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Knowledge society as an inspiration for the theory and practice of adult education

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Education and training has taken on a highly important and stable task - create a bridge between the past, present and future. It has to ensure the continuity of human knowledge, progress and development of its members. On the other hand, education and training is a sensitive seismograph, recording the rapid and dramatic changes in society and actively responding to them - if the education is to be meaningful, functional, socially and personally beneficial.

We live in the 21st century – how does the idea of the world in this century look like, what are the trends that can be expected, from which the new requirements for education and training will be derived? Visions are manifold. Probably:

- It will be a global world – it means that whatever happens on this planet, it will be interconnected (the globalization of the economy and so on);
- It will be a turbulent and uncertain world (transfer and distribution, information processing plays a huge role in the success of the economy – “better educated, better informed wins”);
- It will be a sophisticated world. (Science and qualification will be essential factors of development);
- It will be an intellectualized world (which means the role of mental work will grow);
- It will be an interdisciplinary world (growth of the professional performance requirements, disposition to a broader scope of knowledge from other areas to address challenging work tasks);
- It will be an ecological world (priority of every society);

- It will be a diverse world (variety of philosophical, religious or extremist movements – widening the scope and space for training and education to universal human values - decency, humanity, tolerance and understanding among nations);
- It will be a militant world (threat of war – education through the lifelong process);
- It will be a world of interconnected networks (access to information across borders). Following terms are already used: digital era, internet generation, multimedia learning systems, virtual books, virtual university, internet as a means of global communication etc.);

And finally, the world will be demanding (ramping up pressure on the performance and capabilities of man)¹.

Knowledge is considered as new factor of social and economic development today and in the future. During the 20th century begins the change of the concept of knowledge. Knowledge is nowadays seen as an individual property. Knowledge can be characterized as a set of internally related data, information, values, expert insights forming the basis of professional competence.

Knowledge is not information that is external to the individual and more or less accessible to all. Knowledge is somehow absorbed, processed, and usable information contained meaning. The concept of knowledge expresses the capability to act, and to solve problems and the ability to initiate something. This is the way how lifelong learning is perceived, but also the concepts of the knowledge society, learning society, where learning is the acquisition based on own initiative, powers to act, decision making and problem solving. Thus defined learning does not coincide with the traditional conception of education. Learning is an individual act, while education is a relatively coherent set of social activities that are usually associated with an institution. In the concept of lifelong learning, more emphasis is placed on the individual, his intrinsic motivation, the need to learn and to develop their internal potential through life. People are responsible for themselves.

The concepts of lifelong learning, learning society, the knowledge society are the most discussed current challenges. Other priorities and argumentation strategy can be found, for example, at the OECD, EU, World Bank, employers' associations, trade unions or with UNESCO. In principle they can be divided into normative opinions - mostly represented in policy

¹ Z. Souček, *Musíme být připraveni na 21. století*. Moderní řízení 12/1997, s. 2.

documents of various organizations, and analytical to be found in professional and academic debate. But even in science - pedagogy, adult education, sociology, economics, philosophy, and so on we do not find a united view

- OECD, the World Bank - the center of interest is on the individual who learns, they emphasize directed learning;
- Employers' associations – the aim of education and learning is the best, most powerful and most capable individual – employee, organization;
- UNESCO, the EU – prefer educated man – who has learned to learn who has learned to adapt, who has realized that no knowledge is certain, that the process of searching only provides basic certainty;
- Pedagogy – where schools and teachers are seen as the key force for development of the individual;
- Adult Education – sees the success of the concept in a quality school system, in quality continuing education, learning, internet, individual activity of the individual;
- Sociology – based on the principle of active citizenship, democracy and equal opportunities;
- Economics – human resources, human capital, global markets. Innovation.

These terms are widely discussed not only at the professional level, but also serve as a rewarding and attractive topic of political discussion and media reports.

Starting points of all these visions have much in common – that more people will live in the society based on the acquisition and distribution of knowledge. Property rights and access to knowledge in modern society has become the main competitive advantage but also a universal charm, or more generally, knowledge-based society is based on education, training, internet, global markets, innovations and individual activity. Prevailing economic aspect is evident. Knowledge is seen as the most important strategic resource and learning as the strategically most important ability of individuals, organizations and society. To illustrate: in the late 20th century, an average product on the market contained about 20% of the live work, today, according to some estimates, only 4%. In other words, industrial-oriented economy is fading.

