A Journal Dedicated to Social Equity and Public Administration

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Written by the coeditors-in-chief, this essay introduces the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA) and situates it among other public administration journals. Its mission, aims, and scope are explained. Manuscripts are welcomed that identify and probe societal structures and dynamics that create or perpetuate inequity, or that overcome it. Published for a global audience, it is a theoretically and methodologically inclusive journal. Because social equity is a moving target, always evolving, the pages of this journal will reflect its course.

With this inaugural issue we celebrate a new journal dedicated to the advancement of social equity in all actions and processes related to the pursuit of public purposes. JSEPA serves as the journal of record for social equity theory, research, and practice. It also serves as a catalyst to encourage analysis, deliberations, dialogue, and discourse. In this essay we outline our vision for the journal and its mission, aims, and scope.

While the administrative state has many responsibilities and challenges, one of its most important is social equity—the active commitment to fairness, justice, and equality in public policy, service delivery, and management of public institutions (Johnson and Svara 2011). In fact, social equity is just as important as, if not more important than, the other public administration imperatives of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. However, there is a large hole to fill in the field's awareness and knowledge of it. This is where JSEPA comes in. The journal will be the resource both scholars and practitioners rely on to learn how to diagnose causes and effects of equity issues and how to foster meaningful, actionable, and inclusive solutions. We aim to make equity assessments as commonplace as cost-benefit analyses already are.

Social Equity as a Subject of Inquiry

Journals are living things. They have a past, a present, and a future. As editors, we are temporary guardians whose job it is to serve as pilots, navigating thought as it evolves. To do this, we start with the definition of social equity as put forward by the National Academy of Public Administration after its inclusion of social equity as the fourth pillar of public administration in its 2005 Strategic Plan. Developed after much debate and deliberation, the definition emphasizes the many dimensions of the subject in public policy, implementation, management, ethics, and justice:

> The fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy (National Academy of Public Administration 2006).

Relatedly, the American Society for Public Administration amplifies the social equity imperative by including "strengthening social equity" as the fourth principle in its code of ethics with this instruction: Treat all persons with fairness, justice, and equality and respect individual differences, rights, and freedoms. Promote affirmative action and other initiatives to reduce unfairness, injustice, and inequality in society (ASPA 2013).

Implementation guidelines tell public service professionals to provide services with impartiality and consistency tempered by recognition of differences, ensure that all persons have access to programs and services to which they are entitled, maintain standards of quality for all who receive the programs and services, reduce disparities in outcomes and increase the inclusion of underrepresented groups (Svara et al. 2015).

Cultures that claim allegiance to equal rights continue to battle their schizophrenic selves, proudly professing democratic principles while crazily engaging in practices that are the antithesis. For example, the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg noted that the greatest statement on equality is in the Declaration of Independence, written by a slave owner. Such contradictions are many and continually surround us. It is the taken-for-grantedness that makes them invisible and screams for attention.

As Martin Luther King (1967) said, there are two Americas, one providing "subsidies" for the well-off while the other provides "welfare" for the poor. The former provides socialism for the rich, while the latter provides rugged individualism for the poor. It is up to the artistry of social equity scholars to illuminate inequity through research and discourse. It is up to policy experts and public service professionals to apply an equity lens to their work in order to evaluate the architecture of policies and programs to ensure they are advancing equity, rather than perpetuating inequity. It is up to the citizenry to appreciate and encourage these complementary activities.

While engineers talk about hard infrastructure in the form of bridges, tunnels, and roads, JSEPA's focus is on the soft infrastructure that connects us with those unlike ourselves. It is civic "bridges, tunnels, and roads" that help communities become a bouquet of humanity and live in harmony. The challenge for nations that pride themselves on being democracies is captured well by poet Amanda Gorman as she spoke at the inauguration for President Joseph R. Biden. She said the mark of a nation is how we step into the past and "how we repair it" (Gorman 2021).

Mission

Published for a global audience, JSEPA's mission is to provide a learning space, a journal of record, and a place of introspection and extrospection. One need not look far to find the worldwide legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and anti-indigenous structures. Social equity issues express themselves differently in each culture, but they are there. The journal's content makes it possible for public service professionals, scholars, and students to take note of what works, what fails, and what opportunities are available to advance justice and reduce disparity. Its pages will lead the way for reforms and examples of reconciliation.

Social equity is a moving target, always evolving. Notions of what is and is not equitable are dynamic. They adjust with the times as demographic changes and economic fluctuations alter patterns of advantage. Systems that used to be equitable may no longer be. Needs change. Circumstances change. As a scholarly resource, JSEPA is designed to help identify and provide information that will aid in repairing inequities and in building more equitable structures.

