

Jerzy Kleer¹, Konrad Prandecki²

A WORLD DEFINED BY CHANGE: A HISTORICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Abstract

This chapter attempts to characterize the fundamental factors that underly the continual emergence of change in the world. Adopting a historical and methodological approach, taking a very broad scope of the various stages in the advancement of human civilization, we explore the pace and nature of this perpetual change, seeking to show that it is in fact independent of globalization processes. Instead, we see continual change as stemming primarily from people's both individual and mass needs (for consumption, security, development). As such, we propose a seven-way configuration of interrelated factors driving change in the world, and briefly examine each of these in turn: broadening knowledge about the world, elites, education, technology, territorial expansion, warfare, and the impact of earlier stages of civilization on the newly emerging stage. The modern-day world is, in fact, an amalgam of three interlocked stages of civilization, and is drawing ever closer to a new inflection point, a new civilizational transition – with the attendant chaos, degradation of the traditional model of the state, and risk of conflicts of a new sort. We conclude that these factors do not, in large part, follow directly from globalization – rather, the latter merely speeds up their pace or facilitates the flow of information, thus making it easier for us to recognize them.

Keywords: change, global change, globalization, factors affecting change

1. Introduction

Today's world is defined and driven by change. Scholars studying the subject often draw attention to the great magnitude of changes observed in the world and their rapid pace, arguing that they have been caused chiefly by globalization, which has necessitated an ever-faster pace of technological progress. It is often stressed that the changes are indeed so abrupt that individual humans, and indeed even entire societies, have trouble keeping pace with absorbing the effects of the broadly-understood progress brought by the advancement of civilization, which often leads to social exclusion.

However, even a brief look at the history of mankind reveals that it has, in reality, always been characterized by change, and this fact is independent of

¹ Institute of Economics Polish Academy of Sciences

² Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics National Research Institute

globalization processes. Irrespective of how we define globalization, we can point out that even closed communities undergo evident changes – their pace may be a lot slower, but the process as such is indisputable.

Consequently, it must be said that **this search for new solutions has been a characteristic feature of mankind since the dawn of its history**. Changes are visible at every stage of the advancement of civilization, irrespective of whether we mean hunter-gatherer, agricultural or industrial societies or the newly-emerging post-industrial stage.³

At the same time, irrespective of the constant nature of change, we can observe that these processes are not identical across the world. **Rather, they are diversified, both in terms of intercontinental interdependencies and within specific continents. What is more, such differences are evident also within societies.** These observations provide food for thought on the factors that affect the pace, nature, and impact of the changes taking place in individual societies.

The purpose of this study is to identify and characterize the fundamental factors behind the emergence of change in the world, as well as the pace and nature of those changes.

2. Changes taking place in the world

Considerations, such as these, about understanding the world as being defined by change should of course be supported with examples of the processes that have been influential for the present characteristics of humanity. For reasons related to the nature of this study, we have decided to select what we see as the most important changes in order to illustrate the ongoing processes. The limited space here also prevents us from sketching out even the general characteristics of such processes, but this does not appear necessary in light of the goals of this chapter.

For the sake of simplicity, **we divide the processes of change into three key periods: the historical period**, or the times from the beginning of human

³ We, the authors of this study, are of the opinion that the world is facing another major inflection point that will result in the arrival of a new stage of civilization. This process has already begun, but it is long-term in its nature and will most likely last decades. At our current moment – namely a transition from one stage of civilization to another or, as we shall call it, a civilizational turning point – it is difficult to pin down the characteristics of the newly-emerging next stage of civilization, because the direction of changes has yet to be determined to a sufficient extent, and the external factors are not powerful enough to define it.

For these reasons, the exact shape of this newly-emerging stage remains unknown. In the scientific literature, one can find various terms pointing out something qualitatively new in terms of socioeconomic links, these include the “third wave”, “network society”, “wisdom society”, “knowledge society”, “post-industrial society”, and so on. Simultaneously, it is stressed in the literature that changes in conditions may take a turn for the worse, with threats necessitating a greater focus on survival as opposed to flourishing, as is demonstrated by such proposed concepts as “survival society” and “zero growth”.

history to the mid-1970s; the period of **globalization** (1975–2000); and **the transition to a new stage of civilization** (from 2001 onwards). This division is arbitrary, and the dates presented above are intended not to reflect specific events so much as to convey our general way of thinking to readers. As such, we link the beginning of the current stage of globalization with the changes in China's policy following Mao Zedong's death, the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and the spread of neoliberal policy.

Distinguishing between these periods is especially important for globalization and the transition to a new stage of civilization, because in practice these two processes overlap in time. The globalization wave that started in the 1970s continues until the present day. In recent years, however, we have observed the presence of additional factors that affect changes and make it possible to describe this period as a civilizational turning point, or a transition to a new stage of civilization. It is impossible to pinpoint precisely the moment of such transition, but still we must somehow recognize that recent years differ from previous periods, so we have decided subjectively to define this transition as having started with the arrival of the new millennium. That said, we must stress that this is a great simplification.

The historical period was the longest, so we can expect that it was characterized by the most profound change. If we take into account its scale, this approach is indeed legitimate. But if we compare these transformations with the ones that took place in the era of globalization and during the subsequent transition to a new stage of civilization, we will see that the pace of change in the following periods was much more rapid, and some processes were equally significant.

One purpose of our examination and juxtaposition of these periods is to show that the history of mankind has always been characterized by the presence of change. Another is to list the important transformations that occurred in the different periods we have identified.

In the historical period, we can identify the following areas in which changes took place:

- the style of life (from nomadic communities through agricultural rural communities to urban cultures);
- the socio-institutional system (from tribes to nation states);
- production (from handcrafting through primitive machines to assembly-line based manufacturing);
- the organization of economic activity (from self-reliance through quasi-open economies all the way to national economies and international trade);
- governance (from leadership based on force through monarchy and aristocracy to democracy);
- communication (from oral communication through writing to the use of radio waves);
- the organization of the basic social unit (from tribes through clan or guild membership to family).

In the era of globalization, changes went even further and encompassed the following fields:

- the organization of international trade (from economies with customs barriers to ones close to allowing the free movement of goods and capital);
- the ways in which the world is presented (from newspapers and reporting to the Internet and live video transmissions);
- the organization of governance (from sovereign nation states, through a system based on multilateral interdependencies, to economic integration and the growing role of multinational corporations, which contribute to degrading the existing model of the state);
- the system of government (the evolution of democracy to a quasi-democracy based on populist technocracy, and simultaneously the transition from authoritarianism to authoritarian developmentalism);
- the organization of production (from national production to outsourcing and just-in-time delivery to the relocation of production to target markets or to countries with lower costs).

The period of the transition to a new stage of civilization, in turn, has been characterized by changes in such areas as:

- the organization of the basic social unit (from the more traditional family to partnership-based relationships, one-person households, and single parents);
- means of communication (from direct interpersonal communication to a network society whose members rely on online means of communication);
- the conduct of warfare (a slow shift away from the direct engagement of military personnel towards unmanned technologies and cyberattacks, and away from direct combat towards indirectly undermining the adversary state, including launching cyberattacks against the key components of the economic infrastructure and swaying public opinion, for example through “troll factories”);⁴
- governance (the transition from quasi-democracy to “mediocracy” – i.e. the use of the media to communicate and hold consultations on political decisions and influence public moods – as well as the emergence of plutocracy).

The above list is by no means exhaustive, but we do feel that it names the most important changes in the sphere of development. However, even this short

⁴ A new form of conflict and fearmongering came to be observed in July 2020, when residents of the United States, as well as the United Kingdom and also Poland, received packages from China that contained unidentified seeds. Most likely, the unsolicited packages were intended to be promotional, i.e. aimed at getting likes on social media, but the US authorities regarded them as a new type of threat. People were warned not to open unwanted parcels and to send any opened packets of seeds to the federal authorities. Since the packets were sent without any explanation, the authorities assumed that the seeds may have been distributed to cause the spread of a new invasive species in the United States that might harm the local ecosystems. This led to the emergence of a new type of conflict and a new tool used for the purpose of fearmongering.

catalogue shows that all these periods were (and are) characterized by major changes that have redefined the socioeconomic relations both between and within specific societies to a significant extent.

3. Perpetual elements of change

Once we conclude that change is indeed a perpetual element of human civilization, we should try to answer certain important questions: What components have a strong impact on change? What is the nature of these components? What processes or conditions do they apply to? Formulating even general answers to such questions will make it possible to arrive at an answer to the question of why the world is constantly undergoing change.

