham 2006, 179). Nevertheless, these problems may be balanced by higher transparency and personification accompanying the small scale.

Social factors

As becomes apparent from the above, one central finding of small-state studies is that these countries are characterized by a particular social ecology. The small size of the social field leads to closely knit communities with highly personalized relationships (Benedict 1966; Bray and Packer 1993; Farrugia 1993, 221; Lowenthal 1987; Randma-Liiv 2002; Sutton 1987). When the social field is small, multiple roles have to be played by relatively few individuals (Benedict 1966). That leads to particularistic social relations that extend over time and are affectively charged. A person’s activities and performance are not evaluated based on some universal criteria, but based on *who* he or she is (ibid.). Lowenthal (1987, 35) characterizes small state relationships with the term “managed intimacy” – as their inhabitants meet over a long period of time in different role-relationships, they learn to get along with one another. Furthermore, as the social and economic fabrics of small states tends to be more fragile than in larger states, their inhabitants usually share a common sense of vulnerability (Lowenthal 1987), and a strong national and cultural identity (Sutton 1987, 18-19; Bray 1991). Many of the small states belonging to the SIDS group, are former colonies (Anckar 2020).

In the public sector, close social relationships can be expected to lead to some specific traits and behavioral patterns. Public officials have to operate professionally within a network of people with whom they are personally acquainted, related or connected. The separation of different roles may be difficult or even unrealistic (Baker 1992, 18), thus creating numerous conflicts of interest and the pressure to maintain social relationships over objective and neutral decision-making. As differing opinions can be suppressed by social and cultural sanctions (Baldacchino 2012), speaking up against corruption may not take place (Larmour and Barcham 2006, 180). Nevertheless, the same characteristics that facilitate corruption may also curb it. Although small states can be both homogeneous and heterogeneous in their ethnic, linguistic, religious or racial composition, they tend to be more cohesive (Briguglio 2018b, 11) and trust-based (Jugl 2019). The enhanced personal level trust and high public service motivation deriving from the strong sense of national identity can partly substitute the need for control and reduce communication and monitoring costs.

The above discussion on the three groups of factors is summarized in Table 1. As we see, the special characteristics of small countries can work in both ways – enhancing the corruption risk and reducing it. Although the picture seems similar to the one in corruption research – the theoretical generalizations do not give an unequivocal explanation of the function of countries’ size – three important findings emerge: the size of the population is a critical characteristic of countries; countries with small populations are characterized by special traits of economic, political and social systems; and several of these special traits create a favorable environment for corruption. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

Table 1. The explanatory variables of corruption and the special characteristics of small states

Factors	Explanatory variables analyzed in the corruption literature	Special characteristics of small states outlined in small state studies	Impact of small country traits on corruption
Economic factors	Wealth as measured by GDP per capita, economic growth, income distribution and poverty, wages, size of the public sector, import share, economic freedom, openness and restrictions on foreign trade, foreign investment, capital markets, inflation, natural resources, socio-demographic factors	Very diverse level of economic development; many belong to the category of developing states (SIDS); small domestic markets; small open economies; high dependence on international trade; limited competition at home; importance of FDI; potential dependence on development assistance; limited natural resources	Higher economic freedom, openness to trade, reliance on import and external pressure to improve governance potentially reduce corruption Small markets, lack of economic diversification, limited domestic competition and high shares of foreign aid potentially increase corruption
Politico-administrative factors	Political and civil liberties, length of democratic traditions, freedom of press, structure of the government (federalism and decentralization), electoral system, governmental administration, political instability, legal system and rule of law, quality of governance and bureaucracy, merit system, participation	Majority democratic; pressure towards centralization; diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion; informality and personalism; formal institutions missing or under-institutionalized; potential capture by interest groups or interest groups missing; multi-functionality; limits to specialization; constraints on steering and control; constraints to merit system	Democratic institutions, smaller scale of systems, higher transparency, higher accessibility, international donors potentially reduce corruption High informality, “hollow” formal institutions, individual autonomy, small elites, weakness of media, administrative centralization, multi-functionality, and lack of expertise potentially increase corruption
Socio-cultural factors	Trust, religion, ethnic, linguistic and religious fragmentation, urbanization, historic background (e.g. colonialism, transition), geography, gender representation, value system	More cohesive; more trust-based; post-colonial background; remoteness and insularity (SIDS); particularistic relations; managed intimacy; perceived vulnerability; adherence to tradition; importance of independent statehood	Small social field, particularistic relations and high probability of conflicts of interest potentially increase corruption Trust, social cohesion and shared national identity potentially reduce corruption

5. Discussion

Drawing on the increased recognition of context in corruption research and the controversial findings on the function of country size, we aimed to explore the knowledge created by small state studies and its implications for understanding public sector corruption. The overview above indicates that small state studies provide several insights for corruption research. The three groups of explanatory factors brought forward in the academic debate on corruption – economic, politico-administrative and socio-cultural – embrace also the core issues raised in small state studies. Although small states are diverse regarding their socio-economic development, natural resources, ethnic background, history, value system etc., some of the traits related to small size potentially lower the probability of corruption whereas a number of others are seen to increase corruption risks and hinder anti-corruption activities. For example, while openness of the economy, economic freedom, democratic traditions, transparency, and high trust potentially reduce corruption, small states’ lack of economic diversification and lack of competition in combination with weak media systems may lead to dependence on powerful interest groups, creating a favorable environment for state capture and rent-seeking. The problem is further exacerbated by small elites and close personal connections potentially creating numerous conflicts of interest. The social intimacy combined with informal coordination and communication may result in the weakening of traditional Weberian values of public administration like impersonality, neutrality, objectivity, and predictability. These values have been emphasized as crucial in ensuring the rule of law, quality of governance, and meritocratic bureaucracy, all of which function as deterrents of corruption. In short, small states can be structurally more vulnerable to corruption.

Nevertheless, despite the finding that there are several traits of small states that create a favorable environment for public sector corruption, the verdict on the function of country size is still open. In addition to small states being very diverse, corruption itself is a highly complex social phenomenon that goes to the very fabric of states’ political, economic and cultural institutions (Collier 2002). It depends on the specific institutional environment whether the factors relevant for corruption balance or amplify each other’s impact. According to small state studies, the interaction of the factors can be expected to function differently in small countries than in large countries. Importantly, small states are not scaled-down versions of large ones – missing economies of scale and small social fields make them different qualitatively and create a special context for corruption. For instance, Larmour and Barcham (2006, 183) conclude that “the principles underlying the NIS [*National Integrity Systems*] – of mutual supervision between various institutions, checks and balances, independent offices – seem to run into difficulty when applied at a very small and personal scale.” Moran (2001, 385–386) proposes that small countries might be especially vulnerable to the infiltration of criminal money.

Consequently, we argue that the challenge of advancing research on the relationship of country size and corruption is both a theoretical and an empirical endeavor. The combination of the existing knowledge from corruption research and small state studies offers several avenues for further research. In light of the main controversies in the existing corruption research identified above – no agreement on the causal relationship, lack of discussion on the definition of “smallness”, under-theorization of the function of size, and the usage of decentralized units as proxies for small countries – a few propositions can be made. First,

despite the endemic shortage of statistical data on small countries acknowledged by several scholars (e.g. Amin and Soh 2019, 26; Briguglio 2018b; Knack and Azfar 2000, 2003), there is more information available today than two decades ago when the most often cited studies on the topic were published. The most recent Transparency International CPI includes data on 180 countries (out of 193), allowing the quantitative analyses to be repeated with more data points. Thus far, comparative international studies seldom include the size of countries among their explanatory variables (Veenendaal and Corbett 2015; Sarapuu and Randma-Liiv 2020). Yet, as Corbett and Veenendaal (2018, 166) convincingly point out in the context of comparative political science, the exclusion of small states can be detrimental to the discipline, and adding them is vital “because they do not conform to the standard battery of theoretical explanations found in mainstream democratization theory” (see also Ólafsson 2020).

Consequently, there is the need to include small countries more in the studies on public sector corruption in order to make use of the existing data and to incentivize the creation of new data and knowledge. However, in this endeavor, the problem of lacking data cannot be solved by using decentralized units of larger (federal) states as proxies for small countries. The main arguments for the substitution are found in the similarities of the basic statistical information, like population, area, budget, and maybe even isolation or socio-cultural distinction. Nevertheless, sub-national units and their governance have some decidedly different characteristics compared to small sovereign countries. While sub-national units deal with a limited number of functions, independent small states have to take care of the same tasks as large states – foreign and defense policy, infrastructure, environment, taxation, etc. Furthermore, sub-national units most often are part of a wider society and can draw on its population in terms of human resources whereas smaller states usually have restricted opportunities for that. These differences mean that there are considerable limitations to using decentralized units of larger states as proxies for small ones.

Second, even when the relationship between country size and corruption is conceptualized as an empirical issue, there is the need for underlying theoretical explanations. As Amin and Soh (2019, 26) argue, future research needs to delve into the causal mechanisms through which the size of the country affects the level of corruption as well as into the interaction of different drivers of corruption in order to find out if they “work independently of each other or substitute or complement one another”. There is substantial room for the development of theory on the function of size as a factor of corruption. With regard to the definition of size, the size of a population emerges as a key variable shaping the economic, political and social institutions of countries. While small state studies do not provide us with a clear cut-off point between small, medium or large countries either, the studies underline the importance of “economies of scale” as the central concept explaining the function of size. Due to the research interest, the focus of small state studies is mostly on economies and diseconomies of small scale. However, this knowledge can be used to guide analysis on the relevance of size more generally and also to inquire whether there exists an optimal country size from the perspective of corruption (see Jugl 2019).

In advancing the theoretical understanding of country size as a factor, perhaps the most potential lays in studying the socio-cultural factors. The special social ecology is the key trait that runs through all the spheres of the small state context – economic, political and

socio-cultural. As corruption is inherently interpersonal (Philp 2005), we can assume that the nature of relationships in a society shapes the nature of corruption as well. Most of all, the particularistic environment with high personalism and informal communication means that there is a much bigger role for individual choices than in larger states. As Ólafsson (2020, 153) argues in the context of political communication, the underlying assumption that the professional roles of journalists and politicians can be studied without taking into account the actual persons fulfilling the roles needs reframing in small state context. It means that studying formal institutions has less explanatory power in small countries, and it is crucial to look into the choices and perceptions of individuals (Larmour 2008, 237; Larmour and Barcham 2006, 178; see also Transparency International 2022, 35-36). The latter observation has at least two implications for corruption research – first, a more nuanced approach to the definition and measuring of corruption is needed in order to take account of different forms of corruption becoming manifest; and, second, quantitative comparative studies of corruption need to be complemented with detailed and systematic qualitative studies on the socio-cultural factors of corruption.

Last but not least, the findings presented above have implications for anti-corruption practice. The special social ecology of small states forges close connections between people and challenges the typical anti-corruption rules and regulations. As Walton (2021, 9) argues, small size does not always come with cohesiveness, and more heterogeneous states have to address “the social, economic and cultural drivers of identity formation and corruption” to successfully combat corruption. For example, close relationships and multiple roles may make it more difficult to establish conflict of interest rules, and provide effective whistleblower protection; lack of experts may create revolving door risks; conflict avoidance may hinder effective control, etc. Many of those rules and instruments may have to be adapted to suit the small state environment. Considering the openness of small countries to the global pressures through business, international organizations and foreign aid, the international anti-corruption policies and their influence on small state policy-making could be of further interest. Closer attention being paid to the potential tension between the global best practices type of policy learning on the one hand, and the need to adapt those best practices to the small state context, on the other, could provide interesting information not only on the anti-corruption policies in small states but also on the transferability and universality of policy instruments in general.

6. Conclusion

The article aimed to contribute to the academic debate on public sector corruption, seeking to understand the impact of societal norms and institutions as the causes of corruption. More specifically, it aspired to take an in-depth look into small state studies and to explore the relevance of this knowledge for corruption research. The analysis was inspired by the lack of solid explanations on the function of country size in corruption research. The analysis showed that small state studies do not provide an unequivocal explanation on the function of country size either. The special characteristics of small countries work in both ways – they enhance the corruption risk as well as reducing it. However, the studies define the size of a population as a critical characteristic of countries; explain the impact of small populations on the economic, political and social systems of countries; and outline the special corruption risks related to the

limited scale. The article substantiates the need for more studies into the causal mechanisms of country size and delineates several avenues for further research. Most importantly, small states need to be included in international comparative studies on corruption more than has been the case thus far, quantitative comparative research needs to be complemented with detailed qualitative studies, and considerable progress in knowledge can be expected from linking the socio-cultural factors of corruption with country size. These further steps will benefit both the academic corruption research and international anti-corruption practice.

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Buddhist Governance: Navigating Today's Role of Saṅgha and Dhammarājā, with Special Reference to Cambodia

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the monastic *saṅgha* and the Buddhist king as the *dhammarājā* in the context of good governance in the contemporary world, with a specific focus on the Cambodian perspective. Through an examination of the historical and philosophical foundations of Buddhist governance, it argues for the enduring relevance and applicability of these principles in today's diverse societies. A second line of argument explores how the *saṅgha* assembly, as a collective entity, contributes to the establishment of a just and harmonious society.

Keywords: Buddhist governance, *Saṅgha*, *Dhammarājā*, *dhammādhīpateyya*, *Dhammocracy*, *Pāramī*, Cambodia

1. Introduction

Buddhist governance, rooted in the teachings, values, and historical development of Buddhism, presents a distinctive perspective on statecraft. Beyond a spiritual path, Buddhism encompasses a community and social structure. Emphasizing the ethics of compassion and non-violence, Buddhist governance as a theory seeks to foster harmonious coexistence among diverse communities while prioritizing personal well-being. Though Buddhist governance lacks a blueprint (which is both an advantage and a disadvantage), its underlying principles can guide ethical leadership and social justice.

