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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2023-07-12

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Kuba, K., Capaldi, C., Vivian, M. - C. L.un, Vauclair, C.- M., Bond, H., Dominguez-Espinosa, A...Uchida, Y. (2020). Psychologizing indexes of societal progress: Accounting for cultural diversity in preferred developmental pathways. *Culture and Psychology*. 26 (3), 303-319

Further information on publisher's website:

10.1177/1354067X19868146

Publisher's copyright statement:

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### Abstract

Since World War II, the dominating paradigm of societal development has focused on economic growth. While economic growth has improved the quality of human life in a variety of ways, we posit that the identification of economic growth as the primary societal goal is culture-blind because preferences for developmental pathways likely vary between societies. We argue that the cultural diversity of developmental goals and the pathways leading to these goals could be reflected in a culturally sensitive approach to assessing societal development. For the vast majority of post-materialistic societies, it is an urgent necessity to prepare culturally sensitive compasses on how to develop next, and to start conceptualising growth in a more nuanced and culturally responsive way. Furthermore, we propose that cultural sensitivity in measuring societal growth could also be applied to existing development indicators (e.g., the Human Development Index). We call for cultural researchers, in cooperation with development economists and other social scientists, to prepare a new cultural map of developmental goals, and to create and adapt development indexes that are more culturally sensitive. This innovation could ultimately help social planners understand the diverse pathways of development, and assess the degree to which societies are progressing in a self-determined and indigenously valued manner.

*Keywords:* societal development; societal growth; societal change; cultural sensitivity; cultural diversity; socio-economics; economic development; values

Word count: 10,790

Date: January 2, 2019

Psychologizing Indexes of Societal Progress: Accounting for Cultural Diversity in  
Preferred Developmental Pathways

All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

—United Nations, *General Assembly Resolution 1514, 1960*

Those attempting to guide the economy and our societies are like pilots trying to steer a course without a reliable compass. The decisions they (and we as individual citizens) make depend on what we measure, how good our measurements are and how well our measures are understood.

—Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, 2009*

Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.

—Edward Abbey, *The Journey Home, 1977*

## 1. Introduction

The development of contemporary societies is implicitly most commonly understood as, and sometimes exclusively measured with, economic growth (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009; cf. Barro & Lee, 2013). Although unequal distributions of wealth are still prevalent, economic growth in the last two hundred years has allowed many countries to largely escape the problems of poverty. At the current point in human history, the richest societies can be considered post-materialistic. They have secured the basic needs of most of their members, and are economically prosperous enough to deprioritise economic development and place a

greater emphasis on other societal goals, such as egalitarianism (e.g., Marx), openness (e.g., Popper), harmony (e.g., Confucius), freedom (e.g., Locke), justice (e.g., Rawls), and/or happiness in its various forms. Furthermore, societies that are economically less prosperous may also wish to harmonize economic growth (as a tool of securing basic needs) with other important social issues. So, each society may harmonize societal developmental aims in its own indigenous way, and various aims may be prioritized in each culture to a different degree.

In the current paper, we argue that greater cultural sensitivity (CS) in measuring societal growth is needed in contemporary societies. We call for social scientists to prepare a new cultural map of developmental goals that will account for the variety of goals among societies and ultimately help track each society's progress toward their desired outcomes. In particular, we propose elaborating methods for identifying: (1) the list of possible developmental goals pursued by contemporary societies, (2) the scores measuring preferences of societies towards various developmental goals, and (3) the measures of performance of a society on a given developmental goal. Such a 'map' will help social planners understand the diverse pathways of development, and will let policy-makers guide our societies in a self-determined and indigenously valued manner.

Scandinavians may have different ideas for their future than Italians do. Similarly, Europe in general seems to have different ideas for its development than does the United States. The CS approach will enable these differences to be reflected. Traditionally used, culture-diversity-blind indexes allow for the comparison of countries in a more objective manner than CS indexes, but the latter can guide a culturally sensitive approach to the development of each society separately and show how policy-makers meet societal expectations. Finally, the CS approach will help to empirically check whose type of development current 'culturally universal' indexes and concepts actually track—do they

closely match Italian, Scandinavian, American, Japanese, etc., conceptions of societal progress?

Along with discussing the CS approach to societal development, we present brief summaries of related topics to provide more context for our ideas. This includes summaries on the rise of economic growth as a dominant societal development goal (section 2 and 3), the benefits and shortcomings of economic growth (and GDP in particular) as an indicator of societal progress (section 4), proposed alternative indexes of societal progress (section 5), theory and research on cross-cultural differences regarding societal preferences (section 6 and 7), and the diverse ways in which culture is conceptualized (section 8). Readers who are already familiar with these topics may wish to skip these sections to focus on the more novel aspects of our paper.

## **2. Societal Development in the Era of Scarcity**

Economic growth may be recognised as the societal solution to the problem of scarcity. The ascendancy of this specific developmental pathway is fairly recent. A relative frequency analysis of the terms “economic development” and “economic growth” in the English-language literature across the last two centuries reveals that the overwhelming concentration on the economic goal of development likely started post-World War II (see Figure 1). Previously, and for millennia, military expansion was probably the main aim of societal development and the main “tool of fighting” the problem of scarcity (although one can argue that this was mainly true for rulers and not for their subjects).

[insert Figure 1]

Before 1820, the average rate of growth of yearly income for an average individual (i.e., the rate of growth of world gross domestic product [GDP] per capita) ranged between 0.00% and 0.05% (Bolt & van Zanden, 2014). If accumulated across ten years, for example, this level of income growth would bring the GDP per capita improvement to a maximum of 0.50%. From the perspective of an individual, a half percent improvement in his/her material

standing over the period of ten years is likely imperceptible. Thus, social relations until 1820, at least economically, probably resembled a zero-sum game. If a person wanted to become better off, the another person probably had to get worse off. This zero-sum game can also be applied to societies— military interventions, which were even more common in the past than nowadays, were the main tool for “fighting” the almost universal problems of scarcity and poverty.

Economic development provided an alternative to military expansion in minimizing societal poverty. Although the origins of economic development are linked to warfare, nowadays we relate economic development to welfare. The first calculations of GDP were performed in 1665 in order to determine potential sources of tax revenue to help finance English military expenditures (Kendrick, 1970). World War II was another stimulating factor, since just before and during this conflict, there was a strong need to determine the production capacity of Allied Forces (van den Bergh, 2009). This also stimulated improvements in modelling economic activities on a national and international scale, allowing for the rapid uptake (?) of the GDP indicator as a marker of societies’ development (see also Figure 1). Nowadays, GDP serves as a universal marker of societal well-being.

