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the Neoinstitutional Perspective**

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Dominik Antonowicz

Polish Higher Education and Global Changes – the Neoinstitutional Perspective¹

This working paper offers general account of changes in higher education in Poland after abolishing the communist system in 1989. It aims to draw a research framework for further, more complex research project that is designed to provide understanding to changes of higher education Poland. There has been much of discussion on the subject both inside and outside the academia as the Polish higher education has recently experienced a wide range of deep and quite rapid changes. Notwithstanding a flourishing discourse, it remains fairly unclear in which direction the Polish higher education is heading to and what kind of social forces, political principles or cultural values can possibly drive it there. Even some doubts arose if there is any particular end toward which the higher education sustainably develops. Also some serious claims have been expressed about the Polish higher education being chaotically dragged by spontaneous organized interest groups.

The main task is to understand changes in the Polish higher education. To do so, it will use a global perspective - the world polity theory - assuming that countries such as Poland do not live and act in isolating circumstances. Therefore a fundamental question to answer is “if the world society (and to what extent and in what areas) has been a driving force in developing the Polish higher education after 1989?” The starting point of the research is the year of 1989 when the communism system fell and Poland as an independent state opened up to the outside world. Since then, the whole country has undergone a major transformation, including in its higher education system which experienced a wide range of far reaching changes. There is a number of studies exploring the researched subject most of which use a micophenomenological perspective and see the Polish higher education as an absolutely unique social phenomenon. In the contrary, this paper offers the world polity (macrophenomenological) approach which tends to see the state and its policy substantially constructed from above according to the principles of world culture. This paper will specifically focus on the knowledge society

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(precisely speaking on the discourse of knowledge society) which can be considered as an integral part of world culture. Therefore a macrophenomenological approach is needed because it will examine if/how this concept was translated into the Polish higher education by using the world society as an infrastructure of change and the knowledge society as its content.

The aim of this working paper is to underline the importance of several fundamental questions that seems to be essential for public policy in higher education. First, it is worth knowing how the world society has influenced developments in the Polish higher education since 1989? In particular, to what extent and in what areas the Polish government applied the policy principles of the world society and adopt the worldwide prominence of institutional settings? Secondly, does the world polity model provide an explanation for understanding changes in the Polish higher education? In other more practical terms, can it be used to establish the principles of public policy in developing countries. And within this context, where are the limits of influence of the world polity on national systems of higher education. This leads us to the last fundamental question that refers to the reasons why in certain aspects (e.g. entrepreneurial university, university management, cost-sharing in higher education) public policy in higher education clearly failed to deliver changes that would help the Polish higher education to catch up with the rest of the modern world. Why in some areas the impact of the world polity is massive whereas in others it faces such a strong resistance from “the local forces”. In this working paper there is hardly possible to address all these questions but we can try to build solid foundation for understanding a logic of change that may eventually help us to identify more specific answers supported by evidence. By doing so it will use *the world polity* approach assuming that in contemporary world countries do not act in isolated circumstances. Therefore it aims to evaluate the impact of the values of world society culture on developing higher education in Poland, identifying how the country confirms to the world-widely dominant ideology (of knowledge society) and adapts to certain institutional requirements.

In order to conduct the research properly several steps are required. (1) The research aims to prove that the Polish higher education in the period of 1945-1990 was largely *an isolated island* not disturbed by worldwide trends. It will examine major political (ideological) shifts in the West during the postwar period to study their impact on higher education across the globe. This study attempts to scrutinize if/how the Polish higher education responded to changes occurring in the world society. (2) The second step is to focus on the Polish political

transformation of 1989 as form of “a cultural revolution” and “re-coupling with the world society”. This study will examine a new set of values which underpinned the process of cultural and political transformation of Poland. (3) The study is meant to explore an academic discourse of the knowledge society. It will review the literature on this subject in order to identify what meaning the concept of “knowledge society” holds. Furthermore, the study will evaluate how this (to large extent vague) theoretical concept is being translated into the political agenda. (4) The most important part of the research is an evaluation of diffusion of the knowledge society. It is difficult to operationalize such a complex theoretical concept and measure its impact on higher education. Nevertheless, the analysis will be focused on three major factors which are generally considered to be central for building the pillars of knowledge society in higher education: (a) access, (b) quality, (c) effectiveness. Each of them will be examined individually with a special focus on ideological foundation (values), policy goals and institutional arrangements. The analysis will be based on review the following literature: the Polish public debate on higher education which takes place on major magazine and respected newspapers, the law on higher education (1990-2007), official policy papers and expertise (1990-), reports published by OECD, World Bank, UN on higher education in Poland (1990-2007), reports published on the progress Poland has made in the Bologna process, international agreements on higher education (mostly in Europe) (1990-2007), the public statistics both international (EC, World Bank, OECD) and national (GUS) (1990-2007). The complete the desk research findings, a number of non-standardized in-depth interviews with top people in the Polish higher education will be hold.

1. The world society – theoretical framework

1.1 Institutional roots

The concept of the world polity focuses on the question how global processes shape performance and structure of the nation-state and influence the life of individuals across the globe. It is based on a fundamental assumption that national societies are surrounded by transnational organizations, rooted into world culture and involved in a discourse, which exists under names of the ‘world society’ or ‘world polity’ (Thomas et. al 1987). Hence, the world polity developed a separate line of research addressing the issue of diffusion of world culture values and institutional isomorphism. World society becomes gradually more inter-dependent and internally integrated than ever before. The school of world polity initially

developed in the late 1970s as a part of organizational theory but with the passage of time it established its own paradigm the world society or world polity theory (sometimes it exist under wider name of neo-institutional theory). The founders of the school are John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez both formally associated with the Centre of Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at University of Stanford. From the beginning their research was directed into issues related to the impact of global society on nation states. In particular, much of the conducted research focused on the spread of modern institutions. Previously, the founders of the school had a vital contribution to development of organizational theory as well as to the sociology of education (e.g Meyer 1977; DiMaggio & Powell. 1983, Meyer & Rowan 1977). Across the Atlantic, in Europe there are two leading centers developing the world polity theory. The major one – the Institute of World Society Studies – is placed at the Univeristy of Bielefeld where it was established in 200 by Rudolf Stichweh, Karin Knorr-Cetina and Hans Dieter-Evans. The second leading centre is located in Zurich – the World Society Foundation (also known as the Foundation for the Promotion of Social Science Research on World Society) found by Peter Heinz in 1982. Both institutes are very active in the research field and their presence in noticeably strong in a number of research projects, reports and publications. On the top of it, the World Society Foundation publishes a special journal “World Society Studies” which presents a wide range of research studies on global issues.

