

Higher Education in the Globalization Era

Wojciech Zieliński

Rector, The Silesian University of Technology,
Akademicka 2a, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
wojciech.zielinski@polsl.pl

Abstract - Today's world faces major and important civilization transformation phenomena. The observed process concern among other the new generation awareness changes, revaluation of social categories and ideas as well as changes in the human rights hierarchy. The growing integration and globalization processes in the economy field accompanied by the extraordinary technology development can be observed. The above mentioned processes and phenomena have to be present in the development strategy of educational institutions, especially higher education ones, the role of which includes the preparation towards successful participation in the society development with respect to the most talented young people. The universities have to take into consideration the globalization chances and threats in full, emphasizing the enormous opportunities but also explaining the possible dangers, especially the ones concerning the society disintegration. The transformation from the industrial development era towards the information society age, as well as the quality of life and services issues, incur new role and duties concerning educational processes and institutions. The educational offer of today's world institutions has to be the most widely accessible and at the same time it should be diversified in a manner enabling various society members to develop their specialized abilities and skills.

Index Terms – Globalization process, Technology development, Modern higher education, Information society.

INTRODUCTION

Today's world faces major and important civilization transformation phenomena. The observed process concern among other the new generation awareness changes, revaluation of social categories and ideas as well as changes in the human rights hierarchy. The culture and the way of thinking of young people change with structures which the societies form, and this is to the large extent inevitable. Although in many cases the people do not note the changes in their reactions they do adapt continuously to changing environment.

GLOBALIZATION PROCESS

Several discussions in recent years include the opinion that the largest and the most wealthy cities of Northern America, Europe and Pacific Basin regions have decisive influence on the world's present transformation and future. The cities

belonging to this category can be characterized by some common features. First of all it is the place for large multinational investment, absorbing goods, services and man-power from all parts of the world. Second, it is continuously prepared for the development of traditional as well as modern infrastructure elements which enables the necessary communication with partners from other regions. Such cities are efficiently accessible by means of air-connection, motorways, railway and other means. Usually there exists extensive telecommunication, Internet and tourist traffic between the cities grid nodes. The services needed by international tourists and businessmen are being developed, the congress and exhibition centres are being built and extended, together with large and comfortable hotels and office area and infrastructure. These are the places where large meetings, festivals and congresses take place.

There is no doubt that progress in metropolization processes facilitate in addition the global and networked way of functioning. These processes are affected by historic, tradition related structures of local community. Almost fifty years ago Helen M. Lynd, American sociologist, formulated the opinion [1], that people become aliens in the world known to them as their home, that they become frightened when they can no more rely on answers to questions concerning their identity and connection with their place on earth, that due to consecutive confidence upsetting they feel as children lost in the other world.

Our today world is covered by dense network of multinational enterprises and more and more frequently when we change place due to professional carrier or tourist reasons we live in the same hotels, have meals in the same restaurants, buy in the same shops – in fact in the same places in these same shops. Genius loci phenomenon giving the specific place on earth its unique sense is becoming more and more rare.

EFFICIENCY AND CONSUMPTION CULTURE

The essence of globalization seems to be now the cult of efficiency, the society scale version of fordism concept. Fordism has changed the producers from creators to builders, in today's factory there is no much place for individuality, personality and creativity. In fact one should not expect anything else if the technical activity efficiency is measured nowadays mainly using the economic criteria. Corporations like McDonald's implemented this model also in the services sector.

Similarly to Charlie Chaplin making the same movement with his monkey wrench for the whole day, McDonald's employee repeats the same welcome phrase to each client in every restaurant and offers the same selection

of fast food. In both cases the overall objective is to achieve the highest possible economic efficiency, and this paradigm, born in USA, is spreading in more and more regions of the entire world. Until not so long ago the American cult of efficiency had been loosing against traditional life relishing culture in southern Europe, Latin America and most Asian countries. The success of McDonald's also in these regions means that we are facing the major changes in human culture. The quality is subordinated to quantity, the essence of matter is subordinated to the speed and effectiveness of service. All these are element of consumption oriented culture with consuming as the focus point of human existence.

The new culture finds its way to societies by means of new structures emerging around us, to which we become inevitably addicted. The huge mega-markets create relaxing atmosphere for their visitors, at the same time working hard to make them to consume the offered goods and services. Consumption becomes the dominant source of satisfaction and the main form of entertainment for people with no roots in traditional culture. Consumption becomes less and less the activity towards satisfying the individual's needs, it becomes the new ritual, the new social duty, the necessity.

The trends mentioned above are in full accordance with research on economical development mechanisms during the last ten centuries [2]. The curves representing economical growth and population growth from the world perspective are almost parallel – in fact the curves are almost the same which means, that there was almost no per capita product growth, only the basic society needs were covered. Only from the industrial revolution period the curve of economical growth becomes steeper. Rapid acceleration of this trend started in the second half of 20th century. The effect resulted from the growth of opulence and welfare of the whole society but also from economical stratification into poor and rich groups – with respect to societies and within every society. The regions that do not succeed in following the technological development lag behind more and more, whereas these successful get superfluous profits. Even among the richest there may appear frustration and discontent because one cannot buy everything that the consumption oriented culture dictates to possess and use.