Our general answer is this: **This situation is related primarily to the both individual and mass needs that people have.** But if so, then the corollary question arises: **What is the nature of these needs?** We may be helped in answering this question by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Without going into detail, we can distinguish between three major groups of universal needs which, taken together, have not only determined the survival of humans as a species but also impacted on our development in both qualitative and quantitative terms:

- **needs related to broadly-understood consumption, both individual and collective;**
- **the need for security;**
- **needs related to continuous changes that result in development.**

Development was presented in a similar way by the 19th-century theorists of economic integration, for example those who advocated the concept of *Grossraumwirtschaft*, justifying the need for integration and development with external threats, which they saw as the most powerful stimulus for action.

3.1 Consumption

Broadly-understood **consumption** has always been a prerequisite for the life and functioning of humans as a species. Historically speaking, the possibility of obtaining food served as a starting point for the development of mankind, so it is no coincidence that the basic form of civilization was agrarian society, whose main goal was to ensure an adequate supply of food. Different analyses say that this stage was preceded by hunter-gatherer society, but we do not have enough information about this stage of civilization to describe it in a reliable way. Moreover, the population clusters within this group were too dispersed to allow us to talk about a single, uniform stage of civilization.

That said, this stage of civilization was also characterized by changes. Their pace was rather slow, but hunter-gatherer societies were the ones that harnessed fire and made the first tools, in addition to satisfying their spiritual needs

PAPERS ON GLOBAL CHANGE

(for development) through what was the first evidence of religious worship. The changes described above were fundamentally important for mankind. Hunter-gatherers also started farming land, which changed their lifestyle and methods of foraging for food, thus satisfying one of the most important needs that humans have.

Today, we are unable to say with all certainty what factors led to the expansion of agrarian society. The difference between hunter-gatherer society and agrarian society lay chiefly in their foraging methods. It is usually believed that hunting and gathering were less effective than farming, but many studies have shown that at the initial stages of the development of agriculture, harvest failure and the risk related to ill-managed farming translated into a much greater risk of famine than migrations of animals hunted for food. For this reason, it appears that other conditions such as the possibility of obtaining food as part of a more permanent, sedentary lifestyle were equally important as predictable access to food. Such advantages may have included the possibility of forming permanent settlements near flint mines. This, in turn, facilitated greater access to goods and the satisfaction of non-food consumption needs.

Development was coupled with the gradual emergence of ever-wider consumption needs that went far beyond the normal subsistence needs, i.e. having adequate amounts of food, clothes, and living conditions. Such needs include the development of religion, law, the manufacturing of goods taking into account esthetic needs, and later also the development of art. Irrespective of this, agrarian societies are still dominated by needs related to survival.

A more permanent and settled lifestyle led to more changes, three of which deserve special attention. First of all, the development of agriculture, which facilitated not only the formation of permanent settlements but also the satisfaction of the needs of larger groups. This led to the emergence of cities as centers of development. Secondly, permanent settlements facilitated exchange between different societies, because those who were on the move knew where they could find a specific group. This translated into easier trade. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the formation of permanent settlements led to the specialization of labor, chiefly as a result of the development of cities, and lay the groundwork for the emergence of education systems.

In addition to farmers, whose task was to obtain food, other roles emerged that included warriors, administrators, priests, thinkers and inventors, artists, and many other professions. Such a division of labor varied depending on the period in history and territory, but we may omit such considerations here. We should stress, though, that social differences have existed since the beginning of humanity, and only small groups in society, in all periods in history at that, had factors of production or other forms of pressure on those deprived of such leverage in order to obtain resources needed for survival either through hard work or through engagement in armed expeditions.

3.2 Security

If compared to the consumption of food (and not only food), **security is equally important for survival and in some situations even more important.** Security applies to both individuals and larger groups, or indeed entire societies. Problems related to security have a long history and have undergone quite important changes. **Roughly speaking, such problems may be analyzed at four levels.**

The first, lowest of these levels, which is nonetheless the most important one from a certain perspective, pertains to individuals, or more broadly to the family. In this configuration, individuals must look after their own security as well as the security of their family and those close to them. Security threats at this lowest level may result from financial motives (the need to have resources necessary for survival as well as the risk of being robbed and deprived of property), social stature, and political or religious differences. Conflicts rooted in such motives may be isolated, prolonged, or even persistent (i.e. passed down from one generation to another). Regardless of their duration, these conflicts and related threats, perhaps with the exception of certain political conflicts, have existed since the beginnings of humanity. But even if an individual threat is eliminated, it may be followed by the emergence of another threat of the very same nature, albeit on the part of a different person. For example, the imprisonment of one thief does not protect us from being robbed by another. In certain situations, however, specific threats may be mitigated or may even disappear. In theory, such conflicts and threats even gave rise to strong bonds, for instance through marriage, the emergence of a more powerful mutual enemy, or other reasons – there are plenty examples of such situations, in different societies at that.

The second level is related to tribes and groups, and in later periods to class, social, religious, political, or partisan affiliations. It differs from the first level mainly in that it pertains to security understood much more broadly and requires the involvement of different social groups. Secondly, it applies to the security of not so much an individual or family as a group or groups that pursue rather clearly stated goals, related to the applicable political or religious principles or social liberties and rights. Since such differences also occurred in the past, occur in the present, and will most probably arise also in the future, they prompt or even force all those who profess the same views or have common interests to unite. What is important from this perspective is the dominant cultural system.

The existence of such diversified groups invariably leads to various conflicts, which often create long-term divisions in society. Such conflicts never die down completely, but they are sometimes alleviated to a certain extent or even lead to the establishment of collaboration. This has been particularly visible since the emergence of sovereign nation states, but the aforementioned conflicts and their positive resolutions also occurred earlier.

The third level of security is related to the state. Unlike the measures available at the previous two levels, the state has other resources at its disposal to

PAPERS ON GLOBAL CHANGE

minimize threats and conflicts. These include coercive measures and institutions in the form of different military formations aimed at ensuring not only public but also individual security.

Such coercive measures and institutions have two sources. On the one hand, they result from the long evolution of mutual relations between different social groups and ultimately become applicable norms. Their violation does not always result in sanctions being imposed, but the odium they attract from groups or societies means that they can be regarded as binding norms. Coercive state institutions, in turn, have a different nature. They create an entire system of dos and don'ts, laying down different regulations that on the one hand aim to ensure national security and the transparency of the applicable norms of behavior and on the other one determine the relations (or the rules of dealing) with other countries or external societies.

Institutional rules and norms, despite their long-term nature, evolve as a result of development and economic, political, and social changes on the scale of not only specific states, but also continents or even the world. The characteristics of institutions or their nature may be, and often is, imitational, or taken over from more developed countries.

The problem of security has always been and will always be strongly linked to the conditions of consumption in a specific society. Security is not only an important element of the survival of humans but also a major driving force behind development. Without the continued improvement of the standards of living and security conditions, development may be combined with regression. This has happened in the past on many occasions, is often the case in the present, and will most probably occur also in the future.

The fourth level involves global security. This type of security is still at the initial stage of development, and it is indeed not fully clear if it will ever turn into a full-fledged system. This stems from differences in the particularistic interests pursued by people who live on different continents and in different countries. However, we can observe more and more frequently the need for joint action on the part of humanity to ensure conditions that facilitate the survival of humans on Earth. This applies chiefly to cooperation in countering the excessive stress that humans exert on the environment, but such efforts also include the prevention of a nuclear war, terrorism (in the latter case, this is not as obvious as in other ones), etc.

In the context of worldwide action, the best example of global thinking about security can be found in the attempts to counter climate change. In addition, we can observe a growing risk of the emergence of a range of other, equally dangerous threats, for example those referred to as planetary thresholds. Such threats affect all people, regardless of their ethnicity and views. What poses a problem, however, is their hard-to-capture nature and the absence of a clear method of resolving them.

The complicated nature of global security solutions may be demonstrated by the example of actions related to the COVID-19 epidemic. The problem affects all

of humanity, but instead of collaboration aimed at getting to know the enemy (the virus) better, we have witnessed a cacophony of mutual recriminations and attempts to advance particularistic interests, not necessarily related to the epidemic. In this context, the United States' moves to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) may be seen as the culmination of such trends, limiting the possibility of international cooperation and the resolution of problems at the global level.

It must be stressed that the fourth level of security as such is still not yet a sufficiently significant stimulus inducing change, but this situation may prove substantially different if its importance rises. Depending on the magnitude and rapidity of threats, adjustment measures taken on the scale of the globe may even assume very radical forms, for example a change in the paradigm of economic governance.