Prevailing opinions (of politicians, economists, sociologists) indicate that only countries that will transform into a knowledge society, and allow targeted support for extending the concept of lifelong learning, will be competitive.

In this type of society, participation in lifelong learning and training has become a necessity and actually never ends (as opposed to traditional society, where the learning process is mostly limited to entering job market). Learning acquires another dimension, it is not only important qualitative aspect of an individual, but becomes an essential element of society. Due to the dynamic development of society it is clear that the same dynamics is needed to develop not only knowledge but also skills, because now there is no longer the focus on productivity, but above all on creativity. Learning, education should find themselves at the center of ongoing change, or they should be the initiator of change. Under these conditions, learning and education act as part of the social consumption and as one of the targets of economic prosperity. It is undeniable that education nowadays has become an important economic factor, and is treated as an equal form of capital, although the long-term, but more significant investment, which is a subject to standard financial calculation and which is considered as to the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and return on investment.

During the 20th century the concept of knowledge had been changing. Knowledge is nowadays seen as an individual property. Knowledge is not information that is external to the individual and more or less accessible to all. Knowledge is, on the contrary, absorbed, processed, and usable information containing meaning. The concept of knowledge presents the capability to act, and problem-solving of situation and the ability to initiate something. This is the picture of the knowledge-based society, learning society, where learning is based on own initiative, the will applied to action, decision making and problem solving. Thus defined doctrine does not coincide with the traditional conception of education. We conclude that individual learning is indeed related to the general trends in the development of society, the economic sphere, science and technology, culture and so on. But also to the trend of pluralized and differentiated way of life of individuals who take responsibility for themselves. (In 1995 the *European Commission* issued a document "Teaching and learning towards a cognitive society").

The concept of knowledge-based society is one of the most contentious issues in the present. This concept is widely discussed not only at the expert level but is a rewarding and attractive topic of political discussion and media reports. It should also be said that it is quite difficult to establish the roots of this term. Often mentioned is the name of Peter Drucker, who started to use the term knowledge workers in 90ties of the 20th century. In the 50ties and 60ties of the 20th century, different theories that can be regarded as the forerunners of the current concept of the knowledge society, appeared. For

instance, the theory of scientific - technical revolution (in some countries, the theory of scientific and technological progress). Scientific – technological revolution in Slovakia is associated with the name of Radovan Richta and his popular publication “Civilization at the Crossroads”/ (1966). Another noteworthy name is that of sociologist Daniel Bell (1970) and his theory of post-industrial society. As mentioned before, the 90-ties and the name of Peter Drucker, was the period when the new concept of a knowledge-based economy appeared in literature (Kenichi Ohmae, but also Friedrich von Hayek) or considerations aimed regarding knowledge management (Karl Wiig).

Pedagogy and andragogy were not left aside. Let us mention the work of Torsten Husen (1974) who focused on the learning society. T. Husen refers not only to lifelong learning and the need for new skills, but also to knowledge workers and other issues related to the knowledge-based society. Starting points of all these visions have much in common - that more people will live in the society based on the acquisition and distribution of knowledge. Property rights and access to knowledge in modern society has become the main competitive advantage but also a universal charm, or more generally, knowledge-based society is based on education, training, internet, global markets, innovations and individual activity. Prevailing economic aspect is evident. Knowledge is seen as the most important strategic resource and learning, as the strategically most important ability of individuals, organizations and society.

Since the 70-ties of the 20th century, individual authors (f.e. Dumazedier) have been pointing out that modern society is characterized by an increase in the amount of leisure time and accelerated changes and these changes require corresponding, real lifelong learning. Its implementation is made possible through the availability of time. Therefore, it becomes unbearable to claim that everyone should have the opportunity to learn in any manner and in accordance with their needs. Current theses emphasize the necessity of continuous development of the individual and thus the individual activities as part of lifelong learning take over the character of necessity.

