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A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT: SUBSTITUTING THE NEOLIBERAL PUBLIC POLICY PARADIGM WITH A PARTICIPATORY PUBLIC POLICY PARADIGM

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Peter Hall introduced the concept of paradigm shifts into the public policy discourse. His account explains the seismic transition the world experienced in the 1980s. With this neoliberal paradigm the former social contract between the public leadership and the people unraveled and the future of humanity has been put at risk. To steer humanity back in the direction of a sustainable future, the author argues for a participatory public policy paradigm instituted as a reinvention of Rousseau's social contract theory with three distinct features that respond to the complexity of life in modern times.

KEYWORDS: Degrowth, equality and sustainability, enlightenment philosophy, neoliberal capitalism, public policy paradigm, social contract.

PUBLIC POLICY PARADIGM

Peter Hall (1993) first introduced the concept of paradigm shifts into public policy discourse by analyzing major transitions in the public policy framework of the United Kingdom when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister from 1979 to 1990. To this end, Hall drew on Thomas Kuhn's work. Kuhn (1970) famously challenged the idea that the history of science is best understood as the gradual accumulation of knowledge and theory. In contrast, Kuhn argued that this process was periodically interrupted by epistemological revolutions. In periods of transition, epistemic anomalies unexplainable within the current theory would intensify and lead to the creation of a new paradigm. As a result of Kuhn's work, a paradigm shift in science was defined as a fundamental shift in the basic concepts and experimental practices of science.

Hall (1993) used the paradigm shift concept to suggest that radical changes in public policy paradigms have four characteristics. First, the change in policy is shaped by a corresponding change in the underlying worldview. In the case of the United Kingdom, the shift pointed toward neoliberalism. Second, Hall suggested that public policy paradigm shifts affect whole public policy

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frameworks and not just some part of them. Third, he concluded that newly adopted public policy paradigms have to be internally consistent. Fourth, he noted that the new paradigm is incommensurable with the old one (Princen & 't Hart, 2014).

A comprehensiveness transition in public policy is exactly what Hall (1993) observed in the United Kingdom. For example, he noted how the neoliberal public policy paradigm simultaneously entailed a change in policy goals (from social to monetary), in the instrumental setting (which became predominantly budgetary and business oriented), and in related policy instrumentation. Consequently, the whole public domain “surrendered” to the axiology and ontology of neoliberalism and neoliberal economic theory. The shift represented total acceptance to the idea of the free market as the savior of progress (Achterhuis, 2010). Submission to this mode of market fundamentalism explains the shifts seen in many societies of this period—first in Chile, then in the United Kingdom, then in the United States of America (Princen & 't Hart, 2014), and later in the rest of the world. To understand why this transition occurred, we have to go back to the age of the Enlightenment, specifically to France and England, when the seeds were sown for both the pre-1980s public policy paradigm, which was based on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s social contract theory, and the post-1980s neoliberal public policy paradigm.

THE PLURALIST INFLUENCE OF ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHERS

Enlightenment philosophers have had a profound impact on the development of our world order and more recently on the public policies of many Western countries. Rousseau is a shining example of an Enlightenment philosopher. With his famed book *Du Contrat Social: Ou Principes du Droit Politique*, first published in France in 1762 (Rousseau, 1999), Rousseau made a unique contribution to political philosophy by placing the sovereignty of the people at the center of the political system. In his book, Rousseau argued against the divine right of monarchy and its absolute power, an argument that inspired political reforms in Europe, and in France in particular. Rousseau critiqued the institution of private property and held a visionary view of education. Education, Rousseau argued, should teach students how to live righteously. Rousseau’s plea for equality has had a great influence on socialist theory, social democracy, socialist political movements, the creation of the welfare state, and modern education (Betts, 1999).

During the same period, other Enlightenment philosophers were developing contrasting ideas across the channel in England, philosophers who provided the epistemological backing for classical economics. The liberal worldview of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and Adam Smith presupposed that liberty is in essence the right of self-determination of one’s own property (Rifkin, 2014). As a result, property was defined as an absolute right, and rights were defined as a form of property. This ontological view of rights

and property forever changed the mindset of the people in power in Europe (Graeber, 2011).