Buddhist governance is historically formed around the concept of a just ruler or *dhammarājā*. The *dhammarājā* is a king or a ruler who governs his subjects in a righteous way, based on the model of *dhammocracy* grounded in the principles of the *dharma*¹ and its pursuit. The term "dhammocracy" was first introduced and translated from the Pali term "dhammādhīpateyya" by Monychenda to distinguish the model of Buddhist governance from the concept of democracy. The *dhammatic* model is considered an ideal approach to governing the state and society according to Buddhism. It revolves around the principle of *dharma*, in contrast to being grounded in majority rule (democracy) or the authority of a select few (autocracy). The main role of *dhammarājā* is to embrace the principle of *dharma* and to guide his subjects

¹ *Dharma*, a Sanskrit term, and *Dhamma*, its Pali equivalent, are employed interchangeably and with equal significance throughout the entire article.

to realize the true *dharma* as he is responsible for their well-being and happiness, both materially and spiritually.

The word *dhamma* is a Pali word (*dharma* in Sanskrit). It comes from the Sanskrit root “*dhr*”, i.e., “holding things together” – “*dharma* is the way in which one maintains everything” (see Rocher 1978 and Rocher and Lariviere 2012). The term *dhamma* carries multiple meanings and interpretations, dependent on the context.² Rahula (1974, 58) points out that, “there is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhamma* ... there is nothing in this universe or outside, good or bad, conditioned or non-conditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term.” However, in the context of this paper, the term *dhamma* specifically refers to the principles of Buddhism, particularly to the teachings of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*). The teachings of the Buddha are categorized into two primary groups: *dhamma*, signifying doctrine, and *vinaya*, signifying discipline (Payutto 2002). *Dhamma* and *vinaya* are regarded as the core of Buddhism. Prior to his passing, the Buddha made it clear to his attendant, Venerable Ānanda, in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Discourse about the Great Emancipation (DN 16 – Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2013b), “Whatever *Dhamma* & *Vinaya* I have pointed out & formulated for you, that will be your Teacher when I am gone.”

Alongside the ideal kingship of the *dhammarājā*, the *saṅgha* community is upheld as an exemplary governing body within Buddhism. The *saṅgha* community is a fundamentally Buddhist institution comprising ordained monks and nuns who dedicate their lives to spiritual practice, study, and service – and in fact, as Habermas has recently reminded us, the first monastic community ever (2019, 379). As an integral part of the Buddhist tradition, the *saṅgha* plays a crucial role in preserving and propagating the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhist society is therefore centered around the *saṅgha*.

This paper focuses on who can determine what brings happiness to individuals if not themselves and how the Buddhist model of a dhammocratic approach can enable this. It therefore looks at the role of the Buddhist king as the *dhammarājā* – who creates a space in which his subjects can understand the true *dharma*. Additionally, the study investigates the contemporary relationship between the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā*, specifically emphasizing that the Buddhism practiced in Cambodia is mainly Theravada, thus making the Cambodian case an example of a Theravada case. By examining Buddhist governance, the aspiration is to develop a more compassionate, equitable, and sustainable approach to governance, always realizing the aspects of potentiality and ideal theory that such a venture must necessarily possess.

This paper analyzes the intersection of religion and governance, which has recently been made prominent again (Ongaro and Tantardini 2023a, 2023b), focusing specifically on Buddhism as a world religion (Habermas 2019) and its relevance in and for secular contexts, especially in the global-Western world. The paper aims to conceptualize Buddhist principles relevant to modern governance, with a notable focus on Cambodia as a case study, where the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā* hold constitutional significance in the 21st century – being, in fact, the only remaining Buddhist kingdom. Therefore, the study focuses on examining

2 According to Vedic literature, *dhamma* was a natural, eternal, and immutable law revealed by *brahma*, the self-existent being, to *manu*, a semi-divine being who is regarded as the first king of humanity, and *manu*, in turn, transmitted it to the ancient Sages, who made it known to mankind through abridged versions called *dhammasāstra* or treatises on *dhamma* (see Lingat 1950, 10 and Mérieau 2018, 285–286). Buddhism does not view the concept of *dhamma* as a direct divine-given rule, as in Hinduism; instead, Buddhism regards *dhamma* as the truth and the natural law.

Buddhist governance within the specific context of Cambodia, considering the religious foundations and beliefs that shape it. This approach deviates from recent more traditional Public Administration and Social Science approaches, delving into religious sources for a comprehensive, internal understanding.

To gain insight into the context of Khmer *saṅgha* and Buddhist kingship, parts of this paper draw upon the works of Hansen (2007), Harris (2001a, 2001b, 2005), Kent (2006, 2008), and particularly the approach of Monychenda (1998, 1999, 2008, 2022), widely recognized as a leader in Cambodia’s socially engaged Buddhist movement and one of the leading Khmer Buddhist scholars – some would argue the leading one. From 1985 to 1992, Monychenda directed the Khmer Buddhist Research Center at Site Two Refugee Camp on the Thai-Khmer border, exploring the role of Buddhism in Khmer society and its potential to prevent further tragedies in Cambodia such as the Khmer Rouge regime. In 1990, he founded Buddhism for Development (NGO), promoting socially engaged Buddhism in Cambodia. His socially engaged Buddhist movement reflects his perspective that Buddhism should not be limited or separated from secular affairs. He acknowledges the potential role of Buddhism in Khmer society, particularly within the *saṅgha*, in keeping people informed about the social, political, and economic circumstances, and in making efforts to restore the deteriorating social order by teaching people and leaders how to apply the *dhamma* to their daily lives. Monychenda (1999, 2008) recognizes the significance of the *dhammika* ruler in contemporary Khmer development and suggests that if each person were to emulate this idea, politics could be re-enchanted like the Khmer Empire under the leadership of Jayavarman VII.

To delve into the question of Buddhism and governance from a canonical textual perspective, the paper relies on the Sutta and Vinaya texts, which were initially translated from the Pali texts by Francis and Neil (1879), Rhys Davids and Oldenberg (1881), Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids (1921), Bhikkhu Ānandajoti (2008a, 2008b), Bhikkhu Narada (2013), Bhikkhu Thanissaro (2013a, 2013b, 2013c), Vajira and Story (2013), and Bhikkhu Sujato (2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h). Methodologically, this paper argues from the Buddhist perspective, specifically that of a Khmer Theravada monk, while recognizing the imperatives of religious studies and social science. It places a clear emphasis on its own positionality. Since the paper is built on the argument regarding the role of the Theravada *saṅgha* institution in the Cambodian context, it provides the author with the strength to delve deeply into the argument from an insider’s perspective. However, the author’s affiliation with the Theravada *saṅgha* institution might limit his ability to critically examine it from an outsider’s perspective.

2. Theory: The Synergy between *Saṅgha* Governance and the *Dhammarājā* in Buddhist Societies

In Southeast Asian culture, the power of the *saṅgha* is closely tied to politics, creating a merger of the monastic *saṅgha* community, kingship, and polity (Edwards 2007). This merger centers around the three jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. The king, as *dhammarājā*, safeguards the *dharma* and monastic *saṅgha*, symbolizing their interdependence (Edwards 2007). The king mediates between the worldly realm and an ordered society, while monks mediate between the world and liberation or emancipation from delusions and earthly desires that lead to the attainment of freedom.

In Khmer society, traditionally, the *saṅgha* and *dhammarājā* concepts play integral roles in shaping the social and political landscape. The interactions between these two aspects create a unique synergy that ideally contributes to the establishment of just and compassionate governance based on Buddhist principles.

At its core, the *saṅgha* represents the institutional structure that governs the monastic community within Buddhism. The *saṅgha*, comprising both the *bhikkhu* (male ordained-order) and *bhikkhuni* (female ordained-order) communities, plays a crucial role in preserving and propagating the teachings of the Buddha. Both *saṅghas*’ members dedicate themselves to studying, interpreting, and disseminating Buddhist scriptures, philosophy, and traditions, ensuring the continuity of the *dharma* across generations.

The governance of the *saṅgha* is guided by a set of rules and a well-formulated code of conduct known as the *vinaya*, which provides ethical and disciplinary frameworks for the monastic community (Jayasuriya 2008). In principle, there is no formal hierarchy or favoritism in the *saṅgha* community, but there is the characteristic of seniority of a monk, determined by the date of ordination, that guides interpersonal relations within the community (Jayasuriya 2008). The decision-making process within the *saṅgha* community is theoretically characterized by a consensus-based approach, where decisions are made collectively through open discussions and, when necessary, majority voting. This participatory approach ensures that all members have a voice and are actively involved in the governance process (Moore 2016).

Parallel to *saṅgha* governance, the concept of *dhammarājā* emerges as an ideal kingship model that governs society in accordance with the principles of *dharma*. Monychenda (2008, 314), the director of Cambodia’s non-governmental organization “Buddhism for Development”, coined the term “dhammocracy” to convey his compelling argument that today’s leaders must dutifully adhere to the moral teachings of the Buddha. He observes that Cambodians nurture the hope of security through the governance of virtuous and just rulers, commonly referred to as *dhammarājā* or *dhammik*. *Dhammik* is a vernacularization of the Pali phrase *dhammika dhammarājā*, meaning a righteous king. It has been argued in Khmer Buddhist society that *dhammik* would usher in a new golden age of justice and *dharma*, paving the way for the arrival of the next Buddha (Hansen 2007, 56).

Drechsler (2016, 5) points out that the role of the *dhammarājā* extends beyond being a just ruler in alignment with the *dharma*. Instead, the *dhammarājā* assumes the vital responsibility of guiding and empowering his subjects to realize their *dharma*. The *dhammarājā* embodies justice, benevolence, and ethical leadership and is responsible for the well-being and happiness of the people, both materially and spiritually. While historically associated with ancient Buddhist kingdoms, the idea of *dhammarājā* remains relevant in contemporary discussions on responsible governance, because it emphasizes the importance of moral integrity, compassion, and the pursuit of social welfare in political leadership that arguably are never out of date, and certainly not today.

The synergy between *saṅgha* and *dhammarājā* kingship becomes manifest in their (partial) shared principles and objectives. Both aim to promote the well-being and happiness of individuals and society as a whole. The *Saṅgha*, through its dedicated study, practice, and service, seeks the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering and supports the dissemination of the *dharma* to the public. The *dhammarājā*, on the other hand, governs with wisdom and

compassion, upholding the principles of justice, equality, and ethical conduct, providing the framework within which the *dharma* can be pursued and liberation ideally reached.

The *saṅgha* community and the *dhammarājā* are therefore interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The *saṅgha*, as the custodian of Buddhist teachings and values, provides moral guidance and support to the *dhammarājā* in governing the country. The monastic *saṅgha* community actively engages with the laypeople, including the rulers, through spiritual counseling, rituals, and education, influencing their decision-making processes and fostering ethical leadership.

Simultaneously, the *dhammarājā* looks to the *saṅgha* as a moral authority and guidance source. The monastic community exemplifies the ideals of renunciation, self-discipline, and service to others, serving as a moral compass for the ruler. The *dhammarājā*, inspired by the *saṅgha*’s commitment to the pursuit of truth and liberation from suffering, should govern with compassion, empathy, and a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings.

This possible synergy between *saṅgha* and *dhammarājā* contributes to establishing a just and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist values. By incorporating the teachings of the Buddha into governance practices, leaders can create an environment that fosters social harmony, equality, and the well-being of all individuals.

2.1 Saṅgha governing body

The *saṅgha* is a fundamental institution within Buddhism, comprising *bhikkhu saṅgha* (male-ordained community) and *bhikkhuni saṅgha* (female-ordained community) who have renounced worldly attachments and committed themselves to the pursuit of spiritual awakening by living a dedicated life of spiritual practice, study, and service. The term “*saṅgha*” is a Pali word meaning an “assembly”, “association”, “community” or “order” and is most commonly used to refer to an order of Buddhist monks or nuns (Buswell 2014).

The *saṅgha* originated during the time of the historical Gautama Buddha over 2,600 years ago. Shortly after his enlightenment, the Buddha established the system of governance among the *saṅgha*, introducing a revolutionary paradigm that was in direct contrast to the autocratic ruling systems then prevalent in India (and elsewhere). The *saṅgha* is governed by a set of rules and guidelines known as the *vinaya*, which provides ethical and disciplinary guidelines for the monastic community. While these rules differ slightly from one Buddhist tradition and school to the next, they are generally based on the principles of the *dharma*. During the early period of his enlightenment, the Buddha was the only one who could confer full ordination; however, due to the increasing numbers of people who wanted to join the *saṅgha* community, the Buddha decentralized his authority to an *upajjhāya*, a spiritual preceptor who has been ordained as a monk (*bhikkhu*) for at least ten years.

The primary objective of entering the *saṅgha* community is to liberate oneself from worldly dissatisfaction, which can be achieved through the pursuit of either *vipassanādhura*, which involves the practice of meditation, or *gandhadhura*, which entails the study of scriptures. However, the newly ordained monks must adhere to their spiritual guidance for a minimum of five years before embarking on their own journeys elsewhere, as in principle, the *upajjhāya* occupies the highest position in the monastic community.

