

# **The Meaning of Distributive Justice in Israel, Between Continuity and Change**

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## **Abstract**

The dissertation addresses the meaning of distributive justice in the Israeli society and its changes over time. The study demonstrates the importance of the idea of justice to the understanding of the actual distributive regime and its social legitimacy. The dissertation offers a constructivist theorization of the concept of distributive justice and focus on the shared normative values that define the appropriate distribution of resources. In contrast to universal philosophic theories of justice, the constructivist perspective highlights the contextual, dynamic and plural dimensions of the meaning of justice, which are analyzed in this research.

This is exercised in the context of the Israeli society of the last four decades, a period of neo-liberalization and withdrawal of the welfare state. The research is based on the analysis of perceptions of justice in two social realms: the common normative values among the public, as reflected from public opinion surveys, and the normative values of the public elected representatives, as reflected from parliamentary discussions on the national budget. The findings reveal a complex and dynamic perception of justice that gradually accept market-based distributive principles, but without dismissing traditional collectivist conceptions of justice, which require extensive redistribution of resources. These results expose that the legitimacy of the neo-liberal distributive regime in Israel is limited. This problem even worsened after the 2008 economic crisis, which contributes to the explanation of the popularity of the 'social justice' movement that spread throughout the country in 2011.

In broader perspective, the research demonstrates the contextual, dynamic and plural dimensions of justice perceptions. In particular, it highlights the fact that a change in the normative values entails an interaction between two competing logics: perpetuation of institutionalized cultural elements on the one hand, and adaptation to a changing reality on the other. Lastly, this work points at the importance of the research of normative values and their changes over time and shows how the examination of moral perceptions completes our understanding of the social structure.