The theoretical roots of the world polity come from an institutional theoretical background and derived much of its methodological inspiration form neo-institutional work (e.g North 1996). At this point, it is worth reminding that it was an American neo-institutional sociology to sparkle the research interest on homogenization and diffusion of institutional arrangements. The neo-institutional theory argues that institutional settings such as law, regulations, policies or norms shape organizational structure and behavior of the (political) actors. The world polity (e.g. Meyer et al. 1997, Boli & Thomas 1997) takes more global perspective to examine social processes and underlines the cultural character of institutional development. They believed that world cultural principles and global institutions exercise a profound influence on states, enterprises and individuals (Boli 1993). For the world polity two major – “world society” and “world culture” - appear to be central of any analysis is conducted despite a certain degree of confusions as to its origins and characteristics. Reviewing a bulk literature one may come across a variety of different explanations as to the origins of world society. Stichweh (2004:4) identifies three alternative sources of the genesis of world society. I will

use his typology not only to present different possible roots of world society but also alternative ways of understanding this phenomenon.

The first perspective identifies the arrival of world society in the postwar period, by underlining the emergence of a new type of social order based development of network relations and growing economic and political interdependence. This process has been additionally accelerated by a rapid growth of new means of communication which ignored borders and largely dismissed a problem of geographical distance. The second distinguish approach - so called long sixteen century (1450-1640) – was developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (e.g. 1974). He argues that world society draws its roots from the history of trade between various world regions in 16th and 17th century. Hence, the major concern of his analyses is concentrated on the division of labor with particular focus on centre/peripheries relations. The last approach distinguished by Stichweh (2004) is much less precise in pointing a particular period in the mankind history. This uncertainty exhibits perfectly the title of the book written by Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills (1993) *“The world system. 500 years or 5000?”* In this study, derived inspiration from neomarxist tradition of thought, the authors offer an ecological insight to interactions between societies. As Stichweh (2004:5) accurately summarized when discussing this approach *“it seems to be the case that occasional contact between world regions and occasional casual interference are for some of these writers a sufficient reason to postulate a world system”*.

Stichweh typology shows that there are considerable differences as to the genesis of world society. However, for the purpose of this working paper we will stop at this point to avoid further elaboration on this dilemma. And bearing in mind that there are variety of alternative perspectives on origins of world society and its development we will use account derived from Meyer (1997 et al.) classic paper *“World Society and the Nation State”*. Their point to some extent tries to reflect to all types of approaches identified by Stichweh but also makes it very clear that their *“see such transnational forces a work throughout Western history, but we argue that particular features and processes characteristic of world society since World War II have greatly enhanced the impact of world-institutional development on nation-states”* (p.148).

1.2 Understanding the world polity

The world polity is based on the assumption that many characteristics of the contemporary nation-state are derived from culturally constructed models on global level. The institutional structure of the state and the principles of policies are established above the nation-states and advocated through global cultural polity and a number of associated processes. Hence, this is world society and nation states which draw the greatest attention of world polity theories. To research them is not an easy task and requires deploying comparative macro-analyses to examine the structure of the state and principles of national policies. By doing so, they aim to recognize common patterns of change and identify institutional isomorphism. To acquire a better understanding of uniqueness of the world polity one needs to confront them with existing school of thoughts which offers explanatory theories that link patterns of global changes with institutional development of nation state. This theoretical positioning was articulated by the school of the world polity and advocated by its founders John Meyer, John Boli, George Thomas and Francisco Ramirez. Their mapping efforts in the classic article *World Society and the Nation States* is clearly seen as a form of methodological manifesto of a newly established theoretical paradigm and its place in contemporary theory of social sciences. The argument made is clear and understandable – existing theories (Meyer distinguished three types of them) do not manage to provide sufficient explanation of the complex nature of relations between the world society and the nation state.

The first approach comes from “microrealist perspective” (1) and it is generally link to a group of theorists such as Waltz (1979) and Gilpin (1981), Keohane (1986) and Krasner (1983) who argued that the nation-state is only a rational actor in an archaic world. In their view nation-state primarily reflects natural needs and interests of its citizens. Further, in opposition to the world polity microrealists do not recognize global culture as foundation of political forces which influence nation state and its institutions. Instead, they believe that what dominantly shapes nation-states and societies is balance of various power and interests. Hence, much of microrealistic theories fail to appreciate global process and perceive them in a very narrow sense. It limits them to several of networks of interdependence and occasional transactions. Different arguments are raised by Immanuel Wallerstein (1990), Samir Amin Ches Dunn (1998) and Andre Gunder Frank (1993) who advocate a macrorealistic (2) point of view. They share many important characteristics with the approach of the world polity by

seeing nation-states as being shaped “from above”. But unlike Meyer and his colleagues, the macrorealists tend to define the structure and political principles as a product of global political power-game and economic competition. Their emphasis is put on a growing role of dominant (imperial) countries and transnational organizations (who act in the name of politically and economically powerful organizations such as states or multinational enterprises) in ruling world politics on the global level. In the macrorealists view the rich and powerful interest groups impose the financial and political pressure on various countries (often using the authority of non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations) to pursue their economic or political interests. Further, the macrorealists do not see culture in neutral sense but being inspired by the Marxist intellectual tradition the macrorealist approach explained the concept of culture through the dichotomous categories of domination and subordination. As consequence of taking this viewpoint, their attention is drawn towards the problem of global inequalities and accumulation of the capital with special concern for relations between the West and developing countries in Asia, Africa or South America (Wallerstein 1990). The third distinguished perspective also known as a microphenomenological approach that *conceptualizes the nation-state as the product of national cultural and interpretive systems* (Meyer et al. 1997:147). This approach offers a serious account of cultural dimension of the state and its institutions. In opposition to the world polity, culture is seen as substantially constructed locally (rather than globally). Almond and Verba (1963) attach a great significance to notion of local culture, so they seem to disregard organizational presence of culture in world society. Being confronted with transnational cultural trends such as macdonaldization (Ritzer 1993) the microphenomenological theorists argue that this is an artificial product of Western culture steered purposely (for a profit-seeking reasons) to create certain taste in mass consumption. In this terminological matrix world polity can be found as a macrophenomenological perspective. It stands in opposition to all three perspectives mentioned above. To the contrary to both micro- and macrorealists the world polity sees nation-states as culturally constructed and not necessary rational actors. It neither defines it as a subject of cohesive policy of global powers nor local interests groups. Contrary to the microphenomenological approach, they strongly advocate a notion of culture being largely shaped by transnational forces not by local traditions or domestic circumstances. In result, nation-states are similarly constructed “actors” and mutually legitimized on the basis of widely shared values and institutional isomorphism. In spreading world culture values and establishing similar institutions a central role is attached to transnational organizations (TNS),

international non-governmental organizations (INGO) and intergovernmental organizations (IGO).

