

Revolutionary Changes in the University of the Information Society: Cultural Strategies for Equal Opportunities

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The article provides a socio-philosophical analysis of the transformation of the university as an open scientific and educational space in the context of liquid modernity and digitalization. It is substantiated that contemporary changes represent not merely a crisis of the classical Humboldtian model, but its historical transformation into forms of networked and multidisciplinary knowledge organization. The author proves that the digitalization of education takes on the features of an epistemological and cultural-communicative revolution, which fundamentally alters the culture of cognition, the roles of teachers and students, and the very ontology of the university space. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of the human lifeworld (Lebenswelt): the study analyzes how digitalization reshapes the structures of experience, communication, and meaning-making, creating a hybrid educational reality. The ambivalent nature of these changes is revealed: from new opportunities for democratization and inclusion (based on the experience of leading world universities) to the risks of "techno-systemic colonization," the deepening digital divide, and the instrumentalization of knowledge through efficiency metrics. The concept of academic freedom is reimagined as a dynamic balance between autonomy and responsibility. The article concludes with the necessity of forming new educational strategies capable of ensuring the existential integrity of the individual in a situation of ontological instability within the information society.

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Introduction

Uncertainty is becoming a fundamental principle of contemporary social existence. Ontological instability influences social processes, the human lifeworld, and the diverse practices of human life. Educational strategies and tactics always reflect current social processes and human needs. Digitalization stands as one of the most powerful transformations of our time, encompassing all spheres of social life. In response to the sociocultural and technological changes of the information society, the university – an institution designed not only to impart knowledge but also to foster critical thinking and social responsibility – finds itself at the epicenter of these changes. Our study proposes to discuss the following question: Do trends in the information world pave the way for expanding equal opportunities in education, or do they reproduce and reinforce social and cultural inequalities?

The purpose of this article is to philosophically examine the role of the university in the information age as a space for revolutionary change and to identify the contradictions between the aspiration for equal access to knowledge and the actual social and technological constraints.

Research methods

This study develops a methodological framework, that involves the use of several complementary methods. The

methodological strategy of the study combines a socio-philosophical approach with contemporary concepts from the philosophy of education, the philosophy of culture, and the information society. A socio-philosophical analysis allows us to understand the university as a social institution in the context of global transformations in the information society. Thanks to this approach, the university is viewed not only as an educational institution but also as a cultural space for the formation of new models of social interaction and access to knowledge.

The phenomenological method allows us to analyze the impact of the contemporary system of university knowledge on the human lifeworld. This approach is driven by the complexity of the phenomenon of the modern university itself, which operates at the intersection of educational, technological, social, and cultural transformations. Within the framework of phenomenology, the university is viewed as a specific space for the formation of experience, meanings, and senses that influence the structure of everyday life and personal identity. Phenomenology allows us to focus on the analysis of the human lifeworld (Lebenswelt) as a sphere of immediate experience in which the individual perceives social reality, interacts with others, and forms their own value orientations. In this context, the university emerges as an agent of influence on the lifeworld, structuring intellectual practices, communicative interactions, and the cultural horizons of the individual.



The theoretical foundation of this academic article is based on concepts of the information society, particularly Manuel Castells' ideas regarding the networked structure of the modern world and Peter Drucker's concept of the knowledge society. In the context of university transformation, Jürgen Habermas's ideas on communicative rationality and the public sphere are also important, as they allow us to view the university as a space for open dialogue, knowledge production, and social integration.

Results and Discussion

The concept of the classical university in the national context, as formulated by W. von Humboldt, was based on the autonomy of science and the intrinsic connection between research and teaching. This model of the university shaped not only the German but also the global system of higher education, setting standards that remain a subject of debate to this day. At the heart of Humboldt's concept lies the idea of the unity of teaching and research: the university was not only a place for the transmission of existing knowledge but also a space for its creation. The key principle was academic freedom – freedom of teaching (*Lehrfreiheit*) and freedom of learning (*Lernfreiheit*). According to Humboldt, the university must be autonomous from political power and the utilitarian interests of the state. Although the university was meant to serve the nation, its service did not consist in immediate practical benefit, but in the formation of the nation's cultural elite. The third fundamental principle is the idea of *Bildung*, that is, the self-formation of the individual through engagement with science and culture. The university was viewed as an institution for the spiritual formation of the nation and aimed at the free unfolding of the people's spirit through science, rather than political ideology. It became part of the state project of a modern nation and demonstrated the tension between the universal and the local, between cultural identity and the cosmopolitan nature of science. It is precisely this tension that is the source of its dynamism.

