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THE ROLE OF THE EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract. The solving of actual problems requires an innovative approach in the form of suggested epistemic community. We characterize the epistemic community as a cooperative group consisting of different participants, aimed to the solving of actual problems in the aspect of improving the well-being. The contribution of the epistemic community is in improving of implementation of ethics to the different areas of practice through the mutual cooperation of the ethical expert and relevant experts from the actual problem area.

Keywords: Ehics, Applied ethics, Ethical expert., Epistemic community, Transdisciplinary dialogue

ROLA WSPÓLNOTY EPISTEMICZNEJ W ROZWOJU SPOŁECZNO-GOSPODARCZYM

Streszczenie. Rozwiązanie rzeczywistych problemów wymaga innowacyjnego podejścia w postaci sugerowanej społeczności epistemicznej. Charakteryzujemy społeczność epistemiczną jako grupę współdziałającą, składającą się z różnych uczestników, której celem jest rozwiązywanie rzeczywistych problemów dotyczących poprawy samopoczucia. Wkład wspólnoty epistemicznej polega na poprawie wdrażania etyki w różnych dziedzinach przez współpracę eksperta etycznego i odpowiednich ekspertów z rzeczywistego obszaru problemowego.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka, etyka stosowana, ekspert etyczny, wspólnota epistemiczna, dialog transdyscyplinarny

The epistemic community represents the possibility of transdisciplinary dialogue, where the cooperation of different experts is becoming more and more necessary in the context of

current problems[1]. There is a requirement to find a suitable way of interacting with different professionals, practitioners and laymen. The epistemic community could be a great beneficiary to the work of ethic committees and other multidisciplinary bodies. *The epistemic community* is a group of various participants who interact together in order to solve a particular issue. A mutual agreement is the main goal, where representatives from different areas of the defined issue should be involved in finding solutions. At the same time, it is important for ethics to be included as a central part of the epistemic community. We emphasize that the presence of an ethical expert as a core member is of great significance. An ethical expert is a professional with a specific knowledge of ethics and its subsequent implementation into practice. In this way, the epistemic community is able to maintain a certain ethical standard not only in terms of the individual members, but also in terms of the process of creating solutions and dealing with their consequences. This approach ensures that any solutions will make a positive contribution to the overall well-being of society.

Currently, we are facing many complicated problems with solutions that remain out of reach due to the complex nature of their issues. These are mainly the problems of environmental protection, depletion of mineral sources, migration, military conflicts, poverty, famine and the overall quality of life. These societal challenges require the involvement of several experts and various participating parties to solve them and their multidisciplinary nature makes solving them extremely difficult. Reflection at the individual level is possible, but there can be a lack of final consensus[2]. Without some kind of an overall agreement, the individual solutions for the given area are only partially accepted and therefore they are only partial solutions and it becomes difficult to implement them in practice. The main role of applied ethicists is to consider possible conflicting situations as well as to prevent them and therefore it is necessary to look for a solution that will be feasible and will contribute to improving the overall quality of life.

Experts in applied ethics conduct professional ethical work in different spheres of life to discover and to prevent the causes of moral conflicts. Ethical experts have important theoretical knowledge, tools and procedures for implementing ethics. At present, there is a tendency to apply ethics inappropriately. It is therefore important for ethical experts to be involved as professionals. *"The role of applied ethicists is also to assess and monitor the nature of these discussions, to correct and maintain the desired level of theoretical and methodological culture"* (Fobel, 2005, p. 57)[3].

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[1] See: Peter. M. Haas – Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination (1992), Mai`a K. Davis Cross – The Limits of Epistemic Communities: EU Security Agencies (2015).

[2] We want to point out the fact, that we need multidisciplinary committees to seek a common solution in the context of actual problems. The author G. Lipovetsky points out on that fact in the arising of the third-type of ethics. The applied ethics must respond to the current development of ethics. This is the main reason, why we are exploring the epistemic community like the potential concept of multidisciplinary dialogue. We want to find the characteristic marks of epistemic community and use these marks in the ethic counselling.

[3] See also P. Fobel – Profesionaliymus v etickom poradenstve in P. Fobel – Organizačná etika a profesionálne etické poradenstvo (2013).

The search for ethical perspectives must be adapted over time. The era of information technologies makes it easier to share information and knowledge, which enables communication among different scientific disciplines. Applied ethics reflects current issues and also seeks appropriate ethical views. Therefore, it is necessary and important to search for ethical decisions regarding the wide range of current issues. If the problem space is too extensive and the knowledge too voluminous, it is possible to create an epistemic community. The epistemic community should be a group of experts, whose common goal will be solving issues through discussion.

