

KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

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This paper is focused on the increasing need of education in 21st century and on some problems which emerged in this context – the economists prefer to emphasize the development and growth, profit and effectiveness, and they can overlook general, ethical, and essential problems and needs of the contemporary world. These problems are not resolved by simple algometrical approaches, but they require multi-disciplined paradigms, which can provide social sciences.

Especially in the 21st century we need wide-ranging critical thinking as a basis of responsible ethical behaviour. However in the current educational environment in the tertiary educational system we can observe over-emphasizing of utilitarian requirements. We produce professionals who are expected to be able to find quick, effective but also far-seeing solutions of any given problem, which is in obvious contradiction.

This article discussed three conceptions of a human with the emphasis on the concept of “homo socio-oeconomicus”. This concept enables to see the world in wide context and develops necessary critical thinking, which is also economically more advantageous from the long-term point of view. That is why education in sociological, psychological, philosophical, political and other social sciences should not be considered by economists as something useless without any economic value, but as something that can help them to understand themselves, their environment and the consequences of their decisions. This is the core of this contribution.

education, knowledge, social qualification, three conceptions of a human in economics, responsibility, multi-disciplinary approach

1. Introduction

In traditional society the education was the preserve of a narrow group of people. Schools were mainly religious or were controlled by a strong ecclesiastical power. “Knowledge is power.” – this Francis Bacon’s statement denotes the beginning of modern society. In modern times a new concept of science evolved, which has liberated science from religious, political and other influences. The freedom of scientific research came to the forefront.

This approach is also seen in the work of John Amos Comenius, who emphasized that education is not only acquired knowledge and skills, but also *a workshop of humanity*. The education during the Enlightenment was understood as open, accessible and humanising¹.

Education is transformed from the outset of modern society, which is characterized by new technical inventions, new knowledge, new forms of economic and political power that have enhanced social mobility, formed various groups and set

1 In contemporary society we talk more and more frequently about inequality in education, reproduction of educational inequality, lack of equal opportunities, inequality in access to information technologies, inequalities in participation in further education, obstacles in participation in further education, etc., which is demonstrated by numerous empirical investigation. Comp.: MATĚJŮ, P.; STRAKOVÁ, J.; VESELÝ, A. (eds.), 2010: *Nerovnosti ve vzdělání. O měření k řešení*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství. 495 s. ISBN 978-80-7419-032-2.

new life patterns and different value principles. The industrial revolution brought enormous social change. In the industrial society the man is dominated by the power of economy (Urbanová, 2006), and as a consequence of the development of society education begins to have more practical character and begins to be a necessity. Nevertheless, until the World War II education did not have a mass form, and significant changes can be observed since 50's in the 20 century, during the main period of the modern society. As a result of the development of society and the situation after the Second World War, a lot of roles in the private and public sector required higher qualification. In this situation education serves as a mean of social mobility, as a kind of a lift that allows a shift in the context of social stratification and leads to the expansion of the middle class – the bulwark of the post-war society².

In comparison with the height of the modern society, which culminated during the 30 post-war years, the current social reality is unquestionably much more movable, fluid, volatile, unstable, episodic, temporary, provisional, elusive, and at first sight chaotic with hardly predictable development (Keller, 2004). A lot of rules that were hitherto regarded as given, guaranteed, and authentic, are not valid any more. This phenomenon corresponds also to the new character of education that is based on continuous innovation. This volatility is evidenced in the constant changes in curricula, in the deviation from tradition, and in often repeated sorts of *reforms for reform's sake* (Liessmann, 2008).

2. Knowledge society

In the 80's and 90's of the last century we can encounter more and more often the network structure of large companies (Castells, 1996). This innovation is associated with changes in the market, and with demands on labour forces. Rising unemployment and the development of flexible work relationships deepen problems of social systems in the state. The solution to these problems should be a knowledge society. But this knowledge society differs from the society in the mid-20th century – as mentioned above that time the education was a tool (a lift) for a shift in the social stratification – the current knowledge society serves as *an escape from the individual slump and as a guarantee for maintaining own positions in the labour market* (Keller, Tvrdý, 2008). Education has transformed into a kind of business driven by a profit. The value of obtained diploma can be considered from three perspectives³:

- How it will guarantee our employment,
- How much it influences the level of our salary,

- How it will guarantee our position in the society, our special social status.

Dieter Kirchhöfer (2002) introduces *the concept of entrepreneurship with own knowledge*, which according to him is based on the importance of skilled labour force. In this model each individual is independent, risk-ready and able to manage simple as well as expanded reproduction of its own labour force and competences. The concept of entrepreneurship has several components: inter alia it includes worker's self-management, i.e. the self-control of own work, of the quality of work, of the utilization of a work-time, and of the level of cooperation with others. The man is himself/herself responsible for the economic evaluation of his/her competences. This way the workers are forced to realize on their own expenses the reproduction of their skills, to evaluate the need for future skills and to bear all risk of future market utilization of their competences.