Perspective of those lifelong learning offers such complementarity and continuity. Potential contribution of adult education and continuing education to creation of a tolerant community, economic and social development, poverty alleviation and environmental protection is very important and should increase. The aim youth and adult education as a lifelong process is to develop autonomy and a sense of people and communities for responsibility, to enhance ability to tackle transformation in the economy,

culture and society. Adult education should allow people and communities to manage their destiny and future challenges. It should be noted that the Adult education stems from the culture, traditions, values and previous experiences. Respect to this principle helps to stimulate active participation of citizens (Pirohová, 2015).

Andragogy can take on essentially two different approaches to these changing social factors. The first one would be approvingly optimistic. It is possible to say, even claim, that it has never been in the history of mankind that learning, teaching has been attributed such a significant value. The ancient idea of the society through the development of a general, pervasive and permanent education (ancient Greece, J.A. Comenius, enlightenment) has reached its utmost realization. Its current understanding as of strategic point of development of the society is projected to increase the funds for educational activities, as well as the tumultuous development of new teaching methods and forms. The institutional and non-institutional forms of learning are developing, a massive influx of funds can be seen, concrete measures by the government and national and international organizations are implemented, which are additionally covered by a wide range of legislative standards.

Andragogy gets a space for its research as its sphere of interest is expanding. The effects of all these changes can manifest themselves in other ways. Even recently, andragogy had problems to be profiled as a separate discipline and its position among other social sciences has been the cause of much debate. Today, when the concept of lifelong learning is becoming a kind of master password and an idol of almost all areas of life, Andragogy gains importance as a science researching the principles and conditions of the process.

From this optimistic point of view we can see one more thing. Generally available sources of information should be reflected in all aspects of society. Many authors (f.e. Machonin, Mlčoch, Sojka and others) put terms information society and knowledge-based society in opposition. Information society is understood in the technical sense as the creation and dissemination of technical resources and building of communications network, while the concept of the knowledge society is based on a different perspective.

It represents a departure from the material understanding and focuses on the spiritual (particularly cognitive) activities, so it is actually a practical implementation of the post-materialism theory. Its creator R. Inglehart² based his reasoning on the assumption that the society passes through

² In M. E. Porter, 1991. *Konkurenční strategie*. Praha: Slon.

significant transformations. These are manifested in social, cultural and economic sphere. Society reacts to the changing conditions with the change of values and lifestyle. As an example: a prosperous citizens of the Western world, which is characterized by a high standard of living, are more and more oriented towards the so-called higher needs³ (as in Maslow's hierarchy of needs), such as: political participation, focus on environmental, spiritual values, emancipation, independence and self-realization. The development of post-material values, of course, has a direct correlation with the increase of interest in many areas of traditional, so-called liberal education that helps transformation and the development of recognized cultural values.

Beside this purely optimistic view, the view quite the opposite – pessimistically critical is promoted. Proponents of this view point out first of all to total economization of the educational activities. According to this perspective, education policy cannot be derived from the current economic needs of society only, and the development of ideas about education in the future cannot be based on projections of existing qualification and professional structures. The market alone cannot determine what training will be needed for future generations. Rather, a long-term concept for the development of education, which should include the expected future changes in demands for education. It should be based on the fact that the intellectual value accumulated in the fund of education is reflected economically in the future. It is therefore unrealistic to expect immediate economic effects.

Education is generally seen primarily as a tool for individual as well as society-wide development and prosperity. The purpose of this education is the best, most powerful and most capable individual, organization, society. Performance and pragmatism is adored today. Knowledge has no longer the traditional, universal character, as it was in the recent past. Today it is

³ There is no uniform definition of the knowledge society. Other priorities and argumentation strategy can be found, for example, at the OECD, the World Bank, employers' associations, trade unions or with UNESCO. In principle, they can be divided into normative opinions - mostly represented in policies and documents of various organizations, and analytical which can be found in professional and academic debate. We do not find a single view even in science - sociology, economics, philosophy, and andragogy. Umberto Eco identifies those „integrated” and critical cultural approach of „apocalypitics”. For the first group is the concept of the knowledge society impetus for the creation of new values and identities, the other group points out the information overload, impairment of personal experience and the digitization of thinking. Beside the critical view of culture a socially critical view is also prevalent. It is worth noting that the knowledge-based society is not only a challenge and a chance for personal development of the individual and society, but there are groups that do not participate on this concept.