In later generations, these ideas legitimized the unrelenting expansion of capitalist powers and the exploitation of nature and labor, particularly in the Global South (Arrighi, 2010; Wallerstein, 1974). Private property, profit, the invisible hand of markets, and competition and growth became the higher social objectives of classical economics and the top priority of businesses and public leaders. Capitalist leaders engaged in exploitative behavior, adopting what Val Plumwood (2002) called a male-coded rationality and what Rianne Eisler (1988) defined as the domination model of social relations. In these countries today, economic growth parameters still permeate all aspects of life and are engrained in the public policies of most capitalist nation-states (Wallenborn, 2008).

The disparity between the English philosophers Hobbes, Hume, and Smith and the French Rousseau is striking. As Elken Meiskins Wood (1997) remarked,

Here in England, the characteristic ideology that set it apart from other European cultures is above all the ideology of “improvement”: not the Enlightenment idea of the improvement of humanity, but the improvement of property, the ethic—and indeed the science—of productivity and profit, the commitment to increasing the productivity of labor, the ethic of enclosure and dispossession. (p. 548)

To better understand the differences between England and France, in the next section I describe Rousseau’s social contract theory in more detail.

ROUSSEAU’S SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

From its inception, an ideology that emphasized the improvement of property, productivity, and profit contributed to the harsh social milieu of Europe in the 15th–18th centuries, with its despot kings, dukes, princes, and all-powerful churches; and its lack of free press, fragile nation-states, and absence of a proper education system (Braudel, 1984). In those days, the state did not have any social provisions for the common people. They had to take care of themselves. Charity was a scarce and private initiative and only existed in a few wealthy cities. Although a general expression in those days was, “He that giveth to the poor shall not lack,” the mere pittance some poor people got was handed out mostly to keep the mobs quiet (Grell & Cunningham, 1996).

Rousseau, on the other hand, believed that people were destined to be more than a mere product of their harsh social environments, where only the fittest survived. Unlike the English philosophers Locke and Hobbes, Rousseau thought that humans were born with a good nature and were generally peace loving, social creatures (Geerlof, 2011). According to Rousseau, humans desired to be treated as equals among others, a view that presupposed the love of oneself and the love of others. Loving oneself at the expense of others,

Rousseau argued, is an acquired and unnatural behavior (Cole, 2015). Along these lines, Rousseau asked how the potential for good that each individual possessed can be preserved and strengthened (Betts, 1999).

Rousseau's answer to this question was to place the people at the heart of the political system and to validate their natural attitudes. This is what he called the general will, *La Volonté Générale*. For Rousseau, the general will must be translated into a contract wherein the individual will is aggregated into a voluntary societal agreement. This social contract, Rousseau suggested, should be the basis of the political system. At the same time, Rousseau acknowledged that there is a delicate relationship between individual freedom and the general will. Humans are part of a society because it is in their interest to be so, and despite the general will citizens should remain individuals with their own personal wills and should be free to associate with one another in groups of their choosing, in what Rousseau labeled "partial or particular societies wills" (Rousseau, 1999, p. 66–67). He continued, "What man loses by the social contract is his natural freedom and an unlimited right to do anything which he is tempted and can obtain; what he gains is civil freedom" (Rousseau, 1999, p. 59).

On this view, only the moderate possessions of the working person deserve protection, not the unlimited property rights of the capitalist elite, because they ultimately become a source of oppression and exploitation. Private property can spoil "the innate goodness" in all of us (Rousseau, 2015). For these reasons, Rousseau (2015) recognized that the will of the majority is not always correct, and he was therefore not an advocate for representative governments. He believed in the merits of participatory democracy, which he felt could only function on the scale of a city, like his hometown, Geneva.

In his day, there were simply no best practices for a representative democracy. From a modern point of view, his position on democracy may seem limited. However, he saw it as the prerogative of government to secure freedom, equality, and justice for all. Society, then, stems from an agreement between the individuals composing it, and it is the responsibility of the elite to facilitate and strengthen those ties. On this view, the state is defined not by an administrative agreement, or by its military and policing power, but by the supportive nature of the general will of its members (Cole, 2015).

