



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY IN DEMOCRATIC MODERNIZATION: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROPORTIONALITY OF LEGAL GUARANTEES, REAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND SOCIAL INTERESTS

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Abstract: The article examines the significance of substantive equality for democratic modernization from philosophical and normative perspectives. The study aims to identify the normative relations among the key categories of the problem and to define the limits of their institutional coordination. The methodology combines dialectical, conceptual, comparative, axiological, and reflective methods of analysis. The study develops a multidimensional conceptual framework that systematizes the relevant criteria and the limits within which the key contradictions can be resolved.

Keywords: substantive equality, formal equality, democratic modernization, real opportunities, social interest, structural inequality, dignity

INTRODUCTION

The question of the significance of the concept of substantive equality in democratic modernization in modern democratic societies is one of the central areas of socio-philosophical research. The relevance of the issue is that formal equality may prohibit discrimination, but the access to the right may differ sharply between groups due to historical, economic, and institutional barriers. As democratic institutions become more complex, justice becomes not a moral assessment of an individual political decision, but rather a systemic principle that determines how relations between power, individuals, groups, and institutions are structured. In this context, it is necessary to analyze justice not only as a normative ideal or political slogan, but also as its mechanisms of functioning in the social good.

The theoretical problem of the topic is that formal and substantive interpretations of equality are often opposed; a multidimensional model is needed that harmonizes legal universalism with real opportunities and social interests. Contemporary works of Uzbek scholars actively develop the issues of justice, democracy and human dignity in the national socio-philosophical context [1, p. 501–506; 2, p. 135–139]. These studies show the need to link justice with institutional and spiritual criteria in the process of national transformation. However, the task of the article is not to repeat existing views, but to systematize the internal relationship between categories based on their philosophical foundations.

Even in contemporary scholarly literature in Russian, the social, legal, and philosophical facets of justice are revealed in different methodological positions [3, p. 44–67; 4, p. 167–179]. Their common strength is that they link specific institutional problems to normative categories.

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At the same time, the conceptual limits of these approaches create the need to re-examine the relationship between different values within the framework of a holistic dialectical model.

English-language and other foreign studies link issues of legal guarantee, real opportunity, and the social good to international political-philosophical debates [5, p. 712–738; 6, p. 1205–1218; 7, p. 1181–1204; 8, p. 777–791]. This corpus provides an opportunity to test the degree of generalization of normative arguments without limiting the issue to a single national experience.

The research question of this article is posed as follows: on what normative basis can the relationship between legal guarantee, real opportunity and social interest be organized, so that the strengthening of one principle does not erode the content of the other? In search of an answer to this question, the study defines the processes of ensuring equality in democratic modernization as a subject, and the normative link between object, formal law, real distribution of opportunities and social interests as a subject. The goal is to substantiate substantive equality as a principle of democratic modernization that balances legal guarantee, real opportunity and social interests. To achieve the goal, the semantic boundaries of concepts are defined, their historical-normative transformation is compared, and a conceptual model is developed that balances the contradictions.

The initial hypothesis of the study is that the normative content of justice is revealed more deeply when elements of the model of "guarantee, possibility, structural correction" are treated with each other as a mutually legitimizing condition rather than an external limitation. Such a position differs from the monistic approach: it does not measure justice by a single maximum value. Rather, their social function, risk of harm, and conditions of institutional realization are analyzed before establishing a lexical priority between principles.

The article's theoretical position combines relational and institutional approaches. Whereas the relational perspective places the status and reciprocal quality of members of society at the center, the institutional approach analyzes the rules, procedures, and accountability mechanisms that ensure this status in practice. Therefore, the results are presented as verifiable conceptual theses and normative criteria, rather than as the results of empirical experiment. A clear definition of this boundary is important for methodological honesty in a philosophical article.

The scientific novelty of the study is expressed in three directions: first, substantive equality has been systematized as a criterion for four-dimensional modernization; second, the gap between formal norm and real possibility has been interpreted as a problem of structural conversion; and third, the philosophical underpinnings of the criterion of disproportionate influence in the assessment of social interests have been developed. These innovations do not claim to create a general theoretical system; they provide more explicit categories and evaluation questions for the analysis of the topic. Therefore, the conceptual model of the paper is regarded as a tool for developing hypotheses for further empirical research, policy analysis, and comparative philosophical research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

. Three criteria were used in the sourcing sorting: direct relevance to the topic, clarity of the normative argument, and conceptual coverage of at least one major category of the article's

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problem. The bibliographic corpus was used to compare theoretical positions, not for statistical representation.

