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INOVATIVE CONCEPT OF REORGANIZATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The process of European integration represents first class, social project for all the countries of the subregion of the Western Balkans. The author considers the implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Strategy, as well as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus program of the European Commission dedicated to the establishment of a Knowledge economy in the surveyed countries. The analysis shows that the Western Balkan countries are making great efforts to implement provisions of the Bologna process, particularly at the level of formal adoption in the form of law. However, numerous weaknesses are reported in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and the elements of strengthening the impact of the labour market. According to all relevant indicators, the level of the Europeanisation of higher education in the Western Balkans is below the EU average, which points to the unsustainability and the necessity for the transformation of existing concepts.

Keywords *Innovative concept; Higher education; Knowledge economy; European integration; Western Balkan*

INTRODUCTION

The last decade of the twentieth century, testifies that he began a period of globalization, which is characterized by global competition, breaking the standards of the world market and the international orientation of the organization. Globalization represents a set of different processes which basically have the idea of developing and connecting the world and can be considered from different angles. However, most often defined as a concept, form and phenomenon that implies multiple and drastic changes in all dimensions of life. It has the ability to create change which affect on the whole world. Human knowledge has become the main source of wealth and an important pillar of any society. The quality of higher education determines the future of every country, which led to significant changes in this area. However, in order to education be productive and efficiently it has to follows the rapid changes of everyday life. It is quite clear that knowledge in today's world has become the most important potential, and the development of information and communication technologies contributed to the entire planet are increasingly relies on this "intangible" resource. New situation, which involves the modernization of administration and management, increasing demand for educational and scientific research activities, connectivity and networking, puts new challenges for the Western Balkan countries, which all have a common goal - accession to the European Union. The interest of the entire Western Balkan region is its own development and strengthening connection with Europe, whereby high education can play a significant role. (Arandarenko and Bartlett, 2012, p. 202.)

METHODOLOGY

The modern world is constantly exposed to numerous contradictions that characterize all regions and individual countries. The population will be in controversial conditions, benefits provided by scientific achievements and drastic threats with current threats to human security. It can be said that in the strategy of the overall development of European integration, they represent the fundamental decisions of certain post-socialist countries. The current

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situation points to the responsibility of relevant international and national entities to permanently take appropriate measures in the context of resolving the observed controversies and ensuring a prosperous future. The subject of our research is the consideration of innovative trends in the higher education system in the context of eliminating apparent anomalies, improving the economy and creating conditions for successful convergence towards the European Union. This implies the conception and implementation of appropriate standards in the given sphere, in accordance with Community law, and with the purpose of ensuring the existence of citizens.

The main goal of our work is the scientific research of specific aspects of the reorganization of the higher education system of the countries of the Western Balkans subregion in the project of the Knowledge Economy and their European integration, which has not been sufficiently implemented so far. We will try to use the established academic procedures to look at the most important postulates of the observed topic, as the first-class tasks of the responsible factors of the given creations. A special challenge in the realization of the set tasks is the adoption of standards and certain legislative documents, harmonized with the positive experiences of progressive countries and the legislation of the European Union. In the text, we specifically point out the specifics of the reform of education and science in the concept of association, emphasize weaknesses with perceived repercussions and possible recommendations for their elimination.

We define research hypotheses according to the problem, the subject and the formulated goals, following the traditional Asadem principles.

Basic hypothesis:

The reorganization of the higher education system is a necessary condition for the realization of the strategic project of the long-term development of the countries of the Western Balkans and their inclusion in the European educational space. Innovations and the implementation of the Knowledge Economy project ensure the elimination of anomalies and the realization of the concept of postmodern integrations. The aforementioned postulates create the conditions for the implementation of the population's existential demands, and then the criteria for successful convergence into the European Union.

Special hypotheses:

H 1: Objective indicators indicate that there are numerous weaknesses in the functioning of institutions in various areas, especially in higher education and knowledge affirmation, which reflects on other segments of society in the observed area.

H 2: The processes of European integration and affirmation of knowledge imply the formulation, adoption and application of acts, harmonized with the corresponding international regulations. The successful implementation of the experiences of developed countries can ensure the improvement of the quality of life, improvement of the economic environment and satisfaction with the provision of services at all levels of the organization of society.

