

# Introduction to Volume 1

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## 0.1 Why a Panel on Social Progress?

There are many expert panels on issues ranging from biodiversity to chemical pollution or nuclear proliferation, and the most famous is now the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. A few years ago, a small group of academics started to wonder: Why is there no panel about the promotion of social justice, about the search for a general set of better policies and better institutions – in a nutshell, for a better society? Many policy issues examined by the existing panels have deep societal roots in the economy, in politics, and in cultures and values. Addressing these deeper factors would ease the search for solutions in many domains.

This questioning turned out to be widely shared among social scientists, and motivated the launch of the International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP), in its first congress in Istanbul in 2015. The IPSP is a purely bottom-up initiative, started by a group of researchers. It is complementary to many ongoing efforts by various groups and organizations with which it is collaborating. The United Nations are pushing the ambitious Agenda 2030 and its associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has launched multiple initiatives for a “better life,” for “inclusive growth,” as well as more technical efforts such as the fight against tax evasion; the World Bank has developed multiple approaches against poverty and inequality, and is not afraid of listening to the “voices of the poor” or of “rethinking the social contract”; the ILO articulates an agenda for the promotion of “decent work”; the Social Progress Imperative, also a bottom-up initiative of a few academics, seeks to promote social policies via a specific measurement approach meant to supplement economic indicators. These important efforts are just a few examples in a long list.

The International Panel on Social Progress distinguishes itself from other initiatives by combining three characteristics. First, it seeks to examine not just policy issues for the medium term but also structural and systemic issues for the long term. In other words, it is not afraid of asking existential questions about capitalism, socialism, democracy, religions, inequalities, and so on. A combination of intellectual caution, political conformism, and vested interests often prevent such existential questions from being explicitly discussed. But we should not be afraid to ask: What system should we aim for?

Second, the IPSP seeks to mobilize a uniquely wide set of perspectives, from all the relevant disciplines of social sciences and humanities as well as from all the continents. While the influence of the academic culture of developed countries remains strong in the Report, a substantial effort has been made to open the drafting effort to a global set of views and to present initiatives and case studies from developing countries. Social innovation is not a prerogative of the developed world, quite the contrary. The Global South has been widely influential on many occasions in the far or more recent past and today it still generates many ideas and initiatives that can inspire the world.

Finally, the IPSP does not talk exclusively to the policy-makers in charge of governmental action. Given its coverage of long-term structural issues, its ideas for innovative action also, and primarily, target the actors who are the real “change-makers” of society, namely, the many leaders and citizens who participate in public debates, who volunteer

work in civil society organizations, and who push the official decision-makers out of their comfort zone. Social progress has always been, in the long run, a bottom-up affair, and ideas are a key fuel for its engine.

## 0.2 Social Progress in Sight

The focus on “social progress” in this Report deserves some explanations, as the notion of progress has suffered from use and abuse by a particular elite, who, since the Industrial Revolution, found it natural to lead the world according to its privileges and prejudices. The Panel refers to “social progress” to send a message. Social change is not a neutral matter, and, even if there are many conflicting views on how to conceive of a good or just society, this Panel takes the view that a compass is needed to parse the options that actors and decision-makers face. Moreover, the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have successively made most observers of society lose their faith in socialism and their trust in capitalism, leaving a general sense of disarray and disorientation. The message of this Panel is a message of hope. We can do better, this is not the end of history.

If a main message emerges from this three-volume Report, it is indeed that: (1) considerable progress has been made in the past centuries and humanity is at a peak of possibilities, but it now faces challenges that jeopardize its achievements and even its survival; (2) addressing these challenges and mobilizing our current collective capacities to the benefit of a wider population require reforms that will hurt certain vested interests but rely on general principles that are readily available, involving an expansion of participatory governance and the promotion of equal dignity across persons, groups, and cultures; (3) there is not a unique direction of progress but multiple possibilities and many ideas that can be experimented, with variable adaptability to different economic, political, and cultural contexts.

## 0.3 Aims of the Report and Additional Resources on [www.ipsp.org](http://www.ipsp.org)

The Report presented here is made of 22 chapters over three volumes. Every chapter is co-signed by a multidisciplinary team of authors and represents the views of this team, not necessarily the views of the whole panel. In total, more than 260 authors have been involved, with about 60 percent of contributors coming, in roughly equal proportions, from economics, sociology, and political science, and the remainder representing other disciplines. Each chapter starts with a long summary of its contents, so as to help readers navigate the Report.

The objective of the Panel was to have every chapter team write a critical assessment of the state of the art in the topic covered in the chapter, acknowledging the ongoing debates and suggesting emerging consensus points. The initial objective was also to conclude every chapter with multiple recommendations for action and reform, with a transparent link to the diverse values that underlie the recommendations. These two objectives were encapsulated in the expressions “agree to disagree” and “conditional recommendations.” In the end, one can observe differences in the degree to which the chapters are able to cover all sides of the debates and to make concrete recommendations

that relate to a diversity of possible values and goals. But this Report proves that a large group of specialists from different disciplines can work together and provide a synthesis that no single brain could alone produce. This Report provides the reader with a unique overview of the state of society and the possible futures, with a mine of ideas of possible reforms and actions. For scholars and students, it also offers an exceptional guide to the literature in the relevant academic disciplines of social sciences and the humanities.