The process of transformation from military to economic expansionism in conceptualising societal development took two centuries, but not all societies followed this pathway to an equal extent. Since the industrial revolution, which originated in Europe, the average yearly rate of economic growth in the world has ranged from 0.54% to 2.92% (depending on the analysed period; Bolt & van Zanden, 2014). Relatively stable and significant increases in economic prosperity allowed wealth to accumulate and brought materialistic security to those societies that successfully entered the pathway of economic development. Many of these societies have been recently labelled WEIRD societies (i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

Two centuries of wealth accumulation enabled most WEIRD societies to satisfy basic needs and guarantee that most of their members enjoy feelings of relative stability. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, WEIRD societies have been the most influential in terms of economic, technological, cultural, and military power (Henrich et al., 2010). Consequently, many other societies treat WEIRD societies as models. The economic pathway of development, and GDP as a measure of its achievement, have assumed the highest importance for most contemporary governments around the globe after WWII (Stiglitz et al., 2009).

### **3. Societal Progress at the Dawn of the Post-Materialism Era**

Although WEIRD societies (plus a few others) play the role of model countries for much of the rest of the world, they face the problem of ‘lacking a compass’ on where to go next after they have become prosperous. Economic prosperity enabled the security of basic needs of most inhabitants in WEIRD societies, but this was not accompanied by proportionally higher levels of well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener, Lucas, Schimmack, & Helliwell, 2009). Moreover, WEIRD societies continue to pursue seemingly endless economic progress, despite some of its negative consequences at this point in time<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> By now, two big global unifications of the free market (e.g., WTO’s Doha or Uruguay rounds) and environmental protection (Kyoto Protocols from 1997, Copenhagen Accord from 2009, Paris Agreement from 2015) have developed concurrently, but remain largely blind, or are even seen as being contradictory, to each other. For example, George W. Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol because, “it would cause serious harm to the US economy”, and Donald Trump ceased participation in the Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation, stating that, “The Paris Accord will undermine the US economy”. Thus, the continuous prioritisation of economic development results in real (as compared to declared) issues global with environmental policy further hampering human and planetary health.

The dominance of economic aspects in defining societal development may come from the failure to identify a viable competitor to economic goals. There is probably no single and universally good alternative; different societies may prioritise different aims to different degrees (e.g., egalitarianism, environmental protection, democratization, health, etc.). At the current point in human history (i.e., at the dawn of the post-materialistic stage of development), many societies have achieved sufficient materialistic support to begin expressing higher concerns, like environmental protection, equality in resource provision, broad-based health provision, or freedom of movement and expression (e.g., see Welzel [2013], who documented the spread of emancipative values in the recent century). This process may resemble a Maslowian-progression from satisfaction of basic to higher needs, but at the societal level and with higher needs organised complementarily (not hierarchically).

We argue that it is an urgent necessity to start conceptualising post-materialistic growth in a culturally sensitive way. Otherwise, without culturally sensitive compasses on how to develop next, post-materialistic societies will likely continue to pursue endless materialistic progress, which, if fostered in an unsustainable way, will benefit only a few and its costs will be laid upon future generations.

Experiences of WEIRD societies may seem (especially from their own perspective) to be the model for poorer countries. For societies that still face the problem of extreme scarcity, the economic conceptualisation of societal development is understandable because increases in the economic standing of poor societies brings about significant improvements in their members' well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener et al., 2009). But poor societies may also wish to harmonize their economic progress with other societal aims—aims that are indigenously defined and conceptualised.

Bhutan may serve as an example. Its king proposed to calculate Gross National Happiness (GNH) that combines nine different aspects of societal well-being, and to use GNH as an indicator for policy makers. The GNH index was Bhutan's response to the Western,



economic-oriented categorization of Bhutan as one of the world's least developed countries. The nine dimensions proposed by the king of Bhutan may be prioritized by each society to a different degree<sup>2</sup>. The United Nations recognised this need over fifty years ago in its decolonisation resolution (see the first quote at the beginning of this paper). Thus, the CS approach in conceptualising (and measuring) societal development is viable not only for post-materialistic societies, but for societies that are still working on satisfying the basic needs of their members as well.

To sum up, the purpose of this paper is to argue that although economic growth matters, it is not the only pathway and aim of development (presently, economic growth frequently serves as both). Furthermore, we argue that searching for a single pathway of development of all societies may actually result in the continuation of economic development as the main societal developmental goal (e.g., “If people around the world cannot agree to one alternative, let's stick to what we know”; i.e., to economic growth). By proposing the CS approach, we hope to show that different pathways are possible and needed, and that harmonization of economic development with other social issues is possible for poorer societies, and necessary for post-materialistic societies. This paper extends the current discussion surrounding indexes of development by proposing that the cultural diversity of developmental goals and pathways could be reflected in complementary indexes.

#### **4. Benefits and Problems of Equating Societal Development with Economic Progress**

A widespread belief is that economic development creates societal well-being and stability. Economic development is most often measured with GDP, which “counts all of the

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<sup>2</sup> GNH is an example of a governing body suggesting modifications to the conceptualisation of societal development, but members of a society can express their preferences towards development from the bottom-up as well.

output generated within the borders of a country” and “is composed of goods and services produced for sale in the market and also includes some nonmarket production, such as defense or education services provided by the government” (International Monetary Fund, 2012, para. 4). Although the GDP indicator was originally created for warfare-related purposes and was later intended to be an indicator of wealth exclusively (and not of societal development; Kendrick, 1970), it has become an influential, and even essential, measure for countless aspects of modern life—GDP per capita is the main indicator for economics, public policy, politics, and societies in general. There are international standards for GDP calculation, and much thought has gone into its statistical and conceptual bases (United Nations System of National Accounts, 2009). Standardization of GDP calculation allows for an international comparison of countries and guarantees its reliability. Due to the credibility of the GDP measure, many agents regard information on economic development as an important factor in their decision-making, with politicians and public servants leading this list; economic growth is regarded by many as being central to the performance and goals of the country.

The attention paid to economic development is justified, as it correlates with a number of indicators that capture elements of well-being, such as life expectancy at birth, infant mortality, adult literacy, and indexes of political and civil liberties (Georgas & Berry, 1995; Layard, 2006). Furthermore, the role economic development has in eradicating poverty and solving the problem of scarcity is important to recognize. As mentioned above, economic development likely allowed societies to escape the zero-sum game “played” for millennia, and limits the use of military interventions as a way to tackle scarcity (see also Pinker, 2011). These benefits, in our opinion, provide the strongest arguments for further fostering economic progress among poorer societies (i.e., the societies that still face the problem of extreme scarcity).