Although the *upajjhāya* holds the highest position, there is no absolute power over the decision-making process in the *saṅgha* community. The decision-making process must be open to all *saṅgha* members regardless of their seniority. Recruiting or giving a higher ordination (*upasampadā*) to a new *saṅgha* member requires no less than ten *saṅgha* members, with the exception of bordering regions (*paccanta-gāma*), where the Buddha allows the higher ordination to be held in the meeting of four *saṅgha* members (Dutt 1924, 147; Dickson 1963, 14). If one *saṅgha* member is very sick and unable to join the meeting in person, he must remain outside the boundary of the monastery, or he may send his consent through another, which is called *chanda*, as a sign of pre-agreement with the decision made by the monastic community. Any decision made without even one monk’s presence is invalid (Dutt 1924, 146). In response to the severity of a given issue in the *saṅgha* community, the decision-making process needs to be held through the proper performance of *saṅgha-kamma* (the *saṅgha*’s formal act). *saṅgha-kamma* is employed for various purposes, such as reaching agreements, making decisions, or taking actions within the *saṅgha* assembly, which comprises the following prerequisites (Dutt 1924, 125):

1. The presence of the proper number of competent *saṅgha* members (*sammagga saṅgha*)
2. The conveyance of all absentee ballots (*chanda*)
3. The motion being proposed (*ñatti*)
4. The proper proclamation of the proposed act (*kammavācā*)

In the recruitment of any new members, the *saṅgha* community embraces the bottom-up approach that is contrary to top-down or authoritarian approaches; it therefore works toward inclusivity through consensus decision-making (Dutt 1924; Jinananda 1961; Prebish 2018; Monychenda 2022). In the process of joining the *saṅgha* community, the candidate seeks the approval of the chief of the *saṅgha* community. Subsequently, two mentors are appointed by the *upajjhāya* to assess the candidate’s background. Once the investigation is completed, the mentors verbally propose the candidate’s ordination three times to the assembly of *saṅgha*. In the absence of objections, silence is expected from all present. However, if an objection arises, it necessitates a vocal expression, and the process will be repeated until a consensus is reached. Likewise, appointing individuals to positions of responsibility, such as inventory manager, requires the endorsement of the members residing in the temple. Moreover, these appointments are bound by a stringent legal process, as stipulated in the sacred scriptures (Monychenda 1998, 10).

Although liberating oneself from worldly attachment is a primary objective of joining the *saṅgha* community, helping others escape from miseries and bringing happiness to all sentient beings is also regarded as an ideal way the Buddha assigns to the *saṅgha* members, as focusing solely on oneself would not suffice. After entering the *saṅgha* community, each member bears three responsibilities: a) learning the *dharma*, b) practicing the *dharma*, and c) spreading the *dharma* to the public. As stated in the mission statement of the Dutiyamārapāsa Sutta (SN 4.5 – Bhikkhu Bodhi 2000), the Buddha advises his *saṅgha* members to disseminate the *dharma* to the public as follows:

Wander forth, O bhikkhus, for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Let not two go the same way. Teach, O bhikkhus, the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing. Reveal the perfectly complete and purified holy life. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma. I too, bhikkhus, will go to Senanigama in Uruvela in order to teach the Dhamma.

Monastic life is set up as a ruling system in which leaders are chosen for their qualities and with the approval of the *saṅgha* assembly. Each *saṅgha* member is required to participate in maintaining the stability of the rule of law of the monastery, i.e., participating every two weeks in a ceremony known as *uposatha* (bi-weekly meeting) in the monastery to review compliance with the *pātimokkha* (monastic code). In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN 16 – Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2013b), the Buddha lists seven conditions that will maintain the unity and solidarity of the *saṅgha* community. The first two are these: “(1) As long as the bhikkhus meet often, meet a great deal, their growth can be expected, not their decline. (2) As long as the bhikkhus meet in unity, adjourn from their meetings in unity, and conduct Community business in unity, their growth can be expected, not their decline.”

The *uposatha* observance was formulated to fulfill these purposes, serving as a bi-weekly opportunity for the *saṅgha* assembly to gather, update their membership rolls, address issues, and reaffirm their common adherence to *vinaya* rules (Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2013c, 1098). Performing *uposatha* with an incomplete or divided *saṅgha* assembly is regarded as an offense of wrong-doing according to the *vinaya* rules. Therefore, the first duty is to convey consent and purity, known as *chandapārisuddhi*, on behalf of a *saṅgha* member who cannot attend the *uposatha* observance. In the Mahāvagga (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1881, 274–275), the Buddha instructed that a sick *saṅgha* member, unable to participate in the *uposatha* ceremony, should convey his consent and purity through another bhikkhu to those attending the *uposatha*. In the Suddhika-pācittiya: Requiring of a transgression for purification, any *saṅgha* member who witnesses another member’s transgression but fails to report it to the *saṅgha* community is likewise considered to be committing an offense (*pācittiya*) (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1881, 33; Bhikkhu Ñāṇatusita 2014, 174).

The purity of the *saṅgha* assembly is considered a key factor in conducting the *uposatha* ceremony. As mentioned in the Uposatha Sutta (Ud 5.5 – Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2012), when Venerable Ānanda requested the Buddha to recite the *pātimokkha* to the *saṅgha* assembly on the Uposatha Day, the Buddha refused because the gathering was not pure (Bhikkhu Ānandajot 2008b). To ensure the assembly was pure enough to conduct the formal ceremony, there was a specific intention during the ceremony to provide a platform for a guilty monk to confess his offense. The process of confession can be undertaken in two ways: either by following the *pārisuddhi uposatha*, a brief ceremony of confession without recitation of the whole *pātimokkha* rules, or by following the *sutt-uddesa uposatha*, a ceremony for confession that includes the recitation of the entire *pātimokkha* rules (see Bhikkhu Ariyesako and Bhikkhu Nirodho 2003, 21–25; Dhammasami 2019, 60). This practice is essential because the ceremony obligates each monk to inform the community if they are unable to adhere to the rules, which in turn leads to subsequent actions taken by the *saṅgha* community (Dutt 1924).

In sum, the *saṅgha* in Buddhism lives together as a community, pursuing liberation by adhering to the rules and regulations set forth by the Buddha to maintain continuity and unity within the *saṅgha* assembly. Unity, purity, and integrity are regarded as key factors in preserving the *saṅgha* institution. Democracy or a consensus-based approach is used to make decisions, reach agreements, and act within the *saṅgha* assembly through *saṅghakamma* performances. While the primary purpose of joining the *saṅgha* is to liberate oneself from worldly attachments, the *saṅgha* typically remains connected to lay society because their daily basic needs rely on it, and they also have duties as *dhammadūta*, the *dhamma* messengers, to disseminate and teach the principles of *dhamma* to lay society.

2.2 The *Dhammarājā*

Dhammarājā is often portrayed as a cosmic and ethical king, embodying the principles of righteousness and moral governance. Rooted in Buddhist texts, this perspective envisions *dhammarājā* as a virtuous ruler whose reign is characterized by justice, compassion, and adherence to the *dhamma*. However, the concept of *dhammarājā*, with its multifaceted implications, resonates differently across various perspectives. There are at least three distinct viewpoints regarding the *dhammarājā*: the concept of *dhammarājā* from the Pali text perspective, the historical perspective, and the contemporary perspective.

2.2.1 The *Dhammarājā* from the Pali Literature Perspective

The concept of the ideal kingship in Buddhist literature emerged in response to the perceived decline of *dharma* and general social disorder. In these circumstances, the king assumed the role of a mediator, facilitating the restoration of social order by reinforcing the *dharma* practice within his realm. This concept finds further elaboration in canonical texts and various other Buddhist writings, providing a comprehensive exploration of the model of just governance within Buddhism. The Aggañña Sutta (DN 27 – Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018c), a discourse in which the Buddha explains the origin and evolution of human beings, illustrates a peak of social disorder triggered by greed. This disorder results in the division of rice fields, theft of one another’s plots, and engagement in dishonesty, censure, and punishment following the disappearance of spontaneous rice growth.

In response to this social turmoil, the Sutta describes how humans gathered together, saying, “From our evil deeds, sirs, becoming manifest, inasmuch as stealing, censure, lying, punishment have become known, what if we were to select a certain being, who should be wrathful when indignation is right, who should censure that which should rightly be censured and should banish him who deserves to be banished? But we will give him in return a proportion of the rice” (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921, 93). Then they selected from among themselves “the handsomest, the best favoured, the most attractive, the most capable” individual being and invited him to be their king with a promise of contributing a proportion of the rice (Rhys Davids and Rhys David 1921; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018c).

The Sutta introduces an “elective and contractual theory of kingship”, where the people choose their king, and the king’s compensation comes in the form of a rice tax. Tambiah (1976, 13) points out that this theory combines the notion of “elective and contractual kingship” with

the idea that the chosen king is exceptional among men – most handsome in the physical form and most perfect in conduct. The characteristics of the king, as described in the Sutta, earn him the titles “*mahā sammata*” for being “the great elect”, “*rājā*” for “charming others by the Norm” (*dhamma*), and “*khattiya*”, signifying the “lord of the fields” (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Tambiah 1976; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018c). The king is, in essence, “chosen” in two distinct senses of the word, both as an elective leader and as an exceptional individual that is recognized via the former election. This particular aspect deepens our comprehension of the moral and physical attributes tied to kingship, which are subsequently explored in greater detail in other Buddhist texts.

Among the many qualities of the leader described in the Sutta, “*rājā*”, or the ability to “charm others by the Norm” (*dharma*), is the key quality that highlights the role of the king in making his subjects happy by guiding the principle of the *dharma* back to the right trajectory. In this context, it can be argued that the concept of “*rājā*” of the “*dhamma*” or “*dhammarājā*”, a righteous or just king who rules in accordance with the principles of *dharma*, emerged as a response to the urgent need to apply the principle of *dharma* in governing the state.

Regarding governing the state, Buddhism diverges significantly from the previous Indian Kautilyan, let alone from, shall we say, global-Western Machiavellian thoughts. From a Buddhist standpoint, aggression, war, and violence are entirely incompatible with the principles of good governance (Vijitha 2016). Buddhism introduces the concept of the “*cakkavattin*” (*cakravartin* in Sanskrit), often referred to as the “Wheel-Turning Monarch”, alongside the term “*dhammarājā*”, as they represent the epitome of just and righteous governance (*rājā cakkavattī dhammiko dhammarājā*), embodying the pinnacle of moral virtue within the Buddhist ethos as further aspects of the good monarch. Nivat (1947) has argued that the Buddhist ideal of the Wheel-Turning Monarch is to be detected even in many Hindu court ceremonies, which are essentially (and until today) Brahmanic. However, when we look into both Pali texts, Dhammarājā Sutta (AN 5.133 – Bhikkhu Sujato 2018e) and Cakkavatti Sutta (DN 26 – Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012), the Buddha describes the role and principle of *dhammarājā* and *cakkavattin* kingship in the same manner:

Here, bhikkhu, a wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who rules by the Dhamma, relying just on the Dhamma, honoring, respecting, and venerating the Dhamma, taking the Dhamma as his standard, banner, and authority, provides righteous protection, shelter, and guard for the people in his court. Again, a wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who rules by the Dhamma, relying just on the Dhamma, honoring, respecting, and venerating the Dhamma, taking the Dhamma as his standard, banner, and authority, provides righteous protection, shelter, and guard for his khattiya vassals, his army, brahmins and householders, the people of town and countryside, ascetics and brahmins, and the animals and birds. Having provided such righteous protection, shelter, and guard for all these beings, that wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who rules by the Dhamma, turns the wheel solely through the Dhamma, a wheel that cannot be turned back by any hostile human being.

The Buddha strongly stresses that social disorder and natural disasters will be caused by a ruler who does not rule in accordance with the principles of *dhamma*. As mentioned in the Adhammika Sutta (AN 4.70 – Bhikkhu Sujato 2018f), the Buddha explains how the bad example set by unrighteous rulers can influence their governance, ministers, *brahmins*, householders, and their subjects as a whole, ultimately leading to social disorder and natural disasters.

Regarding the social order, the Buddha described three governing models: autocracy (*attādhīpateyya*), democracy (*lokādhīpateyya*), and *dhammocracy* (*dhammādhīpateyya*) (Monychenda 2008, 314). Among the three models, the Buddha embraced the model of *dhammādhīpateyya* – a form of governance centered on the *dharma*. "*Dharma*" has, as we saw already, many meanings, but in this context, it refers to the teachings of the Buddha, which are presented as universal or natural laws. These laws were not created by Buddha, they function independently with or without his presence, but the Buddha revealed these laws and recommended that we examine them and act accordingly – not relying on blind faith but guided by a process of rational human assessment (Long 2021, 36).

The system of governing the state based on the *dharma* begins with the establishment of the righteous state, ruled by the consent of the governed with policy consistent with the *dharma* (Long 2021, 44). Long (2021) asserts that a political system structured in harmony with these core truths holds the potential to minimize the manifest forms of suffering experienced by all members of society. This effect would be most pronounced among the least fortunate, whose visible sufferings are most acute, and simultaneously foster a constructive role in an individual's pursuit of higher forms of well-being.

2.2.2 The *Dhammarājā* from a Historical Perspective

From a historical standpoint, *Dhammarājā* is seen as a historical king who sought to uphold the *dharma*, prevent its decline and establish a just and harmonious society based on Buddhist principles. The concept of *dhammarājā* has been applied to view the reign of Ashoka (c. 304–232 BCE), the most significant Indian Emperor in history, and Jayavarman VII (c. 1122–1218), the most notable ruler of the Khmer Empire (Drechsler 2019). Ashoka, after his conversion to Buddhism, became a paradigmatic ruler who embraced the principles of non-violence, compassion, and moral conduct in his governance. Ashoka earned the title of a great *dhammarājā* through his commitment to upholding the *dharma*. His contributions include the construction of 84,000 stupas dedicated to Buddhism across India, the defense of Buddhism by expelling 80,000 heretics from the monastic order, and the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings through the dispatch of missionaries to the far reaches of his empire – and beyond (Larsson 2021). Ashoka's state policy was influenced by the inherited Brahmanical Arthashastra of Kautilya (Kulke 2014). In the *Mahāvamsa*, the historical chronicle of Sri Lanka, Ashoka was called *chandāshoka* in ancient times due to his evil deeds during the Kalinga War, but later, he gave up the expansion of might via military means and expanded the might of the *dhamma*, just as the Buddha himself "turned the wheel of *dhamma*", and as a result, he came to be known as *dhammāshoka* (Changkhwanyuen 2003).