In our work, all essential methods of scientific knowledge will be applied, with emphasis on analysis, synthesis, description, classification, systematization and generalization. By using the given methods, a logical and clear path will be ensured, which will result in the realization of the observed research subject and the realization of the projected goals. From the general scientific methods, the hypothetical method of induction and deduction, statistical and comparative method will be applied. Consequently, we will use appropriate academic procedures, instruments and techniques of the research process.

The importance and justification of the current research is reflected in the scientific and social aspects of looking at the mentioned topic, as a first-class social phenomenon. The scientific contribution is manifested in the systematization of existing and acquisition of new knowledge in the fields of education, innovation, economy and other social disciplines, providing wide opportunities for improving the general situation in specific countries and the Western Balkans microregion. Proper engagement of given capacities eliminates weaknesses in the functioning of certain institutions involved in projects, problems in work coordination and other contradictions. Our research encourages debate and social dialogue, from the position of broadest identification and consideration of acute difficulties. The need for formulating real challenges and potential solutions in science and education by applying adequate solutions in theory and practice is initiated in order to improve the situation and ensure the sustainable development of certain areas and the community as a whole.

The social importance and justification is reflected through a competent analysis of the reform of higher education in the countries of the Western Balkans, the application of innovations and the Knowledge Economy project for the purpose of European integration of individual countries.

It is necessary to fulfill the conditions within the scope of competent public administration bodies, as well as the engagement of all government institutions. Establish cooperation between public institutions and non-governmental organizations, indigenous associations, media and other community actors. A relevant interpretation of the necessity for a reform approach to the mentioned topic will imply a deep understanding and a creative relationship of all official factors of society in the context of eliminating negative repercussions and ensuring the progress of state creation. The attitudes and perceptions of different social groups will contribute to the inauguration of the rule of law, the conglomerate of human rights and freedoms, the satisfaction of citizens with the treatment and services of public services, and the implementation of procedures for convergence towards the European Union and other lucrative international associations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

HIGH EDUCATION IN THE AMBIENCE OF KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

The development of technology and all the massive use of computers have led to that today on the Internet for one year appears more information than the total in all previous years of human history. It can be said that today a total knowledge doubled from hour to hour. Earlier, the monopoly on knowledge could keep long, and companies and states have had dozens of years to use their own specific advantages and uniqueness on a global level. Knowledge is expanding very slowly, so the competitors had a long time to find out what is happening and copied the idea. Today it is impossible, because knowledge is spreading throughout the world almost instantaneously. The success and survival in this environment can realize only those who are able to produce and permanently increase their own knowledge and manage with it strategically. According with new trends, successful future and the path of development of each country must be economy which is based on knowledge and quality of high education (Nešković, S., et al., 2016, p. 445).

Today's society has become a society of knowledge and has the following characteristics:

has no boundaries and knowledge flows through it at high speed

knowledge has replaced classical dominance based on natural resources, labor and capital

revolution in the technology

on the global market can be competitive only those who have the best technology and highly educated human resources

domestic businesses has increasingly become multinational, transnational and global

high education became the basis for the development and prosperity.