1.3 Diffusion

As we proceed in exploring the world polity theory, there is a need to examine the means of spreading values and institutional settings. The inner logic of diffusion appears to be essential for understanding how global values and institutional settings spread across the world. It is hard to overestimate the importance of diffusing processes as the world polity concentrates on identifying similarities among actors and institutional conditions under which values, institutions and practices spread across social systems. Forces that engendered this process deserve greater attention than they received insofar. It is certainly worth beginning with definition proposed by Rogers (2003) which refers to *wildly defined innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of social system*. The world polity concretizes on identifying similarities among actors and institutional conditions under which ideas, structural arrangements and practices spread in across social system. It has been generally recognized that a direct contact between prior and potential adopters increased a flow of communication and consequently creates conditions for diffusion. Initially, there was a commonly held belief that diffusion is a solely spatial process where geographical distance plays an essential role. The social science theoretical tradition saw a *contagion process* as a driving force for spreading ideas and practices across the world. A rapid development of digital forms of communication creates a need to adopt a new explanatory focus which draws a greater attention to social dimension rather than geographic one. Meanwhile world polity theory centers its analyses on institutional conditions which facilitate the process of diffusion. They also find cultural similarities between various actors having a direct impact on a pace of the process. Strang and Meyer (1993) noticed that (...) *diffusion is importantly shaped and accelerated by culturally analyzed similarities among actors, and by theorized accounts of actors and practices*. Operating on a **common cultural background and sharing similar sets of cultural values** significantly increases the opportunity for institutional isomorphism and as summarized by Meyer & Strang(1993:490): “*where actors are seen as falling into the same category, diffusion should be rapid*”. While looking for some evidence they reminded us Alexis Tocqueville’s (1833 [2000]) analyses of American society underlying his genius findings of the cultural homogeneity of individuals within the America society. **The second distinguished institutional** condition which

positively influences the process of diffusion is a structural background. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explained that institutional isomorphism comes from cohesive pressure from the state or dominant organization. It applies to situations where organizations which seem to be largely unable to develop individual optimal strategies. As a consequence, formal organizations tend to increase their capacity for spreading innovative practices because they are able to structure conditions for transferring change and accelerating the process of diffusion. What is more, if innovations become benchmarks or achieve a taken-for-granted status their spread unfolds more rapidly. There are a number of examples which illustrate a pace of adopting rule-like practices within institutionalized environment. Policy instruction given by United Nations and associated agencies might be give as an example of effective mechanisms of promoting /forcing cultural similarities and institutional isomorphism. As the postwar history shows states, being under international political pressure, routinely subscribe to astonishingly similar political aims - economic growth, social equality, and the human rights of the individual (Meyer et al 1987), they have also established a wide range of similar institutions (e.g. central banks, ombudsmen). Third **major factor of diffusion is theorizing**, which itself has three separate dimensions: (1) theorizing of content, (2) theorizing of adopters and (3) theorizing of diffusion mechanism. **Theorizing the content** Meyer and Strag (1993:492) described this process as “(...) *self-conscious development and specification of abstract categories and the formulation patterned relationship such as chains of cause and effect*”. In their view, theorizing the content of diffusion increases accessibility of innovation in different local contexts. As abstract cultural constructs they are accessible, distinctive and most important, legitimized by respected professionals such as academics and policy analysts. As Strag and Meyer (1993:500) claim “*theorization specifies why the potential adopter should attend to the behavior of one population and not some other, what effects the practice will have and this practice is particularly applicable or needed give to the adapter (...) .theorizing might be regarded as turning diffusion into rational choice*”. Needless to say, that not every theorized innovation and built model automatically becomes a political agenda. To the contrary, most of them will never leave dusty library shelves and only a tiny margin managed to enjoy the being read outside the walls of academia. In addition, Meyer and Strag (1993) found out that such models must be institutionalized, and codified in organizational routines by building into the framework of standard and authority. There is a number of good examples of such diffusion: the welfare polices, the environmental issues or the civil control over military forces, all of them strongly supported by professionals. The theoretical model of modernization manages to direct societies and their nation-states into widely shared notion of

economic progress and social justice. The second aspect of **theorization concerns “adopters”** by defining populations within which diffusion can occur. *“This occurs when theoretical accounts identify forms of similarity within culturally recognized categories”* (Strag & Meyer 1993:495). In other words, the diffusion spreads more rapidly when a population or an institutional environment fits one theoretically constructed category such as academics, universities or international students. Similar practices (performance indicators, managing strategies or special curricula) can be adopted in similar ways by members (organizations) of theoretically distinguished population. The third aspect of theorization applies to **“diffusion mechanisms”**. The status and social position of theorists and their practice may become central for diffusion (Hall et al. 1989). Diffusion unfolds within a framework of formally or informally organized networks of professionals rather than within certain category of adopters. In many cases professionals (theorists and experts) become leaders of change by legitimizing the content of diffusion. Not more than two centuries ago a number of developing (in most cases colonized) countries sent their delegation to learn best practice in modernized (often colonial) part of the world, whereas nowadays academics, political analysts and consultants travel across the globe.

1.4 A metaphor of an unknown island

World society culture spreads through diffusion, constructing distinctive features of contemporary nation-states, their institutions and societies. Aiming to illustrate an impact of the world society culture Meyer, Ramirez, Boli and Thomas (1997) use a hypothetic example of an unknown island to review the process of incorporating a new society into the world society. It is only an abstract experiment but one can easily find a number of similar examples in contemporary politics. The main argument states that without knowing local history, tradition and political circumstances, there is a high degree of probability to predict possible directions of changes. Obviously, the forecast might be imprecise and highly conditional due to interplay of different global models but no doubt one can easily draw possible scenarios. Placing the discussion in the context of the Western culture, it is expected with a high degree of probability that the society of the unknown island will follow internationally authorized road maps to establish states (commonly recognized as a modern one) with its institutional skeleton. *The society would be analyzed as an economy, with standard types of data, organizations, and policies for domestic and international transactions. Its people would be formally reorganized as citizens with many familiar rights (...)* (Meyer et al 1997:145). Any

newly established state wanting to receive the international recognition must submit to widely recognized values such as the human rights, private property or rules of law. Otherwise it is faced with a wide range of serious consequences from the world society and its powerful actors. Hence, global models often become persuasive at the world level due to deeply rooted belief of its universal applicability. To add more, they are believed to carry unquestionable rule-like solutions with a great deal of applicability whatever the circumstances. It is usually done under an authoritative flag of modernity (or in fact modernization) which largely exclude any form of alternative models regardless local tradition, culture and structure of political institutions (e.g IMF policy in Argentinean financial crises). It is fair to say that for some countries there is only one real political alternative - being modernized or being marginalized, stigmatized (or even excluded). There is a number of countries which up-to-date fail to apply main values of world society culture such as Turkey (women's rights, secular issues) or Belarus (human rights, democracy, free media), not to mention Iran, North Korea etc. It depends on what kind of values are rejected or what kind of institutions have not been diffused. It is also possible to be a key member of the world society in some aspects (economic) and to be excluded in others (political).