The processes of globalization and metropolization are well observed social facts, it is inherent element of our world the present and the future. There is no sense in fight against inevitable future, the societies should better prepare in advance to the future challenges. As long ago as 600 years B.C. the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse argued that the ones who are perfect in solving problems simply solve them before the problems appear, the rulers who are perfect in defeating their enemies simply act before any threat becomes noticeable.

HIGHER EDUCATION ROLE

What is then the role of higher education in the globalization era?

The problem of adjusting the education model to the future generations needs is important to universities for many years. The changes of teaching model are integral element of

university functioning. However, from historical perspective it is clear that not all generations were equally successful in predicting the social changes main streams. The passive attitude to such changes problem usually resulted in the years of stagnation and the intellectual life either stood still or found its place for development outside of universities walls.

In order to be aware member of the modern and increasingly fast changing society one needs not only to perfectly understand the surrounding processes, but also – and maybe even especially – to find and accept one's proper position in the modern world, to understand and shape one's social role, with all resulting chances and threats.

The education level seems to increasingly determine the position and perspectives of individuals, the lack of proper education drastically decreases any successful future prospects. This observation is one of the important reasons for transformation from master-apprentice model of education towards more open scheme guaranteeing access to higher education to much more society members.

The interest in studying as a way towards increasing the standard of life and carrier prospects is especially eminent in less developed countries and regions. For example, in Poland the number of students increased from 400 thousands to 2 millions during the last 25 years. The same trend was observed in the author's university – the Silesian University of Technology (SUT), Poland. The internationalization and globalization of education resulted in the rapid increase of number of outgoing and incoming students taking part in international students' exchange, as well as the increase of international collaboration projects in the field of engineering education and research.

The increasing consumption surely results in the production growth and technology development. On the other hand the technology development is shaped increasingly by large multinational enterprises, which causes some saturation in need for high qualification specialists, while at the same time drastically increases the demand for medium level production organization specialists.

HIGHER EDUCATION MODELS IMPACT

The Bologna Declaration, aiming at unifying studies in Europe and promoting education internationalization, led to the 3-stage higher education model with Bachelor, Master and Doctor degrees, respectively. The system includes the needs formulated by employers because it enables to quickly get sufficiently well prepared specialist – after 1st stage of higher education, whereas it would be possible to use 2nd and 3rd stages for educating smaller number of specialists for more creative work on developing new technologies. However, it turned out that the new system is not particularly welcomed by students. For example, the research performed at Bologna University has shown that 93,4% of Italian students continue their Master studies after completing their 1st stage period, because it is easier to get job after getting Master degree and the salary is higher. Also in Poland students prefer to work for Master level degree because of similar reasons. Therefore it seems reasonable to implement only 3rd stage of higher education as option for students' elite.

Taking into account the especially fast technology development it is necessary to prepare the students to several changes of work during their professional activity and to efficient participation in professional education courses and postgraduate studies. Therefore the typical studies should be fairly general and aiming rather at developing some key competencies – creativity, interpersonal communication skills, team work etc.

HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGES

At the turn of 20th and 21st centuries the civilization progress has increased considerably. Besides undisputable advantages of this process there appeared some obvious civilization threats. These problems should become an important element of academic discussion and activities, also with respect to inter-culture dialogue. The universities, also because of their tradition and high respect in societies, should play leading roles in the mentioned process and in particular conduct education and research programs aiming at changing the attitudes and seeking solutions that would limit the sources of threat to civilization and natural environment. The universities should act against society disintegration processes, promote the building of cultural identity of individuals and whole societies as well as the group based relations.

The transformation from the industrial development era towards the information society age, as well as the quality of life and services issues, incur new role and duties concerning educational processes and institutions. Today's society members are less absorbed by manufacturing activities and have much more time for other activities, thus shifting the role of education from delivering purely professional skills towards preparing the citizens to developing their interests and passions. The educational offer of today's world institutions has to be the most widely accessible and at the same time it should be diversified in a manner enabling various society members to develop their specialized abilities and skills.

It should be admitted that in the fast changing world of today it is much easier to describe the current state than to risk any future forecast. The necessary distance to the opinions presented above in this paper could be expressed by quoting the words of famous Polish poet, Nobel Prize winner, Wisława Szymborska: „The future is neither as clear as the optimists want, nor as dark as the pessimists do”.

CONCLUSIONS

In the paper it was shown that the growing integration and globalization processes in the economy field accompanied by the extraordinary technology development can be observed. Several negative phenomena – like social stratification, partial society disintegration, unemployment threat and disappearance of regional specialization, accompany the undisputed assets of globalization – like effectiveness increase and better chances for less developed countries and regions. The author justified that the above mentioned processes and phenomena have to be present in the development strategy of educational institutions, especially

higher education ones, the role of which includes the preparation towards successful participation in the society development with respect to the most talented young people. The author discussed the thesis that the transformation from the industrial development era towards the information society age, as well as the quality of life and services issues, incurs new role and duties concerning educational processes and institutions.

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