Throughout history, several Buddhist kings in Asia projected themselves as an Ashoka-like Wheel-Turning Monarch or "*cakravartin*" (Boisselier 1990; Lahiri 2015, 5). The name of Ashoka, as Wells (1920, 371) states, "shines, and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan, his name is still honoured. China, Tibet, and even India, though it has left his doctrine, preserve the tradition of his greatness." Tambiah (1973) points out that the Ashokan ethos emphasizes the state's commitment to welfare and prosperity as a precondition to support the monastic institutions, alleviate the suffering of his subjects, and realize the moral law (*dhamma*) in society as a whole. He argues that the Ashokan ethos continues to serve as a charter in

contemporary times, stimulating and legitimizing twentieth-century politics, especially in Buddhist countries. This implies that the principles associated with Ashoka’s governance have transcended time, continuing to shape political thought and actions, and reminding contemporary leaders that the legitimacy of being a great leader does not come from cruelty but from ethical and peaceful means.

Following a path similar to that of Ashoka, Jayavarman VII, the Emperor of the Khmer Empire, initially had a state ideology strongly influenced by the inherited Hindu *Devarājā* cult, but after his conversion to Buddhism, Jayavarman VII applied Buddhist principles to his state policy and adopted the new concept of *Buddharājā* or *Bodhisattva*, looking on himself as “the living Buddha” or “the Buddha-to-be” to govern the state, ultimately leading it to its pinnacle (Briggs 1951; Cœdès 1963; Kulke 2014).

The religious principle of Jayavarman VII is based on the spirit of benevolence in Buddhism and is expressed as benefiting others or rescuing people. As stated in the Say-Fong inscription (K. 368 – Honda 1965, 410), a statement which reminds us of Ashoka’s *dhamma* ethics, Jayavarma VII puts the well-being of his subjects first, “(Once) a person has a physical disease, his (i.e., king’s) mental disease is far more painful. For the suffering of people, is the suffering of masters, not (only) the suffering of people (themselves).”

When considering the Buddhist influence on Jayavarman’s social policy and state ideology, the most significant aspect is his construction of 123 rest houses (*Dharmasālā*)³ and 102 hospitals (*Ārogyasālā*), each meticulously documented with lists of personnel and provisions, serving the needs of pilgrims and providing medical care across the empire, as recorded in the Say-Fong inscription (K. 368 – Honda 1965) and the Ta Prohm inscription (K. 273 – Cœdès 1906). Jayavarman VII built a well-supplied, country-wide hospital network that, as stated in the inscriptions, was accessible and provided without discrimination to all four castes, i.e., Brahmin (priest), Kshatryia (king), Vaishya (merchants), Sudra (commoners or peasants) (Chhem 2005; Sharrock and Jacques 2017).

2.2.3 The *Dhammarājā* from the contemporary Khmer view

The *dhammarājā* from the contemporary Khmer view is a mix of myth and reality. In Cambodia, when confronted with challenging circumstances, especially under the rule of immoral leaders, Khmer people look back to the glorious history of the Khmer Empire under the wise leadership especially of Jayavarman VII. Within the purview of the Khmer Buddhists, Jayavarman VII embodied the essence of a *dhammika* – a vernacularization of the Pali term *dhammika dhammarājā*, signifying a righteous king. The concept of *dhammika* embodies justice, benevolence, and ethical leadership, providing a model for good governance (Vijitha 2016).

The term *dhammik* gained prominence during the late nineteenth century when the nation was under French colonization (1863–1953), and the Khmer people were in search of a

3 Regarding the rest houses, the Sanskrit inscription uses the term “*upakārya*”, which translates to “staging posts with fire” or “*vahneh*” and “*vahnigrhāni*”, both meaning “house of fire” (Maxwell 2007, 43). Finot (1925, 421–422) interpreted these structures as “*dharmasālā*”, considering them religious hostels along pilgrimage routes due to the presence of Lokeśvara Bodhisattva, offering protection against dangers. Although the term “*dharmasālā*” does not appear in the inscription, it has become widely used to refer to these rest houses. In a first-hand account of Khmer civilization by Chou Ta-Kuan (1992, p. 65), a Chinese envoy who resided in Angkor from 1296 to 1297, the Khmer referred to these resting places along the highways as “*sen-mu*” (Khmer, *samnak*).

Messiah, to borrow a term from another religion (or two), to rescue them. A prophetic text called *put-domneay* circulated among the Khmer commoners, predicting a decline in the *dhamma*, which was linked to an unrighteous ruler. This ruler’s errors of judgment fostered the proliferation of poverty, violence, and immoral behavior, ultimately reducing the average human lifespan to just a few years. The text also propagated the belief that within the midst of the social turmoil that gave rise to catastrophic death and destruction, a righteous ruler known as a *dhammik* was expected to emerge. This *dhammik* would usher in a new golden age of justice and *dharma*, thus paving the way for the arrival of the next Buddha (Hansen 2007, 55–56).

One can assume that some politicians and rebel leaders have capitalized on this belief to enhance their influence and pursue legitimacy, with the aim of getting the power to rule the country. In the late nineteenth century, several Khmer rebel leaders claimed to be *neak mean bon*, people possessing great merit, or *dhammika* rulers who could save people from suffering and safeguard the *dharma* (Hansen 2007, 60). Even after two centuries, the hope of encountering the “Khmer Messiah” continues in Cambodia. A rather shrill example for utilizing this is that on 23 August 2022, Khem Veasna, a leader of the fringe League for Democracy Party (LDP), who self-proclaimed himself as *prom reaksa lok* or “The universe safeguarding *brahma*” – the highest form of life in the universe according to Hindu/Buddhist mythology – made a series of apocalyptic predictions on his Facebook page (Sovinda et al. 2022). Veasna claimed that he could rescue those who follow him in the event of an apocalypse. Veasna’s doomsday prophecy prompted his supporters to leave their everyday lives behind and travel from across the country to Siem Reap province, northwestern Cambodia. Some of his followers even traveled from as far as South Korea, Japan, and Thailand to seek refuge from the apocalypse (Samean 2022), which obviously did not take place.

The basis for the Khmer ideal of the *dhammika* ruler on principles is found in various Buddhist *sutras*, particularly those in which the Buddha discussed a leader’s qualities, roles, and responsibilities. From the Khmer perspective, the *dhammika* is someone who adheres to the tenfold royal duties of the king⁴ and possesses supernatural power to safeguard their subjects from adversaries (Monychenda 2008, 313–314). However, Monychenda (2008) argues that Khmer people focus too much on the tenfold duties of the king, which deal with the individual behavior of the leader, and fail to look at the Buddha’s teachings about the *system* of governing the state. He (1999, 32–34) argues that the term “*dhammika* ruler” is essentially a title for an individual who believes in *dhammocracy*, holds respect for *dharma*, loves *dharma*, considers *dharma* as the guiding principle of life, and honors *dharma* as the “flagship”.

Drechsler (2019, 234) asserts that “a classic role of the Buddhist king is that of the *dhammarājā*, of which one aspect of great relevance here (this is a highly complex subject both historically and theoretically) is that of facilitator of his subjects’ attainment of happiness, with the optimal goal of enlightenment. The *dhammarājā* is, then, not (only) the one who rules according to the *dhamma*, but he who guides or enables his subjects to realize the(ir) *dhamma* – anywhere between nudging them thither or creating a space within which this is possible.”

4 The ten royal duties of a righteous king (*Dasa-rājadhamma*), is mentioned in the Nandiyamiga Jātaka (385) of Khuddaka Nikāya, translated from the Pali text by Francis and Neil (1879). This Jātaka tale illustrates the story of the Nandiyā Bodhisattva, advising the Kosala King: “Great king, it is good for a king to rule a kingdom by forsaking the ways of wrongdoing, not offending against the ten kingly virtues and acting with just righteousness ... Alms, morals, charity, justice and penitence, peace, mildness, mercy, meekness, patience.”

3. The Interplay of Religion, Power, and Legitimacy in Cambodia

Like many other countries around the world, Cambodia has been a place where religion has been morally positioned as a *buddhacakra* (the wheel of *dharma*), symbolizing spiritual power, alongside *āṇācakra* (the wheel of authority), representing temporal power (Harris 2001a). Cambodians regard these two powers as a pair of chariot wheels propelling the nation forward (Kent 2006). It can be argued that from the Khmer point of view, if the charioteer (*sārathi*) or the ruler (*dhammarājā*) fails to maintain a balance between the wheels, allowing one to move faster than the other, the chariot will malfunction, or the nation will be destabilized.

Traditionally, temporal power resides in the *veang* (royal palace), while spiritual power is stored in the *wat* (Buddhist temple). Monychenda (2008) argues that the *veang* embodies worldly power for the king, royal family, and ruling class, believed to be the reincarnations of *deva* (gods/angels) or individuals with great past merit, responsible for governing and alleviating the people’s suffering. In contrast, the *wat* is where the *saṅgha* preserves ethical teachings, guiding people morally and leading them to liberation from worldly suffering (*samsāra*). Monychenda (2008) has claimed that in some respects, the *veang* represents city-based power and wealth, while the *wat* symbolizes village prosperity. As Harris (2001b) argues, the two strongest institutions in Cambodia have traditionally been the *saṅgha* and the monarchy; these two institutions always relied on each other either for political or religious survival.

The *saṅgha* and the monarchy effectively legitimize the traditional concept of a “righteous ruler”. Following the Khmer reformed constitution of 1993, the monarchy is elective, and the succession is determined by the Royal Council of the Throne (Bektimirova 2002). This council comprises the president of the National Assembly (who, in the king’s absence, assumes the role of head of state), the prime minister, the supreme patriarch of both Khmer *saṅgha* orders⁵, and the first and second vice-presidents of the National Assembly (Frost 1994, 88). The reinstatement of the monarchy after the fall of the Khmer Rouge terror regime that had dissolved it, itself indirectly attests to the distinct value of Buddhism deeply rooted in Khmer political tradition. The monarchical principle remains inherently entwined with the Buddhist worldview, wherein, as we have argued, the notion of the “*dhammika* ruler” holds significant importance (Bektimirova 2002).

While King Norodom Sihamoni’s role is largely ceremonial, given the constitutional quality of the Buddhist monarchy, he still plays a vital part in the construction of Khmer national identity (Chachavalpongpun 2013). Some would argue that his role is somehow overshadowed by the absolute power of Samdech Hun Sen, the former Prime Minister of Cambodia, who occasionally acted as the guardian of the monarchy, suggesting the duty of the king to remain above politics and not intervene to mediate a political solution (Norén-Nilsson 2016).

As mentioned earlier, in the Khmer context, some part of power is perceived as residing in religious institutions, and gaining access to this power is essential for political survival. From

5 The Khmer Theravadin *saṅgha* orders are divided into two groups: Mahānikāya Order, which represents the local majority of *saṅgha*, and Dhammayuttikanikāya Order, a minority group of *saṅgha*, influenced by the reformed Dhammayut Order of King Mongkut (1804–1868) of Siam (see Promta 1999 and Na-Rangsi 2002). Dhammayuttika Order was first introduced into Cambodia in 1855 by King Norodom through the efforts of Venerable Mahā Pan (1824–1894), the first Supreme Patriarch of the Dhammayut order in Cambodia, who had spent several years in Thailand studying the newly reformed Buddhism of King Mongkut (San 2018). Each group is governed by its respective Supreme Patriarch (see Jotañāno 1961, 41–42; Harris 2005, 236–238; Lawrence 2022, 220–221).

a long historical point of view, Khmer rulers have actively patronized and embraced either Brahmanism or Buddhism to legitimize their authority. The concept of an ideal kingship, such as *devarāja*, *buddharāja* and *dhammarājā* is connected or derived from Hinduism and Buddhism, showing how religious institutions play a significant role in shaping state policies by reminding or expecting the state rulers to fulfill their duties as ruling monarch by adhering to ethical principles (see Coedès 1975, 175; Goss 2017, 6).

King Jayavarman II (c. 770–850), the founder of the Khmer Empire, established the *devarāja* cult, translating to “god-king” (Mabbett 1969). In ancient Cambodia, the King was closely associated with Hindu gods, either Shiva or Vishnu, embodied by the *siva-liṅga* statue. Harihara, a concept merging Vishnu and Shiva, emerged in Indian and Khmer art, symbolizing divine attributes on either side (Lavy 2003). This fusion aimed to connect the divine and human realms (Wales 1995, 29). The debate arises on whether *devarāja* deifies the King as a god or metaphorically illustrates divine qualities. Filliozat (1966, 102) argues against *devarāja* identifying the King as a god, asserting it designates Siva himself.

Saveros (1998, 663), an expert in Khmer linguistics and civilization, further argues that the term *devarāja* has never been a part of the Khmer vocabulary. She points out that the term appears once in the renowned Sdok Kak Thom inscription (K. 235), which sparked speculations on divine kingship in Cambodia. She addresses that instead of identifying the Khmer king as the god-king, the inscription stipulates the king’s duty to worship the *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*, translated into Sanskrit as *devarāja*.

While Cambodia has assimilated various Sanskrit terms such as *rāja*, *adhirāja*, *mahārāja*, *rājasiṅha*, and *rājādhirāja* to designate her chief, ruler, or king, Saveros (1998, 657–659) states that ancient Khmer epigraphy offers three distinct terms referring to these individuals:

1. *Sdac*, derived from “*dac*”, meaning “to detach from a whole, to separate from it, to be superior”.
2. *Kamrateñ*, derived from “*teñ*” meaning “manifest, most prominent, best”.
3. *Kuruñ*, derived from “*ruñ*” meaning “large, broad, tall, high”, and applied to a “chief or king.”

