Introduction to Volume 2

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0.1 The IPSP Report: Aims and Method

This section briefly recalls elements that are expounded in more detail in the Introduction to Volume 1.

The International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP) is an academic, bottom-up initiative, aiming to assess the perspectives for social progress in the coming decades, in the world. Mobilizing large numbers of social scientists and humanities scholars, the IPSP project is complementary to many ongoing efforts by various groups and organizations with which it is collaborating, such as the United Nations and its Agenda 2030, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its multiple initiatives for a "better life" and "inclusive growth," the World Bank and its work against poverty and inequality, the ILO and its "decent work" agenda, the Social Progress Imperative and its measurement initiative supplementing economic indicators, and many others.

The IPSP distinguishes itself from other initiatives by examining not just policy issues for the medium term but also structural and systemic issues for the long term, by mobilizing a uniquely wide set of perspectives, from all relevant disciplines as well as from all continents, and by speaking to actors who are or will be the "change makers" of society. The Panel mobilizes the notion of "social progress" to emphasize that social change is not a neutral matter and that a compass is needed to parse the options that actors and decision makers face. The message of this Panel is a message of hope: We can improve our institutions, curb inequalities, expand democracy, and secure sustainability. Importantly, there is not a unique direction of progress but multiple possibilities and many ideas that can and should be experimented.

The Report presented has 22 chapters spread over 3 volumes. Every chapter is co-signed by a multidisciplinary team of authors and represents the views of this team. In total, more than 260 authors have been involved, with about 60 percent of contributions coming, in roughly equal proportions, from economics, sociology, and political science. Each chapter starts with a long summary of its contents, so as to help readers navigate the Report.

Every chapter is meant to be a critical assessment of the state of the art in the topic covered in the chapter, acknowledging ongoing debates and suggesting emerging points of consensus. Most chapters contain recommendations for action and reform, with an effort to make the underlying values explicit. This Report provides the reader with a unique overview of the state of society and possible futures, with a wealth of ideas and suggestions for 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. 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 Panel members and share their views and experiences.

0.2 Outline of the Report and of Volume 2

The Report is divided into three parts, with two introductory 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 socioeconomic 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, analyzing 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 2) contains the second part of the report, with six chapters covering a wide range of issues from democracy and the rule of law to national and supranational institutions of governance, conflicts, and the media.

Chapter 9 considers the apparently contradictory trends that seem to both expand and shake democracy and the rule of law in different ways across the world. It emphasizes the link between those trends and deeper economic and social evolutions. Chapter 10 deals with violence and conflicts, drawing a contrasting picture of a world that is increasingly peaceful and secure while, still, persistent forms of latent and open conflicts and emerging forms of violence make it look no less frightening. It insists on the fact that inequalities in security are strongly correlated with other socioeconomic inequalities. Chapter 11 studies global governance and its coordination by international organizations and through supranational arrangements. It provides a thorough analysis of how these international bodies handle human rights, women's rights, refugees and migrations, health, conflicts, intellectual property, and climate change. Chapter 12 pursues the analysis of global governance by analyzing the trends by which national governments have

been slowly deprived of many of their prerogatives, to the benefit of a more informal web of public and private transnational institutions and norms that embody the current form of globalization of finance and investment, trade, as well as the global management of labor and environmental issues. Chapter 13 puts the spotlight on media and communications, studying ongoing dramatic changes in the flow of information and the interconnection between people across the world and across communities of ideas. This chapter highlights the serious dangers in the current "business model" of the media (including the social media), and, relying on examples, advocates a public-good approach to the management of access to information and the governance of the media system. Chapter 14 concludes this part of the Report, and this Volume, by emphasizing the challenges to democracy that growing inequalities between social groups generate, and offers many thought-provoking examples of democratic innovation (especially from the Global South) as well as reflections on essential democratic issues such as the relation between state and religion or the role of the nation-state in a globalized world.

This part of the Report is central not just in its position between the two other volumes. Actually, there are two ways in which its importance must be recognized. First, while injustice is often depicted either in terms of inequalities in resources (see Volume 1, and especially Chapter 3 for a focus on this topic) or in terms of discriminations and exclusions for characteristics such as gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation (topics appearing in all parts of this report, but especially prominent in Volume 3), the distribution of power and the ability for individuals and groups to control their destiny is a dimension that is as important to stakeholders as the other dimensions. Even the mere possibility to live in peace and without immediate physical threat (the topic of Chapter 10) is one of the dimensions where, these days, one finds the starkest inequalities in the world.

