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The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the coronavirus pandemic are changing the world

The changes underway as a result of the application of state-of-the-art technologies must be considered in the broader historical context and the serious long-term consequences that can be expected. While many hopes are associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there are also uncertainties. The nature of both work and labour relations will change, as will the roles of the state and local municipalities. It will lead to new life trajectories, for example it will be necessary to reconsider the concept of unemployment and to understand it as a period of preparation for a new profession and the protection of attained social status. This will impose entirely new demands on the social and education systems. Moreover, one must assume an increase in social polarisation and the risks associated with it. The dependence on modern technologies will also create new challenges and dangers. In this context, the coronavirus pandemic can be seen both as a brake and an accelerator.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, the labour market and Covid-19

The article considers the initial findings from the „Comprehensive solutions to the impacts of digitalisation and automation processes on the labour market and, consequently, on society and education“ research project. At the same time, the article attempts to take into account the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. According to the authors, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will exert a major impact on employment, the character of work and the emergence of new employment relationships and, consequently, life in society as a whole. The digitalisation of the economy will necessitate changes in the field of education and will also present risks such as the growth of social polarisation in society. The Covid-19 pandemic exerted contrasting impacts on this process. By reducing social contact, it had a negative effect on activities and entire industries that were expected to gradually absorb the workforce released by automation. On the other hand, the application of digital technologies and the development of working relationships based on these technologies have accelerated significantly. Three factors will continue to influence development going forward: the indisputable and dynamic development of modern technologies, differing impacts of the pandemic on various sectors and the consequences of the economic downturn.

Does Stage 4.0 present more of a threat than an opportunity? An interview with economic advisor Ing. Jaroslav Šulc, CSc.

An extensive interview with economist Jaroslav Šulc – a former adviser to Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions chairpersons, the Prime Minister and President of the Senate – discusses principally the concept of the Industry 4.0 Initiative and the socio-political implications of the digitalisation of the economy. The interview also addresses the approach of the German Fraunhofer Institute to the digitalisation of the economy and takes a look back at older Czech/Czechoslovak traditional approaches to scientific and technical changes and their various consequences.

Review of the book Prokop, Daniel: Blind Spots: On Poverty, Education, Populism and Other Challenges facing Czech Society

On the one hand, the reviewer praises the book for the clarity and comprehensibility with which it addresses topics that are familiar to sociologists and the fact that it points out that the political representation fails to appreciate the importance of these issues, in particular with concern to the definitions of poverty and certain other social inequality phenomena. On the other hand, however, the reviewer highlights a number of weaknesses in the book, for example concerning the passages devoted to access to education and openness to migrants. Jan Keller describes the chapter on the social stratification of Czech society as the most problematic part of the book, one of his arguments for which is supported by comparable findings from abroad.

Review of the book Banerjee, Abhijit V. – Duflo, Esther: Good economics for hard times: better answers to our biggest problems

The reviewed book provides an interesting contribution to the literature dealing with the causes of problems and imbalances in the functioning of today's socio-economic systems. It is based on proven knowledge and appropriately thought-through concepts. It deals with the issues of public finance, income inequality, environmental economics, structural policy, economic growth and development, foreign trade, social security and social policy. It can be recommended to those interested in understanding the problems of today's world, especially those who, when studying basic economic models, have doubts about whether it is all so simple and straightforward.

Review of the book Barša, Pavel – Dokupil Škabraha, Martin (eds.): Beyond Capitalism

The review presents, and provides an assessment of, a book entitled Beyond Capitalism, which focuses on a critique of the characteristics of late capitalism and the introduction of alternatives to the current socio-economic system. The book provides an interesting contribution to the domestic critical debate and has the potential to appeal to a wider audience; however, it is limited to a certain extent by its essay and discussion approach, which slightly diminishes its value for the purely academic audience.

Annex: From the results of the research activities of RILSA (VÚPSV) in 2019

The report, in the form of an appendix, presents the results of the scientific research activities of the Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA) for 2019. The research was based on the „Research Activities of RILSA for 2019“ document and focused on addressing the various important issues facing the development of the social system in the Czech Republic taking into account the current priorities of the management of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The starting point of the scientific research activities in 2019 fully reflected the aims set out in the „Long-term concept of the development of RILSA in the period 2018–2022“.