From information society to knowledge society: analyzing western theories of social transition

The paper presents a study on theoretical and practical causes for an emerging transition to a new phase in development of contemporary high-tech society, the so-called "knowledge society". The main aim of the work is to answer the following questions: Why is information society changing towards knowledge society? What ideas and values are stated within the Western theory of knowledge society?

The knowledge society concept was introduced by Professor P. Drucker in 1969 and since 1990-s it has been widely used in academic sources as a synonym to «learning society». The term «knowledge society» was articulated by Fritz Machlup, Robert Lain, Nico Stehr, Gotthard Bechmann. Some scholars try to find a good Russian equivalent for the term «knowledge-based-society» and use it as a forced version of the information society concept where knowledge is believed to be the most valuable form of information. In that case knowledge is the key factor for economic development and lifelong learning is a must for a person's adaptation and self-sufficiency. The concept emerged as a result of Western intellectuals' critical reviewing the experience of information society. The information society concept has been developing since the mid–20th century but now the concept is undergoing reviewing as there is some inadequacy in understanding today's social reality.

The very idea of information is criticized, it is deconstructed as it is a highly abstract notion and that is why it can't reflect all the peculiarities of modern society and thus it can't be an effective means of conceptualizing. They also deny the logic of narrow technological determinism due to which the essence of information society is just technological progress and the IT revolution is the main characteristic for the ideal society.

The paper provides the analysis of transition from information society to knowledge society in terms of social changes and alterations and probable perspectives. As for historic perspectives there are some barriers for the analysis because Popper's historicism, as well as holism, is not accepted in contemporary social researching and there is some postmodern scpsis about metamarration. We can also feel there is some conceptual socio-philosophical lack and peculiar theoretical hardships because behind information society and knowledge society concepts there are no developed theories which could have a proper set of abstract objects and are acknowledged by most experts. As there is a certain improvisation and a situation-based usage of the concepts there is a tendency to analyze just separate aspects of social structures both of information and knowledge societies.

The lack of a reliable marker for a comparative analysis is based on the deficit of any coherent theoretical horizon which could help to reveal defining points of the transition from information society to knowledge society. To construct a coherent structured view that would allow to systematize all the facts, postulates and axioms concerning sociology, futures studies, philosophy and economics and that could explain social changes of recent decades is possible within the industrial paradigm of growth and development. But that paradigm has undergone some serious changes since the time it appeared.

In the beginning the contemporary society's socio-philosophical theory used to be articulated with the prefix 'post' to emphasize the gap between the new epoch and the previous one, i. e. industrial one. A most trustworthy theory of the kind was D. Bell's postindustrial concept which started as futures studies and was supposed to alleviate the crisis tendency of early 1970-s. This task was not of current importance during the post-war economy increase with a certain development of consumer capitalism and entertainment industry which was based on 1950–60-s' scientific and technical achievements. Then there appeared numerous theories of «industrial society», «consumer society», «welfare state» and D. Bell wrote his famous book with an optimistic title «The End of Ideology». But in his next books «The Coming of Post-Industrial Society» (1973) and «The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism» (1976) ideology was actualized as understanding how important it was to formulate new structural changes in the social system of capitalism. Resuming, D. Bell postulated the following long-term tendencies for capitalism's development when entering the post-industrial era:

- growth of importance of scientific and cognitive values as the main institutional needs of society;
- competence while making experts' solutions which helps scientists participate in political processes;
- bureaucratization of intellectual work which deform the definition of traditional intellectual aims and values;
- growth of amount and social power of technical intellectuals which provokes their conflicts with humanitarians and literary intellectuals and sharpens the problem of «two cultures», increasing the importance of universities for finding its solution;
• overall moral climate of remote future in postindustrial society will depend on the status and ethic standards of science, on increasing or decreasing of individualism with its avant-garde views and mass-consumer hedonism.