1.5 The world society in practice

In brief, the world polity uses a macrosociological approach and it draws its conclusions mostly based on quantitative data derived from public statistics. The school has been recently very active in this research field. A number of analyses conducted successfully used the world polity perspective to identify a large degree of institutional isomorphism worldwide and to provide arguments for similarities an impact of the impact world culture. In particular, much work has been done in the field of comparative education (e.g. Meyer 1977; Meyer and Ramirez 1980, Chabbott & Ramirez 2000 Khamsi-Steiner 2004), environmental issues (e.g. Frank Hironka, Schofer 2000; Goldman 2001; Meyer, Frank, Hironka, Schofer, Tuma 1997), and social policy (e.g Room 2000), women's rights (Orloff 1993) and development of transnational and non-governmental organizations (e.g. Koch 2006; Boli, Thomas 1999). Unfortunately, in so far little work has been done in the transformation in the Easter and Central Europe. This deficit is a simple consequence of at least two factors. As far as Poland is concern the perspective of the world polity is fairly unknown as an analytical framework. In addition a great enthusiasm which accompanied the process of re-establishment of modern state in the beginning 1990s made the process of modernization almost automatic and

conventional. There was little consideration given to alternatives that might fit better into the Polish context. It is all because the values of world society culture and model of democratic state seemed very much to be taken for granted as best available options. Doubts as to the directions of change were largely silenced as an unnecessary delay of modernization. Lacking of a wider analytical perspective makes it more difficult to understand inner logic of the Polish transformation, especially in such a specific field as higher education. Therefore the world polity offers an approach which undoubtedly enriches an existing discourse on the transformation.

2. The world society in science and higher education

2.1 Education

The world polity situates education and science as a core activity of modern nation state. There are close and strong ties between the world society and the science and education, and more than this they seem to be almost inseparable. It certainly provides some arguments on why not a single state has given up political control over an education system, at least in terms of curriculum². Nevertheless, institutional foundation of education seems to be organized and run under the strong influence of world culture and exhibits a considerable degree of institutional isomorphism. This viewpoint exhibits a great heritage of institutional theory in which the school of world polity derived much of its inspirations. Therefore there is little surprise that a comparative research in education has become one of major fields of development of the world polity thoughts attracting attention those who think globally (Meyer & Ramirez 1980:393). *It is the observation of a growth of a common educational outcome, despite cross-national variations in historical legacies and societal characteristics, which initially triggered the idea of a common world, a common source of influence. The idea was employed to make sense of the “world educational revolution”, that is, the global expansion of primary enrollments after World War II* (Meyer, Ramirez, Rubinson and Boli-Bennett 1977, Ramirez 2006). Comparative studies exploring educational development in various nation-states captured attention of researchers such as Meyer (1977) because education data appears to be fairly institutionalized standardized and accessible (see Meyer 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1977). It is all because after II World War organizations such as UN or UNESCO

introduced system of collecting educational data of a large degree of standardization. A wide access to these reveals a great opportunity for researchers to draw strong and worldwide reaching conclusions. The main standing-point of the world polity is that “nation-states” and “national educational systems” are so called “open systems”. They can influence each other but more importantly they are open to theoretical models authorized by science. A background of diffusion is based on cultural assumptions, which involved universalistic values, human empowerment, scientific knowledge and rationality. The system of modern values places at heart of the world culture and exercises a great impact on shaping nation-states. They are being confronted with certain models and standards. These models achieve universal status while being advocated world-wide by international organizations. As recent studies show, nation states exhibit a different degree of conformity to global model (Meyer et al 1977; Ramirez & Meyer 2002). Some countries eagerly adopt world values and adjust to required institutional settings, whereas others seem to be reluctant to do so. Faith in science and authority of political authority of transnational organizations increases strengths linkage between a nation state and the world societies. It is being achieved by attaining professionally defined and theorized standards which have been developed under a common name of “modernity”. Unlike isolated countries which are most likely to pursue their own individual goals, establish a distinguish structure and set own standards regardless a number of serious consequences including political stigmatization by international community.

The world society perspective assumes that national governments seek to international recognition and legitimacy. Hence, they follow to world culture principles and establish adopt “modern” institutions. Many studies conducted by (Meyer & Schofer 2005; Meyer et al 1997; Ramirez 2006, Ramirez & Meyer 2002) provide arguments that educational systems share great deal of similarities across the world. Much of the earlier focuses on expansion institutionalization and standardization of education on the primarily and secondarily level. They found that educational systems have become gradually homogenous since the end of the II World War due to “*a logic of confidence*”, so to use neo-institutional terminology. It began with a growing consensus to establishing the right to education which was finally placed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Expansion of education in a great number of various countries arise issue of striking similarities between the paths of their developments. Most of them routinely follow analogous pattern by creating schools, centralizing power on

² Failure to create only framework of a “European Handbook of Modern History” provide

the national level, setting uniform curricula's, introducing compulsory school laws based on age-graded hierarchies. In that sense so called "world educational revolution" can be seen as best way to achieve global goals which have theorized in universal concepts and legitimized in a professional way.

Regardless the impact of world culture values, it is widely agreed that education plays a critical role in achieving goals widely recognized as fundamental to a nation-interest. Education is so strongly institutionalized and remains under the collective authority. Due to significance of purposes of performing tasks allocated in the primarily and secondary schools. Cohen (1970, 1975) and Bendix (1964) provide the in-depth studies on the nature of connection between mass schooling and the formation of the nation-state. They present evidence that mass schooling embodied institutional system of moral socialization and unification became absolutely essential for shaping a citizen – a new type member of society to be brought up under new power of state authority. In other words, the educational system was set up to address the issue of transforming children into good, loyal and productive citizens for the sake of national interest. It is widely believed that the system serves the national interests by socializing children to new roles. Newly established centralization and institutionalization of political power (a nation state) wanted to create internally homogenized system to provide education for equality and citizenship. Based on empirical data they claim that it is much more probably to be established in society organized under the collective institutional authority than in stateless society. Therefore first mass schooling systems became compulsory as early as in the beginning of eighteen century.

2.2 Higher Education

The impact of the world society can be observed also in the field of higher education and science. There is a number of empirical studies which provide convincing evidence that educational and research institutions hold surprisingly similar characteristics. To begin with historical point of view, higher education (or in fact a number of independent universities) spread across diverse local settings with a great deal of institutional isomorphism (Riddle 1993). No matter, whether it was medieval and cosmopolitan institution based on the rules of guilds, a modern one tied closely to emerging nation-state or recently established the

some arguments that there is almost impossible to design curriculum outside the nation-state.

entrepreneurial model of university. Regardless their local settings they maintain close ties to the universal knowledge system. So, they are all demonstrating a certain degree of similarity despite the fact that organizational structure of higher education institutions tends to reflect more the nature of political institutions than education ones.