However, another set of quality-of-life indicators related to GDP—pollution, limited availability of living space, lower levels of serenity, limited direct access to nature,

congestion, and work stress—suggests that an exclusive economic developmental aim, and the GDP measure itself, may have limitations (Arrow et al., 1995; Balestra, Boarini, & Ruiz, 2018; van den Bergh, 2009; Victor, 2013). In addition, increases in GDP seem to bring minimal benefits to the well-being of societies that have already satisfied their basic needs. In these cases, pursuing economic growth seems to be a repetition of previously successful actions that have diminishing returns after a certain point. For post-materialistic societies, materialistic security seems to have been largely achieved (although problems with its distribution are still notable) and further economic development may bring limited benefits (ref.).

Discussions about GDP's limitations intensified after the financial crisis in 2007-2009 (e.g., Gertner, 2010). Common criticisms of GDP include arguments that it (1) externalizes environmental costs, (2) omits non-market activity, (3) ignores social disparities, and (4) is an inadequate proxy of societal well-being. It is important to note that this list of criticisms is not exhaustive<sup>3</sup>, and that this topic has generated much public and academic debate (e.g., Jones & Klenow, 2016; Stiglitz et al., 2009; van den Bergh, 2009). For the purposes of the current paper, we only briefly summarise this ongoing debate to provide some background for our main contribution to this discussion, one that is uniquely based on research from cultural psychology.

A major shortcoming of GDP as a development indicator is that it does not calculate the negative impact that economic growth can exact on the environment. The depletion of

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<sup>3</sup> For example, research by Bain, Hornsey, Bongiorno, Kashima, and Crimston (2013) reveals that development (not necessarily economic) is only one of five possible worldviews on societal change. The remaining four worldviews that are not represented by the current paradigm of societal growth include balance, golden age (regress), endless cycle, and maintenance.

non-renewable resources (e.g., fossil fuels or ores) and environmental damage (e.g., animal stocks, forests) are not reflected in the GDP calculation. Similarly, pollution costs are not subtracted from a nation's GDP. Omitting environmental externalities in GDP calculations suggests that we are wealthier than we really are (Atkinson et al., 1997). Current policy imposes this uncalculated cost upon future generations as well as poorer nations which are less responsible for causing environmental problems but will still face more its consequences (e.g., Mendelsohn, Dinar, & Williams, 2006).

Second, GDP covers mainly market activities and neglects direct mutual support and informal activities, like child-rearing and household duties, subsistence agriculture, or voluntarism. The transfer of existing informal activities into a formal economy results in notable GDP growth (Ahmad & Koh, 2011), although well-being or standard of living may not change (Sen, 1976).

Furthermore, the GDP per capita indicator emphasizes average income and does not inform observers about the level of wealth inequalities within a society<sup>4</sup>, despite the fact that inequality is an important correlate of almost all major social and health issues after controlling for GDP (Wilkinson, 1997). Individual welfare is not separated from the welfare of the national "peer group", and high inequalities may hinder individual's well-being (Clark, D'Ambrosio, & Ghislandi, 2016; Piketty & Saez, 2014; Wilkinson & Pikett, 2009).

The last major issue is the limited connection between changes in economic development and the subjective well-being of societies. As Ng (2003) documents, systematic

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that GDP is a flow whereas wealth is a stock, so GDP and wealth inequalities cannot be easily compared. Nevertheless, the point remains that GDP does not tell one about the distribution of wealth within a society, which may also be an important societal development goal in some societies since inequalities are associated with a host of social and health issues for societies (Wilkinson & Pikett, 2009).

striving for GDP growth can lead to over-spending on private consumption and an under-provision of public goods, which may not lead to increases in well-being. For example, although the GDP *per capita* in the USA has tripled in the second half of the twentieth century, the average level of life satisfaction has remained unchanged for this period (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Furthermore, in their review of the literature on income and well-being, Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) conclude that “economic growth in the last decades in most economically developed societies has been accompanied by little rise in [subjective well-being]” (p. 119) and that “enormous increases in wealth are required to produce tiny increments in happiness” (p. 141; also see Diener, Lucas, Schimmack & Helliwell, 2009 for a detailed description of mechanisms linking well-being, economic growth, and public policies; cf. Stevenson and Wolfers [2008] who propose that the missing correlation may be due to measurement error). Thus, greater economic prosperity does not necessarily mean greater well-being (Clark, Frijters, & Shields, 2008), and other pathways to societal satisfaction are possible (see ‘open society’ attitudes proposed by Kryszewski, Uchida, Oishi, and Diener [2018]).

As the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (Ul Haq & Jolly, 1996) states, “Human development is the end—economic growth a means to it. So, the purpose of growth should be to enrich people’s lives. But far too often, it does not” (p. 1). Even though economic performance has impacted governmental decisions since World War II, it is no longer an adequate proxy of societal well-being for post-materialistic societies. Furthermore, economic growth far too often seems to be taken not only as a pathway towards progress, but as the ultimate aim of societal development. In order to address these problems, some international institutions offer a set of alternative measures of development.

### **5. Current Alternatives to GDP as a Measure of Societal Progress**

Alternative indicators that address some of the shortcomings of GDP as a measure of societal development are available. We briefly outline them here. By doing so, we wish to

document that our suggestion of cultural responsiveness in measuring growth may apply as well to some of the alternatives to GDP.

First, some indicators, like the index of Sustainable National Income (SNI; Gerlagh, Dellink, Hofkes, & Verbruggen, 2002), focus on factoring environmental costs into the GDP measure. Other alternatives correct the GDP measure by making more complex adjustments. The Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW; Lawn, 2003) and the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI; Delang & Yu, 2015) are examples of methodologies balancing GDP with a broad set of costs (e.g., depletion of resources, pollution, crime, vehicle accidents, family breakdowns, etc.) and additional sources of value (e.g., services provided by volunteer work and by non-paid household work, services yielded by roads and highways, etc.)<sup>5</sup>.

