

# RESILIENT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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# RESILIENT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Navigating Unity in Diversity for  
Sustainable Well-Being

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*For Ari, Maggie, Millie, Nick.*

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# EPIGRAPH

*The problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them.*

*(Albert Einstein)*

*The democratic challenge is to reach an understanding not just of how we might live well as individuals but how we might live well together in environmentally sustainable and socially just arrangements.*

*(Joseph & McGregor, 2020, p. 129)*

*In governing do not try to control; if you do not trust the people, you make them untrustworthy.*

*Lao Tzu (551-479 BCE)*

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# LOGO



The earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (amagi) or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2,300 B.C. in the Sumerian city state of Lagash.

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# PREFACE

This book offers a practical guide for deliberate, transformative but peaceful, and gradual change toward a reimagined democratic governance. It provides a map and a compass for navigating a path toward ensuring the sustained well-being of all living beings, human, and nonhuman. Its integrating theme is *unity in diversity*.

*Sustainability* refers to a dynamic property (the “viability”) of a system, of the path(s) leading to a desired outcome. In a human, and social, context *sustained well-being* is that desired outcome. “Well-being” is defined as a condition in which individuals and communities are free to pursue, and hopefully end up enjoying too, the very diverse lives they value – i.e., to live fulfilling lives at present and into the distant future.

The motivation for writing the book is the extreme pain, suffering, and injustice permeating the world we live in, partly caused by the ineffectiveness of current public-governance approaches in tackling them. At the core of this suffering is the inability of individuals and their communities to live the varied lives they value. And the defining failure of governance is its inability to provide individuals and communities with the freedoms, complemented by opportunities and capabilities, to pursue these diverse and valued lives.

Carlo Rovelli (2020) brilliantly captures the larger background to this suffering.

- The spread of war, causing extreme suffering, refugees, and instability.
- The changing climate and other ecological and medical emergencies that are putting the future of our species, and so many others, at risk.
- The current breakneck increase in economic inequality and the concentrations of wealth that are immoral and that generate conflict.
- The presence of vast nuclear arsenals that continue to represent a real and terrible risk, heightened by recent threats to use them.

One should add to this list the loss of confidence in the ability of existing institutional arrangements to deliver the environmental, social, political, and economic outcomes (the “enablers”) that are essential for individuals and their

communities to live the diverse lives they value, and loss of faith in those who have been entrusted with the responsibility to achieve this (Judt, 2010). Current governance and government arrangements are not fit for purpose – i.e., the fundamental purpose of promoting the well-being of all living organisms on a sustainable basis. Many of the answers that people used to expect from central and local government are now being sought within communities (Mathews, 2020).

Even traditional institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) now acknowledge the validity and urgency of these concerns. The opening remarks of the OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría to the international workshop on *Putting wellbeing metrics into policy action* (October 2019) provide testimony to this claim.

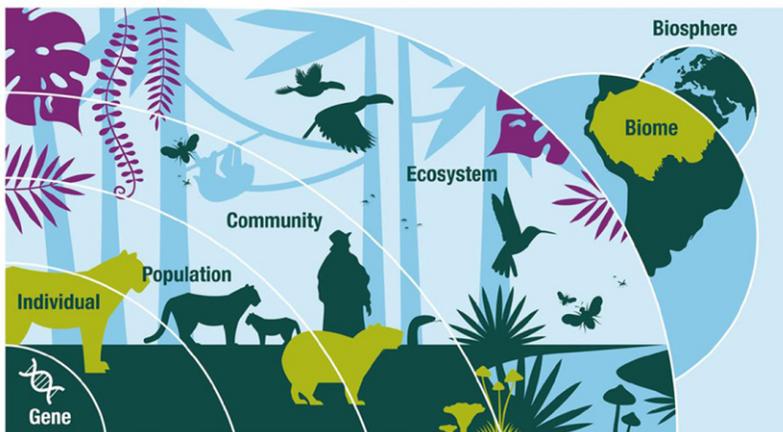
Gurría refers to challenges relating to poverty and related vulnerabilities, widening economic inequalities (now also affecting the middle classes), rising unemployment and labor-market insecurities (especially affecting the young), persistent gender divides on pay and other market outcomes, falling average life satisfaction, rising mental disorders, fewer people reporting that they have friends and family to count on in times of need, diminishing voice and influence on what governments do, and increasing concerns about climate change and biodiversity. These trends have worsened following Covid-19 (OECD, 2021). This provides the imperative for immediate action.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1960) suggested that a writer on public affairs must always answer the following questions: What do you want to change? Why this rather than that?

