

# **Knowledge Country, Knowledge Society, Knowledge Region and Knowledge Citizen**

*Draft Vision*

by

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## **1. The Future Has Begun**

Most of our wise as well as foolish compatriots tend to agree on one thing, namely that the future does not exist, in effect, or if the poor thing should happen to be here already, we can expect nothing but unpredictable evil and elusive but basically infernal consequences. In a slightly better scenario they may think that the future can be put off, as it is indifferent and distant. Moreover, things will not change for a long time to come, anyway.

This country does believe that the future is far away, at a distance that it makes it practically non-existent.

What we are up against is not only that the capacity for utopia of the age is minimal, but that not even a rational future (one without utopias) is imagined.

Even post-modern mass consciousness has failed to rid today's Central European consciousness of its susceptibility to the past. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this semi-post-modern, semi-backward-looking mass consciousness<sup>1</sup> should turn to the past in the event of all social conflicts, which are thus conflicts of consciousness as well.

Consequently, one of today's generally held beliefs is that the past we have lived through constitutes such a heavy defeat that no kind of normal future stands a chance. What is more, even the present is such a disappointment that nothing but Hungary's downfall can be prognosticated. Let us, therefore, turn our backs on the future, they suggest, and try to make the past and the present clear instead.

The moral is frightening: shall we then wallow in the mud of our yesterdays? Does this age whine rather than sing like a bird? Does it feel nostalgia for the past it has rejected? This weird state signals that even our consciousness of the past grows shallow if, at times out of foolishness and at times out of idealisation, we constantly keep looking back. If we conducted a thorough sociological survey of knowledge, the result would in all likelihood be that there is no concept of past, present or future in the current mass consciousness (of space and time). (Mass consciousness does, of course, always possess a peculiar, superficial and uncertain consciousness of past and present.)

The absence of a conceptual consciousness should not fool us. It by no means entails a loss of consciousness; there was nothing to lose from the consciousness of the recent past. Following the fifties and the sixties (when the former mass consciousness was drastically eradicated and brought into uniformity), mass consciousness was partly individualised, partly reconstructed and partly modernised.

If we call the reality of everyday life supreme reality, after Berger and Luckmann, we may say that in the last fifty years mass consciousness has become individualised and modernised to the extent that supreme reality has gradually become modernised and made possible personal and collective individualisation.

Today, however, there is inevitably neither a strategic nor a current consciousness of the future. Nothing can thus be stolen for there has been a total absence of dreams, a sense or thoughts of the future in recent times. Apparently everything is woeful and void. The general tone continues to be downbeat. Central Europe is up to its neck in the filth of disillusionment. Even knowledgeable classes do little but curse and tend to exude the sour flavour of the past. There is a quite peculiar and hitherto undiscovered reason for all this: on the one hand there was no conscious or utopian consciousness of the future, and on the other hand there was an exaggerated (almost utopian) expectation for the future in the subconscious of the collective

mass consciousness.

In my hypothesis, the subconscious disappointment of mass consciousness is the most palpable reason for the indifference concerning the future and, indeed, for the fear of yet another disillusionment.

At this point I must digress. The subconscious of social consciousness (i.e. mass consciousness and high consciousness) basically consists of two components, the so-called culture consciousness and life consciousness (everyday past consciousness), but the two together can be defined as culture consciousness. This latter could be called universal past consciousness, millenary consciousness, civilisation consciousness or value consciousness as well. Thus it follows that mass cultures affect current mass consciousness only when and if they can touch this culture consciousness in the subconscious surreptitiously. There is, therefore, no mass culture without culture consciousness.

Consequently, my hypothesis is that mass culture can never ever spoil culture consciousness; on the contrary, the more intensely culture consciousness is touched, the more successful the prevailing mass culture will be. This way mass consciousness is not, by nature, inaccessible to conceptional past or possible future consciousness either.

Even so the future tends to be alien, alarming, like some sort of unknown disease or a monster figure coming from a hostile planet, in the high consciousness<sup>2</sup> and mass consciousness of today. It is something to be feared, if for nothing else at least because everyday (supreme) reality comprises institutionally programmed strategies of actions which are difficult to dispense with even in an age that does have a future shape.

In the meantime, however, Hungary is making the most momentous decisions of the century as it steps out of the socialist/capitalist frame of the nation state and dives into the also frowningly contemplated integration process of the continent of Europe. Worse still, most people today would gladly pull a stocking over their head or hide away in a cosy corner if there was one in this marginal frontier town on the edge of globalisation.

As if there were anywhere to hide.

There is nothing surprising in all this: the foggy prospect of European integration works as a secret substitute for utopia (concealed personal hope) in the partly reconstructed and modernised mass consciousness. While the sceptical tone of public intercourse demands, as it were, the denial of secret hopes, rational and irrational anxiety mounts on account of the hazy prospects. (These phenomena also show that the subconscious of mass consciousness works very well indeed.)

As the turn of the millennium approaches, the particular emotional experience and way of thinking of Hungarians assess the not-too-distant past as a mistake, and project the disappointing image of everyday present as well as their hopeful/hopeless experience of life onto the future shape, which they consider to be alien anyhow.

Alien because they do not know it, because they do not understand it.

But the future does not begin tomorrow. If anything, it started at least yesterday, in the age of a mass consciousness lacking a vision of or showing indifference towards the future. At the same time Hungarian society, most of which would rather shun the future, (and here comes the paradox) already inhabits an edifice of the future, which - like any old house - is being remodelled and refurbished from top to bottom. Not even the most primitive current consciousness has really perceived that in the next twenty or thirty years Hungary will, in all certainty, become quite different from the way it is now.

We are in a future that reshapes everything, while many people would gladly back out even of the present because everyday (supreme) reality still appears well and truly immobile. Ostensibly, this is an emotionally, intellectually fatigued, worn-out country if we are to believe most of the influential, tone-setting social groups and the well-learned and well-drilled public orations. In the opinion of many, Hungary's knowledgeable class is forgetting its

affinity with erudition, although we are right on the threshold of an era that strives to raise the worth of knowledge above all else.