The most popular alternative to GDP is the Human Development Index (HDI; Jahan, 2015). The United Nations delivers its estimates by aggregating society's progress in three basic aspects of human development: leading a longer life, being more educated, and enjoying a decent standard of living. HDI originates in the idea that humanity's progress needs to be

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<sup>5</sup> An analysis of the more complex measures like ISEW or GPI suggests that for most countries the additional cost of economic growth might have already exceeded the flow of additional benefits (Lawn, 2003). Kubiszewski and collaborators (2013) synthesized data from the last fifty years for seventeen countries and revealed that while the global GDP has tripled since 1950, GPI has actually decreased since 1978. This is around the same time when the global ecological footprint exceeded global biocapacity (i.e., human consumption demands surpassed the capacity of ecosystems to sustainably support them; Wackernagel & Rees, 1996). Other scholars argue that national development measured with GPI or ISEW has stalled in the last few decades (although the trend depends on the analysed countries), and call for alternative monitoring policies that do not exclusively focus on economic growth (Delang & Yu, 2016; van den Bergh, 2009).

more people-centred than focused only on economic growth. The idea of composing an index out of numerous indicators is also reflected in the Human Poverty Index (HPI), which uses similar components as the HDI but weights them differently. Another variation of the HDI is the inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) that counterbalances development with the losses caused by inequalities. Yet other measures—like the GINI coefficient or Gender Inequality Index—are designed to measure the condition of societies on a specific dimension (e.g., wealth or gender inequality), and may also be regarded as an aim of societal development. Real national income, as proposed by Sen (1976), makes the distribution of income an integral part of its comparisons.

The inclusion of several parallel aims of development into one measure is realized in the aforementioned Gross National Happiness index (GNH) as well. This index was suggested by the king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and covers nine domains (i.e., psychological well-being, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards), along with 33 sub-indexes. The GNH index was Bhutan's answer to the Western, economic-oriented ranking of Bhutan as one of the world's least developed countries. The Bhutanese response clarifies that this ranking depends on the dimension used to measure societal progress; the economy, in Bhutanese culture, is argued to not be the most important pathway of development. The philosophy underlying the GNH was recognised by the United Nations in 2011, when resolution 65/309 ("Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development") was adopted without opposing votes (though only a third of countries explicitly supported it). In contrast to the HDI, the GNH has yet to be recognized by many governing bodies when shaping policies. Resonating with the Bhutanese proposition, some Western researchers (e.g., Adler & Seligman, 2016; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2015; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2016) advocate collecting national accounts of well-being, though narrower than GNH, to complement existing economic and social indicators.

As with GDP, the aforementioned alternative indexes also have shortcomings. All face measurability problems; pollution, shortened lifespans, and the social and economic costs of income inequality are only a few examples of issues that a monetary approach cannot easily capture. Another disadvantage relates to the areas the indexes cover; the HDI neglects the environmental sustainability present in the SNI or GPI, which in turn remain blind to longevity or educational attainment present in the HDI. Further criticism comes from scholars who argue that the selected components (e.g., of the HDI) and aggregation procedures are arbitrary (van den Bergh, 2009). Finally, advocates of well-being-based indexes need to address questions about the cultural nature of well-being (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015; Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014; Krys, Uchida, et al., 2018; but see also Diener et al., 2009).

#### **6. Societal Development Indexes from the Perspective of Cultural Psychology**

At this point, we wish to add the voice of cultural psychology to the ongoing academic, political, and social debate on the shortcomings of currently used development indexes, viz., all the currently used development indexes are blind to the cultural diversity of societal developmental goals (or at least do not explicitly take culture into account). The aforementioned development indexes assume implicitly that (1) every society has the same set of developmental goals, (2) every society pursues these goals with an equal intensity, and (3) every society follows the same developmental pathway to satisfy these goals. Grounding our thesis in the rich literature from cultural psychology, we claim that if societies vary in their values, worldviews, or practices, they also are likely to vary in (1) their set of preferred developmental goals, (2) the intensity with which they wish to pursue specific goals, and (3) their preferred pathways leading to these goals. Thus, we advocate that the philosophies underlying development indexes could also reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary societies in terms of their preferred developmental goals, and the pathways leading to these goals.



Similar ideas have been advocated in the Social Indicators Movement (SIM). In the SIM's founding document, Bauer (1966) declared that social development indicators should enable societies to assess whether they are developing with respect to their values and goals (Land & Michalos, 2015). Later on, Solomon and collaborators (1980) suggested a list of eleven tasks to be undertaken by the SIM—the eighth task was to reflect and recognise cultural differences in social development indicators (Shek & Wu, 2018). In particular, Solomon and collaborators recognised that quality of life itself should be defined in various ways from culture to culture, that projects on social development indicators should recognize that cultures may have different value systems, and that we should learn from these differences and try to systematize this knowledge (Land & Michalos, 2015). However, Shek and Wu (2018) conclude that Solomon and colleague's eighth task:

... is a neglected aspect in the movement. Social indicators researchers have commonly assumed that the indicators are universally valid, and can be used in different cultures. Even though some social indicators researchers recognize cultural differences, the related reflection is not substantial (p. 977).

By drawing on research from cultural psychology, we wish to help address this gap and reinvigorate discussions surrounding culturally sensitive approaches to measuring societal development.

## **7. The Cultural Diversity of Societies**

All societies generate preferred responses to problems they face by creating values, social axioms, or scripts for preferred adaptive behaviour—the psychological culture characterizing their citizens (Bond et al., 2004; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 2009). Identifying dimensions of national cultural differences has characterized the research on cultural diversity over the last fifty years (Smith, 2011), and these mapping efforts have been dominated by measuring values. The most popular value classification is offered by Hofstede (2001). His four dimensions of individualism-collectivism, power distance,

uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity, which were later extended to include long-term orientation (Bond, 1987) and indulgence-restraint (Minkov, 2007), have been used to explain and organise cultural differences in many studies. Hofstede aggregated the individual-level data collected in surveys about values and beliefs to the national level and identified cultural dimensions through nation-level factor analysis. His analytic approach became the prototype for most other large-scale cultural studies.

Schwartz's (2009) theoretically-grounded taxonomy of values has been empirically confirmed across 72 cultures. According to Schwartz, each society confronts universal problems and, in order to solve them, needs to (1) define the nature of the relations and boundaries between the person and the group, (2) guarantee that people behave in a responsible manner that preserves the social fabric, and (3) regulate people's treatment of human and natural resources. Reasoning from these three, theoretically identified, key social issues, Schwartz derived three bipolar dimensions (i.e., six value orientations) at the cultural level: (1) autonomy versus embeddedness, (2) egalitarianism versus hierarchy, and (3) harmony versus mastery. He further split the autonomy dimension into two sub-dimensions called intellectual and affective autonomy. The Schwartz theory carries both intuitive and theoretical appeal and is well supported by large cross-national studies comprising thousands of participants worldwide. Schwartz's theory has shown its utility in numerous analyses of social structures, politics, and demographics (e.g., Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

House and collaborators (2004) developed another cross-national study across 62-nations (named GLOBE) aimed at comparing two kinds of cultural phenomena. They described not only cultural values (i.e., ideals), but also cultural practices (i.e., actual behaviors). House and collaborators quantified nine dimensions: performance orientation, assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. One of their most intriguing discoveries was the negative correlation between cultural values and cultural

practices for seven out of nine of the described dimensions. These inverse relationships suggest that, on the level of national culture, values are not always accurate predictors of actual behaviours, and that endorsed values may play a compensatory role to perceived deficiencies in practices.