I want to change current governance and government arrangements that primarily serve the narrow and short-term interests of a small group of human beings at the expense of broader humanity and the biosphere. To replace them with governing *with* as well as *for* individuals and their communities (Mathews, 2020). To create a social order that places individuals and communities at the center, and a public service that serves the public at large, current as well as future generations, with an ethos of *partnership* and *stewardship*. To that end this book recommends *system*-level governance arrangements that would support the emergence of a social order that is aligned with the sustained well-being of all beings, human as well as nonhuman. The foundation of such governance arrangements would be partnerships based on *trust* (See also Mulgan, 2022). As Lao Tzu (551-479 BCE) advised us 2,500 years ago, in governing do not try to control; if you do not trust the people, you make them untrustworthy.

In a broader socio-ecological context the effective pursuit of sustained well-being also demands an appreciation that humanity is *internal* to the *biosphere* (i.e., Nature) – the part of the Earth that is occupied by living organisms. We are embedded in Nature; we are not external to it (Fig. 1). Scientific and technological progress can help human beings to understand natural laws and exploit them for enhancing the well-being of all living creatures; but it cannot help humankind to break free of natural laws. Furthermore, and relatedly, this metaphysical distinction between humanity being *external to* versus being *embedded in* the natural world has another crucial implication: production (or the output of the goods and services we produce and consume) cannot be increased indefinitely; it is bounded (Dasgupta, 2021, p. 119; Chapter 4).

The ability to regenerate is a characteristic of living systems; the biosphere’s regeneration is a key to the sustainability of humanity. Biological diversity, or “biodiversity” for short, means the diversity of life. Its decline disrupts biospheric processes, for example, the processes governing the climate system. Our individual and collective choices have an impact on the regenerative capacity of Nature. This book is an exploration of reimagined democratic governance that is deliberately aimed at encouraging and motivating human beings to make “good” choices in a broader socio-ecological context (Merz et al., 2023). Such choices will keep the broader system in which human and nonhuman lives are lived (comprising the biosphere as well as the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the system) within viable



**Fig. 1. Biosphere and Biodiversity (Dasgupta, 2021, p. 52).**

boundaries so that we can continue living the very diverse lives we value in harmony with each other as well as with the biosphere.

A common thread that runs through this book is the proposition that in the kind of “capricious world” we live in (a world of “radical uncertainty”), with the future not only unknown but unknowable and the way people wish to live their lives is extremely varied and constantly evolving, *resilience* provides the bridge to sustainable well-being. “Resilience” refers to the attributes of being able to both *survive* and *thrive* under all kinds of conditions and in response to unanticipated disruptions to the way we are used to living. Thus, choices that enhance the resilience of the socio-ecological system that defines the possibilities and boundaries of our collective lives are “good” choices. *Diversity* in its multiple dimensions offers the strongest potential foundation, the most fertile soil, for resilience to emerge and to be sustained. *Freedom* serves as the essential nutrient for converting that potential into reality – i.e., diversity, through versatility, into resilience. Freedom needs to be complemented with *autonomy* to maximize its potency for enabling individuals and communities to live fulfilling lives.

Diversity, versatility, and interconnectedness, providing strong foundations for resilience, are inherent in and integral to the *natural order* – but not so for the *social order*. Biodiversity, the variety of life in all its forms, enables Nature to regenerate. This natural process is not automatically replicated in social systems. Diversity does not always sit comfortably in a social context. Even when it exists social diversity does not naturally lead to sustained well-being as an outcome. Transforming the potential that diversity offers as a platform for resilience and thereby a bridge to sustainable well-being into reality by pursuing *unity in diversity* is the distinctive role of good governance in a social and ecological context. *Empowering communities*, complemented by appropriate *system-level* support and controls while insisting on clear accountabilities, offers the most promising strategy for giving effect to such reimagined democratic governance.