The high consciousness of the age is, therefore, becoming not only more individualised but also more structured: inner differences grow at a fast pace. This is so partly because certain groups of knowledge integrate in power groups, and partly because other words, other symbols and other contents gain in importance irrespective of power statuses. The latest trend is contrary to this, namely a covert and overt expectation for the future, indeed a concept for the future has emerged despite the differences in values.

Consequently, now there are a number of intellectual minorities, old and new trades, organised groups, local groups of intellectuals that focus on the future, see the actual horizon and, without turning a blind eye to the dangers, set about (what is more, have already done so) preparing a multifarious future. These are, as a rule, mixed types of consciousness: idealised modernising expectations, post-modern freedom wishes, retrieval of elements of culture consciousness from the subconscious or, say, theoretically thought out utopia programmes. They number few in comparison with the representatives of mass consciousness, occasionally continue to be divided, but they may and, indeed, will inevitably take over the intellectual leadership of the country, as the temperature of the social atmosphere rises feverishly around them, and more and more people who (used to) lack future consciousness are now involved in specific development tasks.

This indicates that elements of the supreme reality as well as the strategic reality, which become more and more integrated in the former (and belong to the realm of a knowledge reality affected by high consciousness<sup>3</sup>), surface not only in high consciousness but occasionally even in mass consciousness. These are at once coupled with desires and illusions (which display a marked presence in people's subconscious).

It is as if the world could be saved right away. As if the (at least 200-year-old) logic of today's world could change overnight. Yet this desire may well prompt the emergence of at least partially utopian and mass consciousness.

It is not yet clear, however, if this minority and this future consciousness will be able to bring round the majority, the mass consciousness, particularly when no-one can hold out the promise of a clear and perfect future. It might work if we rely on culture consciousness or/and build future consciousness.

## **2. The Concept of Future Country**

I am not out to convince anyone. Forces far more powerful than myself will soon clear away the abounding cobwebs from mass consciousness in any case. That in itself will be quite a bitter process.

The best of the knowledgeable class in Hungary have already realised the onslaught of a change of world epoch, which happens to be independent from the turn of the millennium. The best of the younger generations (I beg forgiveness for my bias) are already the most active forces behind a change in the way of thinking. (The best are, again, a minority of high consciousness, of course.)

Now the question is not only whether we shall witness the birth of intellectually great generations but whether the programme of these generations takes shape and becomes effective far and wide in the next few decades. After all, it is not the entire past that has lost its validity and worth, only the laws and categories of the recent past (widespread in mass consciousness) have become outdated. So what are the old concepts still good for?

Nothing is more badly needed than a future concept, even if that concept does not, at present, offer full recovery or a panacea. This essay endeavours to outline a type of future consciousness and future shape which runs by the alias of knowledge county. It could well be given other names too, i.e. intellectual society, information society, culture society, ecology country, mental hygiene nation or, simply, a country that opts for the future, a resurrecting

society, a nation that stands for revival.

This knowledge country is not simply a topical strategic concept. If we talk of the fundamental change (strategic objective) of global reality, this can be no other than *the continual qualitative improvement and subsequent, socially even distribution of high knowledge*<sup>4</sup>, the aim of which is to gradually incorporate high knowledge into mass consciousness and, as a result, to speed up the qualitative improvement of supreme reality. We assume there is constant interaction between supreme reality and high knowledge, so the change of world epoch is more than high knowledge transforming supreme (everyday) reality; it is true the other way around too - the (best-case scenario of qualitatively influenced and controlled) transformation of everyday reality inspires the reform of high consciousness too.

I may be even more categorical: the concept of the knowledge society differs from earlier programmes precisely in as much as it is primarily committed to supreme reality and is, even more, interested in its improvement. Or, in even coarser terms, if supreme reality is essentially subjected reality, while the ruling reality is the complex power of global and regional forces driving everyday life, the task can be no other than creating the balance between prevailing and subjected reality.

The choice of name for the knowledge country programme may be of little importance. But the direction of global trends appear almost definite: what happened yesterday and the day before has now suddenly come to an end. In our money-and-power-focused (neo-)capitalism a knowledge-and-life-centred society, which fundamentally negates and transcends this model, has been born. This is already part of the prevailing and subjected reality too. It has emerged as a programme as well. It is basically not of utopian consciousness by nature but the description of rational and even unavoidable future consciousness and future trend.

The change is not evident in a wide spectrum because the two models exist simultaneously, fusing and separating, constituting continuity and negation at the same time. The finance capitalism of the last ten years has gained energy and power from the new global model still in a minority. No-one has the ability to predict how, when and where the global process will turn into something radically different, and whether that will or will not be the way we expect it today. This trend analysis becomes utopian if it expresses the certainty of a positive end result to the process.

Many people agree that global, continental and national power spheres (i.e. the prevailing realities) are generally little interested in, on the contrary, are even dead set against, the global change of models. Current (and still primitively tuned) mass thinking in Hungary today, and even most representatives of high knowledge see only negative world trends in globalism, while any significant change of paradigm in Europe or Hungary is unthinkable if not effected within or as part of a global model change.

If the global model change is not effected by politics or the political power elite, then by who? The question is in part incorrect because even today many political and power interests are linked to the global model change. It is no coincidence that the central strategy of the European Union (another prevailing reality) basically aims at accomplishing the information society. If not politics, will it be the economy? The question is yet again incorrect in part because the monetary finance economy does not wish to question itself, yet the information economy or, more broadly, the knowledge-based economy definitely backs the model change. If it is not the economy that is the force of decisive importance, then is it the global or regional knowledgeable classes? Highly unlikely, as the conservation of powers is effected by the intellectual elite (high knowledge) in many parts of the world, while groups of strategic knowledge seriously urge the creation of a knowledge world. If the knowledgeable classes are not enough to accomplish the breakthrough, will the fantastic self-development of technology break down the factors of fiercest resistance? The question might be wrong yet again. In any

case it seems to me that it is the development of technology that does the most to lead the way to a change of world.

There is another important aspect. Hungary's forms of being and forms of reality continue to hinge upon Central European history and mass consciousness, and today's macro-structures in Hungary fundamentally depend on the movement of and quest for the future of the global field of force. Despite this the global and continental field of force allow a certain freedom of movement and choice of consciousness, which makes it possible to think over and implement one's own model change according to one's independent future shape.