G. Lipovetsky (1999) justifies the emergence of a third-type of ethics which will respond to current issues, as it is inevitable to identify a dialogue in order to solve various problems. Third-type ethics should be dialogic and responsible, it should look for a balance between efficiency and equality, profit and interest, the present and the future. The participants are professionals from various areas of expertise and at the end of the process they become ethics professionals.

The complexity of the current issues requires the cooperation of various participants. An applied ethicist is ready to work in a team in order to identify solutions. During a dialogue they are able to apply the method of discourse and to seek coherently balanced perspectives. *"An applied ethicist should be sufficiently equipped for work and dialogue at an interdisciplinary level in such a way that they are able to address current issues from an ethical position and for the solutions to be acceptable not only theoretically but also practically"* (Fobel, 2005, p. 55). Many socio-economic issues can be solved by creating an epistemic community, especially where it is necessary to seek appropriate solutions that are feasible, acceptable and beneficial to people[4]. The solutions should be sought by professionals who have sufficient education and practical experience. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of some of the issues, it is necessary to seek consensus across multiple parties, which requires the co-operation of several participants. The interests of all parties in finding ethically balanced and acceptable solutions that will promote the overall quality of life is an important requirement here. It is also important to raise awareness about applied ethics so that awareness is created of the existence of practicing ethics professionals within the field.

One possible way to solve multidisciplinary issues is through an epistemic community which should represent a working group of various participants. Their goal is to find a solution to a particular problem which requires the co-operation of several experts.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics defines the epistemic community as: *„Epistemic communities – defined by Peter Haas, as a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy – relevant knowledge within that domain or issue – area. Aspect of international policy-making are complex, and political actors may rely on experts. If international experts*

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[4] The solution of actual problems needs a final multidisciplinary consensus, and we suggest as the solution the epistemic community which will be capable to create a multidisciplinary solution.

share intellectual beliefs and have common assumptions, then this can be seen in the shape of international cooperation. The epistemic communities approach attempts to recognize the role of knowledge networks in shaping outcomes in areas such as environmental policy an economics. It shares some of the policy networks approach" (McLean, McMillan, 2009, p. 137).

Peter M. Haas (1992) states that due to the growing technical issues and global challenges, international political coordination is not only more and more necessary, but also more complex. We can look to the author for inspiration when identifying the symbols of the epistemic community. The epistemic community should consist of renowned experts who are accepted by society and can provide new points of view regarding the issue at hand. Finding the optimal solution requires the collaboration of several experts from different areas. An epistemic community is characterized by a network of professionals whose skills are professionally recognized in their fields of expertise, meaning that they have relevant knowledge and authority about the topic[5]. Therefore they can deal with environmental, political, economic, social and many other issues. The epistemic community can consist of experts from various fields and backgrounds, sharing common normative and principal beliefs that allow for the creation of a community based on common values. They trust in the basic causality principle, share common beliefs based on their practice, and they also share a common understanding of the nature of various phenomena. They have the same criteria for determining the validity of knowledge in the field, they also share a common view of the solution procedures with regard to the benefit of the entire community. Haas (1992) lists the following features of the epistemic community:

- It does not have to consist only of professionals using the same research methods.
- „*What bonds member of an epistemic community is their shared belief or faith in the verity and the applicability of particular forms of knowledge or specific truths[6],*" (Haas, 1992, p. 3).
- Members have common patterns of thinking, they profess similar social values, and have a commitment to the creation and use of knowledge and wisdom.
- Although members of the same professions or disciplines have a common knowledge base, procedures and tools, unlike the epistemic communities, they lack the shared normative commitments of members of the epistemic group based on common beliefs or values.
- Members of the epistemic community may consist of social and natural scientists, or individuals from any other profession.

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[5] The applied ethicists also has the specific ethics knowledge relevant to the actual topics, that means the applied ethicists is a professional for ethic sphere and may be a member of epistemic community.

[6] The shared belief in the way of shared opinion in the positive solution that is feasible acceptable and beneficial to people.

Epistemic communities *search for solutions* in unknown areas that are not yet researched or solutions that are not yet clear. Based on the analysis and collection of available relevant information, they *interpret possible scenarios, look for alternative solutions*, and then *discuss the most suitable ones*. Their solutions must be *feasible, generally acceptable*, and also *scientifically verifiable*. They combine the knowledge of the individual fields of science and then *subordinate them to the common goal*. In the epistemic community, the data are examined in an overall context, as an interaction between different scientific findings and their likely consequences. Phenomena are explored in the context of several sciences; the information is composed into a single image, with each expert contributing their knowledge to ensure that the issue is being scrutinized from a transdisciplinary perspective.