This new situation corresponds to numerous educational reforms aimed at industrialization and economization of knowledge. They are based on the idea of a flexible person who is willing to lifelong learning and who is using his/her skills with regard to changing markets. However, this knowledge often reminds only a sum of information that can be quickly and easily learned, and quickly forgotten (Liessmann, 2008). Education lost its power of synthesis and the idea of education as a program of self-creation of a man. Education is often *degraded to the professional and skilled knowledge, to calculable indicator of a human capital* (Liessmann, 2008, 11).

As a result of the pressure on knowledge production, its utilization, and the ability of individuals as well as institutions to succeed in the competitive environment, university education loses educational cultivation and the professional preparation becomes entirely instrumental. In consequences of this attitude to education, universities are beginning to have "industrial character" – they behave like "companies" or "knowledge factories" whose job is "a production" or better "a production line" of graduates who are capable to fend themselves in practice. It is imperative that education, the study effort, and knowledge should meet market requirements, and should be utilize as quickly as possible leads to the fact that within the market environment education has been changed into the market commodity. Outside of social sciences the social skills are regarded as unnecessary, useless, delaying, and inefficient. Especially in branches where the education is based on technical skills, the moral and social qualification is disappearing (Radvan, 2010).

2 Talcott Parsons states in its stratification model that in the 50's of the last century up to 88% of Americans belonged to the middle class.

3 Nowadays education is compared to a sort of insurance. Our social mobility within the social stratification is more likely determined by the network of acquaintances, clientage, nepotism than the quality of the schools we studied.

However the result of social skills is the creation of social responsibility and of responsibility for the consequences of our decisions and actions, which is absent in current economic environment.

Social sciences always contributed to extending of education with the development of sophisticated critical thinking. This tendency to find the social dimension in the economy is apparent for example from the theories of Witold Morawski (2005), see below.

3. Three concepts of human in the economy

Witold Morawski (2005) identifies three concepts of a human in the economy. He found inspiration for them in the arrogance of some economists, such as demonstrated in the declaration of Nobel laureate Paul A. Samuelson: *I do not care who makes the laws, if I can write the economic handbooks* (Morawski, 2005, 20). Morawski shows that *the Economic Human* is based on individualism and on irresponsibility for the society. The opposite of this man is, according to Morawski's typology, *the Sociological Human*.⁴ The ideal is the union of *the Economic Human* and *the Sociological Human* into *the Socio-economic Type*.

A brief overview of this theory:

1. Economic Human (*homo oeconomicus*)

The mainstream of economics thought was based on a rationally behaving individual. The aim of his/her actions is self-interest and efforts for maximum satisfaction, for example the maximization of profits. The economic human is focused on economic efficiency. The goal of this man is only his/her own interest. This type does not take into account the human aspects of production and exchange, such as social justice. The economic human has a clearly defined economic goal and looks for means and criteria for its realization. The economic human is

egocentric and concentrates only on own success; the outside world is only the obstacle that has to be overcome to protect own interests. This type is very egotistical. Amitai Etzioni compared the economic human to the computer on two legs: it is efficient, but cold. As stated Etzioni this man has a head, but no heart.

2. Sociological human (*homo sociologicus*)

The sociological human is the extreme opposite of the economic man. The sociological human is an individual who is a member of social groups and/or communities. The agenda of his/her actions are values such as tradition, solidarity, freedom, equality, patriotism. The sociological human is willing to renounce his/her control over own property, and is able to give up own benefit in favour of community goals. The sociological human uses sociological categories of value as good-bad, positive-negative.

Following chart shows main features of economic and sociological human in comparison (Morawski, 2005, p. 28) (Tab. I).

3. Socio-economic Human (*institutionally embedded*)

The socio-economic human (*homo socio-economicus*) represents the synthesis of both social and economic humans involving the traits of both types. The decision-making abilities of this type cannot be considered to be optimal but merely satisfactory, because the decisions are made on the basis of insufficient knowledge of conditions. We can not anticipate all of the consequences of our choices since decision making is necessarily based on incomplete information; it is thus seldom possible to distinguish the best choices from the worst. The thinking of the socio-economic human is based on life experience and on scientific approach. It can

I: Three concepts of human in the economy

Characteristics	Homo oeconomicus	Homo sociologicus
Subject	Individual	Group, community (an individualist member of group or community)
Motivation	Self-interest	Values (tradition, solidarity, freedom, equality, belief)
Criteria of evaluation	Calculating rationality, in utilitarian terms (gain, loss)	Relation of rationality, non-rational, irrational, normative (good × bad)
Principles of behaviour	Free choice	Constraint of behaviour, different meanings of behaviour, influence of customs, manners
Space of behaviour	Market, private realm	Society, market as a social institution, public realm
Principles of organization social of space	Interactions of individuals, after their preferences and rationality of procedures	Influence of politics (power), social justice
Aims of analyses	Prediction	Descriptions, explanation, interpretation
Methods	Formal, mathematical	Empirical, qualitative
Methodology	Reductionism, individualism	Organicism, holism
Intellectual tradition	Smith, Keynes, Samuelson	Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Parsons

4 The authors of this paper consider more appropriate term for this type "*the Social Human*".

thus be argued that the behaviour of socio-economic human is based on perceived and considered reality.