A key trend in the information society is the emergence of new approaches to acquiring knowledge and rethinking its role in modern life. The "knowledge society," as American researcher Peter Drucker termed it, emphasizes the paradigm of lifelong learning. A 2005 UNESCO report titled *Towards Knowledge Societies* distinguished between the concepts of "information society" and "knowledge society" and emphasized the contrast between technological breakthroughs and their sociocultural, political, and ethical implications. It states:

The idea of the information society is based on technological breakthroughs. The concept of knowledge societies encompasses much broader social, ethical, and political dimensions. There is a multitude of such dimensions, which rules out the idea of any single, ready-made model, for such a model would not take sufficient account of cultural and linguistic diversity – vital if individuals are to feel at home in a changing world. Various forms of knowledge and culture always enter into the building of any society, including those strongly influenced by scientific progress and modern technology. It would be inadmissible to envisage the information and communication revolution leading – through a narrow, fatalistic technological determinism – to a single possible form of society (*UNESCO, 2005: 17*).

Digitalization not only changes the technical means of communication and information processing, but also radically transforms the ways in which reality, subjectivity, and sociality are constituted. In the digital environment, ontological instability intensifies due to the blurring of bounda-

ries between the real and the virtual, presence and absence, the corporeal and the symbolic. This gives rise to new forms of social interaction, identity, and knowledge that do not fit into classical modernist models of rationality and education.

In the digital age, the important ideas of the classical university do not disappear, but they require rethinking. For example, Ronald Barnett emphasizes that the university of the future must be "ecological," that is, capable of responding to the complexity and uncertainty of the world without losing its humanistic core. He reflects that

the expansion of higher education has opened new spaces and possibilities. The university is interconnected with a number of ecosystems: knowledge, social institutions, people, the economy, learning, culture, and the natural environment. These seven ecosystems of the university are all fragile, and in order to advance and develop them, universities need to engage with each one (*Barnett, 2018: 3*).

Education is responding to digital transformation by changing the institutional mechanisms of knowledge transfer. It is seeking new algorithms to become a space where individuals can adapt to a changing ontological situation. Technological challenges of a normative nature are emerging in education. Education has traditionally been a space for fostering autonomy, critical thinking, and the capacity for reflection. However, digital systems often impose hidden normative prescriptions through interface design, performance metrics, and ranking mechanisms. What can be measured begins to be considered significant; what is difficult to quantify (deep understanding, ethical reflection, empathy) is marginalized. In this sense, a transformation of educational values is taking place: from a focus on meaning-making to a focus on productivity and metrics. Digital educational practices shape new cognitive styles, alter the temporality of learning, the logic of authority, and the ways knowledge is legitimized. It is important to emphasize that these processes are not entirely negative. They are accompanied by increased access to education, flexibility in learning formats, and new opportunities for collaboration. The problem lies not in the fact of technological mediation itself, but in its imperceptible normative hegemony, where systemic rationality supplants communicative rationality. Such an educational format carries the risks of a fragmented experience, superficial knowledge acquisition, and the loss of a holistic lifeworld.

The concept of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), introduced into academic discourse by Edmund Husserl's phenomenological tradition, refers to the pre-scientific, pre-predicative realm of everyday experience in which a person directly experiences the world as a self-evident horizon of meanings. In subsequent socio-philosophical developments, particularly in the works of Jürgen Habermas, the lifeworld emerges as a symbolically structured space of communicative interaction, reproduced through language, culture, and socialization. We also noted earlier that "The lifeworld becomes an environment where the structure of meanings, worldviews, values, and practices in which we live and construct social reality is formed" (*Kolinko, 2025: 10*). The digitalization of education is transforming precisely this horizon at the level of experience and intersubjective interactions.