But: 1. *An independent future shape cannot reject the values of the Hungarian (and universal) past completely and cannot be diametrically opposed to the metatrends of the global world.* 2. *One's own model change cannot divest itself of all hitherto established (national) institutions and forms of being, and at the same time cannot quit the current economic and political structures of the developed world.* There is only so much room to move in. It is narrow and wide at the same time. It practically closes all avenues and yet it opens up fantastic horizons. It is inconceivable for dogmatists, and incomprehensible for those who follow the old rut.

I am sorry to say but this no longer relates directly to any one system of European thought and can no longer be described in terms of capitalism, socialism or alternatives of a third, new type of system. Apply the old categories and you get modern world neo-capitalism, virtual socialism, and a third, fourth or fifth (etc.) way. To be more precise, it is all of these as yet, but no longer any one of them in particular. It is a newer and newer formation of all of them. Many a time it is a mixture of new reality structures<sup>5</sup> not called by any name. Academic sciences are still at a stage of elaborating classical minds and states of consciousness. They have not even understood them all.

If we reconsider this scope, we come upon a number of astonishing parallels. Let us see the first connection. It is debatable whether *the Hungarian past* is still a living, organic entity or a lifeless museum piece, but it is hardly questionable that Hungary and all other small Central European nations have gone through a culture-centred development. That is so simply because they were neither world powers nor world economic players, and hence the best national and international results could be achieved in the field of culture. Quite understandably, no-one wishes to throw this culture, and within that the highest quality folk and high culture, out the window of the future. Even intellectuals of differing groups of knowledge have reached consensus in defence of high culture.

Let us now turn to the other connection. It is debatable whether *the global information society* is the mere salvaging of the current centres of power in the world or the first and, therefore, most primitive version of the save-all model, but it is hardly questionable that it is a future model focused on intellectual capital and, more broadly, on culture in general as opposed to the earlier politics and economy-oriented models. That is so simply because knowledge, intellectual capital and culture are gradually replacing the army, the economy, finance capital and the political class (the integrated power class and its prevailing reality) as the key to keeping power. Quite understandably, every continent, every global power group and every national state wants to obtain and turn to good use this new knowledge, this new quality.

If this holds true, it is hard to fail to realise that *Hungary's culture-oriented social development and the global culture-oriented future alternative do not cancel each other out; on the contrary, they may reinforce each other.*

The knowledge society (knowledge nation, knowledge country, knowledge state, knowledge region, knowledge democracy and knowledge citizen) programme I describe is on the whole based on this recognition. It is no other than the concept of the future country.

It is quite clear that the notion of intellectual capital, knowledge and culture do not mean

the same. It is just that in Hungarian, my native tongue, the terms "country of intellectual capital" or "culture country" do not sound very well, hence I opt for the word "knowledge". As a metaphor too. It is exceptionally used as synonymous with culture for the intents and purposes of this essay.

By knowledge country the author means that increasing knowledge and making use of it will be the be-all and end-all of all the changes effected in the Hungarian (and Central European) model over the next 50-100 years. This perfectly coincides with the world trends to make the economy of the future a knowledge-based economy, the society of the future a knowledge-oriented society, the politics of the future knowledge-centred politics, the democracy of the future knowledge democracy, the citizen of the future knowledge citizen, and the programme of the future a knowledge programme. This is no qualitative wordplay, no art of punning; every new, complex notion will be explained in detail.

Unlike several other authors<sup>6</sup>, I do not believe that the European alternative can be narrowed down to financial or ecological reforms, or even to having bourgeois democracy radically overhauled, because there is basically no other way than *the European knowledge society alternative*, a part of which will inevitably be the democratisation of the functioning of the European Union or the re-weaving of the social net all over the continent.

The essence of a Hungarian knowledge country strategy, just as the strategic objective of a change of world, is as follows: 1. Hungary should become a European centre of knowledge. 2. Hungary should become a regional (Central European) centre of knowledge. 3. Hungary should become a knowledge country, i.e. a) value-oriented high consciousness should gradually replace mass consciousness devoid of knowledge; b) potentially all Hungarian citizens should have access to high consciousness or high-level knowledge; c) the knowledge society (which allows greater equality of opportunity) should replace consumption-oriented mass society in Hungary too; d) the Hungarian economy should become a regional centre in the global knowledge-based economy which will replace the profit-oriented and already manipulated (though still market-based) world economy; e) the knowledge country is unimaginable without the emergence of a network of special knowledge regions of limited autonomy, etc.

All this, therefore, is no unrealistic vision, no idealistic utopia consciousness, but more than just a rational plan of the future or a pragmatic (short-term) prognosis.

This long-term knowledge country vision is basically no different from the future shape of the already formed global information and communication society, particularly from the information society strategy of the European Union. The Irish, Finnish, Greek or Portuguese information society programme can serve as an example for us because they too, as the least developed members of the European Union, have opted for a similar, knowledge-based alternative. At the same time we can safely state that some well-elaborated constituent elements of planning the information society have become widespread in Europe: these range from information technology to teleworking or from distance teaching to electronic commerce.

The European information society strategy was based on the Bangemann Report published in the summer of 1994. The first sentences read as follows: "Throughout the world, information and communications technologies are generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far-reaching as those of the past. It is a revolution based on information, itself the expression of human knowledge." The head of government of Europe, Jacques Santer (President of the European Commission) says: "Dawn of a new age, the industrial or socio-economic revolution - whatever description we choose - the Information Society is now upon us. This is not intergalactic pipe dreams, not futurologists running wild!" Similar ideas are expressed by Klaus Hänsch, President of the European Parliament too: "There is no doubt about the fact, that the question of the information society is one of the

most important questions in our century<sup>7</sup>."

The problem is not that this recognition has not reached Hungarian mass consciousness. How could it when the Hungarian mass media hardly ever mention it? Hungarian intellectuals - with the exception of the majority of computerised or media intellectuals - voice but their doubts provided they have the least idea of what the information society is, which is not merely an information technology revolution in the strict sense of the word. It is a new, comprehensive paradigm. A new world economic and world social model, if you will. It is the name of a knowledge-based integrated economic, social and political system which, by being basically defined in terms of intellectual capital and culture, is a new formation in itself.

