

# What is the Knowledge Society?



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***Abstract.** This study sets out to establish conceptual delimitations, more concordant to the theoretical acquisitions with regard to the knowledge society. The author considers it opportune to situate in the center of the definition of the concept of knowledge society the problem of prevalence in the typology of resources. Thus, the knowledge society appears as a form of organization in which scientific knowledge predominates, be that informatics as well. The concordances of essence are discovered through the discerning of the functional relationship knowledge society – global society. In the spectrum of meanings specific to this highway of post-postmodernist configuration of the world, the priorities of the project of the second modernity – the paradigmatic matrix of globalization – are approached. In fact, the study argues in favor of refocusing globalization on the humane, on its distinctive values which substantiate and lend sense to the evolutions of the world. Postreferentiality is the rational expression of humanity coming back to itself<sup>1)</sup>.*

**Key words:** the principle of critical mass; postreferentiality; the second modernity; the substance of globalization.



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## A postreferential perspective on resources

The real problem of the knowledge based society is meta-knowledge. The basis for this statement resides in the performance of actional routine of avoiding an entropic risk: the re-invention of the wheel. This is how the world must always come back to the need for formulating an asymptotic answer to the recurrent problem: how to favor development by increasingly using what knowledge is?

### **The first referential: the explicative model**

When we talk about the knowledge society, in its various linguistic approximations, we are referring to the state of grace of people as beings whose creativity combines reason with passion, calculus with inspiration, deduction with induction, logical reasoning with metaphysical appreciation, the contingent or the substance with

transcendence or the immaterial, the value of truth with conjecture etc. In a natural way, an incremental perception gathers shape: the knowledge society is just the post-Cartesian human society, when creativity aims for the undetermined completeness.

The bare identification of this change in the public conscience must not get us worried. It is, anyhow, conforming to a limitative tradition, that of the comfort of the conservation of the frame of reference at the level of what was inculcated in each person's spiritual universe through the channels of general knowledge. The reflex of resorting to the mechanic model of describing the world and – eventually – of anything belonging to it, is the constituting invariable of today's spirituality.

We are still not out of – unless by exception and somewhat exclusively elitist – the paradigm of the clock-universe (Damasio, 2004). We explain to ourselves, self-sufficiently, that anything represents a cog in a contraption powered by the mechanical force of the extending spring. If even the visible universe seems to imitate the regularities of a pendulum, then we can construct and reconstruct any organism, be it alive or not!

The obsession for the mechanism, thoroughly installed in our way of perceiving the world, has culminated with industrialism and the specialization of professional thinking. Scissiparity and division have become the rule, the model for a savant covers ultra-specialization to the smallest possible particle of matter, the vocation of the schools of thought was squandered in the discovery of universal constants, excellence was achieved in the fragmentary profession, the part, the minute, making the whole uninteresting to research.

The signs of evolution though point to a comeback, on a different level, towards the preeminence of the functional whole, be that a self-regulating system or a self-organizing one, a tendency relating to the transformation of knowledge into the essential resource of existence. It can be an immanent tendency of the living world of attaining the functional completeness, but also a sought after alternative to the propensity of the individualization of the state of consciousness which shields the perspective of the whole. The exercise of redesigning the vision is somewhat vital for overcoming the bottleneck of understanding the unsolved problems which crowd the highway of knowledge due to the precarious method of *caeteris paribus*.

It must be pointed out that the paradigmatic reasoning of the knowledge society – as a notion generating directions, instruments, attitudes and practices, a human actional field different in history – needs, after the triumph of mechanics, extremely nuanced explanations. And this

because the conceptual universe of the knowledge society must be completely detached from the transcendental model of society which has always counted – especially implicitly – on knowledge, and it has even given the positivistic impression that it has progressed only as a result of the constantly refined capacity of using the instrumentalization of the values of knowledge in general.

Certainly, without vigor and commonly, human society is a society of knowledge; of knowing the mechanisms for the use of limited resources, which are by definition natural. Generally, society has always been a knowledge society, but which has sought new knowledge meant to exclusively consume mother-nature. The real knowledge society – as an expression of the global society – tries to reconcile the needs of human nature, ever larger and diverse, with those of the regeneration of mother-nature, by proposing ways of development which consume the inexhaustible resources, above all the resource represented by human intelligence, by knowledge, the propensity to innovate, the entrepreneurial capacity, the creative associateship etc.