This trend is particularly vivid as we look at a pace of major changes before and after 1960s in different world regions (see: Schofer and Meyer 2005:900). There is a number of empirical studies which show that cross-national differences declining in the academia after 1945. Since the end of the World War II the impact of world cultural models on shaping national systems of higher education has significantly strengthened, being under strong influence of trends toward increasing decentralization, expanding the human rights, scientisation. And analogous to the case of development of mass schooling, the expansion of higher education has been derived from theorized model of rational society. As Meyer, Ramirez, Frank and Schofer (2006) claim actual role training is not a point – *students learn – and society itself learns – that all the specialized and professionalized roles of contemporary society are fundamentally based on universal scientific knowledge and rationality, and that with schooling, ordinary person can be transformed to possess the relevant competencies* (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank and Schofer 2006:25). The major change happened in regard to size of higher education. The expansion took place on many levels, out of which the most important is enrollment (Bradley and Ramirez 1996) but it also includes a number of institutions, academics and a wide range of courses thought [leading to bizarre phenomena as Golf Management and Spice Girls Studies] (Ramirez and Wotipka 2001). Just to give one example, in the beginning of the 20th century around 500 thousands students were enrolled in higher education institution worldwide, representing 1% of college-age people. By 2000, the number of tertiary students has grown two hundredfold to approximately 100 million people, which represent 20% of the young cohort worldwide (Schofer and Meyer 2005: 898;). Expanding higher education has little explanation in functional theory as there are weak and mixed evidence supporting a strong link between the growth of education and economic development. Nor the conflict theory offers a serious account of the process because the most powerful and privileged group supposed to be interested in limiting access to scarce resources, not expanding one. Both of them fail in confrontation with the phenomena of “overeducation” which has not stopped (in the Polish case even have not even slowed down) gradually increasing enrollment.

It is important to understand that the process of expansion of higher education is linked with growing institutional isomorphism. The process was derived from theoretical concept of a new type of society which has not been yet completely conceptualized. Nevertheless, it firmly exists in both public and academic discourse under several names which have fairly similar (but certainly not the same) meanings “post-industrial society”, “post-modern society” or “learning society”, however the most popular name is - “knowledge society”. The knowledge society becomes a brand name of a variety of reforms in the economics, social policy and education. As **Anja** Jakobi (2007) noted different countries speak of different “knowledge society” but she leaves no doubt that “knowledge society” becomes a background of educational changes. In general, the concept is legitimized by a number of respectable professionals who viewed their arguments in various policy statements and reports. An ongoing debate however moved this academic discourse into a political dimension in particularly in the European context where a legal foundation of institutional isomorphism was signed by 27 European countries. *The Bologna Declaration* is an intergovernmental initiative which aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide. This process is a part of wider agenda established following the principles of the Lisbon Strategy – to achieve *the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010*. Initially, changes under the name of *the Bologna Process* has expanded in terms of the scope and also in terms of countries submitted to its principles. What was initially very much the Western project has become all-European process reaching as far as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova, covers more than 46 countries, 4000 HEI, 17 million students and 435 researchers. The main task of the governmental agreement was to introduce in all participating countries a comparable three cycle degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor degrees) and graduates (Master and Doctoral degrees). It is followed by a full recognition for the study/work period abroad during the participation in exchange programs and growing similarities in criteria of assignments and content of syllabi in comparable subjects etc. It is associated by the rise of a number of English-language courses offered in higher education institutions across Europe which makes a major step forward into internally coherent and standardized market of higher education. The process of harmonization of tertiary education has recently sped up and undoubtedly, there is a strong demand to impose further standards of studying and teaching. Unavoidable effect of this ongoing process is a growing institutional isomorphism among higher education institutions.

2.3 Science

Science plays a central and certainly a double role in the world polity. It serves as both an *explanans* and an *explanandum*. Hempel and Oppenheim (1948:152) made a clear and sharp distinction between these two: "*By the explanandum, we understand the sentence describing the phenomenon to be explained (not that phenomenon itself); by the explanans, the class of those sentences which are adduced to account for the phenomenon*".

In the first case (*explanans*) the world polity offers internally coherent explanation for the expansion of science and diffusion of its institutional arrangements in modern times. It takes a neo-institutional point of view arguing that scientific institutions are being diffused mostly through a strong influence from external environment – world culture. As a result science has been expanding worldwide in largely uniform shape in terms of both substance and organizations (Drori et al 2003 196-8). From a historical perspective it all begun with establishing the foundation of universities in medieval century, spreading across Europe a comparable means of studying, structure of academic institution and hierarchy in academic profession. The idea of university – a community of scholars seeking to the truth and gathered in autonomous organization – desperately struggling for independence from the kingdom and the church – was widely shared thanks to values carried by science (and the faith in science) achieved respectable status in the Western culture. Not paying to much attention to the history of science which has been widely elaborated by George Sarton (1927) or Thomas Kuhn (1970) in the fields of sociology of science and philosophy of science, it is important to notify that the most rapid expansion of science took place after the Second World War (Drori, et al 2003). The process was led by national governments and strongly supported by transnational organizations. Science (and partly mass education) was seen as a peaceful alternative to military invasion in achieving a great deal of betterness and prosperity. After a devastating military horror of the World War II, there was a growing belief that the international community should step up and develop a more effective approach to the conflict prevention. The expansion of science and higher education was partly a response which was meant to achieve social and economic progress harmlessly. And the world society via transnational organizations increased the pressure on national governments to invest resources and build institutional pillars for science development. Deploying these rule-like policy principles and adopting institutional arrangements spread across the Western part of the world (to some extend it also applied to the communist block). Nowadays, the expansion of science is a

widely accepted and hardly questionable process. Drori, Meyer, Ramirez and Schofer (2003) examine a number of indicators which to some extent reflect the speed and direction of institutional development and comes to the conclusion that science is clearly as global phenomenon. This scope of expansion was possible due to its abstract notion, internal logic and cosmopolitan character. In other words, the dominance of the classic paradigm makes it easier for governments to support Western (classic, traditional) form of science in Karl Popper sense. Rather than turn to alternative “science alike” (regardless whether they are para-science or pseudo-science) activities such as astrology, alternative medicine, numerology or iridology. To sum up, it should be no doubt that science is an integral part of world culture because it carries major widely shared values which constitutes modern society.

In second case, (science as *explanandum*) science is meant to perform an absolutely central role for the world polity. It creates a solid foundation for establishing modern nation-state and organizes political and economic life in the society. It led Drori et al (2003) to draw the conclusions analogously to Emil Durheim’s view on the institution of religion. They believe that science posses a largely unquestionable cultural authority and hold the pillars of modern civilization. It is striking how culturally rooted faith in science helps to support the process of adapting modern values and establishing modern institutions. It is ascribed as a new meaning to “human progress” with a central importance attached to social and economic growth, power and wealth. Science as a value of hardly disputed truth is seen as a commonly shared source of trust and standards in many fields. In this context science is an agent of rationalization (in Weberian sense) of society discrediting the authority of religion. Modern science holds the pillars of modern state and legitimizes its political principles such as “rationality”, “human rights” protection, “social justice” and “democracy”, which are situated at the heart of modern statehood. The phenomenon of science comes form widely spread belief that it posses a value of the truth regardless local political or economic environment. Hence, a deep faith in science makes it absolutely essential for *the global diffusion of liberal governmentality* (Drori et al. 2003:266).