Not so long ago many people yearned for a world revolution. Well, this is it. The only snag is that it is not revolutionary by nature but is far more effective than any revolution could be.

It is by far not clear in Hungary today that the information society is the basic model of the next century, the epoch of intellectual capital and knowledge. (For the purposes of this essay the metaphor of the knowledge society is used for the era of the information society.)

What is the challenge of the turn of the millennium? When Hungary joins the European Union, it will not be entering a vacuum or the economic and social structures of the past; it will be entering the information society straight away. The concept of the knowledge society is not a plan for the distant future, therefore, but a strategy already topical now. Or at least so it should be for any Hungarian government.

The knowledge country concept I have elaborated at times only follows the known development plans and at times transcends the global and European proposals. It offers novelties in two aspects: a) it integrates the already existing information society elements, and b) it invents new institutions and services. Not to mention the fact that we envisage a qualitative change by shifting the emphasis from information to culture, and embrace not only economic and government strategies but the reform of the supreme (everyday) reality as well.

In our (knowledge country) strategy of national hue and (within that) in the concept of knowledge regions we have striven to merge all elements that can be adopted in the development of Hungarian society and thinking. We have also considered partially or completely new institutions and content industry services in the light of the history of the institutions and services of amplifying and disseminating knowledge in Hungary.

The future programmes of the history of Hungarian thought constitute organic antecedents for the knowledge country vision. We could cite a number of great thinkers from the history of Hungarian thought ranging from József Eötvös to István Széchenyi, from Mihály Babits to László Németh, from János Pilinszky to (surprise, surprise) Tibor Liska. May I recall some of their ideas now. "Having pronounced equality in our laws, we must not fail to act upon implementing it. And there is no other way to do it, according to our experience, than to extend education and culture to all classes of the nation." (József Eötvös) "Among the phenomena presented to us by the intellectual life of our age I know no other more important for the life of individuals, societies or countries than the spread of a longing for knowledge in the widest strata of society on the one hand, and the adequate manifestation of the ability to communicate and disseminate knowledge in all walks and even the highest spheres of academic life on the other hand." (Zsolt Beöthy) "I cannot imagine a classless society, if it exists not only nominally but in effect in the cultural level of the people, as anything other than an *intellectual society*." (László Németh) "Today, only the other path can be followed, the one that is akin to that of German culture, namely that which brings together diverging intellectual forces in many small centres, joining onto existing rural culture openings, only to lay the foundations of the decentralised Hungarian culture of the future." (Károly Mannheim) Whole books could be filled with quotations from the greats of the history of Hungarian

thought in which they unanimously agree that the future of Hungary must be erected on knowledge, erudition and culture.

The Hungarian future country concept is hence the knowledge country programme (involving primarily the wide-spread utilisation of high knowledge), which coincides on the one hand with the future plan of the global world and on the other the messages and dreams of the history of Hungarian thought.

### **3. The Elements of the Knowledge Country Vision**

If Hungary were one of the developed countries, it would hardly have any other option than to adapt quickly and completely to the existing (mainly potentially existing) future and the demands of that future. If it had slowly slipped down to the level of the third world, it would have no other choice in the short run than inevitably adapt to defeat. As it is in a situation where it belongs to the group of countries of average development, however, it possesses a unique kind of autonomy. This relative autonomy cannot be preserved unless the country composes its vision in keeping with and not distancing itself from the global and European metatrends. This is no subservience but creative adaptation. Regular future-building.

We are not doomed to the future, and apparently we shall not perish should we not opt for the future. This appearance conveys a real basis for the (futureless) mass consciousness and the reluctance of the knowledgeable class.

But in the event of Hungary opting for the future and building that future on a high level, it may reach the developed world in a matter of fifteen to twenty-five years.

If the information society, the knowledge society is imaginable only as a network in essence, it is quite understandable that supplementary elements such as the ecology society, technological development, education in general, the state's developing and balancing role, regionalism or participatory democracy can horizontally link onto the information society nucleus centre. It follows, therefore, that the knowledge society, similarly to the system of cells, is composed of interdependent, interconnected and interactive parts. Consequently, it is worth attributing qualifiers to the term "the knowledge society": *the life and environment-friendly knowledge society could be Hungary's programme for the 21st century.*

The vision of the knowledge country comprises a number of constituent visions: 1. Knowledge-based economy, information economy, teleworking; 2. Information technology, access to knowledge; 3. Knowledge parliament, knowledge society, knowledge democracy; 4. Knowledge teaching, knowledge communications, distance learning; 5. Knowledge region, knowledge subregion, knowledge settlement; 6. Knowledge family, knowledge citizen, quality of life. The detailed strategy of Hungary's knowledge society (information society) is still awaiting comprehensive elaboration.

1. *Knowledge-based economy, information society, teleworking.* Strategies: strategy of knowledge-based economy, strategy of information economy, strategy of social policy (life policy) of the information society, strategy of teleworking, ecological strategy, strategy of home telebanking services, strategy of electronic commerce, strategy of digital parks and future parks.

2. *Information technology, access to knowledge.* Strategies: technical and technological strategy, telecommunications strategy, national transport strategy, information and communications strategy, national research and development strategy, access to knowledge strategy.

3. *Knowledge parliament, knowledge state, knowledge democracy.* Strategies: strategy of participatory democracy, strategy of government (knowledge government), strategy of the developing (knowledge) state, strategy of the parliament of the future (virtual parliament), strategy of local (civil) society, strategy of law-making and constitutionalism.

4. *Knowledge teaching, knowledge communications, distance learning.* Strategies: strategy of education and culture, strategy of adult education, strategy of distance learning,

media strategy, strategy of audio-visual culture, strategy of public service radio and television, strategy of knowledge houses, strategy of developing the Internet, strategy of preserving national intellectual values, strategy of national content industry, strategy of national digital library and archives.