Traditional educational interaction was rooted in the physically localized space of the classroom, which ensured physical presence, synchronous communication, and a shared experience of the learning process. Digital technologies blur the boundaries between "here" and "there," "now" and "later," creating a hybrid space where online and

offline interactions intertwine. As a result, the lifeworld acquires a networked structure: it is no longer confined to a specific place but functions as a dynamic node in digital communication flows. This leads to a shift in the experience of presence from physical to mediated, where interaction is mediated by interfaces and algorithms. Digitalization opens up new possibilities for expanding the lifeworld. It promotes inclusion by overcoming geographical and social barriers; creates conditions for intercultural dialogue; and fosters new practices of co-creation. The lifeworld becomes more open, polyphonic and dynamic. The educational subject acquires new forms of agency: they can not only consume knowledge but also actively produce it in the global digital environment.

The structure of knowledge itself, as a component of our lived world, is also changing. Whereas in the classical model of education, knowledge was transmitted within a hierarchical “teacher – student” system, the digital environment fosters horizontal, distributed access to information. Authority is transforming: algorithmic search and recommendation mechanisms are increasingly becoming the source of knowledge’s legitimacy. This causes a shift from an institutionally anchored epistemic model to a networked one, in which the individual constructs their own learning trajectory. At the same time, there is a risk of fragmentation of experience, where knowledge appears not as a coherent semantic context but as a collection of informational fragments.

Digitalization, in fact, is leading to an epistemological revolution. It involves a shift from knowledge as a stable canon to knowledge as an open, dynamic process. Traditional epistemology, with its stable rules, methods, and forms, no longer meets the demands of society, as emphasized by Singaporean researcher Kwan Hong Tan in his thesis *The Epistemological Revolution: Foundations of Fluctuational Epistemology in the Age of Ontological Instability* (Tan, 2025). He presents

Fluctuational Epistemology as a comprehensive alternative that embraces instability as the creative condition making knowledge possible. Through rigorous philosophical analysis, novel conceptual development, and systematic exploration of practical implications, this work establishes the foundations for an entirely new epistemological field that can operate within conditions of fundamental instability. The thesis demonstrates that what traditional epistemology treats as obstacles – uncertainty, temporality, relationality – are actually the creative conditions that make knowledge possible in the first place (Tan, 2025: 1).

The ever-changing world creates uncertainty within the realm of knowledge, no matter how much we might wish to rely on unchanging, established formulas and concepts.

The Knowledge Paradox shows that these are not merely practical difficulties that might be overcome through more careful analysis but logical necessities that follow from the temporal and relational nature of conceptual meaning. Concepts acquire their meaning through ongoing processes of usage that necessarily involve temporal development and relational comparison (Tan, 2025: 23).

The issue highlighted by Kwan Hong Tan leads to a broader discourse on the conceptualization of truth: does it reflect objective reality, is it the coherence of partial knowledge with the whole, or is it formed as a consensus within the scientific community? The postmodern world gives rise to multiple understandings of truth. In this sense, the role of educational institutions is not to burden pupils and students with a vast amount of knowledge, but to provide them with the competencies to search for and process

information, the ability to navigate a pluralistic world of scientific and pseudoscientific propositions, manipulative slogans, and the construction of reality.

Search algorithms, recommendation systems, and automated content generation tools shape an individual’s “epistemic horizons.” What becomes accessible, relevant, or authoritative is increasingly determined not by communicative consensus within a community, but by the logic of algorithmic selection. There is a shift from the dialogical construction of knowledge to its personalized filtering. This creates the risk of fragmentation of the semantic field and the formation of “information bubbles,” within which the lifeworld narrows down to individualized data streams. This epistemological dimension characterizes the phenomenon of technosystemic colonization, which we will address later.

The aspect of Humboldt’s concept that emphasizes the research component of universities is gaining conceptual relevance. Ukrainian researcher S. Kurbatov confirms in his monograph *The Phenomenon of the University in the Context of Temporal and Spatial Challenges*:

The embodiment of the global innovation paradigm in the higher education system is the research university, which is positioned not as a place for the transmission of existing knowledge, as is typical of the traditional university, but as a place for the production of new knowledge (Kurbatov, 2014: 84).

Today, digital technologies are changing not only the forms of communication but also the very structure of knowledge. M. Castells’s idea of modern society as a networked structure interprets information in ontological terms, viewing it as a key resource for power and development (Castells, 2010). In this context, the university ceases to be a closed space for the accumulation of knowledge and transforms into a node of global information networks.

