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GOVERNANCE FOR WELL-BEING: FOSTERING MEANINGFUL AND MINDFUL LIVING IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. This research investigates philosophical and mindful visions of political governance, sustainable development, and well-being. It explores how nations and their policies can enhance individual and community well-being while remaining sociologically, environmentally, and economically sustainable. Using case studies of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Scandinavian welfare states, the paper demonstrates governance models prioritising social justice, environmental protection, and economic goals. The study integrates the philosophical ideas of Amartya Sen, who emphasises the expansion of individual capabilities; John Rawls, who advocates for justice as fairness; and Michel Foucault, who critiques power structures that shape societal norms. The research builds on existing frameworks linking sustainable development and governance, offering recommendations for orienting governance toward equity, justice, and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: political philosophy; mindful living; meaningful life; governance models; social justice; welfare state

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1. Introduction

Meaningful and mindful life has been an idea that has intrigued various scholars, not only in philosophy but in psychology and political science as well. Searching for meaning in life is generally considered a private issue; however, its political aspects are vital and relatively unexplored. The politics, including the forms of government, the prevalent culture, and the state's agenda, provide the basis for individuals and society to articulate what it takes to have a meaningful and mindful life. In this case, we propose a study on the nexus between meaning and mindfulness with politics to reveal the relationship between an individual's well-being and the political ideologies and practices that facilitate or inhibit it.

In the past few decades, research interest in well-being has grown due to the emergence of justice theories, public policy improvements, and the sociopolitical critique of neoliberalism. For instance, Amartya Sen capability approach recognises the importance of governance in widening peoples' options to achieve desirable outcomes in life (Sen, 1999). Similarly, John Rawls' theory of justice focuses on fairness and equality in establishing conditions necessary for societies where people can flourish (Rawls, 1971). The sad thing is that these frameworks primarily concern the adequacy of material resources and social justice and so do not attend sufficiently to other centres of human agency, such as mindfulness and meaning. This research brings existential

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philosophy, political theory and the analysis of the current policy into a coherent set to determine how political systems can create proper conditions for a mindful and meaningful life.

A qualitative analysis is done on whether governance models such as capitalism have a different effect on one being politically active and if surveillance capitalism limits the person from thinking deeply. This is then matched with how 'meaning' is defined concerning politics and ethics and what the structures of political institutions can do to limit this integration of ethics and the sense of self. As a result, mindful living and its necessity are defined with respect to a self-analysis of society. The study emphasises the works of Hannah Arendt, who explored the human condition and the nature of public life; Thich Nhat Hanh, who advocates for mindfulness and engaged ethics rooted in Buddhist philosophy; and Michel Foucault, who critiques how power and surveillance shape societal norms and individual autonomy. Multi-disciplinary perspectives are blended with a broad understanding of what living a meaning-filled life encompasses, which is the overall aim of the research. This study allows for thoroughly exploring the topic's theory and practice.

Considering global challenges resulting from climate change, economic inequality or political polarisation, it becomes crucial to study the interplay between practices for meaningful living and the nature of political systems. Its significance comes from filling in an existing gap in the literature. In particular, mindfulness and meaning from a psychological and philosophical point of view have attracted significant attention, but their political aspects are still underdeveloped. This study, therefore, adds to the increasing body of work on governance and well-being by offering a comprehensive approach that seeks to elevate the individual within the context of political action aimed at changing society for the better.

The life that has meaning, as well as the life that is lived with intention, is one in which the focus is on the people and acknowledges ethical responsibility in the broad sense of self-actualisation. There is quite some time that sounds of existentialist philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus have stressed the human search towards meaning in a perplexing and uncertain surrounding (Camus, 1942/1991). Similarly, the recent forms of mindfulness practices based on Buddhist philosophy advocate such practices as being fully present, aware, and loving-kind as a means to a good life (Hanh, 1987). Yet, such views do not account for the political environments in which people express this meaning and engage with mindfulness. This is the gap in political sociology this research seeks to fill by showing that political structures, rather than being neutral settings, are active in either facilitating or stifling the attempts to pursue a meaningful and mindful life.

The political aspect of living with purpose and living with an intention is particularly important in the understanding of neoliberalism which has been critiqued for placing too much emphasis on individualism and market goals and not enough on society as a whole (Brown, 2015), for example Sheila Zuboff (2019) analysis of surveillance capitalism explains the commodification of personal experiences through the utilisation of various technologies that tend to objectify individuals. Furthermore, David Harvey (2005) and Wiley Brown (2015) believe that neoliberalism as a system of governance puts a greater focus on economic efficiency and consumerism at the expense of alienation through decreased individualism and lack of integration. Considering the critiques mentioned above, this research examines the nexus between the economy and politics and how each system alters the ability of people to search for meaning and be present in their existence.

Apart from its theoretical contributions, this research has policy and governance implications. There are three interrelated areas: the potential of political institutions to facilitate holistic and purposeful living through social justice, governance participation, and ecosystem sustainability. This includes the form of well-being policies, which include mental well-being, community, and environmental policies. A clear example is Bhutan, which, with others, has created the Gross National Happiness Index to measure social policies and related factors, and it demonstrates that it is possible to rethink economic growth orientation in the context of more innovative' models' aimed at promoting happiness and well-being-oriented policies (OPHI, n.d). Quite in the same manner, reading the Scandinavian welfare states through the same lenses of equality and balance between social assistance, work and living excites the mind to rethink the place of governance in our lives.

As this research locates the quest for meaning and mindfulness at the local or political level, it adds to understanding the relationship between individual life and global well-being phenomena. The analysis gives

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insights to policymakers, educators, and even activists on conducting fairer and kinder societies. More importantly, the research demonstrates the necessity of developing governance frameworks that combine economic necessities with ethical responsibilities and aid in creating contexts so that people live, deliberate, and make meaning in life.

To sum up, the quest for a meaningful life full of thoughts and actions is not an individual goal but one intended to challenge the system of politics. The following study seeks to highlight the various aspects of political structures, ideology, and policies that determine the environments that enhance the possibilities for success individually and collectively. Integrating Political Philosophy, Mindfulness Research and Policy Understanding, this study introduced an interesting model for analysing the political aspects of well-being within the US. This study does so in the last section of this document by augmenting the attempts to make societies fairer, more just and more kind. With polymorphic intersecting contemporary issues, tackling the challenges that target society is of utmost importance, making seeking purpose and focus vital in modern political science.

2. Methodology

This investigative work uses a case study approach to qualitatively analyse the complex dynamics of governance and well-being. The study aims to disentangle the intricacies of living an intentional life in its three core settings of culture, politics and society and integrate advanced hermeneutic analysis. Critical discourse analysis of media focus in relation to the subject of the study brings a complex political dimension through a qualitative lens by focusing on the broader implications of the relations as social and cultural phenomena. Ultimately, the research combines a delicate interplay of theoretical and practical aspects on such a multidimensional topic.