The dialectical method was used to determine the intrinsic linkage of seemingly contradictory normative demands. This method sees contradiction as a source of development of the concept, rather than an error to be eliminated. The analysis showed the positive function of each principle, along with the normative danger it could pose when absolutized. As a result, synthesis was understood not as a mechanical mean, but as a redefinition of the functional limits of principles.

Conceptual analysis served to isolate the range of meaning of key terms, to preserve them from mutually confusing equivalents, and to turn them into operational questions. The comparative method made it possible to compare arguments from different academic traditions in the same problem area. Axiological analysis, on the other hand, was used to assess not only the effectiveness of a decision or institution, but its impact on dignity, freedom, equality, participation, and accountability.

The principle of reflexive equilibrium was adopted to create a feedback loop between general normative theses, concrete examples, and counter-arguments. While a general principle was intuitively acceptable, the scope of application of the principle was reconsidered if it consistently produced a disproportionate or discriminatory result. By contrast, a single unfavorable consequence alone was not taken as sufficient grounds for abandoning a universal norm. This method allows normative conclusions to be formulated as a scientific position that can be corrected rather than a dogmatic judgment.

The limitation of the study is that it does not produce new questionnaire or experimental information. For this reason, the criteria proposed in the article are not interpreted as "proven empirical laws" but as theoretical results that arise from sources and conceptual arguments. This limitation increases the scientific verifiability of the results: in subsequent studies they can be turned into indicators, measured and compared across different institutions.

RESULTS

Substantive equality is not the forced production of equal outcomes, but rather the normative assessment of the structural factors that prevent the enjoyment of rights and opportunities. This thesis requires that legal guarantee be interpreted not as a separate, self-sufficient principle, but as a reciprocal relationship with real possibility and social interest. Philosophically, the issue is not so much about the simplistic question of 'which value is superior?' but rather about the question of how values define each other's legitimate. The normative criterion must therefore be examined simultaneously with real social conditions, the possibility of institutions, and the subjectivity status of the individual. [1, p. 501–506]

If the strength of formal equality lies in universal rule and non-discrimination, its limit lies in its response to different starting conditions with the same instrument. The dialectical nature of this case is that, on the one hand, legal guarantee manifests itself as a legitimate goal of the democratic order, and on the other hand, its absolutization can narrow the content of real possibility. A just solution, then, is not a mechanical compromise of conflicting demands, but a harmonization of them at a new level of institutional quality. Such an approach avoids suc-

cumbing to abstract idealism and expands the possibility of its application to social practice. [2, p. 135–139]

Real opportunity is not only the nominal choice of the individual, but the availability of the necessary knowledge, resources, health, time, and institutional access to make the choice. The main methodological error here is to identify equality of outcome with equality of opportunity, or rather, to perceive formal opportunity as real freedom. The content of legal guarantee is fully revealed only when it is linked to the individual's ability to use available resources, the openness of decisions, and the reduction of disproportionate harms caused by institutions. In this context, the criterion of justice does not assess static distribution, but also the quality of the social mechanisms by which opportunities are produced. [3, p. 44–67]

The substantive approach does not weaken the legal guarantee; rather, it requires that the right operate with equal force in different social conditions. Theoretically, this view suggests that it is not enough to measure justice solely by the amount of benefits. Justice is also determined by how institutional processes are organized, whose vote the decision takes, how responsibility is distributed, and how the social good is protected. Thus, the study treats consequential, procedural, and relational justice as three complementary layers; a defect in one of them also weakens legitimacy in the other two layers. [4, p. 167–179]

In a situation where there is historical discrimination or structural constraints, even a rule that appears to be neutral can produce a disproportionate outcome. Linking this conclusion to the transformative nature of democracy, it is seen that institutions are not a ready-made and immutable structure, but a normative mechanism that is constantly relegitimized through collective experience. An individual's social position, intergroup disparities, and historical heritage can lead to different perceptions of real possibility. Therefore, justice politics should not limit itself to proclaiming a universal rule, but should reflexively assess the real consequences of that rule in different social situations. [5, p. 712–738]

