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NATALIA MIKHALCHENKOVA

MODERN UNIVERSITIES AT THE CROSSROAD OF GLOBALIZATION: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

At the beginning of the 21st century, universities all over the world found themselves in a paradox. Never before in human history have there been so many of them and never before have they played such an important role, yet never before have they faced such uncertainty about their future and doubt about their own identity. They are funded more than ever before; however, they are struggling with fears regarding their place in the system of priorities of the state and society. The number of students in the world is greater than ever before, yet there is growth in skepticism about expediency (intellectual and material) of receiving higher education. While in certain parts of the world universities are considered to be engines that advance the scientific and technological progress and economic development, and developing countries strive to establish new institutions of higher education, in other regions universities are criticized for their being “arrogant”, “behind”, “conservative”, and “elite”.

The tension that exists around universities in society takes various forms depending on local specifics and cultural traditions, but the very fact of university education spreading fast around the world is a clear indicator of growing public expectations about higher education. However, while in developing countries there is hope that recently established universities will help them compete in the global economy, in more prosperous western countries, with their long established traditions and institutions of higher education, there is a growing concern that open scientific search, which has always been main activity in the academic community, is becoming more endangered in the climate of globalization and immediate demands of the market economy.

In universities those who specialize in technical sci-

ences, medicine and a number of other narrow specializations feel most confident, whereas their colleagues in humanitarian and social sciences as well as in some other fundamental sciences are deeply concerned for their future. As a result, their perception of the university reality is different. For instance, a professor at the financial department of a university in Singapore or at the department of metallurgy in Wuhan university in China will justifiably believe that universities have never been as popular and well financed as nowadays. However, a professor of medieval history in Oslo or of German literature in Sheffield may be very anxious about their future when their scientific knowledge becomes devalued in society. As a result, there is an obvious division in the academic community, which adds tension, including political tension, in the sphere of higher education.

It is noteworthy to mention that expansion of higher education over the past decades has shown itself not only in the increasing number of students but also in extension of the range of specializations and kinds of educational institutions. Therefore, the term “university” now has a broader meaning because it is used in relation to various forms of educational institutions which follow the secondary school. These institutions perform a number of important social functions from providing professional training to transferring innovative technologies; they also contribute to accomplishing important public goals such as shaping public values and providing social mobility. Although all these goals are of great importance, they do not take priority in institutions which we call universities. Thus a natural question arises as to what a modern university is and how different it is from other educational organizations, such as schools, research laboratories, educational associations, museums, etc.

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЫ НА ПЕРЕПУТЬЕ ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИИ: ОБЩИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация: Под влиянием глобализации по всему миру происходит трансформация систем высшего образования, серьезное изменение роли и места университетов в жизни современных обществ. В статье раскрываются основные параметры происходящих изменений, ставится под сомнение ориентация на конкуренцию между вузами и излишняя увлеченность международными рейтингами, которые за внешне объективными цифровыми показателями скрывают ответ на главный вопрос о ценности университетского образования как общественного блага.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, университет, глобализация, конкуренция, наука, рейтинг.

A modern university, above all, is an educational establishment which carries certain prestige in society. It is not by accident that we can observe a tendency, which is common both for Russia and other countries, when various educational institutions of higher education “fight” for the official status of “university”.

It appears that, in general, a modern university must possess the following minimum characteristics.

First of all, it must provide a certain post-school education which should go beyond mere professional education.

Second, in universities there should be education and research which is not defined only by immediate demands of practical activity.

Third, university activity follows different directions and is expressed in a whole range of various disciplines. By the way, the very word “university” is derived from the Latin “universitas” which means “the whole, aggregate”.

Fourth, this establishment has a certain institutional autonomy in the issues related to intellectual activity.

The structure of these four minimum characteristics depends on the presence of other, stricter, forms of educational institutions. This very structure allows us to suggest what is the reason of the current tension between universities and those public systems in which universities exist. There is an impression that universities, in their nature, always try to go beyond the clearly defined framework of immediate practical tasks. The very principle of open free intellectual search comes into contradiction with imperatives imposed by those who support and finance universities. It is no accident that under authoritative and totalitarian political regimes the autonomy of universities is restricted or completely

eradicated. However, even in democratic societies there can arise rather pressing situations when professors “go too far” and students go beyond what is generally accepted and conduct research which is declared harmful and dangerous for public development. In order to prevent the latter from happening, supervisory boards, which are comprised of representatives of the state and business, are established; state authorities make decisions concerning certain universities; there is strict accountability to ministries of education and subsequently stricter control of certain kinds and spheres of university activity. Nevertheless, the government is hardly able to control everything that happens in libraries and laboratories. The very desire to control and restrict universities contradicts the demands that society sets for them. Scientists are required to expand scientific knowledge, but, as is well known, scientific search follows its own logic which cannot be disrupted without risking to destroy the whole process. Indeed, the state can take different disciplinary measures, even dismissing professors and expelling students; however, liberal societies, as a rule, respond to such occasions extremely negatively, which is why authorities have to look for more sophisticated ways to restrict academic liberties.

