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GOVERNING THE COMMONS LIKE A PRAGMATIST: THE CASE OF JOHN DEWEY

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the process of neoliberal policies, commons have been in a state of enclosure and exploitation. That kept the debate on governing the commons is very much alive. This paper examines what John Dewey can contribute to the debate through his method of inquiry. As part of his method, we will examine mechanisms such as public deliberation and democratic experimentalism. In addition, his contribution to the re-conceptualization of the commons will be discussed.

KEYWORDS: commons, pragmatism, John Dewey, deliberative democracy, democratic experimentalism

“If we cannot organize ourselves so that we don’t depend on capital and the state to stop us from being choked by our shit, how can we hope to bring about a revolutionary change in our life?”

Caffentzis, G. 2010. *The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?* Lawrence and Wishart.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the contribution of John Dewey’s philosophy of pragmatism to the concept of governing the commons. In the first section, main characteristics of the commons will be outlined. Then we will dive into the general characteristics of pragmatism. Thirdly, we will discuss the importance of public deliberation and experimentalism as outlined

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by John Dewey and his recommendations for shaping a governing mechanism which can be implemented to address the issue of governance¹ of the commons. Finally, we will discuss how Dewey could help in re-conceptualizing the commons. In this paper, the focus will not be on making a clear distinction between Dewey's original philosophy and Deweyan interpretations as the aim of this paper is to contribute to the adaptation of Deweyan thoughts for contemporary use, especially in governing the commons.

WHAT ARE THE COMMONS?

As an operational definition of commons, I will use the one given by Charlotte Hess: "a commons is a resource shared by a group where the resource is vulnerable to enclosure, overuse and social dilemmas. Unlike a public good, it requires management and protection in order to sustain it."² (2008, 37). I believe that this definition is useful because it links the issue of governance to the concept of the commons as its important and inseparable component. It is also important to highlight the fact that commons are owned by the community. However, the concept of the commons itself is not uniform and fixed. It is important that the definition be general because by commons we mean a wide variety of resources constantly changing.

Under traditional commons, we meant "resources seen as limited but essential for the survival of local communities" (Berge 2006, 65), which referred mainly to land or water resources among others. But with new commons, we see the emergence of a variety of forms of resources that need to be articulated.

This is precisely why Hess introduces the notion of new commons that visibly enrich the spectrum of what we consider under the term. New commons are created as a product of the development of several processes. First, the development of new technologies allows us to „capture“ and recognize new forms of commons. Second, the appropriation and disappearance of resources through privatization and exploitation make us aware of the exploited resource. Finally, recognition of new commons in the legal system can be a good instrument for the articulation of the new commons (Hess 2008). As a result, new forms of commons are emerging, such as cultural, infrastructural, knowledge commons, health commons and global commons.

1 The term governance will be used for when discussing the governance of the commons and public governance. Later on, the term management will be used when talking about agile and lean management in private sector.

2 For some other definitions of the commons see: Vaccaro and Beltran 2019.

Cultural commons are a good example of conceptualization and recognition of endangered resources due to commodification and privatization. So some authors have written about the danger to indigenous cultures and communities that are threatened by the growing tourism industry (Caruthers 1998; Ifeka and Abua 2005).

Something that has been a topic for a long time, but has only recently been recognized as a new form of commons, are non-profit organizations, that is, the NGO sector (Lohmann 2001). For example, John Dewey sees various forms of associations of citizens as prime sources of socialization and as ways of articulating various interests³ (Hildebrand 2008). The process of commodification and neoliberal policies lead to the destruction of certain cultural patterns of the community, reducing the level of solidarity and social capital. As we shall see later, these issues are of paramount importance in Dewey's conceptualization of experimental democracy and the democratic way of life. Related to cultural commons are neighborhood commons that concern public local policy issues such as housing practices, local civic associations or green spaces (Kleit 2004; Choe 1993; French and Hyatt 1997).

Infrastructural commons give us a good example of how new forms appear due to the development of technology that helps us detect them. By infrastructural commons, we mean transport commons such as roads, communication commons such as mobile telephony, administrative commons such as local communities, and public institutions and services that provide certain services such as the school or health system (Frischmann 2007). The Internet appears as an important communication and transport commons and is a perfect example of how new technologies create and help discover new commons. As part of the emergence of the Internet, knowledge commons are also appearing, which concern the facilitation and creation of knowledge and information that will be available to everyone (Brin 1995; Rainie and Kalsnes 2001).

The diversity of new and traditional forms of commons also requires diversity in the forms of governance, as well as governance innovations due to the specificities that different types of commons bring with them. What emerges as a question is whether there can and should be only one fixed governance mechanism that will be equally good and effective for every situation, especially in a state of constant changes and the emergence of new commons and threats. To answer this question, I will look at what Dewey has to offer us in governing the commons through the prism of adaptation and innovation of the governing mechanisms.

3 Dewey usually refers to such associations as communities or publics, where publics have a strong political connotation, which is not necessarily a case with communities (Hildebrand 2008).