5. *Knowledge region, knowledge subregion, knowledge settlement.* Strategies: strategy of Hungarian settlement planning, strategy of knowledge regions and knowledge subregions, strategy of knowledge cities and knowledge villages, strategy of local knowledge society, strategy of artisan economy, strategy of experimental projects, strategy of electronic self-governance, strategy of telemedicine, strategy of space informatics, strategy of telehouses.

6. *Knowledge family, knowledge citizen, quality of life.* Strategies: strategy of knowledge citizen, strategy of national mental hygiene, strategy of digital detached houses, strategy of nature-lover life style, strategy of utilising alternative energies, strategy of art, strategies of religions, strategy of family knowledge services, strategy of family consumption, strategy of protecting the private sphere and personal data.

Is this too much or too little?

Is it too much part of the present or too much part of the future? Is the programme still subjected to the (recent) past, or does it reject the past and the present far too much?

The Bangemann Report published four years ago outlined the following as enhanced development areas for a developed Europe: teleworking (more jobs, new jobs, for a mobile society), distance learning (life-long learning for a changing society), a network for universities and research centres (networking Europe's brain power), telematic services for SMEs (relaunching a main engine for growth and employment in Europe), road traffic management, air traffic control (an electronic airway for Europe), healthcare networks, electronic tendering (more effective administration at lower cost), trans-european public administration network (better government, cheaper government), city information highways (bringing the information society into the home).

So I ask again: is all this too much or too little? Three and a half years after the Bangemann Report the European Commission's continual (rolling) action plan consists of as many as 338 articles (guidelines, proposals and resolutions) even if not every article comprises a new subject. (This action plan was published in Hungarian in February 1998 in the book entitled "What Is the Future?".)

The branches of information and communications technology in the Irish strategy (Information Society Ireland. Strategy for Action) embraced the following: financial services (including telebanking), software services, on-line information services, distance learning, telemedicine, home shopping, electronic spending services, travel information, consulting services, entertainment multimedia services, planning services, teleshopping, technical support groups, office management services, distance perception services, research development, logistical services, media services, environmental protection services, distance maintenance, animation and computer graphics. A list twice this long could easily have been produced, I believe.

Furthermore, the Irish project names flagship projects as well: virtual cities, Net TV, "cyber" schools, knowledge resource centres. Dublin is meant to be the first virtual city, Net TV is to be an interactive television series about the Irish information society, "cyber" school means that educational institutions and libraries in Ireland are to be linked onto the Internet through ISDN, while the knowledge resource centres are to co-ordinate information demand and supply.

Skipping the description of the concepts of the leading nations, I must state that the small European nations make an incredibly ambitious effort to meet the future (strategic future) half way. So from their point of view the Hungarian knowledge society strategy is a basically realistic and rational future plan, and may even be ahead of them in its well elaborated and

systematised concept, but looking at it from Budapest it seems a utopia some thirty to fifty years ahead, which is unrealistic for the time being. In Hungary even computer engineers believe that, say, the marriage or combination, the marketing and mass purchase of the PC and the television (see PCTV) is not viable in the next ten years.

If I did not quote the European examples, I am convinced that nine out of ten readers of the Hungarian knowledge society programme would consider it a strategy for the mid-21st century. The paradox appears to be a lasting one: the futureless mass consciousness is not in harmony with Hungary, which is much nearer to the future.

Moreover, the six points I drew up could have contained a number of other comprehensive or specific strategies. Since the information society is not merely an information technology or telecommunications strategy, and the knowledge society is not merely an educational strategy, we might as well adapt to the development practice followed the world over, namely that *the knowledge society amounts to comprehensive and systematic development in all walks of the economy, the state, society and education, or to an inevitably new type of modernisation policy.*

I shall now analyse some of these strategies.

- *Information technology, access to knowledge.* Let me highlight but one group of subjects: the interactive information-communications network. The Hungarian electronic information-communications system is partly underdeveloped, partly fast becoming out-dated: the majority of families have a television set, but most of those sets are superannuated; telephone line penetration has improved drastically in the last few years, but it will be long before every household in Hungary has one; for the moment only a low percentage of families have acquired a PC, and the number of Internet users per one thousand citizens is no more than forty (250 thousand altogether); Hungary does not plan at present to implement a superhighway network, not even for higher education or the academic research network; compared to the low incomes and international standard fees, telephone tariffs and Internet fees are extremely costly in Hungary; a very modest number of households are tapped by cable television systems, and cable television services do not as yet make organised access to knowledge possible; etc.

The following changes are expected in the next decades: even in the event of a low level of infrastructural development almost all households are expected to have a connected telephone line, and even the videotelephone might become widespread; presumably every second or third household will possess a PC, and Hungary will catch up with the level of Finland today (245 per one thousand citizens) within 5 to 7 years in the optimal case when it comes to Internet usage; in the event of a world class level of infrastructural development 70-80 per cent of households in Hungary will have joined the (technically integrated) information-communications network (i.e. telephone, cable television and PC connection) within 10 years; citizens will be able to establish contact through cable optics, broadcast (mainly AM micro) and satellite networks; in short we may say that thanks to the phenomenal development of information technology it now seems a realistic plan that soon any citizen of the world will theoretically be able to communicate interactively with any other citizen, organisation or institution any place on earth.

Hungarian infrastructural (information technology) development policy, whatever financial conditions it has at its disposal, has no other option than to endeavour in the next two parliamentary periods of four to eight years to propagate world class technology in Hungary as fast as possible, which will mean both that Hungary will link onto the global information-communications networks, national superhighways will be developed in Hungary, almost all households will be tapped by the interactive information-communications system and fees will be considerably reduced and the tariffs of later services will be kept low. Should Hungary fail to follow the suggested concept of knowledge regions and if

development happens spontaneously, without conceptional planning, solely in tandem with the interests of the infrastructural market, the information technology boom will take place all the same, but in that case it will have an extremely uneven social and distributional structure and will incur a high cost.