a measure of practicality, possible applications. It is no accident that the central concept of knowledge is defined by the American center for productivity and quality as „information in action.” If it is not of practical use, it is actually of no value and cannot be considered knowledge. This means that primary qualification function of education would get in the forefront, and would have taken a dominant position in the education system. It seems as a real danger that there is a narrower understanding of the education and training as the field of skills and the role of educational institutions only as a means of generating a supply of skilled labor. The question arises whether we should not use the terms of „society of skills” or „the society of expertise” instead of knowledge-based society. The problem is the emphasis on specialization with required knowledge of the relatively narrowly defined field. This view is probably most pronounced gap between economic and social approaches to learning. Some critics (e.g. Jansen) point to the increasing importance of official certificates as the output of a learning process (called credentialism), while noting that the intended qualifying education is not able to meet the current demands of the ongoing social changes. The knowledge society is characterized as an educated society, founded on the principles of active citizenship, liberal democracy and equal opportunities (Edwards, 1998). In contrast John R. Saul (1997) points out that our society instead of broadening access to information, knowledge and education, is in fact, losing interest in the freedom of the individual, in democracy. The concept of the knowledge society becomes modern myth based on earlier myths regarding productivity and change. It is a myth that particularly suits large corporations and global financial institutions. These considerations are based on the fact that in this world, knowledge is distributed very unevenly. This means that in fact not only that knowledge does not meet the competencies and the freedom of individuals, but what is even worse, it damages development of the whole society (Strain, Field, 1998). The point is that a relatively easily accessible information puts high demands on its processing, i.e. the ability of critical thinking and independent judgment. This ability, however, must necessarily be based on the constructed knowledge base and the certain skills that are available in relatively limited group of people. We can see a widening gap between different social groups, companies, states. A real emergence of “knowledge capitalism” will accelerate this trend even more. A whole new social group appears – knowledge workers. Unlike Marx’s proletariat, kognitariat has its production tools more or less available at hand at all times. And they will determine the future direction of the society, its character, profile, values and lifestyle. „Knowledge” workers do not rule but lead (Drucker, 1994).

Currently, the advantage is in hands of people possessing advanced and very specific knowledge. These people are the best paid in the labor market. Again, the more specific the knowledge is, the better return of own investment in knowledge is. Knowledge is not universal, it is essentially a business tool, its form and use depends on the application area, working position, the aim and content. It is another reason to consider the traditional idea of broadly humanistic education to be obsolete.

Actually, this situation is not at all new. We can track and find some parallels with the situation in Greece and in later period of human development, when education was not a separate activity held at a certain place at a certain time and a certain age, but was continuous in whole society. But just as in ancient Greece the participation in education was restricted to free citizens (who constituted a significant minority), now the information is quite „loose and freely” disseminated by means of mass communication and reasonably available only for some groups of the population. Much awaited and unlimited access to information and the resulting easy vertical mobility has not yet come. Real danger is the social tension between

those who have and those who do not have access to the training. We already face the problem of how to ensure the dignity, status and recognition of “non-knowledge” (mostly manual) workers. And I have not mentioned the concept of work flexibility that pays attention to the training and education of key staff only.

One of the consequences of the efforts to maximize the availability of education is paradoxically inflation of education as the value. Diploma or graduation in the labor market will mean less and higher educational levels to obtain a chance to succeed will be needed. These ideas have appeared in modified form in works of Nietzsche, later developed by Bourdieu⁴ (“deceived generation”), or U. Beck. Of course, education has value in itself, at least as it is perceived as a tool for personal development and cultivation. But it would be a tragedy if it should be seen as something that should be formally recognized.

One of the aims of andragogy as the science of adult education should be to support the educational efforts and approaches designed to educate a proactive person. It can be achieved by changing the ways in which people learn to learn, and by support of learning opportunities. Certain stereotypes in education can be overcome with intensive examination and

⁴ P. Ondrejko, *Sociálny a kultúrny kapitál ako sociálne hodnoty, normy a ciele vo výchove a vzdelávaní*. In: *Pedagogika*, roč. 2. č. 4.

implementation of non-utilitarian spheres of education such as adult civic and interest education.