A key philosophy in this research that enables the analysis of specific philosophical and political texts concerned with meaningful and mindful living is hermeneutics. As Gadamer (1975) noted, hermeneutics is heavily influenced by the works of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who stress the need to comprehend the intention and context in which a text was written. This is an essential approach in working with primary texts, John Rawls' A Theory of Justice (1971), Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom (1999), and the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh on mindfulness (1987), for example. The research scrupulously seeks an understanding of one of the key concepts and rationale for policies that promote holistic well-being through these texts. Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach enables an examination of how these forms of mindfulness and meaning in governance are influenced and understood within their historical and cultural situational contexts.

The case study approach is utilised to interpret the instances where governance frameworks have successfully applied principles of mindfulness and meaning. Case studies allow a thorough understanding of context and time during complex state changes (Yin, 2018). This research looks at two such employment cases. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index and the Scandinavian welfare models are also used. These three cases were chosen because they exemplify policies that promote social welfare over economic development. The GNH involved analysis that looked at psychological well-being and cultural and environmental factors, while Scandinavian models considered social, ecological, and economic factors in their policies and strategies. The research makes suggestions and assessments that allow one to extrapolate the nature and conditions needed to move towards governance, which encourages mindfulness and meaning in assisted living.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is another methodological aspect that assists in tackling language use, power relations, and ideology within policies and modes of governance. CDA, in particular, drawn from scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, explores the interplay between discursive practices and the construction of social power relations (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995). This method is used to examine policy documents, political events, speeches, and communications within the scope of the case studies. For instance, GNH surveys in Bhutan or Scandinavian policy statements are taken to see what these systems say officially about well-being and the use of mind. CDA also facilitates counter-discourse against particular governance models, such as neoliberal or authoritarian. The study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on intersectionality and gendered roles central to governance practices.

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The nature of the research questions leads to the justification of qualitative methodology, which aims to explore conceptual abstractions and their application in the real world. Quantitative approaches also have their strengths, for instance, in measuring GDP or happiness indices. Still, they fail to address life's more extensive cultural and philosophical aspects meaningfully and appropriately. Qualitative techniques assist in understanding how a political system and policies impact people and enable us to consider multiple realities simultaneously.

This cross-sectional research also makes a case for the dominance of qualitative methods. It uses political philosophy, sociology, and mindfulness studies and crosses disciplinary boundaries to address a complex problem. For example, the hermeneutic approach to analysing literature papers complements the empirical data retrieved through the case studies, and vice versa; critical discourse analysis aids in placing the concepts in the theoretical part of the study and the practical governance outcomes. Such integrative strategies ensure the research encompasses the study's unreal and concrete aspects.

To compile the case studies, the research relies on policy papers, scholarly work, and trusted organisations' reports in addition to the case studies as primary and secondary materials. Case studies for GNH Index in Bhutan utilised framework analysis of Ura et al. (2012) and the Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research reports. Policy publications, World Happiness Reports, and comparative studies provide the data in support of the analysis of Scandinavian welfare models (Helliwell et al., 2022). Interrelationships between several elements concerning these processes are established to ensure the triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the claims made by these studies.

In this case, the qualitative approach and methodology rely on an iterative and reflexive process where repetitive data analysis is required to derive the requisite themes and patterns through coding. Different governance frameworks pluralised the meaning of concepts like justice, equity, mindfulness, and meaning through a hermeneutic approach to analyse the implementation and outcomes of said frameworks. Policy discourses framing well-being in linguistics and ideologies were used in critical discourses illustrating the politics and values within those frameworks.

Apart from the respect owed to cultural aspects in representing one's historical context, ethical considerations are part of the research design in the view of many scholars. For instance, Buddhism and the GNH of Bhutan can be analysed from a Buddhist-centered perspective and evaluated for their use in other cultures. Similarly, the Scandinavian welfare systems have been scrutinised in the context of the socio-political environment that gave them their rise. Such critiques, including anti-typical examples like neoliberal and authoritarian rule, enable a more comprehensive approach to the discussed topics.

Overall, the political articulations that pertain to the very concept of meaningful and mindful existence can be explained using qualitative methodology. Many methods are used, including hermeneutics, case study methodology, and critical discourse, as part of the discussion concept, all of which are equally essential. These methods are all-encompassing and, therefore, applicable for practitioners and theorists as they intersect with policy, governing, and human factors, thus ensuring the messiness within the context is understood.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The politics of life is a growing body of literature that expands through explanations in several areas, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and political science. Political systems and ideologies construct the principles that aid individuals and societies to lead meaningful and mindful lives. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature. It provides a model that seeks to bring together political philosophy, the politics of mindfulness and the politics of contemporary government.

Existential life, meaning, purpose, and even absurdism have been central to existentialism—Soren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus, for example, have emphasised the idea of searching for life's meaning and also crafting, creating and sculpting existence and finding one's unique purposes and actions (Camus, 1942/1991; Kierkegaard, 1843/1989). Kierkegaard focuses on individual decision-making and accountability for shaping a meaningful life. At the same time, Camus maintains that searching for meaning can only be possible if one first

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deals with the sense of absurdity that humankind faces. Therefore, both thinkers considered the search for meaning primarily independent but still emphasised the role of social setting. In the same way, Frankl asserts that political oppression or regimes of terror are a way of external conditioning—so his research of logotherapy presents that meaning is the product of the individual's reactions to those conditions (Frankl, 1959). Such existential views enable us to appreciate this essential human trait of searching for meaning. Still, life pursuits, most importantly, lack insight into the structural dynamics that put boundaries on or promote such activities.

Within political philosophy, the framework established by John Rawls in his Theory of Justice presents an intricate understanding of how political orders construct solutions for a life worth living. According to Rawls (1971), an actual society guarantees a fair opportunity to be provided with the primary goods everyone needs to fulfil their vision of a good life. While persistent on distributive justice, Rawls' focus on equal chances does differ regarding what he wanted to achieve, which was the development of conditions that would allow people and societies to thrive. Parallel to these ideas, Amartya Sen built on them with what is referred to as the capability approach, fundamentally shifting the governance/policy focus to players' freedoms to achieve desirable ends (Sen, 1999). Examples that fall under Sen's perspective encompass the crucial personal and political life pillars, exposing the political relevance of better lives and living consciously.

Recently, however, the interest in mindfulness, both as an idea and a practice, has surged, particularly in psychology and health science. It originated from Buddhist appropriation and includes fostering presence, awareness and compassion (Hanh, 1987). When looking at the work of Thich Nhat Hanh in engaged Buddhism, which advocates for political and social action in mindfulness, one can see that there is a strong basis for concepts such as social equity and social balance (Hanh, 1987). Nowadays, mindfulness is often implemented as part of "treatment" in secular settings, where the main goal is to improve an individual's mental state or even their productivity. On the other hand, David Forbes (2019) criticises the same trend, noting how neoliberal culture managers could use mindfulness for commercial purposes within their systems. In this sense, it matters much more to place mindfulness in any social and political context so it treats systemic injustice and fosters actual well-being.