This type of person combines the advantages of both sociological and economic approaches, creating a sort of golden mean between perspectives that are strictly economic on one side and strictly sociological on the other side. The ability to see all systems (economic, political, legal and cultural) as interconnected can increase the understanding of their mutual interaction. This approach promises to overcome the border between sociology and economy.⁵

The concept of socio-economic human involves the ability to see social world in wider connections, the competence to use multidisciplinary approaches for solving economic problems and in particular the capacity to develop the critical thinking, skills that are so necessary today. This approach seems to be even more advantageous in terms of economics because it can help to reduce social pathology or illegal behaviours.

Education in social sciences and the humanities (sociology, psychology, philosophy and political science) can markedly contribute to the development of the socio-economic human, and should not be viewed by economist as a distracting and economically useless exercise, but rather as the basis for developing very important social skills based on knowledge and understanding of the self

and others as well as of surroundings in the widest context that can be transformed into forms of responsibility for oneself and the world.

In the contemporary world we are confronted with an increasing number of various lifestyles, concepts of knowledge and methods and differences in value orientation rankings. At the same time, we accept the legal nature of this undeniable diversity (Welsch, 1993). We cannot find space for communication, for the unification or integration without some common values, without something absolute. What, beside shared values, can hold different people or communities together? Axiological propinquity is a presupposition of our mutual understanding (comp. Habermas, 1981). We should therefore emphasize an education capable of increasing moral and legal consciousness and reinforcing social responsibility (comp. Večeřa, Urbanová, 2011).

We live in a time of rapid social change characterized by an increase in social tensions and conflicts. As Ulrich Beck aptly noted (2004), contemporary post-modern society has a whole range of social conflicts unknown to previous societies. These conflicts often arise in solving questions concerning quality of life, equality of rights in connection with the emancipation of social groups, etc. Human cultivation, to which the humanities can contribute, is vital at this time.

4. CONCLUSION

To be well educated is not a result of institutionally acquired knowledge and skills, but rather the result of perpetual curiosity, the ability to transform life experiences into knowledge and the advanced critical thinking skills involved as a necessary foundation for orientation in today's complex world. The well educated person perceives and understands phenomena in all relations and wide contexts as does sociology. A sociological perspective *makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives* (Berger, 1991, 28). We should regard education as a social phenomenon, considering it in connection with other social phenomena as a part of a complex social reality.

The ideal of well-educated man involves the notion of striving to free oneself from all ideological prejudices. All forms of (scientific) knowledge (hypotheses and theories) should be approached critically, especially those things claiming to be transhistorical, universally, or even eternally valid. Opinions or notions should be perceived and analyzed from different points of view. A well educated person investigates phenomena, compares them to similar ones, considers analogies and interpretations, gathers arguments and constantly asks questions (Radvan, 2010).

Knowledge is not a matter only of expertise, but rather of finding relations and comprehension. A part of the effort to understand things must be the search for agents or interests one could find beyond ideas or events ("Cui bono?").

A well-educated person is defined by pro-social attitudes; is helpful to people, including those with few commonalities; refuses knowledge for its own sake; is led by the principles of social justice, solidarity and mutual support; is decent and tolerant; feels responsibility for the development of civil rights and

5 We should understand to economic sociology, as a new scientific discipline that applies sociological analysis to economic phenomena. A market, the core issue of economic sociology, operates under particular social conditions that are usually outside the interest of standard economic analysis (although they have crucial meaning in some points). This demonstrates the need to assess market economy in terms other than economic. It is not possible that the world of economics and economists is enclosed and only immanent in nature and is thus, theoretically a closed autopoietic system.

democratic institutions; and actively participates in the development of citizen society. Well-educated people aim to understand all phenomena they encounter without thoughts of expediency (Radvan, 2010).

Specialization therefore can not be preferred at the expense of wider education. Tertiary education must not be degraded into the preparation of, to quote Bělohradský "qualified idiots" (in Vít, 2003). The humanities occupy a unique place in the development of human personality and in the cultivation of its thinking. A high rate of return on investment in the humanities can be expected even in economic terms. For prosperous society a high level of trust and social solidarity are a necessary condition, or in Masaryk's words: *Do not lie, do not steal, do not fear*.

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