At the end of this section on conceptualizing commons, I will make a basic categorization of commons into first and second-order commons. When we talk about the commons of the first-order, we mean the common spaces and resources used and owned by the community (urban spaces, water resources, parks, etc.). When talking about the commons of the second-order, I mean those commons that enable efficient and fair governance of the commons of the first-order, that is, the effective functioning of democracy. Examples of such commons would be solidarity, the social capital of citizens, civil society organizations, democratic political culture, information and knowledge.

NEED FOR THE RE-ARTICULATION OF THE COMMONS

A wave of neoliberal economic policies was introduced in Britain and the USA from the 1970s and especially from the 1980s, spreading through the world. Even the former communist states were not bypassed by these policies, as a gradual process of neoliberal state-building took place⁴ (Džuverović and Milošević 2020). This process was characterized by the universalism of liberal values, which required the state to introduce market mechanisms (if there weren't any) and deregulation (Richmond 2009). It was a top-down decision-making process where legitimacy was evaluated in relation to international organizations and standards, and not in relation to local support of citizens (Džuverović and Milošević 2020). The process of privatization of the resources that used to be considered common goods – the commons (such as health care, education, natural resources, etc.), hugely impacted their sustainability and availability. This was accompanied by the process of depoliticization in the sense that “asking questions about economic production within the framework of politics was considered taboo” (Szekely 2022, 28). Thus, commons were out of the mainstream political discourse and the target of privatization.

The privatization of common resources has been considered one of the remedies to the “tragedy of the commons” – the expected overuse of resources or goods that are shared among a group of people. The issue of governing the commons has been the focus of social and academic discussions ever since Garrett Hardin's famous article on the tragedy of the commons in which he presented the problem of governance as a prisoner's dilemma where each player tends to non-cooperate and maximize his utility, thus depleting the common good or resource (Hardin 1968). His main preoccupation is overpopulation. In the already famous metaphor of

4 Governing the commons during the communist era was also characterized by rigid and centralized form of governance of the bureaucracy. For more see: Mirovitskaya and Soroos 1995.

the open pasture, Hardin claims that individuals driven by personal interests will act in such a way as to seize the greatest possible benefit for themselves, by unlimited grazing of their herd on a common meadow, which will soon cease to exist. As a remedy for this phenomenon, Hardin prescribes a centralized administration³, i.e. the state, as a player that will seriously raise the costs of non-cooperation and force individuals to create a sustainable use of resources through cooperation: “if we want to avoid destruction in this overpopulated world, we must be subject to some other coercion forces outside ourselves, Leviathan, to use Hobbes’s vocabulary” (Hardin 1968, 314). Starting from similar assumptions, other authors advocated the privatization of the commons as the only effective solution (Demsetz 1967; Johnson 1972; Smith 1981). Interest in this topic is intensified by Elinor Ostrom’s book on governing the commons, where she highlights the possibilities of the self-organization of communities and the setting of governance and monitoring rules which could ensure the sustainability of the common resource (Ostrom 1990). Ostrom emphasizes the importance of appreciating the possibility of communication among the users themselves, through which they can overcome the negative outcomes of the prisoner’s dilemma, and create an effective surveillance system. She still remains in the Prisoner’s Dilemma game, but she solves the issue of sanctioning and increasing costs to strategic players in a different way.

WHAT DOES PRAGMATISM BRING US?

In this section, I will briefly refer to some main features of pragmatism that will emerge later when we consider in more detail the idea of democratic governance offered by Dewey. The main premise of the philosophy of pragmatism is anti-foundationalism, which represents the belief that no idea is universally perfect and set in stone (Barnes 2008). Pragmatists believe that no idea (ideology, religion, philosophical system) will lead us to some transcendental truth⁵. As Richard Rorty warns that “we have to give up on the idea that there are unconditional, transcultural obligations, obligations rooted in unchanging, ahistorical human nature” (1999, xxvii). We will see later, in John Dewey’s theory, this concept will especially have an impact on the conceptualization of democracy through democratic experimentalism, where the molding of democracy as an instrument of governance into only one form will be criticized, but a combination of different demo-

5 In his philosophy, Dewey does not accept any arguments of inherent human nature or inevitable historic destiny. Even the ideals such as justice are determined by society, “once political philosophers remove ideals from their dynamic and human environment they become idols – inert to the analysis and improvement of pressing problems, they close inquiry rather than enlarge it” (Hildebrand 2008, 97).