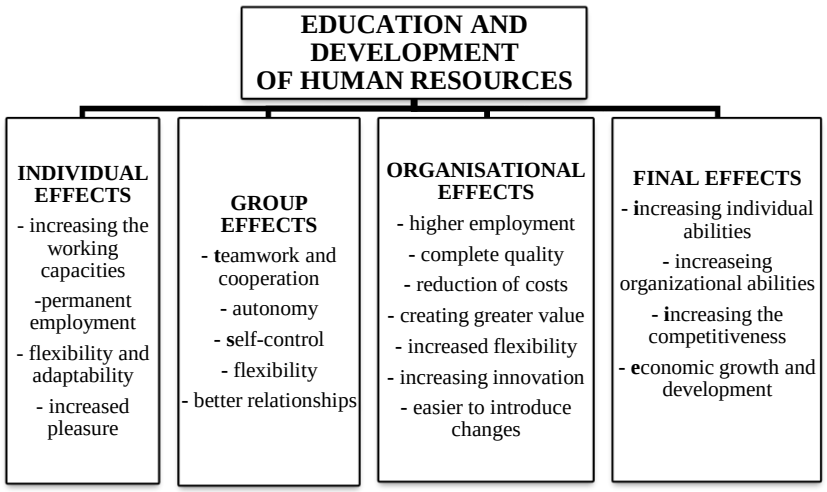
Modern economy is definitely economy of specific knowledge. The knowledge which is contained in scientific and technological achievements accelerates the process of globalization, enhances interdependency in the world economy and on the world market and determines the pace and processes of social development in general. Thanks to new technologies, communication and new economy globalization is imposed new rules, new content, new dimensions and new knowledge and created new conditions that have to adapt to all who want to succeed. It has precisely defined requirements: continuous investment in knowledge, technology, research and development and anyone who is not included in this process on the time, severely lagging behind (Gajić, A., 2023, p. 89). Experiences and facts from practice indicate that the innovation and high technology (which are composed of human knowledge and unique abilities) have become one of the most important elements for the development of modern society. It is considered that today is one of the basic factors of economic growth and development continuous growth of knowledge and innovation capabilities which can't exist without each other. Increasing the knowledge allows new ideas, but without increased innovation capabilities this new and profitable ideas will not be able to be realized. Innovation is the key in the creation of growth and development strategy and in

contemporary way of business very few organizations can survive without innovation. Only strategy of development which is based on knowledge and innovation guarantees success.

The impact of globalization on education is cause by the impact of globalization on production process. As the global economy expands, there is a need for specialized education and proper work force. Especially interesting is the impact that trend globalization in economy makes on education. Research show, and practice confirms, that economic globalization and IT revolution demand radical changes in the very nature of the learning process and educational system modernization. Education represents the cradle of society and the treasure trove of knowledge, but it needs to be constantly improved and enriched with new knowledge based on development needs of modern society. Modernization of education system means, above all, modernization of aids in educational process such as introducing new educational technologies (computers, videos, digital education etc.), as well as enrichment of educational content, internationalization of knowledge, globalization of education system, high specialization of educational profiles etc. changes that the IT development brings, possibilities of using different sources and not being limited only to books, as well as a new system of communication, bring with them a new atmosphere – teachers are not the only sources of knowledge and information any more, nor is the school the only center of learning and development. These situations make the value system change and deepen considerably, making the educators to always improve themselves, to be up to date with changes and to constantly work on their additional education, so that they could prepare their students for everything that could be asked of them in the future. Nowadays the schools are expected to give adequate basic education, develop ethical values, form the character and plant key values necessary for further life. All those values will in future give young people better chances for successful jobs and payment – economic security. However, the most important task of education is to follow changes in all the spheres and to change accordingly. Traditional designation of education, which comes from understanding education as systematic acquisition of scientific knowledge about nature, society and human opinion, must be changed with modern designation, which comes from the fact that the education is a system of institutional knowledge acquisition and the teaching of people to gain knowledge, skills and habits they need (Jovanović, Ž., Nešković, S., Kostić, Z., 2017, 242).

Figure 1. The effects of contemporary education

collection of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of a country's productiveness. Level of competitiveness shows the capacity of national economy to generate sustainable economic growth with the current development level in the medium-term period.



Source: The table is the result of the author's research

The importance of knowledge in human life, living and functioning is ever increasing. It contributes to widening and deepening of human knowledge and cognition, to upgrading the practical functioning in all the aspects of

human interests, to faster and easier business functioning, to the management of business processes and the distribution of available resources, to the fuller realization of human rights and freedoms, to the participation in making social and state decisions and to the direction of the way to the future. It all affects the motivation in acquiring more knowledge and developing of information-communication abilities and culture of the individuals and every community, more so because the information-communication knowledge is becoming one of the main conditions for job advancement, in the field, in every aspect of human and economic activity, meaning in life and work of evey individual and community.

EUROPEANISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE

WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRIES

European initiatives of the utmost importance to the higher education of Western Balkans countries are The Bologna process, The Lisbon strategy and Europe 2020 document. In order to secure sustainable development and the safe future, European Union adopted a strategy known as The Lisbon strategy in 2000. The goals of the strategy were to make EU the most competitive and the most dynamic economy in the world, based on knowledge and able to sustain economic growth, by 2010. The key component of the strategy was development and improvement of knowledge, which meant greater investments in education and professional training, scientifical and technological research and innovation. However, some of the goals of The Lisbon strategy have not been achieved so in EU started the process of making the new strategic frame that resulted in the Europe 2020 document: strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, whose goal was economic development of EU based on the knowledge and environmental protection, high level of employment, productivity and social cohesion. (Gajić A., and oth., 2024, 231) Education is one of the central themes of this strategy as well and it involves the use of alternative instruments and mechanisms in the implementation of the EU policy, such as Lifelong Learning Programme, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus etc. The strategy has set five goals, two of which are directly related to higher education and research: minimum 3% of GDP should be allocated for the research and development; at least 40% of the younger generation should possess a tertiary level of education or diploma; the share of adults (30-34 years old) with education at the tertiary level should be at least 40%; on average at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning. This strategy is not important only for member states of EU, but it also represents important potential for EU candidate countries to whom belong all the countries of Western Balkans with the exception of Croatia.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 refers to the reform of higher education systems in Europe and is the basis of the Bologna process, which includes: acceptance of the system of recognizable and comparable degrees, the acceptance of the system which is based on three main cycles of studies (undergraduate, master and doctoral studies), introduction of ECTS (ECST) scoring system and the Diploma Supplement, improvement of the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, ensuring the quality of higher education, the development of comparable curricula, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research. All these instruments are intended to facilitate the employment by recognizing the acquired knowledge and competencies of graduates across Europe. The final aim of the declaration is to establish a single European educational space in which lecturers, researchers and students can move easily and quickly. By accepting the Bologna process the Western Balkan countries have taken on obligations from this declaration. From a wider, euro integration aspect, this means the implementation of the necessary higher education reforms in these countries, in order to reposition their universities at European and international level and improve their own quality and competitiveness.

Lifelong Learning Programme is the cooperation program in the field of education of the European Union which supports the development of all levels of education. For now, the Western Balkans countries can participate in certain types of projects, only if their educational institutions offer expertise in an area which is the theme of the project and thus contribute to achieving the best possible results. Since LLP is one of the main sources of funding for education development in the EU, it is important that educational institutions of these countries start their preparations for full participation in this program on time.

Tempus (Trans-European mobility scheme for university studies) is the EU program that helps reform and modernize higher education in the partner countries, and is one of the oldest and most successful EU cooperation programmes. The program helps that the education systems of partner countries accept development trends of

higher education in EU derived from the Lisbon agenda and the Bologna process and fund projects involving higher education institutions from the EU and more than 20 partner countries. Tempus program started in 1990 with main goal being the modernisation of higher education sector and to enable the institutional cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia joined the Tempus program almost immediately after its creation (1991). However, political situation in this region have stopped this cooperation and a lot of time had passed before newly formed countries rejoined the program (EACEA, 2012).

Erasmus Mundus started in 1987. It represents the program of support to cooperation and mobility in higher education through promotion of the best European master and doctoral studies. The goal of the program is quality improvement of higher education and inter-cultural understanding through cooperation with partner countries (which are not members of the EU). It aims to increase the attractiveness and recognition of European higher education around the world and the European Union as one of the centers of excellence. The program works by allowing students and teaching and scientific staff from all over the world the possibility of inclusion in postgraduate studies at the higher education institutions of the EU, and vice versa, it allows for the mobility of students and teachers from EU to the partner countries. EU provides scholarships, both for citizens of partner countries who have been admitted to the Erasmus Mundus master and doctoral programs in EU countries, as well as for its own nationals studying at partner universities. All the countries of Western Balkans participate in this program.