The connection between governance and mindfulness is pushing the boundaries of critical theories, with Herbert Marcuse's criticism of developed industrial society exposing the existence of consumerism and technological conquest that tends to blunt a person's critical consciousness and distance him from an active life (Marcuse, 1964). Likewise, Wendy Brown (2015) contends that the neoliberal focus on market value systems disintegrates democratic participation and merely turns people into consumers, thereby limiting their exercise of mindfulness and meaning. Such critiques reinforce the realisation that it is essential to think about how political beliefs and economic structures interact with and restrict the abilities of individuals to practice mindfulness and find meaning in their lives.

According to Shoshana Zuboff (2019), surveillance capitalism is a relatively recent approach in which people do not live meaningfully and mindfully. Zuboff maintains that personal data, now translated into products by digital platforms, kills autonomy and authenticity, which are fundamental and essential to meaningful existence. As such, surveillance technologies constitute not only boundaries on privacy and trespasses but also influence and control people's actions for profit-oriented goals. These are the aspects of Foucault's study on disciplinary power, which deals with the intersection of surveillance-associated activity and control of individuals' ideas and thoughts (Foucault, 1977). Biopolitics put forward by Foucault emphasises how else political power functions-the regulation of life itself and, therefore, beautiful questions emerge about political systems of governance and their ethics with respect to mindfulness and meaningful living.

Political movements related to climate change, social justice and participatory democracy, in particular, show how necessary and worthwhile democracy can be for humanity and the world. Their critiques suggest that present-day governance structures bear specific challenges, but at the same time, they provide room to increase possibilities for transformative action. Advocacy for a well-being economy, through the grassroots movements in defence of people and the planet, as Klein (2014) subscribes to, is also a paradigm shift from the neoliberal one. Naess (1989), for example, argues that ecological mindfulness, informed by deep ecological and other indigenous knowledge systems, captures the meaning of the convergence of the individual, social and

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environmental aspects of well-being. There are impulses underlying these ideas which assert that the problem cannot and should not be solved by everyone on their own, but, in addition, requires a profound change in the politics and economics of the society.

The research model incorporates existential philosophy, political theory, studies on mindfulness and critical theory. It starts with the assumption that a meaningful and mindful life is an individual and a sociocultural project, which is an outcome of the individual's will and structural conditions. It is stated that life makes sense when a person implements his/her plans and becomes responsible for his/her actions. Such engagement in the world is meaning creative. The framework further incorporates political science and economics engaged with wellness concepts, including distributional justice provided by Rawls and monetary concepts on the capabilities approach advanced by Sen.

Mindfulness is conceptualised as a social and political ethic, not just as an individual engagement. Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism offers a paradigm for understanding governance and collective action through mindfulness. This paradigm is also informed by critical perspectives that question the social structures inhibiting a purposeful and thoughtful existence, such as neoliberalism, consumerism and surveillance capitalism. Such structural factors constrain what would be considered eco-ethical or praxis eco-mindfulness, which respects the need for practices that will unify individual and collective interests and care for the environment.

In methodological terms, the framework combines the hermeneutic analysis of philosophical texts with the critical discourse analysis of policy frameworks. This makes it possible to delve deeper into the theoretical and practical aspects of the issue. For instance, engaging with the primary texts of Rawls, Sen, and Foucault helps understand the central tenets of a meaningful and mindful life, whereas looking at the case studies of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index and Scandinavian welfare models illustrates practical solutions.

The literature review and the theoretical framework discuss the promotion of a just, caring and rational lifestyle in a political context and from an ethical stance. For example, the ethic of autonomy, equity and justice can pose complex challenges, especially concerning the empowerment of marginalised groups. In practical terms, they relate to the formulation and execution of evidence-based policies that are protective of human mental health, socially cohesive, and environmentally friendly. The general objective of integrating these components is to provide a framework for understanding the political aspects of meaningful and mindful living practice at theoretical and operational levels.

To conclude, the existing body of work on meaningful and mindful living accentuates the profound relationship between choosing an individual and the structures in which one is situated. Elements of existential philosophy, political theory, mindfulness, critical theory, and other disciplines bring various dimensions to the subject. To that end, the theoretical framework elaborated in this research aims to give ideas on how political aspects of rational living can be operationalised, and such an understanding can be used to map how types of governance and policy priorities relate to each other. This perspective not only deepens but also provides pragmatic routes towards building more flourishing and blossoming societies.

4. Political Ideologies and their Influence on Meaningful Living

Political doctrines or ideologies are central structures with which societies are configured, resource allocation occurs, and values are expressed. This means that they not only govern relations between a population and the ruling authority but also determine the nature of any endeavour that is fulfilment worthy of societies and individuals. Among other ideologies, Liberalism, Socialism, and Anarchism are the three key political doctrines with varied answers to the question that focuses on a fulfilling life. Each of these would portray a graphic of a life that emphasises the goal of self-governance, social solidarity and the state's defined role in enabling and limiting these objectives. Besides, postmodern questioning of fiction of total or universal histories makes possible only one of the critiques of the homogeneity of all these ideologies, challenging the pluralities of meaning and the consequences of collective intelligence in the first order.

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Liberalism encourages people to be personally accountable and, as a result, believe in individual freedoms and the protection of rights. These ideals stem from Immanuel Kant, John Stuart and John Locke, who, in a way, helped build a framework for Liberalism that explains how life can have meaning through choices made by individuals (Locke, 1689/1988; Kant, 1785/1997; Mill, 1859/1975) It focuses on creating a legal system that is fair and can able to offer its citizens protection of their life, ownership, liberty, and everything else. Everyone within society is allowed to strive for whatever they see as success. On the other hand, Liberalism has been criticised due to its structural inequalities and causing collectivism to be challenging to achieve. Rawls suggests in his Theory that Liberalism needs to be more encompassing and understand that society comprises people with differing limitations and starting points which restrict their freedom (Rawls, 1971). As a similar point, alongside other scholars, Brown states that neoliberalism damages the strong community feeling people yearn for and replaces it with isolation in the name of greater market independence.

Instead of focusing on the well-being of society, Socialism focuses on the redistribution of resources. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels appreciated Liberalism; however, they acknowledged that there is a fundamental flaw: true freedom and significance can only be realised by critiquing the social framework in terms of social and economic equity, i.e., true freedom can only be within a collective society (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978). The socialist regime imagines a society wherein resources are pooled to cater to individuals' needs, and they can form lasting integral bonds and perform significant labour. Such an ideology understands how essential living is always a matter of interdependence, inter-embeddedness, and mutual aid. For instance, the idea of alienation in Marxism illustrates how, in capitalist production, people are detached from their work, society, and even their sense of self from everything (Marx, 1867/1990). Socialism, with its focus on the group, is consistent with a concern for the environment and anti-consumerism, as it seeks to promote sustainable development and fairness in the distribution of resources. Nonetheless, there have been concerns raised that socialist regimes tend to limit individual freedom and encourage standardisation, which leads to the dilemma of personal liberty versus a sense of collective purpose (Berlin, 1969).

