

The Book *Introduction to the political economy of a socially responsible society as a socially responsible tool!?*

Emer. Prof., Dr., Dr. Matjaz Mulej,
UM EPF and IRDO Maribor
matjaz.mulej@um.si

Borut Ambrožič
Student of social gerontology doctoral study, ECM Maribor, Slovenia
borut.ambrozic@triera.si

Abstract:

Like any other book, this book is a source of information trying to influence its readers. It must meet, first, the syntactic criterion (e.g. by putting letters into words, words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, etc.), second, the semantic criterion (e.g. by incorporation of sense-making content into the written text), and third, the pragmatic criterion (e.g. attain influence over the receiver), to become an information, after being data, first, and then message. Whether a book becomes a socially responsible one or not, depends on the type of influence attained by authors over their audience: it can enlarge or diminish or leave intact the readers' knowledge and values as components of readers' subjective starting points of their process of defining and realizing their objectives in a socially responsible or irresponsible manner. Authors of the book under discussion here hope to enlarge socially responsible behavior of individuals, of their organizations of any type, and of the society at large.

Key words: social responsibility, book as a tool, socially responsible society, information

Knjiga *Uvod v politično ekonomijo družbeno odgovorne družbe kot družbeno odgovoren pripomoček!?*

Povzetek

Kot vsaka druga knjiga je ta knjiga vir informacij, ki poskuša vplivati na bralce. Najprej mora izpolnjevati sintaktični kriterij (npr. s sestavljanjem črk v besede, besed v stavke, stavkov v odstavke itd.), drugič semantični kriterij (npr. z vključevanjem smiselne vsebine v pisno besedilo) in tretjič, pragmatično merilo (npr. doseganje vpliva na sprejemnika), da postane informacija, potem ko so najprej podatki in nato sporočilo. Ali bo knjiga postala družbeno odgovorna ali ne, je odvisno od vrste vpliva, ki ga avtorji dosežejo na svoje občinstvo: lahko poveča ali zmanjša ali prepusti bralčevo znanje in vrednote nedotaknjene kot elemente bralčevih subjektivnih izhodišč njihovega procesa za opredelitev in uresničevanje svojih ciljev



na družbeno odgovoren ali neodgovoren način. Avtorji obravnavane knjige upajo, da bodo povečali družbeno odgovorno vedenje posameznikov, njihovih organizacij vseh vrst in širše družbe.

Ključne besede: družbena odgovornost, knjiga kot orodje, družbeno odgovorna družba, informacije

Introduction

Decades ago already, Oton Župančič wrote that the book is the most telling witness that a nation is aware of itself, its living and its desire to live. With the global socioeconomic crisis, which clearly broke out in 2008, humanity announced via its highest authorities that it is necessary to activate social responsibility, i.e., everyone's responsibility for influencing society, as a way out of the crisis. A review of domestic and international literature and findings on the given practice showed that neither Slovenia nor the rest of the world yet have books or the political economy of a socially responsible society. The first step in this direction is the reported-about book, which teaches – provides information to – the reader about a socially responsible society. It has a theoretical and applied part. Before discussing this book, we will pay some attention to the history and importance of the book as a human tool of influence.

History and importance of the book

From clay tiles to the emergence of an e-book, the book experienced remarkable development. The original way of communicating and spreading messages between people was an oral tradition. The writing is a different way and a means of saving and disseminating data. According to the role that writing has and used to have in the cultural development of humanity, the writing is the greatest achievement of the human spirit (Trošt, 2010). The development of the writing began due to the growing need for recording, especially among traders (Tolić, 2015). With the invention of the printing press, the spread of knowledge among the European population began to occur on a larger scale than the literary elites of the nobility and churches did before, which changed history to an extremely large extent. Because people read more than ever before, they also thought more (Eisenstein, 1980).

Anyone who reads books lives differently than those who do not read. Literary reading is enriching the human existence in experiential, emotional and cognitive terms, and above all in understanding the world and the life. Various cultures, since ancient times, have created, distributed, transmitted and received texts. For the development of the Slovenian nation and the Slovenian language, the fundamental decision on the Slovene language at all stages of social development was also of great importance, including in art and science. The fight for freedom of language was later an integral part of the struggle for social and national liberation (Pogorelec, 2011).

In recent years, a universal social transformation is taking place, which changes the models of our life, the modes of communication, the forms of acquiring knowledge, the arguments for the legitimization of human actions, as well as the ideological systems of values and the form of



human self-understanding (Škamperle, 2015). Regardless of the history of books in the future, their past shows how the field of knowledge can take on a clear scientific identity. Books belong to communication circuits with consistent patterns, which are not limited by linguistic and national boundaries (Darnton, 1982). The monograph with the elements of the manual can also be educational educational material and a useful tool (Kerbler, 2012).

