The Concept of Noonomy: Summary of a Prospective Model for Socioeconomic System Organization

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Abstract. Continuous evolution of the socioeconomic system and inherent contradictions which need to be resolved require a theoretical evaluation of prospective models for system organization. This study seeks to delineate the main trends in the transformation of the modern economy and society and use them as the foundation for a scholarly assessment of the prospective future public order. The author’s approach relies on comparative analysis, classical economic theory and the Marxist method, particularly Marx’s concept of the base and superstructure. The author establishes that the technological development, which under modern conditions has taken the shape of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is a key factor in the future transformation of the socioeconomic system. These changes will result in the formation of the noonomy, i.e. a completely new model for organizing the material base of the public order reliant on super-high level of technological and technical development wherein humans will be ‘supplanted’ and removed from production. The author presents the main features and characteristics of the noonomy.

1. Introduction

The modern economy and society are developing dynamically, but their progress is affected by many contradictory trends, which renders foresight for even the near future rather complex. This complexity stems from joint influence exuded on development dynamics by various factors, both fundamental and situational. Given the specificity of the institutional environment and ongoing fluctuations, their convergence makes for a rather unpredictable and complicated picture. Still, the description of the economy’s future shape is not only theoretically relevant, but also has some applied potential. An understanding of the future economic model and its core characteristics will provide politicians, businesses and ordinary citizens with an opportunity to select the optimal path for transitioning towards a new order by harmoniously incorporating individual trajectories within general trends.

According to the author, when the situation is analyzed in the long-term perspective, random and short-term trends are negligible because they can delay or change only minute details of the future economy which is shaped by fundamental trends. The assessment of these fundamental trends is the purpose of this study.

2. Sources and Methods

The study uses statistical and empirical data from open access resources compiled by Russian and international statistical and analytical organizations (Russian Federal State Statistics Service, Eurostat, World Bank, etc.), as well as specialized UN agencies which monitor the status and development trends of the modern economy. In his work, the author also relies on his analysis and comparison of
theoretical concepts introduced by world-renowned experts in the area of economic and social development, futures and conflict studies, systems analysis and modeling.

The author’s method is based on the Marxist approach as described by K. Marx himself and numerous followers who elaborated on Marx’s ideas throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The main aspect of the Marxist method applied in this study pertains to Marx’s take on the structure of public relations, i.e. his theory of base and superstructure [1]. The relationship between the two can be described as follows: the economy constitutes the base, for it creates all material prerequisites for regular social operations and development. The level of economic development determines not only current living standards, but also the organization of the entire system of superstructure institutions (culture, politics, religion, law, etc.). Under such approach, advances in economic development constitute the foundation of public progress.

The method under consideration does not eliminate the possibility of the superstructure’s inverse effect upon the base. Political decisions definitely influence economic processes. For example, in the case of the trade war with China initiated by the US President Donald Trump, political rivalry between two global powers not only caused structural changes in certain segments of their economies, but also brought on global shifts in the entire architecture of international economic relations. The author believes that these are local manifestations of a complex system of direct and inverse relations between the base and the superstructure. Still, the base plays a key role in this relationship.

As a matter of fact, in the aforementioned example the increase in China’s economic might (an objective base-related factor) raised concerns among US politicians and encouraged them to counteract China’s increasing global economic influence in order to safeguard the positions of the U.S. (a subjective superstructure-related factor). Presently, it is hard to predict what will become of this confrontation between two modern economic powerhouses in 1, 2 or 3 years, but if we assess the situation from the strategic perspective, objective base-related trends will prove dominant.

3. Results and Discussion

According to representatives of the classical economic theory, the division of labor constitutes a core principle underpinning the development of an economic system [2]. The division of labor allows for boosting labor efficiency, increasing prosperity, i.e. perfecting the base as the foundation of social well-being. Still, manual labor has limited potential for efficiency growth. Its potential was completely exhausted between the sixteenth and the last third of the eighteenth centuries due to the development of manufacturing as a method of production.

Potential for increasing efficiency through the division of manual labor was capped by people’s limited physical ability to perform operations on an ever-increasing scope, scale, speed, precision, etc., but our economic progress has not stopped. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the progress has predominantly relied on various technical devices, and the capital-labor ratio now serves as a determining factor in operational efficiency [3].

The world is currently experiencing the Fourth Industrial Revolution [4], and, as the author shows in his earlier research [5], the course of this Revolution will shape the socioeconomic system in the near future. Technological changes bring about changes in the economy which are clearly visible and accounted for in the national and international statistics [6]. The structure of output in the economy, its sectoral composition, core technologies, etc. are changing. The author’s concept of noonomy discussed in a separate monograph [7] comprises the study of these trends and their prospective outcomes. The concept rests on the idea that in their development technologies will gradually supplant humans from production, which will result in complete disappearance of the economy in its modern sense. This removal of people from economic relations (i.e. the transformation of the base) will lead to dramatic changes in the society as a whole (i.e. the superstructure).
It is necessary to expound on the very concept of noonomy because changes in the socioeconomic system which accompany its genesis are so radical that they warrant careful theoretical consideration. The term noonomy consists of two parts: ‘noo’ and ‘nomy’.