In global terms, the issue of the countries competitiveness is linked to the works of World Economic Forum (WEF) and its Global Competitiveness Index (GCI). This index is based on twelve pillars of competitiveness organized in three groups. Higher education and trainings are part of the second group that shows Efficiency Increase Factors of analyzed country. All the data are normalized on the scale from 1 to 7 (1 – the worst mark, 7 – the best mark), which is also the range for possible values for all the indicators, pillars of competitiveness and the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) itself. The significance the pillars within the group have on the particular country depends on its development level. Taking everything into consideration GCI could be roughly defined aa

Table 1. Comparative overview of socio-economic data for 2022 of Western Balkan countries and EU countries with the most developed/top quality higher education

2022	Population (in millions)	GDP (in US$ millions)	GDP per capita (US $)	HCI (Higher Education and Training) 1-7 1 (worst) 7 (best)	Competitiveness of Higher Education Ranking (Out of 140 countries)
Albania	2,9	18,916.38	6,810.1	4,7	47
BiH	3,5	24,473.91	7,568.8	3,8	97
Montenegro	0,6	6,229.80	10,093.4	4,6	54
Macedonia	1,8	13,563.13	6,591.5	4,8	46
Serbia	6,6	63,563.40	9,537.7	4,3	71
Denmark	5,8	400,167.20	67,790.1	5,8	9
France	66,7	2,779,092.24	40,886.3	5,3	25
Finland	5,2	282,896.25	50,916.3	6,1	2
Germany	80,6	4,082,469.49	48,718.0	5,6	17
England	65,1	3,089,072.72	46,125.3	5,6	18

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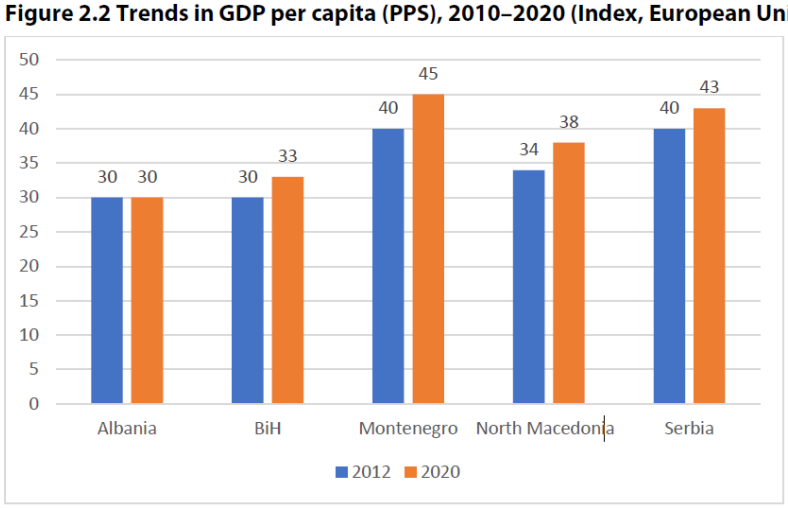
Source:https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD

In conclusion, it can be observed that the period of transition and structural economic reforms in the Western Balkan countries has not led to the expected improvement in the standard of living for the population. On the contrary, the economic crisis has further complicated the situation, negatively impacting various segments, including higher education. Data analysis shows that Western Balkan countries continue to have low gross domestic product (GDP) and significantly lower GDP per capita values compared to the researched EU countries. Additionally, the competitiveness of higher education in this region is low, with a ranking ranging from 46th to 97th out of 140 countries analyzed by the World Economic Forum (WEF). Macedonia stands out as a country with the highest value in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) in the field of higher education, while Bosnia and Herzegovina are ranked the lowest.

Compared to EU countries, where higher education is rated extremely high, especially Finland, which ranks second out of 140 countries, Western Balkan countries lag behind in this area. Researched European EU countries are ranked highly in terms of the competitiveness of higher education, further indicating a performance gap between these regions.

Furthermore, a possible addition to these conclusions may relate to identifying the need for additional reforms and strategies that could improve the economic situation and competitiveness of higher education in Western Balkan countries. Emphasizing the role of education in overall economic development may be crucial in developing long-term plans and policies.

