

Knowledge Society: Migration Discourse in the Captivity of ^{Capital}

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The article is devoted to the nature of modern knowledge society, which is characterized primarily by a sharp increase in intellectual capital (education, experience, skills, competencies, know-how, patents, the price of personnel on the labor market, etc.) in the volume of capitalization of big business. Knowledge society is a society of high social dynamics, an embodiment of the migration archetype, rational discourse and intellectual labor, implementing the well-known thesis in a new way.

"Knowledge is Power. Theories of knowledge societies that emerged in the 1960s have been rethought, reformulated and justified over the last three decades by Nico Stehr, a renowned German sociologist and philosopher. The article briefly introduces Stehr's concept, presents arguments in support of it, and highlights some of the gaps that remain inexplicable in the light of the social realities of recent years. It is concluded that the knowledge society represents a significant social trend in the emergence of science and technology as a leading productive force. And in it we see a form of urban discourse of freedom - cognitive self-realization of the individual in the spectrum of broad possibilities of public good as a subject of epistemological urbanism. However, this trend is opposed by the modern capitalism of knowledge (privatization, "enclosure of knowledge", including by means of patents), as well as by the high degree of risk and uncertainty dominating in the modern world.

Keywords: knowledge society, knowledge and information, intellectual capital, urban discourse of freedom, *epistemological* urbanism, knowledge capitalism, patents, "enclosing knowledge", fragility of society

The power of knowledge: new packaging or substantive innovation?

The project of interaction between science and society, often denoted by the slogan "Knowledge is Power" and referring to Francis Bacon, is widely known (Dmitriev, 2022; Kasavin, 2020). The idea of the project proclaimed the cultural and civilizational function of science in radically transforming the society of the 17th century.

A "good" society was conceived only as the realized power of knowledge. Knowledge was attributed the status of the rational core of society and the main human ability to give a new start to social development and well-being. Hence, power was understood in a non-traditional way, not as a means to retain and multiply what had been conquered, but as the ability to develop, to go beyond the limits of the given.

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The power of knowledge in Bacon's "New Atlantis" required for its realization the enclosed space of a city-state of the type of the ancient polis, where the kings of the rigid polis were hardened. It should be emphasized that the power of knowledge in Bacon's "New Atlantis" required for its realization the closed space of a city-state like the ancient polis, where strict regulation reigns. In it, only the directly useful "fruitful experiences" (applied knowledge) are free, while the "light-bearing experiences" (fundamental knowledge of causes) are kept secret.

Here the productive capacity of the philosophical imagination was, as usual, opposed to the actual state of affairs. In those days, it was not knowledge that was the force. On the contrary, it was on the periphery of the public interest and had no tangible effectiveness. Power was embodied by the political power of the monarch and the big feudal lords, as well as by the influence of the highest church hierarchy. The power of knowledge was an outright utopia, but it proved to be an ingenious vision of the true nature of power and sociality in general. The highest meaning of any society is the production of cultural and intellectual achievements. It is these, and not gold, territories or forced labor, that play the role of an enzyme of social development, providing man with a space of intellectual migration, a rational-discursive organization of activity. The most powerful force is power over minds.

In the twentieth century, the slogan "Knowledge is Power" was already treated as a statement of fact. Now another task was on the theoretical agenda - to answer the Kantian question of how this fact is possible. The program of the sociology of scientific knowledge addressed this task as an inverse of the Baconian one. It was to derive fundamental knowledge (science) from the social relations and images that are responsible for the production of knowledge (Bloor, 1976). However, this program faced a fundamental difficulty. Nowadays science is developing much faster than society, the latter is fatally lagging behind and hardly has the necessary explanatory power. It is difficult to find in society such creative forces, such living enzymes that would give knowledge an unprecedented dynamism. Attempts to present the scientific revolution of the twentieth century as a project of modernity, the result of the rapid development of art and culture as a whole, proved insufficiently justified. In particular, Forman's thesis links Weimar culture to new physical theories (Forman, 1971). However, the very atmosphere of indeterminism inherent in this epoch, according to the author, does not allow to build a deterministic chain from art to science, but forces to speak about science only as an element of this atmosphere, no less strongly influencing the development of art.