Finally, seeing science as an integral part of cultural background of modernity the world polity largely undermines its instrumental value (Drori et al 2003). Calling upon mixed evidence, they view the impact of science more as a product of general assumption rather than an empirical research. This viewpoint is based on Robert Merton’s (1970[1938]) studies on the early growth of science who found the culture, not instrumental needs of governments or firms, a simulative factor (Schofer 2004). In addition, it is important to realize that there are

mixed evidence as to the contribution of science to the economic growth (Schofer, Ramirez, Meyer 2000; Shenhav & Kames 1991). Therefore Driori et al (2003:11) refers to instrumental role of science as largely overestimated and claims that *functional or instrumental theories of the usefulness of social science should be viewed as part of “the folk culture and modernity.*

3. Re-coupling an isolated island? - the transformation of Poland

The position of the departure of this study is that the communist regime established a unique and very autarchic system which was largely driven by ideological principles. Countries associated with the COMECON (The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) operated in ***a political, cultural and economic isolation***, exercising a weak and highly restricted relation with the outside world. Therefore bearing in mind all the limits of metaphorical language one can say that that Poland and other COMECON countries could be seen (in the period 1945-1989) as an *unknown island*. According to Meyer et al (1997) - who initially used this metaphor to analyze a relation between the world society and the nation state - an *unknown island* confronted with the outside world would soon follow the principles of world society culture and would adopt widely shared institutional order. Continuing this metaphorical comparison, the political revolution of 1989 appeared to be a process of coupling an unknown with the outside world, a process of joining countries such as Poland to the world society. By adapting the world culture values and establishing a widely shared institutional order their new policy course was granted international legitimacy.

From the Polish perspective the transformation of 1989 was very as much like an elementary choice of civilization in the development strategy. It applies mostly to diffusing fundamental cultural values such as the human rights, democracy and the rule of law but also adopting major political institutions such as the democratic election and the free market competition. A political course of coupling the world society was not restricted to flagship issues; to the contrary the world society works across the society, including the higher education. The Polish higher education for almost five decades operated in fairly ideological circumstances of the soviet science, being largely separated for the outside world. Knowing that science and higher education are undoubtedly global, and universal, so the transformation clearly opened a window opportunity for them to join the world of science and higher education. In short, the metaphor of *an unknown island* will particularly be focused on (1) exploring the issue of Poland as country operates in isolating circumstances in cultural, political and economic

terms; (2) examining the situation and development of the Polish higher education under the communist regime in regard to world trends in higher education, (3) understanding significance of the political revolution of 1989 as a choice of joining the world society

4. A discourse of knowledge society

Since the beginning of 1970s the knowledge society has become a popular refrain amongst social scientists, policy makers, and dominantly politicians. It becomes almost an integral part of all kinds of speeches and political manifestos which somehow refer to the future of economic or educational policy. In addition, a large number of publications have also appeared on the subject. The more often “knowledge society” comes out of the mouth of politicians, journalist and even academics, the less clear it becomes what it actually means. “Knowledge society” is often seen as analogous to other theoretical concepts which have strong references to recent changes in modern society. In particular, in the context of political discussion the *‘knowledge society’*, *“information society”* *“network society”* are used interchangeably as if they carry similar meanings. In fact, they are sometimes theoretically separated by miles from each other; however in a wide political context they seem to be only “buzzwords” which are somehow meant to symbolize a new type of society.

4.1 The knowledge society within a postindustrial debate

Nevertheless, the concepts of “knowledge society” and “knowledge economy” were initially created by Peter Ferdinand Drucker (1969) in his famous book *“The age of discontinuity”*. Succinctly stated, he defines knowledge society as society in which the importance of knowledge has dramatically increased. Knowledge which Drucker identified as a stimulating value for transforming economy had purely instrumental character and he made a clear distinction between it and knowledge traditionally associated with the intellectuals (Jakobi 2007:42; Drucker 1969:630-631). The latter is instrumental, more technical and applicable (ready to use in industrial environment). Therefore it plays a central role in producing a value added quality and establishing a comparative advantage on the market. So, as much as the industrial revolution re-structured the XIX century society, so the post-industrial revolution

brings far reaching changes and the knowledge society³. The Drucker's work was followed by another classic work on new modes of production published by Daniel Bell ([1974] 1999). The book *The Coming of the Post-industrial society*" refers directly to a new concept of society which emerged from shift from a manufacturing based economy to a service based economy. In Bell's view the coming of post-industrial society incorporates three major components: the economic (dominance of the service trades and white collar occupation), technological (development of science based industry) and societal (a new type of society based scientific information and technology determines social structure). But in this view a central role is attached "knowledge" and "technical information" which re-shape (or even revolutionized) an existing social structure. So, he claimed that significance of human capital increases and becomes a determining factor of an emerging new social structure in the post-industrial type of society. In this context Drucker (1969) went further than Bell while elaborating his vision of the knowledge society. He made a valuable point claiming that a new type of society is based on choice for the individual rather than predetermined occupation. Knowledge serves as a great opportunity and a tool of emancipation from a static and deterministic society. (...) [I]t is now possible to make one's living, and a good living at that, doing almost anything one wants to do and playing almost any knowledge. This is something new under the sun (Drucker 1969:272).

Some confusion appears when it comes to elaborating on the origin of the knowledge society. In Drucker's work there are direct reference to social changes after the WW II, development of mass schooling, the expansion of lifespan and the preservation of youthfulness, whereas in Bell takes more technological point of view, seeing "knowledge" and "science" and "technology" as forces leading to a new type of society. The most technologically determinist point of view is presented by an American futurist - Alvin Toffler (1980). His incredibly influential books were focused on the impact of rapid technological development and establishing a new type of society. In his book *The Third Wave* he describes three types of global trends in mankind history, by using the metaphor of 'waves'. The first wave refers to the agrarian revolution, the second one applies to the industrial revolution and the third refers to the super-industrial society – the information age. All the three waves were caused by rapid and major technological change, which can also called technological revolution. With all

³ Although there are some authors e.g. Nico Stehr who do not agree with this thesis. For them there is not such a thing as post-industrial revolution as the industry has not vanished, it only changed its character.

respect for Tofflers' work, it must be said that he is foremost a futurologist and popular writer and therefore his descriptive books has rather limited contribution to a general discourse on the knowledge society. Nevertheless, his theoretical concept of the third wave has been inspiration for many both inside and outside the academia.