cratic institutions that are in agreement with the newly created will be sought in accordance with the context and needs of the community. What Dewey points out as a big problem with institutions is that „we glorify the past, and legalize and idealize the status quo, instead of seriously asking how we are to employ the means at our disposal so as to form an equitable and stable society” (Dewey 1946, 159). Another important characteristic of pragmatism is that knowledge is a social phenomenon (Barnes 2008). This concept of knowledge builds on the understanding of knowledge as another form of commons that is very important for the development of the human and social capital of individuals, so it is important to ensure governance that will disseminate information and knowledge in the best way, especially the connection between knowledge and participatory forms democracy. John Dewey emphasized the importance of para-state institutions that spread knowledge and therefore can prevent the standardization of knowledge and ensure the pluralism that is necessary for the equality of the ability to participate politically (Emerson 2019). Dewey, like other pragmatists, emphasized the contingency that exists in the world and social processes which often radically change the social situation and therefore needs. That is why he emphasized the importance of developing reflective intelligence, i.e. the ability (but also the will) to adapt attitudes and beliefs to new situations and changes, especially when we talk about collective ideas and institutions, no matter how sacred they may be and long a part of the political culture of the community (Dewey 1922). As we saw in the previous section, constant changes create new commons, often through unintended consequences, which entails the need for institutions and governance mechanisms to adapt to it, especially by introducing innovative mechanisms. This was seen by Dewey himself, who advocated the form of democracy which in response to the great changes that are taking place in all spheres of society, enables citizens to participate in discussions within the community, to experiment in terms of shaping new institutions and forms of democracy (Dewey 1944). Thus, through trial and error, we eventually arrive at more optimal results in governing the commons. As a product of the already mentioned characteristics of the philosophy of pragmatism, pluralism appears, which insists on the confrontation of opposites and opponents, precisely because no idea or institution captures the entirety of social reality, something always manages to escape or be omitted (James 1977). For this reason, John Dewey’s democratic experimentalism includes many features of agonistic democracy⁶, although it surpasses it in its radicalism (Jackson, 2019).

6 Agonistic democracy acknowledges that there will always be conflicts due to opposed interests and focuses on contrasting conflicted sides by turning them from enemies into adversaries. For more see: Mouffe 2000.

JOHN DEWEY'S DEMOCRACY

A. PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Dewey believed that democracy is the best instrument for achieving the practical goals and interests of citizens, although he was highly critical of liberal representative democracy. Democracy is the correct system because it is the „embodiment of the moral ideal of a good which consists in the development of all the social capacities of every individual” (Dewey 1918). As we will see through the work, democracy is an instrument for governing first-order commons, but it is also a process where second-order commons are acquired, which citizens need for successful governance. For Dewey, real democracy is „a joint exercise of practical intelligence by citizens at large, in interaction with their representatives and other state officials. It is cooperative social experimentation” (Anderson 2006).

Criticizing the aristocracy present in representative democracy, embodied by the discourse on the supremacy of experts and the uninformed public (Lipmann 2010), Dewey argued in favor of participatory models of democracy that horizontalize decision-making power claiming that citizens have contextual and social intelligence that experts often lack, and which can be crucial in structuring community problems and formulating adequate policies (Shook 2013).

By this, Dewey certainly does not exclude experts and their knowledge from the decision-making process but emphasizes the importance of dispersing decision-making power to the citizens themselves because there is no strong enough justification to exclude or limit citizens in the process of policy formation. When he talks about the importance of including citizens' public discussion in the work of the bureaucracy, Dewey insists that “[n]o government by experts in which the masses do not have a chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few. And the enlightenment must proceed in a way which forces the administrative specialist to take account of the needs.” (Emerson 2019, 94; Dewey 2012, 208).

That is why Dewey introduces the notion of public deliberation as one of the models of citizen involvement in decision-making (Shook 2013). Dewey cites inquiry as the main mode of citizen participation, whose form has its roots in the experimental model of the natural sciences and consists of several steps: identifying the problem; formation of a hypothesis (proposal of some policy); discussion of the implications of the hypothesis; and testing the hypothesis itself, that is, the solution (Ralston 2010). This framework can be applied to the case of a certain endangered commons, for example, the construction of mini-hydroelectric power plants and endangering the mountain rivers and the living world in and

around them. Once the citizens become aware of the problem⁷, they could form citizen assemblies or forums where certain solutions and the implications of those solutions are discussed, then as a result of the discussion a policy proposal is formulated that should make the endangered commons sustainable, and finally, it is further tested in reality. The proposed solution is constantly subject to revision and at no point does it become permanent and irrefutable. These types of assemblies are irresistibly reminiscent of deliberative assemblies that are part of the practice of deliberative democracy, precisely for this reason many theorists considered Dewey a predecessor of this democracy current (Dryzek 2000; Habermas 1996). Dewey viewed such assemblies of citizens as partners of the bureaucracy, whose input should ensure the better formulation of policies that benefit those affected by it. Like some other American progressives of that time, such as Marry Follett, he believed that the state does not have exclusive legitimacy over the making and implementation of community political decisions, but also that such democratic forums of citizens can be a legitimate source of social action (Emerson 2019). For Dewey, such citizen forums represent an instrument through which decisions are reached that are not a mere sum of individual preferences, but the product of substantive communication among community members through appreciation of the life experiences and practices of participating individuals. Consensus is not the primary focus for Dewey, unlike for the theorists of deliberative democracy, but the quality of the discussion itself (Pappas 2012). Dewey puts ownership of deliberation to the citizens, that is, members of the community (Jackson 2019). In his theory, he uses communication instead of deliberation with the aim to highlight community ownership (communication=community).

