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MODERN SYSTEM OF RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF STRATIFICATION

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Abstract

The modern system of higher education in Russia is passing through a period of stratification. This calls for studying this phenomenon to develop strategies for minimizing risks in the future. Stratification in the sphere of education is a multidimensional, hierarchically organized educational area consisting of hierarchically located stable strata, by which we mean the aggregate of educational institutions of higher education united by common status indicators. The global trend of stratification of the educational space in the modern educational policy in relation to the system of Russian higher education has a dominant status and is growing, leading eventually to the elitarization of the part of Russian universities. The stratification process of the higher education system in Russia includes the following trends: hierarchization, elitarization, rating, autonomization, specialization, and regionalization. Positive aspects consist in overcoming the infrastructural and technological lag of Russian universities from the leading universities of the world. Negative aspects are serious risks of financial and social imbalance. Reflection of the identified risks of stratification policy of the Russian educational space and prompt response to them creates opportunities for the dynamic development of the domestic higher education system and harmonization in this area the Westernizational-liberal and traditional-conservative strategies for implementing modern educational policies.

Keywords: University, stratification, educational policy, strategic development.

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1. Introduction

The strategic goal of the Russian higher education system is to ensure the provision of quality higher education, the formation of an effective network of Russian educational institutions of higher education that provide training of professionals taking into account the prospects for socio-economic development and according to the labor market needs. At the same time, the processes of globalization of higher education in the information age inevitably introduce a system of the Russian higher education into the area of modern strategic tendencies (Boguslavsky & Lelchitsky, 2017).

Globalization, as a context, sets development vectors for national systems of higher education and science (Boguslavskii & Neborskii, 2016). Business activities, the development of socially significant projects and partnership programs are increasingly expected from modern universities. The state reduces expenses in this area continually (Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum, 2008). Such a state of affairs concerns not only the USA or Europe, but in particular East Asia, that includes China and Japan, where the commercialization of higher education led to its massification (Mok & Jiang, 2017). Since, as has been convincingly shown in numerous studies, the lack of funding creates obstacles to the sustainable development of universities (Aleixo, Leal, & Azeiteiro, 2018), states implement a differentiated policy in this field.

Many countries, in particular, were involved in the implementation of programs “world-class universities” (Marginson, 2017). China's experience is remarkable in this regard, since 1995 the program 21/1 has been implemented and since 1998 the program 98/5, that are aimed at creating world-class universities (Zha, 2009). Studies show that the programs produced tangible results after 20 years (Hu, Liu, Chen, & Qin, 2017). The Russian system of higher education has actually only begun to move toward similar programs, experiencing at this historical stage a serious transformation that entails its stratification.

2. Problem Statement

The modern system of higher education in Russia is experiencing a period of stratification. This raises the need to study this phenomenon to develop strategies for minimizing risks in the future.

3. Research Questions

Thus, the research group faced a number of questions, and the answer to them was presented in the article. What is the process of stratification of higher education in Russia? What trends, as well as positive and negative aspects associated with it, are observed in the system of higher education?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to reveal the nature of stratification process in the higher education system in Russia. Identification of trends emerging in connection with this process. Analysis of positive and negative aspects of the process of stratification of higher education in Russia.

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5. Research Methods

The study of stratification processes problem in the system of higher education in Russia was conducted using the method of the discourse analysis of normative documents. The method of interpretation was used to determine the key trends in the stratification process, as well as the method of critical analysis to identify positive and negative aspects of stratification.

6. Findings

When we project the sociological concept "stratification" (from Latin "stratum" – layer, stratum and "facere" – to make) to the system of higher education, we can give such an interpretation of this definition. The stratification in the sphere of education is a multidimensional, hierarchically organized educational area consisting of hierarchically located stable strata, by which we mean the aggregate of educational institutions of higher education united by common status indicators. The assignment of higher education institutions by the strata occurs according to their contribution to the achievement of the state educational policy objectives, depending on the significance of their educational activities for the state, society and the individual.