It is fair to say that it is difficult to characterize the knowledge-based society using only quantitative indicators such growth through new and innovative knowledge, what is the share of a microchip research, quality control and own production on the final price or how many people are learning at work and how much time is spent on it. The knowledge society is not a final reality but a process, and all the numbers get obsolete with the pace of society development.

Reflections of the knowledge society are criticized for certain unilateralism, namely:

- Focus on knowledge as a prerequisite for work activities in terms of human capital, which is preferred mainly in economic and political discussions (according to critics it is the impetus that other concepts are considered as well e.g. on civil society);
- View of knowledge as a source of economic prosperity, life chances and employability (personal development, flexibility, self-realization, self-improvement, or the meaning of life is in the opinion of critics marginalized);
- Knowledge-based society is based on the application of the principle of meritocracy. But, on the other hand, it is impossible to challenge Drucker's statement who argues that in the knowledge society everyone has the chance, but not everyone can belong to the winning side. Knowledge-based society does not eliminate inequality and social issues. It produces some relevant knowledge and information and directs the communication. Someone in this process contributes only marginally or not at all. And it's not just because of the ability and the will.

Knowledge-based society as a theoretical concept and as observable reality cannot be ignored by the practice of adult education. It is necessary to admit that Andragogy as a science reflects the knowledge society as a theory coming from the outside. In doing so, it mainly uses the knowledge of sociology, the results of other sciences to a lesser extent. Reprocessing into own educational concept is just at the beginning. Of course there can be inferred certain projections:

- Necessity of constant decision making, individualization and differentiation in society will apparently increase at the expense of factual knowledge and there will be an increased need for orientation knowledge – rules and sense;

- The role of counselors, mediators and facilitators of knowledge, experts will increase, (as true “knowledge” workers – Drucker). This is connected with the question of professionalism and de-professionalism of andragogic work and andragogic skills;
- There is a need to re-discuss the issue of general education as an input and communications background and to actively participate in the knowledge society.

Andragogy as a science must decide whether a particular concept of the knowledge society is the only starting point for the reasoning or one of possible inspirations. At the same time it must make clear whether Andragogy considers as more beneficial the analytical works, or just rely on normative views and find ways of implementing it. With these considerations Andragogy should not forget its own traditions and knowledge.

From the perspective of andragogical practice we can say that the described changes have an impact on the whole area of adult education, i.e. the contents, methods, institutions, the profession and participants. From our perspective Andragogy has no major problems to cope with the demands of the knowledge society. Some of current highly regarded approaches to adult education have always been preferred, particularly participant’s perception of education and links with practice, the use of modern methods, the use of e-learning, modular programs and recognition of informal learning. The most important question is the purpose of the andragogical practice. Is it just provision of functional adaptation to social trends for adults or finding space for personal development, and social and cultural forms of cohabitation? Both of these needs adult education today already satisfies.

The knowledge society has to possess also a different dimension. Should a person only learn, educate and use acquired knowledge and skills only at work for the employer? Nothing more? This society should be all about quality of life, family and leisure time. Quality of life and quality of work life have extensive impacts on the private lives of people, their leisure and family life. Swift pace of life with stress, as reflection of growing requirements on an individual – an employee and necessity to prove their abilities, skills, as well as knowledge pose a threat to human civilization (Armstrong, 2012).

People in developed countries are starting to take more interest in the quality of life which is not only reflection of their income, but also of leisure time, self-realization, a healthy environment and art. Leisure, family, friendship, quality of life, quality of work life take the first place in value hierarchy of modern people. Organizations should urgently respond to this trend by

creating new forms of participation on the transformation of organization, the new organization of working time and remuneration.

Every job brings loss of energy, fatigue and often inconvenience. It is important to adjust life rhythm, alternate work and rest, release tension so as the person - the employee does not get into unnecessary hysterical haste. Human body is perfect, but one should learn how not to destroy it, but rather refine and controlled it.

In the effort to follow a certain rhythm of work and rest one can ask questions how and where to find free time, more free time for personality development, how to live in a time of constant change and fast tempo so that we can maintain health and sense of satisfaction. In this context, we often talk about the need for lifestyle changes and the need for creation of temporal conditions.

An important concept is the concept of time. It is divided into work and post-work time, but we cannot identify it with leisure time. People often try to use their leisure time, in all possible ways, to realize the knowledge and ability which cannot be applied in their work.