It may be that some fundamentals of the strategies for knowledge society could have inadequate motivations, of the type that concentrate on the need for competition, as an expression of the exploitation of the competitive function (Groupe de Lisbonne, 1995). As others seem to simply fail in utopism, especially where there is no capacity of generating or benefiting from the resources, such as a Romanian attempt of orchestrating a durable development project with a year 2025 horizon. Beyond these extremes, there are enough experiences which can generate a data fund for a credible strategy of evolution toward the knowledge society.

Between the quality of progressing through knowledge, which the human society had, and the model of the knowledge society there is a difference of critical mass. When society arrives at diligently producing knowledge and preponderantly consuming knowledge, then it really becomes the knowledge society. Now, knowledge is effectively pluri- and trans-discipline to the point of paradigmatic fusions, concrete to the point of scientification and immaterial to the point of virtuality. In the knowledge society, the idea, as an information, is not just primordial, but has priority, while it manifests itself both as ineffable and substantial, essential and concrete, functional and efficient.

#### **The second referential: the global society**

As a resource of development, knowledge transforms into inexhaustible power, whose administration can only be done globally in order not to become its opposite. The

frequent associating of globalization with the knowledge society in the professionalized discourse is both opportune and justified. Frankly speaking, globalization has for finality the global society, which can be consistently identified in the spectrum of meanings of the knowledge society, from the centering of development on innovation to the comfortable mobility of factors and the fulfillment of liberties through self-assumed standardized discernment.

The evolutions toward the global society – as a definitive expression of globalization –, even if they seem theological, especially through the accepted logistics for the objectives of the knowledge based society in some parts of the globe such as the European Union, are not either linear or predetermined. The knowledge society bears indeterminations which relate only to the substance of knowledge, unprogrammable in essence in impossible to incase in the framework of a paradigm without the risk of not founding failed projects or of administrating a “wonderful new world”, utopian not just because it would be normative.

The connectivity between globalization and the knowledge society – as a global society –, even though natural, has much more sophisticated regularities than the experience of projecting global strategies would permit us to foresee. The difficulty emerges from the fact that the knowledge society is seen as a solution to the unsolved problems of history, and also as in insurance for the harmonization between the human nature, the human condition and the global context, including mother-nature (Edvinsson, 2002).

Even if it persists in its suspicion that, thus accredited, the knowledge society overbids on the desirable over the possible – represented by the global fund of creativity, we are faced with the ideal situation of overcoming, among others, the neuroses of the pre-global world, from mysticism to political superrealism. If today the counter-reactions to the global society take the recalibrated shape of the fears experienced in history, it doesn't constitute but a sign that the knowledge society – as a fundament of globalization – is alive, it dislocates the articulations of the pre-global world. Conflict – to be seen anywhere – is the violent expression of a world – the pre-global one – built on reflexes of adversity. This world is condemned, even brutally and irrevocably, to surrender its spot to the global world, as a support for competition.

The imagined decadences of the future through an excess of knowledge is, more often than not, invented to satisfy apocalyptic passions (Fukuyama, 2005). Sure, accidents are possible, rationally uncontrolled inclinations reproduce regardless, obscure interests will continue to

confiscate goods, especially ideas, but in general the knowledge society will create the favorable environment for well done things. The changes of conscience – in a positive sense, affect not just every individual and community in particular, but humankind as a whole. The world will be, obviously not at once at everywhere, responsible in regard to its insertion in the global system. It seems like an excess in optimism, although I believe that, in reality, the evolution of the knowledge society, as any other formula for a post-ideological society, is stalled by an excess of hereditary conservatism which refuses renewal *de facto* because it ruins habits.

If we take into account that the categorical practices in the administration of the economy about to globalize, deviant with regard to the essence of globalization, marked by the hegemony of a part which controls all the other parts of the global whole and which discretionarily administrates global powers – economical, political, scientific, energetic, military, cultural etc. – the knowledge society is still threatened by major derailments. As with globalization, the knowledge society, as a global society (otherwise it wouldn't even have sense but as a retrograde exercise of phalanstery), instead of triggering the second modernity (Beck, 2003), it can be a simple, but dangerous cluster of civilization. This would forever define the fault line between a self-sufficient center and a periphery extended to the maximum, condemned to underdevelopment, even under the benign formula of imitation, underling and reproductive of the alteration on the axis of progress.