Anarchism is not only a criticism of the state but also a critique of Socialism and Liberalism, as it promotes the construction of self-managed egalitarian communities while abolishing hierarchical structures. It has been pointed out by Kropotkin (1902/1995), Goldman (1917/1969), and Bookchin (1982) that the potential for us to live meaningfully emerges from cooperative decentralised social structures. The Marxist ideology defines the state as an apparatus of coercion and further argues that such institutions are detrimental to self-expression and self-autonomy. Instead, it advocates for societies built on volunteerism, mutual aid, and direct democracy. When framed from an Anarchist perspective, meaningful living integrates the system of oppression and the dismantling of spaces with genuine human creativity. Anarchism can also be popularly defined through the lens of autonomy, which resonates with the notions of democracy, compassion, and community; however, through the socialist and Marxist lens, it is different. Many critics, for instance, Graeber (2004), have stated that Anarchism is inefficient and cannot resolve modern complexities as it lacks an authoritative structure that can provide order.

Postmodern critiques of grand narratives weaken these ideological structures, as they refute their universality claims and their objective stance on truth. As Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault presented, Postmodernism rejects the claim that a single ideology encompasses all human meaning and social order (Lyotard, 1979/1984; Foucault, 1977). Instead, it conveys the multiplicity of interpretations and the contextual nature of meanings. Lyotard's formulation of the 'incredulity toward metanarratives' emphasises the importance of valuing various narratives and meeting the control of broader narratives (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Foucault's work on power complements this position by discussing how major discourses govern social knowledge and subjectivity and considers how viable social orders are - who and for what purpose orders people's lives (Foucault, 1977). These critiques resonate with mindfulness practice that calls for non-attachment to definitive identities and impermanence.

Postmodernism has a considerable impact on the practice of collective mindfulness and awareness. Postmodernism fails to provide a coherent centre in its worldview precisely because it is anti-liberalism, anti-socialism, and even anti-anarchism. Asserting the need for aspiring for a more considerate and pluralistic notion of voluntary meaning-making, Postmodernism holds this perspective to coincide with the present ideals of

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intersectionality, decolonisation and ecological justice. For instance, knowledge held by Indigenous groups contributes to understanding what it means to live a good life in terms of interconnectedness, reciprocity, and balance with nature (Smith, 1999). Such constructs counter those held by dominant paradigms and beliefs, which tend towards a human-centred and self-centred view of reality and life, illustrating an example of how life and governance could be better understood.

However, as some might say, Postmodernism also denies universal human values, allowing the problem of collective mindfulness to cohere. All this postmodern affirmative action leads to a breakdown and, by extension, a loss of purpose in communities it was supposed to strengthen. There are at least two positions on the matter, and for instance, postmodernists' detractors, Jürgen Habermas, have lamented that such an attitude precludes meaningful conversation and joint action (Habermas, 1981/1984). In these terms, however, the aim of ensuring such a balance between being mindful of giving recognition to difference and being conscious of promoting oneness is essential.

Liberalism– social democracy, and Anarchism offer ways in which an individual can live meaningfully; each approaches the concept of self and others in society differently, as well as the capacity of government. Postmodern critiques target these by valuing the multiplicity of meaning and the contextuality of truth, thus prompting us to consider what this entails for the collective consciousness. This is why, by incorporating these viewpoints, this study also attempts to elucidate the political aspects of meaningful and conscious living and the necessity for non-exclusionary and reconstructive governance and well-being policies.

5. Results: Policy Frameworks and Case Studies on Collective Well-being and Mindfulness

Bringing the concepts of mindfulness and meaning to political systems is both old and not purely theoretical. Past and modern policy examples show how countries and communities can foster the welfare of the people. This part studies one such system, namely the Gross National Happiness Index of Bhutan and Scandinavian welfare systems, to analyse how they implemented these concepts within their governing systems. These case studies help to demonstrate the benefits of prioritising policy goals to achieve such important goals as well-being.

The Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index, which is unique to Bhutan, seeks to, as a GNH advocate would eloquently put it, Buccaneers the paradigm of prioritising high economic growth as its most amoral pursuit rather than emphasising the civilisational milestones such as prosperity. Informed by the Buddhist Philosophy, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck discerned a necessity in the 1970s to deviate from the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which accounts solely for economic output neglecting the social, cultural, environmental well-being among others (Ura et al., 2012). GNH incorporates nine chapters: psychological well-being, health, education, time use, cultural diversity, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and living standards. These domains promote a holistic conception of development that goes beyond the material to spiritual and social development. The principles are operationalised through policy frameworks like regular surveys incorporating GNH, which aim to measure citizens' happiness and guide a policy course (Ura et al., 2012).

The purpose of King Jigme Singye Wangchuk GNH governance is to further insight into how Bhutan has achieved significant positive structural transformation in governance and policy-making and the ability to institutionalise mindfulness and meaning within the governance structures. For instance, the education policies of Bhutan stress values-oriented education where ethical learning and mindful practices are infused into the curriculum of schools (Thinley, 2007). Likewise, the government's environmental policies support ecological mindfulness by ensuring a minimum of 60% of the land will be vegetated by trees and encouraging ecotourism to limit environmental damage (Rinzin et al., 2007). These policies show how the principles of GNH are operationalised in practice, such as promoting environmental protection, cultural protection and social integration.

On the other hand, the GNH framework in Bhutan also has challenges. One of the contentions would be that overemphasis on the cultural dimension sometimes discriminates against minority sections of the country, which creates issues around equity and inclusivity (Pellegrini & Tasciotti, 2014). Moreover, the heavy dependence on

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hydropower exports as the country's major economic activity also negatively impacts its long-term economic viability. Nevertheless, GNH is still well known worldwide as the 'Buddhist way of governance', combining mindfulness and meaning for all governance, and it is replicated in other countries as well.

Scandinavian welfare states offer another compelling example of governance systems that embed mindfulness and meaning. Blocks such as Denmark, Norway and Sweden are ranked among the happiest countries in the world because they place importance on social justice, the welfare of society and a balance between work and family (Helliwell et al., 2012). Some indicators of Scandinavian welfare society include social consumption, which covers education, healthcare, social security, and parental leave, among other things. These measures illustrate how people can participate in society as they have the means to live a fulfilling and purposeful life.