It is interesting to notice that Deweyan pragmatists perceive deliberation and language as well as civil forums within the community, not only as social phenomena but also as important commons that citizens possess and can further develop. They represent good examples of *second-order commons*. That is why one of the most important criteria for evaluating a good decision and public policy is whether it strengthens future discussions and the functioning of such forums (Emerson, 2019).

However, it would be wrong to characterize John Dewey as a forefather of deliberative democracy as some authors say that his political theory is more radical and goes beyond the limitations of deliberative democracy (Jackson 2019). In fact, if we were to shape the way of governing the commons according to Dewey's principles, deliberative democracy would not be sufficient to remove all non-democratic decision-making elements.

7 It should be stressed that often it is very difficult for people to recognize that they have common problems, especially in the state of oppression. See: Boltanski 2011.

There are three points of criticism of deliberative democracy from the point of view of Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism:

1. Existence of some already determined goal or desired outcomes of deliberation.
2. Problematizing the insistence on the rationality of the arguments themselves within the discussion.
3. Ignoring the social context and injustice within which the deliberation takes place. (Pappas 2012).

Deliberative democracy sets before itself some desirable goals as outcomes of deliberation (Talisso 2005), which Dewey sees as pre-deliberative limitations of citizens within the discussion process. He emphasizes the quality of deliberation that is as burdenless as possible by pre-set normative restrictions and expectations. The assumption is that citizens in open communication will reach a solution that is in line with their daily practices and interests (which for Dewey are inextricably linked to the interests of the community), whatever that solution may be. This attitude of Dewey's is not so problematic when we consider the discussion or forum itself as a commons that we must nurture and improve, however, it becomes extremely problematic for us when we want to use deliberation as an instrument to achieve the best solution for the largest number of users of a certain commons, i.e. when we want to shape the sustainable governing mechanism of the community's commons through that process. Freeing the deliberative process of any normative expectations other than the inherent value of the deliberation itself will not necessarily lead to outcomes that lead to sustainable governance of the commons. Nevertheless, despite the low threshold of normative requirements, Dewey believed that there are illegitimate preferences and arguments that must be filtered during the discussion, such as those that call for the reduction of the rights of other individuals or groups, attitudes and arguments that exude racism and discrimination for example (Shook 2013).

Another criticism concerns the insistence of certain authors that deliberation itself is a process in which rational arguments are exchanged and where the strength of the argument is measured solely by how rationally justified the argument is (Benhabib 1996; Dryzek 2000). Emotions are left aside here, but so are many other elements of our experience such as telling stories and rhetorical performances. Here Dewey is following in the footsteps of some authors of post-structuralist feminism such as Iris Marion Young, who criticizes the exclusion and ignoring of everything that is not rationally argued (Young 1990; Pappas 2012). The inclusion of emotions, but also elements such as storytelling, which are an important part of the experience of both the community and individuals, is the only way to the authentic involvement of the community and citizens in the

decision-making process. If we take as an example a deliberative forum that discusses further governance of the city park (urban commons), arguments that come from emotional attachment and fond memories in favor of not disturbing the existing appearance of the park, must be equally taken into account as those arguments that speak in favor of the commercialization of certain objects within the park, which consist of statistical data about the income that such commercialization brings to the community. Deliberation in this sense would be authentic and would not close the door to the symbolic performances of citizens, but would follow the experience and way of communication of the community in which it takes place.

Finally, Dewey's third objection to the theory of deliberative democracy concerns the ignoring of the wider social context and the injustice that is present. Certain theorists of deliberative democracy believe that almost any asymmetry of power, but also disparities in human capital (education, self-confidence, debating skills) can be reduced within deliberative forums (Emerson 2019)⁸. However, Dewey, following in the footsteps of Hegel, insists on the importance of rights that empower⁹, which start from the existence of social inequality and injustice, expand the circle of positive freedom and enable the individual to develop and improve his/her skills in order to participate in a more equal way in social and political life (Shook 2013). Economic inequality often goes hand in hand with other forms of domination such as political or class domination. That is why we have to introduce the notion of domination into the discussion which is "characterized by its capacity to restrict, in more or less significant proportions, the field of critique or (which in practice comes down to the same thing) deprive it of any purchase on reality" (Boltanski 2011, 117). For example, some post-communist countries experienced a mix of economic and political inequalities that prevented the citizens from articulating legitimate political interests. This was the case with competitive authoritarian regimes in which "formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy." (Levitsky and Way 2002, 52). Inequality, in fact, can be seen as a form of structural violence, where violence is perceived as any sort of limitation that could have been avoided. Such violence often is indirect,

8 Theorist of solidaristic grounded normative theory would support this notion, as they criticized theorists of deliberative democracy for neglecting and understating the importance of inequality and discrimination. For more see: Ackerly 2008; Forman 2018; Johnson 2022.

9 Dewey emphasized that political facts, such as human rights, are not outside of desire and judgement of the citizens (Dewey 1946). This means that right such as the ones of empowerment are highly dependent on social context, they are not abstract and unchangeable.

subtle and without a clear source (Galtung 1969). These various forms of inequality and domination need to be overcome so that equitable deliberation is made possible.