When D. Bell was comparing pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial societies, his aim was not to describe these social systems but to reveal qualitative changes in their structures. In economic technical system the main principle for social structure is functional rationalism and efficiency, for policy — egalitarianism, for culture — self-expression. In his concept social reference points are reviewed through scientification of all life's aspects, which means admitting the fact that knowledge and information are the axis of modern society. Later D. Bell preferred the idea of information society to the concept of postindustrial society. D. Bell's notion shifting directed the transition from industrial society to postindustrial society and then to knowledge society which meant not only forms of social reality development but also objects for scientific analysis.

D. Belf's concept had been widely discussed and criticized which gave a birth to a still ongoing discussion about the relations between industrial, postindustrial and knowledge societies. French sociologists S. Nora and A. Mink were rather skeptic about the universal character of postindustrialism and believed it to be just an upgraded version of industrial, i.e. is liberal and market, approach to society development. Its perspectives were seen in getting tranquilized through increasing citizens' well-being and providing equality in living standards which is fundamental for escaping social tension. These authors think that «postindustrial approach is effective when used for the information ruling producers' and consumers' behaviour but it's useless for the culture pattern problems».

To fill this gap was a task for some postmodernists who paid much attention to socio-cultural changes of the last quarter of the 20th century and to the role of knowledge in those processes. Postmodern social theory was focused not on economic transformations, labour and employment issues, but on spheres of information routine such as mass media, fashion, advertising, individual self-consciousness. Postmodern discourse insisted on the fact that there was a crisis of Enlightenment ideology as «archeo-onto-theo-teleo-phono-logocentrism» (J. Derrida) and that a social machine is always prior to a technical one, and it's a social machine that chooses technical elements (G. Deleuze). Thus, it was said that to produce knowledge which is oriented on some practical usage is a very simplified understanding of social changes and shifts. There should be a denial of technological determination and the search should be done in the field of socio-cultural and anthropological grounds of postindustrial society. The authors of postmodern approach — J. Baudrillard, J.-F. Lyotard, F. Jameson — articulated the list of socio-cultural determinants which were fundamental for contemporary society's genesis. They are logocentrism, rationalism and individualism, capitalism presuming economical effectiveness and benefit, militarism, counterculture and avant-garde experiments. As postindustrial society is the Western civilization phenomenon, including its philosophy, world view and ideology, its peculiarity is formed by these very characteristics. For J. Baudrillard contemporary radical transformations are caused by «the end of the social» and defined by metamorphosis of meaning and knowledge. Truth, meaning and knowledge have been disappearing; there stay just signs and performance. Knowledge perspectives are illusive because «... the abundance of knowledge is indifferently floating away in all directions».

J.-F. Lyotard's «The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge» (1979) is a kind of a report about epistemological consequences of scientific achievements which coincided with the starting point of postindustrial society. J.-F. Lyotard emphasizes the idea of knowledge being a society's main economic force but mentions it lost its traditional legitimacy. Science is just a kind of a speech play, it lost its emperor privileges as comparing with other knowledge of contemporary epoch. Science is characterized by getting pluralism in argumentation, technification of proving, equalizing truth and effectiveness. New legitimacy of knowledge is in its effectiveness. Transformation of science is done together with discreditament of significant modern narratives: German idealism, which tells about spirit as a gradually revealing truth, and French story of revolution's emancipating role and a human being who is a hero getting freedom through learning and knowledge. So, J.-F. Lyotard views the present as a stage of cognitive development, he dwells upon epistemological destiny of sciences and states radical changes in all spheres of human life. Metanarrative crisis gives a critical view towards any system of ideas which can be seen as a universal one and which sets an ideology presuming economical effectiveness and benefit, militarism, counterculture and avant-garde experiments. As postindustrial society is the Western civilization phenomenon, including its philosophy, world view and ideology, its peculiarity is formed by these very characteristics.