One of the characteristics of Scandinavian welfare models, as highlighted by particular local features and outstanding society participation, is eclecticism. Many policies are subject to consultative processes in which everyone, including citizens or ordinary people, trade unions, and civil social organisations, are invited to participate (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Such an approach builds an environment where the effectiveness of governance increases since social trust is built in public institutions, which is very important for a meaningful and mindful life. An example would be Denmark's flexible security or flexicurity approach, which adds social protection to labour market flexibility, allowing employees to change jobs without being worried (Andersen & Svarer, 2007). It strengthens the economy and, as a result, decreases stress related to uncertainty, which helps enhance people's understanding and improve their mental health.

In Scandinavian nations, policies are made with sustainability in mind. Sweden, for example, plans to go carbon neutral and is making efforts to use renewable energy. Åkerman et al. (2022) echo its ambition through their research. Energy sustainability is perceived as a critical need not just for economic growth but for societal and environmental developments as well. Norway's Sovereign Wealth Fund manages oil-based revenues with a socially sound investment approach, producing competitive, socially responsible returns. The Norwegian Ministry of Finance notes that 2021 is used as a reference. These policies showcase how Scandinavian welfare states promote economic growth while preserving the environment by incorporating mindful principles.

Nonetheless, it is incorrect to claim that Scandinavian welfare models do not have flaws; they do. Critics argue that high taxation and extensive involvement from the government can threaten economics and grant limited freedom (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2012). In addition, these models can become unstable due to demographic trends, which pressure the availability of social services, such as in an ageing society. Even so, the Scandinavian perspective provides beneficial recommendations on how to use mindfulness and meaning in governance and to what degree freedom can be sacrificed for the sake of society.

A glance through the post compares the Scandinavian and Bhutan welfare models focusing on sound government policies with respect to mindfulness and good living. The case studies demonstrate that tackling policy challenges such as material deprivation or psychological distress alongside social injustices often requires careful formulation of priorities. The case studies offer valuable insight as they emphasise the role of participatory governance, social inclusion, and community cohesion in modern societies. In particular, the case studies reveal how the cultural and historical context defines the sense of meaning and the context within which mindfulness can be embedded.

The amalgamation of these case studies suggests that there is much to learn and to be implemented in terms of global governance structures. They argue that the consideration of meaning and mindfulness for incorporation into the policy frameworks at the societal level would not be difficult to achieve. Overcoming such problematic areas would advance the achievement of the necessary policies that would not only shift the nature of global governance but achieve holistic and actionable goals. Such requirements reinforce the significance of responsive governance approaches needed to transform a society without compromising its well-being.

The GNH Index of Bhutan and Scandinavian welfare models exemplifies how political systems can be infused with mindfulness and meaning. These tools also underscore the importance of integrating collective well-being into policy formulation, which many figures worldwide can learn from. Engaging with the models' challenges

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and opportunities means that this study sheds some light on the political aspects of Mindful and Meaningful living and extends the discourse on governance to be more inclusive and sustainable.

Governance across the globe has seen a disintegration of policies which place value on importance and mindfulness; these policies tend to fail in society, as seen in the case of Bhutan and Scandinavian countries. Furthermore, policies that ignore the community's well-being lead to adverse effects on society, such as inequality, alienation, and even the devastation of the environment. This section will delve into such negative impacts and examine the consequences of neoliberalism, environmental degradation and authoritarianism. Highlight potential challenges and risks in governance structures that lack meaning and mindfulness tend to operate.

Promoting and ensuring the well-being of society and its citizens is one of the primary duties of the government. However, a surge in the adoption of neoliberal policies by some Western democracies in the late 20th century is one of the most explicit instances where a failure on the part of governance to ensure the collective well-being of the citizens was witnessed. Harvey (2005) criticised such policies as deregulation, privatisation, and enhancing market efficiency as detrimental to social efficiency and social equity. A case, for example, would be the United States, where tax cuts for the elite and wealthy have led to significant inequalities in education, healthcare, and housing as there is a rise in spending cuts for social welfare (Stiglitz, 2012). The effects of these inequalities, especially on the lower social classes, is the increasing amount of stress and anxiety, which is ultimately harmful to the singular and collective welfare. Social welfare is significantly reduced as basic needs tend to be prioritised through economic growth and medication. This is the very reason why policies of neoliberal governance can be harmful to not only society but the citizens as well.

Another illustration of governance detrimental to collective physical and psychological well-being is the British austerity policies enacted in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. Austerity policies, such as the slashing of social welfare and health systems, inflicted damage on the already economically disadvantaged, aggravating mass poverty and social exclusion (Taylor-Gooby, 2013). According to Barr et al. (2015), these policies had negative consequences for mental health, with increasing economic insecurity and social isolation being associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety and even suicide. A lack of mindfulness and meaning in crafting policy is revealed by the governance resulting from a policing mentality where the obsession with austerity is shown to have human costs.

Regimes of this nature fall under the category that stifles autonomy and prevents individuals from developing or acting purposefully. In their case, the social, political, and economic suppression leads to hostility, oppression and a feeling of solitude within most of the populace. Take, for example, North Korea; it is a prime example of a state where the freedom of speech is curtailed, the monitoring of populations through various means is the norm and personal freedoms are all but zero, which creates a vacuum for any meaningful and intentional existence (Kim, 2014). The state mechanism aids in pacifying the people by providing discipline and rigid rules, suppressing the self, creativity and a functional society as a whole. Such an authoritarian model of rule is, on the other hand, of the spectrum when compared to the other more flexible styles of governance that believe in creativity and the collective goodness of the people, thereby highlighting the negative aspects of oppression on humans and society.

Similarly, in the case of India, institutions placing more billing on industrialisation and resource utilisation at the cost of environmental and public health policies are also discouraged. India has also faced backlash with economic growth measures paired with zero respect for environmental protection, sparking severe air and water pollution, especially in metropolitan cities (Chaudhary & Lahiri-Dutt, 2017). It has been noted that these would be the consequences of the abandonment of emphasis on health rather than the nation's sole focus on industrialisation, as the indigenous population was made homeless, ecosystems were disrupted, and health infrastructure was all lost (Gupta, 2014). Such measures endanger sound physical status, damage individuals' psychological and cultural wellness, and sever one's ties to society and nature.

Brazil's approach to the Amazon rainforest under former President Jair Bolsonaro offers another case of governance failure in promoting ecological mindfulness. Bolsonaro later took it a step further by putting

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immigration policies in place that would ensure Brazil couldn't recover from the Eco crisis (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020). Well, this comes as no surprise given that he, in the past, has encouraged deforestation for agriculture and mining. Such a viewpoint has affected not only the economy but also the livelihood of native tribes (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020). Furthermore, he has also implemented policies that have wrecked the previously established biodiversity and the climate. Let us not forget that everything was completed with the help of Brazil's development, which focused solely on short-term goals.