‘Noo’ is a term of Greek descent derived from ‘noos’ (νοῦς). ‘Noos’ stands for Intellect+Knowledge. In this instance, it is important to differentiate between the concept that is under consideration and Knowledge as the Absolute because the theory of knowledge economy is also quite popular nowadays. Knowledge is related to Intellect, but they are not the same. ‘Noos’ does not entail all knowledge in its entirety, for Knowledge exists independently. Nor does ‘noos’ stand for Intellect in its pure form as an abstract notion. ‘Noos’ is not just a mere aggregate of Knowledge and Intellect, but a complex system comprised of their superimposition. They are bound by a large number of direct and inverse ties.

In the criterion base that is formed on the basis of cognition, Intellect is also formed on the basis of cognition. Intellect simultaneously constitutes a part of knowledge which allows for assessing correlations between this part of knowledge and a criterion base and the part of knowledge which comprises the base itself. ‘Noos’ also has its criterion base, but it is non-utilitarian. Moreover, it is constantly changing, as we advance in cognition and process the newly acquired knowledge. It is this in-depth meaning that the author ascribes to the Greek word ‘noos’.

The core difference between ‘noos’ and knowledge and intellect (rationality) perceived separately can be easily illustrated if we consider the modern model of market economy. It is generally believed that the economy is inherently rational (or aspires towards rationality). But is it sentient? On the other hand, the economy is based on knowledge, but is the application of this knowledge always rational? Unfortunately, it is impossible to give unequivocally affirmative responses to these questions. The existence of global issues in the modern economy (e.g. waste growth, environmental hazards, imbalances in social and economic development, poverty, etc.) provides a conclusive example of the economy’s insentience (irrationality). And the humanity’s ever-accumulating knowledge on global issues has yet to bring about dramatic shifts in their resolution.

When we speak of the noonomy, we are referring to special ‘noos’-based principles underpinning the formation of means for the satisfaction of human wants. That is a distinctive method of management—the noomethod. Just as the economy is a method of management in an economic society, the noonomy constitutes the method of management in the upcoming noosociety. It is important to distinguish between the concept of noosociety and the noosphere [8]. Noosociety is a distinctive mode of social organization that is not related to the noosphere.

On the other hand, the term ‘noonomy’ contains the stem ‘nomos’ (νομός). ‘Nomos’ is an ancient concept used by philosophers in the first third of the twentieth century to signify the basic principle for organizing any space, i.e. a general convention or an absolute law that governs the existence of all things. Under the noonomy, ‘nomos’ stands for the law, order, mode, and principle underpinning the organization of general system management.

Therefore, the noonomy constitutes a method for the satisfaction of wants under the society which possesses the following characteristics: has the light of knowledge; has no relations to production and no production relations; has no relations to property and no ownership relations; and wherein there is no economy, and the economy is impossible. The noonomy stipulates non-economic satisfaction of wants.

Thus, a different type of people’s relation to production will serve as the foundation of the future social order, i.e. the noonomy. That is a part of the base. Humans will be still creating the production system, so their role will not diminish in this sense, but they will no longer be inside the system in the course of its operations. In its current functioning, the society’s production system relies on ownership relations. The noosociety will not have these relations any more. Labor is another pillar of the existing order. This element will also cease to exist. The main idea of the author’s concept of noonomy is that
the society (superstructure) will exercise control over the production system (base), but will not be positioned within it.

In other words, the base and the superstructure (as defined by Marx) will remain, and they will still be bound by a system of direct and inverse ties, but between them there will be a clear boundary which is currently non-existent due to that fact that humans are now simultaneously participating in both the base and the superstructure. Under the noonomy, humans will be supplanted from the base by the world of machines, and this change will revolutionize the entire system of public relations.

4. Summary

Modern socioeconomic development is affected by a large number of contradictory trends, which complicates the task of scientific forecasting as it pertains to the future shape of the socioeconomic system. The author’s comparative analysis based on Marxism and the classical economic theory shows that progress in science and technology (which has taken the shape of the Fourth Industrial Revolution) constitutes the most significant influencing factor at the modern stage in civilizational development.

Assessment presented in this paper relies on the Marxist approach, particularly the concepts of base and superstructure. According to the author, advances in economic development have been identified as the cause of and main factor in social progress. Since acceleration and intensification of technological development constitute a key factor in the transformation of the economy, the author believes that the same factor will be instrumental in changing the society as a whole.

Further technological development closely bound with social and economic development should result in the formation of a new foundation for social organization—the noonomy. The noonomy constitutes a way for the satisfaction of human wants under the future society wherein people will be supplanted from the economy as we know it and will be stationed not within production, but beyond it. Under the noonomy, humans will still create the production system, but they will no longer be inside the system in the course of its operations. These changes will revolutionize the entire system of public relations.

References