

## Imperative: 'The More the Better' as a Danger for Proper Development of Information Society

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### Abstract

*Proper social development takes into account the welfare of an individual and of a community, and first of all it respects their rights and freedom in every interpersonal interaction and between culture and nature. I focus on the present stage of development of information society (information is one of the most important values in the society) in which pro-technological attitude to life and reality dominates, as well as economization and commercialization of the humanities. I express the opinion that organizing the whole social life according to the imperative: "the more the better" endangers everything that all the fields of science have achieved so far. It also deprives the new technologies of the proper sense of their existence and does not propose a positive vision of the future for information society. The situation is quite the opposite. I give examples which illustrate the fact that an individual becomes more and more disintegrated and dependent creature and, which is against common slogans, society becomes less and less creative and innovative. People often lose both the sense of reality and authenticity and the ability to evaluate and shape good value of their own life and good quality of interpersonal relations. The idea of universitas is reduced to the relation between producers and consumers/ prosumers. That is why I support introducing into life the conception of integrated man, conception based on self-restraint and so called "information hygiene".*

**Keywords:** information society - quantity marker – quality of living – integrated man.

In the 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the richest societies with the most developed economies started to change into information societies. This notion became commonly used in that decade, because it was assumed that the notion indicates the next phase of social development after industrial society. It was the phase based on the expansion of technical means of communication. For half a century masses of conceptions and definitions of information society were created. They took into account its various aspects and forms. Today while concluding the state of research concerning the subject it may be stated that this form of cultural development of mankind possesses the following qualities:

1. the dominating role of information and knowledge in all the fields of functioning of man, society and economy;
2. common using of computers, IT programs and various means of communication;
3. constantly increasing meaning of the Internet, multimedia and media;
4. increasing compression of time and space;
5. increasing amount of information and increasing speed of its circulation;
6. multiplying of virtualisation of mental life and social and economic relations;
7. passing of new technologies to all the fields of life and increasing addiction to computers;
8. individual and social meaning of the phenomenon of digital exclusion, connected with various competences and possibilities of access to information.

All members of information society can feel everywhere the existence of technology. Such a direction of development seems to be durable, because multidimensional character of connections, influences and results gets constantly intensified. It is connected with dependencies existing between technologies and various social phenomena. Piotr Żabicki described perceptively three technological worlds, the reality of the most common electronic communication, the sphere of financial operations and the activity of the most popular mass medium, which is television. The worlds are essential in everyday life of both individuals and social groups. Like other researchers of the phenomena he decisively associated their functioning with pedagogical issues. In the conclusion of his research he asked and postulated: "in mass proportion, instead of technology of everyday routine shouldn't we already talk about technological everyday routine, or even when we refer to everyday routine, shouldn't we define it almost automatically in connection with technologies?" (Żabicki, 2007, 214). Shouldn't we even formulate "demands concerning paying special attention (of users, broadcasters, decision-makers) to using technologies, communicational education, availability and help in acquiring knowledge, in other

words, to all those elements which help us understand today, but first of all tomorrow, ourselves" (ibidem).

Nowadays there are numerous conceptions of so called "new planet", which first of all take into account the future of the Internet and information society. For example Kazimierz Krzysztofek predicts that the following phenomena will develop more and more intensely:

- increasing amount of human activity "emigrates" to cyberspace;
- increase of data and information (including technology of self-record and self-show) transforms society into Big Data Society;
- the feeling of continuity is replaced by the feeling of change: the amount of Web-native social activities and events increases;
- they have only digital character;
- activism surpasses determinism;
- hierarchical institutions lose their position of information monopoly (Krzysztofek, 2014, 90-101) - concretization of Derrick de Kerckhove's thesis: the network decentralizes human thinking and acting more than any other factors (1998, 82).

Undoubtedly the turning point in the history of information society was the fact that the Internet became more common. It happened at the beginning of the 80s of the previous century. One of the consequences of the fact is illustrated by Rafał Stec with numbers. Among others, he writes: "Just on YouTube we put 48 hours of material every minute. The amount of data passing over the whole Internet would fill 8.2 million of popular 4 gigabytes USB pen drives which would load 139 lorries. Since the beginning of mankind to 2003 we produced 5 exabytes of information. Today we produce that much every two days and we even accelerate, although we have produced more bytes than stars shining in the universe" (Stec, 2012, 22). The tendency of contemporary cultural development which he points out is confirmed in other sources. For example the data published by the company Intel suggests: "By 2016 the number of appliances connected to the Internet will have tripled the number of the whole population and it will be 22 billion, every three minutes the amount of information that equals all the films produced by mankind will pass over the Internet, every month only video recordings passing over the Internet will be so numerous that a single person would need 6 million years to watch it. And annual capability of the whole Internet movement will surpass 1.3 zettabytes which is 1.3 sextillion of bytes which is 1 300 000 000 000 000 000 000 (13 and 20 zeros) of bytes" (Stec, 2012, 22). So the problem of excess of information (redundancy, information noise) becomes important both for individuals and social groups.