Such a social order and supporting governance arrangements need to be deliberately and purposefully constructed and protected. Institutions protecting and nourishing freedom will serve as the main instruments of good governance – freedom *from* any form of domination and freedom *to* live the lives we value. The role of good governance extends to ensuring that individuals and communities have the opportunities and capabilities (i.e., the *autonomy*) to convert their freedom to fulfilling lives.

Wise governance, one that embraces diversity and wishes to nourish the potential for versatility that it offers, acknowledges the need to reimagine itself. With increasing diversity comes the realization that no form of “central

government” will be accepted as an agent for the “community as a whole.” The greater the degree of diversity in a community the greater the potential it offers as a foundation for sustainable well-being through resilience. However, greater diversity also diminishes the effectiveness and efficiency of central top-down governance structures to achieve that convergence from diversity to resilience through versatility. Governance needs to be reimagined to remain fit for that purpose. To use economics jargon there are diseconomies of both scale and scope for central governance and government from increasing diversity as a foundation for versatility and hence resilience.

Imagine the role of good governance as that of a *steward gardener* caring for a “well-being garden” (serving as a metaphor for the broader socio-ecological system) for the benefit of all creatures working on and living off the garden in their very diverse ways, in harmony with each other and into the indefinite future. Pursuing this imagination, this book explores the foundations of a *social order* that emulates the rules and values of the *natural order*. Such a social order will be founded on the principle of non-domination in all spheres of life and grounded in *unity in diversity*. It will embrace the principle of equity regarding both *responsibilities* and *rights* in caring for the well-being garden as well as enjoying everything it has to offer.

How will we know if we are succeeding – if the governance arrangements proposed in this book are working? To serve that purpose, we need an integrating analytical framework that captures the interdependencies and complementarities between the key outcomes that define a healthy socio-ecological system. We also need a vehicle (a model) that can help us appraise and evaluate suites of policy interventions in terms of their contributions to sustained well-being. Finally, to make all this possible, we need a common metric (a common “currency”) that can be used to aggregate and compare the collective impacts of these interventions on a set of seemingly incommensurable outcomes. In Chapters 9 and 10, I provide such an analytical framework. In Chapter 12, I provide the required model and unifying currency (i.e., well-being).

Before I embark on this expedition of exploring a social order that may help improve not only the daily lives of individuals and communities but their long-term well-being as well, one crucial point needs to be emphasized. There is nothing new in this sort of agonizing; that is in the search for better social orders. The origins of such explorations can be traced back at least 2,500 years. They are regularly revived whenever the dominant social orders of the day come under stress. In this specific sense history does repeat itself (Segall, 2023).

Two thousand five hundred years ago, and repeatedly since, thoughtful minds have pondered questions such as the ones I am exploring in this book. What is the best way to organize government in support of an equitable social

order where everyone has a chance to flourish? How can we ensure that individuals and communities are able to freely strive to reach their potential so that they can live fulfilling lives? The catalyst for these explorations has always been the accumulation and abuse of power in the hands of various concentrated interest groups (landowners, aristocratic groups, kings, “churches” of all varieties, priests, colonial powers, business classes, and so on) and the institutions that represent them. Such abuse has repeatedly brought communities (including Indigenous Peoples) close to the point of social breakdown under the weight of the stresses it generates.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Confucius, Socrates, and the Buddha, living and teaching in different parts of the world, separated by great distances and almost certainly totally unaware of each other’s existence let alone teachings, and speaking completely different languages, were converging on the view that the social order of the time had to change. From one where power and wealth were passed down exclusively through hereditary bloodlines, to alternative orders that were more open to social mobility. This in turn provided fertile ground for the emergence of the idea that what is available to the few should and could be available to all (Puett & Gross-Loh, 2016).

At present, the state, supported by the bureaucrats, administrators, and consultants who advise and serve it, the public and private sector institutions (national and international) that have been created to legitimize and reinforce their powers, and monopoly capital are the interest groups in whose hands power is being concentrated and abused for the benefit of the privileged few and at the expense of the great majority of human beings and their communities as well as nonhuman beings. In response, and yet again, we are asking similar questions to those posed by the Buddha, Confucius, and Socrates about 2,500 years ago, right around the world, and exploring social orders that may address and transform this imbalance in favor of individuals and communities at large.