Among these three terms, she highlights *kamrateñ*⁶ as a sacred term employed in Khmer society to refer to both “the god” and “the king,” with two different suffixes: *jagat* (cosmos/world) and *phdai krom* (below/under/earth). *Kamrateñ jagat* is a hybrid compound, combining Khmer and Sanskrit, literally meaning “the lord of the heavenly kingdom”. At this point, one cannot help but compare it with *kamrateñ phdai krom*, which means “the lord of the earthly kingdom”, because they are almost superimposed. In other words, *kamrateñ jagat* is perceived as the ruler of the macrocosm in Khmer belief, while *kamrateñ phdai krom* symbolizes the ruler of the microcosm. These terms embody the dual facets of the entire universe, distinct yet complementary.

6 The term “Kamrateñ” is also used to refer to a highly respected Buddhist monk. For instance, inscription (K. 177) at Angkor, dated 1437 A.D., provides information about a prominent monk named Brah Kamrateñ Añ Laṅkā, who came from Chanbori, which was part of the Khmer territory. He pursued studies in grammar and dhamma at Angkor, eventually attaining the position of Mahādhammakathika, denoting a Great Lecturer in Buddhism and a distinguished royal scholar. He then received an invitation from a king to deliver Buddhist sermons to princes and princesses at the royal palace (Saveros 1981).

With the transition from Hinduism to Buddhism, particularly in Theravada Buddhism, deities and Hindu gods were not recognized and were reduced to the status of spirits serving the Buddha or demi-gods governing inferior heavens (Wales 1995, 31). The perception of an ideal king under Buddhism is evident in the fact that he is considered a *bodhisattva*, *cakravartin*, or *dhammarājā* (Wales 1995; Vijitha 2016; Moore 2016). Most post-Angkorean kings and rulers chose to spend time as monks to establish their legitimacy as ideal Buddhist rulers. This practice aimed to fulfill the ten perfections (*pārami*), granting them the ability to tap into spiritual power and showcase their influence and merit through the prosperity of the pagodas they endorsed (Guthrie 2002).

In social science literature, scholars have employed Weber’s concept of charisma (Weber 1988) to elucidate diverse social movements led by charismatic figures. Similarly, within the study of Buddhist movements guided by charismatic leaders, the term “charisma” is often equated with “*pārami*”, despite the absence of a direct Pali term or Buddhist equivalent for the Greek term “charisma” as it is employed in Christian contexts or contemporary sociology (Pisith 2018, 204).

However, having a claim to power does not automatically grant them moral legitimacy. To establish moral legitimacy, one must exercise power in a manner aligned with Khmer religious concepts of righteousness and proper worldviews (Kent 2006, 350–351). In Buddhism, *pārami* is regarded as a sacred force involving the cultivation of virtues to a state of sublime perfection. This process fosters a pathway of purification that ultimately aligns with the pursuit of enlightenment. Acquiring *Pārami* involves engaging in virtuous acts, such as donating to pagodas or offering the monastic *saṅgha* community alms. Contemporary politicians also seek to align themselves with the members of the monastic *saṅgha* due to the trust people have in them (Monychenda 2008, 312).

This practice is regarded as crucial for attaining the status of being a good king, a respected member of the royal family, or a capable leader. It is worth noting that the current king of Cambodia was ordained twice in Paris; Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the first Prime Minister of Cambodia from 1993 to 1997, was ordained for one week in India; and Sam Rainsy, a leader of the main opposition party in Cambodia, had at least a one-week ordination stint in Cambodia. Hun Sen, Cambodia’s current Prime Minister’s direct predecessor, on the other hand, has never been a monk, but he frequently referred to his past as a temple boy (Monychenda 2008, 312). His son and successor, Samdech Hun Manet, spent a brief period of time as a monk to honor his late grandmother, following the Khmer Buddhist tradition of paying respects to deceased family members (Kamnottra 2020).

Despite facing criticism of the election and doubts about the legitimacy of Manet’s candidacy for premiership from the Western world, Manet received support from China, which stated that the election was free and fair (Strangio 2023). Alongside this, various institutions and prominent figures aligned with the ruling party publicly endorsed Manet’s candidacy. Notably, the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council of Cambodia, traditionally expected to maintain neutrality, also joined this wave of support, issuing an endorsement for Manet’s premiership candidacy (Sirivadh 2021). Some would argue that the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council has a strong association with the ruling party or is controlled by them. However, the endorsement from the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council shows how the integration of the *saṅgha* into the political structure and the

recognition of Buddhism as the state religion play significant roles in granting the state the authority to limit the sovereignty of the *saṅgha* by positioning its role as the protector of the Buddha’s *dharma* (Bechert 1973).

4. A Normative Discussion: The Buddha and His Teachings Again

The relationship between religion and governance has long been a subject of profound interest and significance, as noted by scholars like Ongaro and Tantardini (2023a, 2023b) within the realm of Public Administration. These two spheres’ interaction has shaped societies, norms, and power structures throughout history. One particular religious tradition that has garnered significant attention is Buddhism. Its uniqueness as a world religion, as highlighted by Habermas (Habermas 2019; Foshay 2009; San et al. 2023), extends beyond its spiritual and philosophical aspects. Buddhism’s global reach and emergence as a prominent faith within predominantly secular societies, such as the Western world, adds to its intrigue (McMahan 2020).

While Buddhism is commonly viewed as an apolitical and introspective tradition (Weber 1988), its potential influence on society, particularly on governance, cannot be overlooked. The apparent detachment from political matters, particularly in the contemporary context, has led to uncertainties regarding the role of Buddhism in governance. This paradoxical nature raises questions about the ways in which Buddhist principles and institutions intersect with the mechanisms of political control and decision-making. Within Buddhism, three key relationships take center stage:

4.1 The *Saṅgha*-Laity Relationship with an Intersection of the Role of *Dhammarājā* as a *Dharma* Protector and Promoter

In the *saṅgha*-laity relationship, the *dhammarājā* assumes the role of *dharma* protector and promoter, creating a conducive environment to foster a healthy and mutually beneficial connection between the two parties. Acting as the protector and promoter of the *dharma*, the *dhammarājā* serves to unify and facilitate these two integral components. Like how the Buddha guides even the most unfortunate towards the path to enlightenment, the duty of the *rājā*, the king, or more abstractly, the state, lies in providing means of sustenance and security to all its citizens, for as all monks are like sons to the Buddha, all citizens of the state are like sons to the ruler (Zimmermann 2006). Without the state’s role in providing for the citizens, the *saṅgha*, which lives off the secular world, also perishes.

As the Buddha would show paths towards enlightenment to all beings regardless of their capacity to understand to move forward on their path, the state has to provide for the sustenance and security of even the poorest of its citizens, showing them the path towards the upliftment of their lives. The state is primarily responsible for fulfilling the citizens’ basic needs since one cannot meditate on an empty stomach. Providing this level of access to all citizens, regardless of their economic status, is the primary responsibility of the state, and it is also one of the highest implications of Buddhist thinking when it comes to economic governance (Long 2021, 39-40). People should see a path towards how a dignified life without

hunger can be attained, a roof over the head, and a sense of security for the future (Long 2021, 39). How the state provides need not be in unison for everyone – like how the Buddha or monks use *upāya-kauśalya* to teach depending on who is on the receiving end (Keown 1992). What the capability of the respective person is to cultivate the understanding of the *dharma* is similar to how the state must have varied provisions based on the differences and not assume equality or even aim for it. The needs of the old are different from those of the young, and women may require different priorities compared to men, depending on space and time.

The role of the state has two dimensions, too, with the duty of the *rāja* not only being about the material sustenance of the subjects but also enabling his subjects to realize the dhamma. Even in contemporary times, Buddhist monarchies, although they have almost vanished, have shown the concept’s applicability (Drechsler 2020).

Even with a *dhammarājā* ruling it, the idea that every state can provide equally for all its citizens or become immediately equal in economic standing to those more prosperous is more of a utopian thought than a vision with practicality; the classically Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan’s tendency to compare itself with Switzerland and Singapore while still being a “Least Developed Country” (see Drechsler 2020) is a point in case. Not all countries are equally able, and if one ruminates on the implications of the Buddhist law of karmic causality as well as of simple geospatiality, they can practically never be, and as such, nor are their goals the same, nor the means available to reach these goals. The state, then, has the responsibility to set the goals and choose the ethical means that best suit their context, not just generally but specifically concerning the groups and subgroups of its citizens.

4.2 The *Saṅgha*-Laity Symbiotic but Direct Relationship

The relationship between the *saṅgha* and the laity is symbiotic. The role of the *saṅgha* to the secular world is that of a guide or an advisor to teach them the dharma and guide them toward the path of enlightenment. In the context of its historical development and contemporary practice, Buddhism is primarily based on the activities of the *saṅgha*, who functioned as literati, preserving a substantial body of literature and higher studies, including historical and other non-religious writings, and also played a crucial role in providing fundamental education to villagers (Bechert 1973).

The *saṅgha* depends on the laity to provide the means of subsistence to the *saṅgha*. The survival of the *saṅgha* depends on the laity. Thus, the *saṅgha* is also responsible for advising or at least well-wishing for worldly matters concerning trade, commerce, agriculture, law, and security. In Sigālovāda Sutta, (DN 31 – Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Bhikkhu Narada 2013; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018d), a discourse that discusses the advice of the Buddha to Sigāla, the Buddha mentions the mutual relationship between the laity and the *saṅgha*. Based on the discourse, to promote and encourage the dharma practice of the *saṅgha*, the laity should respect the *saṅgha* through kind actions, kind words, kind thoughts, keeping their houses open for them, and supporting them with basic requisites.

In return, the *saṅgha* should bear in mind that they have an obligation to care and show compassion to the lay people by restraining them from doing evil deeds, persuading them

to perform wholesome deeds, thinking compassionately, teaching them what they have not learned, clarifying what they have already learned and showing them the path to the heavenly state.

4.3 The Independent Relationship between the “Ruler” of the Citizens and the “Leader” of the Saṅgha members

In the context of the 21st century, it is noteworthy that Cambodia stands as a unique example where Buddhism, the monarchy, and the *saṅgha* have been constitutionally recognized, as stated in Cambodia’s 1993 Constitution (Lawrence 2022). In several Buddhist discourses, the *saṅgha* plays a significant role in helping the *dhammarājā* govern his subjects in accordance with the principle of *dharma*. As mentioned in the Aggañña Sutta (DN 27 – Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Bhikku Sujato 2018c), the Buddha suggests that *saṅgha* members should serve as advisors to righteous rulers. However, the Buddha also emphasizes that the *saṅgha* should abstain from direct involvement in political affairs. The *sutta* also notes that the king must adhere to the moral instructions of the *dharma* to maintain legitimacy, promote peace, foster prosperity, and secure the survival of his kingdom.

The Buddha, through upāya-kauśalya (skillful means), teaches the *dharma* to beings with varied capacities to understand it, showing their unique path toward enlightenment (Keown 1992). Similarly, the *saṅgha* is also present to guide the *rājas* or the rulers of states. Kūṭadanta Sutta (DN 5) and Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta (DN 26) are just two of several examples where Buddhist scriptures directly address matters of the secular world, focusing on issues of poverty and crime and the need for economic upliftment (Rahula 1974).

While the close connections between the state and the Khmer *saṅgha* may offer mutual benefits in terms of political legitimacy and security, the state’s absolute authority over the *saṅgha*’s leaders may raise questions about the *saṅgha*’s integrity (Kent 2008; Lawrence 2022). It can be argued that the loss of these principles would limit the sovereignty of the *saṅgha*, making them unable to make the right decision and to fulfill their role as moral advisors and exemplars for the ruler in governing the state in accordance with the *dharma*. To ensure the *saṅgha* community remains committed to the neutrality principle and can contribute to truly good governance, the state must create a healthy environment for them. Through this, the *saṅgha* can fully embrace their role of offering moral guidance and telling what is just (*dharma*) and unjust (*adharmā*) for the state.

Turning the focus again to the Cambodian context, the endeavor must be to comprehend what Buddhist governance in the key Khmer example would look like. This exploration delves into theoretical constructs and the practical manifestations of these ideas within Cambodia’s societal and state structures. While the framework for Buddhist governance in Cambodia must be rooted in an understanding of local customs, beliefs, and historical trajectories, it is crucial to emphasize the core element of the *dhammarājā*, particularly their commitment to embracing the *dhammocracy* (*dhammādhīpateyya*). Given that the concept of genuinely good governance and a just ruler in Buddhism revolves around the ruler’s alignment with the *dharma*, understanding what *dharma* represents in the contemporary world is a key factor for both the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā* in order to evaluate their actions.

5. Conclusion

This paper has tried to explore the relationship between the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā* in contemporary governance, with special reference to Cambodia. It has discussed the multifaceted responsibilities of the *dhammarājā* and examined various aspects of Buddhist governance. The emphasis of the *saṅgha* on communal living, ethical conduct, and *dhammocratic* principles indeed offers valuable insights for effective leadership, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the notion of *dhammarājā* as a ruler guided by Buddhist principles serves as a model for responsible governance, prioritizing social welfare, equality, and human rights, even well beyond a monarchical system. By incorporating Buddhist values into governance, leaders can ideally better navigate challenges, foster social cohesion, and promote a just society. Ultimately, the teachings of the *saṅgha* and the ideals of the *dhammarājā* provide valuable guidance for ethical leadership, community building, and the pursuit of a fair, inclusive, and compassionate society.

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Participative Governance Tools in the Polish Local Government

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Abstract

Participation is an important element of good governance and has impact on both its efficiency and its democratic character. This is why the local governments in Poland apply a growing number of diverse participatory tools in strategic planning, as well as problem solving. The article aims to review the most common among those tools to provide an overview of how communes encourage citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Among others, the article discusses such popular tools as consultations and participatory budgeting, as well as the more innovative ones, including civic panels and city labs. It also reflects on how participatory governance tools should be assessed and which of their features are key.

Keywords: participation, good governance, local government, Poland

1. Introduction

Participation is now perceived as an important feature of good modern democratic governance (Kriesi and Müller 2013). In the context of the populist backslide, there is a growing awareness that broader involvement of citizens in the processes of decision-making at various stages and levels might not only improve the quality of governance, but also enhance democracy and legitimise particular decisions, as well as the political system as a whole (Gastil and Knobloch 2020).