Today we witness a fundamental change in ideas about books and the relationship between the author and the public (Escarpit, 1965). Innovation of printed texts and their significance as mediators of religious, political, social, scientific and intellectual changes is still felt today. Every year, thousands of books are published, focusing only on certain aspects of innovation, but how to identify those which really can change society for better?

A case: 'Introduction to political economy of a socially responsible society'¹ and its selected information

The common denominator from the economic viewpoint: social responsibility causes little costs and troubles; social irresponsibility causes enormous costs and troubles.

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First: Social responsibility is a socio-economic model of a free-market society without monopolies

Social responsibility is a socio-economic model that humanity has adopted globally in the ISO 26000 standard in the autumn of 2010, only two years after it had publicly acknowledged in 2008 that the given socio-economic system, called neoliberalism, is in a serious crisis. The essence of this crisis is the dominance of (especially businesses' and partly states') monopolies instead of the free market, by allowing irresponsible, narrow-minded and one-sided decisions that lead to more or less short-term benefits of only a tiny percentage of humankind. At the same time, the monopolists consider themselves to be a free world with a free market, which is unfortunately not true. The given market relations and given legal relations do not provide enough tools for the path of humanity out of the current global socio-economic crisis. One must

¹ By: Matjaž Mulej, Viljem Merhar, Viktor Žakelj, editors and authors; further authors: Mira Zore, Anita Hrast, Ludvik Toplak, Tadej Slapnik, Katja Rašič, Borut Ambrožič



implement, humankind says in ISO 26000, social responsibility, i.e. the responsibility of everyone to society, i.e. people and natural conditions for the survival of people (ISO, 2010).

Second: social responsibility enforces three basic concepts of a reliable society

These concepts are:

- 1) the responsibility of everyone for their impacts on society, i.e. humans and nature (nobody exists without impacts on and from other parts of humanity and natural environment);
- 2) interdependence (due to specialization, division of labor, and natural differences with which humans complement each other, independence can exist in law only; independence and dependence are human perceptions causing irresponsibility and poor cooperation);
- 3) holistic approach (aimed at including into thinking, decision making and action of all crucial viewpoint and related attributes as well as their synergies, not sums only, in order for no crucial attributes of causes, conditions, processes and consequences to be forgotten about and no crucial damages to be caused, all way to global crises and world wars).

Third: social responsibility is supported by seven principles as fundamental values

They are human attributes, applied individually and in organizations all way from families to the global society for the society to be more sustainable than so far and for humankind to be less endangered than so far:

- a) accountability (e.g. the reliable ones are better to work with),
- b) transparency (e.g. cooperation is easier, if no crucial information is hidden),
- c) ethics (e.g. people with honesty and integrity are easier to work and live with),
- d) respect for the interests of stakeholders (e.g. if the owners/shareholders do not consider their staff and other partners and people as interested parties, their decisions and actions might be one-sided and fail therefore, causing irresponsibility and troubles all way to world wars),
- e) respect for the rule of law (but not a monopolistic and one-sided law, causing e.g. discrimination and damage to people),
- f) respect for international norms (as agreement with the role and influence of law),
- g) respect for human rights (unfortunately, human rights still need defense against abuse).

Fourth: This is a book about times beyond neoliberal times

Unfortunately, this is not a book about life, which prevails now in neoliberal times, but about life that should replace these times. The most explicitly we said this with the title of another book in four volumes: *Social responsibility beyond neoliberalism and charity* (Mulej and Dyck, ed., 2014), and in addition to others, published (in cooperation) by the IRDO Institute for the Development of Social Responsibility. Our main reason for our work on social responsibility is clear from the title of our further book in three volumes: *Stop hating your children and*



grandchildren (Mulej et al., 2016, IRDO and Kulturni center Maribor (in Slovene) and our three guest-edited journal issues (Mulej et al., 2013, 2014, 2015). Books and articles on social responsibility are very many millions in world literature, but our insight into Slovenian and internationally accessible literature shows that no book in the entire world offers

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY.

Authors neither found a book on a socially responsible society, but only about socially responsible organizations, named in the English written literature the corporations. Nor did authors find newer books on the political economy, the essence of which was left aside when the Economics was established, which is neither history- or class-based, nor the basic general economic science (see: Durjava, 1987). Authors therefore wrote a new book with the contributions by nine authors named earlier.