The second way in which this part of the Report is central is that implementing societal change is ultimately a matter of collective action, which requires pulling levers and putting pressure on power centers. In a world that is now controlled by a very small global elite, social progress will not happen without a redistribution of power to bring more democracy not just in the classical sphere of politics but in all organizations where power determines the fate of members in important ways. This will also involve enhancing the role of supranational organizations (of states, NGOs, civil society actors) that have the unique capacity of coordinating action at the level needed to address global challenges. This perspective actually pervades the Report as a whole, and one can find important discussions of these issues in Volume 1 (e.g. in Chapter 6 for the corporation) and Volume 3 (e.g. in Chapter 17 for the family). The reflections offered in Volume 2 about democracy should be understood as going well beyond a narrow conception of power and politics. They can inform our understanding of power issues in all aspects of social life.

0.3 Contentious Words in a Report

Social sciences, unlike natural sciences, work with words that are also used in public debates and are sometimes used as weapons across the ideological battlefield. Social scientists themselves are of course not immune to value judgments influencing their choice of topics and their embrace of certain arguments or theses. While value judgments should be resisted when they can pollute positive analysis of facts, they should be recognized as necessary and made transparent when recommendations are proposed. This is why the IPSP has a full chapter on values and principles, and many recommendations about how to promote social progress understood in a certain way.

But the choice of words is especially sensitive for the analysis of social systems, when the same words are already weapons in the social and political battles of the day. In the preparation of the IPSP, this has raised debates about certain words. The case of "capitalism," for instance, is rather easy. Almost everyone in current debates accepts the characterization of the dominant economic system as "capitalist," and both critics and champions can use the word and understand approximately the same thing – though, interestingly, the special subordinate relation that labor has with capital under capitalism is not something that everyone spontaneously identifies as a defining feature of this economic and social system.

The case of "neoliberalism" has not been so easy and has not found a solution that would satisfy everyone in the Panel. What is special about this word is that it does not seem to be used by conservatives or libertarians anymore, and instead plays the role of a punching ball in the discourse of the critics (Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy 2016). Therefore, many see its being used as the signal of a particular position in the ideological spectrum, a signal of bias that undermines the credibility of the discourse.

However, there is a real phenomenon in search of a less fraught word. Liberal pro-market ideas have been revived, with remarkable dedication, by thinkers such as Hayek and Friedman, and when Keynesianism was shaken by the exhaustion of demand-side economic policies in the 1970s, an alternative was readily available and was very effectively pushed by the wealthy interests with which it was naturally congenial – although other ideas such as Ordoliberalism have also been influential at this juncture in Europe. Reagan and Thatcher could then launch the conservative revolution with an ideological base that was simple (indeed, some would say simplistic) and powerful. The Washington Consensus would soon unleash its injunctions for liberalization, structural adjustment, and shock therapy throughout the world, with all the damages that have ensued for the most vulnerable populations. This wave was, like most overambitious ideologies, even ready to fraternize with dictators in order to force its peculiar conception of "freedom" on reluctant peoples.

The last financial crisis may have momentarily shaken the arrogance of free market ideologues and politicians, but institutions have not changed much and liberal pro-market ideas remain dominant in most governmental spheres. However, scientific analysis cannot use the word "neoliberalism" without caution, given the multiplicity and diversity of phenomena and discourses under scrutiny. For instance, Chapter 9 notes that pro-market ideas, focused on competition, must be distinguished from pro-corporate ideas, which favor corporate interests even when this undermines market competition.

The Panel coordinators, facing this difficult equation, suggested, whenever that was possible, to use alternative words that could be more precise and more neutral in the final version of the Report, in view of the non-academic audience of the Report and its potential role in public debates. The Report that is offered here contains a mixture of conventions. Some chapters do not use the word at all, or very pointedly to refer to the conservative wave of the end of the twentieth century, while others use it extensively, following the usual academic conventions in certain disciplines and schools of thought. It is hoped that readers will understand that when the authors use it here, it is as a notion that is useful to describe a set of ideas and societal phenomena, not as a pejorative weapon meant to cast shame on ideological opponents. The general tendency of the Report is to approach the market as a useful mechanism for the creation and allocation of resources, provided its limitations are recognized and its function, "embedded" (in Polanyi's words) within suitable social institutions, is made compatible with general social objectives attuned to the common good.

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Reference

Springer, S., K. Birch, and J. MacLeavy (eds.). 2016. *Handbook of Neoliberalism*. London: Routledge.