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## **Citizenship education and its antitheses in the light of knowledge society discourse**

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### **Abstract**

*Nowadays, we observe an increasing impact of economic and market policies on education, in many contexts across the globe. This influence can be discerned in both cultural and linguistic terms, re-defining basic concepts which construe common understanding of social reality and its various aspects, such as political, axiological, and educational. The main purpose of the paper is to explore the bases for conceptualizing the idea of education for a knowledge society, in the view of documents, reports, and foresights on social and economic policy (EU, UN, UNESCO, WTO, World Bank, Poland 2030, etc.). It is argued that a shifting meaning of concepts such as knowledge, learning and its outcomes, as well as a change in perceiving a human being as a subject of education, brings meaningful consequences for defining, constructing, and implementing the idea of citizenship education. The methodological and theoretical approaches adopted here are inspired by critical discourse analysis.*

**Keywords:** *knowledge society, knowledge, citizenship, learning, discourse*

### **Introduction: the idea of knowledge society**

The idea of a knowledge society emerged at the end of 1960s, when sociologically oriented researchers and philosophers turned their attention to a particular role of both knowledge and expertise in a process of technological progress and socio-economic growth in Western societies in the post-industrial era (Drucker, 1969; Drucker, 1993; Stehr, 1994). Initially, the concept of a knowledge society was developed in congruence with the idea of an information society, with its focus on the tremendous acceleration in information technology, with its consequences for global modernisation processes (Lyotard, 1979; Beniger, 1986). Nevertheless, during the last several years, we can witness an increasing use of the concept of a knowledge society over the one of an information society. Conceivably, the crucial reason for this in both academic and media discourse on social development might be associated with a fact of incorporating the idea of knowledge society into official discourse of economic and social policy, which is reflected in numerous documents, analyses and foresights published by national and supranational organizations.

In the light of earlier – i.e. sociological and philosophical – visions, developed at the end of twentieth century, information and its transfer was supposed to form a cornerstone of post-

industrial transformation. Newly emerging social quality was supposed to be saturated with a dense network of Information Technology (IT) media, which would enable an immediate transfer of huge amount of information as well as would create new opportunities for unhindered communication between people (Toffler, 1970). Unhampered communication and common access to information would underlay new – reflective, however mediated through expert systems – strategies of creating human identities (Giddens, 1991). They would also influence organizational structures and management systems (Drucker, 1993) as well as leading to expansion of professional-knowledge activities in almost every aspect of human life. Last but not least, knowledge would interfere with politics, which would result in transformations in the political sphere: the transformations being influenced by a presence of corporate bodies of experts and scientists (Beck, 1992). From the perspective of knowledge society discourse, emerging transformations relate both to the quality of individuals' and whole societies' lives. As such, knowledge society discourse involves a promise of better knowledge, greater happiness, and higher living standards for all.

Such a utilitarian flavour of the idea of a knowledge society might have been a crucial reason for attracting an economic perspective. As to the economic standpoint, the idea of a knowledge society has been simplified and reduced to a strictly mechanical concept of information society, where knowledge perceived in terms of economically valuable information, undergoes constant transformations. It is continuously distributed, redistributed and transformed in societies, predominantly seen as peculiar knowledge-markets. Again, a utilitarian promise of 'greater happiness' appears. Herein, this relates to a perspective of economic growth which is supposed to follow business innovations which benefit from direct knowledge application. An economic bias in contemporary discourse of knowledge society with its central question: 'how to produce, develop and apply knowledge in most economically efficient way' directs economic focus on educational issues.

### **Education in the light of knowledge society discourse**

From a perspective given by economic aspect of knowledge society discourse, education is seen as the scope for efficient knowledge transfer from its producers (technology centres, universities, etc.) to the bodies and minds of human beings, who would transform knowledge into economic profit. Therein, education is understood in terms of human capital. For example, current Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommendations for education involve exhausting investments in human capital, seen as an indispensable step under the circumstances of globalization (OECD, 2007). Correspondingly, the European Commission (EC) advocates an intensive investment in education and training as a crucial strategy in developing the European Union (EU) into one of the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economies in the world (CEDFOP, 2003). Consequently, the Polish national forecast *Polska 2030* (Boni, 2009) presents the investment in human capital as a central tactic employed to foster the economic growth:

Knowledge might be considered as a main source of our competitiveness as long as we create supportive environment for development and synergy of educational systems. (...) In other words, a surge in productivity and, consequently, in competitiveness is conditioned by a constant increase in human capital quality which accompanies a development of educational systems infrastructure. (Boni, 2009, p. 205).