3.3 Needs related to development

The third component comprises the needs that are related to development, both personal and social. Development pertains to spiritual and material needs. It may manifest itself in efforts to boost one's social position through the increased possession of more goods or in the form of the development of human civilization, for example through new inventions or innovative solutions. **Stimuli for development (change) may differ in their nature. Here, we should place the emphasis on two: education and people's need to compare themselves with others.**

Education is crucial for generating knowledge and creating tools for creative thinking. **Also, it is a component that in its formalized form was the last to be included in the list of social needs, but the closer the world approached the modern era, the more important this component became.**

For many centuries, or strictly speaking millennia, education was practically inaccessible to an overwhelming majority of societies – a situation that did not change until the Late Middle Ages. With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution and the industrial stage of civilization, the development of education started to gather momentum, but it accelerated in a significant way only in those societies and countries that were characterized by the emergence of a new model of functioning and demand for people who were educated, be it at lower or higher levels.

Such development was initially observed mainly in the countries of Western Europe, but it gradually spread across other European countries, including those that had emerged under the influence of the European cultural circle. From this perspective, a breakthrough came in the aftermath of the two world wars, especially World War II.

On the one hand, this situation was affected by the rise in the number of countries. When the world was on the brink of World War I, there were 15 sovereign states in Europe. Today, there are 44. This translates into growing demand for people who are educated and capable of governing sovereign states.

PAPERS ON GLOBAL CHANGE

On the other hand, similar phenomena can be observed in the economy, where a higher level of development translates into growing demand for well-educated workers, whereas unqualified workers have greater difficulty finding jobs. Increasingly, labor involves the operation of specialist devices, as opposed to the simple application of human muscle-power.

This phenomenon has become particularly visible in recent decades. Hence, education is becoming an essential commodity, such as consumption and security. In this context, we could say that the arrival of information society has necessitated relatively universal education, which is a prerequisite for changes and for understanding their nature.

Basic conditions for modern-day development include changes not only in technology but also mental changes, and the latter are practically impossible without education. Hence, we can view education as one of the most important sectors that have influence over development and, more important, the changes taking place in the world.

For this reason, education has become one of the most important public goods in which the state is engaged. This holds true for both public and private education. Better educated individuals have greater possibilities of securing their own wellbeing.

In turn, **people's need to compare themselves to others** has practically always been part of human nature. Humans need to stand out among others, for example by looking "better". This need may take on many forms, pertaining to both wealth (the goods in someone's possession as well as their value, the accumulation of goods deprived of utility functions, such as works of art, historic monuments, and so on) as well as the spiritual aspects (the possibility of participating in exceptional cultural or religious events, experiencing unique aspects of nature, having access to works of culture, gaining recognition in the eyes of others, and influencing the course of events, for example as a result of one's political position, professional titles, scientific degrees, and so on). Changes that result from such comparison with others may be effected through both positive and negative actions. The former include all action aimed at creating something or achieving added value, for example formulating a new scientific theory, creating an invention, setting up an enterprise, and so on. The latter comprise the steps taken to worsen the situation of others while maintaining or improving one's own situation. In this case, there is also a wide range of tools that can be used, starting from simple theft or robbery, through the creation of fake news and negative opinions, all the way to much more complicated actions that involve using one's own position and authority to discredit individuals or social groups that might serve as a point of reference. We can find plenty of examples of such actions in the world around us, so we see no need to list them extensively. It is important that we stress people's need to stand out from the rest as a strong incentive leading to change. Its impact is significant at the level of both specific individuals and groups (local communities, nations, religious groups, and so on).

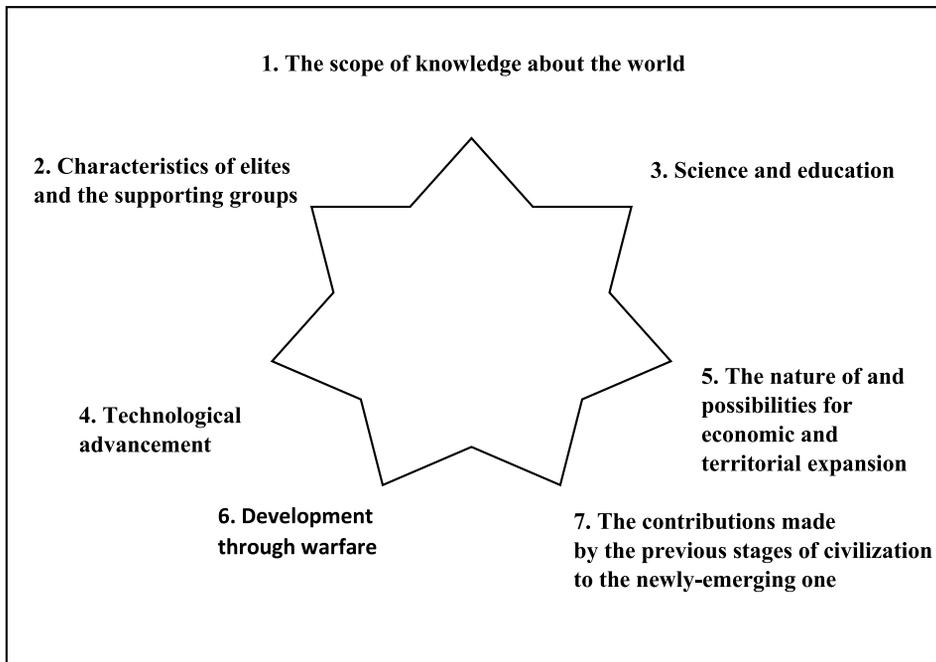
4. Historical factors behind development

Securing the continued improvement of the conditions needed for survival has always been the starting point for development processes. However, analyzing them, especially in the long-term (including the past, the present, and the future), requires us to take into account more components and, more importantly, their differing nature. That said, it seems that the human individual will remain the most fundamental driver of all change, setting the direction or directions of development for larger groups and communities of people.

We will not attempt to go into detail on the different characteristics of development, which has always been globally diversified, but instead now wish to take a closer look at the factors that have influenced this process in the past stages of civilization, the present stage, and the new stage to which we are currently transitioning.

Development (change) may be caused by different factors whose exact number may vary depending on how detailed the topics we analyze are. Taking into account the key components that affect development, we may present them as falling into a certain **distinctive, seven-way configuration of interrelated factors**. Before we present this analysis, we must stress that the role of these

Fig. 1. Seven-way configuration of interrelated factors driving change



Source: authors' original proposal

components has changed in different periods of history and in different regions. In addition, they often fulfilled different functions in different countries. The order in which they are presented is not intended to reflect their importance, but it does signify the sequence in which they appeared in history, not so much individually as to a certain extent collectively. The collective nature of these factors becomes more significant as we transition from one stage of civilization to another or from one epoch to another. This means that the number of those actively participating in such changes grows.

4.1. Ever-growing knowledge of the world

If we look at the history of the world, the gradual development of the human species, we will see that one of the most important characteristics of emerging societies was their ever-increasing knowledge about the world. Getting to know the world was a gradual and evolutionary process that was related to the capacity of individuals or social groups to move around and transfer the acquired knowledge. Roughly speaking, we can distinguish between four major phases of world exploration, each broadening human knowledge about the world, chiefly from the perspective of the part of the European community that was the most active in this respect.⁵

Phase one:

This phrase is essentially linked to the emergence of the Roman Empire, or the period from the reign of Octavian (the 1st century BCE) until the division of the Empire in 395 into the Western Roman Empire (which lasted until 476) and the Eastern Roman Empire, later called the Byzantine Empire, conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Geographical knowledge encompassed the Mediterranean Basin, the Middle East, and partially some regions in Asia.

Phase two:

Although geographical discoveries have a long history that dates back to 600 BCE, it is assumed that the beginning of perpetual and continuous change in the world was ushered in by Columbus' discovery of America (1492). Although major regions in Asia had been discovered before, certain aspects of the great transition from agrarian society to industrial society are usually linked to the discovery of America.

⁵ In the historical context, we should note a certain paradox that becomes evident when comparing the histories of China and Japan. On the one hand, China enjoyed many advantages that facilitated rapid growth and permanent change. The country's knowledge about the world, which surpassed the knowledge of the Europeans for many centuries, also played an important role in this respect. But since China had no rivals and felt it was the world's most developed country, it also showed no inclination to implement reforms, which ended up leading to a difficult clash with European countries and their aggressive policy. In Japan's case, in turn, a deliberate policy of isolationism, which also meant that the country knew little about its external surroundings, contributed to the demise of its power and ultimately necessitated launching effective reforms.