- *Knowledge parliament, knowledge state, knowledge democracy.* Within this only the future of the national assembly. The European Parliament model has become superannuated for a number of reasons: there are no well-defined social classes and hence the parties cannot be associated with social classes; voters gradually lose their faith in today's parliamentary democracy which has prevailed since the 19th century; citizens in today's modern societies will not make do with franchise alone but they strive for direct participation instead; national legislation becomes rather limited in scope in a global economy and society; the role and prestige of parliaments gradually decreases due to the growing competence of the governments; the parties of national parliaments represent, almost without exception, the interests of the power elite; the competence of national parliaments considerably shrinks in the European Union compared to the authority of the European Parliament and particularly the European Commission; in electronic democracy all citizens will become virtual MPs in a matter of 10-20 years; in as little as a few decades the widespread use of the system of electronic (binding and non-binding) referendums will become technically possible.

Changes expected in the next fifty years: the global parliamentary network will unfold; some kind of world parliament will be called for; the role of the European Parliament will grow; the role of national parliaments will be radically changed and some form of regional legislature will be called into being; the Hungarian parliament should have a lower and upper house (first and second chamber), and the two chambers should not be hierarchical in structure but should share the tasks; upper houses have tended to lose importance compared to the lower houses in the last one hundred years, but soon a contrary process is expected to get under way as the upper houses will constitute the knowledge parliament; the second chamber will allow the representation of all the important interest groups and spheres of importance (employees, employers, churches, chambers of commerce, nationalities, territorial associations, civil organisations, prominent personalities, European regions between countries and the Hungarians of the world); in a gradually developing electronic representational democracy all citizens are potentially virtual members of parliament, all vital issues can be decided through electronic referendums, and electronic governance can be introduced first on the local government and subsequently on the state administration level. Knowledge parliament does not simply mean that in a knowledge country the national assembly can be automatically called knowledge parliament but that significant (high) knowledge is necessary both for experts and members to make good decisions, and the national assembly does not only bring legislation to codify the changes which have already taken place but undertakes the strategic running of the country. In other words, it constitutionally controls the knowledge country as well as the changes.

The road of transition leading from the traditional form of parliament to the electronic assembly of the future will be relatively long, spanning at least two or three parliamentary periods. First the parliamentary committee sessions will be held through video conference, then the traditional members of the lower house can request a partial, informative voting on certain issues, or local electronic referendums or elections can be organised in some intelligent villages or regions, until finally "Internet representatives" elected or delegated in one way or another will become members of the second chamber with their own proper mandate. Then it is just another step on the road when first the elected representatives are obliged to ask through electronic means the opinion of citizens in their constituency concerning acts of parliament both during the process of drafting and before voting, and

subsequently the roles are radically and irrevocably reversed, as the citizens will decide in all cases empowering through electronic means their member of parliament with a mostly binding mandate. The changes can probably reach a stage when the citizens will be able to participate directly in parliamentary decision-making and can dispense with the middleman. No more than a co-ordinator or desk officer will be needed. Naturally, the transition can unfold according to a different scenario too, through different stages, but it can hardly be queried that classical (but outdated) parliament democracy will turn into electronic participatory democracy (institutionally not yet matured). Many people foresee intense efforts on behalf of the political elite either in power or in opposition to slow down this type of development of democracy, but this slowing action can only cause political or legitimisation conflicts and provoke crises.

- *Knowledge teaching, knowledge communications, distance learning.* Within this only one group of questions: adult education and distance learning in adult education. Knowledge and knowledge transmission in Hungarian society is quantitatively little and qualitatively somewhat outdated compared to the global epoch change. As little as 9 per cent of Hungarian citizens (over 15) have been through some form of higher education, while this proportion is two or three times greater in leading developed countries. The knowledge acquired in colleges and universities loses its validity in seven years at best, so the adult population ought to do high level refresher courses at least every ten years. Many people have realised that Hungarian adult education is not well thought out, and the system of vocation training is no substitute for the missing chain of universities apt to teach adults. Post-graduate training ought to play a much more prominent part in higher education. The network of people's colleges are by far not satisfactory as a means of secondary adult education in Hungary. Adult illiteracy also ought to be decreased. In adult education distance learning nothing but PC instruction has been launched to date; etc.

What would be necessary in a matter of twenty years? At least half of all Hungarian citizens ought to be involved in systematic, thorough and intensive adult education and distance learning at least every ten years. A comprehensive, national adult educational system should be implemented: there should be schools and education for the basic training of illiterates and semi-illiterates; those who have been through elementary school should attend workers' secondary schools or other but similarly open forms of education; more and more citizens should gain new knowledge, old and new guidelines and community-building techniques in an extended, nation-wide network of people's colleges; the well-functioning system of vocational training should be made part of the national distance learning scheme; colleges and universities should endeavour to make second and third degrees more accessible; post-graduate training should, in any case, gain more prominence in the Hungarian educational system; universities for adult education (civil universities or similar types of education) should appear in all regions and subregions; adult educational institutions should also be able to offer degrees recognised by the state in an effort to improve graduates' chances in the labour market; Hungary should introduce the European registration which grants competence cards for personal expertise; the national concept and network of distance learning in adult education should at last be created.

To bridge the gap between the long-term objective and today's reality at least fifteen regional civil universities should be established within the next five years. These could transmit the new knowledge (the radically different quality of knowledge of the information society era) and the new life strategies intensively in the three-year (higher) education and through distance learning available all around the country at civil universities. These latter take the concept of European open universities one step further and basically strive to meet the requirements of the global knowledge society.

#### **4. Knowledge region and knowledge citizen**

In an authoritarian centralised society or in every epoch of Hungary's economic and social progress in the last two hundred years developing the country has meant the establishment and running of no more than one (centralised) national institution for each area or task of greater importance. Hungary has, therefore, had one national assembly (the country not being a federal state), one trade union centre, one national bank, one federation of Hungarian industrialists, one (central) faculty of arts, one national theatre or one central archives. As a result of state development and spontaneous progress a number of regional centres sprung up (provincial towns, county institutions, regional intellectual centres, the local branches of central organisations), but seldom did these regional institutions play as important a role as the central institutions. The regional institutions, moreover, created a huge gap with entire regions and zones being left unattended and uncatered for. This is why, among other reasons, we can say that regional and settlement differences reflect social and intellectual differences in Hungary as well. Inequalities in the structure of settlements increased rather than decreased in the last thirty years of socialism functioning on the basis of rational central planning.