On the other hand, from a perspective provided by contemporary neoliberal economy (and politics as well), education can be viewed as a market of educational services as well as a tradable commodity. This perspective is directly expressed in *General Agreement on Trade in Services* (WTO, 1995) which was elaborated by such business organizations as the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Economic focus on education can be also analysed from a perspective of words pronounced by Margaret Thatcher, who is counted among main creators of neoliberal politics. As she stated in an interview given in 1981, 'Economics are the method. The object is to change the soul' (Gray, 2013). These words, as noticed by Eugenia Potulicka (2013), draw attention to understanding economy in terms of producing the *homo economicus* as new mankind who is both an obedient consumer and orderly producer. According to Colin Gordon (1991), neoliberal politics has done 'reactivation and a radical inversion' within the concept of *homo economicus* involved in the perspective of early liberalism. The radical shift from earlier ideas is that whereas in former theories *homo economicus* was an autonomous subject whose activity must remain 'untouchable by government', now its neoliberal variant aims at creating *homo economicus* as a 'manipulative man, man who is perpetually responsive to modification in his environment' (Gordon, 1991, p. 43). From this perspective economy might be regarded as education itself.

### **The notion of knowledge in knowledge society discourse**

Colonization of education within the discourse of economy involves incorporation of a concept of knowledge where it is understood not only in terms of capital, but also as an educational or even disciplinary tool. I proceed to discuss this point in the view of contemporary documents and foresights on social policy, which were issued by international organizations.

Since 1972, the idea of knowledge society seems to be gradually implemented into an official discourse of educational, economic and social policy, with its basic claim that knowledge is a crucial factor of both social and economic growth. A harbinger of these views seems discernible in the first report of the International Commission on the Development of Education: *Learning to be. The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure, 1972) as well as in the Report to the Club of Rome: *No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap* (Botkin, Elmandjra, Malitza, 1979); however, most specific explications of this view were presented after 1990. For example, European Commission White Paper on *Growth,*

*Competitiveness, and Employment* (CEC, 1993) included a systematic analysis of the concept of knowledge society in relation to social policy issues, with a special focus on economic growth and labour market regulations. In this report we can already notice a pro-economic orientation, which has been developing in subsequent documents on social policy (such as: Bangeman, 1994; EP, 1996; HLEG, 1997). These documents were elaborated in cooperative mode by collective bodies representing both business and public sector, such as UNESCO, OECD, and World Bank). The most mature conception of knowledge society seems to have begun in 2003, when *Handbook of Knowledge Society Foresight* was issued by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Within this document the idea of knowledge society was related to phenomena such as globalization, information technology, economical innovations, development of service sectors in economy (especially knowledge-based business services), knowledge management, etc. (EFILWC, 2003).

The most consolidated approach to the contemporary idea of knowledge society was given by UNESCO World Report: *Towards Knowledge Societies* (2005). The document, however, seems to promote the concept of information society rather than knowledge society. Herein, the idea on knowledge society is related to its 'capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development' (UNESCO 2005, p. 27). For UNESCO the construction of knowledge societies leads to humanization of the process of globalization and, as such, it is closely related to fulfilling the idea of human rights, manifested in freedom of opinion and expression, common access to education and unhampered participation in cultural life (UNESCO, 2005, p. 18). Peculiarly enough, the report aims at delivering a new economical basis for re-defining the idea of democracy. This attempt is realized through metonymic strategy of re-describing concepts that are basic for the idea of democracy (e.g. freedom, equality, solidarity), in changed terms of knowledge society discourse.

The concept of *freedom* is redefined in terms of free access to information:

Freedom of expression is moreover the guarantee of access for all to contents that are as diversified and reliable as possible. It goes beyond posing the question of access from the strictly economic and social point of view of infrastructure investments and overcoming the digital divide, and must be seen from the point of view of fundamental rights, the political safeguarding of those rights and the diversity of contents that circulate in the global information society (UNESCO, 2005, pp. 38-39).

*Equality* seems to allude to both equal and universal access to information and, as it is declared, lays at the heart of the practices and values of knowledge society (UNESCO, 2005, pp. 169-170).

*Solidarity* is understood in terms of common knowledge-sharing processes:

A knowledge society must foster knowledge-sharing. A knowledge society should be able to integrate all its members and to promote new forms of solidarity involving both present and future generations. Nobody should be excluded from knowledge societies, where knowledge is a public good, available to each and every individual (UNESCO, 2005, p. 18).

A particular aspect of the idea of solidarity, as expressed in the report, is constituted by a concept of *digital solidarity*, depicted in terms of common access to new communications technologies.