Phase three:

This phase involves the subjugation of numerous poorly-developed countries in Africa, America, and Asia by European countries. The first countries to become colonial powers were Portugal and Spain (the 15th and the 16th century). In the period from the 16th to the 18th century, they were joined by England, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium, and in the second half of the 19th century by the United States, Italy, Germany, and Japan. In this context, we must not forget about Russia, which due to its geographical conditions created a different model of colonization, i.e. it did not have to subjugate overseas territories in far-away regions but instead took control of the vast neighboring areas. Such colonization was both peaceful (for example in Siberia) and armed (the conquest of the Caucasus). Colonialism changed the world to a fundamental degree by providing strong stimuli for development within the colonial powers, which on the one hand gained numerous resources and low-cost labor and on the other hand underwent changes in their systems of administration and implemented institutional solutions related to the industrial stage of civilization. Colonialism came to encompass practically the whole of the world – Africa, Australia, and New Zealand as well as Asia and America, especially South and Middle America.

Phase four:

This phase covers the period stretching from World War I, through World War II, to the failure of the socialist experiment. This period was characterized by full decolonization and the emergence of countries that adopted socialism, countries linked to the Soviet Union but also those that then formed Yugoslavia. The disintegration of the Soviet Union was a bloodless process, but the breakup of Yugoslavia entailed long-term armed conflict. The fourth phase put an end to the possibilities of geographical exploration and expansion, with most regions of the world being already discovered and described. There were very few tribes left that tried to retain their distinctive cultural identity by isolating themselves from their surroundings. Over time, however, this became increasingly difficult.

The fourth phase, or strictly speaking the end of World War II, also brought about changes in Europe. As the need arose to mitigate the threat of another armed conflict, the European countries chose to integrate, and since then they have pursued ever closer integration. The changes taking place in Europe are not only far-reaching but also new and unique. The European Union (EU), which is a result of these processes, is an important element of information society. Such solutions may be seen as a bridge to a new stage of civilization, as demonstrated by numerous integration projects in the world, which often emulate European solutions but are institutionally not as developed as the EU.

However, the institutional solutions linked to the new stage of civilization are already accompanied by a rather extensive technological infrastructure, including new communication systems and especially new substitutes for manual labor, such as robotization and artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, humanity's discovery of the world as a whole and acquiring knowledge about it has been a long process that still continues, but the world is nowadays already so well studied that we can assess relatively correctly both the benefits and the dangers that are entailed by the changes necessary from the perspective of the continued advancement of information society, the nature of current threats, the conflicts that exist between specific countries and may escalate, and the sources of internal conflicts.

4.2. Characteristics of elites and supporting groups

Development and changes are a common phenomenon on the global scale. However, the history of various countries, nations, or even continents teaches us that changes related to development are not merely positive or linear. These different positive and negative experiences have had various causes, but the decisive role, in our view, has been played by the nature of elites and the groups that support them.

When we analyze the past and present changes as well as the changes likely to take place on the global scale, we must always bear in mind that the stimuli for changes and their potential directions are shaped by political as well as intellectual and scientific elites, both temporally and territorially. Some see these directions as positive, others as negative. This results from the aforementioned universal principle holding that the nature of development is diversified, and this holds true for the development of various societies as well as groups and individuals. All extant documentation as well as historical information appears to show that important changes have always been spearheaded or inspired by individuals or larger groups, and in the modern-day world by different political parties. In this context, we should characterize these elites in somewhat greater detail and from different perspectives.

The first and most general division of elites relates to the nature of their activity. Here, we can list two key groups: political elites and intellectual elites. Without analyzing these two groups in detail, we can treat their key functions as the point of departure for further considerations. If we wanted to define the first of these groups in unambiguous terms, we would say that political elites determine the direction and methods of development, infusing its nature with a specific ideology. Essentially, it could be said that ideology in a sense determined the direction of development, and not the other way round. Without trying to define in a clear and unambiguous way the influence that the ideology professed by elites has had on development, we might only note that the negative impact of ideology has changed the world quite frequently, and the costs of these changes have been particularly high.

As for intellectual elites, their influence over development has been fundamentally different. This resulted on the one hand from the different roles that they played, and on the other from the differences that existed within specific groups. Intellectual elites can be generally seen as being of two different kinds.

The first of these comprises elites that wield fundamental influence over the broadly-understood social mentality thanks to the works that they create in the sphere of literature, music, painting, etc. Specific intellectual schools, or especially influential intellectual individuals, could be strongly linked to political elites of various affiliation. In turn, the latter kind of intellectual has always been linked to science and wielded special influence over development in the context of both technical sciences and some humanities. That said, it is hard to distinguish such a consolidated group within humanities – here, rather, we would probably have individuals or smaller groups linked to the political elite.

The activity of specific elites has precipitated changes on the scale of the globe or specific continents, not to mention specific countries, and the consequences of such influence has varied widely. We could argue over which group has had greater influence over changes and development: political elites or intellectual elites. We do not have sufficiently reliable metrics to assess this. Of course, such attempts have been made, but they were influenced by temporal changes that resulted from economic growth, the degree of innovation, the level of education, and perhaps above all the political model. In this context, we should only stress that some types of elites have had a destructive impact on development and changes on the scale of continents or even the whole globe.

When we try to classify the impacts that individual components have had on development or changes, we will come across numerous barriers that hinder this process. However, it appears that the political factor has had the greatest influence in the short or medium term. As a rule, political elites, backed by numerous groups representing diverse interests, carry out changes a lot faster than intellectual elites, which does not mean that these changes are always positive. Both past and present experiences offer numerous examples of such situations.

These considerations lead us to a single conclusion: without political and intellectual elites, the changes that have played out in different fields and areas, not to mention changes of a global scale, would not have taken place. In the conditions of peacetime, both political as well as scientific and intellectual elites set forth the main directions of change on the global scale.

4.3. Education and science

Of course, we could argue over which of the seven components presented above serves as the most powerful causative factor behind changes, both mental and real ones. If we wanted to measure change in the long-term and in all of the main spheres in life, we would say that this role is played by education and science. These two fields may overlap in many areas, but we should give priority to science.

If we look at the history of the world, especially in longer periods, considering both the agrarian stage of civilization and partially the industrial stage, we will see that large or even dominant parts of societies belonged to groups that had no or extremely limited contact with education. It was not until the industrial

stage of civilization reached more mature phases that education became universal, because that was necessitated by both the system of production and the functioning of the state. Education as a universal phenomenon was present chiefly in the economically developed countries. Its situation was not as good in the countries that relied on peripheral and imitative economic and institutional solutions linked to capitalism, which was seen as synonymous with industrial society.

Science played a different role, and this held true for both exact sciences and humanities. The former laid the groundwork for new solutions in the sphere of production, technology, and communication. Exact sciences created the framework and conditions for changes, which were initially quantitative and over time became also qualitative. Later, those were also developmental changes, linked chiefly to technological advancements, which changed the conditions of life and production as well as hard infrastructure. Humanities fulfilled different tasks: on the one hand, they showed visions of the world both in the present and in the future, sometimes even utopian ones, but they also sketched out the tenets of the future reality. But their main task involved changing the social mentality. That is because every change in terms of quality, production, or politics forces societies to alter their mentality.

In short, it is difficult to overestimate the role of education and science as important mechanisms facilitating development and by the same token also radical changes, regardless of the scope of this process. This is because this process has been evolutionary and diversified, not only globally but also across the scale of specific continents or even countries.

4.4. Technological advancement

With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, the world started to change rapidly. Two important processes took place that changed the face of the world, though to different degrees and at different paces. First of all, human labor was largely replaced by machines, especially in the burgeoning industry. Secondly, cities changed in terms of their importance and characteristics and transformed into major centers of labor, causing people to migrate on a massive scale away from rural settings in search of work in the industry and in the service sector.

If we look at the industrial stage of civilization from the perspective of the influence of technology and science, we can list several important processes that changed the conditions of life for huge groups in society, which was not an easy process, at least for the first generations.

First of all, these changes included a fundamental change in the nature of labor. Factories demanded work that was rhythmical, timely, and – just as importantly – precise. Such labor differed completely from the work performed in agriculture, especially by owners of small farms.⁶

⁶ In this context, it is worth noting that this process was coupled with the simultaneous emergence of the modern-day system of education, which operated based on similar principles, with schools working in similar ways as factories. Schools were expected to teach students to

Secondly, cities imposed a relevant system of norms, or dos and don'ts. New, previously-known institutions emerged that regulated the principles of conduct in cities, which differed substantially from life in rural areas, at least initially.