Moving beyond cultural differences in values, Leung et al. (2002) and Bond et al. (2004) researched general beliefs (or generalized expectancies), which they labeled social axioms. Like axioms in mathematics, social axioms are basic premises that people endorse and use to guide their choices and behaviors. Leung and collaborators (2002) revealed a five-factor structure of social axioms present among individuals across cultures, and labeled these five dimensions social cynicism, social complexity, reward for application, religiosity, and fate control. Bond and collaborators (2004) further extracted two social axioms differentiating national cultures: dynamic externality and societal cynicism. Leung and Bond (2009) argued that, whereas values help people answer the fundamental question about what goals to pursue, social axioms provide answers to questions about how to pursue these goals, and therefore how to meet the challenges of everyday life.

The World Values Survey (WVS) is yet another large international project that provides evidence for the cultural diversity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. The contribution of this project derives not only from its scale (i.e., WVS covers countries representing 80% of the world's population), but also from the representativeness of the samples in each nation and from the repeated assessments over time (i.e., there have been six waves of data collection so far). Analyses of the WVS data show the relative stability of cultures, as results tend to be fairly consistent over time, but also reveal the evolution of cultures. For example, value dimension of secularism seems to have become more important over time (Li & Bond, 2010) as well as a need for uniqueness in China (Zou, 2016).

Data extracted from the WVS have become the basis for numerous taxonomies of national cultures, including goals for the socialization of children (self-directedness vs. other-

directedness and civility vs. practicality; Bond & Lun, 2014; Lun & Bond, 2016), values (traditional vs. secular orientations and survival vs. self-expression values; Inglehart & Baker, 2000), and communication styles (moderate, consensus, dissent, and extremity cultures; Smith, 2011). The WVS also serves as a dataset for macro-social analysis focused, for example, on emancipation (Welzel, 2013), happiness (Carballo, 2015), democracy (Norris, 2015), and religion (Esmer, Klingemann, & Puranen, 2009).

Other cross-national projects, describe cultural variability in regard to the rigidity of norms (tightness vs. looseness of cultures; Gelfand et al., 2011), sexist attitudes (Glick et al., 2004), and emotional display rules (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

The projects described above document and quantify the diversity of ways in which societies may be compared. Although studies on values have played the dominating role and other culture-type constructs remain understudied, the already collected knowledge confirms that national cultures are quantifiable and relatively stable phenomena (undergoing slow evolutionary processes though; e.g., Li & Bond, 2010), and that including a diversity of cultural measures is necessary to understand macro-social reality. Different emphases across different types of cultural constructs have implications for numerous areas of societies' functioning. Therefore, the diverse ways in which cultural groups differ could be involved in the analysis of developmental pathways of societies as well.

### **8. Diverse Conceptualizations of Culture**

GDP is usually calculated for countries and is most often used to guide national policies. A lot of the research on cultural differences (e.g., the work cited in the above section) also involves between-country comparisons. Thus, our current proposition of preparing culturally sensitive indexes of development focuses at the country level of analysis. However, culture may be conceptualised in many more ways than just “national culture” (Jahoda, 2012; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017; Toomela, 2003). Studies that adopt a

cultural sensitivity focus with a different theoretical approach to culture are possible and may help increase understanding of the cultural roots of societal development.

In searching for the common ground of cultural studies, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) listed over 150 definitions of culture. Since their work, the number and the diversity of definitions of culture grew, as did the number of approaches to studying culture (Baldwin et al., 2006). Each perspective on culture may bring new insights into the development of societies and the role of the human being within this intersubjective process. Studies on societal development that approach culture as semiotic mediation (Mazur, 2018; Valsiner, 1999), for instance, may increase understanding of how personified semiotic means help people regulate their relationships within developing (or at least constantly changing) macro-societal environments. Studies that focus on culture as power struggle (Gramsci, 1971; Shi-xu, 2002) may help increase understanding of how the development of societies is influenced by power imbalances and competition within and between societies. Because each person's preferences towards an ideal society may be shaped by the cultural situation they are embedded in, studies that conceptualise culture as situated activity (Serpell, 2018) may help explain the influence of situational cultural contexts (e.g., language, social structure) on concepts and ideals of societal development.

Those who study culture as dialogical nature of the self (Ginev, 2017; Hermans, 2001) may help increase understanding of how the “dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions” (Hermans, 2001, p. 248) can modify people's perspective on societal development (e.g., from focusing exclusively on economic growth to other [more ecologically or socially oriented] understandings of what societal growth in fact is). Culture in other studies is defined as sets of meanings embedded in discourse that may differ along gender, ethnicity, class, or other group-based categories (Shi-xu, 2002). Studies on culture as meaning making may help uncover trajectories of meaning people attribute to societal development, its different epistemic positions, and different subjective or affective ways of experiencing

societal development (De Luca Picione & Freda, 2016). Studies that approach culture as an aggregate of shared representations that are imposed upon individuals from the outside (Galli, Fasanelli, & Schember, 2017; Raudsepp, 2005) may help us understand how collective (i.e., societal level) forms of understanding of societal development may differ from the sum of individual perceptions. These are only a few examples of how various methods of cultural psychology can contribute to studies of societal development.

As Jahoda (2012) noticed, definitions and approaches to culture are sometimes incompatible with each other (e.g., some locate culture exclusively in the mind, while others locate culture in the material world created by humans). From our perspective, the lack of one universal approach to culture is not an obstacle for CS studies. What really matters is that each approach describes the psychology of human beings as being embedded within their cultural contexts, and each may contribute to a greater understanding of societal development processes. Societal development processes are deeply cultural,<sup>6</sup> but this is largely ignored in societal development research and practice. To begin to fill this gap, we consider ways in which cultural diversity could be accounted for when measuring the societal development of nations, while acknowledging here that our conceptualization of culture is only one of many.

### **9. Descriptive and Evaluative Approaches to Culturally Sensitive Development Indexes**

There are many approaches imaginable for incorporating cultural factors into development indexes. Two broad types of approaches that may have the greatest importance for future studies are the development of indexes using either (1) a descriptive approach that ignores the individual, societal, and environmental consequences of developmental goals, or

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<sup>6</sup> The intertwined relationship between culture and development is also suggested etymologically, as the term ‘culture’ derives from Latin *colere*: to promote growth, to cultivate, to nurture.