Stratification in the sphere of modern Russian higher education is consolidated and supported by various state and social institutions, constantly reproduced and modernized that is an important condition for improving the system of higher education. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account that the inherent inequality is an indispensable sign of stratification of the system of higher education and its institutions.

The global trend of stratification of the educational area in the modern educational policy in relation to the Russian higher education system has a dominant status and is growing, leading eventually to the elitarization of the part of Russian universities. Similar experience exists even in the USA and Canada, where for the period from 1971 to 2006, there was an increase in structural stratification, mainly due to state finances (Davies & Zarifa, 2012) and later, yet in the early 2000s, in Europe (Triventi, 2013).

Herewith, stratification is a definite positive alternative to the previously dominant trend towards concentration of resources to create large and super-large universities. This was manifested in a consistent reduction in the number of subjects of the higher education system as a result of their merger, absorption and re-profiling. This process had a particularly negative impact on the higher pedagogical education cluster.

Objective basis of modern stratification policy is the project "Universities as centers of the innovation creation area". This project is aimed at ensuring global competitiveness of leading Russian universities by 2025; creation university centres of innovation, technological and social development in the subjects of the Russian Federation. The planned budget of the priority project was 13.7 billion rubles in 2017, and 1.1 billion rubles additionally gained from extra-budgetary sources.

We emphasize that the current stratification policy in relation to the higher education system is multidimensional and has different vectors, and includes a number of crossing trends. Let us examine them in detail.

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Hierarchization. The most prominent manifestation of stratification trends is the alignment of the hierarchical structure of higher education institutions within the higher education system, with the allocation in it a stratum of privileged higher education institutions. This stratum includes:

– 2 National universities (Moscow State University and St Petersburg University);

– 10 Federal universities, established in each subject of the Federation by combining several educational institutions;

– 29 National research universities.

The total volume of federal budget funds, aimed at the development of leading Russian universities in the period 2007-2016, amounted to 114 billion rubles. Their key tasks are conducting fundamental scientific research and training highly qualified specialists, increasing the global competitiveness and quality of Russian education in general. It should be noted that the hierarchy of universities, according to a number of researchers, makes higher education more democratic, expanding access for entrants from less well-off levels of society (Roksa, 2008).

Elitarization. State support of leading universities continues, including the program for increasing the competitiveness of universities that includes 21 universities, selected by the results of the contest for providing state support to leading Russian universities to enhance their competitiveness among the world's leading research and educational centres.

The total amount of financing programs for improving competitiveness in 2016 amounted 18.8 billion rubles, and 10.927 billion rubles (58.2% of total funding) of them are federal budget funds. In 2017-2019 years it is planned to allocate from 10 to 10.6 billion rubles annually for the implementation the program.

In the same context, it is possible to consider contests for obtaining mega-grants for the creation of world-class research laboratories; obtaining breakthrough scientific results; training highly qualified specialists, including young scientists. The size of each grant for scientific research in 2018-2020 will amount to 90 million rubles. It is clear that obtaining grants is more likely by teams from leading universities. However, as the US experience shows, the actual division into elite and standard universities leads to a decrease in social mobility (Brezis & Hellier, 2018).

Rating estimation. There is an increasing entry of elite Russian universities into prestigious international rankings in the higher education sphere and their dynamic promotion up in these ratings.

According to the decree “On measures to implement the state policy in the field of education and science” (2012), the project “5-100” is implemented, aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Russian universities in the international arena. The key indicator of the project in terms of international competitiveness is the entry of the leading Russian universities into the TOP-100 of the world rankings of universities. The planned value of the indicator for entering the TOP-100 in 2017-2020 is 5 universities, and by 2025 – at least 10 universities.

The goal of the project is to increase the prestige of Russian higher education and to enter at least five universities from the participants of the project (21 universities) one hundred of the best universities of authoritative world rankings: QS World University Rankings, Quacquarelli Symonds, Times Higher Education, and Academic Ranking of World Universities.