No other reasons have determined the European Union to adopt the Lisbon Strategy, through which to target on medium-term the standard of the knowledge based society. Thus the provocation that the EU would be the real knowledge based society was accepted because it is based on an advanced approximation of globalization (Archibugi, Lundvall, 2001). It also has functional elements in regard to the prefiguration of the global society in the manner – still somewhat hesitant – of a political union.

The European attempt for a knowledge based society shows the initial elements of a successful path because it brings to fold the whole set of contemporary values which must constitute the proof of a capacity to refound attitudes and practices in a way specific to the global society.

### **The third referential: the recessive paradigms**

It seems clear that the values derived from the cleavages operated by the national and industrial revolutions that debuted two or three centuries ago conserve the attitudes and practices of a world obsessed by fragmentarism and mechanism, as well as by adversity and an imbalance of

forces. These values – and evidently many others – find it problematic to insert themselves into the differently made, complete body of the global world. They mustn't, without exception, become recessive, as they must not necessarily generate idiosyncrasy to change (Brzezinski, 2005). The values of the pre-global world lose or modify their relevance within the essential guidelines of the global world. For instance, the value – not just symbolic – of sovereignty, as a mark of the pre-global world, perfectly exemplifies the transformational process of values. Sovereignty is a vestment of the part (and evidently also as a support of adversity) in a whole suggestive of the pre-global world. The symbols and the memory of sovereignty (Huntington, 2004), especially nationally supported, block – sometimes violently – the extension of the symbols of the global world. It is sufficient to point out – in order to illustrate this aspect – to the British attitude toward the Euro currency, but also to the recent evolutions regarding the advancement toward a political union by adopting a treaty if instituting a constitution for Europe.

It looks like, on the road to a global society, a bitter conflict between the sets of values of the pre-global world and those of the world becoming global. The knowledge society – as an approximation of the global society – is not shielded either from risks, blockages, ambushes, hijackings, lags etc. The European Union offers the most significant example in this regard. The Lisbon Strategy not only lags, but is often questioned, is pushed toward senses and objectives exclusively biased toward output, under the guidelines – which really have to be imitated? – of today's hegemonic society, represented by the USA. Instead of following the trend set out by the European formula for a global society, the instrumentalization of the Lisbon Strategy takes its heading from the comparative analyses with the American model, which, in fact, is the most accurate formula – of a type exclusively geared toward efficiency – of a pre-global society in its maximal formula. The American model looks successful from the perspective of the productive and innovative efficiency compared to the meanings of the sets of values of the pre-global world. Or, at the limit, what sense does it still have, for example, the efficiency justified almost exclusively by enormous externalities, as well as by unprecedented mechanisms for the transfer of value-added from the rest of the world to the United States by way of the dollar as the single reserve currency? (think about the story of petrodollars).

As what endurance and comfort offers the model which adopts the principle symbolized by the “wall of death”, the circus number represented by the risk assumed by a motorcycle rider of spinning endlessly around the interior

walls of a tower? Stopping the engine, at full speed, would be fatal! In this emblematic case we find ourselves in a one-dimensional world, exclusively dependent on the mechanism, fatally opened to risk. It is a world of the inherent exhaustion of resources, depressed by the rule of speed and obsessed by the cease of the power to keep on trajectory. The battle for the trend complicates the movement to a stall, the existence of several riders on the same circular track being hard to accomplish, even unimaginable.

Paradoxically, the USA finds itself in a situation where it can contradict its historic image, of a country promoting liberties and democracy, putting now a question mark over any different – especially political – option of theirs. The famous artificial ideology of political correctness augments the sensation of slipping towards the one-dimensional world. The leveling of attitudes, as a sign of mimeographic thinking, is not in any way the support of globalization, but the astonishing expression of the hegemonic confiscation of the global powers.

The knowledge society, as a global society, is either built on its own set of values (adversity replaced by competition, for example), or it stays a shape bereft of essence – as many others – of the extending pre-global world (when adversity actually simulates competition).