Social reforms aimed at reducing structural inequality are a process closely related to any type of citizen consultation and deliberation¹⁰ because they have an impact on the ability of citizens to participate equally and represent their interests. As we will see in the next section, public deliberation is not the only governance mechanism employed, but also some other decision-making methods.

B. DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTALISM

In “Public and its problems” Dewey argues that “industry and inventions in technology, for example, create means which alter the modes of associated behavior and which radically change the quantity, character and place of impact of their indirect consequences” (Dewey 1946, 31). We could argue that these changes create new forms of association, new commons and interest, which in order to articulate themselves need to “break existing political forms” (Dewey 1946, 31).

Considering the constant changes and different situations in which the community or commons find themselves, one governance system cannot be applicable and adequate forever and everywhere. That is why some authors state that Dewey’s radical democracy far exceeds the notion of deliberative democracy, although deliberation still constitutes one of its most important aspects (Jackson 2014; Sabel 2012). For Dewey, democracy is „the personal way of life of individuals that signifies the constant possession and expression of attitudes, the formation of personal character, and the determination of desires and purposes in all areas of life” (Dewey 1993). Dewey approaches the concept of democracy holistically because true democracy is one that exists in all spheres of society, even in non-political institutions such as business organizations. On the one hand, practicing democracy in non-political spheres of life contributes to the building of social capital that is important for political participation, on the other, outcomes that arise in non-political spheres of life, such as in the workplace, also affect the political sphere (Jackson 2014). Citizens of a community will have a hard time developing the skills needed for participation and deliberation in the process of governing the commons if they do not have the opportunity to develop democratic skills and internalize democratic values in other spheres of life. As democracy is a social and relational phenomenon, it is very important to democratize all spheres of life, not

¹⁰ But also to any other governing mechanism, for example agile governance which will be introduced later on.

only economic and political but also those more personal spheres of life that can be fertile ground for the development of a reflective and participatory political culture, i.e. a democratic way of life, which is why he emphasizes the role of the family or the church in the formation of individuals (Emerson 2019). In this sense, democratic life itself, according to Dewey's understanding, is a form of the commons that is vital for both functional democracy (second-order) and just and effective governance of the first-order commons.

Although this perspective has certain logic from the point of view of Dewey's philosophy, it is also very problematic because often the reason for citizens' participation in the governing of the commons is that they make a certain commons accessible and sustainable, and not in order to exclusively develop their skills for democratic life. In reality, they are often secondary, although undoubtedly important.

The extent to which Dewey thought that non-political and political spheres are connected is shown by the fact that, within the concept of democratic experimentalism, he looked for a model of good governance in the production method of some industry sector organizations (Sabel 2012). He noticed that there could be some lessons learned from the production process and transferred into the governance. Namely, every problem or challenge in a production led to a deep examination of the root of the problem and quick adaptation to the new situation, therefore, as long as the hypothesis, or parts of the hypothesis, worked, it was applied. However, constant monitoring makes it possible to spot problems, and inquiry leads to changing problematic parts and adapting the process of production. Today, in management theory, such a system is the closest to what we call agile management, and in the political sphere agile governance. If we apply this mechanism to the governance of the commons, we arrive at a model that, in addition to being flexible and adaptable to circumstances, is not burdened or defined by any institution, value or pattern of behavior that proves inadequate during testing. Considering that we have a growing number of new forms of commons with different characteristics (some are exhaustible, while some spread with greater use, for example) it is natural to assume that in every situation one model will not be equally good and effective. That is why it is necessary to apply different democratic mechanisms in different situations. No mechanism, whether we are talking about participatory, deliberative or agonistic democracy, will not be used if the inquiry by citizens and the monitoring of the results show that they are inadequate. Constant changes require constant innovation of governance institutions (Sabel 2012). Thus, Dewey saw protest politics as a form of participatory democracy, when deliberation was not sufficient or possible, which he showed when he participated in marches for African-American and

women's rights (Shook 2013). Protest politics could serve as an extra-institutional democratic mechanism of governance by citizens when deliberative democracy is not feasible, or as a supplement to deliberative institutions. A deliberative governance mechanism will be adequate where citizens have time to decide through discussion on a sustainable solution for the use of the commons, but where the commons are threatened and facing rapid disappearance, protest politics will be a more useful and practical democratic mechanism¹¹. Protest politics may pave the way for the establishment of a deliberative mechanism, but it itself represents an institution of participatory democracy available to affected citizens. The purpose is to constantly innovate political decision-making institutions and combine them according to the needs that the context requires. The process itself will not be linear and will have its ups and downs, but could eventually lead to a better-adjusted governing system than what could have been achieved with traditional policy-making.

In this section, I presented some of the models of democratic experimentalism offered by Dewey: industrial democracy representing employee participation, then agile management mechanism, and finally, protest politics as a form of citizen participation. However, in addition to these mechanisms, democratic experimentalism also includes various forms of civil disobedience, union and labor strikes, and any form of class struggle¹² (Festenstein 2019).