At the same time, the mode of functioning and dissemination of fundamental and applied knowledge was revised (in comparison with Bacon's project). The former was declared a public good (available to all, freely consumed, non-competitive goods). The latter, on the contrary, provided competitive advantages and, therefore, was privatized, receiving legal "fencing" in the form of patents. The paradox is that it thereby also takes out-

In the course of the last decade, the Russian Federation has been able to create a monopoly position in the market, allowing it to block innovation and make super-profits at the expense of it.

In Bacon's case, the power of knowledge realizes itself largely thanks to the closed city-state, it is a "power-in-fortress". Knowledge may be acquired through free cultural migration and actual travel to unknown lands, but it is discursively articulated and even disseminated only as a settled, regulated, coded and guarded phenomenon. This was very much in line with the status of the medieval city, castle, monastery, university, which provided security for the sedentary inhabitants within its walls. A forest or a field, on the contrary, is a territory of freedom, an opportunity to hide, to realize oneself without any regulation, and to lose one's head. Every migration of a medieval merchant, sailor, warrior, monk, craftsman, artist, doctor implies movement *between* cities, with all the attendant risks and gains.

The current situation paints a completely different picture. On the one hand, it is the city, where research and educational institutions are located, that attracts the subject of cognition and encourages him to migrate *not from the city, but to the city*. Big cities are great opportunities for choice, a lagoon of navigation and self-organization, a territory of freedom in which one can both get lost and find oneself. On the other hand, the regulation of urban life canalizes human behavior, throws people into the territory of rules, into the "traffic by lanes and traffic lights". Science itself is a "knowledge factory" in which routine often dominates over creativity. Hence, scientific mobility (*migration between cities*) is an indispensable component of world science, which allows researchers to break out of the local community with its standards and paradigms, to join other channels of communication and pictures of reality. In general, such a perspective of analysis, when knowledge and science are considered in the infrastructural and institutional context of the city, as a form of urban discourse, can be designated by the term "epistemological urbanism". When the focus of attention is on the cognitive process against the background of the subject's spatial displacement, travel and adventure, we can speak of "migration epistemology". There is reason to believe that these two approaches are in a relation of additionality.

Thus, today, the progress of sciences (including social sciences and humanities) and technologies to a large extent determines social progress (with all the arguments about the debatability of this notion), and not vice versa. At the same time, knowledge, being the core of the new productive forces (to use K. Marx's terminology), is a prisoner of the old production relations. On the one hand, knowledge transforms space into a "liquid world" (Z. Bau-man), ensuring the migration of information flows, technological transfer and unprecedented communication possibilities. On the other hand, private property interest taboos the free dissemination of knowledge,

It promotes its "sedentarization", confining scientific discourse to the territory of the patent and forcing it to serve not the public good but economic and political domination.

Nico Stehr is an opinion leader

All this is the subject of interest of Nico Stehr, a prominent philosopher, sociologist, generalist humanist, and public intellectual. His figure, not unknown in Russian intellectual circles, nevertheless deserves a brief biographical note. Stehr was born on March 19, 1942 in Berlin. After graduating from grammar school, he entered the University of Cologne, where he completed his studies with a master's degree in economics under the guidance of René Koenig. In 1970, Stehr went to the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship and received a doctorate in sociology from the University of Oregon and taught at American and Canadian universities from 1967 to 2000. Before returning to Germany, he was a Research Fellow at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Study at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. During the academic year 2002-2003, Stehr was the Paul Lazarsfeld Gast Professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. During the 2002-2003 academic year, Stehr was the Paul Lazarsfeld Gaste Professor at the University of Vienna. At the same time, he was a Senior Research Fellow at the Sustainable Development Research Institute of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, a Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Essen, Germany, and Editor of the Canadian Journal of Sociology, which he founded (until 2006). In 2011, Stehr established the European Center for Sustainability Studies (ECS) at Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen, Germany. From August 2013 to June 2018, he was head of the Department of Communication and Cultural Management at the same university; since 2018, he has been Professor Emeritus^S. For his scientific achievements, Stehr has been honored as a Fellow of the Royal Society (Canada) and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts².