In the eighties and particularly in the nineties, as multi-party democracy and the market economy were becoming institutionalised, the number of power centres, the economic centres and the national cultural institutions doubled or multiplied: we no longer have just one party headquarters, one employers' association or one writers' association. The aforesaid notwithstanding, not one state leadership or intellectual workshop, either in the last century or after World War II or at the time of the change of regime (perhaps with the exception of the Erdei-Bibó county concept), has ever come up with a strategic development concept on how to establish a horizontal rather than vertical and hierarchical country structure to create a new Hungary that could offer relatively similar social and life opportunities to its citizens. This strategy was never conceived perhaps because regional differences appear almost as natural differences on the one hand, and no era or political line ever planned 30-50 years ahead on the other hand. It is also not a negligible fact that none of the governments possessed the political stability and financial resources to elaborate such a grandiose and comprehensive future strategy. One must never overlook, furthermore, that the Trianon peace treaty (peace dictate) obviously rendered Hungary's relatively acceptable territorial, settlement and social structure impossible to reconstruct for at least one hundred years.

As long as Hungary retains her current regional structure, the dire state of her settlement structure and the social and cultural differences they entail, any talk of knowledge country or knowledge citizen is just an illusion. The future is by no means a series of identical conditions and institutions in the 5-7 (big) regions, the 19 counties, the 100-130 subregions and the approximately 3200 settlements. Yet according to the knowledge society concept planning the future and development trends of the structure of Hungarian settlements is very timely both historically and strategically. For that the initial hypothesis is as follows: 1. Planning should start not on the level of individual counties or settlements but on the level of subregions. Seeing that both the incentivated and spontaneous organisation of subregions has begun in the last decade, the current network of natural, settlement, economic and social subregions can be described relatively easily and exactly. 2. Every subregion should draft its own development plan, naturally in keeping with what Hungary might be like in fifty years' time and what the national regional development concept offers. One of the pivotal principles of drafting this concept is that the subregion should also have several centres, since institutions and services embracing the whole of the subregion can be situated in different settlements. 3. As it soon becomes clear what tasks and what requirements the subregion is unable to fulfil on its own, the national regional development plan should consider how to organise the larger region (say half a county or a whole county, or a region of the country, or eventually a European interregion) for varying functions in varying fields. 4. It is highly likely that certain

institutions and services will be needed in all the subregions and, inevitably, there will be other organisations and options that might vary from subregion to subregion depending on local particularities, ideas and constraints.

Whether a subregion or region may be a community big or latent enough to exert social pressure for the services of the knowledge region to be ensured for the good of the community is a weighty theoretical and practical problem<sup>8</sup>. This raises the dilemma whether to consider the knowledge region as a voluntary group (community!), which can be justly expected to join forces for their common territorial, economic and intellectual goals, or this territorial-social unit cannot be regarded as a latent community, and development should be left up to the co-operation of local governments or (much smaller) professional groups interested in development. Researchers of collective action doubt that such a social fragment (of at least 80-100 thousand citizens in a subregion) would be willing to organise itself into a group able to perform concerted action "only because they would have good reason to do so as a group, although smaller groups might well do so" (M.Olson). Therefore the correct answer is that instead of the unorganised big community, "smaller groups", economic and civil associations organised in the interest of the region may elaborate the concept of the knowledge region and cater for its development and control.

By knowledge region we may mean a virtual community or a symbolic group. In other words, once the knowledge region programme is implemented, shared knowledge in a given region may forge a virtual community capable of concerted action and self-management out of a "latent community" incapable of concerted action. For the moment this is but a hypothesis, and there is no way of telling if the knowledge region will, in effect, be a viable latent (virtual) community or not.

I for one do not exclude that possibility.

In any case it is no accident that the knowledge region strategy occupies a central place in the knowledge society concept because, on the one hand, territorial-social differences can be intensively moderated best within the framework of the global information-communications society and, on the other hand, only this new model makes it possible either in the developed or in the underdeveloped regions for real modernisation (culture revival or reconstruction if you will) to reach every citizen and family, and even those people who live socially isolated lives and do little for the public good.

The interactive society of today or tomorrow is basically horizontal in its structure and strives to disperse knowledge everywhere and to assist its spread from all sources irrespective of the degree to which the knowledge class and the knowledge offer improve social self-organisation. It follows from this that at least one hundred knowledge regions should come about in Hungary in the first half of the 21st century. By knowledge region (which we might call knowledge subregion, but that is somewhat more complicated to use) we mean territorial-social groups of 80-120 thousand people with a natural, economic and cultural potential for relative autonomy.

With a view to these principles and aims the knowledge regions, leaving aside the traditional institutions and possibilities for our present purposes, have been planned as follows.

- The (main) obligatory institutions of knowledge regions everywhere: subregion interactive information-communications networks (or interconnected networks), at least one or more knowledge house(s) and telehouse(s), media centre(s) and regional public service, commercial media, regional future parks, information economy parks, technology and innovation parks, interactive health houses, hospitals, homeopathy clinics, regional and local libraries, information banks, higher and adult educational institutions, civil universities in each region, virtual universities, ecology centres, eco-settlements, eco-zones, remote-controlled and

nature-friendly transport, regional alternative energy services, electronic public administration, regional tele-self-government, etc.

- The obligatory services of the knowledge regions to be provided everywhere: telephones for everyone, broadband optical and satellite television, PC connection, the current and future forms of the Internet, teleworking, distance learning, teaching electronic writing skills, home banking services, telemedicine and mental hygiene (tele)services, virtual economic enterprises, electronic commerce, telemarketing, cable television or microwave knowledge channels, space informatics, electronic direct democracy, multimedia entertainment games, etc.
- The not obligatory, optional institutions of the knowledge regions: knowledge cities and knowledge villages, videotelephone, national and regional teleparliament, regional art centres and schools, new type of special secondary, higher and adult educational institutions, provincial technology transfer centres, creativity centres, virtual science workshops, eco-houses, bio-economy enterprises, artisan houses, scientific and development centres, regional electronic dailies, journals, books, tourism with special services, certain knowledge regions joining the European Union's IRISI and RISI (interregional and regional) development programmes, etc.
- The also not obligatory, individual services of the knowledge region: a PC for at least one in every two families, Web-television (PCTV), regional local currency (or electronic currency), family robots at work, international teleworking possibilities, higher education distance learning in English and German, the introduction of a European health card, satellite-controlled transport and communications, virtual globetrotting, electronic church services, cars and trucks running on alternative energy, local knowledge communities, digital family houses, family knowledge services and media programmes, the new institutions of cyber democracy, etc.