Thirdly, a new system of transportation developed slowly thanks to the presence of post offices, telegraphs, and telephones as well as the use of steam locomotives. At the same time, rail enabled to people to move about relatively rapidly and look for jobs outside familiar settings.

Fourthly, education gradually became mandatory, at least at the level of primary education. Thanks to this, talented young people could pursue further education at higher levels. This situation was conducive to the development of technical education at primary, secondary, and tertiary level and was fostered above all by demand on the part of the burgeoning industry.

Fifthly, the free-market economy started to develop on an ever-broader scale, thus fundamentally transforming attitudes towards economic activity and prospects of advancement as part of this system.

Sixthly, cities created possibilities for establishing numerous contacts in different associations, ranging from sports associations through unions (including labor unions) to political parties. Such opportunities could be more realistically explored in major urban agglomerations, but smaller towns also offered chances for further development, better jobs, and the establishment of numerous contacts. In any event, urban migration from distant rural areas offered truly great opportunities, especially for the brave.

In short, technological advancement has gone hand-in-hand with fundamental processes of change in terms of the role of human labor and for the gradual but unabating rise of major urban centers.

4.5. Characteristics and nature of economic and territorial expansion

The relatively rapid dissemination of the market economy became one of the most important characteristics of the industrial stage of civilization in the economic sphere, with the market becoming a major regulator of production. Demand and supply became the main mechanisms determining the ups and downs of production, in addition to regulating prices, especially in the liberal political model.

Another important characteristic of the market economy is the constant pursuit of expansion, whose main goal is to gain control of not only the internal market in what is the country of origin for the production and the owner of the enterprise, but also external markets. This is tantamount to the "seizure" of foreign territory in a relatively peaceful manner. Those fighting for their position in the market competed chiefly on price and product quality. External expansion became

be punctual and to work according to schedule (with sharply fixed lessons and breaktimes), rather than based on the former style of lectures, delivered by masters, with no time limits – they had ended when the topic was exhausted, not when some school bell started to ring.

a necessity, because growing demand in the internal market was coupled with the emergence of new enterprises, whose owners wanted to amass fortunes by modifying sought-after goods and manipulating prices.

Although competition, whose goal was to claim an ever-growing part of the market, both internally and externally, was peaceful, the early stages of market rivalry were characterized by various conflicts, sometimes even armed ones. As we stated before, important forms of external expansion included colonial conquests, especially those made by powerful or highly-developed European countries. The dissemination of the market economy was gradual and effected both by peaceful means and by means of armed combat not only in the areas dominated by the industrial stage of civilization but also in those dominated by the agrarian stage.

The market economy not only created conditions for the appearance of new types of products but also promoted technological advancements, which completely transformed the key production resources of the new stage of civilization (thus gradually changing public mentality), including in particular the new type of labor in industrial facilities. In this way, the market economy became one of the most important mechanisms of development.

4.6. Armed conflicts as a major driver of change and development

Since the beginning of the development of mankind, armed conflicts have been a persistent and more importantly ever-growing phenomenon. In this respect, we could formulate the following interdependence: the higher the level of development of a given society, the more dramatic the conflicts it experiences in terms of both the number of casualties and changes in the territories occupied by the participants in these conflicts as well as material damage. Wars may and do have widely varying sources. We will not attempt to present a detailed breakdown of such causes here, but will instead focus on the several past centuries so as to distinguish several types of wars that had overwhelming influence over changes and development.

We should start off by recognizing **religious wars**. In the 17th century, they were an important prelude to the emergence of the industrial stage of civilization as well as sovereign nation states, especially in Europe (this model of the state has remained valid until the present day). The model of the sovereign nation state continued to crystallize throughout the Napoleonic Wars, which transformed completely the feudal or post-feudal models. The 19th century witnessed the beginnings of **revolutionary wars**, with the Paris Commune serving as the prototype for such conflicts. Also noteworthy were the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the civil war in Spain. **World Wars I and II** were of a different nature and ranked among the most important conflicts in terms of their scale, the number of the countries involved, the casualties, and the consequences.

This list of wars or types of armed conflicts is not exhaustive, but we should also mention **conflicts resulting from the breakup of countries**. These include

the armed conflict linked to the breakup of Yugoslavia as well as various wars resulting from decolonization, which have in practice continued until the modern times. They have been linked both to religious conflicts, partly similar to the religious wars in the 17th century, and to ethnic conflicts, as ethnic groups very often find themselves divided by borders drawn without any heed being paid to the ethnicity of inhabitants.

Wars entail numerous consequences, but among the most important ones are territorial shifts. New countries emerge, some of which did not exist before. Others change their territories, as was the case after Italian unification and the status changes of Singapore and Hong Kong, not to mention the importance of the breakup of the Soviet Union for the emergence of sovereign states.

Wars have had an equally important impact on technological advancements and the mental development of societies. It would be hard to list all the inventions that were inspired by the activity of the military sector and were partially applied in the civilian sector, but they ranged from nuclear fission and the development of aviation to flights to the moon, nanotechnology, and many more.

Wars have also had an overwhelming influence over mental changes in numerous societies, both the winning ones and those who were defeated. New alliances were formed, but hatred continued to escalate. Wars have given rise to both positive and negative changes.

4.7. The human, intellectual, and economic contributions that the previous stages of civilization have made to ongoing processes of change

This problem, an extremely complex one, has essentially not been analyzed in detail before, with the contributions that specific segments made to changes and development having been scrutinized and analyzed rather randomly. This results not only from the complexity of the world as a whole but also from the differences between specific segments in the context of both continents and countries. For this reason, we have decided to point out several contributions that we consider particularly important for development and by the same token changes, not only those of a fundamental nature.

First of all, each consecutive stage of civilizational advancement is based on certain fundamental components that the past brings to lay the groundwork for further development. Such contributions include above all human capital along with its size, education level, and creativity, as well as the dominant mentality. This capital is greatly dependent on the size of the population and its characteristics. Development entails constant growth in population numbers, but this growth is not distributed evenly across time or space.

Secondly, the segment related to the flourishing of cities and hard infrastructure contributes to development in an equally important way. Its significance is linked to its durability, which often stretches beyond the following stages of civilization. More importantly, its role continues to grow, not only as

a result of the migration of people from agriculture to the industry and the service sector. Although some types of production disappear and the nature of services changes, they are replaced or indeed even succeeded by new products and services that originated in the past, but their massive scale belongs to the new phase of development. This is also a manifestation of the continuity between the past and the present and partially also a prelude to future development.

Historical experiences teach us that numerous concepts and ideas that could not be put into effect in the past provide an important impulse for change in the subsequent phases of development both locally, continentally, and globally. This fact results from the imitative nature of development, which is a certain universal rule that applies to practically all stages of civilization, including the ones that are yet to come.

Thirdly, these permanent components or even segments that are changing the world include different ideas, ideologies, and views that are initially professed or supported by individuals or small groups and over time begin to influence politics, interpersonal relations in certain societies or countries as ideologies that go beyond the borders of specific countries. Such ideologies sometimes affect positively interpersonal relations and the emergence of such institutions as democracy as a model and an ideology, whereas others have a negative impact on state institutions, the examples being Bolshevism and fascism. At the same time, there are many different ideologies, both positive ones, which stem from the general structure of democracy and include ethnic, religious, and moral tolerance, and negative ones such as nationalism, ethnic favoritism, racism, and so on. The diversity of these ideologies has a huge impact on changes, not only within specific countries but also globally.

This segment has played an important role in the past, and it also affects in a significant way the interpersonal relations in the modern-day world. It will most likely also have great importance in the future, especially in light of modern communication systems.

4.8. Summary of the seven-way configuration of change-driving factors

If we regard all the components of the seven-way configuration of factors as a model of changes in the historical process of mankind's development, we will see that all of them have affected development, but to very different extents. In most cases, such changes were positive, but we must not omit the negative processes.

If we look at all these changes in a comprehensive way, we will see that development and related changes are not linear but have a very sinusoidal nature at all levels: individual countries and continents as well as the whole of the globe. This brings us to the conclusion that development-related changes will have a similar nature also in the future, and we can already see this in the present-day world.

5. The impact of globalization on the changing world

Globalization may be seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, this phenomenon has a very long history, because integration and interaction, whether peaceful or conflict-driven, have always been present in the world. Such processes are caused by economic, political, technological, and partly also social factors. The first acceleration of globalization processes was coupled with geographical discoveries, which on the one hand broadened visions of the world and on the other led to the establishment of the first political and economic ties with the newly-discovered lands, most of which became colonies, chiefly of the European countries.