(2) an evaluative approach that focuses on developmental goals that are beneficial for individuals, societies, and the planet. These two approaches have different potentials. And in both cases the corresponding cultural map will change across time as societies evolve and new prescriptive goals are defined (Marsico, 2015).

The descriptive approach would describe people's preferences as they are without assessing whether a given developmental pathway is beneficial or harmful. Demographic growth, for instance, is likely not the most desirable pathway of development for a well-populated planet. However, some governments and people still find demographic growth important; the descriptive approach would recognise demographic growth in its list of developmental aims. This approach involves describing people's actual expectations (without imposing preliminary assumptions about whether a given pathway is good or bad), and would help us understand them. It could also describe past pathways of development (e.g., policy-makers often fostered demographic growth in the past). The evaluative approach, in contrast, may help shape a better future. In indexes crafted with the evaluative approach, the 'goodness' and 'badness' of developmental pathways for contemporary and future societies will have to be taken into consideration.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)—the collection of seventeen global developmental goals set by the United Nations in 2015—can help illustrate the complementarity of both approaches. Each society may wish to follow its own indigenous pathway of sustainable development, and studies on cultural preferences towards each of the seventeen SDG can help shape these pathways. Such studies will fall within the above outlined evaluative approach. However, studies that focus exclusively on SDG will remain blind to people's actual preferences towards development. Some people and societies wish to follow pathways that science recognises as harmful and unsustainable (again, demographic growth may serve as an example). By studying 'harmful' preferences, one can elaborate a comprehensive map of actual preferences. Such a comprehensive mapping is necessary if we

want to understand not only what we wish to happen, but also how to change priorities that we wish did not drive people's behaviour. The latter is possible only with a descriptive approach.

The evaluative approach is not without its own limitations; all evaluations are themselves culturally biased. Therefore, the evaluative approach may raise methodological and axiological problems. The tensions present between the descriptive and evaluative approaches may, however, generate fruitful scientific discussion and open up areas to empirical study. In the longer perspective, such discussion may also lead to a shared formulation of important goals for the development of all human societies (like the SDG). Only the starting points would be different for various countries, and thus their pathways of development (but not the palette of common goals).

The selection of potential developmental goals is broad. Satiation of basic needs allows classical topics, such as egalitarianism (e.g., Marx), openness (e.g., Popper), harmony (e.g., Confucius), freedom (e.g., Locke), justice (e.g., Rawls), or spirituality (e.g., St. Augustine), to attract more attention in discussions of desirable societal aims. One may also consider emphasizing areas researched more contemporarily, such as happiness in its various forms (e.g., Diener et al., 2009; Uchida, Ogihara, & Fukushima, 2015), meaning in life (e.g., Oishi & Diener, 2014), protection of the dignity of a community (Mies, 2014; Jaskiewicz & Besta, 2018), environmental protection (O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb, & Steinberger, 2018), gender egalitarianism (Krys, Capaldi, et al., 2018), democracy (Ernø, 2016), or low wealth inequalities (Piketty & Saez, 2014). These are only a few examples of potentially beneficial developmental aims.

### **10. Towards More Culturally Sensitive Development Indexes**

Statistical indicators are important for designing and assessing governmental policies, which in turn influence the functioning of societies and their members. It is both possible and reasonable to formulate development indexes that give consideration to the cultural diversity



of preferred developmental goals (descriptive CS indexes) that, at the same time, will not be harmful to the long-term prosperity of humankind (evaluative CS indexes). The cooperation of cultural researchers and development economists, along with other social scientists, is needed to elaborate the theories and resultant maps of societies' developmental goals.

In order to craft descriptive or evaluative CS indexes, researchers need to elaborate the methods for identifying:

(1) the list of possible developmental goals pursued by contemporary societies; these lists should take a culturally inclusive approach in their development as with the values identified by Schwartz (2009) or the social axioms identified by Bond and colleagues (2004; see Berry, 2013 for more on the concept of pan-cultural universals),

(2) the scores measuring preferences of societies towards various developmental goals; as with values or social axioms, the scores will be attributed to societies and will allow for the assessment of cross-national diversity of preferences towards a given developmental pathway, and

(3) the measures of performance of a society on a given developmental goal; for example, GDP per capita could be a measure of the economic component of the CS index.

The set of pan-culturally identified developmental goals (point 1 above) will probably remain relatively stable over time and will reflect the diversity of possible developmental pathways. Theories of basic psychological motives (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schonbrodt & Gerstenberg, 2012) or moral foundations (Graham et al., 2012; Miller, 2008) may be helpful in this task.

The scores measuring preferences of societies towards developmental goals (point 2 above) would probably need to be refreshed (e.g., a moving average would likely help) as societies evolve and their preferences towards specific developmental pathways slowly change over time. The tracking of societies' preferences for developmental pathways could be based on measures incorporated into projects like the WVS or the Gallup poll.

Finally, the scores of measures tailored to track the performance of societies on a given developmental goal (point 3 above) would change on a yearly basis (e.g., every year the World Bank delivers estimates of GDP per capita), although the selection of these measures should probably remain relatively stable over time (e.g., GDP per capita would be consistently used to track economic development over time).

In crafting CS indexes, top-down and bottom-up approaches can be applied. After the king of Bhutan declared that gross national happiness is more important for Bhutan than GDP, Bhutanese scientists started elaborating the methodology for GNH according to the Bhutanese king's ideas. This is an example of a top-down approach. Explicitly taking the preferences of citizens of a given country into consideration, like it has been done in the Better Life Initiative (BLI), is an example of bottom-up approach. The BLI was launched in 2011 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in order to involve people in discussions on well-being and to learn what matters most to them. This initiative uncovered cultural differences in preferences toward different aspects of well-being: education, jobs, and civic engagement are rated as being particularly important in South America, personal safety and work-life balance are highly rated in Asia-Pacific, health matters most for Europeans, and life satisfaction for North Americans (Balestra, Boarini, & Toso, 2018). The BLI also offered the Better Life Index, in which the authors weighted a country's outcomes by people's preferences towards the eleven specified aspects of well-being. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches have their advantages, and CS indexes that combine results of scientific studies (e.g., on the hampering effects of inequalities) and explicitly take into consideration people's preferences may be the most fruitful line of CS indexes (in an evaluative approach).

The first version of an international standard system of national accounts (i.e., the GDP measurement manual) was published in 1953, and has since undergone major revisions in 1968, 1993, and 2008. A similar manual can be imagined for CS indexes, and similar revisions will probably be necessary. But first, cultural researchers, in cooperation with

development scientists and ideally with the support of a global institution like the United Nations, need to identify the list of pan-cultural developmental goals and elaborate a method for calculating preferences for these goals across cultures.