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These ratings are often criticized because they confuse more and more the complex and heterogeneous picture of the university area, ignoring the diversity of regional universities missions and the characteristics of national higher education systems (Millot, 2015). In the ratings there are significant differences between some indices, even when measuring criteria such as teaching and research (Olcaya, Bulu, 2017). Nevertheless, these ratings remain a tool for forming public opinion and the reputation of the university in the world, that affects the preferences of scientists and students.

In 2016, out of 21 universities participating in the project for increasing competitiveness, 20 are represented in 3 leading world rankings, 16 of them are in the World University Rankings (THE), 13 – in the QS World University Rankings (QS), 1 – for the first time in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). By the end of 2018 at least 12 leading Russian universities should be included in the TOP-400 world ratings for at least two years to prove their sustainable development. By 2019 there will already be 16 such universities in the TOP-400. Currently, criteria are being developed for the creation of a Russian system of university rankings that of course will only strengthen stratification processes.

Autonomization. Until 2020 it is planned to implement the program of a new model of state scientific certification, to form a list of higher education organizations that have the right independently of the Higher Attestation Commission to award academic degrees and issue appropriate diplomas (since 2009 MSU (Moscow State University) and St. Petersburg State University have such rights). Currently this program includes 45 universities and scientific institutions. Strict criteria are determined for those institutions that plan to obtain such an autonomous status. For example, in St. Petersburg State University, for each defence, a dissertational council is assembled. There are at least 5 members which are specialized on the topic of a particular specialty, not more than 2-3 of them are employees of St. Petersburg State University, the rest of the representatives are from other Russian or foreign scientific organizations and universities. At the same time, there must be at least one foreign specialist in the dissertation council.

In the long term, it is expected that such institutions will be given the opportunity to independently confer academic titles of a professor and an associate professor. Undoubtedly, taking into consideration the positive impact of these measures on increasing the responsibility of educational and scientific institutions for their decisions in these spheres, potentially such discourse threatens the unified educational area of the Russian Federation, creating a precedent when diplomas issued in one university will not be recognized in the other. In this aspect, we should emphasize that the selection of a group of 47 institutions, undoubtedly, strengthens stratification trends either establishing one more cluster of subjects of the educational environment.

Specialization. In the short term, it is envisaged to restrict the sphere of educational activity of industrial higher education institutions and to reduce it exclusively to profile specialties. This will exclude getting the education, for example, in the universities of the forestry or mining industry in the universal specialties of lawyers, economists, psychologists or even IT.

Potentially, such restrictions can affect pedagogical institutions of higher education in terms of training lawyers, economists and accordingly we mean the closure of these faculties or, as a rule,

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institutions in the structure of pedagogical universities. All this will lead to a differentiation of the system of higher education into universal and specialized institutions of higher education.

Regionalization. For ensuring sustainable social and economic development of the subjects of the Russian Federation, the work is underway to form a group of large, nationally competitive universities, focused on the qualitative training of specialists, which are in demand in the regional labour market. For this purpose at the present time a priority program is being implemented to create in the regions on a competitive basis a system of 33 supporting universities (by 2017 there were 11 of them). They are scientific and educational clusters that must train the personnel necessary for the economy and labour market of the regions and become scientific and socio-cultural centres in the regions. In 2016 subsidies of 1,250 million rubles in total were allocated for the implementation of the programs for the development of support universities from the federal budget to perform the state task. Co-financing from the subjects of the Russian Federation for the implementation of development programs in 2016, 6 out of 11 universities-winners in the amount of 230 million rubles, which confirms the high level of interest of regions in the development of universities.

6 universities-winners (out of 11) got co-financing from the subjects of the Russian Federation for the implementation of development programs in 2016. The amount of financing is 230 million rubles, which confirms the high level of interest of regions in the development of these universities.