Nico Stehr's research interests were initially initiated by economics and law, but quickly took on a broader character. In his own opinion, he was impressed by the work of émigré social scientists, exemplified by K. Mannheim. Besides him and other sociological classics such as E. Durkheim, M. Weber and R. Merton, Stehr was particularly influenced by N. Elias, P. Drucker, D. Bell and P. Lazarsfeld. If one were to define the place of Stehr's works in the context of the evolution of the social sciences of the XX-XXI centuries, it would be extremely difficult due to the synthetic and interdisciplinary nature of his research. In many ways, this task will be undertaken by different authors because of their own inclinations and theoretical interests. Sociologists would place him in a tradition that goes back to

2. For more on Nico Stehr, see: Adolf, 2018.

from Bacon, i.e. to a number of authors who discovered the specificity of modern societies in the unprecedented influence of knowledge and science on politics, economy and culture. And then Stehr's works will turn out to be a stage in the development of the theory of post-industrial and information society or a variant of postmodern research in the style of Z. Bauman or E. Giddens. At the same time, Stehr is likely to be categorically divorced from B. Latour and his idea of the crisis of sociology. Sociologists of knowledge and scientific knowledge, in particular, could draw a line from Marxism through K. Mannheim to the "strong program" of B. Barnes and D. Bloor and point out that he contributed to all three (or already more) waves of development of this direction (Stolyarova, 2015). Specialists in STS (Science and Technology Studies; Science, Technology and Society) will count him among their colleagues by analogy with D. Mackenzie and his analysis of financial markets (Mackenzie, 2006). Equally, supporters of critical social epistemology in the person of C. Fuller, who for more than 30 years ago did the same with D. Mackenzie and his analysis of financial markets (Mackenzie, 2006). Fuller, who wrote a review of Stehr's book over 30 years ago (Fuller, 1991).

Today, Stehr's research continues the most original line he and Gernot Böhme set out in *Knowledge Society* (1986). It focuses on the transformation of modern societies into knowledge societies and the changes in the main social spheres (science, politics, politics, governance, economics, inequality and globalization). They also address the social consequences of climate change. Stehr is one of the authors of the Hartwell Paper (Hartwell Paper, 2010)³ on climate policy. Stehr has published more than 25 books, and a number of his works have been translated into Russian, including "Weather. Climate. Man" (2011), "The Power of Scientific Knowledge" (2015), "Knowledge is Power? What We Know About Knowledge" (2017), "Information, Power and Knowledge" (2019)⁴.

Nico Stehr is not only an academic social scientist and scientific organizer, but also a communication genius: a friendly, intelligent person whose communication circle is extremely wide and varied. I had the pleasure of observing Nico at seminars at Zeppelin University, where I was also fortunate enough to give a paper, and at his home. At the university - in the department, in the auditorium, in the canteen, in the corridor - he was always surrounded by young scientists. This interaction continues in a restaurant, on the quay of Lake Constance, in his hospitable home in the small town of Wangen im Algai. And this is where the specificity of Stehr's research and publication strategy comes into play. Among other things, he cooperates willingly with colleagues, and his role as a generator of ideas is unquestionable. Colleagues and students studying various problems and aspects of science, technology and contemporary society build their theories and data into his conceptual framework, and he, for his part, delves into these details and develops his initial conceptualizations. Stehr has initially provided a brilliant example of how to

3. https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/27939/1/HartwellPaper_English_version.pdf

