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Abstract

The bursting transition to a knowledge-based economy poses unexpected challenges to global education systems. On one hand, the uneven development of technology allows some or other world regions to gain a major technological advantage and occupy market niches in the field of online education and training, but on the other hand, the rapid multiplication of these same technologies creates new global competition, which undeniably escalates with the time. Education systems around the world are undergoing a qualitatively new kind of transformation, linked to the possibility of being both regionally challenged and globally accessible, and the tendencies of globalization come in direct clash with the cultural identity of nations and individuals in a purely digital dimension.

The article explores the opportunities for online education in literature and philosophy with the tools of the most advanced distance learning platforms, defending the thesis that online teaching of humanities acts as a natural “antioxidant” to the ever more technologically and unifying global educational ecosystem. We face one of the most serious challenges in today's world, namely replacing the centuries-old copy-paste models of the “traditional” education with an externally attractive but frightening unifying model of the modern digital culture that threatens to smash differences and to crush the diversity of philosophies, semantics, notion and worldview characteristic of different peoples and nations. The key role of online education in humanities, in particular literature and philosophy, for the promotion of the cultural identity, the specific way of thinking and the construction of kind of “digital bridges” between the different regions, ethnic groups and social communities has been explored.

Keywords: knowledge-based economy, distance learning, digital world, global educational ecosystem.

1 INTRODUCTION

The technology development encourages mankind's entry into the so-called “Knowledge economy”. The world's digital content and media is growing rapidly at a never stopping rate [1]. After the agrarian and the industrial revolutions in the world’s historical development, a new type of social relationship was formed, based on the next, technological wave, which was leaded by the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The knowledge nowadays already spreads at light speed from one end of the world to the other, scientific discoveries appear in a much faster cycle because of the ability to effectively and simultaneously engage the efforts of thousands of scientists around the world and the service sector becomes the most significant in the national economies. Knowledge becomes a major asset and outcome concerning productivity, and intellectual products are already recognized as one of the niches with the highest added value. New ICT solutions provide opportunities for:

- Improved access and easy content navigation; adapted display specialized content search, grouping, sorting, intelligent curation of digital cultural, historical and artistic objects;
- Selection and recommendation of information;
- Context-dependent use of digital resources;
- Analysis, understanding and interpretation of the content, etc. [2]

In our quest to utilize the knowledge that Internet brings to us in the quickest and the most effective way however, we often forget that many of the models and successful practices that work seamlessly elsewhere may not be as profitable or could be even fundamentally unsuitable to the respective local conditions. Starting from the cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic differences and reaching the philosophical and moral dimensions, conditioned by the diversity of the various human cultures, values
and worldview, we often are not able to assess to what extent a model, product or service can be successful before implementing it, and the result may be painful. The globalization is undoubtedly a good thing for the mankind, but its unsolicited and hectic implementation could have sometimes a devastating effect. The social relations around the world have a complex structure that somehow resembles the development of a climate, plant or animal ecosystem, in which the balancing is, as a rule, very delicate, especially given the fact that they are also significantly influenced by each other. Cutting the forests, we change the water balance, killing the frogs immediately lifts the mosquito population, increasing the carbon emissions reflects in melting the glaciers, and so on, thus very often when we are able to evaluate the effect of our actions, the changes are already irreversible.

The enforcement of a common “global” culture or philosophy, unfortunately, can be just as dramatic and devastating to people. For centuries, the progress has been driven by the diversity, and each nation has contributed important elements to the colorful and multi-layered mosaic of the human civilization. Whatever scientific discoveries have been made, whatever religions, theories, and doctrines have been defended, there have always been individuals with different opinion, whose disagreement has led to a critical thinking, so once the controversy has arisen, its development was used to discover the truth. It was certainly not final, because the various opinions continued to exist somewhere, so there was the next truth and new discoveries and new horizons of thought and imagination.