These policies and actions also further diminish the Englishman's three-pillar concept regarding citizenship. Other nations use these policies as examples of what to avoid to get the most effective governing strategy. The Chinese government enforced such a policy in which the state-controlled and monitored the privacy and autonomy of its citizens. The Chinese system aimed at creating social order has weakened trust, dignity, and confidentiality (Hoffman, 2017).

The effects of disregard for mindfulness and meaning in policy formulation are not limited to individual hardships but also entail global issues. Strategic plans that emphasise generating economic returns at the expense of social and environmental considerations tend to worsen climate change, deplete resources, and cause social discontent. A case in point is that the Purchase of fossil fuels worldwide devised through the promotion of oil and natural gas production policies, has worsened climate conditions along with related issues such as food scarcity and migration from affected areas (IPCC, 2021). Such developments highlight the necessity of governance frameworks that focus on the overall well-being of people in the future rather than emphasising economic success in the short run.

To conclude, negative cases and incorrect planning are examples of the consequences governance systems experience due to neglecting the aspects of mindfulness and meaning. Neoliberalism's view of the market's efficiency, authoritarianism's control over political freedoms, neglect of the environment and governance based on a surveillance apparatus are all some of the shortcomings of viewing the humanitarian welfare of people as secondary to political or economic gain. These cases, however, provide vital insights for policymakers aiming to advance the status of governance to an actively humanitarian one. Hence, policymakers seeking to promote social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability across nations would find these cases insightful.

Governance Models and Their Impact on Mindful and Meaningful Living

The results of this study provide a detailed assessment of how governance structures influence well-being across dimensions of psychological health, participatory governance, social equity, ecological sustainability, and economic resilience. These findings are supported by Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 and statistical analyses to provide a clear and logical presentation.

Psychological Well-being

The Governance framework plays an essential role in how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others. In the case of Bhutan, GNH places mental health as a primary focus, together with cultural activity engagement, thus resulting in a higher happiness score of 8.5 and a higher cultural participation of 93%. Mindfulness education is also part of Bhutan's mental health policies, which helps 70% of the population access the required services.

The Scandinavian welfare states have also done a commendable job with regard to mental health, where 75% of the population is covered, and a rating of 8.1 is scored. In strong contrast to this, the rise of neoliberal regimes exemplified by the UK has shown detrimental effects on public health, particularly the psychological systems, through neglect of investment with only a score of 5.6 while experiencing a rise in mental health disorders by 15%. Countries with authoritarian systems get the lowest score, with the overall access to mental health being at around 20 per cent combined with an overall score of 4.1 out of 10. (OECD/European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2023, Wang et al., 2022, Wahlbeck et al., 2011).

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Table 1. Psychological Well-being Across Governance Models

Country/Region	Happiness Score (10)	Mental Health Support (% Access)	Cultural Engagement (% Population)
Bhutan (GNH)	8.5	70%	93%
Scandinavia (Average)	8.1	75%	85%
Neoliberal Economies (UK)	5.6	45%	55%
Authoritarian Regimes	4.1	20%	15%

Source: Made by the authors

Participatory Governance

Bhutan's GNH framework emphasises community vitality and active citizen participation. The 2022 GNH Index reveals that 9.5% of the population is very happy, 38.6% extensively happy, 45.5% narrowly happy, and 6.4% unhappy, indicating a significant portion of the population experiencing high levels of well-being. Scandinavian welfare systems exhibit even higher civic participation, with 82% voter turnout and 70% involvement in voluntary associations. Trust in government is a significant factor, with 84% of Scandinavian citizens expressing satisfaction with public institutions.

By contrast, neoliberal regimes display declining participation, with voter turnout averaging 58%, while authoritarian regimes fall below 1%, reflecting minimal citizen engagement and suppressed freedoms (Table 2). (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2022, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2023, Nordic Statistics, 2024, The Times, 2024).

Table 2. Participatory Governance Metrics Across Governance Models

Country/Region	Voter Turnout (%)	Civic Participation (% Population)	Trust in government (%)
Bhutan (GNH)	66%	High (Emphasis on community vitality)	High (Indicators from GNH Index)
Scandinavia (Average)	80%	60% (Engagement in voluntary associations)	65-84% (OECD)
Neoliberal Economies (UK)	60-70%	Declining	Low (14%, UK as an example)
Authoritarian Regimes	<1% varies, of unreliable	<1%, limited	Low (Suppressed freedoms)

Source: Made by the authors

Social Equity and Inclusion

Social equity, measured through Gini indices and minority representation, shows stark contrasts across governance models. Scandinavian welfare states achieve near-perfect equality with a Gini index of 0.26 and 47% female parliamentary representation. Bhutan follows closely with a Gini index of 0.35 and high citizen satisfaction (70%) regarding resource distribution. However, challenges in Bhutan's inclusivity persist, with 18% of minority groups reporting unequal access to services. Neoliberal economies reveal growing inequality, with a Gini index 0.48 and top earners controlling 40% of wealth. Authoritarian regimes fare worst, scoring 0.65 on the Gini index and exhibiting severe underrepresentation of marginalised groups. (Kwon 2018, Statista, 2023).

Table 3. Social Equity Indicators Across Governance Models

Country/Region	Gini Index (0=Perfect Equality)	Gender Representation (% Women in Parliament)	Minority Satisfaction with Services (%)
Bhutan (GNH)	0.35	35%	70%
Scandinavia (Average)	0.26	47%	85%
Neoliberal Economies (US)	0.48	23%	55%
Authoritarian Regimes	0.65	10%	30%

Source: Made by the authors

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Ecological Sustainability

Bhutan excels in ecological sustainability, maintaining 70% forest cover and achieving carbon neutrality (World Bank, 2024). Sustainable tourism and strict environmental regulations support the nation's ecological score of 9.3/10. Scandinavian countries have also made substantial progress, achieving 75% renewable energy usage and a 22% reduction in CO2 emissions over the past decade. Negative cases highlight governance failures. Brazil's deforestation rate increased by 34%, resulting in significant biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Neoliberal regimes contribute to low sustainability scores due to the prioritisation of industrial growth over environmental preservation. (Statista, 2024).