The second new social phenomenon, apart from information excess, is specific behaviour of multimedia users, which can be called infoactivism (Miczka, 2015, 115-124). Everyday life of many people becomes similar to the life of a media maniac, for example that of Krishnan Guru-Murthy. He is a Channel 4 news presenter who describes his day as follows: "the majority of my normal work day I spend with some multimedia appliance and I understand it very well why people can get out of every day more 'medial time' than 'real time'" (Krishnan, 2009). At 6.30 a.m. Guru-Murthy switches on his computer to prepare for work watching morning TV, listening to Radio 4 and browsing informational web portals. While "playing with the iPhone or BlackBerry" he keeps updated on Twitter. He also takes his headphones to the gym and watches "a bit of TV" on the go. On his office desk two computers are switched on all the time, the first one being used for work and the other one to follow Twitter and the news on TV. On his way home from work, Guru-Murthy checks the latest tweets about his programmes on the iPhone and only at 8.45 p.m. he finally spends "about an hour without media". But as he says in his electronic profile: "if my child doesn't filch my iPhone I use it before sleep to check front pages of newspapers" (Krishnan, 2009).

Aforementioned phenomenon of multitasking is another phase of multimedia users' communication behaviour evolution, which has been already described by numerous researchers. It has been usually perceived as the ecstasy of communication (Baudrillard, 1988) or as communicational spasm, in other words a form of communication, which disperses the most important traditional systems of thinking and acting, deepens unlimited belief in technology, evokes unprecedented information interferences and cultural shocks (Miczka, 2002, 7-14). In other words, in information society the strategies of quick communication changes became dominating. They take all the time new forms of aggression and conquest and breach, both in life and in cultures, former rules of internal balance. They also give people the impression that they can choose among their possibilities in a way they think is the most suitable. They can also more and more efficiently change their own life and at the same time influence the surrounding world. Ecstasy and spasm can be perceived as the symptoms of abnormality and being lost but nowadays it is first of all a symptom of life in the conditions of indefiniteness intensifying itself. The life which was defined by Paul Virilio at the turn of the millennium as infected with information bomb (2000). At the same time Zygmunt Bauman perceived in the perspective liquid modernity (2000).

A little bit earlier, almost 20 years ago, David Shenk in his conception of data smog (1997) signaled

intensification of these phenomena. In the introduction of his book entitled *Data Smog* he wrote that to publish this book he had to buy 40 other books, gain copies of 575 press articles and interview people for over 80 hours. And it was just an introduction to scientific work about information smog, because later he had to browse 481 various literary items using electronic database NEXIS gathering 46.2 MB of information, which equals about 14000 printed pages. He also had to visit 1000 websites. Shenk emphasizes that he did all that just to participate in further increase of overproduction of information, because he introduced another title to American book market of 60000 new titles in 1997.

In this situation information society can be called society of risk. Researchers of this issue even today use the notion "multi risk society". They refer to the fact that contradictory criteria cannot be removed from the process of choosing action strategies, the process performed by individuals and communities. We all feel that the process of achieving some values does not help to introduce other values into life. There is no one measure to connect different values although certainly there are some connections between them. We are under constant pressure of so called increasing risk of risk so we have to value result of a previous valuation without a perspective of getting a result which guarantees making the right decision, making the right choice.

Of course the risk, commonly understood as the possibility of an occurrence perceived as negative, as danger, in other words as the opposition to chance, has always existed in human life, it often even enriched it in a positive way. Today we know that the higher the level of social evolution is the more random phenomena and coincidences are and their role in life of individuals and communities is bigger. We also know that maximum freedom implies maximum risk in making individual and community (social) aims real. Pluralisation of reality results in the fact that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century man is forced to choose from basic decision strategies these ones which guarantee openness, in other words weaken bipolarity of relations between confirmation and contradiction, between true and untrue. Usually we chose strategy of the biggest safety according to the opinion that it is the best way of behaviour, or the strategy of the smallest disappointment, because we thought that we avoid adversities and the biggest dangers. Sometimes, not very often, we used strategy of the biggest gain, when we achieved higher level of optimism we were more eager to gamble and the level of risk was not a discouraging element. Today we have to use more and more often the strategy of not being right enough because we deal with cases in which everything should be treated as equally probable and with the rule of certain-in-uncertain because probability cannot be defined.