These concepts are frequently referred to as decentralised multi-level governance (Berner et al. 2011, 129). At the local level, participation is easier to organise, and also its impact may be more perceptible for citizens, thus bringing a more significant effect in terms of governance efficiency, as well as legitimating the local authorities in view of re-election. In Poland local governments have gotten involved in the development of participatory tools (Kalisiak-Mędelska 2015, 251-281) – those described in legal provisions concerning local government like elections, referenda and consultations, those known from other states and local governments, like participatory budgeting, as well as original new concepts, such as civic panels. The meaning and impact of these tools is variable, some of them, even though they are broadly discussed and increasingly popular, have less impact than the less appreciated ones; however, they all contribute to a new, more open and inclusive image of communal governance.

The objective of the paper is to review different participatory tools applied by Polish communes, considering their characteristics and potential impact and discussing how communes

encourage citizen involvement. The paper explores various possibilities of inclusion of citizens in the decision-making processes, referring to popular participation tools. It is based on desk review, analysis of legal acts, information published by the National Electoral Commission and by communes themselves. Finally, the paper also reflects on how participatory governance tools should be assessed and attempts to identify their key features.

The remaining part of the paper is structured as follows. Section two describes shortly the concepts of participation and deliberation in the democratic systems, as analysed by other researchers. Section three provides the local context, describing Poles' attitudes toward the local and regional government as compared to the central institutions (especially the government and the Sejm, i.e. the lower chamber of the Polish parliament). The fourth section focuses on selected participatory tools, starting with those that are regulated in legal provisions, i.e. two types of referenda, consultations, ancillary and participatory budgeting, including the specific form of participatory budgeting called the village fund. Further, the section proceeds to discuss two of more innovative tools, which have been recently introduced by some Polish local governments: civic panels and urban labs. While quite new, both solutions have already been applied in several communes in Poland. Finally, the section turns from mechanisms developed by local authorities to possibilities arising from bottom-up activities of the civil society and non-governmental organisations. Section five is an attempt to identify major features that allow for characterisation and assessment of the participative tools. The paper is closed with conclusions.

2. Participation, deliberation and participatory democracy

With the modern crisis of democracy reflected in the rise of populism in Europe (Valadier 2019, 31-38), a lot of attention has been paid to participation, participative democracy and deliberative democracy as a bottom-up response to the diminishing trust in democratic representation. The concept of deliberative democracy focuses on the process of achieving decisions through discussions among citizens (Rostbøll 2001, 168). It focuses more on the process of reaching an agreement than on acting on the interest of a specific group or groups of citizens (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2006, 3-4). It therefore relies on informed cooperation within a community and a well-intentioned effort to find a compromise and on the participation of citizens in the process of development and selections of solutions to be applied in various issues.

Participation is a concept long explored in political science and deeply rooted in practical policy implementation. While it is frequently analysed through the classification referred to as Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein 1969), one should remember that the ladder was a reflection based on Sherry Arnstein's prior experience in attempts to introduce increasingly participatory mechanisms in the problem-solving of American authorities she had worked with (Gaber 2019), which indicates the concept's immersion in practical policies concerning political empowerment of communities on one hand and prevention of in-community conflict on the other.

Even though Arnstein's classification is now re-explored and modified by many researchers (Lim et al. 2018, 45-48), still, scholars reflect also on the difficulty of implementing the

concept of participation which is key to the idea of participative democracy: “the model of participatory-deliberative democracy is more attractive as a truly democratic ideal than the model of formal deliberative democracy, but it certainly faces more difficulties when it comes to the practicalities, and especially the institutional design” (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2006, 1).

Participation is sometimes analysed in association with – or in contrast to – deliberation. “The theory of deliberation would emphasize the process whereby preferences are formed and described, while participatory theory would pay more attention to the inclusion of the broadest diversity of citizens” (García and Ganuza 2010, 2-3). These terms describe therefore different stages of the process, with deliberation referring rather to the process of articulation and aggregation of interests to build up and enhance a more efficient communication process within governance structures, while participation reflects the process of inclusion of broader and more diverse groups of citizens or residents within the decision-making procedures themselves. However, they are both gaining momentum in the context of what is frequently referred to as the crisis of democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). The inclusive, consensus-driven deliberation aimed at building consensus is discussed as a counterbalance to the populist discourse (Zaslove et al. 2020), especially considering the populist claims that representative democracy has been alienated from the broad society. Thus, participatory democracy might serve as a tool to boost legitimacy of the political system, but also improve quality of governance.

3. Legitimacy and perception of local government in Poland

Poland after 2015 has undergone significant reforms, especially concerning the judiciary. The outcome of the reforms for the rule of law in Poland has been controversial, triggering a serious conflict with the European Union (Coli 2018) and major criticism by EU institutions (e.g. European Commission 2017) and non-governmental organisations (Freedom House 2019). In the scientific literature, there have also been discussions on the impact of populism on the Polish government (e.g. Bakke and Sitter 2020). However, public opinion polls and results of local and regional elections show a significant discrepancy in perception of the central administration on one hand, and self-government on the other.

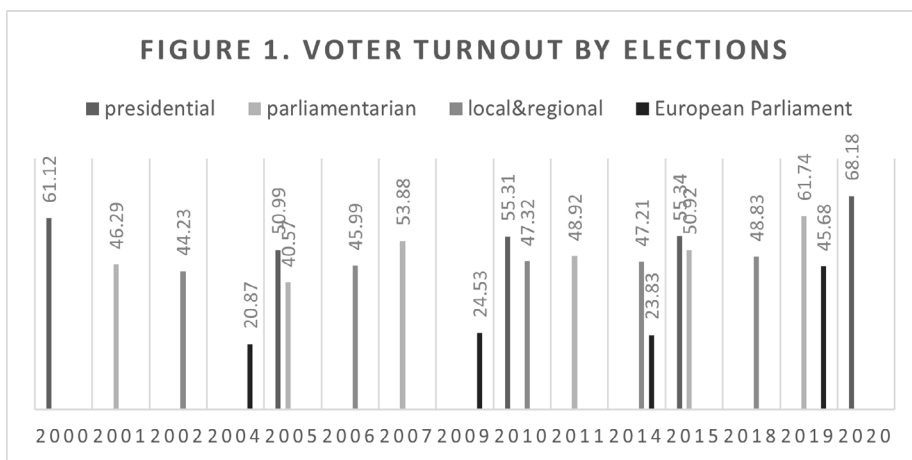
The perception of central public authorities and institutions is bad, and analogically, citizens declare a low level of trust in them. As evidenced by all-Polish studies on representative samples by the Public Opinion Research Centre, between 2010 and 2022, trust for the government ranged from 31 to 46%, while distrust ranged from 45 to 62%. The respective ranges for the parliament were between 21 and 34% for trust and 53 to 68% for distrust (CBOS 2022). The increase in trust observed after the change of the ruling majority in 2015 was temporary, and neither the parliament nor the government exceeded 50% of trust at any wave of the survey.

In this context, the public’s attitude toward self-government is a positive exception. In a survey held in February 2020 by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS 2020b), local government¹ ranked sixth among the most trusted institutions; however, this was higher than the president, government, parliament or courts, or even the ombudsman. Overall, 74% of respondents of this survey declared they trusted local authorities, while 17% declared distrust. According to another survey of the same year (CBOS 2020a), these generalised declarations

¹ The survey provided respondents with a list of 20 institutions, which included the local authorities but did not refer to the regional self-government.

of trust corresponded also to the assessment of operations of the self-government²; 73% of its respondents were satisfied and only 18% were dissatisfied with policies of self-government. The results were consistently high from 2014 until 2020 (satisfaction varying within the range between 62 and 73%, and dissatisfaction reaching the highest level of 29% in November 2014 and then ranging between 18 and 23%). The positive opinions on the local self-government were not affected by the very negative image of political parties: between 2002 and 2022 trust in political parties never exceeded 28%, while distrust in political parties never fell below 54% (CBOS 2022). However, especially local elections are dominated by independent local activists and groups: out of almost 2,500 mayors and village mayors elected in 2018, only 18.18% were officially party candidates³ (Polska Komisja Wyborcza).

Also, in another study, as many as 60% of respondents declared that they felt they had an impact on public affairs at the local level as compared to 40% in the case of the central state level (Gendźwiłł and Żerkowska-Balas 2018, 11), but this opinion did not translate to higher voter turnout in the self-government elections. Actually, with a quite stable participation of voters around 50%, local and regional elections consistently remain the lowest-turnout votes in Poland, only above the elections of the European Parliament (Figure 1). It is especially prominent in comparison to national elections: turnouts at both parliamentary elections in 2019 and presidential elections in 2020 were record high, exceeding 60%, while local and regional elections in 2018 had a turnout below 50%, analogous to the result of 2014 and significantly lower than in 2010.



Source: original development of data by the Polish National Electoral Commission, www.pkw.gov.pl, accessed on 1 December 2020.

Importantly, Polish local governments witnessed another important grassroots phenomenon with urban movements. Although their origins are dated even earlier, the current phase of their dynamic development started after 2004 and Poland’s accession to the European Union (Grzechnik 2019, 88-89). Their postulates included broader participation and more social justice in the name of citizens’ right to the city (Wojtaszak 2017, 74). In the elections of 2014 and

² In this case, the survey referred to the self-councils in general, without quoting the tier.

³ The situation was different in the case of regional council (sejmik wojewódzki): in this case the ruling Law and Justice Party took 46% of councillors’ seats and participates in governing coalitions in 9 out of the 16 voivodeships, while the main opposition party took 35% of the seats and formed ruling coalitions in the remaining 7 regions. Candidates who represented no party took only 3.8% of seats in the regional councils. Therefore, the discrepancy in the residents’ opinions about the central and local governments should not be associated with support or lack of support for an individual party.

2018 many urban activists were elected to hold positions in local governments (Kubicki 2019, 20–21), giving them an opportunity to gain a direct impact on the way how local communities are governed, and to initiate or stimulate the introduction of new forms of policy-shaping.

Therefore, the local self-governments strive to apply participative, frequently also innovative tools to use the potential of support and include more citizens in the decision-making process. There is a variety of mechanisms that encourage citizens' deliberation or provide channels through which citizens or residents of communes can communicate their interests and opinions, but also shape decisions made within the local authorities.

4. Participatory governance tools in local government in Poland

Statutory provisions on the local government in Poland provide for several obligatory mechanisms involving the direct inclusion of citizens in decision-making, starting with the fundamental ones in the form of elections, then providing for a possibility to organise referendums with respect to local affairs (including the removal of the local authorities). The general act on communal self-government (Act on communal self-government 1990, art. 5) refers also to other mechanisms, such as consultations and ancillary units. Since the 2018 amendment, large cities are also obliged to organise participatory budgeting processes. The special form of participatory budgeting applied at rural communes (sołectki fund) is not obligatory, but its terms are regulated in a special act of law (Act on Sołectki Fund 2014). Still, there are also many other initiatives, originating from the self-governments themselves, from local activists, NGOs or scientific milieus, that are aimed at introducing new, more inclusive mechanisms of governance.

The objective of the paper is to discuss some of the widespread tools of citizen participation offered by the Polish communal self-government and to define criteria of their efficiency. The list is not exclusive, especially in view of the constant evolution in this area with new concepts being developed and implemented. However, this selection serves to provide an overview of the current situation.

4.1 Removal referendum

Provisions of the Act on communal self-government provide for a possibility to organise local referendums concerning local issues. Referendums may concern the establishment, joining, division or liquidation of a commune; there are also consultative referendums; referendums on the imposition of new local taxation; and referendums on the removal of local authorities. A motion to hold such a referendum is effective, if signed by 10% of residents of a commune or powiat, or by 5% of residents of a voivodeship, otherwise such a referendum can be initiated by the local or regional council (Rachwał 2014, 82–83). Thus, they are not a regular tool, and each individual case has to be preceded by a lengthy procedure of collecting votes or persuading councillors.

According to the current data of the Polish National Electoral Commission, during the first two years of the current term of local authorities (2018–2020), there were 42 removal referendums held in Polish communes, including 26 concerning the executive organ, nine concerning the

communal or municipal council and seven concerning both organs. Thus, this is quite a rarely used mechanism.

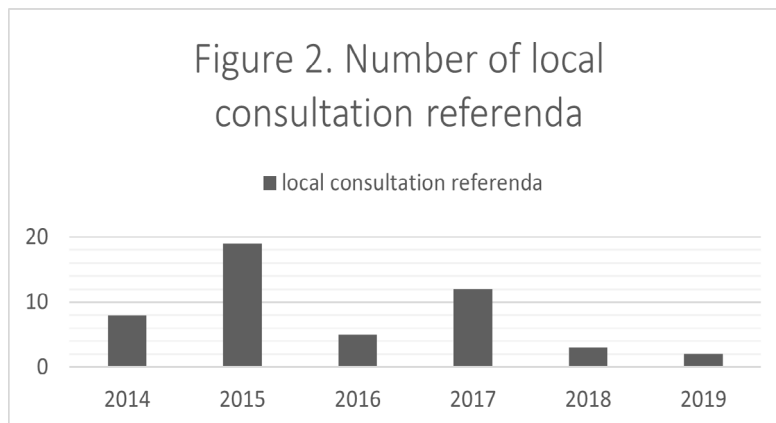
A removal referendum is valid if the voter turnout equals at least $\frac{3}{5}$ of the number of voters who partook in the original elections, making it difficult to ensure such validity – according to data published by the Parliamentary Analytic Office, average voter turnout in council removal referendums between November 2015 and September 2016 was 14.61% as compared to 47.40% in the general elections in 2014, while in the case of the executive organ removal referendum the numbers were 15.86 for referendums as compared to 47.40% in the first round of the original elections and 39.97% in the second round (Rulka 2016, 2). In the term of 2006–2010, out of 62 removal referendums held, only 12 (19.5%) were valid, and their results were binding for the local authorities. In the term of 2010–2014, the rate fell to 13% (15 valid referendums out of 114 held), and in the first half of the next term, 2014–2017, only 3 referendums were valid in 36 held (Jureczko 2017). This shows how difficult it is to mobilise citizens to take part in this mechanism, leading to the conviction that a removal referendum is not an efficient way to take action within the local community. This may be viewed as a paradox, since according to the legal provisions each citizen is allowed to vote in the local referendum, making it formally an inclusive mechanism.