Figure 2. Trends in GDP per capita, 2010 - 2020



Source: Eurostat online https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/gdp-per-capita-maddison

Many changes that the age of globalization brought before the companies and the countries have led to the new challenges in terms of sustaining competitiveness, and the future will demand the fulfilment of even higher quality tasks. Modern global markets are based on completely new rules of competitiveness, which resulted in company and country strategy changes. In order to create and improve competitiveness nowadays it is clearly emphasized the orientation on investments into intangible assets. Science and technology are built into the basis of every modern society and are part of every aspect of human life. Ever faster scientific and technological progress and IT development emphasize the importance of human capital. In the “knowledge society” competitiveness advantage is based on human knowledge and the use of potential chances and possibilities whose realisation asks for human knowledge. Nowadays key factor for competitiveness improvement is human capital which more often than not reaches up to 90% of company value. That is the acknowledgment that the knowledge, competence and

skills are keys for positive competitiveness position. The country, the capital and the equipment are no longer the deciding factor in world market. Individuals, companies and even countries are becoming more and more dependent on the ways in which they develop their abilities and apply their knowledge with the goal of realising their goals.

CONCLUSION

Socio-economic changes that accompany rapid scientific and technological development, especially the expansion of modern technologies, need highly educated people who are able to function effectively in social processes and use the available technology. Economy competitiveness on the global scale demands high level of expertise and work force competitiveness, because the modern technological processes are based on highly educated population. Even the countries that have significant natural resources, nowadays cannot partake in further development race without educated and innovation-trained people. When it comes to the development and the application of new technologies, development tendencies of market economy oriented countries show that the education and the creation of highly skilled human resources are in the top of national strategy priorities and economic and technological development policies. Therefore the postmodern education must imply the development of highly educated personnel which can improve the national development and respond adequately to the demands of modern environment. The development of top education must be correlated to the modern development of science and technology, which means the education of human resources for specific needs and types of technical, technological, communications and innovation technologies. The new age called the digital age and the age of knowledge, demands new types of education as well. However, it is without a doubt that the institutionalised education remains the best form of education if it follows modern trends. Everything said leads to a conclusion that 21st century education needs to be guided towards the gain of specific knowledge and skills. In these new and changed circumstances, the education has a goal of increasing the human adaptability to the coming time and to increase the abilities that humans need in order to be able to fight and adjust the changes. That means that the human's future will depend on its education.

Higher education plays significant role in the European integration processes and in the encouragement of economic and social development of Western Balkans countries. It is necessary to follow global trends and persevere through the higher education reform processes, and the reforms should be based on advanced knowledge and skills in different areas. When we talk about the Western Balkans countries it can be concluded that when it comes to the European integration processes, all of them are putting maximum effort into the implementation of all the parts of the Bologna process, and into the achievement of the goals of the Lisbon strategy and the Europe 2020 document considering the higher education. All the countries of the region have taken part in the Tempus, Erasmus Mundus and the other EU higher education programs. However, the achievement levels of these countries, as well as individual national investments into this field, are still below EU average. It is clear that the total quality of higher education in Western Balkans region is still not on satisfactory level and it needs to be put an additional effort in order to fulfil the set goals and create competitiveness of higher education and intellectual resources of these countries in the "Knowledge Economy". (Nešković, 2022, 55) The key to strengthen these transitional economies is the creation and development of higher education of European (and world) quality, compatibility of educational offer with the demand of a unified market, the creation and implementation of study programs that stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship and the development of innovation practices which would allow for postgraduates to gain new experiences and practical knowledge relevant to the quick employment.

In the field of inter-disciplinary research of systems in general, the general systems theory is the subject of study. The goal of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) is to investigate the principles that can be applied to the systems at any level of the systemic inquiry process.

The general theory of systems proper was first proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the year 1950. Later, in the seventies, Humberto Maturana introduced the notion of autopoiesis, which accounts for the structuring of living systems as closed networks of self-production of the components that make them. A. W. In the field of

cybernetics, Ross Ashby and Norbert Wiener established a mathematical theory that is closely related to control theory. This theory is known as the mathematical theory of communication and control of systems through feedback regulation. The same decade saw the work of René Thom and E.C. In accordance with bifurcations in dynamic systems, Zeeman developed the theory of catastrophes, which is a field of mathematics that categorizes occurrences that are marked by rapid alterations in their behavior (Friedman, 1994).

Chaos theory is a mathematical theory of nonlinear dynamical systems that was first described in 1980 by David Ruelle, Edward Lorenz, Mitchell Feigenbaum, Steve Smale, and James A. Yorke. This theory describes bifurcations, unusual attractions, and chaotic motions. Complex adaptive system (CAS) is a new science of complexity that describes emergence, adaptation, and self

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