Tellingly, Rousseau was an advocate for an active role of the state in governing society. In his writing on the social contract, on inequality, and on political economy, Rousseau's thinking was profoundly political in the modern sense of the word. The nation-state should be seen from the perspective of the wellbeing of all its members (Rousseau, 2015). In modern terms, Rousseau viewed the state as the generator and public financier of social provisions, not as the sole conditioner for the prosperity of the business world. He discouraged the idea of placing economic interests at the center of government, and he advocated that human interests be the backbone of public policy programs. Taxation, he believed, should target only those who are eligible to pay, and

particular luxuries should have an additional tax (Cole, 2015). In his work, Rousseau argued that democracy is dependent on equality, and held that a true democracy cannot exist without:

a considerable degree in equality in rank and fortune, without which equality in rights and power cannot last long. ... For luxury either derives from wealth, or makes it necessary; it corrupts both rich and poor at once, one through possession, the other through covetousness; it puts the country on sale to vanity and soft living; it deprives the state of all its citizens, making each of them subject to the other, and all of them to public opinion. (Rousseau, 1999, p. 101)

Rousseau wrote this provocative analysis in 18th-century France, where most people lived off the land. In a sense, he foresaw what would happen centuries later through the advent of neoliberal capitalism.

Rousseau's philosophy was also hugely important for the emergence of democratic Western societies. His social contract theory underpinned the public policy frameworks of these democracies, which aimed to guarantee equality between citizens by implementing well-designed policy interventions. His philosophy has resonated throughout the 20th century in, for example, the emergence of the welfare state and the publicly financed social provisions of Western democracies, which are designed to create conditions of equality. These conditions are nowadays expressed as

(1) equal universal suffrage—that is extension of the right to vote to everyone as a completion of their political freedom; (2) social equality—understood as equality of status and of consideration, thus implying that class and wealth distinctions carry no distinction; and (3) equality of opportunity. ... The latter can be further subdivided into (1) equal access, (2) equal start, and (3) economic sameness—the same wealth to all. (Sartori, 1987, pp. 343–345)

Having reviewed the main principals of Rousseau's social contract theory, I now describe the historical context and basis for neoliberal approaches to government and economics.

THE EMANATION OF NEOLIBERAL PUBLIC POLICIES

The dominant socioeconomic approaches to public policy in the period preceding the 1980s were based on John Maynard Keynes's (1997) work *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Keynesian theory challenges the idea of the invisible hand of classical economics. Keynes argued that such mechanisms do not operate in a self-correcting manner at all, as demonstrated by the fact that unregulated markets frequently cause severe economic depressions (Polanyi, 2001). Keynesian theory, like Rousseau's social contract theory, supports the decisive role of the state and other stakeholders, such as labor unions, as stabilizers and initiators of socioeconomic and institutional innovation (Kotz, 2015).

Until the 1980s, most governments in Western democracies negotiated contractual deals in consultation with labor unions, employment organizations, and

civil organizations on issues like terms of employment, fringe benefits, employment guarantees, and governmental social provisions for working parents, disabled workers, immigrants, and the unemployed. These “labor paragraphs” became an important element of the social contract between the nation-state, the people, and “regulated” capitalism. The social contracts between the public leadership of nation-states and their constituents guaranteed the stability of many Western societies for decades. Much of the 20th century can be typified as an era where the logic of equality prevailed in the public policy discourse by “concerted efforts to bring the poor and the marginalized into the political and economic mainstream” (Sassen, 2014, p. 212).

However, major shifts in the public policy frameworks of many governments emerged in the 1980s, initiated by politicians, including Augusto Pinochet in Chile, Margaret Thatcher in Britain, and Ronald Reagan in the United States. From this period forward a neoliberal tsunami surged over the world (Achterhuis, 2010). Many journalists depicted the elections of these politicians as the starting point of neoliberal capitalism, coining terms like “Reaganomics” in the United States of America and “Thatcherism” in the United Kingdom, but the evidence supports a different interpretation.

Already in the early 1970s, neoliberal ideas emerged in academic circles that coincided with a shift in the interests of big business and with the reinvention of social conservatism (Graeber, 2011; Kotz, 2015; Versluis, 2006). In the late 1970s, this trilogy of movements paved the way for a rapid shift in economic and financial policies, which nowadays are known as neoliberal public policies. A combination of high levels of inflation and unemployment, along with seemingly untamable and growing public deficits, created the conditions for these policies and gave neoliberal gurus like Ayn Rand (and her disciple Alan Greenspan), Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman a red carpet welcome in the world of public policy. Keynesian policy practices fell into disgrace.

In the United States, Ayn Rand proved to be a very influential philosopher. Although hardly known in Europe, her ideas spread through a number of best-sellers, among them the capitalist utopia *Atlas Shrugged*. From the perspective of rational self-interest, she declared selfishness a virtue. She was also a believer in the self-correcting forces of the market. Through her personality and her work, she strongly influenced high-ranking politicians and members of the U.S. government and central banks, among them Alan Greenspan (Achterhuis, 2010).