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When we discuss the peculiarities of postindustrial period it's necessary to admit the effectiveness of Western sociologists' debates about its class characteristics. The main thing they found was the ambivalence of a new class of intellectuals and the role it played in the ideology of transitory social reality. Amongst the new class of top intellectuals sociologists reckoned researchers, teachers, journalists, mass media representatives, «social employees» (psychologists, lawyers, designers, high-rank officials, functionaries and bureaucrats), these are people who can create and spread ideas, values, meanings, symbolic facts and standards. Traditionally that class was supposed to be free in researching and giving social and artistic criticism.

The Professor of London University P. Scruton says about a large intelligent class of a society which cannot be engaged by any separate party but should try to support order and proper management in the whole society. But the German sociologist H. Schelky says that due to the growth of the significance of professional skills doing intellectual things underwent changes and the public function of intellectuals became degraded. On the one hand, their ability to give a critical reflexion lets them form ideology; on the other hand, it lets them come into the top spheres of political life to defend their class interests while saving capitalism. H. Schelky proves that among the intellectuals there appeared a new ruling group which in fact behaves the way any ruling class does. And the only difference is it tries to supply its supremacy with ideological means.

R. Florida analyzes the socio-technical structure of postindustrial society in his famous work «The Rise of the Creative Class» and dwells upon the fact that the amount of people doing something creative is growing, but the author sees significant differences inside service employees' stratum which has two centers: those who make something creative and those who just reproduce. This tendency is discussed by some other researchers. «If postindustrialism is regarded not only as a postindustrial enterprise structure but first of all as labour and technology changes then the service growth can turn out to be very contradictory». A. V. Buggalin believes. On the one hand, there is a vivid progress in creative fields, on the other hand, semi-qualified and low-skilled work is getting highly needed. If the fundamental idea is the postulate that there is no other society model for North countries of late capitalism then again creative class is a function of corporate capital and it is mainly

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concentrated in business, finance, state management, military sphere and some fields that are attendant to them, such as science, elite education, mass media, press, entertainment industry. Dominating values of the class are still values of consuming.

The key points of postindustrial concept and its critics’ arguments allow arriving at some preliminary conclusions. First, in spite there is no proper periodisation of postindustrialism, it grows from industrialism and its fundamental world views concern progress, unification, standardization, universalisation. The professor of Manchester University T. Shanin believes that «the empiric basis of present societies’ epistemology is industrializing with its endless satisfaction of ever growing needs through the increase of wealth, the improvement of technologies, science, compulsory education, individual freedoms». Second, the ideology of information society which is being developed on the postindustrial basis presupposes mankind will go on moving in the direction marked by industrialism. There is no doubt information society demonstrates changes not only in technologies, but also in social institutions and public life. And there are some peculiar changes and social consequences are ambivalent. A. V. Buzgalin supposes: «The development of global energy, information and network structures can provide not only knowledge and education accessibility but also finance speculations».

The concept of knowledge society is viewed by Western scholars as alternative to information society. But it emerged as the result of transferring economic ideas into a wide field of social researching, the main issues of which had been already formulated in the theories of information society. Accentuating the ideas of scientific character and the ideas of knowledge reproduction as key factors for a stable development of society, changes in cognitive and information aspects of present labour system and public production, demands for higher education system — all these philosophic points turn out to be mutual both for information society and knowledge society, and it makes it possible to view them as variants of one paradigm. Then we can observe a quantitative growth of contemporary tendencies and parameters with no resulting in knowledge society. Let’s see what G. Bechmann says, he believes that the difference between knowledge society and industrial society can be found through its typical way of production, i.e. Fordism, which turns natural resources into consumer goods, factory labour on the basis of Taylorism and postindustrial processes of tertiarisation, i.e. service economy is alternative to industrial production. «The transition to knowledge society means dematerializing and lessening of energy dependence together with a growing role of information and knowledge. The trend is accompanied by globalization which demands a high level of information and organization support in the sphere of technical production management».