IS AGILE GOVERNANCE COMPATIBLE WITH DEWEY?

Dewey's non-separating concept of governance in the political sphere from that in the economic or private one led some authors to look for the principles of governance in organizations that were non-political in nature. Thus relying on post-bureaucratic organizations that include the industrial sector concept of lean and agile management is introduced as a possible adapted solution for public governance (Sabel and Simon 2017). Sabel and Simon state the following as the main principles of adapted lean management:

1. *Rolling rule regime* where although there are main guidelines and rules, the agents¹³ who implement the governance can deviate from them when such a deviation would lead to more optimal outcomes.

11 Some authors have argued that deliberative democracy can be mixed with other participative mechanisms, and that one does not necessarily exclude the other (Bohman 1996; della Porta 2013; Elstub 2018).

12 Participative workplace policies include spreading the ownership on workers and economic bicameralism. For more see: Landemore and Ferreras 2015.

13 Under agent we mean bureaucrats and citizens.

Of course, the control exists and a clear and justified explanation from the agents is needed as to why the rules were deviated from.

2. *Root-cause analysis* serves to clearly and accurately identify errors in governance and existing rules. This requires constant monitoring and deep analysis of the problem.
3. *Peer review*, also represents a type of monitoring where those who are on the frontline have a major role in examining formulated governance policies, unlike traditional bureaucracy where that role is performed by those who are higher in the hierarchy. Here we return to Dewey's insistence on the contextual knowledge held by those closest to the implementation of governance policies, as well as those affected by it.
4. Finally, there is *performance measurement*, which serves as an instrument for monitoring the effectiveness of governance policies and monitors not only the level of compliance with the rules of the regime, but also the level of achieved goals (Sabel and Simon 2017).

Following these rules leads to a governance regime that is much more ready for changes in the needs of citizens, as well as the level of resources or the state of the commons, compared to the traditional model of bureaucracy and governance.

Alongside with the use of some postulates of lean management, the focus is on agile governance as a mechanism that largely corresponds to John Dewey's philosophy. What this type of governance should bring is „the ability of human societies to sense, adapt and respond rapidly and sustainably to changes in its environment, by means of the coordinated combination of agile and lean capabilities with governance capabilities” (Luna et al 2016). Accordingly, agile governance is a model that is responsive to changes and easily adapts to them (Mergel, Ganapati and Whitford 2020). It is slowly finding wider use in administration, however, it is mainly applied in software project management. Opposite to it is the traditional governance model in the bureaucracy, the waterfall model (Whitford 2020), which is characterized by rigidity, hierarchy and routinized sequences in the application and formulation of public policy. Agile management, on the other hand, insists on adapting to the changes in the needs of end-users, which is why ethnographic methods are often employed in examining needs and obtaining information. However, if we introduce deliberation as one of the bases of information gathering, but also of governance, ethnographic methods become, if not superfluous, then definitely a secondary instrument of agile governance. Agile management has 12 of its main principles, which, although intended primarily for private sector organizations, still can find some application in public governance. I reformulated those 12 principles so that they fit the needs

of public governance, and narrowed them down a bit to 10, thus we came to the following principles:

1. Seek to fulfil the citizen's needs... Continuously improve service.
2. Respond to the demand for changes.
3. Shorten the timescale for the delivery... Deliver changes frequently.
4. Bureaucrats should work hand in hand with end users/citizens.
5. Emphasize face-to-face conversation between the policy design team and the broader public.
6. Sustainable development is the goal. All involved parties should be able to maintain a constant pace of engagement.
7. Continuously focus on technical quality and good design.
8. Emphasize simplicity.
9. Self-organization in teams improves design and production.
10. Regularly reflect on how to improve this process. (Beck et al. 2001).

In addition, agile governance insists not only on efficiency through rapid adaptation, but also on inclusiveness and equality of participation in the governance process (Mergel, Ganapati and Whitford 2020), thus responding to the two main elements of good governance according to Dewey, constant innovation and equality of participation.

Still, there is a need to deal more with the issues of equal participation and domination as we should not be uncritical of the concept of agile governance. Since it comes from the sphere of capitalist production, it is characterized by power inequality and the relation of "monetized servitude" (Vrousalis 2021, 46) stemming from profit orientation. In order to have a more just and equal governance model few elements need to be included. Firstly, there should always be a space for reflective moments by all involved and affected by the governance process of the commons (Boltanski 2011). That means that the community ownership of the commons applies to the governance model as well, in the sense, that they can rethink the way the commons will be governed on an equal basis. Relations of domination would have no place in the process of governance. Secondly, agile governance must be open to adjusting to the new political forms (associations and interests) due to the constant changes (Dewey 1946). Not giving a voice and a way for new political forms to participate in governing the commons represents domination and structural violence. This would not be compatible with the thought of John Dewey. Therefore, governing the commons must contribute to emancipation as the second-order commons.