In Europe, the economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek’s *laissez-faire* economics had a major impact on the development of public policy convictions, in particular those of his friend Margaret Thatcher (Achterhuis, 2010). Through the neoliberal policy frameworks of these politicians, the era of regulated capitalism and the European welfare state had come to a close. Neoliberal capitalism became the hallmark of public policy frameworks and was implemented as a shock doctrine (Klein, 2007). Consequently, a major public policy paradigm shift occurred (Hall, 1993).

Its economic counterpart, neoliberal economic theory, became known under several epistemological denominations, for instance: Bruce Bartlett’s

supply-side economics, Milton Friedman's monetarism, and the rational expectation theory that still underpins many contemporary macroeconomic planning models (Lipsey & Steiner, 1981). Neoliberal economic theory can be regarded as a specific interpretation of the school of thought of the philosopher Adam Smith (2003). The theory and its ensuing public policy frameworks are grounded on a strict individualistic conception of society. Human welfare is perceived as dependent on an unrestricted idea of individual freedom with the rationality of the market as the primer of individual choice (Kotz, 2015).

According to this philosophy, economic growth equals a flourishing society, and the market and consumerism are the main providers of growth and happiness. On this view, socioeconomic interventions should be limited as much as possible because a modern economy cannot coexist with market-inhibiting forces like a strong government and an organized working class (Kotz, 2015). This ideology meant the end of the social contract as the anchor of public policy and transformed the view of society as an interdependent collective of human beings.

Politicians that embraced the neoliberal policy paradigm argued that the design principles of the stock market should enter other realms, including those of higher education, social provisions, and public transportation. They promised that the forces of the market would result in more efficiency, and its greater transparency would guarantee a higher quality of public services (Kotz, 2015). The idea was that business is more transparent, effective, efficient, and trustworthy than government, which gave fuel to the view that the public sector should be organized as a business, as reflected in trendy terms like "new public management" (Dror, 2002). New public management reflects a high trust in the market and in private business methods (Hood, 1995). It is at odds with Rousseau's social contract theory. Consequentially, governments gave the corporate world the maximum space available to become a key player in the public sector (Barber, 2004; Mason, 2015). As a result, many public services were subjected to market forces, the lines between public and private were redrawn, and the very distinction between them slowly hybridized (in 't Veld, 1997).

THE UNRAVELING OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

According to Kotz (2015), the neoliberal public policy agenda consists of a package of policy instruments, including

- (1) the renunciation of Keynesian-inspired government demand management policy;
- (2) deregulation of basic industries, such as public transportation, public utilities, and the telephone companies;
- (3) deregulation of the financial sector;
- (4) weakening of environmental, consumer product safety, and job safety regulation;
- (5) reduction of the enforcement of anti-trust laws;
- (6) privatization or contracting out of public functions;
- (7) elimination of or cutbacks in social welfare programs; and
- (8) enactment of tax cuts for business and wealthy households. (p. 14)

All these measures aim to encourage investments, create jobs, and reward work efforts that, according to the public leaders who embraced the neoliberal public policy paradigm, should trickle down to ordinary people.

However, the disconcerting socioeconomic reality is a growing gap between profits and wages. Simultaneously, a rapidly rising share of income is going to the rich and does not at all trickle down to the common people, as neoliberal leaders have promised for decades. As a result, consumer spending has become progressively financed by debt (Kunkel, 2014). As David Loy (2002) argued, the dismantled European welfare system and the social provisions of other Western democracies, which once guaranteed affordable education, public transportation, healthcare, and welfare provisions for the most vulnerable, have left the fate of ordinary people living a decent life in the hands of the religion of the market, with the stock market as its temple.

These people are the “99 percent” of the world population, or “the have nots” as David Graeber (2013) called them. Indeed, Oxfam (2017), the worldwide nonprofit organization designed to combat poverty, reported that in 2017 as few as eight men owned as much wealth as half of the poorest segment of all humanity. In sum, a network of transnational corporations have used the process of deregulation and globalization to get a firm grip on the world economy and the global consumer market (Graeber, 2013). As a result, the concentration of decision-making power is now in the hands of the “happy few” (Shiva, 2015). These people form an elite class and limit their interactions to like-minded people, or “insiders,” as Varoufakis (2017, p. 22) calls them. Among them are the public and business leaders who are driven by the desire to preserve their wealth and power and whose interests are grounded in the perpetuation of the neoliberal system. A concentration of economic powers in a few vertically integrated companies now dominate their respective sectors, are transnational in scope, and are located in a select number of metropolitan cities (Florida, 2017). These developments have resulted in a weakening influence of national governments (Sassen, 2014).