This focus on promoting positive change is woven into the journal's history and institutional structure. JSEPA is a peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the Section on Democracy and Social Justice of the American Society for Public Administration and generously supported by three universities: University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska Omaha, and Virginia Commonwealth University. Its goal is to be the leading voice on social equity as it pertains to the pursuit of public purposes. It is the outlet for cutting edge theory, research, and commentary on matters of access, process, quality, and outcomes of administrative actions, policy decisions, and administrative and constitutional law. It is also a voice for reconciliation, restoration, and remediation strategies. JSEPA embodies hope with all of its implications for building a more perfect, just, and equitable union.

Aims

The aim of JSEPA is to bridge the research–practice divide that otherwise stifles progress in overcoming social and structural inequities. The pages of this journal are the place to raise awareness, to pose questions, to test hypotheses, and to debunk shibboleths.

Whatever the policy arena, there are equity issues to explore and to advance. In the United States, for example, backlash is nothing new. The resurfacing of

old prejudices, hostilities, and ambivalences is predictable. As if on a roller coaster—one that barrels forward then unexpectedly regresses backward—advances are followed by pushback. As JSEPA grows into a resource that heightens awareness of ethnocentrism, racism, colorism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and effects of colonization, it will stand as an outlet not only for identification of problems but for strategies to ameliorate them. And it will not only advance awareness of categories, but sensitivity to the effects of intersectionalities.

Public administration is the software of democracy, encoding values and norms in its institutions. JSEPA's pages will examine the intermingling of power that underlies administrative and policy decisions, historical legacies, and overlooked social justice concerns. *Social justice* and *social equity* are related but different terms. While both focus on the community rather than the individual, social justice contributes to social equity because the latter is the condition that describes access to, distribution of, and outcomes related to public goods. The former, social justice, is instrumental for achieving the latter, social equity. Manuscripts that tackle social justice head-on are welcomed, whether they are encased in questions of how climate change threatens marginalized communities, how refugees are banned from seeking shelter, or how disadvantaged populations are treated as threats. Vital public administration issues facing communities and nations will be explored.

Unconscious bias and so-called "neutral" practices are difficult to challenge. Inattentional blindness is a reality (Mack and Rock 1998), as is inattentional amnesia (Wolfe 1999). Because of this, research that reveals equity myths will provide intellectual "munitions" for altering the course of events. As Rubin and Bartle (2021) demonstrate, budgeting is not gender neutral in its impact. Similarly, HR processes confer advantage to those who have always held it, unless someone mindfully challenges them. As the late Justice Ginsburg observed, when she was a child, there were few women in orchestras. Auditioners thought they could tell the difference between a man and a woman playing, routinely judging men to be better. But once orchestras erected a screen between auditioners and those trying out, women applicants were selected for many positions. In other words, the "neutral" process of selecting musicians for orches-

tras routinely advantaged men because of implicit bias. (See Portillo, Bearfield, and Humphrey 2020 for more on the myth of neutrality.) Today's bands and symphonies include women because someone thought to erect a screen between judge and musician. Similar critiques are now being made of artificial intelligence algorithms that are written based on assumptions of those who build them. These are only a few examples of how research can probe contemporary processes and identify those that perpetuate unconscious bias and suffer from blindness, amnesia, and related social maladies.

Government actions are not the only focus for the nexus of social equity and public administration. Nonprofits, as they strive to put the "community" in community-based human services, yield a number of equity considerations (Farwell and Handy 2020). The priorities and decision calculi of grantmakers, board members, and community advisors factor greatly into programs, and research into equity dimensions is sorely needed. So are lessons learned from practices that advance equity as well as those that, intentionally or unintentionally, perpetuate inequity. For example, studies of collective impact models and other collaborative strategies will illuminate how practices accentuate or diminish equity (Dolamore and Kline 2020).

Research that illuminates inequity is the starting point for changing how the levers of advantage turn. Decolonization—a term that focuses on moving beyond ethnocentrism and looks anew at the other, without a hierarchy in mind—is indispensable here. This requires institutional forces to change, whether in programs, professions, or governments. Those who have privilege rarely see it, for they assume it as a given. The first step in decolonization is self-awareness and research that holds a mirror up to communities, programs, and policies to accelerate the process. To decolonize is to examine unquestioned norms by deconstructing them so they can be reconstructed in a way that is more equitable. Analogous to financial audits, equity audits are a means for creating this mirror. By tracking process (due process, transparency, representativeness, and equal rights), access (opportunity to participate in processes and programs), quality (do processes and programs meet standards?), and outcomes (are public services equitable?), equity audits reveal the realities of programs.