What are our chances of succeeding in this endeavor, having failed persistently in the past? Very small. And why do we have any hope of succeeding? Because we are at a touching distance from the edge of the abyss. The whole life system is threatened; we risk severe suffering if not extinction if we fail. Therein lies the source of my hope (See also Martin Wolf, 2023).

In Chapter 10 I suggest that “communalism” (Bookchin, 2006) (or what Andreas Chatzidakis et al. (2020, p. 63) refer to as “progressive municipalism”), founded on the principles of non-domination and the freedom for all to pursue the lives they value, offers a promising platform for the emergence of fit-for-purpose social governance arrangements. Such governance arrangements would

empower the communities (geographic and virtual) in which people live their lives and interact with each other, providing a fertile ground for the emergence of polities, a public service, and public institutions that adopt and embrace a *stewardship ethos* dedicated to promoting and protecting the long-term well-being of the communities they are there to serve.

Endowing communities with greater voice, autonomy, and resources cannot by itself serve as a panacea for all our social, political, natural, and economic ills – certainly not. Nevertheless, by nourishing diversity, inclusion, and equity, it offers the promise of contributing to less extremism and greater social cohesion, as well as greater material prosperity, without damaging the health of the biosphere.

“Communalism,” by offering a promising social platform for embracing diversity and facilitating inclusion, would also liberate individuals and their traditional close-knit communities from the trappings of established patterns of thinking, behaving, and living. In thus encouraging the adoption of broader and longer term perspectives in making choices, it would align the *social order* with the *natural order*, providing a bridge to sustainable well-being. To achieve all this “communalism” needs to be complemented and supported by strong governance arrangements that play a stewardship role for the environmental, social, political, and economic *system* at large (See also Rajan, 2019).

I elaborate on these themes and proposals in *Part B*, the main part of the book, focused on improving public policy and governance in practical ways, in the service of sustainable well-being. *Part A*, based primarily on a limited set of secondary sources, provides a sketch of the metaphysical and philosophical foundations of the idea that everything is connected. I use this as a platform on which I build my proposal for a reimagined governance aimed at establishing a social order grounded in *unity in diversity* – one that is in tune with the sustainable well-being of all living beings. That platform needs to be supported by a shared narrative. Devoid of metaphysical and philosophical foundations, such a narrative would not endure and offer lasting value. Nevertheless, readers who have no interest in the metaphysical and philosophical foundations of the public policy framework I propose can, having read this *Preface* to the book, skip directly to Chapter 8.

One final point needs to be made about the structure of the book. The title of each chapter has the name of one or two scholars associated with it. It is almost certain that over the centuries and even very recently, many other scholars from across the world would have studied and written extensively on the concepts of unity and diversity, representing various geographies, genders, and ethnicities, some of whom I refer to in the chapters and some (possibly

many) I know nothing about. Indeed, the latter may well include scholars who have contributed to the development and/or articulation of the same ideas more substantially and in far better ways than the ones I cite, while also covering other dimensions of diversity and unity relating to technology, kinship, identity, and so on. This does not matter for my purposes. My interest lies in identifying the ideas that serve as building blocks in the development of the specific policy framework that I propose in *Part B* of the book. I have learned about these ideas from the individuals whose works I cite. I make no claim to comprehensiveness, nor to contributing to scholarship on the origins, articulation, and/or further development of these ideas.

This book is written for and dedicated to the young. To slightly paraphrase Thomas S. Eliot in his *Preface* to Simon Weil's *The Need for Roots* (1949): "This book belongs in that category of prolegomena to [public policy] which politicians [and public servants] seldom read, and which most of them would be unlikely to understand or to know how to apply.

*Such books do not influence the contemporary conduct of affairs: for the men and women already engaged in this career and committed to the jargon of the marketplace they always come too late. This is one of those books which ought to be studied by the young before their leisure has been lost and their capacity for thought destroyed in the life of the hustings and the legislative assembly; books the effect of which, we can only hope, will become apparent in the attitude of mind of another generation.*

This defines my hope and aspiration for this book.

Girol Karacaoglu  
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