L. Floridi emphasizes that we live in an “infosphere” where the boundaries between online and offline are blurring, and individuals are becoming part of the information environment (Floridi, 2014). In the digital age, the university functions not only as an educational institution but as a platform for the production, exchange, and critical interpretation of knowledge, as well as a venue for demonstrating equal opportunities.

The philosophy of equality in the university environment is based on the idea that education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, social background, or cultural identity. That is why universities have accessibility services that help students with disabilities receive course materials in a convenient format, have extra time on exams, or use special technologies. This policy reflects the principle of fairness: equality does not mean treating everyone the same, but rather creating conditions in which every person has a real opportunity to realize their potential. In this context, the university becomes a model of a society where diversity is not an obstacle but a source of development.

We have examined, through specific examples, how the principle of equality manifests itself in universities in terms of teaching practices, access, and governance. One of the key arguments in favor of digitalization is the prospect of equal access to education. Online courses, open educational resources, and digital libraries break down spatial and social barriers. At many universities, student work is graded anonymously to avoid bias based on gender, nationality, or social status. For example, University College London uses anonymous grading for most written

exams and term papers, so the grade depends solely on the quality of the work.

A significant shift in the landscape of modern university campuses is the commitment to providing equal living conditions and creating a safe environment for all students, as well as establishing gender equality in both academic settings and daily life. European and American universities are implementing gender-neutral dormitories, restrooms, and policies. Harvard University serves as an example, prioritizing gender-inclusive housing. Harvard students can choose a room regardless of their gender identity. Students can live in the same room in any gender combination: men, women, transgender students, non-binary people, and other gender identities. The guiding principle is the students' preference, not their gender. Of course, no one is required to live in this arrangement; students choose this option voluntarily. All roommates must agree to this living arrangement. If a student does not choose this option, they will be placed in traditional (single-sex) housing.

At the University of Toronto, the principle of equity is also implemented through policies promoting inclusion and support for students with diverse needs (*Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Report, 2023*). The university has established specialized accessibility services that help students with physical, mental, or learning disabilities fully participate in their studies. In the context of digitalization, the university offers options such as extended time on exams; access to course materials in specialized formats (audio, digital texts); assistive technologies for people with disabilities; and individual counseling to help overcome academic barriers. The university operates an Institutional Equity Office (*The Institutional Equity Office, 2026*), which coordinates policies on equality, diversity, and inclusion. The university's website outlines the Office's functions, which include combating discrimination, supporting students and staff who have faced bias, developing other equity policies at the university, and collaborating with various university departments and organizations. The Office oversees the following units: the Anti-Racism & Cultural Diversity Office; the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office; and the Accessibility Office. This truly exemplifies institutional equity, where the principle of fairness is embedded at the university's administrative level.

Increasingly, distance learning institutions that uphold the principles of equality and fairness are emerging in the educational landscape. One example is the University of Phoenix, which offers educational innovations in the distance learning market. The University of Phoenix has been continuously accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) since 1978. It "became one of the first online universities designed for working adults. We offer a powerful combination of career guidance, personal support, and flexible learning opportunities – all with options to help save time and money on your degree" (*University of Phoenix, 2026*). The total number of students in the previous academic year was approximately 111,248, including 89,828 undergraduates and 21,420 graduate students. This demonstrates the demand for innovative forms of education.

In practice, however, digital education often gives rise to new forms of inequality. The commercialization of education allows universities to develop research and teaching projects, but it limits access to the university environment for many segments of the population in poor countries, thereby increasing social and cultural inequality. The opportunity to study at educational institutions with limited funding provides access to knowledge and professional

competencies, but the level of technological support at such institutions is lower, and academic prospects are hindered.

The digital divide manifests itself not only in the lack of technical resources, but also in varying levels of digital literacy, cultural capital, and the ability to engage in self-directed learning. Long before the digital age, Pierre Bourdieu emphasized that educational institutions tend to reproduce social inequality, masking it under the guise of neutral assessment procedures. His work *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1990) was of great humanistic and scholarly significance for examining the problems of contemporary intellectual culture and university education. In the digital university, this logic of market and power influences does not disappear, but merely takes on new forms.