Before we present the mechanisms and consequences of modern-day globalization processes that have a significant or even decisive impact on the changing world, we feel it is crucial to point out how in the past globalization processes were partly reversible – unlike modern-day globalization, which is more likely than not to intensify, at least in the nearest century. It appears impossible to slow down such changes, let alone to reverse them. Before we attempt to provide broader arguments to justify this hypothesis, we should mention two opposing processes that took place in the late 1980s. That was when on the one hand full decolonization came to an end and on the other one globalization processes grew in intensity, sparked off chiefly by economic and technological changes.

The notion of permanent and ever-more intensive globalization processes is apt when we look globally, not in the context of individual countries, especially small and medium-sized ones. Such countries are characterized by relatively low or limited population and economic potentials, which means that the globalization processes there may have and often have both positive and negative consequences.

What is globalization, then? The answer is both simple and extremely complicated, because globalization on the one hand boils down to integration and on the other one triggers numerous contradictions that existed in the past as well as creates new ones that were previously unknown or insignificant. We will not go into great detail here, but will limit ourselves to listing the following components and mechanisms of globalization:

1. The universal nature of the market economy, despite the fact that its manifestation in specific countries is diversified in terms of both scale and scope.
2. The ever-deepening international division of labor, which has caused foreign trade to take on special significance in the process of growth.
3. The growing role of the movement of goods, services, and capital has led to the emergence of new economic and financial entities such as multinational corporations and financial markets. These often seem to be interfering in the internal activity of specific countries, not only in the sphere of economics, which in many countries leads to certain powers being taken over by such new entities.

4. Globalization has led to the emergence of international institutions that have a significant regulatory impact on trade between countries, the flow of investments, and financial markets.
5. The factors that proved particularly conducive to globalization processes were technological changes related to the Information Revolution, with the resultant informational flow revolutionizing not only the availability of information but also the rapid pace of its exchange, not to mention visualization-related processes.
6. Globalization favors the emergence of new institutions such as integration-based organizations. The most developed form of such institutions is the EU, but many integration-based organizations of an economic nature already exist, on all continents at that.
7. In the context of the consequences of globalization, we may not omit to mention the emergence of new economic powers, which came into existence in a relatively short time span (the past three decades), such as China and to a smaller extent also India.

In the context of the changing world, globalization may be approached from the perspective of both its positive and its negative aspects. There is no arguing that globalization is one of the most important modern-day mechanisms of changing the world.

Positive globalization processes include: first of all, growth in GDP on a global scale; secondly, revolutionary changes in technology, especially communication systems; thirdly, positive economic, social, and educational changes in many countries of the world; and fourthly, the possibilities of exploring the world and easily moving across the globe.

As for the negative processes and changes, we can list especially the rapidly growing income differentials on the scale of specific countries and continents as well as the whole globe. Further, the list includes above all rivalry between major powers as well as their supporters and allies, chiefly those that rank among small and medium-sized countries. Finally, there are the fierce fight over resources and rivalry over new technologies.

Such diversified interests are pursued against the backdrop of conflicts of different degrees of visibility between small and medium-sized countries resulting from the past events and from the cultural systems of such countries.

In the context of these considerations, we feel obliged to posit the following question: **How is globalization affecting the volatility of the world?** It is difficult to answer this question in an unambiguous way, because we cannot measure the pace of change in an objective way, nor can we compare the modern-world with previous periods in history. However, based on observations of the world around us, we can see that changes have accelerated rapidly over the past decades. This may be due to a range of factors, but the particularly powerful ones appear to include the opening up of the world. On the one hand, this process was caused by globalization, especially in the economic sphere – initially, in the form of easier international trade

and later in the form of changes in factors of production and easier capital flows. However, we must not forget all these things would not have been possible without globalization in the flow of information and ideas, which brought about political transformations in the world. Here, we should mention above all the reforms launched in China in 1976 after Mao Zedong's death as well as the fall of the bipolar world as a result of *perestroika*, the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the transformations in the former socialist countries, also those outside Europe.

Globalization, through the increased visibility of the Western world and lifestyle, has contributed to changes in the life of a significant share of the population. A certain feedback mechanism could be observed here, with the political transformations making it possible for inhabitants of the countries experiencing them to travel abroad, especially to culturally different areas, and thus also to learn more about the world as well as the needs and lifestyles of people living in other countries. This, in turn, brought about eagerness to follow a similar path of development to attain the Western lifestyle, at least in terms of wealth. Consequently, a certain self-propelling mechanism emerged that could be initially set in motion only through the easier exchange of goods, but soon also through imitation of existing innovations and later through their further improvement. The roles became partially reversed, and the flow of goods contributed to the development of technology, with a crucial role being played by information and communication technologies.

Facilitating the flow of information results in the development of new technologies and possibilities for people. Globalization has led to the dissemination of information technologies and the Internet, which have significantly altered the face of the world's economy. Examples include the outsourcing of production and services, which is currently a common practice. Such a situation on the one hand leads to the reduction of the costs of doing business and on the other one creates barriers or even conflicts in the relations between customers and manufacturers. Simultaneously, communication technologies affect methods of working. Visionaries have long pointed out the scale of possible changes leading to the emergence of a new type of society whose members will not be forced to function according to existing rules, i.e. commute to work every day and perform their tasks at specific hours. The possibility of following such a path of development has been tested extensively during the COVID-19 epidemic, with workers in many countries being forced to work remotely. Practice has shown that such work is by all means possible. In many cases, it has been received quite favorably.⁷

⁷ This involuntary experiment will surely be the subject of many studies with interesting conclusions. Opinions on this issue are divided. On the one hand, people have noticed that remote work is possible and sometimes even more effective than in-office work, because they are more focused on the tasks at hand. In addition, those who spend an hour every day commuting to and from work started to benefit from an extra 10 hours of free time a week. On the other hand, remote work requires certain discipline, which may be hard for those who are not used to organizing their work by themselves. Moreover, such additional burdens as the

Irrespective of how we look at globalization, it is one of the most important processes behind development, and it causes the world to undergo profound change, both positive and negative. It is difficult to say which of these processes prevail, because they have not continued long enough to allow us to make accurate estimates. We will return to this topic after we analyze the transitions from one stage of civilization to another that we are currently witnessing.

6. Change in the period of the ongoing transition to a new stage of civilization

We live in an era that could be described as an inflection point in the advancement of civilization. In practice, we can observe two completely different civilizational turning points taking place in the modern-day world. The first of these involves the transition from industrial to post-industrial (information) society, and the second could be referred to as the degradation of agrarian society.

Such a clash is something unique and previously unknown. This entails special and not always positive consequences for development processes, especially those that change the face of the world in the long-term.

It appears that special importance should be attached to what are highly diverse goals pursued by specific regions and countries, which follow not only from the fact that they are at different stages of the advancement of civilization but also from the existence of a huge temporal gap in their development. It becomes especially visible when we compare such countries as the UK and Switzerland with most of the countries in the central part of Africa.

If the transition from the industrial stage of civilization to information society is a certain historical necessity, because the conditions for this change already exist (chiefly technological and economic but partially also mental ones), the transition related to the degradation of agrarian society raises certain doubts. Such doubts can be expressed in the form of the following question: **Is it possible to skip over one stage in the advancement of civilization, jumping instead into the next, more developed stage?** No existing theory of civilization, of all those posited in sociology, philosophy, economics, and political science, has provided us with an answer to this question. We could even go one step further and presume that this question, as such, has ever really been asked.

But it must be asked for at least two reasons. First of all, the modern-day world is a complex system of intertwined phenomena, and now this is more true than ever before. Secondly, some of the modern-era novelties reach the

need to look after children, which were also forced to learn remotely or share their Internet connection (whose quality is not always sufficient) with other members of the household, led to difficulties that made it harder to assess such solutions objectively.

economically or politically least developed countries, but these novelties are not always limited to positive processes and include to a significant extent also negative phenomena. Decolonization did not mean a rapid transition to modernity or prosperity.

If the need arose to answer the question of what stage of civilization we are currently living in, the answers would differ depending on who we asked and where. **The modern-day world is, in fact, an amalgam of three interlocked stages of civilization with different population, economic, social, and political potentials.**

There is no doubt that if we adopted population as the criterion, we would see that the dominant part of the world's population is still at the agrarian stage. This applies chiefly to Africa and to a large extent to Asia, but this stage of civilization is also dominant in some areas in Middle America. In turn, the industrial stage is the dominant stage of civilization in Europe, North America, and certain regions in Asia (Japan, South Korea, and China, which are characterized by a mixture of the agrarian stage and the industrial stage, along with certain rather well-developed components of information society), as well as Australia and New Zealand. In North America, just like in Europe, the post-industrial stage is already developing in a significant way, but the degree and pace of this development remains highly diversified.