### 11. Cultural Sensitivity Applied to Existing Indexes

One route to cultural sensitivity of development indexes is the implementation of culturally sensitive weights to already known, and presently cultural diversity-blind indexes. The Human Development Index, the most popular alternative to GDP, is constructed as the geometric mean of three sub-indexes—education, longevity, and economics ( $I_{subscript}$  stands for the index of a given dimension):

$$\text{HDI} = (I_{health} \times I_{education} \times I_{economics})^{1/3}$$

Thus, the HDI implicitly assumes that each of its three components is equally important for each society. However, there is no empirical evidence that every society prefers each of these three pathways of development with equal strength. By collecting or accessing relevant data, researchers could weigh longevity, education, and economics by the actual preferences of each society and then assess how well each society is meeting its own goals in a Culturally Sensitive HDI (CS-HDI;  $W_{subscript}$  stands for the weight of a given dimension):

$$\text{CS-HDI} = (I_{health}^{W_{health}} \times I_{education}^{W_{education}} \times I_{economics}^{W_{economics}})^{1/(W_{health} + W_{education} + W_{economics})}$$

As a result, this adapted CS-HDI would place relatively more significance to the dimensions that a given society aspires to attain and would thereby become more culturally sensitive<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> As an example, selected items from Schwartz Value Survey could serve as weights in the CS-HDI. Specifically, importance given to the ‘WEALTH (material possessions, money)’, ‘HEALTHY (not being sick physically or mentally)’, and ‘INTELLIGENT (logical, thinking)’ items could be used to weigh the indexes for economics, health, and education, respectively.

Research on differing societal preferences for developmental goals has practical implications—governments do face the question of which pathways to prioritise: to invest in healthcare, to facilitate the availability of education, or to foster economic growth. Although these three pathways do not have to be mutually exclusive, some societies find them to be competing (e.g., the discussion about the Affordable Care Act in the USA), and governments face decisions where to place limited finances. Either consciously (like Scandinavian governments), or as the indirect result of decisions, governments differently promote each of these three pathways.

Canada and USA may serve as an example of potential cultural differences in preferences towards development. In the HDI ranking for 2015, Canada and the US share exactly the same level on the HDI (i.e. .920), but the interpretation of their position may be unclear. Whereas these two societies share moderately high levels of education (16.3 vs. 16.5 years, respectively), they differ in their life expectancies (82.2 vs. 79.2 years) and in their economic performance (purchasing power parity US \$: 42,582 vs. 53,245). Do Canadians prioritize health more than US citizens? Do US citizens prioritize economic prosperity more than Canadians? If yes, their ranking matches their societal desires and values for progress. But what if the answer is no and their societal goals are actually similar, and both countries prioritise longevity over economic prosperity? In such a case, both countries would be ranked on different positions in the CS-HDI approach (they would still remain in the same position on the universal HDI rankings, however).

The ‘hard’ HDI may remain objective and universal, but as we showed above the CS approach can be complementary without replacing existing indexes. With the CS approach, we can also check whose preferences the universalistic/objective HDI tracks the most. Do they closely match Italian, Scandinavian, American, Japanese, or Bhutanese conceptions of societal progress? Currently, weights used in the universalistic HDI are arbitrarily selected (i.e., the three sub-indexes are given the same weight). It is unclear whether this is the best

possible distribution of weights between longevity, education, and economic prosperity. Most likely, specific weights may fit different societies better than others.

The CS and universalistic approaches are similar to emic and etic approaches to research in cultural psychology (Berry, 1999). More specifically, the etic approach is similar to universalistic indexes like the HDI in the sense of providing a standard that enables comparison across cultures, whereas the emic approach is similar to the CS approach as it highlights the specificity of each culture. Both approaches provide valuable information and are complementary to one another.

Weighing developmental pathways by cultural preferences will probably realign the order of countries in the CS-HDI rankings. Most importantly, data about cultural preferences for developmental pathways may be a useful tool for individual agents and governmental agencies responsible for creating and implementing policies. Currently, governments arguably select the pathways of development somewhat arbitrarily, or according to some implicit perspective of what constitutes progress. A culturally sensitive measure could help them select the best solutions for their own societies (and could help us learn how well traditional ‘universalistic’ conceptualizations of societal progress fit each country).

## **12. Risks of the CS Approach**

The CS approach should not be used as a justification for oppressive practices. Although judging the developmental aims of governments is uncomfortable from a cultural relativistic position, we would like to explicitly articulate our disagreement with potential abuses of our presented idea. If any governing body would like to justify its oppressive practices with the CS approach, we will recognise it as an abuse of the CS idea and as a betrayal of the members of its own society. The transformation from militarism towards economisation facilitated emancipation in various forms, and the potential next step of development from economisation towards culturally diversified concepts of societal growth

may only be welcomed if accompanied by further emancipation from scarcity, poverty, and oppression.

Furthermore, we consider human rights as inalienable to every human being in every society<sup>8</sup>. Human rights are a non-negotiable core of every developmental pathway. The process of societal change that disrespects human rights is not a development, but retrogression. Thus, the oppression of social minorities should not be justified as a societal preference and an indigenous way of development. A society that discourages any single group to fully benefit from every aspect of social life is a violation of basic human rights and limits human flourishing. Prejudice and intolerance should have nothing in common with following an indigenous way of development.

We recognize the risk that some governing bodies may try to abuse our presented idea to justify their oppressive practices. We hope, though, that misuse of the CS idea, if appears at all, will be an exception and rare. The CS approach has, on the contrary, the potential to undermine oppressive regimes if the actual values and desires of their citizens are being ignored and not being actualized. The CS approach may help people realize what the whole society wishes (beyond economic prosperity; descriptive CS) and compare it to the currently existing culture-insensitive indexes in regard to what is being delivered by governing bodies.

It is also possible that if we develop studies on people's preferences towards societal development, we may obtain directions that undermine social welfare overall (e.g., military expansion over neighbouring countries or further improvement of economic standing without respect to environmental boundaries). An evaluative approach (see section 8 of this paper)

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<sup>8</sup> We do acknowledge cultural ambiguities in the conceptualisation of human rights— various countries have criticized the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (from 1948) for not taking into account the cultural and religious context of non-Western countries (e.g., Ignatieff, 2001).

may be a solution to this threat. Future studies may also need to deal with within-country cultural differences. Ideally, a culturally sensitive approach should recognise and respect variations across social groups and individuals within a society. This is relevant when thinking of cultural minorities, but applies also to other qualities differentiating people (see Fleurbaey & Blanchet, 2013).