Jürgen Habermas warned that rationality reduced to technical efficiency can supplant communicative rationality, which is the foundation of a democratic society: "Rationality limited to technical efficiency tends to colonize the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987: 196). The digitization of education is transforming intersubjectivity. Communication increasingly takes place through digital platforms, which alters the structure of mutual understanding. An analysis of these processes through the lens of communication theory shows that systemic mechanisms (technological protocols, algorithmic modeling of behavior) are increasingly intervening in the lifeworld, modifying the ways in which consensus is reached. The educational process is becoming dependent on infrastructures that are not neutral: they dictate formats of participation, the pace of interaction, and even permissible forms of expression. Thus, the lifeworld is undergoing a certain form of technosystemic colonization (which we mentioned at the beginning of the article), as the logic of efficiency and optimization influences the semantic and value structures of education. The university, as a space for critical discourse, must resist the reduction of education to a set of digital services and metrics.

We use the concept of technosystemic colonization to refine and update Habermas's thesis on the colonization of the lifeworld by the system in the context of digital modernity. Jürgen Habermas distinguishes between the lifeworld as a sphere of meaning-making, reproduced through communicative rationality, and the system as a space of instrumental rationality, mediated by money and power. In the digital age, a third algorithm is added – the technological one – which no longer merely serves communication but structurally defines it. It is in this sense that we can speak of technosystemic colonization of the educational lifeworld.

We will illustrate another problem using the example of the University of Copenhagen. Denmark has demonstrated practical reforms in the field of university sociology by closing the sociology department at the capital's university. The reason for this seemingly repressive measure was the politicization of the social sciences. It was the parliament that condemned the "political activism" of researchers studying social processes. The state's official position is that science must be separated from ideology. In Copenhagen, funding and student enrollment have been cut, and strict criteria for academic rigor and oversight mechanisms have been introduced in an effort to separate academic science from political activism. The closure of the sociology department at the University of Copenhagen was perceived by society not as a ban on the discipline, but as the result of political and budgetary rebalancing. The reforms include the decentralization of universities, limiting the politicization of academic approaches, countering imported ideologies, and aligning education with the real needs of

the labor market rather than pursuing a “degree for the sake of a degree.” Decentralization aims to expand the reach of academic contacts from educational centers to provincial cities, strengthen ties with suburban communities, and break down the “capital bubble.” We consider such academic mobility to be a productive cultural strategy for equal opportunity policies, expanding the audience for academic discourse, and popularizing knowledge.

The pushback against external ideological narratives stems from a reaction to globalization or, more precisely, the Westernization of the national sphere. Globalization is an uneven process. It fails to take into account the national interests of countries with weak political agency. Recent years have shown the difficulty Western democracies face in protecting their ideological priorities in the face of aggressive totalitarian states that do not recognize established rules and impose the “rule of force.” Globalization demands a qualitatively different level of awareness and control over social processes. One cannot build the future with the political tools of the past. In this context, Denmark’s desire to protect its academic tradition from “woke” culture and Americanization, on the one hand, and from the influence of the post-communist world, on the other, becomes understandable. This trend aligns with the concept of glocalization, which is characterized by the coexistence of opposing trends – globalization and the preservation and reinforcement of sociocultural differences and local identities. Glocalization implies the simultaneous presence of trends toward universalization and particularization; the pursuit of community cohesion coexists with the pursuit of heterogeneity and decentralization. The search for new perspectives on national education policies leads to the conclusion that the local cannot exist without the global. Educational strategies must be considered from the perspective of sociocultural and political institutions that protect national interests while seeking to align them with the interests of international structures and intercultural networks. It is precisely this concept of local interests that serves as an essential link in building productive models of educational glocalization.

Revolutionary changes in the university’s intellectual landscape are often portrayed in the public consciousness as rapid, irreversible, and unambiguously productive. However, our analytical study urges caution regarding such an optimistic narrative. One might recall B. Ridings’ observation that the modern university risks losing its own identity by becoming a functional tool of the market and management. Digital platforms open up new opportunities for learning and research, but at the same time create mechanisms for the control, standardization, and commercialization of education. Algorithmic assessment systems, paid educational services, and dependence on global corporations call into question the traditional understanding of academic freedom.