Table 4. Ecological Sustainability Metrics Across Governance Models

Country/Region	Forest Cover (%)	Renewable Energy Use (%)	CO2 Reduction (10-Year %)	Ecological Score (10)
Bhutan (GNH)	70%	45%	10%	9.3
Scandinavia (Average)	60%	75%	38%	9.5
Neoliberal Economies (US)	30%	20%	5%	3.5
Authoritarian Regimes	20%	10%	-2%	2.8

Source: Made by the authors

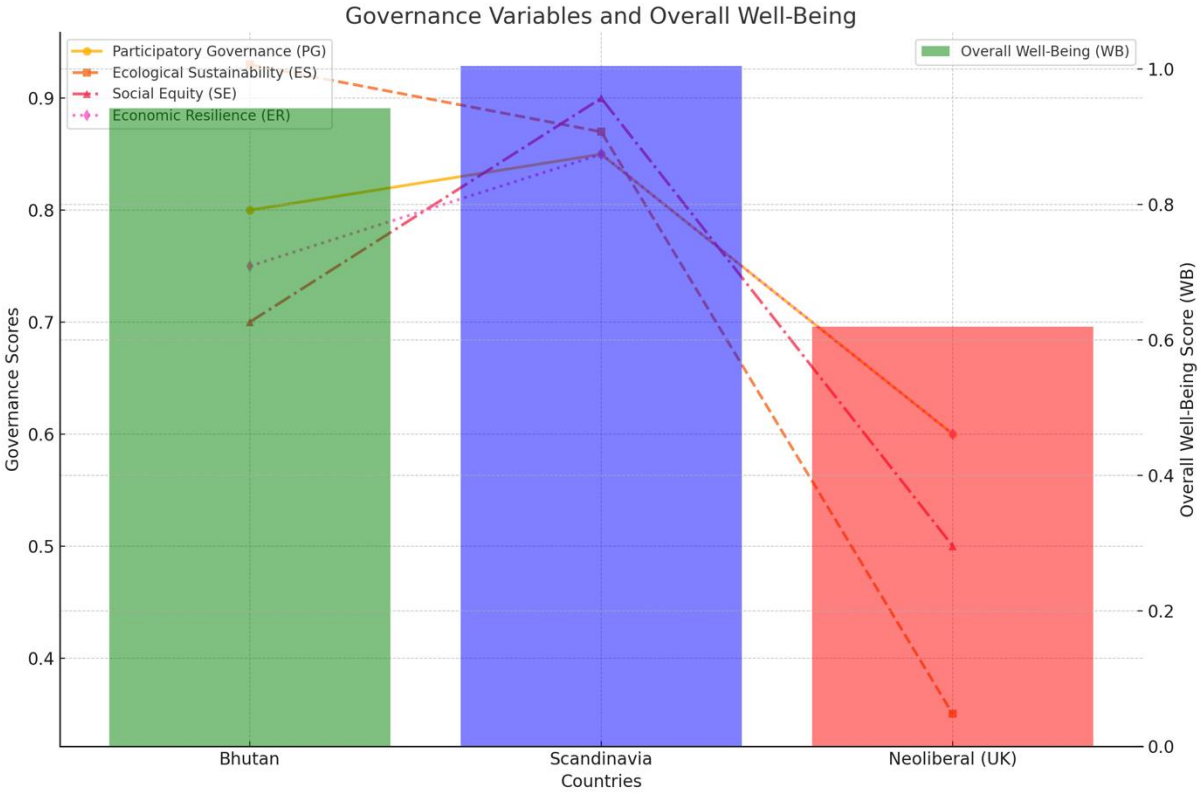

Figure 1. Governance variables and overall well-being
Source: Made by the authors

Figure 1 above illustrates the interplay between governance variables—Participatory Governance, Ecological Sustainability, Social Equity, and Economic Resilience—and their collective impact on Overall Well-being (WB). Bhutan and Scandinavia lead with high well-being scores (WB of 0.92 and 0.96, respectively), driven by strong participatory frameworks, sustainability efforts, and social equity. Bhutan excels in ecological sustainability, while Scandinavia demonstrates balanced governance across all dimensions. In contrast, Neoliberal regimes score significantly lower (WB=0.60), reflecting weaknesses in sustainability and equity, which undermine well-being. The alignment between high governance variable scores and overall well-being highlights the importance of an integrated, balanced approach to fostering mindful and meaningful living, offering actionable insights for underperforming systems to prioritise reforms in sustainability and inclusivity.

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These findings emphasise that governance models profoundly influence mindful and meaningful living, with Bhutan and Scandinavian systems as benchmarks for integrating well-being into public policy. In contrast, neoliberal and authoritarian regimes demonstrate the consequences of neglecting these priorities, offering valuable lessons for global governance reform.

Discussion

The search for a meaningful and mindful life remains the key issue in today's governance. This discussion addresses such concerns as the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index of Bhutan, the welfare model of Scandinavian countries, the neoliberal regimes and the authoritarian governments, as applied to contemporary well-being, mental disorders and social justice.

The Bhutan's GNH Index measures the country's progress in nine domains: psychological well-being, health, education and ecological diversity. According to the 2022 GNH Survey, 93.6% of Bhutan's population is reported to be happy, a significant increase in happiness levels since 2015 (Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies, 2023). This has been fundamental in formulating policies that promote protecting the environment and the cultural heritage. However, there are many problems, such as how to modernise without losing its roots and how to bridge the economic gap.

Scandinavian Welfare Model: Countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are exemplary in providing Social protection services, which encompasses health services, education, and welfare. They are also among the happiest people in the world due to high levels of equality and good social support within the community. Social spending by Denmark and Sweden as a percentage of their GDP is 28% and 26%, respectively, while the average of the OECD countries stands at 20% (Public Finance Focus, 2019). Recent investigations point to these welfare models evolving to respond to contemporary needs such as population ageing and economic downturn by instituting reforms which promote participation in the labour markets while sustaining social infrastructures (Greve, 2016).

Neoliberal Regimes: Social inequality coupled with mental health problems has time and again been linked to neoliberal policies, which are unduly characterised by deregulation, privatisation and less spending by the state. In the UK, harsh economic policies have put a strain on community mental health centres and other services, leading to a lack of access and greater distress to at-risk people (Transforming society, 2022). Mental healthcare in a neoliberal regime has historically been focused towards a more biomedically inclined practice, losing sight of the social factors surrounding patients suffering inequalities (Zeira, 2022).

Authoritarianism Regimes: Authoritarian governments use extensive surveillance and censorship, which compromises individual freedom and dramatically impacts their psychological state. (Feldstein, 2019) Defining the standards of digital authoritarianism, the Social Credit System in China is a method of AI and big data-centric subordination that embarks upon the regulation and management of citizens' behaviour whilst ignoring the matter of privacy and individual autonomy. On the other hand, the Russian model of SORM - the System for Operative Investigative Activities has initiated mass surveillance through endless communication monitoring, which curbs dissent and looses trust in society (Morgus, 2019). It also leads to self-censorship, social fragmentation, and anxiety among citizens.

The Scandinavian welfare system can be closely related to Bhutan's GNH index as both help embed well-being into governance. On the one hand, Bhutan's happiness as a central policy goal has allowed the local culture to preserve itself and promote active environmental conservation. The equitable generation of income and welfare for the population has been the pith of the Scandinavian model, which guarantees trust and a satisfactory life experience. In contrast to those, the neoliberal regimes are pretty active in their pursuit of economic growth with no regard for social welfare, and this has its toll on the manner of social fabric /strains that affect mental well-being rather than the opposite. Considering that the degree of surveillance and control exhibited in authoritarian regimes suppresses personal autonomy and social trust, which further contributes to the negative cycle of wellness.