DEWEY'S CONCEPTUALIZATION
OF THE COMMONS

The rights of emancipation and development have a very important place in Dewey's theory. As we mentioned, the rights of emancipation represent the rights of positive freedom and they are social and inter-relational in the sense that the community should be obliged to enable its members to exercise those rights in order to develop themselves, which, in turn, must not threaten the development of other individuals (Shook 2013). By exercising these rights citizens become more competent and can give better input to the political system and governance in general. The development of the individual represents a commons of the second order with an inherent value, while the rights of emancipation here have an instrumental value, they do not have an immutable form and are not abstract and universal. Dewey himself views them as concepts immersed in a wider social context and created by society itself (Shook 2013). Since human and citizen rights depend on a wider social context, this means that rights as such can be adjusted to the needs and practices of citizens and their communities¹⁴ (Hildebrand 2008). To give an example, this could mean that marginalized communities could have a bigger share of the commons or could be allowed to exploit the commons if they are directly dependent on the given common resource.¹⁵

Cultivating habits for participating in collective decision-making, that is, habits for democratic life is also an important habit of the second-order commons for Dewey (Ralston 2012). The development of such habits and attitudes that favor the participatory model of democracy is achieved through education, the dissemination of pieces of information necessary for decision-making, and finally, through participation itself. Therefore, the enumerated ways of acquiring habits themselves become commons of the second order, which shows the interdependence of different forms of commons and how the deterioration of one can cause danger to other commons. In addition, Dewey believes that "the human ability to formulate and share meanings, is a social affair" (Hildebrand 2008). Ideally, the public should harness cooperative communication and exchange of knowledge through solidarity and participation. In such public citizens are empowered to acquire the necessary knowledge about the issue they

14 Keeping in mind that rights need to empower and emancipate and not be used as a tool for domination.

15 Not giving them preferential access to the common resource could mean their further degradation and even threat to their existence. Of course, there should be a balance between such affirmative actions and sustainability of the commons.

are interested in¹⁶. A great example of what this means in practice gives us David Hildebrand when talking about the trade-off between wanting safe drinking water and lower taxes. By participating in an adequate public, citizens with these preferences will learn of the trade-off between clean water and lower taxes, as in order to get drinking water, taxes for corporations would need to get higher (Hildebrand 2008).

When I considered new forms of commons in order to show the constant development and their emergence, I mentioned Lohmann's inclusion of the NGO sector as one of the forms of commons. Dewey would fully agree with such inclusion because he himself saw the contribution that civil organizations can have to the democratization of society (Festenstein 2019). By participating in the work of such organizations (trade unions, church organizations, civic initiatives, etc.), citizens create democratic habits necessary for more successful participation. Then, Dewey includes a corporate¹⁷ moment in the public discussion where relevant organizations from the civil sector can give their input and contribute to the growth of the quality of deliberation, while in the case of other models of participatory democracy they can contribute to successful social mobilization (in the case of protests or various forms of civil disobedience). According to Dewey, one of the core features of any community is *shared action* (Hildebrand 2008). For a community to exist, it needs to emerge through shared action, meaning that governing the commons as shared action empowers communities (second-order commons)¹⁸.

So far, we have seen how communication, or language, is an important element of Dewey's theory of democracy, and he most often uses the term communication instead of deliberation to emphasize the connection that language has with the community in which it is used (communication – community) (Jackson 2019). As a common language and public discourse are subject to influence and appropriation by the more powerful classes and are inevitably embedded in the relations of power and hierarchy that exist in society (Abend 2008), it is, therefore, important to make the discourse inclusive and democratic. It could be done through an open debate among citizens on the meanings of political terms, the question of political correctness and legitimate political options, because the meaning of important terms and the boundaries of what is allowed and what is not allowed in the discourse must not be determined exclusively by

16 Adequate public serves here as a second-order commons for the dissemination of knowledge (form of new commons).

17 Corporate in terms of including not just individuals, but also various associations of individuals in deliberative process.

18 Besides shared action, key features of a community are shared values and associative nature (Hildebrand 2008).

a small elite. If that is the case, we find structural inequality and violence embodied in the very discourse that is dominant in society, and then also in deliberative forums.

THINGS ARE NOT ALL FINE AND DANDY

Dewey's philosophy and Deweyan's political thought were not without their problems and criticisms. Some authors like C.A. Bowers criticized Dewey and his philosophy for staying silent on the rising environmental problems, presenting Western ethnocentrism as universalism, and having discriminatory remarks towards the indigenous people¹⁹(Bowers 2006). These are indeed troubling remarks that should not be sidelined, however, filtering long-gone authors through today's ethical standards and norms can sometimes be a bit of a slippery slope, mainly because authors, much like other people are products of their time. For example, when it comes to environmental issues, only since the 1960s did they come into the mainstream of political agenda, which is why we could not entirely blame Dewey for not addressing them properly. Still, nothing is stopping us from filtering out problematic elements of his original thought, mainly through Deweyan political thought provided by the likes of the authors cited and mentioned in this paper, for instance²⁰.