This increasing concentration of wealth, income, and influence has undermined equality of opportunity on multiple levels. On an individual level, it has led to the expropriation of opportunity, particularly for the underprivileged and the people in the Global South (Sassen, 2014). On a group level, socioeconomic inequality decreases the stability of society (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), a risky situation identical to the decade prior to the Second World War (Polanyi, 2001).

Nature is also paying the price for the behaviors of these transnational companies and the small group of neoliberal capitalists who run them and are supported in their endeavors by the neoliberal policies of Western governments. Since the 1980s, neoliberal capitalists have been on a global mission to subsume the world economy under their rule by consuming nonrenewable natural resources and cheap labor at an unprecedented pace and by economizing the reciprocal, or household, economy (Moore, 2015). This type of globalization increases long-distance trade and enhances the wasteful nature of the capitalist

production system, which is sustained by overconsumption in the rich world and is driven by the state-induced promotion of consumerism. These are the main drivers of environmental degradation (Harvey, 2014; Shiva, 2015).

By now, approximately 60% of Earth's ecosystems are degraded and/or are used unsustainably (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). These developments translate into the crossing of crucial planetary ecological boundaries, of which climate change and the loss of biodiversity are foremost dangers to the future of humanity, since both will force the Earth system into a new unpredictable state (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015; Wells, 2013).

Since the 1980s, an overall decline in the quality of democracy has also been reported (Bochsler & Merkel, 2017). Representative democracy and the media have been increasingly colonized by the ruling business and public elite. Voting rights are progressively abused and lower-class participation has been limited (Kovel, 2007). The growing influence of corporate globalization on the economy and politics gives the people a feeling of not being represented and of not being able to govern their own lives, creating a mounting sense of apathy and anxiety among the populace (Bookchin, 2015; Graeber, 2015). Further, trust in public leadership is declining and belief in the effectiveness of national democratic governments is rescinding (Fao & Mounk, 2016; Twenge, Campbell, & Carter, 2014). A growing number of people doubt the capacity of public leadership to govern in the interests of ordinary people (Dror, 2002).

The capacity of our public leaders to govern is being challenged by groups of people from all over the world partaking in new social movements. These groups defy the idea of production for consumption and call for a socially just and ecologically sustainable society (Kallis, 2018; Klein, 2014; Rifkin, 2011, 2014). These movements include indigenous resistance groups; eco-feminists; refugees from Africa and the Middle East who enter Europe; black adolescents in U.S. cities; Yellow Jackets in Paris; Occupiers on Wall Street; demonstrators at Gezi Park in Istanbul; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender protesters in Jakarta.

These groups are on the frontline of an unfolding revolutionary phenomenon whose underlying theme centers on countering the annexation of society by the neoliberal elite, and on vying for a new paradigm grounded in a participatory, inclusive, socially just, and sustainable worldview (Chomsky, 1999, 2010; Graeber, 2015; Harvey, 2010; Rifkin, 2014). Even the message of many religious fundamentalists—however much one may disagree with their specific diagnosis and solutions—speaks to the ills of neoliberal society and underlines the inability of public leadership to develop and implement an invigorating global solidarity around core public and spiritual values (Huntington, 2011; Kepel, 2007; Tuğal, 2016).

In short, it is my contention that public leadership and the world as a whole is on the wrong track. The time has come to replace the neoliberal public policy paradigm, as these developments signify wicked and interrelated problems that cannot be solved with public policies anchored on neoliberal ideas. An alternative public policy paradigm needs to be envisioned, developed, and visionary social contract theory can be the anchor of this new social contract.

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

Echoing Hall (1993), I suggest that a novel public policy paradigm has to be grounded in a new worldview, on a consistent policy program, and on related policy instrumentation. To turn the table and counteract the havoc neoliberal public policies have caused, future public policies have to be decolonized and separated from neoliberal thought and its overarching economic worldview. Its content and process of emergence is by definition time–space contingent and needs specification due to the difference in institutional and societal context of each nation-state.