The drafting process involved the collection of thousands of online comments. Nevertheless, this Report reflects, as planned, the voice of academia rather than a broader group of thinkers or stakeholders. This is the contribution of a group of people who specialize in research. They offer their expertise and thoughts to the public debate, without seeking to bypass the democratic confrontation of projects. The readers are invited to take this Report as a resource, as a mine for ideas and arguments, as a tool for their own thought and action. They are also invited to engage with the Panel members and share their views and experiences.

Some of the chapters have longer versions, with more detailed analysis, more data, or case studies, which are available in open access on the IPSP website ([www.ipsp.org](http://www.ipsp.org)), along with videos of the authors and teaching resources. Visitors of the website are also invited to provide comments and to participate in surveys and forums.

0.4 Outline of the Report and of Volume I

The Report is divided into three parts, together with two introductory chapters and two concluding chapters. The introductory chapters lay out the main social trends that form the background of this Report (Chapter 1), and the main values and principles that form a “compass” for those who seek social progress (Chapter 2).

The first part of the Report deals with socio-economic transformations, and focuses on economic inequalities (Chapter 3), growth and environmental issues (Chapter 4), urbanization (Chapter 5), capitalist institutions of markets, corporations and finance (Chapter 6), labor (Chapter 7), concluding with a reflection on how economic organization determines well-being and social justice (Chapter 8).

The second part of the Report scrutinizes political issues, scrutinizing the ongoing complex trends in democracy and the rule of law (Chapter 9), the forms and resolutions of situations of violence and conflicts (Chapter 10), the mixed efficacy of supranational institutions and organizations (Chapter 11), as well as the multiple forms of global governance (Chapter 12), and the important role for democracy of media and communications (Chapter 13). It concludes with a chapter on the challenges to democracy raised by inequalities, and the various ways in which democracy can be rejuvenated (Chapter 14).

The third part of the Report is devoted to transformations in cultures and values, with analyses of cultural trends linked to “modernization” and its pitfalls, as well as globalization (Chapter 15), a study of the complex relation between religions and social progress (Chapter 16), an examination of the promises and challenges in ongoing transformations

in family structures and norms (Chapter 17), a focus on trends and policy issues regarding health and life–death issues (Chapter 18), a study of the ways in which education can contribute to social progress (Chapter 19), and finally, a chapter on the important values of solidarity and belonging (Chapter 20).

The two concluding chapters include a synthesis on the various innovative ways in which social progress can go forward (Chapter 21) and a reflection on how the various disciplines of social science can play a role in the evolution of society and the design of policy (Chapter 22).

The present volume (Volume I) contains the two introductory chapters as well as the first part of the Report. Chapter 1 argues that humanity is at a peak of possibilities, given the tremendous achievements obtained through science and technology as well as the emergence of complex economic and political institutions, but it also identifies the considerable challenges and threats that need to be addressed in the coming decades, such as inequalities and development gaps, population growth and migrations, environmental degradation and climate change. Chapter 2 shows the list of relevant values and principles at the core of the ideal of social progress is long and deserves to be better known and debated, including in view of cultural variations that put different weights on them. It also puts human issues in perspective and argues for a broader view encompassing other forms of life in a comprehensive understanding of our stewardship of the planet.

Chapter 3 analyzes the trends and the determinants of economic inequalities, and provides a comprehensive discussion of the various ways in which inequalities and poverty can be reduced, emphasizing in particular that standard forms of redistribution are far from the only policy levers one should consider. Chapter 4 argues that growth can be made compatible with “planetary welfare,” but that this requires shifting from an exploitative view of the relation between the economy and nature, toward a much more careful and collectively organized management of the many “commons,” including global commons such as the climate and biodiversity, that are essential to our development and flourishing. Chapter 5 focuses on cities, which will be the habitat of most members of future generations, and it highlights how the various elements of urban design and urban policy have crucial consequences for the dialectic of exclusion and inclusion among social groups. A vision of the “just city” (or a set of visions, for various economic, social, and cultural contexts) has to be part of any concrete view of a just society. Chapter 6 lay bare some widespread misconceptions of the key institutions of capitalism, discusses a variety of important financial issues that impact beyond the economic sphere (e.g. lobbying), and provides compelling arguments for a reform of the corporation that would change both its governance and its social purpose. Chapter 7 dives into the world of work, emphasizing how important work is for the structuration of individual lives and social groups. It addresses the growing anxiety about the future of work in a digitalized age and argues for moderate optimism in this respect, without ignoring the observed worrisome trends in the quality of jobs. Chapter 8 takes a systemic perspective on well-being and social justice, and examines how cooperation and social cohesion have been and can be promoted through various economic institutions and social systems. In particular, it provides a thorough discussion of the qualities and limitations of social democracy, and a balanced assessment of the

contribution of market competition and government intervention to social progress.

The fact that socio-economic issues are placed at the beginning of the Report does not reflect the view that they matter more than political and cultural issues treated in the other parts. This first part does point at the importance of issues of power and culture in socio-economic trends, and therefore invites the reader to abandon the mechanistic view that the economy is the basis that univocally determines the other components of the social fabric.

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