Fifth: This book is a part of research on social responsibility replacing the current crisis

Of course not all important aspects are covered, but all of them cannot be covered at once. At the same time, this book is published on the basis of research involving at least six books, among the authors of which is at least Matjaž Mulej as one of the above-mentioned authors; each book is complementing the application part - the annex to this book. Our books and collections of articles published so far in world journals on system theory and cybernetics (as the sciences on the most complex treatment of complex phenomena based on interdisciplinary cooperation and therefore on values, culture, ethics and norms of interdependence among the responsible ones), in recent years, are also complementary to this book. We are building on thousands of pages of findings from hundreds of authors from dozens of countries, if we count only those with which we have explicitly co-worked as authors since 2004, since IRDO Institute for the Development of Social Responsibility exists. But the political economy of a socially responsible society has not been captured so far neither by others nor by our team.

Sixth: The book has a theoretical and an applied part – to provide crucial information

In the theoretical part of this book, authors briefly show:

- the essence of political economy as the fundamental economic theory of modern society (Merhar, partly also Mulej),
- the link between the societal (indicative, mostly) plan and the market as societies' tools that implements the political economy of a socially responsible society (Žakelj),
- the essence of social responsibility of corporations / organizations as significantly influential communities and different from the entire societies (Zore), and
- social responsibility as an essential non-technological invention-innovation-diffusion process (Mulej).

In the annexed appendix authors included various but complementary contributions on the:



- European aspects of social responsibility (Hrast),
- Slovene strategy regarding social responsibility (Hrast, Mulej, Slapnik),
- measuring economic performance in a socially responsible society (Rašič, partly Ambrožič, Mulej),
- serious legal errors in denationalization processes due to insufficient legal knowledge and insufficient social responsibility of very influential people in Slovenia today (Toplak),
- too little social responsibility of politicians and public media in Slovenia today (Merhar),
- the essence of democracy as a web of above briefed values, not just formal political arrangements, reduced to election of power-holders, in a socially responsible society (Mulej), and
- P.S., including the recognition that the Nobel Prize for Economics 2018 confirms our work (Merhar).

Seventh: the common denominator of the book: social responsibility as a personal, organizational and societal characteristic

The authors' common denominator is the assertion of social responsibility as a personal characteristic aimed to become the dominant characteristic and activity of organizations, the entire modern society and its organs, in order for society to find the way out of the current global socio-economic crisis. An alternative to this path is probably the Third World War and thus the collapse of humanity, at least its current civilization. Why so?

Eighth: Human beings are either socially responsible, and seriously destructive

Man is the only creature that is creative and (exceptionally) even innovative, if he or she is socially responsible, and seriously destructive, if he or she is not socially responsible, i.e. does not behave requisitely holistically, with the ethics of interdependence and acceptance of responsibility for his or her effects on people and nature, i.e. on society. Without the political economy of a socially responsible society, humankind practices socially responsible behavior with difficulty. Data in public press from the autumn of 2018 that humanity destroys its living conditions, worse than ever in history, requires social responsibility for humanity to survive.

It is a socially responsible political economy that will theoretically substantiate the demand for the redistribution of income and wealth, which is resisted by monopolistic managers of financial capital - the financial oligarchies that have transferred the leadership of the government and the business functions to well-paid and socially insufficiently responsible, but apologetically committed managerial staff.

Therefore, in the creation of this book, a large number of socially engaged people were involved. They/We are responsible authors, who dealt with various aspects of the problem of the emerging Political Economy of a socially responsible society. Why does this fact matter in economic terms?



Ninth: Social responsibility is a very important source of economic advantages

The practice has shown that the use of ISO 26000 is a very important source of economic advantages; for example, it is more cost-effective to achieve legitimate trust of coworkers, other business partners, customers and wider circles of people, to care for their health and well-being, and to preserve a healthy nature, as well as to solve the problems caused by the opposite actions, such as strikes, wars, unreliable partners, destroyed natural conditions for life, etc. Unfortunately, people often overlook these advantages because they prevent costs and troubles, while the costs of achieving a healthy nature and the like are also evident in bookkeeping.

The European Union advised its Member States to become examples of corporate social responsibility, but did not say how to achieve this (EC/EU, 2011). To the authors of this book, this fact showed that it is necessary to carefully read the very title of ISO 26000. It is limited to the social responsibility of organizations. This means that there is no political economy of socially, that is, to people, and nature, responsible society. One opens a discussion about the latter with this book. Authors uncovered by browsing the sources, there is no such book in world literature.

Tenth: Some data about problematic consequences of the neoliberal one-sidedness: facts on the current reality require social responsibility as a new socio-economic order

Perhaps the insights remind you, too, of the modern state of the world society and its economy and its problems, such as: the crisis of affluence; only 15% of humankind have at least \$ 6 a day; \$ 5 billion a day are spent for weapons; more than ten wars and about one hundred million people expelled from their homes; a handful or, at most, one percent of humankind are owners of such a property as the poorer half of humankind together; huge money hidden in tax havens instead of invested; extremely high remuneration of bankers compared to entrepreneurs; many criticisms of neoliberal situations with monopolies instead of a free market; etc. Because of such qualities, humanity, at the global level, decided to seek a path from a blind street with a new effort for social responsibility instead of indifference. However, only with this book is surfacing the political economy of a socially responsible society.