A removal referendum and especially the referendum campaign provide a chance for the residents to discuss the prior achievements of the local authorities; however, the final decision is either for or against the organ. Thus, it offers less possibility of reshaping policy priorities or articulating interests than deliberative tools and may in consequence polarise the community, as has been discussed in the case of referendums in general (Bell and McVeigh 2018, 68).

4.2 Consultative referendum

Removal referendums are a basic mechanism of citizen participation, since they are a tool of enforcing responsibility of the authorities and the citizens’ right to censor their representatives. However, they do not offer a space for discussing solutions to be implemented within the community. This objective can be served by consultative referendums, which may concern any issue within the competencies of the local authorities or “other issues related to social, economic or cultural bonds binding the community” (Act on Local Referendum 2000, art. 2). Importantly, a referendum may be initiated by residents themselves (10% of the total number of inhabitants authorised to vote within the given commune or powiat), equally as by the respective council. For the validity of a referendum, a voter turnout of 30% is required. The law defines that a consultative referendum may concern any issue within the local authorities’ responsibilities, which is a broad definition, but in no circumstances is it mandatory, so – like the removal referendum – it is not a regular, recurring tool.

It has to be highlighted that the referendum result cannot replace a respective act of local law, and therefore, even if valid, it is in no way binding for the local authorities. Although local government leaders frequently treat them so, declaring beforehand that they would follow the voters’ decision, this solution, which offers hardly any space for deliberation, is less efficient than a general consultation process, and therefore it is not highly popular in local governments, as evidenced by the sheer number of referendums held (Figure 2), as well as the fact that if organised, they frequently combined with elections or the national referendum (as in 2015) to save costs and effort.



Source: original development of data by Statistics Poland, www.bdl.stat.gov.pl (last accessed 30 March 2021)⁴.

In 2014–2019, there were only 49 consultation referenda held, none of them concerning voluntary taxation. Thus, this mechanism cannot be considered an efficient tool of boosting citizen participation, especially considering that only half of them on average reach the mandatory validity threshold of 30%, making their result not binding for the authorities (Zakrzewski 2020, 15). This also shows that while the mechanism is potentially inclusive and open to all residents, it is not attractive for them.

4.3 Consultations

There’s more space for important deliberation among citizens in the case of the consultation process. The Act on communal self-government leaves local authorities with a very broad margin of freedom in organising such consultations, indicating only several circumstances when the process is required (Act on communal self-government 1990), and allowing the authorities to organise the process according to their specific needs.

Consultations serve basically to include residents’ opinions in the decision-making process, but they also stimulate transparency and efficiency in governance. They encourage self-organisation of residents and articulation of their needs (Czopek and Żołnierczyk 2017, 85). They are open to anyone living inside the territorial unit or even non-residents; however, considering their form and effort required for participation, they attract the most active and involved citizens.

Local consultations may concern the entire local community or selected groups. An express example of the latter concerns the establishment of ancillary units (Act on communal self-government 1990, art. 41), but it can involve also other selected groups, as in the case of communal youth councils or communal senior councils, in which young or elderly citizens respectively are invited to provide regular advice and initiate measures adapted to the groups’ interests. These tools are not very popular, as research shows that in 2015 only 6% of communes in Minor Poland had appointed communal senior councils and a further 4% planned to do so (Mańka 2015, 6), while youth communal councils operated in 16% of Lower Silesian communes in 2020⁵; however, it provides opportunities to promote easily overlooked needs of specific groups, as well as to encourage social involvement among residents. On the other hand, due to the specific process of appointment and accountability, the councils

⁴ Statistics Poland platform, table data: Category: Local Government; Group: Organs of Gminas; Subgroup: Gmina referendums by case types; last accessed on the 4 March 2024.

⁵ Dolny Śląsk. Młody Dolny Śląsk. Młodzieżowe Rady Miasta na Dolnym Śląsku, <http://www.umwd.dolnyslask.pl/mlody-dolny-slask/mlodziejowe-rady-na-dolnym-slasku/> (last accessed on 4 March 2024).

cannot be unequivocally categorised as representative bodies (Pawłowska 2022, 69).

It should be stressed that such councils, when appointed, are permanent, and therefore they are always available to citizens and not only when a specific consultation process is organised as in the case of general consultations. On the other hand, neither the minority-specialised councils nor the general consultations process generate solutions that are formally binding to the local authorities. It depends on the local authorities' will and policy whether they are incorporated in the decision-making process or not.

4.4 Ancillary units

Ancillary units are a solution that stands out in its aetiology, as they are not a recent innovation. On the contrary, they rely on a tradition dating back centuries (Ptak 2016, 33-45). Present-day Polish legal provisions are very flexible in defining ancillary units by communal authorities – in terms of their territorial demarcation, responsibilities, funding, as well as organisation (Swianiewicz et al. 2013, 56-67). This is why the internal structure of Polish communes (division into ancillary units and their competencies) is diversified, but the solution itself is quite widespread. The most popular type of ancillary unit, *sołectwo* (village), was established in 2,137 out of 2,477 Polish communes, and there are more than 40,000 such units in Poland⁶. Thus, sublocal ancillary units are far more popular in rural areas than in Polish cities.

As a consequence of their dependence on the communal council's decisions, ancillary units are not a guaranteed right of citizens' right; they may or may not be established. However, when created, they become quite a regular and permanent actor in the local political processes. They rarely get a chance to make decisions or provide even binding recommendations. On the other hand, they serve as a useful forum for deliberation, discussing and articulating interests for sublocal activists willing to participate. Although the system allows for the involvement of a limited number of people, their turnover shows that ancillary units may be quite inclusive. They also try to reach out to residents through various community-building initiatives (Madej 2021).

Ancillary units serve various purposes within the communal governance system, as some of them play an active role in investment planning, as in the case of Kraków or Opole, others act as consultative bodies, as in Łódź, or assist in the organisation of municipal social consultation processes, as in Lublin, and yet others are restricted to community-building activities. However, in many cases, there is no clear strategy or concept of the sublocal governance structure, and ancillary units are more of a tradition than a well-adapted tool of overall self-government strategy (Madej 2022). This is also why in some cases (e.g. Wrocław, Łódź), city authorities undertake to reform the ancillary units system.

4.5 Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting has become a very popular solution in Poland, applied for the first time in Sopot in 2011. Currently, it has been introduced not only in communes, but in voivodeships and poviats as well. According to currently binding provisions, it is obligatory to apply this mechanism in major cities. In general, the Polish version of participatory budgeting is focused

⁶ Statistics Poland platform, table data: Category: Territorial Division; Group: Administrative Division, Settlement; Subgroup: Village Administrator's Offices (<https://stat.gov.pl/>, last accessed 4 March 2024)

on the phase of project selection and not on the deliberative aspect of defining priorities and development strategies (Michalska-Żyła and Brzeziński 2017, 211-213). Therefore, the highest level of citizen participation is associated with a vote – in most cases either a traditional or an online vote is accepted (Pytlik 2017, 114), which requires little involvement and commitment.

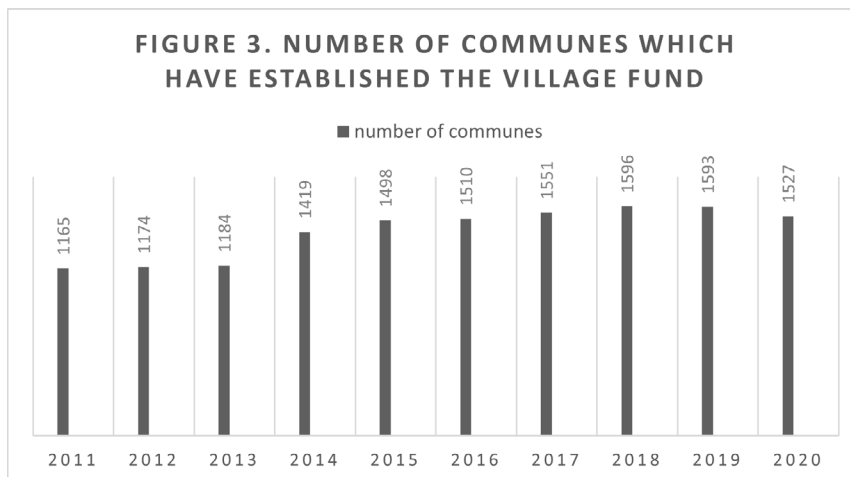
In terms of activating citizens and encouraging them to take responsibility for their neighbourhood, the stage of project initiation and development is the most important. It is also this stage which involves the highest level of deliberation, as opposed to the vote itself. Self-government strives to stimulate its inclusiveness by way of organising workshops and consultations. To avoid inequalities between city centres and outskirts, communes divide the funding between commune-wide and subcommunal projects. In Poland, it has become a mainstay that participatory budgeting is a regular annual process and that decisions made by citizens in the vote are binding for the authorities.

The Polish participatory budgeting usually does not cover a large percentage of the local/regional government units' budget, usually falling below 1% (Madej 2019, 271), which is also a reason why the investments do not affect the overall strategies, but it has become an important tool for urban movements and sublocal activists to promote postulates of small as well as bigger communities within communes. While it is spreading to more and more local and regional government units, its popularity among citizens is wavering⁷, but it has certainly paved the way for various other forms of participative and also deliberative mechanisms of decision-making on the self-government level.

4.6 Village fund (fundusz sołecki)

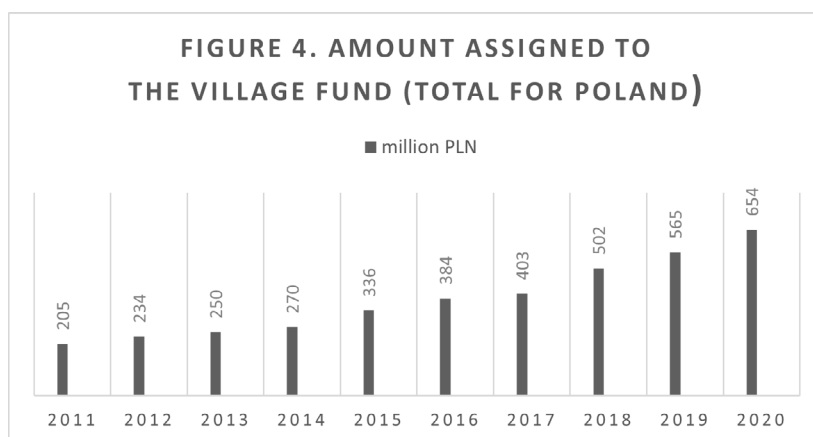
A specific form of participatory budgeting has been introduced in Polish rural communes in 2009, currently regulated by the Act on Sołecki Fund of 2014 (Act on Sołecki Fund 2014). It is applied in ancillary units called sołectwo, established mostly in the countryside, deeply rooted in Polish traditions and quite widespread in Poland. According to data of Statistics Poland, rural and mixed urban-rural communes make up 87% of all communes (2,175 out of 2,477), and more than 99% of them had appointed village administrators (*sołtys*) for at least one locality. In 2020, more than 70% of those communes had established the village fund and – as shown in Figure 3 – this number was steadily growing within the last decade with a slight fall in 2020, making the mechanism more and more inclusive.

⁷ Report on implementation of the act on public benefit and voluntary work for 2014 and 2015, Sejm of the Republic of Poland, entry no. 1171, 8 December 2016, p. 2.



Source: original development of data by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/fundusz-solecki>, accessed on 1 February 2021.

Also the amounts assigned for the village fund (Figure 4) show that this mechanism of participatory allocation of resources to projects is gaining momentum.



Source: original development of data by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/fundusz-solecki>, accessed on 1 February 2021 (data for 2020 reflect the estimated plan, as the actual data are not confirmed yet).

The application of the village fund in a given commune requires a resolution of the commune’s council, but when the decision is made, the village fund mechanism becomes a regular solution, applied on an annual basis. Within the set terms and amounts, the decisions made by the community are binding and have to be carried out.

The funding within this mechanism is allocated by communal authorities upon an application approved by the village assembly. Projects may be initiated by the village administrator, village council or a group of 15 residents and may concern any issues, provided that it lies within the competence of the communes, serves to improve the residents’ wellbeing and is consistent with the commune’s strategy. Projects may be implemented jointly by cooperating villages. Thus, the funding assigned to the village fund can be used to implement bottom-up projects, and it helps peripheral communities express their needs and initiate measures funded by the communal government. In the smaller, rural communities, this mechanism

requires more cooperation and deliberation than the urban, vote-centred participatory budgeting.

4.7 Cooperation with NGOs

Another participatory mechanism applied within the local government involves cooperation with local activists associated with non-governmental organisations. The Act on public benefit activities and voluntary work states in its art. 5 that “public administration organs perform their activities in the scope of public responsibilities ... in cooperation with non-governmental organisations” (Act on public benefit activities 2003) in their respective territory of operations and defines a non-exclusive list of forms of such cooperation, including mutual communication about planned activities, consulting normative acts in their respective areas of interest, as well as form joint advisory or initiating teams. Another key form suggested by the act concerns authorities’ “entrusting of public tasks” to NGOs. In the case of local governments, the same act defines their obligation to develop and implement yearly plans of cooperation with non-governmental organisations. This broad list makes this a very inclusive tool, and at the same time it opens a forum for the deliberative role of the residents.