Competition, having rules of play, is less costly than the irrational and irreducible adversity. Adversity eliminates players definitively, while competition keeps on re-throwing the trophy into play for all participants. Competition is human, as opposed to adversity, which reproduces on pre- and post-human fundamentals. Adversity has exclusively material goals, sublimed by power, while competition offers the chance of the spiritual guidelines recognizable in humanization (Dinu, 2004).

Adversity, including under the formula of eliminatory competition, confiscates intelligence, concentrates performance – through brain migration; in contrast to competition, which emanates equal chances of success anywhere, democratizing power and disseminating the capacity for innovation, as well as prosperity. Competition, as an ordinate principle of the global world of a knowledge society kind, progresses through creative destruction, while adversity – as an ordinate principle of the pre-global world – sacrifices, removes from the circuit, eliminates, entropizes, recycles crises, actualizes the apocalypse etc.

### **The human-value postreferential**

In way unhoped-for, the global society bring humanity back to the natural condition of depending on its own inexhaustible resource – innovative including with regard to liberties – reason, knowledge. In fact, this is truly about

the world returning to its own self, marked as its global stage of existence, when the renaissance attempts of centering the characteristics of society on the human-value are resuscitated.

Which would make any generic concept, of the type of the knowledge society, to suppose adherence beyond the rational, as it happened with socialism or communism; it is its quality of stimulating related developments with ideological ambitions. The projection of the premises, when it happens beyond the condition of comparing everything to the possible guidelines, with the exact measure of the available powers, fails into utopia. For instance, there are not few temptations of solving everything through globalization, this being not at all different from the practice of excessively conjecturally loading communism with powers, the true cause of its surprising demise.

As any other societal projection, the knowledge society too is voluntarily accredited with higher expectations than it can satisfy. Even in the most perverted way, globalization is suspected of super top-down functions also with regard to its capacity of solving the specific problems of the pre-global world, such as poverty, underdevelopment etc. Obviously a less visible trick for the uninitiated takes place here: the idea of the continuity of the ordinate principle of the world is induced, the order imposed from the perspective of the interest of the more potent party, which means, simply put – in a Caragiale-esque style – is modified somewhat, but in fact the essential is left unchanged.

The truth is that, to the extent of the move toward the project for a global society – in the functional variant of the knowledge society – there is no suggestion of a line continuity of practices, instruments, attitudes and visions. If it was so, the expected solution to the unsolved problems of the global world would be illusory, as both the intellectual and general effort would be useless in the absence of the process of change.

The understanding of the different mode of operating in a knowledge society makes possible its very functional existence, in the distinct period of the global world, it even categorically marks the censorship between the

pre-global and the global world. Certainly, there is still a need for leaps to be made in our understanding, for the explicative model of the global world to be truly internalized in order for it to effectively become reality. In fact, it would be an unnerving error to talk about the knowledge society without arriving to the internalization in a critical mass of individuals, of the defining significances of the new societal model. Otherwise, we would be talking about something which is self-producing, which is both absurd and catastrophic to the sense of the concept of knowledge, it would even annul the distinction of man inside living nature.

Things would not get twisted too much if another manner of approaching the reality of the knowledge society wouldn't be overused which such alarming frequency: its technicalist projection, limited at the material support of information, including at the atrociousness of idolizing artificial thinking. This theorized demiurgical attitude, as a determinant for the knowledge society, represents the perverted phase of the manifestation of the principle of the pre-global world, fed by mechanicism and Manichaeism.

The knowledge society would in any way be the expression of the human creativity marked by the rules of living systems (Prigogine, Stengers, 1997), and not of the systems functional with ergo-phage inertiality, or with top-down reproducibility (Penrose, 1998). In a direct way, the knowledge society is either way infinitely more than its instruments, be that the World Wide Web, as the knowledge society cannot be, as I said before, another wonderful new world.

As with the global society which gives it substance, the knowledge society cannot be – by respecting its essence – an utopia, even if it point us to an ideal society worthy of attaining through sacrifice.

The avoidance of the insinuating globaltopia is not only necessary, but must be possible precisely through the internalization of the specifics of the knowledge society. Even by respecting humanity's limits of being progressive with itself, keeping in mind the historically proven fact that nature – including the human nature – does not make leaps.

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## Note

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<sup>(1)</sup> The ideas in this article constituted my contribution (“Societatea cunoașterii. O perspectivă postreferențială asupra resurselor”) to the volume “Societatea

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