The most recent work on the knowledge society is produced by Nico Stehr (1994). His book *Knowledge societies* indicated that the roots of society's metamorphosis, a new shape of its structure and development of knowledge society are closely *linked first and foremost to a radical transformation in 'the structure of the economy'* (Stehr 1994:122). And he disagree with Bell's term "post-industrial society" as he argues that manufacture does not disappear, it is just become dominated by a white collar type of work. Another point which distinguishes Stehr's vision from what Bell wrote in the beginning of 70s is definition of knowledge. As it was mentioned above Bell tends to define it in a narrow sense as scientific and technical formal knowledge whereas for Stehr (1994:95) knowledge is seen *a universal phenomenon, or an anthropological constant* and more importantly as *a capacity for social action*. And finally, a new type of society is portrayed - without illusions - in rather bright colors as a growing chance for empowerment for individuals. For Stehr (1994) a new type of society is largely indeterminate and it is based on flexible, transient networks that extend opportunity for individuals almost to an unlimited size.

Among widely known theorists whose work directly relates to recent changes in a society are Ulrich Beck (e.g. 1992) and Manuel Castells (e.g. 1989, 1996). Their work present weak links to the concept of knowledge society but their names are often mentioned within the framework of post-industrialism discourse. Beck's concept of *the risk society* involves also knowledge and it argues that knowledge becomes an essential factor in managing the risk. In general, Beck uses a notion of risk to portrait changes in the modern society. In his view the risk is mostly caused by the rapid development and splays unequal across the social structure. People form lower strata of society tend to be widely exposed to dangers associated with the rapid development due to knowledge deficit, a limited access to information or a lack of ability to decode them. So, it can be understood that that knowledge plays a new but vital role in shaping social structure and fosters vertical social mobility. But what is more important in Beck's analysis it is knowledge to reduce hazards and insecurities induced by modernization itself (Beck 1992). Meanwhile another great theorist Manuel Castells draws attention into different direction. His work focuses on the impact of technological revolution on a new type

of social relations. This impact comes from the rapid development of new means of communication and involves a new model of society – the network society – which is based on fairly open and largely unrestricted by geographical distance social relations. To summarize it briefly we can use a quote from Castells' most famous book "The rise of network society" (1996:477) "*information is the key ingredient of our social organization (...) it is the beginning of a new existence (...)*". Although, the concept of society proposed by Beck and Castells entered for good to the obligatory canon of the contemporary sociological theories, their contribution has rather limited use in my further analysis. It must be said, however, that the theoretical debate on knowledge society is an integral part of a discourse on post-industrialism and the concept of the knowledge society is deeply rooted in science.

4.2 Status of knowledge in the knowledge economy

An academic discourse on knowledge society is closely tied to the notion of knowledge economy. In fact, they seem to be largely inseparable at least while we take into account the academic debate. There has been a massive literature on the knowledge economy published recently; however the discussion has generated many loose ends. It was Drucker (1969) among the firsts who came up with the idea of new type of economy⁴. Unfortunately, at the time when he was writing there was little information available in terms of emerging a new type of economy, so his work could not provide us with much of detailed analysis. Instead, Drucker seemed to be more interesting in general understanding of the socio-economic background of the forthcoming (at the time) change and provided a rather descriptive vision of what he named as a knowledge economy. Despite giving a number of examples throughout the book his analysis lacks precision but his overall contribution to development of idea of knowledge economy is hard to overestimate. The main tasks, however, remains largely unachieved due to a growing confusion as to application of different measures in the attempts to capture the knowledge economy. Extensive literature on this subject proposes a variety of different indicators, none of which received a rule-like status. Nevertheless, it is widely recognized that the knowledge economy is built on fairly invisible factors such as knowledge, idea or innovation. In other words, innovations and ideas, combined with skills and knowledge become tools for success and wealth being of prior importance to physical labor or natural

⁴ In fact the first „knowledge industry” was proposed Fritz Machlup in his book *Production and distribution of knowledge in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962)

resources used to be in the 19th century (Blackstone 2001). The creation of knowledge has already become the key to productivity, competitive strength, and economic achievement. *“Knowledge has become the central “factor of production” in an advanced, developed economy* “(Drucker 1969:264). It must be underline that it was easy to estimate the significance of capital and cost of labor, while it is far more difficult to capture value of knowledge and hard to measure its impact on economy because it is weightless and tangible. In brief, the advent of a new type of economy could be perfectly summarized by Stehr’s words (1994:10) *“a shift from an economy driven and governed, in large measure, by “material” inputs into the productive process and its organization to an economy in which transformations in productive and distributive processes are determined much more by ‘symbolic’ or knowledge based inputs”*.

There is little doubt that nature of economy has changed but a fundamental question where the knowledge economy comes from? Where are historical roots of the knowledge economy? In most analysis the advent of knowledge economy is closely linked with a technological revolution and transformation in a change of production. This technological determinism is striking in Bell’s, Toffler’s or Stehrs’ (1994) work. Drucker takes - contrary to most of existing functional analysis - a rather opposing viewpoint: *“It is not the demand for labor but the supply that underlines this great transformation of society and economy. (...) The arrival of knowledge worker changed the nature of jobs. Because modern society has to employ people who expect and demand knowledge work. Knowledge jobs have to be created. As a result, the character of work is being transformed”* (Drucker 1969:282). In other words, according to Drucker it was the knowledge worker who came first and created demand for knowledge work. He makes claims that the complexity of today’s work appears to be more a subject of myth rather than a part of reality. This line of thought leads him the conclusion that the emergence of knowledge society has more to do with a change in working-life expectancy than growing demand from the post-industrial economy. To make a long story short, people live longer and earn much more during their lifetime. Consequently working time lengthens up to of fifty years and it becomes an unduly long period of time. So a substantial extension of years spent on education postpones entrance into the labor market. If there is no need to enter the labor market as soon as possible, people tend to postpone this moment in order to achieve the best possible point to start working life. So after spending years at schools people - regardless type of work and productivity - expect higher salaries with every educational effort they made. Therefore, at least for Drucker, staying in the system of education becomes a

profitable investment and that is what explains that *extending the years of schooling is rational economic behavior. It “maximizes profits” far more effectively than anything the shrewdest businessman could ever have worked out* (Drucker1969:283). In addition, due to a long period of time at school graduates are not longer available for apprenticeship (learning by doing or learning from experience) and whatever they undertake after years sitting at the school desk, they must begin from a foundation in knowledge (Ibidem: 284). Because the extent years of schooling forced to established jobs which required human’s minds application rather than physical power.