Besides these four minimum characteristics, in our opinion, it is worth mentioning that universities also have a possibility to select and form their own staff of professors, researchers, administrators, and most importantly, students, which impedes the control over universities on the part of the state and society. Schools must teach everyone, but they do not prepare their own teachers. Companies hire new employees and train them, but that is not their main activity. Unlike them, universi-

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the transformation of higher education in the climate of globalization.

Main changes of higher education in the middle of the 20th century	Changes in the climate of globalization
The initial period of formation of mass systems of higher education	Mature systems of mass higher education in most developed countries
Higher education is mostly considered a public good	Higher education is more often interpreted as a private good
Limited use of international models and practices; higher education as part of a national culture	Growing use and convergence of models and practices; higher education as part of globalization
National and regional markets for graduates, depending on the prestige of a certain university	Growing world and international markets for graduates, depending on the prestige of a certain university
High level of institutional autonomy -limited accountability and control	Obscured institutional autonomy - increasing accountability and control
The government is like a partner of the academic community	The government is like an antagonist (an opponent or an enemy)
Accreditation or quality assessment at the national level	Possible international accreditation and quality assessment
The traditional pedagogy - limited use of technologies	The changing pedagogy - more frequent use of information technologies
Significant government subsidies	Reduced government subsidies
Low level of commercialization, it is predominantly in the USA	Growing commercialization
Growth of the scientific community	An established scientific community
Restrictions of cross-national exchange of knowledge and communications	Global exchange of knowledge and communications

ties produce future scientists, researchers and teachers, and it is not just one of the functions of universities, but it is their inherent characteristic which ensures keeping and continuing traditions. Starting from early student years, young people are trained to be independent in their intellectual work, to practice autonomy and choose their own priorities. That is why understanding of and defining academic liberties by people who do not belong to the academic community are problematic, as a rule.

The main question related to higher education that is asked these days is whether there have been any drastic changes in universities in the climate of globalization. Probably, under the circumstances, it is necessary to step aside from the European ideal (including the Russian one), which was established in the 19th century, and to pay attention to the Asian «incarnation» of the Americanized version of the European model where to the forefront of university education come such directions as technology, medicine and management, which, as a matter of fact, is often associated with universities of the 21st century?

When discussing globalization of universities, we often use this word as a synonym of internationalization. But it can hardly be interpreted as something absolutely new. Education and science are international in their nature. Universities of one country always borrowed experience of universities of other countries, learning from each other. Starting from the end of the 19th century, European empires naturally contributed to spreading European models all over the world. However, in the last decades of the 20th century and, more noticeably, at the beginning of the 21st century, the scope of higher education in all developed countries (and in some developing countries) has been undergoing transformation which is accompanied by introduction of analogous organizational and financial forms, which testify to a radical deviation from the long existing national traditions in this sphere.

On the basis of a number of studies conducted in recent years [Case, Huisman, 2016], we can make a **table** to present the most significant, in our opinion, changes that happened to universities.

Analyzing the ongoing process, we would like to highlight that not all of these changes are of a revolutionary character. For example, the use of information and communication technologies in the educational process is mere spread of innovative changes that happened in society into the sphere of higher education. Indeed, computerization immensely influences the methods of education, but one can barely speak about a total transformation of this process. One can also doubt that there have been qualitative changes in the academic community. Undoubtedly, the increasing rate of information exchange and use of English as a means of scientific communication influence the overall situation in higher education; however, that is related rather to intensification than transformation. Along with that, the question of whether higher education is a public or a personal good

concerns the foundation of social life and values; it also influences the way public systems function.

However, the focus of attention should, undoubtedly, be on those changes that signal about a replacement of a national component by an international one. One of the main aspects of such transformation is increasing mobility of students. At first, the main points of attraction were universities of the USA and the UK, whereas, in recent years it has been Singapore and Australia that have come to the front as regional recruiters. Australian universities were given a task at the end of the 1990s to sharply increase revenues from foreign students. Eventually their number comprised more than 2.5% of the overall number of students [Barnett, 2013. P.47]. Nowadays this figure has gone up higher in a number of universities in the UK, the USA and some other countries. There are especially many foreign students in masters and doctoral programs. For instance, in 2010, in the London School of Economics the number of such students exceeded 60% [Barnett, 2013. P.49].

