

# From Elite Higher Education to Mass Education

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Even though, the universities originate from the Middle Ages, XIX and XX centuries can be considered as the meridian of traditional university. The universities started to develop especially fast after the Second World War, when the supreme mission of university was connected to serving the society and humanity. By the beginning of XXI century, it was clear that especially universities play unprecedentedly important role in the transformation to innovation-based economy. Therefore, university education cannot be only public, it is also of private and personal interest.

## From modernistic values to postmodernistic

Formation of a new university or higher education model at the end of XX century, which also influenced the proliferation of higher education considerably, has been closely related to fast paradigmatic changes in society. Transformation from industrial society to information society, globalisation of economy, formation of knowledge-based economy, rapid development of democracy, etc. set new requirements, also for higher education. In the conditions of globalisation, international competitiveness depends more and more on irrationally thinking employees. The ability to think in a critical and complex way and high speciality professionalism are the most desirable skills and knowledge in today's rapidly changing society. But to cope with these rapid social changes, we need to continuously study and retrain.

Changing radically and with speed Western society has been named post-era, characterised by the conceptual notions like "post-industrial", "post-modern", "post-liberal", etc. Stressed is essential difference of the post-era society from those of agricultural or industrial and manufacturing societies. Agricultural society is mostly influenced by the surrounding natural environment, industrial society mostly from the technology and production. The central role in the post-era society has been taken by information. Therefore are challenges, met in the post-era society, first and foremost controlled by information, not so much by territory as before (according to J.-F. Lyotard, 1984). Those in the possession of information have power. Fast technological development of science, progressive vagueness on the borders of real and virtual world, etc., have driven situation to the point where science is more dependent of the technological development than ever before. Two of the main functions of science - research and forwarding of the acquired knowledge — have already felt the influence. Example for the first might as well be genetics, owing its theoretical paradigm to cybernetics. The other function is un-separable from the commercialisation of the info-devices and diminution of their measurements. All this has considerably changed the ways of acquiring, using and having access to knowledge. In the world of unification processes due to the fast technological development and rationalization of socio-political systems, the questions of values have emerged with new acuteness, which in the opinion of Georg Henrik von Wright (1996) are primarily and closely connected with the questions of humanity and solidarity.

From the aspects of system of values has hard critic fell upon great modernistic stories about freedom and equality, truth and justice, etc. J.-F. Lyotard has stressed that postmodernism is the most provocative way of interfering with the discussions about science, knowledge and technology and thus the enlightenment needs once more to be asked from: can mankind be rescued by scientific knowledge and technology? Has the total alienation from oneself and the society, where the Western civilization is finding itself today, been the utmost aim of the enlightenment? Is there escape of that alienation? Can one find it through education and to begin with the higher education, which has in the contemporary society turned into mass education?