4.3 A new status of knowledge

Whatever the origins of knowledge economy the consequence is clear - a growing significance of knowledge involved in profit-making activity which can no longer maintain a status of public good. In purely economic terms knowledge has become the crucial source of added value. The enterprises aiming to obtain a comparative advantage on the market requires an increasing amount of knowledge and innovation. It is widely believed that knowledge application can make a difference in the modern business. But enterprises being practically oriented often expect a “ready-to-use” type of knowledge because only than it carries market value and can bring financial returns. Unfortunately, their demands have been left largely unanswered because higher education institutions (in particular universities) experienced serious problems with overcoming the silo-structure and traditionally established disciplinary divisions. It is right to say that cooperation with industry has never been an easy goal for high education institutions as they are focused on knowledge itself, without much focus on practical application. As a result the knowledge production gradually moves off the campus because the interdisciplinary approach seems to outreach the capacity of academic performance. Further, in most countries – as an alternative to traditional scientific institutions – a knowledge-production sector has been established. It consists of a wide variety of various institutions such as industrial laboratories, research centers, think-thanks NGOs or state agencies (e.g. military or medical ones). This fundamental change in knowledge production has attracted great research attention effected in rapidly growing sociological literature on changing modes of knowledge production. The new economy requires reexamining commonly held belief on means of knowledge production. There is a wide range of different categories under which new types of knowledge exist in literature. This radical change Ziman (2000) called a move into *post-academic science phase*, Michael Gibbson (1994) refers to

recent developments as *shift from Mode_1 to Mode_2 knowledge production*, while Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) or Elzinga (1995) uses a category of *postnormal science*. Helga Novotny et al (2001) noticed that this direction of change goes against well-established academic tradition crossing the boundaries between disciplines and closing the gap between the university and society. Knowledge is seen as a driving force of a new type of knowledge based economy and it replaces capital, raw materials and labor as the means of production. Following this line of thought it becomes obvious that applying knowledge generates a (greater) need for a new type of workforce – knowledge workers (professionals, managerial and technical people (Drucker 1969:629). But the knowledge workers are not defined as successors to the “free professionals” and “open-minded intellectuals” but it is a postindustrial successor of the manual worker. *“Knowledge” as normally considered by the “intellectual” is something very different from “knowledge” in the context of “knowledge economy” or “knowledge work”* (Drucker 1969:269). Although Drucker’s idea that the shift towards the knowledge economy came about due to expanding the length of education, it still requires an inflow of highly skilled workforces. Knowledge jobs once created need well educated people. Drucker believes that a new type of knowledge (different than one possessed by intellectuals) requires continuous upgrading and renewal, hence a lifelong learning lies at the heart of knowledge society. Therefore a central attention is directed to system of education, in particular higher education, which in novel situation is designed to facilitate and support the growing economy. In the face of increasing importance of knowledge and its management - unlike in the past – higher education performs important tasks but at the same time it gets a far greater (indirect) responsibility for the economic development. Tilak (2002) rightly claims that development of strong education systems, including specifically higher education and research systems is a necessary prerequisite for development of knowledge society.

4.4 Knowledge society or overeducated society

Increasing significance of knowledge is only one side of the coin. On another side one can argue that knowledge economy requires first and foremost certificates much more than knowledge of skills. It has a significant impact on creating a demand for collecting educational qualifications. In the literature the phenomenon of overeducation was linked to expansion of higher education. Knowledge as such did not increase its importance but there is undoubtedly the increase in value attached to educational degrees (see: Fuller 2001). He compared work done by saleswomen in the beginning of XX century and the late 1960s seeing no difference

in the complexity of their work. The problem is not new and it was initially discussed in the US in the beginning of 1980s. Since then The Bureau of Labor Statistics provide evidence that the proportion of underutilized grew from the level of 11% in 1961 to 20% in 1990 (see Court & Connor 1994). There are more worrying signals coming from Europe where the expansion of higher education seems to reveal also some side effects. The phenomenon called *overeducation* defined as a situation where “*the attainment of qualifications threatens to run ahead of the economy’s ability to absorb those qualifications*” (Robinson 1995:2). It is a classic example of mismatch between one’s educational level and the required level (defined as educational level necessary to get the job) for his/her current job. This phenomenon is caused by an inflation of credentials (Collins 1979) is not driven by technical requirements of the new job of the knowledge economy but a socialization to the dominant status culture as hiring criteria (Halaby 1994:47). To conclude this line of thought, it is worth reminding Drucker’s findings while he compared work and education of saleswomen in the beginning of XIX century and in 1970s. He comes to the conclusion the level of their education is subsequently different but the type of work remains fairly similar.

Finally, it must be underlined that knowledge economy and knowledge society becomes become extensively used “buzzwords” across the globe. Using the most popular internet search engine “google.com” one might find that searching “knowledge economy”- affecting in one million findings and “knowledge society”- five hundreds thousand findings in the global network. Its is a great number but still less than other popular refrain such as “sustainable development” almost like “fighting terrorism” but used more often than for example “class conflict”

A discourse of knowledge society moves toward the policy realm, and “knowledge industry” becomes as a destination for economic and educational policy reform. However, it is probably fair to say that both concepts of “knowledge society” and “knowledge economy” in the political context revealed tendency to be divorced from reality. In other words, the concepts of “knowledge economy” and “knowledge society” have major influence on establishing principles for economic and educational policy despite involving a high degree of uncertainty as to what they really mean. Anne Jakobi (2007) shows perfectly how these two concepts are being interpreted and used in various political, cultural and economic contexts. Nevertheless, achieving “knowledge society” and “knowledge economy” becomes a flagship agenda for many governments from developed and technologically advanced countries to largely

economically poor and technologically undeveloped ones. The concept of knowledge economy became even a goal for the European Union economic agenda when member states agreed to achieve certain criteria during the Lisbon Summit in 2000. So, as a conclusion we may say that what appears to be considerably vague academic concept was translated into the concrete policy principles in order to achieve *the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*. (Lisbon Strategy Art. 5)

5. Knowledge society and reforms in the Polish higher education – questions to be addressed

The discourse on the knowledge society appears to be unduly complex and fuzzy but the concept itself becomes increasingly popular refrain in the public realm. The more it is phrased in all kind of policy reports and strategic plans, the less clear becomes what meaning it holds. Generally speaking, it refers to the knowledge society as a background of wide agenda such as higher educational reforms and Jakobi (2007:39) noticed *the idea of the knowledge society has helped countries to increasingly perceive themselves as similar with respect to necessary educational changes*. It corresponds with a starting point of this part of this paper involves a basic assumption that international organizations have grown to be major players in education policy. They are most significant transnational agents that evaluate individual countries against the progress they made in introducing the world society. Their influence becomes particularly strong and vivid in setting international quality standards and securing their implementation. Using their authority (in policy reviews, rankings), political power and financial resources transnational organizations develop and try to pursue their own understanding of “knowledge society”.

The research question that must address how much the world society has led the development in the Polish higher education since 1989. By doing so, it will try to answer which world society values were accepted and which institutions diffused in the Polish higher education. And also it will make an attempt to find answer why some values have been rejected and institutions organized differently. While elaborating the influence of the world society on the Polish higher education another important issue will be taken into consideration – if/how these conclusions can be apply to other countries in the Eastern Europe or can it cover all developing countries world wide. It also should pay special attention to evaluation of the

attempts made by the government to build the knowledge society in Poland. Conceptualizing the discourse on the knowledge society helps to understand situation of the Polish higher education weather it is on the right course to the knowledge society or it takes an opposite direction? The most probable answer is that the Polish higher education develops its own way to the knowledge society, but the question remains unanswered why the Polish way is so different, what makes it so special?

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