4. Among the articles, reviews and reviews published in Russia devoted to Stehr's works, we would like to single out: Tukhvatulina, 2015; Machin, 2018; Savchenko, 2023.

to work with facts. It is interesting to observe him in the process of preparing his next work. His entire office is littered with stacks of books with bookmarks, piles of photocopied articles scribbled with notes, charts, graphs and diagrams on the floor, two laptops on his desk connected to various databases, and the phone rings when Stehr needs to verify a detail or a name with one of his colleagues on any of the continents. Stehr is not shy about co-authoring with his colleagues, including former graduate students, many of whom are now professors. The interdisciplinary nature of the discourse he practices at the intersection of sociology, epistemology and philosophy of science, economics, history, psychology, political and cultural studies is not surprising. It is one of the best examples of what a broadly understood program of Science and Technology Studies, or, in another version, Science, Technology and Society, can produce. Stehr's books are published almost simultaneously, in different or identical versions, in English and German, reaching the widest possible audience.

Modern society: knowledge as development

The theory of knowledge societies, a particular version of which was formulated by Nico Stehr⁵, brings us back to Bacon's idea. Our modernity is the age of the power of knowledge. In making it the subject of his analysis, Stehr rejects the abstract approach adopted in analytic epistemology, in which knowledge is understood as justified true belief. Instead, he proposes a sociological definition of knowledge as an ability to act and examines in detail the functioning of knowledge in a variety of economic, political, and social contexts. Knowledge, according to Stehr, should be distinguished from information, although this distinction is often neglected. For example, a common view is that information is a subset of knowledge, which is reduced and transformed into messages that are broadcast between decision-making agents. Stehr proposes a different approach: the content of information primarily refers to the *properties of products or outcomes* (attributes), while the content of knowledge is characterized by the *quality of processes* (Stehr, 2024: 90). The arguments in favor of this position, if briefly summarized, are as follows. Knowledge production in the analysis is broken down into two interrelated segments. First, it is the process itself, conditioned by the subject of cognition and the context of production. Second, it is the objectified results of cognition, which are alienated from the subject, impersonalized and can be expressed quantitatively. It goes without saying that the results are used in the course of the process, and the process itself is, as it were, rolled up in the result. However, strictly according to the rules, in the limit - algorithmically used-

5. The translation of Stehr's book (Stehr, 2023), now in preparation, celebrates thirty years of his theory, substantially revising and supplementing the author's earlier approaches and arguments (Stehr, 1994) while retaining and developing the main ideas.

Only certain fragments of information are recognized. Conversely, knowledge operations are largely hidden in the "black box" of subjectivity. Somewhat coarser, the distinction between knowledge and information proposed by Stehr can be compared to the well-known opposition between the contexts of discovery and justification (H. Reichenbach), as well as to the distinction between discourse and text (Kasavin, 2008).

It is quite logical that Stehr, taking the position of a sociologist rather than an epistemologist and philosopher of science, considers it necessary to pay attention to the process of knowledge production, even if the means of its analysis are not perfect. This allows him to discover the fact that the modern economy of knowledge does not "see" knowledge, limiting its interest to information. Hence the inability to take into account (including the economic one) the importance of a significant part of intellectual capital, which is not algorithms, but skills, competencies, know-how. And here the epistemological meaning of the sociological definition of knowledge as the *ability to act* is unexpectedly and epiphenomenally revealed. It implies the study of the cognitive subject and his activity in dynamics, in the whole contradictory variety of their cultural and social dimensions. It is the complexity of the phenomenon of knowledge that explains why the power of knowledge does not autonomously guarantee progress: knowledge is a phenomenon with both positive and negative signs. The illusions of the Enlightenment are shattered. "After Auschwitz (J.-F. Lyotard), the boundary between rationality and inhumanity became permeable. Let the state of political and economic life be determined by the amount of human (intellectual) capital: it is this capital that makes up to 90% of the capital of such companies as Amazon, Microsoft, Google, Nvidia, expressed in the value of their shares⁶. So the power of large corporations is also due to the increasing role of knowledge in capital, concentration and monopolization of knowledge in the hands of a few. Superstar firms, most of which are located in the United States, derive superprofits from their position and are not ready to give it up.