In the age of the Internet, however, it is difficult to hide yourself and keep your uniqueness of thinking. Global “truths” now penetrate everywhere, people get used to certain “common” values and start a process of unintentional unification of their perceptions and worldview. While for purely scientific facts this has its positives (for example, it is rarely necessary nowadays to persuade someone that the earth is not flat or that it is rotating), in areas such as morality and culture, the globalization could have a rather negative impact. For example, many teenagers tend to ignore their national identity and cultural uniqueness in the name of some global pop culture, money making and media fame spontaneously become a symbol of the personal prosperity, and many people, when hearing about Leonardo, think not about da Vinci, but about DiCaprio. The paradox in this case is that, on one hand, the globalization is expected to support and develop the competitiveness of mankind, but on the other - it imposes some kind of standards of thinking and behavior that lead to unification, which stifles competition and leads to stagnation of thinking, because “the world thinks so.”

In order to adequately address the problem, we must choose a more rational approach of perceiving the global trends by, on one hand, understanding and utilizing their advantages, but on the other - preserving our identity and diversity already at the next level, in the digital world. It is important to clearly differentiate these two tendencies, and in order to avoid the trend of modernity, the process must be driven by people with a substantial dose of critical thinking who do not take everything for granted and are in no hurry to accept innovation at all costs.

2 THE PROBLEM GENESIS

Most of us from the earliest childhood are educated in a spirit of empathy with modernity and the development of technology. On one hand, technology helps us to deal faster and more effectively with the day-to-day activities, and on the other - it leads to a qualitative change in our way of life and work, allowing us to deal with problems that were impossible to solve before the globalization knocked to our doors. Today, we are able to instantly find information on any topic from the Internet, send hundreds of messages thousands of miles away, conduct training remotely, and work together on projects with people we have never seen in our lives.

These processes have undoubted positives, but we rarely think that, driven by the momentum of inertia, we are actually taking fewer decisions ourselves and become more and more dependent on technology for even the most routine activities. Most people have gradually stopped reading books because they pull the information they need directly from the web, we already add and subtract double-digit numbers using a calculator, and sometimes we forget to even look around, relying on the GPS on our smartphone.

This kind of addiction to technology and to “global” way of thinking also has its serious negatives and the result could already be seen - many modern children are not at all taught to think and increasingly rely on technology for the most ordinary daily activities. While our “transient” generation (that one that lived before and after the advent of the Internet) still has a chance, since much of its life has gone outside the Net, the modern teenager is just deprived of opportunities for independent development.
and grows in a totally networked, highly technological and, in its essence, quite dependent world. He is accustomed only to premade solutions and, at some point, he finds himself totally uncompetitive, while at the same time he utilizes the most competitive tools of the world (ICT) much better than us, the intermediate generation. This paradox can easily be explained by the method of vaccination - while we have grown in another environment that has challenged and provoked us to develop certain skills and qualities, the modern generation, unintentionally, has allowed these qualities to atrophy (or rather we, as their parents, have not taken enough care of our children) long before they had evolved, and if we leave our teenagers out of the Net for a day, they will feel like being on an uninhabited island and will not know what to do.

The solution not to allow this to happen is to encourage them to reveal their own wishes and interests before the network and the trends of globalization unify them and prevent the development of their uniqueness as citizens, society and individuals. In simple words - to learn who they are and what they can before they read it on Facebook and develop their personalities before they decide to copy the model of some TV reality format.

3 THE LIGHT IN THE DARK

The rational approach requires us to transfer our individuality to the digital world by taking its advantages, but also by retaining the critical insights and assessing every phenomenon besides through the prism of innovation, also from our personal perspective and individual assessment. In this aspect, it is important to educate children relatively early to have a critical spirit in order to be objective when confronted with the challenge of taking premade decisions from the internet. I will certainly not presume that using the information from the Internet is a bad thing, however it is immature and vicious to expect it always to offer solutions and to accept them without any skepticism.

The recent years have revealed stronger trends in manipulating people and societies using the potential of the global network. With the accumulation of information and increasing the power of computers, the possibilities of what we call today “social engineering” and fake news can greatly contribute to pushing the mindset of entire social groups, ethnicities or even countries in one direction or another. Through the Internet, referendums can be manipulated successfully, elections could be compromised, fashion trends could be imposed, as well as political programs or even religious doctrines. In this aspect, the most natural solution to counteract the unhealthy impact of the global network is to be able to properly use its own potential and capabilities.