Conclusion

Current changes in the digital transformation of universities are often interpreted as a crisis of the Humboldtian model. However, in our view, this is more a matter of its historical transformation. We see signs of an epistemological and cultural-communicative revolution in the educational processes of the information society. The principle of the unity of research and teaching is not disappearing but is taking on new forms through interdisciplinarity, project-based learning, and student participation in research laboratories. Academic freedom is also transforming: it no

longer means complete isolation from the state or the market but involves a complex system of balances between autonomy and responsibility. Thus, the cultural and communicative revolution in digital education entails the adoption of new technologies, a profound shift in the culture of knowledge, modes of communication, the roles of teachers and students, and the very model of the university.

We have analyzed how digital learning, academic communication, and the university’s scientific and cultural environment are shaping new models of everyday human experience. A transformation of the lifeworld is taking place amid the digitalization of education. This transformation involves not merely a technological upgrade of teaching tools, but a profound shift in the structures of experience, communication, and meaning-making. The educational lifeworld is becoming networked, mediatized, and hybrid; its boundaries are expanding, but at the same time, the risk of losing integrity and autonomy is growing. A philosophical analysis of this process requires combining phenomenological attention to the structure of experience with critical reflection on the role of technological systems in shaping contemporary educational reality.

The dominant discourse on university digitalization is often rooted in technological optimism, which holds that digital platforms automatically ensure the democratization of education and equal opportunities. Equality is achieved through anonymous grading of student work. Gender-neutral policies are transforming university life and the campus environment, fostering respect for diverse gender identities. An inclusive infrastructure and cultural environment are being created. The experience of Harvard University, University College London, the University of Toronto, and the University of Phoenix demonstrates that modern education must combine academic freedom with ethical principles of respect, equality, and human dignity. It is through such practices that universities foster a culture of tolerance and responsibility that extends far beyond the classroom.

Digitalization is not a neutral process: it shapes a new ontology of the university space, where knowledge can be evaluated not only by criteria of truth or critical significance, but also by metrics of traffic, rankings, and commercial appeal. This approach, however, has its drawbacks, as it reduces complex social and cultural processes to the instrumental logic of efficiency. The desire to steer young people toward more practical and professionally limited fields is a pragmatic step, but it comes with risks to the general humanities-oriented nature of education.

Thus, higher education in the context of an information society, which creates ontological instability – requires philosophical reflection from the perspective of the ambivalence between effectiveness and innovation, as well as the anthropological and ontological challenges it poses. This concerns the need to rethink educational strategies as practices for developing a person’s ability to navigate multiple, unstable realities while maintaining critical thinking, existential responsibility, and the meaningful integrity of one’s own existence.

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Революційні зміни в університеті інформаційного суспільства: культурні стратегії рівних можливостей

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У статті здійснено соціально-філософський аналіз трансформації університету як відкритого науково-освітнього простору в умовах плінної сучасності та цифровізації. Обґрунтовано, що сучасні зміни є не просто кризою класичної гумбольдтівської моделі, а її історичним перетворенням у форми мережевої та міждисциплінарної організації знання. Доведено, що цифровізація освіти набуває рис епістемологічної та культурно-комунікативної революції, яка докорінно змінює культуру пізнання, ролі викладачів і студентів та саму онтологію університетського простору. Особливу увагу приділено трансформації життєсвіту (lifeworld) людини: проаналізовано, як цифровізація переформатовує структури досвіду, комунікації та смислотворення, створюючи гібридну освітню реальність. Виявлено амбівалентний характер цих змін: від нових можливостей для демократизації та інклюзії (на прикладі досвіду провідних світових університетів) до ризиків «техносистемної колонізації», посилення цифрового розриву та інструменталізації знання через метрики ефективності. Переосмислено концепт академічної свободи як динамічного балансу між автономією та відповідальністю. Зроблено висновок про необхідність формування нових освітніх стратегій, здатних забезпечити екзистенційну цілісність особистості в ситуації онтологічної нестабільності інформаційного суспільства.

Ключові слова: освіта, соціальна роль університету, інформаційно-комунікативна революція, інформаційне суспільство, культура, інклюзія, ідентичність, рівність, справедливість.

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