Knowledge, being only intellectual power, reveals its economic weaknesses. For example, it lends itself to being "walled off" by patents, and the largest firms use this mechanism to taboo knowledge, limiting innovation and narrowing the free market space. Stehr documents in detail the persistence of the economic essence of modern capitalism as the power of the few rich over the many poor. This can be traced both internationally and within the United States itself, where social stratification is increasing. Russia is mentioned only once in Stehr's book: "The United States was the largest beneficiary in 2010, while Russia (not shown in the table) received almost no-

6. The popular literature often characterizes financial derivatives (equities incl.) as "soap bubbles" that periodically "burst" and therefore cannot be a form of "reliable" capital. However, market price fluctuations are a natural and inevitable factor of economic life under capitalism. They also apply to real estate, precious metals, minerals and the price of money itself.

It is also the first time that a country has received funds from abroad for intellectual property controlled by the country" (Stehr, 2024: 153).

Stehr articulates what might be called the *paradox of the knowledge economy*. On the one hand, knowledge is a public good, or a commodity beyond competition. Intellectual assets are subject to endless exchange, sale or other use, without being permanently alienated from the author or owner. Knowledge has the property of potential or actual availability. It is able to migrate freely between social actors without reducing its content, to permeate social space, creating information channels for the possible, ideal movement of goods and services. Knowledge is "potentially democratic and egalitarian, but at the same time it offers corporations unprecedented opportunities for financial capital - concentration of wealth and monopoly power" (Pagano, 2018: 355).

At the same time, Stehr repeatedly cites Udo Pagano to support his thesis that the private ownership of knowledge is used by superstar firms to strengthen their monopolistic position in the market and multiply their own intellectual capital, which is increasingly valued in the form of shares on the world's financial markets. He draws attention to a seemingly unthinkable circumstance: the same forces that should have been, if not completely disavowed, at least substantially displaced by the power of intellectual capital continue to dominate the knowledge society. However, knowledge, taking the form of capital, becomes as unfree as the Queen of England, who reigns but does not rule.

It is noteworthy that the facts cited by Stehr bring some clarity to the economic and social situation that Germany is experiencing today. It lags far behind the US, Japan, Korea and noticeably behind the UK and France in terms of intellectual capital growth, particularly in the number of patents. Recently the most powerful economy in Europe, Germany's GDP in 2023 decreased by 0.3 percent and became the only G7 country with negative growth. Among other reasons, experts point to the weak degree of digitalization of the economy and social sphere, the shortage of highly qualified personnel and the inert economic and bureaucratic mentality. There is reason to believe that the liberalization of the citizenship law announced in January 2024 is intended to partially compensate for these problems at the expense of migrant professionals. Stehr is not unreasonable in his assertion about the "fragility" of the modern knowledge society. However, the situation in Germany demonstrates the fragility of an industrialized society facing the challenges of modernity. Unexpected shortage of energy resources, stock market fluctuations, a significant segment of traditional agricultural production, strong social policy - all of these are unrelated but negatively influencing

factors. They show that developed industrial society, in order to solve the contradictions insurmountable within its own framework, is forced to go beyond its limits, to become an informational, post-industrial knowledge society.

Another trend noted by Stehr is more optimistic, but does not change the overall picture. In parallel with the development of monopolistic knowledge capitalism, the social influence and freedom of the individual armed with knowledge is increasing. In particular, the entire agenda of climate change and its global threat has been initiated by individual scientists, public intellectuals who demonstrate a high degree of responsibility for the fate of humanity. To what extent their individual efforts, albeit publicized, can stand up to the power of large monopolies and government bureaucracies remains a big question. It is also a question about the nature and prospects of modern democracy, which teeters on the brink of authoritarianism and is less and less in line with its original notion of "rule of the people".