This characteristic is not full because it just states the transition from Ford-Keynesian pattern of mass production supported by the state which functioned since 1940-s up to 1980-s to post-Ford pattern revealing no peculiarities. Another G. Bechmann’s idea is seen as more substantial: «… it is vital for the transition to knowledge society to see knowledge as active expander of society culture resources. Scientific cognition turns material conquest of nature into a process controlled by science. It doesn’t mean society loses other sources of cognition such as life wisdom, religion, poetic intuitions».

The project of knowledge society in terms of geopolitics can be viewed as alternative to united Europe, American model of consumer society and its conceptualizing in theories of information society. There appeared the UNESCO’s report «Towards Knowledge Societies» made by world’s leading philosophers and sociologists: G. Vattimo, J. Derrida, M. Castells, J. Kristeva, B. Latour, P. Ricoeur, A. Touraine, J. Habermas. There were also used some materials of Russian researchers Yu. N. Afanasiev and S. P. Kapitsa.

According to the report, knowledge society is oriented towards spiritual and intellectual development, democratic values and self development, seeking for new forms of solidarity. Knowledge society ideas help to reassess the very concept of development in terms of human resources value and varieties of knowledge systems, including wisdom, autochthonous (native-born) knowledge and recipe knowledge. The paradigm of growth and development as the quintessence of industrialism ideology, containing the idea of knowledge society, demands for clarifying its perspectives, aims, challenges and risks which accompany the process of formation of this society pattern.

The ideology of knowledge society concept is condensed in the postulate of a long-term development of contemporary society on the joint basis of science, economy, politics and education. While the potential of information society is based on technological achievements, the development of knowledge society means wider social, political and ethic parameters. Within the knowledge society concept there were formulated the following priorities:

• a fairer assessment of present knowledge for getting over digital, cognitive and language disunity of information society;
• a wider participation of those who are interested in equal knowledge access;
• a more effective integration of political actions into the field of knowledge.

The transition from information society to knowledge society is qualified to a new not technological, but social paradigm. The role of knowledge is articulated in two aspects: it is not only a key factor for economic development, but also a factor which helps mankind get developed in terms of personal independence. The fundamental idea of knowledge society is a recognized necessity and real ability of finding, producing, processing and handling, transforming, spreading and using to get and employ knowledge which is vital for mankind development. The task of knowledge society is to develop critical and cognitive skills. The concept of knowledge society contains the postulate that the most widespread and renewable resource in the world which needs protecting and encouraging is the capacity to create. It makes it necessary to extend personal rights and abilities which get realized through integration, solidarity and cooperation. So, knowledge society is supposed to reach the aim which was not fully gained by information society, i.e. to find agreement between cultures and new forms of democratic cooperation that can contribute to getting true mutual understanding. The concept of knowledge society is based on the idea that formation of such societies opens the way for humanization of global processes through breaking all the barriers and bans both between North and South and inside any society. The importance of ethnic, cultural and linguistic variety emphasizes the inseparability of knowledge access and the conditions it is created in.

Within the concept of knowledge society there is understanding about more adequate solution of knowledge access than a mere possibility to get a technical access to information that is essential for information society. For knowledge society it is not possible to just have an unlimited information traffic, it is vital to exchange information, to compare, criticize, assess and think it over using scientific and philosophic analyses for all who are interested to be able to produce new knowledge on the basis of information streams. In that aspect knowledge is considered to be a tool for critical analysis and reflection of the information stream mankind is having. So, a growing gap between information and knowledge, unbalance between developed and developing sectors of the world make us see the perspectives of stable human growth while forming knowledge society as synthesis of information society achievements, knowledge-based economy and lifelong learning.