Author M. Davis Cross (2015) focuses on the epistemic community and its typical members. Not every group can be an epistemic community. Epistemic communities can be found inside but also outside formal institutions; they may consist of scientists as well as of other experts and authorities. A non-governmental group can be as influential as a scientific one (ethicists, diplomats, lawyers, bankers, senior officials, etc.). The only condition for becoming a member of an epistemic community is specific knowledge and authoritative status. For example, the European Defence Agency is supposed to be an epistemic community. The members are experts in various areas, but the European Defence Agency lacks the qualities that would make it more than a group of experts. They do not have the possibility to engage in joint activities beyond the formal mandate, and they are hindered by the highly hierarchical and institutional environment which limits its members in this regard. They have to adhere to the legal conditions of confidentiality because much of the information is secret and cannot be discussed openly with the other members. In such a defined environment as a security agency, informal interactions and information sharing are practically forbidden. For this very reason, such a community could never be an epistemic one, despite the cooperation of various recognized experts. The epistemic community cannot be formed by a group of professionals who will work in a highly formal institutional environment with a strict hierarchy, limits, and goals which are governed by the job position. The vertical division of power will not permit it, even though exceptions are possible if the power is distributed horizontally and the same value of voice is assigned to each vote. Davis Cross (2015) lists the following features of the *epistemic community*: the group works beyond the bounds of its duties and expectations; they are more than just a summation of individual members; they meet outside of work hours, meetings are less formal in order to openly discuss common important issues. They act out of their own beliefs, interact with other members, share certain professional standards, virtues, opinions and theoretical bases which are independent from their official position. The community members are interested in seeking feasible solutions in the given area of interest.

The epistemic group creates a *knowledge network* consisting of specialists, authorities, professionals, scientists and experts. The composition should vary according to the

multidimensional nature of each problem. An important element is to aim at a common goal and *to share common beliefs / ethos*. The main motive is to solve current issues and to contribute to the well-being of the entire community. The priority is *to solve the problem.* The individual members should therefore remain *impartial* and will not use the community to represent themselves. By combining the knowledge of individual members, the epistemic community can create new knowledge and use that to solve a problem. Informal relationships among members dominate and open discussions are conducted in order to look for highly effective and expert solutions. Shared common features include shared values, standards, and codes of conduct.

We stress the importance of sharing a certain system of values, norms, and the acceptance of a common ethos, certitude, and the subsequent salutary solution that seeks to benefit the society. The acceptance of responsibility for their actions and decisions is highly important. Members of an epistemic community must have a sense of responsibility and have to follow ethical values.

Characteristics of a community that we believe make it epistemic:

- a group of various specialists, scientists, recognized authorities, experts, practitioners who jointly create a knowledge network,
- recognised in their area,
- multidisciplinarity and relevance to the topic given,
- subordination to a higher cause, seeking of a viable solution,
- volunteering on their own initiative,
- united by their common certitude, a common ethos,
- the members have adopted a common culture,
- common values, standards and goals,
- equivalence, horizontal sharing of power, trust, respect,
- informal relationships that promote interaction,
- an interest in improving society,
- seeking solutions to a new, not yet answered question, an attempt to reach a consensus,
- acting in the area of ambiguity and uncertainty,
- looking for high-quality, professional and viable solutions that bring positive change in society.

Critical thinking as well as the ability to be empathetic are essential. Equality, the skill to express our opinion and to promote it and to fairly accept and recognize the claims of others is also important. The members of the epistemic community are act mainly for the benefit of society, that is, to seek a better quality of life for all, and to promote the well-being of the entire society.

The socio-economic problems of today need to be addressed in a transdisciplinary dialogue. This means that different experts and practitioners will need to be involved in the solution and an applied ethicist should also be a member of the working team. An applied ethicist is professionally capable of conducting an interdisciplinary dialogue with respect to the principles of ethics discourse and seeking coherently balanced solutions[7]. It is important that the participants who are involved in the solution are representative of the entire scope of the problem. This will affect the feasibility and acceptability of the solution in practice. The solution will represent a consensus agreed upon by all participants as the representatives of society. Nowadays it is possible to conduct a transdisciplinary dialogue. This is a favourable period for the emergence of epistemic communities that can bring a new direction to socio-economic development through the interaction of various experts regarding a specific problem.

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[7] Applied ethicist also will supervise the ethical dimension of final solution and the whole process of creating solutions.