Scope

JSEPA's scope of coverage is broad, with manuscripts welcomed that explore, investigate, describe, explain, and critique a wide variety of social equity issues. These issues arise in the context of management, policy, and/or law. They surround access, processes, quality and outcomes of administrative or policy decisions; rulemaking processes that enhance or hinder equity; ethical considerations; and strategies that correct inequity. JSEPA is interested in "smart practices" as well as equity audits, causes and impacts of inequity, and strategies to correct it. Whether the focus is domestic, comparative, or international, manuscripts are welcomed on topics such as the following:

- Benchmarks for success
- Best practices and the policies and conditions that support them
- Challenges to democratic norms and civic participation that result from marginalizing people
- Commentary that explores cause and effects of social, political, economic, and environmental inequities
- Comparative analysis of policies, programs, and outcomes
- Critical examinations of structural and institutional barriers that limit full participation of marginalized communities
- Empirical work examining issues related to social justice across all policy arenas
- Equity audits and best practices for conducting them
- Evaluations of solutions
- Exploration of the lived experiences of directly impacted communities
- Inequities attached to demographic identities
- Intersectionalities and their implications for inequity
- Justice and equity
- Pedagogical techniques for preparing students to engage in social justice work
- Power and its relationship to social equity
- Reparations and strategies for implementation
- Social equity assessments that take access, process, quality, and outcomes into account
- Social equity drivers for public programs (emergency management, housing, education, health care, transportation, law enforcement, and more)
- Social equity for indigenous communities
- Strategies public service professionals can use to dismantle barriers to access and participation
- Theory development with regard to social equity
- Tribal communities and their equity challenges

Manuscripts may focus on any policy domain and target any facet of procedural fairness, which refers to due process, transparency, equal rights, and representativeness. They may also target issues of access, which refers to the opportunity to participate in processes and programs. Quality is also a concern and this refers to evaluation of whether processes meet acceptable levels, and/or outcomes. Questions of interest include: What policy levers work? What administrative structures work? How are administrative burdens and demarketing employed to perpetuate inequity? These are only a few examples of questions the journal is eager to address.

JSEPA is theoretically and methodologically inclusive. The proper method is the one that best provides the information necessary to address the question of interest. Analysis has the capacity to reveal much about the dynamics embedded in inequity when thoughtful measurement and interpretation are employed. For instance, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation are less control variables and better used as independent variables with deep structures and meanings. While the single story or narrative provides details, the perspective from which it is told amplifies insights and illuminates issues otherwise hidden. In other words, data sources are many and range from singular voices to meta-analyses of aggregated data sets.

International Dimensions

A more global understanding of social equity will illuminate the importance of geography, national culture, and policy norms. JSEPA exists to record what social equity issues look like around the globe and to reflect on their incidence and evolution. Whether in Thailand or Germany, the United States or Pakistan, South Africa or South Korea, Mexico or Australia, equity issues reflect cultural characteristics. And these, in turn, affect politics, management, and law. Moreover, priorities differ across countries, as do their relative importance. Whether democracies or authoritarian regimes, the tension between equity and merit bears exploration, especially with regard to the balance that is achieved.

Analysis of historical and intentional exclusions, social injustices, and development of corrective strategies will move the subject of social equity forward, regardless

of continent or country. Social justice is a sophisticated concept embedded in culture with its nuances varying according to national customs.

In Closing

While capital assets depreciate, human assets do not. Social equity is about peoples' lives and clearing paths so they can live their best lives. If public administration is to be the hopeful field it can be, then its goal is to create a bouquet of humanity, where people of all descriptions live harmoniously. It is incumbent on the practice community, the research community, and educational institutions to continuously poke and prod to find where inequities lurk and to modify institutions, processes, and practices that perpetuate it. Achieving equity requires different levels of support based on each individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Research and commentary that helps readers know what that level of support is, how to acknowledge unequal starting places, and how to correct imbalances belong in this journal.

JSEPA's raison d'être is to provide a space dedicated to identifying and probing societal structures that create and perpetuate inequity. It is the journal of record for accounts of strategies that advance equity and report what works and what does not. This journal for social equity research and discourse now takes its place among the pantheon of public administration journals that focus on budgeting, human resources, and performance. It belongs among them because social equity must be infused in all functions that pursue public purposes. The journey toward justice begins with a single step, a single research project, a single change, building on itself along the way.

It takes the efforts of many to produce a journal, starting with journal sponsors, authors, the editorial team, and the production team. We applaud the foresight and effort of Susan Gooden, Richard Greggory Johnson, RaJade Berry-James, and Sean McCandless as they created this journal. For all who have already leaned in to get JSEPA underway, thank you. For all those who are watching, join in and contribute to this noble effort.

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