In addition, Michael A. Wilkinson claims that Dewey tries to oust the element of *political* from the concept of governance when he introduces the scientific method, thus overlooking the importance of political dominance and inequality (2012). In his words, Dewey relies too much on the liberal notion of the free market of ideas and rejects the notion of revolution, thus further ignoring the power imbalance, political inequality and obstacles towards the new ideas (2012). To some extent, I agree with Wilkinson, but from what was previously written in this paper we can see that the element of *political* has its place in Dewey's theory²¹, on the other hand, it is true that Dewey does not talk in length on how these new mechanisms can come to be, especially if opposed by the positions of power. This needs to be elaborated more in future debates and research.

Finally, I have to point out the possible fallacies of the participatory mechanism mentioned in this paper, as they are not the perfect tools for governing. For instance, Davis A. Super claims that the participatory

19 Bowers here refers to Dewey's characterization of the "savages" as governed by habits instead by intelligence.

20 Many authors when referencing Dewey's work do not do so as part of the historical studies, but more as an interplay in conceptualizing ideas for contemporary use.

21 Let us recall that one of the ways for governance is through participatory mechanisms that include social mobilization such as protests and marches.

approach to antipoverty programs in the US had worse results than the centralized one (2008). This does not mean that centralized mechanisms are better and more efficient than participatory and decentralized ones, but only that sometimes participatory mechanisms can fail, which is something that Dewey was certainly aware of, as we mentioned earlier in the paper. Moreover, even if working properly, there is another problem of eventual participatory saturation by the citizens as we cannot expect them to endure regular and long deliberative and participatory processes (Smith and Setälä 2018).

All in all, Deweyan political philosophy offers us a great starting point in researching citizen-led governance mechanisms and their potential. This means that we need to look for ways to adapt and draw positive lessons from John Dewey in order to apply them to solve the problems of our time.

CONCLUSION: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Throughout this paper, we considered two types of contributions of John Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism to the problem of sustainable and just governance of the commons. The first type of contribution is reflected in the way the commons are governed. As we saw in the chapter dealing with the definition of new commons, constant changes create new forms of commons, the pragmatist position is that the speed of these changes and unexpected outcomes and consequences create the need for innovations in governance methods and mechanisms. Pragmatist anti-fundamentalism criticizes the sacredness of political institutions, governance institutions are especially important for us and emphasizes the need for constant innovation and adaptation not only to changes but also to everyday practices and needs of citizens and the community. Deliberation, i.e. civil assemblies and forums, appears as one mechanism of innovative governance of the commons. In them, citizens can directly participate in the creation of governance plans and public policies concerning the sustainability of the commons through collective discussion. Such discussion includes not only the exchange and collision of rational arguments, but also the exchange and understanding of the experience of others, emotions, but also performance acts such as rhetoric, the idea being that the deliberation itself, as well as the outcome of the deliberation, should be in accordance with the practices²² of the participating citizens. Dewey focuses exclusively on the quality of deliberation and the complete exclusion of desirable outcomes in the deliberative process is problematic because the purpose of any govern-

22 Individual and community practices.

ance mechanism, at least when we talk about the commons, is to lead to sustainability and fair outcomes, the quality of deliberation is there extremely important, but not primary. From the point of view of pragmatism, it would be wrong to highlight deliberation as the only and everywhere applicable governance mechanism, deliberation is just one of the innovative options that correct the negative consequences of ossified representative democracy and economic outcomes on the market. Experimentation is, according to pragmatists, one of the main methods of governance by which we arrive at better-adapted and more adequate institutions, and thus better outcomes. Insisting only on the instruments of deliberative democracy would contradict the pragmatist philosophy because it would shut down the process of examining institutions and constant innovation. Therefore, the instruments of participatory democracy, which are often combined with deliberative democracy, appear as suitable instruments.

Dewey's contribution to the concept of the commons is not only related to the governance of the commons, but also to a further conceptualization of the term. Throughout the paper, the importance of re-conceptualizing the commons through community ownership that escapes the clutches of the market and the state was of utmost importance. This becomes the first and the most important step that gives legitimacy to reclaiming the political aspect of governing the commons within the community.

Throughout his entire political theory, the concept of democratic life, which represents a form of second-order commons associated with the cultivation of civic virtues, habits and attitudes that favor political participation, is carried through. This form of the commons is firmly connected with other forms, such as solidarity and the NGO sector, which are fertile ground for the expansion of the very concept of democratic life in Dewey's sense, which further leads to better governance of the commons. We will easily notice that this also applies to some other commons. For example, if we were to talk about health as a form of the commons, then we could see a connection between health and the preservation of green commons within the city, such as parks that serve for recreation, but also preserve the mental health of users.

As two main contributions of John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, we highlight the agile governance of commons embodied in public deliberations and democratic experimentalism, i.e. the need for innovations in governance to follow constant changes and the emergence of new commons, as well as for the adaptation of governance mechanisms to the characteristics of specific commons through constant monitoring. Another contribution is highlighting the interconnectedness of different forms of commons.

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