At the same time, the contemporary situation offers unexpected counterarguments to the concept of knowledge society. For example, America's leadership in the growth and accumulation of intellectual capital and high technology has served the belief in its geo-political and military superiority. In particular, it has been repeatedly shown that technology ensures the ability of the U.S. armed forces to conduct rapid and successful military operations. Today, this thesis is revealed to be questionable, if only by the example of the conflict in the Red Sea. It is not yet technically possible to force peace on the Yemeni Houthis, although the situation is fraught with blocking maritime cargo transportation and dramatic economic consequences for the countries supporting the Israeli military operation in Gaza. The peculiarities of Yemen's geography, the availability of weapons, albeit not very advanced, and the concentration of religious-political power allow the Houthis to confront the world's technological leaders, maintain tensions in the key region and have a significant impact on the global political and economic agenda. Thus, as in Bacon's time, it is not knowledge but political and religious will that is the main force.

Results

So what are the results, the social consequences of the power of knowledge embodied in science and technology? Fortunately, we are not yet aware of these outcomes and will never know them in their final form. But already today, the ambivalence of science and technology is on full display. Leaving aside the practical advantages and problems that are obvious, the current situation raises a question that has been known since the time of Socrates. What does it mean to have power over minds? Enlightenment

or confusion of minds? Stehr answers this question as follows: "...We can conclude that the growth and wider dissemination of knowledge paradoxically generates more uncertainty and randomness rather than 'claims to objective knowledge' and the resulting resolution of social divisions or more successful domination" (Stehr, 2024: 141). This is the most important conclusion characterizing modern rationalism and humanism, which refuse the unconditional cult of knowledge, reason and science. Any cult can and should be subject to critical reflection and even opposition. Therefore.

A "good" knowledge society is one that takes responsibility for knowledge and demands reasonable, qualified responsibility for political and economic action. The enlightenment of power and the efficacy of knowledge go hand in hand in such a society. Stehr, speaking of the modern, real knowledge society, identifies its contradictions and criticizes it sharply and justifiably. The basis of this critique is the deeper knowledge of knowledge and society that the author proposes and puts forward as a relevant and promising research program. This critique has not only a descriptive content, not only reveals the most complex problems of contemporary civilization. It also convinces us that, to a large extent, their solution lies in our hands, in the power of the people who produce and disseminate knowledge in the territory of freedom.

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The article focuses on the nature of the modern knowledge society, which is characterized, first of all, by a sharp increase in intellectual capital (education, experience, skills, competencies, know-how, the price of personnel in the labor market, patents, etc.) in the amount of capitalization.

of large business. The knowledge society is a society of high social dynamics, the embodiment of the migration archetype, of rational discourse and intellectual work, which realizes the well-

the known thesis "Knowledge is power" in a new way. The last three decades, Nico Stehr, a well-known German sociologist and philosopher has been rethinking, reformulating, and substantiating the theories of the knowledge society, which appeared in the 1960s. The article investigates Stehr's concept, expresses arguments in its support, and highlights some blank spots that remain inexplicable for him in the light of the social realities of recent years. The conclusion runs that the knowledge society represents a significant social trend in the formation of science and technology as a leading productive force. It also manifests a form of the urban discourse of freedom - the cognitive self-realization of the individual in the spectrum of wide possibilities of the public good as a subject-matter of epistemological urban studies. However, this trend is countered by modern knowledge capitalism (privatization, fencing off of knowledge, including that with the help of patents), as well as by the high degree of risk and uncertainty that dominates the modern world.

Keywords: knowledge society, knowledge and information, intellectual capital, urban discourse of freedom, epistemological urban studies, knowledge capitalism, patents, fencing off of knowledge, social fragility.

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