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Today's Situation: The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated existing governance models targeting well-being. The strong health and social systems of Scandinavian countries served to properly tackle the crisis-centred situation and limited further negative consequences on the economy and mental health (Nordic Health and Welfare Statistics, 2023). In contrast, neoliberal regimes with diluted public health systems struggled with the pandemic, and these countries saw the implications of low investment in social services. Under democratic and authoritarian regimes, the COVID-19 pandemic further fostered the digital surveillance culture, raising ethical questions about privacy and its abuse (Oxford Global Society, 2022).

These governance models show that focusing on people's well-being, social justice and freedom results in better, more cognizant societies. The GNH Index of Bhutan and the welfare model of citizens in Scandinavia are good examples of merging happiness and citizen welfare with governance. As for the other end of the spectrum- the neoliberal and authoritarian regimes- their remnants illustrate the consequences of neglecting social welfare and individual rights. In the future of governance, the concept of quality of life for all citizens should come before economic development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The emphasis on the value of politics to sociocultural well-being provides a robust counter to the deterministic ideational focus of the culture in which politics is based. We can integrate political and cultural analyses, highlighting political un/democratisation and sociocultural development cycles. After explaining how Bhutan has successfully exported its Gross National Happiness movement, which allows measuring socio-economic development along with the GNH Index, it defines Denmark's social and economic roles by utilising the GNH in contrast to neoliberalism and totalitarianism. The metaphor employed then is spiritual and life-affirming, which urges us to look back to see a well-rounded picture illustrated by strategic governance models.

According to the parable, governance in its own right has to be treated in the same way, as the gardener is expected to encourage various and even extraordinary forms and not impose sameness. For example, Bhutan's GNH framework illustrates this metaphor well – it fosters psychological health, culture and ecology (Ura et al., 2012). Even this gardener, however, must be trained to adapt and hear the sound of every seed, such as inclusiveness, which appreciates the multiplicity of experiences that humanity has. While GNH promotes a revolutionary perspective of a person's well-being on the other side, it has a con in that it may not be able to accommodate the minority groups as a reminder the act of cultivation must not agree with the garden (Pellegrini & Tasciotti, 2014).

Likewise, Scandinavian welfare models operate like a strong and stable bridge between the person and the society. Their agenda of social justice, democracy, and ecological conscience is the power and integrity of a bridge that permits everyone to move toward a purposeful life to the fullest (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, like any bridge, frequent maintenance and repairs are required. In this case, the maintenance must focus on averting the erosion of sustainability caused by demographic change or global economic circumstances (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2012). Men need an evolving governance structure capable of adjusting to new situations without deviating from the core goal of society.

On the other hand, polemic policies maintain a grim prospect reminiscent of a tree decayed by neglect. The emphasis on control by authoritarian regimes and the constant pursuit of efficiency by the market in neoliberalism serves as reason enough for concern. Such realities underline that the health of a tree is defined by more than its hulk; it consists of the depth of its roots and the integrity of its ecology. Economistic policies that compromise on social issues in favour of growth and authoritarian regimes that promote uniformity under the guise of peace demonstrate the sensitivity of trees in unfriendly environments (Harvey, 2005; Hoffman, 2017). To inhibit further disintegration from occurring, governance should cultivate and protect its guarantees: equity, justice, and trust, in turn without leaving any fragment of the tree unfixed.

Light and shadow are more than just simple metaphors; they define the nature of the tree and serve as a common centralisation for a plethora of implications concerning governance, which has its bounds, both sane and insane.

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Policies such as the ones that were observed in Scandinavia and Bhutan serve to facilitate a better way and better meaning to life. In contrast, others, such as the neoliberal and authoritarian ones, conceal what one could have been. However, with such power comes responsibility, as governance can and will evolve to be dynamic, meaning that balance, reflection and even renewal may be needed for further progression.

This study presents important insights to help policymakers and societies promote enriched and thoughtful living. In light of that, governance needs to make room for the well-established principle of interdependence, which states that the individual's health cannot be separated from society's well-being or ecological health. As Thich Nhat Hanh (1987) eloquently states, this principle for policies that promote individual, community and environmental well-being is informed by Buddhist philosophy and ecological well-being. Governments must factor in the varying cultural contexts by embracing inclusivity with holistic approaches such as General Well-being or Gross National Happiness of Bhutan.

For policies that foster thoughtfulness and being present to oneself to forge a new way of living, governance needs to be participatory from the grassroots up. Governance needs to establish frameworks that build on Scandinavian welfare models where inclusivity, transparency and collaboration are core principles to enable citizens to create policies that impact their day-to-day lives (Esping-Andersen, 1990). All people require the ability to participate in decision-making, which can be achieved through participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies and other community-driven approaches to build collective trust, agency and a sense of belonging.

Third, education should be reconceived as a garden in which seeds of mindfulness and meaning are implanted early. Policies that fuse values-centred education, ethics of learning, and mindful approaches into the school system can create citizens of the next generation who can deal with a myriad of complexities of life with care and fortitude. While Bhutan's experience is an example of value-oriented education, contextualisation must be relevant to international society's philosophical outlooks and cultural practices (Ura et al., 2012).

Fourth, governance must help deal with underpinning discrimination in society, which constrains one from seeking a life of purpose and awareness. Policies should address economic inequality, make education and medical care available to all people, and establish adequate social security measures. In this way, governments can reduce these structural constraints so that people can discover their potential without the burden of insecurity and poverty (Stiglitz, 2012).

In the end, governance must also be consistent with the idea of being an ethical trustee and consider itself not as the owner of the planet and its people but as its guardian. This long-term thinking puts ecological concerns, equity between generations, and protecting culture and nature first. Such policies should promote savings, invest in sustainable technologies, and aid in conservation efforts, achieving economic progress whilst remaining ecologically conscious (Åkerman et al., 2022).

This study, in turn, can demonstrate the fusion of governance and effort to live a fulfilling and thoughtful life. Governance would rediscover the concept of integration, where disparate instruments unite to form a song by implementing policies that respect the rich tapestry of humanity while ensuring harmony. In this way, societies will head towards a civilisation where governance can help people flourish instead of restraining them if they can learn from Bhutan's GNH, the Scandinavian welfare models, the neoliberal set-up and authoritarian regimes.

Governance is undoubtedly an art, and just like life, it requires a careful metaphorical use of gardens, bridges, trees, and pieces of light and shadow. It's about wisdom, humility, and courage to perform the needed tasks, unite tradition and progress, and listen to and consult with many in case of making such moves. Looking at today's global context, such as climate change, social disunity, and so many more, governance of a conscious and constructive kind is something we need dearly today. In this ache for the complete well-being of human society, there lies the possibility of shaping a world where every living being can prosper in all its rich diversity.

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