The need for interest, meaning, involvement, which is not satisfied by rationalized acts of working life, and latent mental stress that these acts in many individuals produce, affect the activity that they are doing in their leisure time.

We do not claim that the different ways of work can explain all the characteristic features of leisure time because their content and form vary greatly by country, traditions, cultural models as well as socio-economic level, but the work, its nature and manner belong to the factors influencing the way they spend their off-duty time, but also family life.

Employee's life basically runs daily between home and work. In Slovakia, for several years there has been competition Family Friendly Employer. This contest is run by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The competition has categories: Family Policy, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, The most original measures for the family. The objective of this competition is clear. Employees should find professional realization, pleasure at work and happy family life. If the organization wants to realize the measures, it is necessary to know the basic functions of family and possibilities of modification (Lukáč., Lukáčová, 2007).

Work and family life, if they are in accordance, contribute to personal satisfaction and serenity. But we must not forget that man (both men and women) feel responsibility for providing family and they work more. They accumulate the time spent at work and time spent travelling to work and

back. Family life as such can be unbalanced or even completely suppressed. Lack of time for family can cause dissatisfaction with the job.

Although in modern times the importance of the family as a social and economic unit significantly decreased, we can conclude that there is no significant weakening of family influence on people as an intimate background of one's behavior.

People often accept the fact that the work is necessarily in conflict with family life, and also that the organization plays no role in correcting this imbalance. Therefore, for people in employment there is more priority to solve the problems arising from the relationship between work and family life. According to P. M. Senge, (2007) pressures on the individual by the organization necessarily get in conflict with the requirements placed on him by their family. Particularly regarding education, career, travel, working dinner and of course overtime.

These pressures stem mainly from the exclusive focus on the objectives of the organization at the expense of personal goals. This means that if we consider as more important the goals of organization, we may neglect to consider impacts on personal and family life. The growth of the amount of time and commitment of employees brings success

and more interesting work opportunities, but on the other hand, it deprives the family relations, as well as family welfare. If you reduce the time spent working, the income drops which creates pressure to pursue more work. Each occasional success in family life is eliminated by increased demands for time spent working. Everyone should think about achieving a balance between the work and the family.

Conflicts between work and family can be one of the main reasons that limit efficiency and ability to improve, because these conflicts divert attention of staff and weaken their performance. We agree with Senge's view that finding synergies between family life and active life at work becomes more urgent. Number of families, where both parents work, is constantly growing. Personal interests cease to be a private matter. Organizations, unfortunately only abroad, are increasingly realizing that they should give up pressures and demands that negatively affect the balance between work, family and health. Organizations have the opportunity to create the conditions for their employees to approach the family and work problems with the same seriousness, to discuss them, solve problems and consider it while designing their work schedules.

Conflict between work, family and health is also conflict of values and time. This conflict significantly loses its drama, when an organization

promotes values that lie at the heart of most people and that are of the same importance at work and at home (Pirohová, 2007).

Education and training is becoming a mediator of society progress, is a prerequisite for its economic and cultural development. People are starting to realize that the only education can help to adapt to rapid change and continuous modernization. Although this argument is not yet actual and given the economic importance of the work it is hard to say whether it will be – even in our society we start to feel the willingness to participate in further education and acquire knowledge and develop skills that are not necessarily connected with occupation.

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Knowledge society as an inspiration for the theory and practice of adult education

Knowledge is considered to be the factor of societal and economical development of today and tomorrow. The concepts of lifelong learning, learning society, knowledge society or society based on knowledge are one of the most currently discussed problems. There are other priorities and argumentative strategies found in OECD, EU, World Bank, Employers' Associations, trade-unions or in UNESCO. They can be divided to normative – represented mainly in politics and in the documents of various organizations and analytic – which can be found in professional and scientific discussion. On the other hand, there is not common view neither in science – pedagogy, andragogy, sociology, economics, philosophy etc. Education has eminent and stable role – to create the bridge between past, present and future, to ensure continuity of human knowledge and development of society and its members. Two main objectives are fulfilling in the process of adult citizens education. The first is societal objective, aimed at the development of human resources, the second is aimed on the individual personality development, its ability to adapt on the changing life conditions.