

Comments on the paper by Kalman Dezseri

In order to limit the spread of the covid-19, digital tools have become crucial. Digitalisation implies the progressive conversion of documents, services, and goods into digital mediums and the adaptation of economic agents such as companies, consumers, the state, banks and the media to this new situation. A new economy based on new production techniques, adapted employment, and a transformed way of life is gradually emerging.

In Kalman Dezseri's paper, he explained that digitalisation is transforming the economy. Digitalisation is transforming the economy because it brings new needs, desires, and also a new way of conceiving economic exchanges. For this reason, Dezséri compared digitalisation to a technological shock. It is a shock that will have consequences not only for the structure of production but also for employment, needs, social relations, and many others.

At the production level, digitalization implies the creation of new interfaces, the exploitation of data, a new relationship with customers, and a reduction in costs due to the platformisation and dematerialisation of assets. Digitalisation also allows companies to achieve economies of scale. Traditional companies are faced with newly created platforms that benefit from economies of scale and keep out new entrants. As such, small- and medium-sized businesses struggle against larger ones and legislation which reflects on, and alleviates, this imbalance, is necessary.

In addition, digitalisation is redefining global competition and challenging the poles of power. The European Union wants to become a world leader in the digital economy but is confronted with both China and the United States. Kalman Dezséri explains that "the regulations of the pioneer hegemon country will set the direction for the followers". In that regard, and in addition to the United States' relative decline recently, there is an increased incentive for them to cooperate with Europe. This would allow for a greater pool of resources and skills available to facilitate rapid technological development and expansion in Europe and the United States. Otherwise, China is likely to become the "hegemon", and will begin exporting their own technological standards and practices worldwide – and Europe and the United States may be forced to follow.

The democratisation of digital media is promoted by the digitalisation of society. The increasing use of mobile phones is contributing to the popularity of these new sources of information. These media allow citizens to have access to new sources of information that are not controlled by a single decision-making centre. This is a double-edged sword, however, as disinformation and propaganda can find its way into mainstream media, diluting fact-based reasoning. Consumers have greater opportunities to “select, filter, search, control, and participate”, but so do large tech and social media companies and governments. Ensuring data collected is used for benign purposes is also vital. These issues are a central component of deteriorating trust between citizen and government in Europe. The author also mentioned the limits of digital media. There is no common policy on taxation at the national and international level.

On the other hand, Kalman Dezséri analysed the effects of digitalisation in a microeconomic way. Indeed, he described how digitalisation affects wages, jobs and education. Digitalisation allows the creation of new types of jobs such as data analysts, data miners, data architects. It could create up to several million jobs, he noted. However, digitalisation is destroying some of the more traditional jobs. For Dezséri, the adaptation of education systems must become a priority. The new generations must be equipped with the ethics of digitalisation, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI). It is also important to address the polarisation and inequality which has been further exacerbated by the pandemic. Digital infrastructure and literacy are imperative for states to possess worldwide. If this does not change, a substantial portion of the world’s population are left behind, and vast troves of useful data go by unused.

As the author underlined, the new types of relationships reduce the roles of social institutions such as the state, church, parties, unions, clubs, and associations. During primary socialisation, individuals internalise norms and values through the first instances they come into contact with, such as the family or school. When the author stressed the loss of influence of social institutions such as the state, church, parties, etc., he probably implied that people no longer need social institutions and must turn to technology.

In addition, Kalman Dezséri does not mention the school as a social institution, however, it is a fundamental instance of socialisation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, distance learning disrupted traditional educational norms. While online education became crucial during the Covid-19 crisis and

helped maintain educational continuity, the digitalisation of education has certain limits. Since the beginning of the crisis, many students are suffering from symptoms of depression due to isolation, dropping out of school, and a loss of bearings. Although distance learning has enabled children and students to continue their learning, the pandemic has disrupted their social relationships and their constructions as individuals in society.

The future of religion in the digital age is also very interesting question. Indeed, Europe has been experiencing a process of secularisation since the 19th century. A contemporary of the 19th century, Max Weber, described the phenomena that have emerged over the last few centuries. He theorised about the “disenchantment of the world”, or the idea that the explanation of things by magic and religion will be replaced by rational and scientific explanations.¹ The father of sociology, Emile Durkheim, went further and proposed a differentiation between traditional societies where the relationship to religion and the community is strong, and modern societies where the collective consciousness is weakening. Thus, religion loses its influence in modern society. ² This process is called secularisation. It is a "long process of differentiation and separation of institutions and spheres of knowledge and culture from religion and its authorities".³ Although we are seeing a loss of influence of religious institutions in the life of Europeans, digitalisation does not necessarily mean their death. Digitalisation can even encourage the development of religious phenomena. As Kalman Dezseri highlighted, the digitalisation of society affects employment and risks reinforcing the inequalities between those who will be able to adapt to the digital era and those who will not. In this context, it is possible to envisage a revival of religion in order to reassert itself on a changing society. A revival of religion does not mean that religious institutions become more powerful, but rather that individuals turn to religion to strengthen their identity.

When a crisis occurs, whether economic, social, environmental, or even health-related, social behaviours appear. The CNRS research director Alain Chouraqui and his scientific team in the Camp des Milles Foundation in France analyse the processes that can lead to the worst in a society, namely mass crimes, while showing the resistibility of this process. The Foundation's scientific work emphasises "the social ground" as that state of society in which racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, or homophobia pre-exist. However, this hatred has an “enormous explosive potential” when society

¹ Weber, M. (1905), *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism*.

² Durkheim, E. (1912) *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*.

³Zubaida, S. (2005). “Islam and Secularization”. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 33(3), 438-448, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23654381>

undergoes economic, social, environmental, or even health crises. Indeed, crises can exacerbate and crystallise “the fear of the other”. These moments of destabilisation and crisis generate a loss of reference points in society, frustration, and social jealousy which can lead to violent acts.⁴

During the Covid-19 pandemic, fake news, conspiracies, and hate speech exploded on social networks. For example, anti-Asian racism has developed as a result of the pandemic. This racism is based on stereotypical representations, among which Chinese practices on animals, such as the pangolin, contribute to the creation of a health risk for the entire world.⁵ This racism has been seen all over the world, including in Europe and the United States. Social networks and digital tools have facilitated the spread of racist and extremist ideas.⁶

The Conspiracy Observatory with the help of Rudy Reichstadt and Valérie Igounet, a historian specialising in the study of the extreme right and the history of negationism, has created the Conspiracy Watch. In this website, a map is available to list conspiracy-related comments, statements, and remarks during the Covid-19 crisis. Social networks have been the scene of this hate. (Cf: document below).

While hate speech has increased on the internet (social networks, blogs, websites) during the pandemic, the progressive digitalisation of society may also encourage these acts. For this reason, the European Union must adopt clear regulations and policies in terms of digital media, security, and data protection.

⁴ Chouraqui A. (n.d) « POUR RÉSISTER ... à l’engrenage des extrémismes, des racismes et de l’antisémitisme », Edition cherche midi, prologue de Simone Veil, préface de Jean-Paul de Gaudemar.

⁵ Anh, D. (2020) “‘You Started the Corona!’ as Anti-Asian Hate Incidents Explode, Climbing Past 800, Activists Push for Aid”, Los Angeles Times, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-05/anti-asian-hate-newsom-help>

⁶ Lee J., Yadav M. (2020) “The Rise of Anti-Asian Hate in the Wake of Covid-19 – Items”, Items. Insights from the Social Sciences, <https://items.ssrc.org/covid-19-and-the-social-sciences/the-rise-of-anti-asian-hate-in-the-wake-of-covid-19/>

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