3.1 Data vs. information

The generation of the 21st century no longer reads books on paper, but it could successfully get the same information from the internet as long as someone directs it where and what to look for or rather how to take the right direction instead of expecting the network to “offer” the solution. Our role as parents, teachers and mentors of young people is to teach them how to sift out the important things and learn to appreciate the valuable works, ideas, concepts. Virtually anything can be found on the web, but the judgment of what really matters and what does not, ultimately, take the consumer, as long as his or her opinion is influenced by a moderate dose of criticality, which is the joint task of both the education system and the family upbringing.

Yes, the modern teenager does not go outside without his smartphone, but we can just more often post him problems that require cognitive thinking or moral judgment, and these are things that are not yet available in Google. In order to become personalities and to manage their own lives rather than a computer managing them, people need to develop their own culture, national identity, critical thinking, reveal and express their individual interests and hobbies, rather than someone inspire them through Facebook and need to get used to enjoy the landscape around them instead of just looking for YouTube videos. If he wants to stand out and keep his uniqueness, the modern young man must grow up rather early with the thought that the world surrounding him is no more important than the way he has learned to perceive it (Fig.1) and ultimately the final effect is the result of the combination of both.
3.2 The Challenges of Globalization

It is not easy to remain locally empathetic, but at the same time globally accessible, knowledgeable and capable, but everything is a matter of personal balance, inner harmony and proper education. After all, children are not born with a tablet or a smartphone in hand, someone gives it to them. One parent's decision to “trust” the internet is fundamentally wrong because the child has to be gradually introduced into the world of technology and guided constantly alongside the development of its human value system. In our daily routine, we often leave our children unattended with a TV or computer, relying on a few peaceful hours, without realizing that we are leaving our child in a situation of playing Russian roulette leaving its education to random factors. The idea that he is safe at home and nothing can happen is fundamentally wrong because the damage to his brain, thanks to Facebook type of culture, can be much more significant and lasting than anything that can happen to him on the street. Contemporary children often "live" more in their virtual world than in the reality, and if we do not realize this early, then it may be impossible to save them from the dark side. Yes, the globalization attracts with the feeling that you can identify yourself with your heroes, whom you follow on Instagram or Twitter, thus becoming part of the “fashion” in the eyes of your friends and that thought can easily daze the head of each child. However, if we are aware of the threat, it is not difficult to counteract, by sympathetically supporting our child in his first digital steps. E-learning is flexible, modular, inexpensive and scalable [3], it is important to combine it with traditional learning methods, making a natural transition between the real world and the virtual world, and helping children feel equally comfortable in both.

3.3 Learning Humanities in the Digital World

Many parents, and also teachers, make a serious mistake, trying to explain to the child what they should not do, what TV programs they should not watch, and what web sites they should not visit. In fact, if we can identify real valuable resources on the web, if we can engage students' minds with meaningful and interesting activities, they simply will not need to look for anything else and will just plunge into the ocean of opportunities that we are targeting. Rich digital content is a powerful way of providing today's students with high quality, relevant and up-to-date instructional materials [4], but we need to be precise in choosing the best resources, taking into account the individual characteristics of the learner.
From the antiquity to the end of the 20th century, the truly harmonious and versatile individuals usually were engaged in a multitude of activities from a very early age, developing diverse skills and interests. The presence of digital reality is a new phenomenon typical of the 21st century but many of the useful lessons and patterns of the past can be successfully transformed into the new virtual ecosystem as long as the parents and the teachers are aware of the way a child is thinking. Logically, if the child is early familiar with the technology and Internet is his/her favorite media, we must make sure that he/she will find within the resources, lessons and values we consider important for his/her development, and directing the next generation towards our own value system is our obvious task. With the development of digital technologies, teachers’ responsibility also increases. Today teachers are required to be facilitators to help learners make judgments about the quality and validity of new sources and knowledge, be open-minded and critical independent professionals [5].