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Bologna process whose aim was to establish a common unified cycle of gaining Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's degrees in countries which had adhered to various directions of university education. One way of rationalization is to ease up transition from one national system to another, by introducing semester-long modules, in particular.

One of most remarkable, and contentious at the same time, manifestations of quality changes in the position of universities is widespread preoccupation with international rankings and the desire to get into a new kind of "Ivy League". When the results of rankings are favourable for a certain university or country, they are widely used for propagandistic reasons and for lobbying the issue of additional sponsorship. Nevertheless, as British researcher S. Collini justly, in our opinion, noted, these ratings, in fact, are useless [Collini, 2012. P. 17].

First of all, there is no exact verified data for a number of parameters of universities' activity so that this data could be used to make comparisons. Subjective "student satisfaction" surveys provide little reliable and useful information. Secondly, the most important point in rankings is scientific achievements of universities; thus when science and universities are not part of one whole, as it is the case in Russia, universities find themselves at a disadvantage. Rather illustrative in this respect is the so-called Shanghai Ranking, one of the most authoritative rankings in the world. This Academic Ranking of World Universities directly aims to assess scientific dominance among 500 leading universities of the world and it has been published annually since 2003¹. It is based on six objective indicators, including the number of graduates and staff awarded by the Nobel Prize or the Fields Medal, the number of frequently quoted scientists, the number of

¹ Shanghai Ranking-2015: only two Russian universities. http://ria.ru/abitura_world/20150815/1183702875.html#ixzz40oAyKwPq

articles published in the journals *Nature* and *Science*, and other indicators. Every year more than 1,200 universities are rated, and 500 best universities are selected. In 2015, the top three universities were the oldest American universities: Harvard (1636), Stanford (1891), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1861). There are only two Russian universities in the 500 top list. They are the Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU), which lost two positions and took the 86th place in the ranking this year, and St. Petersburg State University (SPSU), which got into the “301-400” list of the best universities of the world, as it did last year.

The problem is that in such rankings a great deal of attention is disproportionately given to “big science”; as a rule, this “big science” is English-speaking and is almost exceptionally related to mathematics and sciences. As a result, the most decisive factor is how much money is spent on research projects in different universities, and that is taken as proof of superiority of one university over another.

On the whole, preoccupation with rankings, in our opinion, is connected with two inter-related aspects in discussions, which are held all over the world, on the role of universities in the climate of globalization.

Firstly, it is a superficial opinion that universities compete with each other in the framework of certain world competition, which, in its turn, is the consequence of a widely spread statement about the importance of making the national economy competitive. It is no accident that even the used language testifies to an opportunistic approach to intellect, fears of “brain drain”, and a possible intellectual devastation of a country because of a rapid and effective development of other countries. Interestingly enough, this kind of approach has become dominant in public discourse very fast over the past two or three decades, and that has happened despite the fact that science and education are characterized by the spirit of corporatism and cooperation, exchange of achievements and successful experience.

Secondly, it is necessary to note that there is growing distrust towards rational arguments which are often considered to be a veil for group interests or a kind of elite arrogance; this distrust is replaced by various numeric indicators which create apparent objectivity and, along with the idea of competition, are able to lay the foundation for rankings. S. Collini notes that, as a result, today’s university authorities “watch the rankings as carefully as football managers follow the points table, and the “tournament” position frequently serves as a justification for policy change” [Collini, 2012. P.18].

It is no accident that in a whole number of countries government authorities declare that it is almost one of the most important goals of the state policy in the sphere of higher education to make sure that “their” universities would get into the rankings as well as to set the conditions (financial among others) for their equal competition with American “heavyweights”. It largely involves scientific research in the field of biology, physics, medicine, etc., which entails investments into these particular spheres. As a result, many parameters according to which a university can be regarded as a value for society and play an important role in the intellectual life of the country are just ignored. For instance, in Great Britain main debates concern how equally Oxford and Cambridge can “rival” with Harvard and Stanford [O’Byrne, Bond, 2012. P.571-584]. The question of how much the university system of a certain country meets the demands of its public development is often neglected. All the more, the answer to this question can hardly be expressed in a pseudo-objective numeric way.

To conclude, modern universities are losing their uniqueness, which was their inherent characteristic over centuries, and are gaining more similarity with other large organizations. Acknowledging this fact, in our opinion, requires rethinking the role and place of universities in the national, regional and global society; defining an optimal correlation of science and education, a private and public good.

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Summary: Globalization leads to the transformation of the systems of higher education all over the world as well as to dramatic changes in the role and place of universities in the life of modern societies. The article reveals main aspects of these changes. It also raises doubt about the focus on competition among universities and preoccupation with international ranking systems that with all their superficial numeric objectivity cannot answer the question about the value of university education as a public good.

Key words: higher education, university, globalization, competition, science, ranking.

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