Table 1. Analytical Criteria of the "Guarantee, Opportunity, Structural Adjustment" Model

Measurement	Philosophical content	Mezon Regulations	Institutsional ko'rinish
Legal equality	Same-sex and justified treatment of identical situations	Non-discrimination and legal protection	Universal norma
Real chance	Resource and ability for the practical use of rights	Identification and compensation of barriers	Education, labor, entry into service
Ovoz va e'tirof	Hearing the experiences of marginalized groups in decision-making	Reducing stigma and stereotypes	Participation and representation
Structural change	Fixing institutions that reproduce inequalities	Long-term capacity convergence	Policy design and monitoring

Proportionalization of social interests does not mean absolutizing the benefit of the majority, but rather taking into account the impact of policy burdens and benefits on the most vulnerable groups. As a result, the relationship between legal guarantee, real opportunity and social good is interpreted as a mutually reinforcing normative architecture, rather than as 'zero-sum' competition. The sustainability of one principle depends not on the negation of the other, but on its institutional guarantee. This view allows us to move the relationship between

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the state and society out of a paternalistic scheme and into a whole system of right, responsibility, participation, and accountability; it is this situation that forms the conceptual basis of the model of 'guarantee, opportunity, structural adjustment'. [6, p. 1205–1218]

An essential element of substantive equality is voice and participation: when the affected group is excluded from the decision-making process, compensatory politics can become paternalistic. This thesis requires that legal guarantee be interpreted not as a separate, self-sufficient principle, but as a mutually conditioned relationship with real possibility and social good. Philosophically, the issue is not so much about the simplistic question of 'which value is superior?' but rather about the question of how values define each other's legitimical boundaries. The normative criterion must therefore be examined simultaneously with real social conditions, the possibility of institutions, and the subjectivity status of the individual. [7, p. 1181–1204]

Structural change is broader than helping the individual, it involves a change in the rules, norms, and practices that systematically reproduce inequality. The dialectical nature of this case is that, on the one hand, legal guarantee manifests itself as the legitimate goal of the democratic order, while on the other hand, its absolutization can narrow the content of real possibility. A just solution, then, is not a mechanical compromise of conflicting demands, but a harmonization of them at a new level of institutional quality. Such an approach avoids succumbing to abstract idealism and expands the possibility of applying it to social practice. [8, p. 777–791]

In the process of modernization, technological and institutional innovations can create new inequalities; therefore, substantive equality must become the criterion for assessing prior impact. The main methodological error here is to identify equality of outcome with equality of opportunity, or conversely, to perceive formal opportunity as real freedom. The content of legal guarantee is fully revealed only when it is linked to an individual's ability to use available resources, the openness of decisions, and the reduction of disproportionate harms caused by institutions. In this context, the criterion of justice does not assess static distribution, but also the quality of the social mechanisms by which opportunities are produced. [1, p. 501–506]

The link between responsibility and equality requires a normative consideration of the social conditions of choice, rather than denying individual choice. Theoretically, this view suggests that it is not enough to measure justice by the amount of benefits alone. Justice is also determined by how institutional processes are organized, whose vote the decision takes, how responsibility is distributed, and how the social good is protected. Thus, the study treats outcomeal, procedural, and relational justice as three complementary layers; a defect in one of them also weakens legitimacy in the other two layers. [2, p. 135–139]

DISCUSSION

The results obtained show that it is difficult to reduce the importance of the concept of substantive equality in democratic modernization to a one-dimensional formula. The context of national transformation, justice and values in Uzbek sources [1; 2] emphasizes that this topic is inseparable from the concrete historical experience of society. Conceptual and institutional analyses in Russian scientific literature [3; 4] clarify the legal and social expression of principles. Foreign studies [5–8] reveal universal normative facets of the problem. Bringing them into

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one model does not lose theoretical differences, but rather shows to what extent generalization can be achieved.