The new social contract should be the outcome of a co-creative process between the political and administrative leadership, and the people, civic institutions, and their leadership. A starting point of this process must be the political leader's vow to the people and the Earth to uphold the values of democracy as an invitation for the people to join in the process of transition toward a sustainable future. In the sense that it is organized around the public interest, the new social contract can be considered a reinvention of Rousseau's social contract, but it also has a few contemporary features that reflect the complexity of our times. The first of these is a different worldview.

THE PARTICIPATORY WORLDVIEW

Human existence and its future is fundamentally relational. Therefore, the ontology of the new social contract should be based on a reappraisal of our spiritual heritage and on the interconnectedness among humans, nature, and the cosmos. In the social sciences, the participatory paradigm represents this worldview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001). This paradigm asserts that everything in the cosmos, including human beings, is a projection of the whole and vice versa (Heron, 1992, 1998). On a human level, this view presupposes an active participation through encounters and dialog in a shared culture founded on an inclusive and democratized world grounded on core human and spiritual values (Kelly, 2010). On this view, it is inaccurate to picture individual humans as independent from one another and the Earth, and it is misguided to place some individuals over others, as is done in the economized reality of the current world order.

The participatory worldview assumes personal wholeness on individual, organizational, and social levels. In this regard, it embraces John Dewey's notion of pragmatism. For Dewey, the world cannot be understood from the position of a first person who is passively observing and changing the world around him without taking into account the perspectives of the other(s). Echoing Dewey, Hilary Bradbury (2015) argues that the world is a complex whole wherein humans are actively engaged as creatures that explore, initiate and co-create change through relationships. Instead, Dewey argued, the world is a complex whole wherein humans are actively engaged as “being–knowing–doing” creatures exploring, initiating, and co-creating change

through relationships (Bradbury, 2015). This is a complex process because our world is multipolar, multicivilizational, multisexual, and multireligious, with all kinds of intersections between them. It is also inhabited by a growing number of people who are discovering their own “multi-ness.” In this world of ambiguity, diversity, and heterogeneity, norms, certainty, and homogeneity are the exceptions. In short, this perspective is incommensurable with a modern world order founded on Cartesian–Newtonian philosophy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001).

It is important to emphasize that a shift toward a participatory paradigm cannot be enforced, or merely proclaimed as “the next worldview.” A dominant world order is always the unpredictable outcome of long-lasting processes of human actions, as was the case with the neoliberal revolution. As Kuhn (1970) explained, novel paradigms operate beneath the surface of the dominant one and its manifestations in social theories, dominant leaders, institutional behaviors, and power structures. In other words, a new paradigm is largely unknown until the old ways of perceiving the world generate more problems than solutions.

Oftentimes these problems and the novel, dissenting ideas of how to deal with them are the catalysts for triggering a shift toward another paradigm. The new paradigm then manifests itself next to the existing paradigm. The co-existence of paradigms and multiple perspectives is engrained in our world order and is expressed in complex thinking (Morin, 2015). To give an analogous illustration, the evolution of our universe and of life on the planet exemplifies how the mechanisms of transition unfold as processes of co-creation, progress and regress, and birth and decay in periods of great turmoil that are enclosed by periods of relative stability (Kaku, 2005; Singh, 2004).

At the moment, we are living in an era where wicked problems emerge, and where the old solutions no longer work. At the same time, a multitude of ideas and social theories (e.g., complexity theory and action research); policy proposals (e.g., basic income, degrowth, participatory and representative democracy, sustainable energy, and bioregionalism); and civil society initiatives (e.g., energy commons, intentional communities, participatory budgets, and permaculture) have emerged to represent a participatory worldview (Geerlof, 2018). In other words, change is on its way, and public leaders should embrace these initiatives with a new social contract.

COHERENT PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAMS TO ENSURE INTEGRAL SUSTAINABILITY

A successful public policy paradigm based on a participatory worldview needs a coherent policy program. However, because of the participatory nature of this program, no fixed blue print can be created in advance. Still, to counteract the weakening of representative democracies, the first step public leaders should take is to rebuild trust with the people by giving them the tools to take

their lives into their own hands and encourage them to express their general will. This requires rebalancing the scales of representative and participatory democracy in the direction of the latter.