Last, but not least, the report delivers new perspective for defining *civic society* in terms of 'network society', where 'the free flow of ideas and information, boosted by the new technologies, will be a formidable lever for democracy and the participation of all in public life and decision-making' (UNESCO, 2005, p. 43). A similar idea appears in the national foresight *Poland 2030*, with its strong focus on network society regarded as the core of democracy (Boni, 2009, p. 67). Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that for Jurgen Habermas (who is referred to within both *Towards Knowledge Societies* report and *Poland 2030* foresight) new IT media, do not constitute themselves a *locus* of public sphere in democratic societies, regardless how important is their role in delivering technology which fosters public debate (see: Habermas, 1992; Kellner, 2000, p. 284).

What we may expect from the declarations of commitment to democratic values, as expressed in aforementioned documents, is to be accompanied by such a concept of knowledge which delivers strong foundations for construing competences of democratic citizens. However, the presented perspective seems remarkably distant from both Enlightenment and modern views on citizenship education with its core elements: civic consciousness, critical thinking, and social engagement based on intellectual and moral competencies of citizens.

The concept of knowledge that emerges from a discourse of knowledge society, in its both academic and official variant, carries a strong mechanical notion. There is also an air of mystery surrounding the conception of knowledge. Peter Drucker (1969), who was the first author to apply the concept of knowledge society, elevated knowledge to a position of central capital of modern societies, a key for their future development and a basic economical resource. Nevertheless, the author did not mention, how this 'central capital' ought to be understood. In the light of academic classical scholars related to knowledge society discourse (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1969; 1993; Stehr, 1994), knowledge may be understood in terms of a system of statements which relate to facts or ideas (Bell, 1973, p. 41). At the same time it is conceived as a promising alternative for labour force or natural resources, which constitutes a substantial factor of social development. However, the relationship between knowledge production and economic growth seems to remain puzzling. Certain clarification on these vagaries might be delivered by socio-economic perspective, with its focus on learning as a tool for both knowledge transmission and human capital development. Therein, as a matter

of economic considerations, the problem of knowledge and learning might be reduced to a question: ‘how to model a human being as a capital asset’?

The key role in answering the question plays a notion of knowledge involved in the official discourse of knowledge society. The main ways of understanding of knowledge, which are identified on the basis of official documents, reports, and foresights, have been presented below.

**Table 1: Notions of knowledge in knowledge society discourse**

Source	Notion of knowledge
Towards Knowledge Societies (UNESCO 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominant capital of post-industrial societies</li> <li>• Sources of information transmitted via advanced information technologies</li> <li>• Common goods (as opposite to information understood in terms of private property)</li> </ul> <p>‘Emerging from the desire to exchange knowledge by making its transmission more efficient, information remains a fixed stabilized form of knowledge, pegged to time and to the user (...). Thus, information is in many cases a commodity, in which case it is bought or sold, whereas knowledge, despite certain restrictions (defence secrets, intellectual property, traditional forms of esoteric knowledge, for example), belongs of right to any reasonable mind’ (UNESCO 2005, p. 159)<sup>1</sup>.</p>
Science and Innovation Policy. Key Challenges and Opportunities (OECD Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy at Ministerial Level, 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Object of production which undergoes beyond human mind:</li> </ul> <p>‘Indeed, as innovation becomes more science-intensive and firms increasingly acquire scientific and technical knowledge from external sources, businesses make more intensive use of public research’ (OECD, 2004, p. 8).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assets validated by patent registration processes:</li> </ul> <p>‘Science contributes more regularly and more directly to industrial innovation today than in the past, as reflected in the growing number of references in patent applications to scientific literature’ (OECD, 2004, p. 17).</p>

Specific notions of knowledge, presented in official documents are accompanied by classifications of different types of knowledge which emerge from areas such as knowledge

<sup>1</sup> However, a question arise out of the above statement: what extent of ‘common property’ would remain if we were to deduct information from knowledge?

management in economy or knowledge engineering in IT and computer science. These are listed below:

**Table 2: Knowledge classifications in knowledge society discourse**

Source	Categories of knowledge
Knowledge Management in the Learning Society, (OECD, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• know what</li> <li>• know why (general laws of science, explications)</li> <li>• know-how (factual knowledge which bases on application abilities)</li> <li>• know-who (an ability to identify knowledge providers in various disciplines and areas of knowledge)</li> </ul>
Towards knowledge societies (UNESCO, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• descriptive knowledge (facts and information)</li> <li>• procedural knowledge (answering 'how?' questions),</li> <li>• explanatory knowledge (answering 'why?' questions)</li> <li>• behavioural knowledge (simple skills)</li> </ul>