### 13. Conclusions

We hope that the CS approach towards societal development will be recognised as an urgent topic for the majority of societies (for similar signals see Balestra, Baoarini, & Toso, 2018; Shek & Wu, 2018). We do not pretend that the current paper is a full description of the proposed idea and the concrete steps toward its implementation. Such a description would exceed the limits of a single article and, more importantly, requires further empirical studies first. With this paper we hope to stimulate efforts in this direction. Future papers will need to grapple with and provide answers to basic questions on how to determine societal preferences. For example, whose preferences (e.g., lay people's, political bodies', elites') will be tracked? What is a societal *preference*? What about preferences that some people recognise as good and others recognize as bad for individuals, society, the whole of humanity, and/or the planet? Answers to these questions may resemble answers to questions about the nature of democracy, the source of democratic will, and the method of aggregation of democratic votes—there will probably be numerous studies and ongoing debates. Even if we assume that all citizens have well-defined preferences, it may be impossible to aggregate them in a clear and acceptable way (see Arrow's possibility theorem; 1950). How the various preferences should be negotiated into societal preferences is another simple question requiring an answer. In addition, how should we conceptualise a *culturally* sensitive approach? In our current initial proposition, we equate culture with “national culture”, but a culturally sensitive approach could go beyond such a narrow conceptualisation of culture (i.e., culture is more heterogenized, dynamic, and fluid than “national cultures” can be). Here, we simply wish to

introduce the idea of cultural sensitivity in measuring societal development, and leave comprehensive and detailed discussion of solutions for future work. A substantial body of research on GDP was conducted before it became an international standard; similar rigorous theoretical and empirical studies are needed to develop CS indexes.

We believe that the CS approach is necessary to understand and measure well-intentioned progress (in an evaluative approach, as we label it in section 8) and to track existing pathways of human progress (in a descriptive approach). The CS approach is an urgently needed complementary modification to what we currently use: a universalistic approach that is unable to capture culturally diversified pathways to post-materialistic development of societies (Shek & Wu, 2018). We hope that CS development indexes will help orchestrate the developmental pathways that are beneficial to the future of humankind.

Globalization has forced us to question what aspects of the human experience are universal and what aspects are culturally shaped. The lack of complex understanding about the influence of cultural context on the behaviour of individuals was probably an impediment to solving one of the worst economic and social crisis in post-World War II history (e.g., German vs. Greek expectations toward debt crisis resolution; Salvatore et al., 2018), and still drives intercultural conflict more generally (e.g., debates in North America and Europe concerning immigration, refugees, and Islam). Psychology emerged largely as a discipline aiming at healing individuals. With scientific rigor, psychology has documented individual differences and revealed the variety of pathways leading to individual flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Cultural psychology has the potential to offer support in healing societal systems by documenting cultural differences and shaping solutions that are sensitive to the cultural diversity of contemporary societies.

Stiglitz and collaborators (2009) noticed that those attempting to guide our societies are like pilots. The decisions they make depend on what they measure and how good their measurements are. Introducing cultural sensitivity to growth measurement will help social



scientists understand the culturally diversified pathways for the development of societies, and in effect may influence governmental policies. For the vast majority of societies, it is a necessity to start conceptualising post-materialistic growth in a culturally sensitive way. Otherwise, without good compasses on how to develop next, they will likely continue to degrade planetary (and human) health in the pursuit of endless economic progress. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity in defining growth will help us understand humankind, and cross the boundaries and the potential fault lines that culture imposes on each of us.

In the contemporary world, sensitivity to cultural diversity is an issue of high societal, practical, and political importance. We argue that cultural researchers have an important role to play in addressing this issue. WEIRD societies also have a responsibility as these societies were the ones that attempted to apply their developmental goals in a one-size-fits-all approach to the rest of the world. This way, contemporary societies may fulfil the United Nations ‘decolonisation’ resolution from 1960 that states, “All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.

The Golden Rule (Kant, 1785/2002) is a fundamental moral code across cultures (Wolf, 2016). The Confucian Analects, the Christian Bible, and the Buddhist Udanavarga teach us that we should treat others the way we would like to be treated, or at least, not to treat others as we do not wish to be treated. By steering global development towards economic paths of development, WEIRD societies applied the golden moral principle to non-WEIRD societies. Since World War II, this golden moral code also implicitly guided global institutions to the most common, economic way of measuring development that is, however, blind to cultural diversity of preferred development paths or goals. Popper (1945/1966) suggested that the golden rule is a good standard which “can perhaps even be improved by doing unto others, wherever possible, as *they* want to be done by” (p. 386). Philosophers

called this concept the platinum rule, and the platinum rule may be applied to measures of societal development as well.

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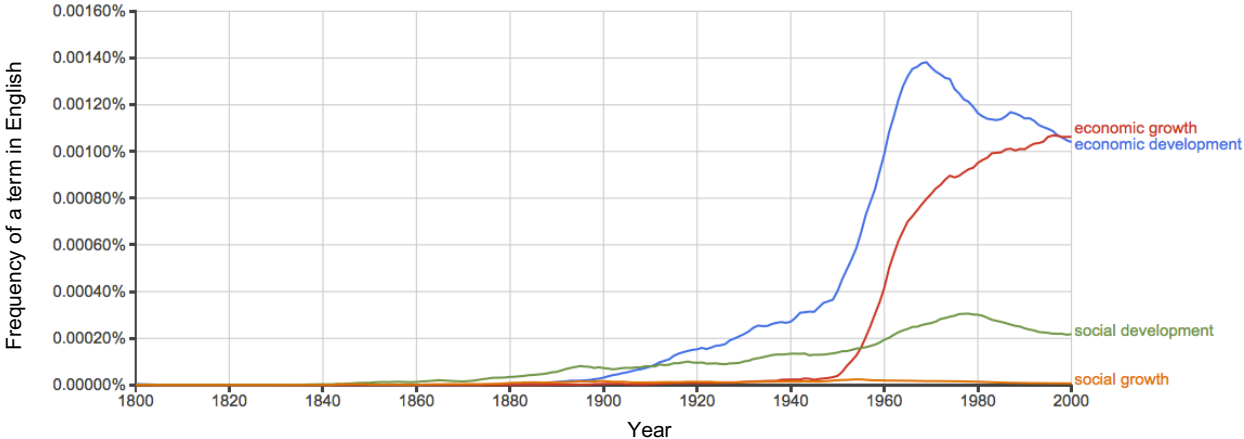


Figure 1. Relative frequency of economic and social development terms in English literature across the last 200 years. The vertical axis represents the relative frequency (percent) of use of a given term in the whole (digitized) English-language literature. The horizontal axis shows the year of publication. Source: <https://books.google.com/ngrams>