Representative democracy must be grounded (again) on networks of small communities, and it must be based on the vitality of participating groups and a strong democratic culture (Barber, 2004). There are examples of participatory democracies effectively embedded within overarching systems of representative democracy. For example, in South America remarkable steps have been taken in increasing citizens' participation in decision-making processes (in 't Veld, 2013). Similarly, Brazil has a history of combining direct and representative forms of democracy. In Porto Alegre, one of the best examples of the participatory process, more than two decades of trial and error have resulted in a new system of democratic governance grounded in the notion of people's participation in decision making on public investment through a system called The Participatory Budget (Souza, 2002).

A reappraisal of the sovereignty of the nation-state is also a necessary precondition for the new social contract's development and implementation. Today, the successful functioning of representative democracies at the national level is being suppressed and hampered all over the world. The circle of influence of national governments does not coincide with the circle of responsibility for which their electorates hold them accountable. The real power is in the hands of the capitalist elite and the supranational organizations instated to promote and sustain neoliberal policy agendas. These supranational bodies—including the World bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and even many European institutions—are excluded from democratic accountability. The sovereignty of the nation-state has to be reinstated, decolonized, and moved away from the economic interests of the capitalist elite and grounded again in a strong democracy.

Further, the subsidiarity principle of governance has to be given new meaning under the new social contract. The subsidiarity principle in traditional terms aimed to allocate authority at the lowest possible level of government. In the new social contract, subsidiarity entails leaving as much as possible the decision-making processes in the hands of the peoples—in their local communities, cooperatives, and physical and virtual commons—by giving them the legal, financial, and economic tools to pursue their collective goals (Shiva, 2015). Such an unequivocal transfer of decision making, responsibility, and economic power would give the people the space to co-create socially and ecologically sustainable futures. Barber (2004) defined this transfer of power as a form of strong democracy, a “participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation, and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interest into public goods. Crucial terms are: activity, process, self-legislation, creation, and transformation” (p. 151). A strong democracy is not just an instrument of collective decision making but a way of living.

In an attempt to unlock more sustainable futures, the new social contract should embody another ontological springboard: It should move away from an orientation of isolation and toward a worldview that sees human systems as embedded in natural systems. The ontology of the old social contract legitimated the nation-state as the highest authority of society, and it assigned authority to the nation-state over the individual. It also created the legal order of nation-states and defined the legal rights of individuals and their obligations. The old social contract *de jure* and *de facto* protected the rights of individuals from the nation-state and provided the logic for solidarity and equality as meta-political objectives. But in the old social contract—which represented the modern heritage of Enlightenment philosophy—only the rights of individuals were protected; neither the rights of nature nor the rights of the inanimate world were included.

The rights of nature and the inanimate world should become pillars of the new social contract. The constitution of Ecuador is a great example of this ideal. Ecuador is the first country in the world to consider the rights of nature and to create the legal conditions for enforcing such ecosystem rights, as expressed in articles 71 to 74 of their constitution. These conditions include the prohibition of extraction of nonrenewable resources from protected areas and the avoidance of monoculture production (Political Database of the Americas, 2008).

Another important policy goal of the new social contract is to contribute to a sustainable world order. For this to happen, the spell of compound growth has to be broken. By 2010, the world economy had expanded to USD \$55,570,000,000,000 (Harvey, 2010). The continuation of growth at an annual growth rate of 3%, the average growth target for most governments, means that the world economy will double in the next 24 years (Monbiot, 2017). Compound growth is increasingly the result of consumerism (World Bank, 2016), and it is the main reason why environmental degradation accelerates at the pace that it does, and it is why global warming is so hard to stop (Harvey, 2010).

As an alternative, degrowth models have been proposed by many scholars as the only viable way to secure a socially and ecologically sustainable future (Kallis, Kerschner, & Martinez-Alier, 2012). A degrowth society is “built on quality rather than on quantity, on cooperation rather than on competition, and ... on a humanity liberated from economics for which social justice is the imperative” (Latouche, 2003, p. 18). In a degrowth world, prosperity is decoupled from material accumulation, signifying a desire to emphasize the “commons,” “care,” and “conviviality” as the shared values of the societal systems (D’Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2015).

The magnitude of change required to shift high-consumption societies into sustainable degrowth systems is helpfully described by a scenario study conducted in Canada by Peter A. Victor (2012). Victor applied LowGrow, an interactive system model, to explore the possibility of a macro-economic framework not based on growth. His four scenarios are: a business-as-usual scenario (as a reference point), a selective growth scenario, a low/no growth scenario, and a degrowth scenario. The degrowth scenario is based on a substantial period of degrowth as a pathway toward reaching a steady state

economy operating at a reduced level of economic output that could secure a sustainable ecological footprint, based on Canada's fair share of global ecosystem capacity.