In order to summarize the notion of knowledge within the discourse of knowledge society, its key characteristics are presented below:

- I. *Autonomy of knowledge*, by which I mean its detachment from human mind (e.g. cognitive processes); knowledge produced in anonymous 'knowledge centres' and sourced from transmission mechanisms, is conceived as external to its potential users; thus both theoretical and official variants of knowledge society discourse neglect the role of processes of knowledge construing both in its aspect of cognitive transformations which undergo 'within' human mind and social interactions involved in knowledge production activities;
- II. *Transmissibility*, which underlines both materialistic (atomic) and static/inner vision of knowledge (the notion of transmissibility is opposite to current psychological, socio-cultural and pedagogical views on knowledge and acquiring /construing knowledge processes);
- III. *Applicability*, with its predominant (and very naive) conviction that knowledge constitutes a set of 'ready to apply' rules; from psychological point of view, the relationship between knowledge and practice is highly complicated and involved in a complex of cognitive processes as well as in interaction between human mind and culture;
- IV. *Utilitarian concept of knowledge*, with main focus on its role as a factor of economic growth; this concept of knowledge also involves an utilitarian belief that usefulness (understood in terms of profitability) constitutes the only criterion for assessing the value of knowledge – thus moral criteria are not taken into account. This locates the concept of knowledge within *instrumental rationality* as the rationality of social control (Habermas, 1968);



- V. *Atomistic concept of knowledge*, with its predominant view on knowledge as ‘a sum of information’;
- VI. *Strong focus on science and technology as basic domains of knowledge production* – in this respect it is tempting to pose a provocative question: ‘Can the humanities be any longer considered as a domain of knowledge creation?’

In reference to the enlisted notions, hardly anyone could not form an association between the concept of knowledge in knowledge society discourse and its notion presented by eighteenth century French encyclopaedists, who believed that development of the humanity is a simple consequence of quantitative growth in knowledge.

### **Knowledge in knowledge society: consequences for conceptualising learning and citizenship education**

The idea of knowledge embedded in the concept of knowledge society brings meaningful consequences for conceptualizing learning processes in terms of knowledge transmission. In the light of the report *Towards Knowledge Societies*, learning is understood in terms of active searching for information, expanding knowledge resources, and ‘updating’ (A. M.-Ch.) which refers to ‘enabling each individual to keep up with knowledge’ (UNESCO, 2005, p. 62). It might be also understood in instrumental terms of ‘picking up new skills’ (Commission on Growth and Development, 2008, p. 5)<sup>2</sup>. Regardless what particular meanings denote the role of learning in knowledge society discourse, the central focus is on learning as entirely subordinated to economic interests. Such a position could seem highly debatable even from a perspective presented by economy itself. As for Amartya Sen, a problem lies in the distinction between means and ends:

The acknowledgement of the role of human qualities in promoting and sustaining economic growth – momentous as it is – tells us nothing about *why* economic growth is sought in the first place. If, instead, the focus is ultimately on the expansion of human freedom to live the kind of lives that people have reason to value, then the role of economic growth in expanding these opportunities has to be integrated into that more foundational understanding of the process of development as the expansion of human capability to lead freer and more worthwhile lives (Sen, 1997, p. 1960).

The concepts of knowledge and learning embedded in the discourse of knowledge society seem to bring meaningful consequences for conceptualizing the idea of citizenship education. This idea, however, is hardly present in official documents on knowledge society, which also may seem remarkable. Philosophical and educational views on citizenship and

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<sup>2</sup> The issues of lifelong learning, even though highly remarkable in knowledge society discourse, remain beyond the scope of the paper.

citizenship education usually accentuate four basic elements of citizenship competence: civic consciousness, reflective judgement, critical thinking, and public engagement based on intellectual and moral competencies of individuals. Thus citizenship education cannot be limited to an involvement in economic growth and reduced to a notion of human capital or, so-called, 'civic capital'. As one may notice, the notion of human capital prevails over the meaning of citizenship competence within the discourse of knowledge society; however, in the recent debate in economy a new concept of *civic capital* arises. Herein, civic capital is understood in terms of a set of values and beliefs that help cooperation; 'so-defined civic capital is an important omitted factor of production' (Guisa, Sapienza, Zingales, 2010, p. 48). It is worth noticing that the concept of civic capital is being currently applied by the World Bank (ibid.).

The reductionist approach to re-define the issues of citizenship and citizenship education, discernible within the socioeconomic perspective in knowledge society debate, promotes a distorted notion of central components of the idea of citizenship.