If the subsequent governments are willing, all the basic institutions of all the regions and subregions of Hungary can be modernised and raised to the vanguard of the most developed countries in the world at a total cost of no more than one thousand billion HUF (i.e. 125 billion annually) calculated at 1997 rates in a matter of two parliamentary terms. We have elaborated a full investment and financial plan for one of Hungary's knowledge subregions on the basis of which we can say that the development together with the payable interests does not come near the above-mentioned 10 billion HUF per region. At most it amounts to 7 billion HUF. What is even more surprising is that the investment is recovered in less than seven years if we calculate that no more than 15 per cent of citizens use the services of the knowledge region for the time being.

At the same time nothing whatsoever justifies that this one thousand billion HUF should be financed exclusively by the state. It would be safe to say, in fact, that both domestic and foreign capital would be willing to participate in this knowledge society programme provided the government defrays, say, 30 per cent of the cost. That would mean 300 billion HUF instead of the one thousand billion, that is 37.5 billion HUF annually. If any Hungarian government fails to allocate such a sum for development for the next millennium annually, it does not deserve the power to govern the country. Hence the future plan of knowledge region or knowledge country is basically not a monetary but a financing problem. (If the rate of return is generally no longer than 7 to 10 years, it can even be an exceptionally good business undertaking.) Not to mention the fact that such a development strategy could practically reduce unemployment to under 3 per cent and ensure the currently most backward and inactive regions an incredible scope of action, whereby every family would experience palpable improvement in its life.

So what would Hungary be like around 2012-2016 once the knowledge regions have materialised? An earlier date could easily be set, but we might suppose a slight delay in the

investment or the governments might take longer than foreseen to implement all the planned development. We must not overlook, moreover, that the inner, qualitative development of the knowledge regions will not become widespread until about 5-10 years following the setting up of the institutions.

*Practically all the citizens of Hungary (who have finished at least six grades and who themselves want to) will turn into knowledge citizens, and Hungary will join the group of most developed countries in the world (even if the traditional indices such as the GDP place her elsewhere). In other words, knowledge reality will become the ruling reality, and high knowledge will become considerably integrated in mass consciousness.*

### **5. Utopian future vision?**

Do we dare to dream?

At the outset of this essay the author claimed that there was no capacity for utopia in this country. He was not quite accurate. It is true that no serious capacity for utopia is visible publicly, but it is partly fledged or virtually ready in professional circles, intellectual workshops and local (development) miracles. As long as the point of departure is not only the current state of mass consciousness, not only the high consciousness integrated in the power sphere and not only the post-modern mass culture, the change, the turn may well come about. The culture consciousness can be "excavated" from the subconscious of social consciousness, the old-new intellectual capital can be widely distributed, the potential of the global culture society may provide inspiration, the determined search of the better part of Hungary for the future and values may produce momentum, and the will of individuals and of society may gain strength. The knowledge country does stand a chance.

Do we then dare to plan rationally and decide rationally with a commitment to the future?

We have no reason to delay. Subsequent governments cannot possibly fail to recognise the inevitability of making decisions. Social groups or intellectual circles afraid of the future are unlikely to thwart progress. Most people will have been convinced once the first few knowledge regions have been built, anyway. Opponents will, nevertheless, constantly direct criticism at the leaders of development, thus spurring them on to continue to correct mistakes and improve the programme. Though it may sound utopian, I daresay that the knowledge country has virtually existed even up till now in its elements. But who will eventually achieve and when that the comprehensive strategy of the knowledge country be elaborated, that governments launch or carry on the national knowledge development programme on the basis of that, and that society (social consciousness) at last opt for a steady, value-oriented future?

In any case, a future vision may and does exist.

<sup>1</sup>Everyday knowledge varies in its inner structure through the ages. It is generally primary knowledge, which exists on a pre-theory level. (Cf. Peter L. Berger - Thomas Luckmann: The Social Construction of Reality.) In the age of mass societies it is quite justified to refer to everyday consciousness as mass consciousness.

<sup>2</sup>If "compared to the reality of everyday life other realities appear as a closed domain of meaning, as enclaves in the supreme reality characterised by specific meanings and manners of experiencing" (Berger-Luckmann op.cit.), then high knowledge (theoretical knowledge, knowledge of the knowledgeable class) also forms an enclave of a closed domain of meaning in institutionalised

<sup>3</sup>Beside the concept of supreme, everyday reality we must use an independent category for the reality of most knowledge categories (and other groups), which can be described as critical reality, strategic reality or knowledge reality. (In keeping with the logic of this essay "knowledge reality" seems to be the most acceptable concept.

<sup>4</sup>I do not mean the social distribution of knowledge (see: Alfred Schütz: The Everyday and Scientific Interpretation of Actions), but knowledge distribution that consciously influences the already existing distribution of knowledge.

<sup>5</sup>The analysis will have shown that I use the terms "everyday reality" (supreme reality), prevailing reality (the prevailing economic, political, etc. reality) and knowledge reality (the high level, strategic reality of knowledgeable groups, and the strategic elements of reality) to describe structured social reality. (Later on I shall introduce the term "virtual/symbolic reality" too.)

<sup>6</sup>See, for instance, Hans-Peter Martin-Harald Schumann: The Trap of Globalisation or Paul Kennedy: Preparing for the Twenty-first Century.

<sup>7</sup>The Japanese, American and the European programme is accessible in detail in the volume entitled What Is The Future? (The Information Society and The Hungarian Initiatives)

<sup>8</sup>One of the representatives of group theory writes the following: "big latent groups are usually unable to enforce their interests through voluntary action". (Mancur Olson: The Logic Of Collective Action)

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