Such briefly described and diverse characteristics of civilizational turning points show how much the world is changing, because these processes have taken place over just the several past decades, although the beginnings of information society were visible in some countries even earlier.

The modern-day world is not just ethnically and culturally diversified. Importantly, it is also characterized by a mixture of different stages of civilization. This situation has far-reaching consequences that manifest themselves in contradictions, both those that are legacies from the past eras and the new ones, which are effects of the recent decades.

We will not attempt to present a hierarchy of threats or contradictions or present them all, but will nonetheless list those that are especially important for the modern-day world.

6.1. Changes in the list of the countries dominating different stages of civilization

In agrarian society, we can list different dominant countries depending on the period. Here, we should mention Egypt, the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great's state, and in particular the Roman Empire. The peaks of their dominance came at different periods of history. In the industrial stage of civilization, in turn, the dominant country was the UK, followed later by the United States. The Soviet Union was also considered as one of the world's powers and one of the countries that exerted their dominance in the bipolar balance of power during the Cold War.

It is difficult to say which countries will hold dominant positions in the information stage of civilization. That said, the emergence of two such entities is visible from today's perspective. The first is the United States with its established presence as an economic, military, and political power. The second is its ever-stronger rival – China. The pace of change in China's economy and politics is enormous, even unprecedented. In just three decades, China has turned from a country with a very low level of development into a power that is successfully competing against the United States and has even surpassed it in some aspects. Consequently, the rivalry between these two entities is growing, and its intensity is so great that many commentators are already calling it a new "economic war", likening it to the Cold War. In fact, its consequences may be much more far-reaching. It appears that this conflict is no so much a race as a war of attrition. It is quite likely that it will play out on completely new levels, with cyberwarfare being one of the numerous new fields of rivalry. Despite having numerous advantages, such as being very advanced in building the post-industrial economy, the United States is struggling to retain its position, and these efforts appear ultimately fated to fail. This belief results from the changing conditions, which have their source in the combination of civilizational turning points and globalization. What is more, China as a country that is pursuing expansion often makes use of the latest fruits of development, thanks to which it appears better adapted to facing imminent challenges. China's advantages include: a greater capacity on the part of the authorities to acting adaptively in rapidly changing conditions, a better understanding of the importance of environmental threats, and a society with a more disciplined approach shaped by cultural conditions. All in all, this rivalry offers yet more evidence that change is a continual process.

6.2. Political changes in the world

Industrial society created its main political model in the form of liberal democracy. This is a model that has so far provided the broadest rights and freedoms to citizens. Nevertheless, the past three decades have also witnessed ever-growing autocratization, or a change of regime towards limiting freedoms while still maintaining elections. This process was initiated in the 1990s. Strong economic performance on the part of such countries as China and Singapore shows that the system of government referred to as authoritarian developmentalism can compete with democracy, especially in societies that are culturally accustomed to the authoritative role of government.

At the same time, we can notice a certain distortion of democracy caused by the excessive influence of non-democratic forces. This process may result from the dominant role of the media (mediacracy) or capital (plutocracy). Such a situation leads indirectly to a decline in public trust and the development of populist and nationalist movements.

In 2019, for the first time in thirty years, fewer than half of the world's countries were categorized as democracies (a drop from 58% to 48%), with some

2.6 billion citizens living in countries ruled by autocrats and their parties. The crisis of democracy is growing worse, and it is difficult to say with all certainty what political model will prove dominant in the digital stage of civilization. It is possible that a new, hybrid solution will be created on the basis of the existing systems of government, but note that given the ongoing development of information systems, political decisions are made increasingly on the basis of not only national interests but also public approval, even if these decisions might be ill-advised. This applies to both democracies and authoritarian regimes. The latter, admittedly, have greater latitude to act, but also have to take into account public approval for their actions.

6.3. A new social structure

Each stage of civilization is characterized by its own distinctive social structure, despite the fact that certain solutions are taken over from the previous stage. A social structure crystallizes under the influence of developmental changes, creating social bonds of a new nature and often also changing the relations between particular groups, especially as a result of changes in production and technology as well as political transformations. New hierarchies and barriers appear, and so does distance between individual social groups.

Since the conditions for the transition to the digital stage of civilization are already evident, we can say clearly that changes in the social structure are already taking place. They are present in both civilizational turning points and pertain to numerous economically developed countries, but they have been also observed in developing countries. Here, we can list first of all the disappearance of certain types of professions and secondly the emergence of numerous new professions in the field of new technologies such as automation, robotization, artificial intelligence, and so on. They constitute strong competition to the traditional workforce. Thirdly, it is possible to observe the breakdown of family as a basic social unit. Fourthly, a new class has emerged that is referred to as the “precariat”. Fifthly, the ruling establishment has been growing steadily, both nationally and internationally. This applies in particular to the civil service, the task of which is to ensure the proper functioning of the government institutions.

As the social structure changes, new authorities and new values emerge, and so does a new language that is often incomprehensible to those who adhere to traditional values. Such changes lead to numerous conflicts between the traditional social structure and the modern one, which in turn upsets the existing political and social order. Tensions emerge both within societies and in the relations between them.

The scale of these processes is unknown and impossible to estimate. Emphasis is usually placed on the changes taking place at the individual level, i.e. the breakdown of the family, the development of liberalism and egoism as values that take precedence over cooperation and compromise. Single-parent families,

cohabitation (arrangements where people live together without being formally married), and aversion to forging any relationships are slowly becoming the norm. These changes may also lead to institutional transformations, for example through the establishment of new states. One reaction to globalization comprises its exact opposite, namely growing fragmentation. It may assume both well-known forms, such as Catalonia's bid to break away from Spain, and previously-unknown ones, such the emergence of countries without territories (based on cyberspace) or operating according to different rules.

6.4. Booming population growth

One of the most important threats, especially in the context of the future, is posed by the booming population growth that we have witnessed since the beginning of this century. Existing technological advancements, especially the industrialization of agriculture, have ensured relatively easy access to food, which resulted in rapidly rising population numbers. Forecasts show that this trend is slowly leveling out, but the growth itself remains very rapid, which gives rise to fears over humanity's ability to obtain food, secure conditions for development, and prevent an environmental disaster.

According to UN data, the world's population is expected to rise steadily until 2100, with the detailed forecasts being as follows: 6.143 billion in 2000, 7.379 billion in 2015, 9.735 billion in 2050, 10.577 billion in 2075, and 10.875 billion in 2100 (UNDP 2019). Population numbers are projected to rise at the fastest rate in Africa and Asia, whereas Europe is expected to record a negative growth rate before 2050.

What are the consequences of such forecasts? The first and foremost one follows from the fact that this booming population growth will be centered mainly in the least developed continents. We can assume with a high degree likelihood that the economic potential both in Africa and in Asia will not be sufficient to ensure relatively satisfactory growth in the wellbeing of most people. This, in turn, means that people will make more intensive efforts to migrate to other, more developed continents, chiefly Europe. This will trigger numerous conflicts, a foretaste of which Europe has already been given. Rapidly growing population numbers may nonetheless lead to fiercer conflicts, and that is something none of the developed continents are prepared for.

Based on the experience so far, it is difficult to assume that assistance from the developed countries will be sufficient to effectively resolve the escalating population problems faced by Africa and partially Asia.

This is one of the most important problems to be resolved on the global scale. As yet, however, the world is not prepared for doing so, financially or mentally.

6.5. Climate warming and the degradation of the natural environment

Population growth and the advancement of civilization, including the rise in consumption, have caused the anthropogenic stress on the environment to grow steadily. The most visible sign of this situation is climate change, which is advancing more or less in accordance with the models presented by researchers, who warn against its destructive consequences. Currently, the scale of changes is large enough to be felt by people without the need to conduct specialist measurements. The changes being observed have already caused significant costs for humans and the natural environment.

That said, very few tendencies to introduce political changes and effective prevention measures are noticeable. Existing solutions, such as the Paris Agreement,⁸ are inadequate to the situation or are not put into effect. Such a position results from the need to conduct substantial changes in the methods and scale of consumption and the organization of state policies (a change of priorities in tax policy).