According to the (latest available) report of implementation of this act in 2014–2015 (Report 2016), entrusting public tasks to NGOs or financial support for them in the implementation of such tasks was the most popular mechanism among public agencies. Thus, it can be perceived as a regular or even permanent element of the broadly-defined local and regional policies. It was most often applied by marshal’s offices (self-government on the regional level) and urban poviats (big cities’ self-government). Local government most frequently entrusted NGOs with tasks associated with promoting sports and physical well-being, as well as arts, culture and cultural heritage. Upon the conclusion of a relevant agreement, both the NGO and the authorities are bound by its provisions.

4.8 Civic panels

The freedom of organising consultations with citizens opens a space for local authorities’ innovativeness in providing communication opportunities that would be more efficient in customising local policies, while simultaneously also attractive enough to involve citizens. The low voter turnout in local and regional elections, as well as referendums, and falling participation even in participatory budgeting votes reflect the need for new tools and mechanisms that would enhance citizens’ motivation and also give citizens a sense of real impact.

One such concept is civic panels, a form of mini-publics (Grönlund, Bächtiger, Setälä, 2014), first introduced in Gdansk in 2016, then implemented also in other cities, including Warsaw, Lublin, Wrocław. This mechanism involves a series of meetings and discussions of a representative group of members of the community, devoted to a pre-defined, specific subject concerning the community and falling within the competence of the local self-government. During the meetings they learn about the issue in question, they are presented with potential solutions and talk about them in order to choose and recommend to the authorities a specific option they deem the best for the commune and community (Gerwin 2018). A very important strength

of this method is its deliberative character. Contrary to a referendum, it does not involve a yes/no answer to a question, it creates space for consensus and sharing opinions. Another positive feature is the informative aspect: as the panel's works are spread to the community (by way of video transmission, publication of the panel's reports, as well as by personal communication with members of the panel), the community is better informed about experts' opinions on the discussed subject. With its random selection of participants and ensuring time for the information and discussion stages, mini-publics are very inclusive and deliberative tools. Their decisions can only be binding if a high percentage of the participants agree on a solution, but their impact on the authorities and the communities is also indirect: through presentation of various arguments and potential decisions (Gastil and Knobloch 2020). On the other hand, civic panels are a complex and long-lasting process, requiring long-term commitment by its members, and thus the scope of their potential application is limited. Therefore, it is not a frequently used tool.

4.9 City labs

Another form of involving various local actors in city governance that has been applied in Polish communes lately is city labs. They serve as a communication, deliberation and cooperation platform for local authorities and residents, but also other institutions, such as social organisations and companies, thus integrating various milieus involved in urban development. The inclusion of diverse actors lies at the foundation of the concept of city labs. They provide for interdisciplinary co-creation and testing of innovative solutions for the city and the community, in terms of organisation, service provision, as well as governance (Kopyciński 2018, 100). Importantly, they are designed to serve as long-term measures and do not depend on fast and spectacular outcomes, but become permanent hubs and provide a forum for regular discussions and sharing of ideas.

So far, city labs have been implemented as pilot initiatives in two Polish Cities – Gdynia and Rzeszów (Kaszur 2020, 38). In the Polish case, the process was initiated by local authorities and focuses on selected themes concerning the operation of the commune, such as local environmental policies, public transport or smart city, but also issues related to the improvement of decision-making quality and citizen participation. City labs also provide space for self-development and integration by way of organising training, urban cafés and similar solutions. However, they do not gain the position of decision-makers, and they can only provide concepts, inspiration and advice.

5. Evaluation of participatory tools in the Polish local government

The applied mechanisms of involvement of broad groups of citizens in decision-making processes differ in many respects, and then, as legally authorised and practically reasonable, they are adapted to specific needs and conditions of different communities and territorial units. As participative governance tools are designed to draw citizens into the processes of governing their local and regional communities, the most important challenges to be confronted involve ways to attract residents on one hand and making the participative decisions a part of the entire complex of strategic solutions applied in the commune, powiat

or voivodeship. The former issue requires mechanisms that are innovative and attractive, give the residents a sense of actual impact and responsibility for the community, but still they have to be adapted to residents' limitations, both in terms of knowledge and the time they can devote to governing their community. The latter aspect refers to the noticeable tendency by which participative tools function as separated elements of the local strategy and operations, limited in practice to either a consultative role or lifestyle projects concerning small sublocal communities with only a potential to influence and transform the entire local or regional policies.

In terms of governance quality and practical significance, the above review allows for development of several criteria in the assessment of participative tools.

1. inclusiveness: the scope of inclusion of all residents of the territorial unit in question on one hand, and a demarcation of who is considered a stakeholder on the other; it also involves striking a balance between broad participation and ensuring that all participants are equally heard; and finally the question of how to encourage participation of marginalised groups and thus avoid transformation of social participation into a mechanism of empowering the privileged;
2. deliberative nature: the important role of a forum where residents' wishes and complaints are articulated; the opportunity for everybody concerned and willing to have a say on the discussed issues and attempts taken to build a consensus around major themes or specific solutions;
3. actual impact: conditions and terms of implementation of the solutions selected through the participatory mechanism; whether the mechanism involves true decision-making or rather a consultative and supportive role;
4. regularity: whether the mechanism is a one-off tool to make strategic decisions or rather a regular, repetitive process, involving residents in the day-to-day governance of the local government units.

Table 1 provides a preliminary evaluation of the tools discussed in the paper. It shows that each mechanism involves a trade-off between different elements which have to be very carefully and thoroughly considered by local authorities. The selection of the right tools has to be guided by the character of the problem in question, as well as the specific nature of the given community.

Table 1. Assessment of participatory tools in the Polish local government.

	Inclusiveness	Deliberative nature	Actual impact	Regularity
Removal referendum	high potential, but unused	none	high potential, but unused	no
Consultative referendum	high potential, but unused	low	low	no
Consultations	high potential, but unused	high	low	no
Ancillary units	high potential	high	low	yes
Participatory budgeting	high potential	high potential	yes	yes
Village fund (fundusz sołecki)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Cooperation with NGOs	yes	yes	yes	yes
Civic panels	yes	yes	high potential	no
City labs	yes	yes	no	yes

Further research will enable the inclusion of other tools as well.

6. Conclusion

Participative governance has become an important and ever more popular tool in the Polish local governance. The developing urban movements, changes in social expectations and attitudes, social research results, as well as patterns spread from various parts of the world encourage local authorities to develop solutions present in the local government at least since the 1990s (ancillary units, consultations), adapt solutions developed elsewhere to Polish conditions (participatory budgeting) or innovate (civic panels). This process changes policies, as well as the governing style.

If well considered and well implemented, participative tools stimulate not only more diverse and more efficient measures taken, but also deeper transparency and accountability of local and regional authorities and officials; however, some of them remain scarcely used by local authorities or neglected by local communities. The broad range of tools used in Poland, along with the possibility of developing new ones or improving the existing ones offers a space for encouraging participation and deliberation to improve local policies, as well as governance. To achieve that, further research is required with respect to the application of participative mechanisms, taking into account contemplated subjects, involved actors, achieved levels of participation, course of the process and its impact, as well as overall assessment.

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Book Review: The scaffolding is on and Public Administration literature will change

SHOBHIT SHAKYA, TALTECH, RAGNAR NURKSE DEPARTMENT OF INNOVATION AND GOVERNANCE

By Edoardo Ongaro and Michele Tantardini
Religion and Public Administration: An Introduction
Edward Elgar, 2023
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With the attempt to put behind the fallacy of considering the doctrine of separation of religion and state as an ideal for Public Administration (PA) globally, Edoardo Ongaro and Michele Tantardini (2023) have brought out an important book that makes an important contribution to the field of PA. The book not only reinforces the recognition of the significant impact that religion has on the studies and practice of PA but, more importantly, helps to establish a framework that could serve as the groundwork for future research in this field.

The idea of secularization as put forward by Charles Taylor (2007), which the authors also mainly relied on, is not a complete obsolescence of religion in all matters of the socio-political lives of people globally. As the authors also mention, citing various other key scholars who have contributed to the sociology of religion, there is no "inevitability in secularization" (12); if to consider the contexts globally and not get fixated on the Global-West paradigm (Drechsler 2013), there is also often not a desirability of secularization either. The appropriate positionality is put forward by the authors in claiming that their perspective is "Global and not Globalist". The central argument in the book is that "religion is influential on the functioning of PA" – religion is explanans and PA the explanandum (17, 65).

The book is suitably titled *Religion and Public Administration: An Introduction*, as this is an introductory work, but undoubtedly a solid one to the vast area of potential studies that involve the study of religion within the context of PA. A more detailed discussion of each of the seven major religions included in the book would likely be a book each on its own that would likely involve a diverse collection of authors and scholarly expertise. It is not that there have not been calls for considering the inclusion of religion into the study of PA in the past (see, e.g., Lynch et al. 1997), but such arbitrary calls without the necessary ground works have not been able to bring such shifts. Considering the challenges, a proper introduction to this area of study with a clear framework and set of themes is a Herculean task, one that is highly commendable for having been achieved. The book is foremost an important volume to have for those interested in the subject matter as a foundational reference for analytical and conceptual themes that could be built upon.

The book is divided into 8 chapters. The introduction lays out the theoretical premise of the book and also the methodology employed. The foundational framework is rich and includes some very important theoretical elements that carry the book well. The introductory chapter

also explains the structure of the book and provides a guideline on how to read it. Here the authors accept the shortcoming of the book in being able to present an in-depth presentation of each of the seven religions, categorized as four Asian and three Abrahamic religions in the book. But the point of the book is palpably not about exhaustive descriptive details on the religions discussed but rather about providing these discussions and details as examples to convey the conceptual framing in a more comprehensible way. While the authors themselves suggest maybe skipping chapters for those knowledgeable of the religions, my judgement on the matter is that reading it serially without skipping the chapters will be advantageous for most readers.

Chapter 2 is mainly about the country-specific data on the measures of the placement of religion in the administration of each of the countries – the demographics, religious freedom and religious regimes. The data mapping is based on the framework introduced by Turner (2013) in categorizing religious regimes into the categories of liberalism, Caesarism, Identification of state and religion, and theocracy. The extensive data provided here can be very helpful for researchers who may want to do case studies and surveys of specific countries and are looking for a starting point. The data will also be valuable from a standalone point of view without necessarily linking to the rest of the book as well. The authors have resorted to basing their analysis not on the country specificities that the data presented in chapter 2 but generally focusing on the religious scriptures and theological commentaries, only occasionally coming back to country-specific contexts.

The next two chapters are about the PA-focused introductions to Asian religions and Abrahamic religions: namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism as part of the Asian religions and Judaism, Christianity and Islam as part of the Abrahamic religions. The authors have effectively addressed the theological dimension of introducing the seven religions, a task made challenging by the fact that they do not possess backgrounds in the theology of most of these religions. The chapter will be very helpful in developing a basic understanding of how religions may have implications in PA. As the details here are more to facilitate the understanding of how there can be implications in different ways in the context of different religions, the text is not particularly approached as a structured comparison between the religions and there is more detailed information provided on some religions compared to others. A comparative study among these religions, with constraints of a single framework, would be fruitless due to the diverse contexts, foundations, and PA-related implements associated with each.

In the next three chapters, the authors discuss the implications of religion and its influences on PA from three perspectives – shaping of individual traits like personality, motivation and behavioural elements; organizational level influences; and as an ideational basis concerning legitimacy, accountability, responsibility and power. The set of ten themes presented and the argumentation is highly convincing when taken as a whole. There can be arguments for or against any theoretical framework based on one’s own theoretical foundations, but for a rich set of themes that has been presented by the authors, there are going to be a few counterarguments and pitfalls. But such potential pitfalls are mostly well-addressed by the authors; for example, the authors cite Turner (2013) to present the criticism of “lumping together” various developments and also “unwittingly working with a Western – or, more specifically, a Protestant – view of what counts as religion” (70). Within the chapters, the

PA emphasis is at the forefront with theological discussion provided within each of the ten themes, which cover all three micro, meso and macro level analyses for each of the religions included; the micro level referring to the individual personality traits; the meso level to the organizational level themes; and finally, the macro level referring to the ideational basis, such as legitimacy and power.

The analyses provided within each of the ten themes presented serve as highly relevant examples of how elements of each of the religions could provide implications concerning respective themes. The discussions provided are rich and efficacious, but as this is not exhaustive, for many readers who are interested in their research in line with the topic of the book, each of these short discussions can prove to be the basis and the source of ideas for future research which can go much further in depth. The ten themes put together are comprehensive altogether and cover key dimensions of possible studies in PA. All in all the possibilities of future studies are vast, and the final chapter, which posts a series of questions, adds to the efficacy of this book. The authors also link the ten themes with potential research questions that researchers with an interest in the field can adopt in developing their research on the topics concerning the implications of religion in PA. The last four chapters combined will provide both the theoretical foundation for attempting such research but also the agendas that are laid out straightforwardly with examples that help to provide some easy directions. The richness of the literature and the theoretical lenses provided will enable researchers to choose selectively the dimensions presented and build on that.

The book, as the authors put it in the concluding chapter, is indeed primarily a call for “synergies between public administration and religious studies scholars”. One cannot stress enough that this book is an important part of a literature void within the discipline of PA that acknowledges the continued centrality of religion in the global context. Human actions tend to get reproduced within structures that both enable and restrict human agency (Giddens 1984), and, as such, the elements of religion that are embedded within the structures that endure should always have been relevant for the study of PA despite the exercise of secularization. Moreover, in the post-secular world that we now live in, the Western idea of secular rationalism and separation of politics and administration seems more of a deviation or a special-case scenario (Habermas 2005). This book will certainly serve as a scaffolding that has now been put on for what will eventually be the building of a comprehensive body of literature which will be significant for the discipline of PA globally for many years to come.

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