The introduction of increasingly new and flexible forms of learning, enabling mobility, interactivity, universality and ubiquity, continuously enhances both the platforms and the skills and habits of students and teachers working with them [6]. The development of various digital platforms for online education is the effective way to make a permanent connection with our child’s teachers, to keep live track of his/her development and, at the same time, to get a reasonable assurance that he/she is engaged with the proper, from our point of view, educational resources or at least is able to interpret and analyze them in a proper and non-conflicting manner. Although in most people’s mind the distance learning is more appropriate for the natural and mathematical sciences, where phenomena and processes can be suitably visualized with animations, videos or relevant interactive examples and tasks, in fact, literature, history, culture, art or philosophy have no less potential in the digital reality. Modern teleworking platforms allow interactive sessions and discussions with teachers and peers, solving collective tasks through teamwork, listening to poetry and music of the best quality that adequately conveys the messages of the authors, visiting virtual museums and galleries. In fact, internet culture can totally erase our cultural identity, but it can also highlight and impose it, as long as we are active, engaged and convincing enough when we try to advertise it. Nothing is eternal in the global network, multi billion companies are born and developed for a few months, different innovative services appear literally every day, and it is not by chance that the top market cap companies such as Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft come from the ICT sector. This, of course, should not scare us, we have to take the challenge and ride the wave. Obviously, if we do not learn to fight for our own identity in the global network, the wave will just flood us. But in fact everything depends only on ourselves, no one could force us accommodate a foreign culture or values if we are not ready to recognize and accept them.

Internet is not just a network, it is also a way of thinking. We could conclude that it is not just technological, but also a moral choice, and computer skills do not necessarily make us useful and empathetic to the values of the society. In the long run, it is quite possible that humanitarian specialties prove greater educational potential, as unlike natural laws that have more or less universal nature, and one can reach the truth in a purely empirical way, in areas like culture and art, where happens the real synergy of vision, aesthetics and ideas, the internet can be the bridge to bringing the world together around a new kind of value system. A system that respects the differences but tolerates the understanding, a system in which you should listen to the other, before attempting to impose your opinion, a system in which people are not divided according to wealth, ethnicity, or religion, and fight with ideas, not with weapons.

### 3.4 Preserving our identity

It’s not always easy to preserve your identity in a global world. In real life, the fighter planes have radio identifiers that clearly designate them in order to avoid confusion during combat operations. In sporting events, the teams wear different colors to distinguish easily from the opponent. Thanks to the internet, we also have the opportunity to designate ourselves - we share the preferred social networks and groups, work on common goals, like similar Facebook posts and tweets. Many of our fellow citizens, friends and relatives take advantage of the benefits of the globalization, moving to various locations round the world and, in practice, the internet is the natural environment in which we continue to communicate with them, helping them maintain their ties and cultural affiliation, language and values, as well as keep their national self-consciousness active, even thousands of kilometers away. Many of them encourage their children to use digital resources in their native language, and the availability of appropriate educational materials online is a prerequisite for maintaining the necessary level of understanding and empathy with the problems of the nation and the state. Although in the broad expert understanding the internet is perceived as the cutting edge of the globalization wave, the opportunities it provides to identify and manifest us as individuals, culture, and way of thinking are
much more than the threats to unify and smash our uniqueness, as long as we have the willingness and the desire to fight.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The penetration of the new ICT is not a threat to the cultural and national identity if it is interpreted rationally and its positives are used for the purposes of the individual development rather than the introduction of a mass world subculture. The identification of appropriate digital platforms and resources, especially in the Humanities - literature, art and philosophy, may be vital for the harmonious development of adolescents and the adequate building of their appropriate value system, sustainable in the digital world. This does not relieve us from the need to be day-to-day sympathetic with the digital life of our child, but at least it makes it very easy to support his/her smooth, rational and harmonious development and help him/her leave a lasting trace in the knowledge economy, in which the mankind has already entered.

REFERENCES