4 Ibid. P. 118.
Can knowledge societies be sources of new risks? The report reviews some of them, but it's not so easy to admit there were no grounds for them in the previous period. Knowledge societies are called societies of technological surveillance or control revolution which is the centre of digital revolution. Here we have a contradiction between values of encouraging information freedom and transparency and illegal intrusion into private sphere which leads to mixing up «knowledge for everybody and knowledge of everybody». In terms of culture it is found unpromising to transform knowledge society into entertainment society. A ghost of frivolity and light-mindedness starts following our societies which are saturated with entertainment. As for higher education, experts are worried about its getting commercialized, about the striving of universities for getting benefit and about the fact that at the world's higher education market developing countries are supposed to act as consumers.

The peculiarity of knowledge society is a privileged position of some fields of knowledge, these are IT, biology, nanotechnologies. Their rise was accompanied with a serious interdisciplinary integration and the growth of experts' influence. Experts, as those who are professional, legitimate politicians' solutions through the power of knowledge and carry out ideological function which appeared in industrial society. As for humanities, the key figures here are teachers, researchers working in socio-humanitarian fields, artistic people, journalists, NGO officials and they are responsible for renewal of critical and humanistic tradition which is necessary for criticizing political solutions concerning science and research, development of new technologies, risks management, anti-crisis management, environment protection, education, health care. Positive results of humanitarians here will inevitably make knowledge society predictable.

To resume it all, we should enumerate the values that are fundamental for knowledge society and are considered to be necessary to make knowledge belong human beings. First, the process of culture homogenization which leads to extinction of languages and ethnic traditions in many parts of the world makes it of top priority to save linguistic variety. Language variety makes knowledge access easier at all levels of learning. Language variety is important as besides codified knowledge and formatted information it saves and spreads «live» skills, i.e. native-born (autochthonous) knowledge, know-how, folklore, routine knowledge. Integration of different regimes of knowledge allows keeping unique types of cognition, its flexibility and variety.

Second, knowledge society declares the value of translation as socio-cultural and linguistic practice which helps to find agreement and mutual understanding between civilizations, countries and individuals. Translation is a mediator between cultural and cognitive variety and universality of knowledge.

Third, the learning society cannot be a society of only one type of information. Double education which is regarded as a society's value can help to achieve a balance between global and native languages, on the one hand, and it can add humanitarian knowledge to technical knowledge which is still prevailing.

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Social network internet and mass culture

In recently intensive shaping global information space exists in the world, introduction information-communication and Internet-technology in all spheres of the life's state and society. As effect, in world scale appeared new, not acknowledging state borders ambience contacts, which has accelerated international exchange to information in social-economic and public-political sphere.

However, what shows the analysis established situations in Internet, given ambience, given people possibility liberally to spread any given amongst interested persons was by leaps and bounds filled also by obscene information. Herewith, what the experts IA “Reiter's” suppose, if standard “general” channels relationship, as a rule, block spreading to such information, that Internet has played the role “mirrors society” and has for the first time shown the true scales a demand for pornography on the part of person.

So, for present-day day amount pornographic site in Internet, on miscellaneous estimation, forms from 30 before 40 million units, annual income with which exceeds 120 billion dollar USA. Herewith as of UNO, more than 4 million web-sites in structure of the world volume porno recurs are dedicated to themes to pornographies minor children, volume which is daily renewed on 200 new scenes, but annual income forms 20 million dollar USA.

Active spreading to obscene information exists in all known world social set Internet also. In particular, Russia has acknowledged the social network “ВКонтакте”, in which registered more than 11 million is teenager, in t.ch. 7.5 million from RF, the main keeper baby pornography in Russian segment Internet. The Similar situation is noted and on page of the Russian social networks “Odnoklassniki.ru” and “Mail.ru”, “My world”, in which exist the groups and users, keeping and spreading material on different subjects of the pornographies and prostitutions. In west segment Internet key Interne-resource, keeping and spreading audio-visual pornographic information, are a popular American social networks “Face book” and “My space”. Herewith, in the opinion of expert, at the average for month of the users in specified social set mention the word “is spoil” more than 130 thousand once, “sex” — 129 thousand once.

2 Ibid. P. 62.
3 Ibid. P. 93.
4 Ibid. P. 201.