One of the essential sources of intensifying risk in everyday life of information society members seems to be the dogma of growth, which means using quantity as a measure of quality of the things people do, in other words the problem of actual productivity. Man constantly finds out that they should know more and more, be able to do more and more, and work longer and more efficiently and take care about quantity indicators in every form of their activity. Practically quantity became an obsession for many contemporary individuals and social groups. But natural biological and cultural and communicational mechanisms are not sufficient any more to solve coincidentia oppositorum which take place in information society. Finally it is a threat to desirable (good) development of those individuals and groups.

First of all the problem of quality of living becomes again a subject of heated debate but this time in completely new conditions. As Roy Baumeister says, information chaos causes "ego depletion syndrome" (1993). The cult of overworking and efficiency connected with using soft technology often causes effects which are opposite to what was expected. And the domination of fuzzy logic in techno everyday routine makes it difficult or even impossible to interpret information properly, while information should be transformed into knowledge. All those elements deepen the difficulty connected with the increase of creativity, entrepreneurship and innovativeness of people and social and economic entities. It is proven by scientific research. For example research carried out in 2010 by Kyung Hee Kim and his colleagues comes to a sad conclusion: "It turned out that unlike intelligence quotient (IQ) which in every next generation grows 10 points in average, creativity quotient (CQ) systematically falls down. It has been going on since 1990" (Kim, 2011, 295). The increase of IQ is caused by the fact that people are more intelligent in richer and more diversified societies. The decrease of creativity is connected with the appearance and spread of personal computers, although their introduction was supposed to achieve the opposite.

Members of the most developed information societies, both economically and technologically, more and more often become aware of the fact that being productive does not mean putting emphasis on the quantity, there is necessity of conscious limiting of techno consumerism. It is also precisely supported by arguments of anthropologists. For example Bogusław Pawłowski strongly emphasizes that it is high time to get rid of the dogma of constant and fast growth "ecological routs of our planet do not allow for endless development" (Pawłowski, 2008).

Growing gap between technical progress and morality is commonly felt, in other words it is the distance between technical abilities of technology users and the ability to judge the way they use it. That is why it is necessary to concentrate the attention of individuals and societies on introducing into life the conception of an integrated man, based

on the model of self-limitation in Michael Novak's proposition of moral ecology, which I have already written about in one of my previous texts: "It would be a sum of ideas, narrations, associations, systems of symbols, dominating opinions and practices. In pluralist societies it would be a particular source of moral influences. Novak also thinks that such subordination of public sphere supports choosing by people morally correct actions and is positive for development of civil society. For both an individual, who should be an integral person, who has technical knowledge and uses moral judgment, and for community so called self-government is very important. It is manifested in mature use of individual freedom which simply means its reasonable limits. People lack the maturity especially in so called epoch of info-freedom offered by the Internet and virtual realities in which a social movement called cyber-libertarianism develops. It announces possibility of almost total liberation of man out of supervision of the state, of the laws and limits of physical world. In other words, moral ecology would not only be attempt of individual and group subordination of pluralist experiences but it is also an attempt to activate passive and often thoughtless users of soft technology and an attempt to create collectively the law which is morally right. It is of course a utopian conception but it is worth trying to work out positive attitude to moral ecology and first of all to self-government in frames of common, general pedagogy, binding law and various public discourses. As Michael Novak notices it is easier to complete the individual task when we are thought about it by the whole surrounding public ethos, encouraging to take it up and providing numerous examples of its completion or examples of self-destruction because its incompleteness (Novak, 1999, 17 & 2004). That is why we can state that social ecology of freedom will encourage personal freedom or discourage its development" (Miczka, 2013, 337).

In this situation one of the essential tasks of general and subject education should be promoting of "information hygiene". Probably for the first time in the history of mankind "praise of slowness" (Honoré, 2013) becomes an important pedagogical principle and "the art of idleness" (Poole, 2014) becomes the aim of teaching and upbringing. In other words "it is ability to find the difference between useful and redundant information, sticking to the point, not wasting time, avoiding stress and overload with excess information which results in losing the ability to take a decision and to find the difference between important things and rubbish" (Schnabel, 2010).

Of course the aforementioned conclusions should be confronted with the theses which are popular recently. They are announced by researchers who represent sciences and humanities and who find the first element of the antinomy "shortage – excess" particularly valuable for the development of man.

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