The first important conclusion of the discussion is that viewing legal guarantee as an absolute priority value can render invisible the legitimate requirements of a real possibility or social good. From this, however, does not follow the relativistic conclusion that there is no order between values. In the proposed model, situations such as harm to human dignity, unjustified discrimination, systematic exclusion of voice, and evasion of responsibility act as normative "red lines." Balance, then, is not to justify any compromise, but also to set minimum limits at which compromise cannot be compromised.

The second consequence concerns institutional mediation. The philosophical principle is not directly transferred to real politics; it enters into institutional form through systems of criterion, procedure, indicator, and responsibility. At this stage there is a danger of semantic loss: for example, if a real possibility in the broad sense is reduced to only one statistical indicator, its relational or axiological content is reduced. Operationalization, therefore, should not be understood as a reduction of a philosophical concept to "something that can be measured," but as a process of expressing its various facets through several indicators.

The third outcome has to do with democratic legitimacy. The "guarantee, opportunity, structural adjustment" model assumes that not only the ultimate interest is important in citizens' evaluation of institutions, but also procedure, explanation, respect, and participation. This situation transforms public relations from a PR task to a normative accountability task. An institution must clarify the reason for the decision, accept the evidence of the affected groups, and trigger a corrective mechanism if a serious error is discovered. Such reflexivity is not a weakness, but a way of continuously reproducing legitimacy in a transformational democracy.

The philosophical essence of substantive equality is not to "make everyone the same," but to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to participate in social interaction with equal dignity. Linking this conclusion to the transformative nature of democracy, it is seen that institutions are not a ready-made and immutable structure, but a normative mechanism that is constantly relegitimized through collective experience. An individual's social position, intergroup disparities, and historical heritage can lead to different perceptions of real possibility. Therefore, justice politics should not limit itself to proclaiming a universal rule, but should reflexively assess the real consequences of that rule in different social situations. [7, p. 1181–1204]

The fairness of democratic modernization is measured not by the total volume of new opportunities, but also by who they are realistically opened up to and what barriers remain. As a result, the relationship between legal guarantee, real opportunity and social good is interpreted not as 'zero-sum' competition, but as a mutually reinforcing normative architecture. The sustainability of one principle depends not on the denial of the other, but on its institutional guarantee. This view allows us to move the relationship between the state and society out of a paternalistic scheme and into a whole system of right, responsibility, participation and accountability; it is this situation that forms the conceptual basis of the model of 'guarantee, opportunity, structural adjustment'. [8, p. 777–791]

In applying the proposed approach to practical policy analysis, at least three stages can be distinguished. In the first stage, the immediate purpose of the decision and the beneficiary groups are identified. In the second stage, hidden costs, limited opportunities, and regulatory harms are analyzed. In the third stage, the impact of the decision on legal guarantee, real opportunity, and the social good is evaluated through interrelated indicators, rather than being separated from each other. This method avoids short conclusions such as "efficient, means fair" or "equal, therefore fair."

Within the framework of the article, three practical recommendations were formed: 1) the introduction of equity impact analysis in new policies and reforms; 2) the supplementation of legal access indicators with real-world use indicators; and 3) the institutionalization of the participation of marginalized groups in decision design. These recommendations are not ready-made administrative regulations; they are normative design principles that must be adapted to the specific sector and institution. Their advantage is that they encourage political decision to be judged not only by the outcome, but also by the epistemic and procedural environment in which the decision is developed.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the study, the importance of the concept of substantive equality in democratic modernization was justified not as a collection of separate categories, but as a normative system interconnected within the framework of the model of "guarantee, possibility, structural adjustment". Substantive equality was systematized as a criterion of four-dimensional modernization. This conclusion indicates the need to move from a monistic criterion to a multidimensional evaluation system in theoretical analysis. The gap between formal norm and real possibility has been interpreted as a problem of structural conversion. Therefore, the quality of institutions should be evaluated not only by formal authority or final indicators, but also by procedural and relational criteria. In the assessment of social interests, the philosophical foundations of the criterion of disproportionate influence have been developed. These criteria can be operationalized in subsequent empirical research through surveys, expert evaluations, or comparative indices. The limit of research is its theoretical-conceptual nature. Therefore, the model presented is not accepted as a universal empirical law, but as a normative-analytic construct that must be tested with new evidence and corrected if necessary.

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