In Victor's (2012) degrowth scenario, a degrowth objective in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of 50% has to be achieved by 2035, or CAD \$15,260 GDP per capita, the level the average Canadian enjoyed in 1976. Within 30 years, this scenario shows a reduction in greenhouse gas emission of nearly 80%; a substantial reduction in government expenditures, unemployment, and the human poverty index; and an 80% reduction in working time. While a promising study, it is important to note that the scenarios are not presented as forecasts. Due to the large number of factors and the feedback mechanisms involved, complexity is at odds with predicting a future state of society. However, as a learning model, the four scenarios show implications for a degrowth scenario in terms of the scope of policy change and the outcomes in comparison with the low/no growth, selective growth, and business-as-usual scenarios.

A range of other policy interventions have been proposed to assure a transition toward a socially and ecologically sustainable future. Examples include (a) the reintegration of the economy in civil society by focusing on local and regional production; (b) the creation of non-debt money and regional currencies that contribute to downscaling, the localization of economic activity, and constraints on the circulation of money; (c) the formation of sharing economies and new forms of property that revolve around use-value instead of exchange-value; (d) the promotion of utopias, innovative ways of local living, and local communities withdrawn from capitalist culture (Cosme, Santos, & O'Neill, 2017); (e) the reinstatement of the commons (Olstrom, 1990); (f) the support of welfare institutions, such as basic income institutions, job guarantee schemes, and work sharing (Bregman, 2017); and (g) the implementation of zero and negative interest rates to induce a steady-state economy (Jacobs & Jones, 2006).

To self-organize and co-create, people need education on how to learn, how to become happy people, and how to develop communicative and creative abilities. Access to educational facilities, excellent educators, inviting and stimulating educational environments, a mix of disciplinary and transdisciplinary programs, and online learning facilities are required to prepare people for their future roles as co-creators and co-leaders (Montuori, 2006). Affordable healthcare and housing and safe living environments are equally important for a flourishing, creative, and entrepreneurial populace (Florida, 2012). The new social contract must also include a service-level agreement between people and public leadership regarding the availability and quality of public services.

FORGING A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

The development and implementation of a new social contract is an enormous endeavor, one that must take into account the existence of a globalized

neoliberal capitalist infrastructure of corporate bodies, governments of nation-states, and supranational organizations, whom above all protect the rights and possessions of the capitalist elite. This means the proposed policy paradigm shift cannot be realized incrementally; it requires a public leadership that breaks away from the current public policy paradigm and neoliberal public leadership models.

A major question here is, Who is going to lead this major transition? Current public leaders are not equipped for this task because they are part of the problem and not the solution (Sassen, 2014). However, existing models of successful transitions show that major breaks with the neoliberal paradigm can be achieved, even in short periods of time. A good example here is Uruguay's energy transition toward an almost completely sustainable system. The key elements of the Uruguayan process include a long-term vision, a concise process of multiparty decision making, the involvement of academia, an integral policy program with implementation strength, the participation of civil society and a supportive societal environment, and the presence of a state-owned electricity company that serves as the platform for energy transition (International Renewable Energy Agency, 2015; Sierra, 2016).

Future public leaders—political, administrative, and civic—are invited to take the lead in co-envisioning, co-creating, and co-implementing this new social contract and in being part of new social movements with integral sustainability agendas. These transformative public leaders are out there already, but they have to manifest on a scale in formal leadership roles that can turn the tables on the current paradigm (Geerlof, 2014). These transformative public leaders represent a paradigm shift away from traditional top-down approaches and neoliberal policy paradigms and toward more participatory ones (Montuori, 2010). These are leaders who know intrinsically that leadership is not a value-free endeavor but a moral one. Their leadership presence is characterized as value-based and non-leader centered, and their actions strive to create societal transitions that contribute to a participatory world order (Geerlof, 2018; Montuori & Donnelly, 2017). A related and crucial quality of transformative public leaders is their ability to deal with the dialectical nature of public policy, where the old paradigm and the new emerging paradigm will co-exist and collide in the phase of transition (Geerlof, 2017).

As Rousseau once said, the world of reality has its limits, but the world of imagination is boundless. Let us then start to image an ecologically sustainable and socially just and democratic world by envisioning the new social contract as one of the creative instruments used to achieve this goal.

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