Herein consciousness relates to a literal meaning of being informed or 'possessing' information /knowledge. In contrast, the idea of citizenship, that arose on the basis of Enlightenment discourse of civil society, focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world (in its both moral and intellectual aspects). This idea still remained discernible in UNESCO paper on *Citizenship Education for the 21st Century* (1998). As to consciousness, informed citizenship is not about 'possessing information' but relates to the ability of understanding surrounding reality on the basis of knowledge which is actively construed in the processes of both Socratic *self-examination* and negotiation of meanings, that undergoes during social interaction. This also involves reflexive attitude towards knowledge and surrounding world.

The political notion of reflexivity becomes especially apparent in a philosophical perspective developed by Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas. Arendt put an emphasis on political significance of human reflection, which, after Kant, she described in terms of *enlarged mentality*. According to Arendt, enlarged mentality makes us capable of seeing the world from perspectives given by other people. Therefore it provides foundations for existence of public spheres in democratic societies, where action, deliberation, participation, and decision making are performed. (Arendt, 1961, pp. 220-221). Similarly, for Jurgen Habermas, who employed the Arendtian concept of public sphere to a broader project of strengthening and expanding contemporary democracies, notion of enlarged mentality lies at the heart of political issues (Meczowska-Christiansen, 2013, p. 193).

Reflective judgement as a competence of a democratic citizen, directly relates to the idea of political freedom. Reflective judgement engages moral reflection which supports one's disposition to act in accordance with inner convictions about 'right' and 'wrong'. For Hannah Arendt, who regarded reflective judgement as the most politically significant faculty of human mind, it refers to 'an independent human faculty, unsupported by law and public opinion, that judges anew in full spontaneity every deed and intent whenever the occasion

arises' (Arendt, 1964, p. 187). Knowledge society discourse, with its utilitarian bias, neglects the role of moral judgement in both education and citizenship, and offers 'ready to apply' set of economic rules instead.

Public engagement as a component of citizenship education refers to social cooperation in processes of knowledge construction. For educationists such as John Dewey, Jerome Bruner or Paulo Freire, engagement in knowledge construction activities, undertaken within educational settings, is equivalent to public forms of participation in democratic society. Herein, the core element of civic activities is constituted by negotiation of rules of knowledge formation, which provides opportunities for development of critical thinking and reflexive attitudes towards others. From the perspective of knowledge society discourse, knowledge, as a set of 'ready to apply' technologies acquired from external resources, does not constitute a subject for social cooperation and dialogic activities conducted in the course of educational processes.

Public engagement of democratic citizens is not possible without the ability of critical thinking, which may be defined in political terms as a capability to identify ideological interests and dismantle power arrangements within social and educational settings. It can also be understood in more formal terms of advanced intellectual abilities of an individual (such as skills of intellectual analysis, evaluation, intellectual integrity, intellectual courage, development of sophistic or self-deceptive thinking, etc. (see: Cosgrove, 2011, p. 345). For Paulo Freire critical thinking relates to *coscientization*, understood in terms of the ability for reflexive understanding of the surrounding reality, which is accompanied by sensitivity to oppressive elements in social life; it also includes readiness to act against oppression (see: Freire, 2005).

Significance of critical thinking is literally expressed in UNESCO World Report *Towards Knowledge Societies* (UNESCO, 2005). According to UNESCO, critical thinking plays a crucial role in understanding democratic citizenship. Nevertheless, in the aforementioned report one might identify an utterly distorted notion of critical thinking, which arises on utilitarian concept of knowledge and instrumental role assigned to education:

In knowledge societies, everyone must be able to move easily through the flow of information submerging us, and to develop cognitive and critical thinking skills to distinguish between 'useful' and 'useless' information. (UNESCO, 2005, p. 19).

As far as the consequences of conceptualizing knowledge in knowledge society discourse are taken into considerations, one might regard the discourse of knowledge society as a counter-discourse to the Enlightenment idea of human maturity and civic development. Its utilitarian bias seems to locate the concept of knowledge within *technical rationality* (Marcuse, 1941), as the rationality of social control characteristic of advanced industrial societies, where 'technics becomes the universal form of material production' (Marcuse, 1964, p. 127). Further references of technical rationality, described by Habermas in terms of *instrumental rationality*, put an emphasis on *strategic action* as a dominant form of social

interaction that hinders mutual understanding and open communication between people (Habermas, 1968). Therefore, it suppresses democracy and its consequences for education may lead to narrowed, or even misrepresented forms of activities allegedly oriented towards developing of citizenship competences.

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