In the modern-day world, characterized by a more or less open plutocracy, economic changes – i.e. placing the financial responsibility on high-emissions sectors of the economy and restricting their freedom of doing business on the one hand and limiting consumption on the other – are nearly impossible to carry through, because they entail that political candidates will lose the support of certain economic entities and the media (which are usually closely interlinked). By the same token, any political camp that tries to introduce such changes is automatically at a disadvantage. The effects include feigned reforms, and even more experts are being employed for eco-marketing activities solely aimed at improving the image of high-emissions sectors.

Against this backdrop, anti-change moods are being fanned and scientific evidence is being called into question, through the creation of alternative analyses in line with specific policies. Such studies and skeptical groups are utilized by the governments to continue policies that do not require any considerable engagement. There are precious few exceptions to this rule, including the EU and China, which are pursuing long-term and increasingly strict climate policies. However, as we mentioned before, climate change belongs to the fourth, global level of security problems, so the effectiveness of the efforts to resolve them depends on the attitudes on the part of the dominant majority of countries and people. Currently, we can see no indications of such changes in the foreseeable future.

However, the problem chiefly boils down to the fact that climate warming and the degradation of the environment are irreversible, especially if we link them

⁸ This refers to the deal signed at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015. When the document was signed, it was argued that it represented a significant success in the fight against climate change. In practice, its publication was immediately followed by numerous opinions expressed by experts who pointed out that the deal lacked binding commitments and the existing ones were rather vague.

to the booming population growth and the very rapid development of cities and hard infrastructure. At the very best, we can only mitigate or minimize these processes.

7. Conclusions

The brief exploration of changes we have presented above is by no means an exhaustive list of the contradictions plaguing the world, but the factors that have taken into account do nonetheless allow us to draw certain simple conclusions. Namely, first of all, change is a perpetual element of human civilization. The only difference lies in the pace of change, which continues to accelerate. Secondly, globalization is not the only factor affecting change, and this makes it hard to separate its effects from the impact of other factors. In many cases, it surely serves as a catalyst for change and should therefore be observed very carefully. That said, the source of such changes is usually independent of globalization, and they would have probably taken place even without it yet at a much slower rate.

Thirdly, the world is currently transitioning in terms of civilization. Each such transition has marked an important turning point, and this also holds true for the ongoing ones. The current situation in the world is somewhat chaotic, with nervous moves and changes being made, their direction not always evident. This often leads to a sense of uncertainty or even helplessness in the face of the processes taking place in the world. The tensions accompanying changes are many times greater. We can see no end to this process, so the coming decades will likely be marked by change and uncertainty, and we should not expect the crystallization of the new stage of civilization to cause the process of change to slow down or stagnate. Its pace will most likely remain the same.

Against this backdrop, we feel we should point out some of the particularly dangerous threats that partially stem from the past, but the present has modified them to a significant degree. What serves as our point of departure here is the process that could be described as **chaos in the conditions of civilizational transition**.

Such turnings points have happened in the past, but they have never been so manifestly chaotic as they are now. This results from two important facts: first of all, the pace of developmental changes in both the emerging new stage of civilization and the degradation of the agrarian stage is particularly rapid; and secondly the transformations are taking place concurrently irrespective of the characteristics and the level of the space in which such changes occur. What are the manifestations of this transition-related chaos? We can list three particularly important ones:

1. Processes upsetting the existing political and institutional order.
2. Disruptions in the regularity and sequential nature of change in the fundamental components of civilization.

3. Numerous groups in society, which at least *en masse* are not mentally prepared for the profound changes brought about by a transition from one stage of civilization to another.

The mentality of society as a barrier to development changes is an important component determining both development and the mutual relations between the groups that form a specific community. It determines numerous solutions, both political and economic ones. This is not the place to go into detail on the factors that affect mentality; we will instead just mention here first of all the cultural system that is dominant in a specific country or part of society, secondly the level of prosperity, especially income and social differentials, and thirdly the policy pursued by the state and its political model. The societal mentality is a relatively permanent factor, but it nonetheless undergoes certain changes, though they are much slower than other components that affect development. Simultaneously, the societal mentality is largely dependent on the dominant cultural system, whose components are likely to generate conflicts to a greater or lesser extent, and this becomes especially visible in periods of changes. In such situations, what we can observe in a specific society is a process that could be referred to as the splitting of mentality, which may manifest itself in both political and social regression. In the conditions of civilizational transition, such phenomena as a rule make themselves manifest, escalating differences in a given society and having a quite significant impact on its internal and partially also external policy.

Another important change-related process, especially during the current transitions to new stages of civilization, is **the degradation of the traditional model of the state that emerged in the industrial stage of civilization**. The most important characteristics of the traditional model of the state have always included the sovereignty of deciding about model solutions, the nature of the institutions, the relations with other countries, and so on. The main mechanisms of such degradation are the common nature of the market economy and its new entities: multinational corporations, international regulatory institutions in more or less specialized fields, as well as integration organizations. The latter have so far assumed very different forms, the most mature one being the EU. What are the signs of such degradation? Generally speaking, they include the taking over of certain powers by external institutions. The scope of such delegated authority varies greatly. Although the benefits from this process are numerous, they are viewed unfavorably by numerous social groups, especially certain politicians or parties.

Important manifestations of civilizational turning points have included not only full decolonization but also the emergence of new countries, both those that had existed in the past and the newly-formed ones. A new-old type of differences emerged **between small and medium-sized countries both in Europe and in Africa and Asia**. In the not-so-distant past, small and medium-sized countries functioned chiefly in Europe and their external links were limited for political and economic reasons, but this situation changed to a fundamental degree in the period of decolonization, especially in the last decade of the 20th century both in Europe

as well as in Asia and Africa. This is not only because we currently have over 200 formally independent states but also because the statehood of many of them is still taking shape, which leads to different conflicts, often of an armed nature. This holds true for Africa as well as partially Asia. The sources of these conflicts vary greatly. In Europe, they are linked to sovereignty issues as well as political, cultural, and religious affiliations. On other continents, they are coupled with territorial, religious, and political problems.

What poses the main problem, however, is the growing dependence on the countries that wield economic and partially also political influence over the globe. Such countries shape the world order to a smaller or greater extent, thus forcing smaller countries to follow their goals. In this context, we should point out the problem of religious warfare. If such conflicts lay at the source of the industrial stage of civilization and led to the division of Christianity into Catholicism and Protestantism, then the question remains: will we witness another such religious war on the brink of the transition to information society and if so, then what could the nature of such a war be?

The conflict within Islam: a war between Sunnis and Shiites. This armed conflict has continued for nearly two decades, despite having a much longer history. The emergence of numerous countries where Islam is a dominant religion created conditions for the escalation of this conflict. It cannot be ruled out that religious differences will drag some countries into regular warfare, especially as the Islamic countries are characterized by very high rates of population growth. Another conflict that emerges against this backdrop is the problem of refugees, who decide to flee conflict-stricken regions and migrate not to culturally similar countries but to wealthy societies, where they have greater chances of finding employment and living in better conditions.

The above considerations lead us to consider a more general issue: **Might booming population growth not lead to a new war, much broader in scale, in the near or far future? This is because refugees will have difficulty finding adequate space for themselves, will not be able to find employment, and will not be accepted by the local communities in their destination countries.**

Such a possibility cannot be ruled out. There are, we believe, two factors arguing in favor of it. The first is linked to the existence of two military and economic powers, namely the United States and China, which are engaged in an ever-more intensive rivalry. More importantly, this rivalry may escalate into a confrontation, not only a peaceful one, as is currently the case, but also a military confrontation. The second comprises great economic and political diversity of an intercontinental nature, which may also provoke different conflicts, possibly also military ones.

Finally, we cannot rule out other threats, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which do not create conditions for positive change but most likely foster negative ones. The international community may be even forced to take quasi-forceful measures that will have a positive impact on development in the

future, on the international scale at that, although this development will most likely not be evenly distributed.

All in all, we believe that our final conclusion may be as follows: the world is experiencing rapid change whose positive and negative consequences will be faced by the whole of the world's population, and will entail a shift in the degree importance that specific countries or even continents have enjoyed in the recent past and enjoy in the present. But such is the logic behind a civilizational transition.

At the same time, we must point out that many of these changes, even those that are global in their nature, do not follow directly from globalization but from other factors that occurred earlier or are independent of globalization. Globalization only speeds up their pace or facilitates the flow of information, thus making it easier for us to recognize such factors, but it does not generate them. In some cases, such as global threats to the natural environment, globalization may be a tool for helping to resolve the problem, or setting directions of changes, but the factor behind change (in this case, the occurrence of global threats through the increased intensity and scale of local threats) would be independent of globalization.

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