The socially responsible economy management, which in the present is required (also) by environmental problems of the planet Earth and its inhabitants as the primary production factors - the objects of work and labor, can no longer be realized solely by the capitalist profit motive of economy. It cannot be realized by the current neo-liberalist paradigm of capitalist commodity production. This re-established itself as a counter-reform of the Keynesian reform of monopoly capitalism and deepened the crisis of capitalism as a socio-economic system.

In the 1930s, the crisis of capitalism as a socioeconomic system was tackled with Keynesian means of economic policy - by defusing deflationary gaps - which strengthened the economic role of the state and its property. After the Second World War, Keynesian economic policy instruments were generally accepted. They were even recommended by the United Nations, although they were not satisfying the financial oligarchies of the economically most developed countries. They were waiting for the appropriate economic conditions that would allow the



elimination of Keynesian economic policy recommendations, mainly requiring the redistribution of income and wealth of financial oligarchies. In the last third of the 20th century, this situation was offered to the financial oligarchies with the emergence of debt crises and the stagnation of the economy with simultaneous inflation - with the emergence of stagflation. It resulted in the current neo-liberalist paradigm against the Keynesian economic role of the state and its property - the current neoliberalist paradigm of capitalist monopolistic economy management, to the return from Keynesian state capitalism to the current monopoly capitalism - (neo) imperialism, has sharpened and exacerbated the crisis of capitalism as a socio-economic system.

All socially unfavorable consequences of the current neoliberalist paradigm that has eliminated the Keynesian reform of monopoly capitalism, update all those economic theoretical findings that the apologetic bourgeois neoclassical Marshall's economic theory - the current (neo)-liberalist Economics - by abandoning the social and class character of the political economy, deliberately ignored.

Eleventh: Humankind's need for political economy of a socially responsible society

The current (neo) liberalist paradigm is maintained and strengthened, which, with the accumulation of wealth of financial oligarchies, worsens the crisis of capitalism as a socio-economic system. It must be eliminated with an alternative political economy, for example, with the political economy of a socially responsible society. Authors for it are suggested. So are categories of it, relations between market and (indicative macro) planning in a socially responsible society, attributes of the corporate social responsibility, and the process of making a socially responsible society. Elaboration belongs to further research.

Twelfth: Nobel Awards for economy in 2018 support social responsibility

And then comes a kind of a happy end: The Nobel prize for economists 2018 was granted to two economists concerned with comparable worries – climate change and technological development. Without a socially responsible global society they are hardly solvable. This fact makes this book, as well as the previous books provided by IRDO, matter. Namely, the book on *Introduction to the political economy of a socially responsible society* is the latest achievement of research within IRDO and the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Maribor. In 15 years, besides 13 volumes of IRDO social responsibility conferences, and about 20 books and collections of articles (in global journals on system theory and cybernetics), were published (See: www.irdo.si). Only the latter resulted from participation of over a hundred authors from over thirty countries from all continents, and in proceedings there are about a thousand from all continents. A number of masters and doctoral theses are still worth mentioning. In short, the book is a new and first, pioneering, one, but it has many foundations. Reviewers, at least, wrote that this book matters and is able to help people find their way out of neoliberalism's current and long-term crisis.

Conclusions



There are two main competitors to the influence that the books, including the discussed one, might and should have: (1) other books and the awareness and interest of potential readers in this book rather than in other millions of books and other sources of information, and (2) time for reading as a part of all other duties and other activities requiring time of potential readers. Both of them are obstacles to the socially responsible society, because ignorant and superficial persons are hardly able to be innovators and/or active, or passive at least, members of teams working on innovation processes, including a socially responsible society as an invention that has not yet reached its broad innovation diffusion phase to a generally accepted beneficial new practice. This (current) fact does not diminish the importance of the books; it makes the effort promoting the books more important, including this book that we took as a case of a crucial piece of information with a (so far) small echo in the current neoliberal society with its profit and benefit and happiness based on consuming rather than on reading and working on making a socially responsible society a general practice. One cannot expect selfish, one-sided and bad guys to disappear, but to be less many and less successful (see e.g.: Sedlaček, 2015), due to prevailing of social responsibility. But one must also expect their effort against promotion of social responsibility as an alternative to the neoliberal practices of today, especially the current financial oligarchs will most probably try very hard to keep their monopolies and resulting special benefits. Books might be crucial tool of societal innovation, but rather indirectly than directly – as sources of information leading to successful action. It is no incident, that power holders have burned books on societal innovations, often.

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