In 2017, 22 new supporting universities were chosen: 8 universities will receive 100 million rubles each of them a year from the federal budget to implement the development program and 14 universities will receive 10 million rubles each and financial support of the regions. This will enable them to train management teams, get consulting support for the development and implementation of development programs and a number of other preferences. In total 3 billion rubles are allocated for this program. Moreover, all the supporting universities announced significant amounts of additional financing for development programs from their own funds, regional budgets and other sources.

The development programs provide measures oriented on: modernization of educational activities that presupposes, first of all, the development and implementation of project-oriented educational programs covering team work for fulfilment of full life cycle projects; development of personnel potential of educational organizations by introducing of an effective contract system, creation of a personnel reserve; development of material and technical base. In the future, the number of supporting universities can reach 150. The establishment of supporting universities will help concentrate intellectual potential and the formation of scientific and educational complexes aimed at economic and social development of the Russian regions.

In the same perspective we should also consider the creation (since 2017) innovation, technological and social development centres in the universities within 30 subjects of the Russian Federation. To accomplish this task the universities should have techno parks, engineering centres and (or) business incubators within their infrastructures, and also have a direct relationship to regional clusters, to special economic zones.

By the end of 2017, 40 such university centres will be created, in 2018 another 15 centres will be added, and by 2025 there will be at least 100 of them in at least 80 subjects of the Russian Federation. These centres should develop programs oriented on the full life cycle. The number of places in the

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Master's degree and Post-graduate programs will be at least 20% of the total number. This is necessary the universities should actively develop science. The Master's degree will be project-oriented and aimed at technological entrepreneurship. A total number of such programs to be prepared must be at least 400 in the near future. At the same time the share of students of the refreshing courses for the qualification improvement will be at least 35% of the number of all students, and half of all graduates should work in the region.

The analysis of these measures shows that the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation understand the social injustice of stratification educational policy towards most regional universities. Currently they strengthen the trend towards creating productive universities in the regions. This is done to stimulate the socio-economic development of the regions, and also to motivate smart school graduates choose not only prestigious, mostly metropolitan universities, but mostly remain to learn and then work in their regions.

Undoubtedly the activities carried out in the context of stratification policies have a great positive potential. They stimulate the university staff to modernize the infrastructure, create a modern technology for the educational process, and introduce new disciplines. The idea to establish higher education institutions deeply and firmly in the regions is of fundamental importance; moreover these universities must be organically integrated into the overall social and economic development of the regions in order to reduce social instability and degrading processes because of the outflow of the most creative part of the local schools graduates to the universities of the capital. The problem of such outflow is one of the most urgent in the modern society (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2011).

All this activity contributes to overcoming the existing infrastructural and technological backwardness of Russian universities from the world's leading universities, the formation in the universities such integral components of modern university infrastructure as technology parks, engineering centres and business incubators. Due to this, Russian universities become potentially attractive again for the Russian entrants from rich families, who previously traditionally chose foreign universities, as well as for foreign students. This is especially significant in the view of the project "Export of Russian education" (2017). It is expected that by 2025 the number of foreign full-time students in Russian universities should grow from 220 thousand in 2017 to 710 thousand, and the number of foreign listeners of online courses should reach 3.5 million (now we have 1.1 million people). For this in particular it is envisaged to create international services to support foreign students, for the first time in 20 universities, and from 2021 – in all universities of the country.

At the same time, the formation of a privileged group of approximately 40-50 Russian institutions of higher education, representing about 5% of 896 currently operating in the Russian Federation, creates serious risks. First of all, in the context of the emergence of budget financing towards elite universities, which arises from the redistribution of budgetary funding, there is a risk for the remaining institutions of higher education to be in a situation of recession or even degradation. This is because the state budget in the current conditions is more limited than unlimited.

It is impossible not to pay attention on the fact that the formation of an elite group of universities violates the principle of social justice, which is always very painfully perceived in the scientific and pedagogical community. Realizing these risks, the state allocated 4.25 billion rubles in 2017 from the

reserve fund for the development of universities. Subsidies should be spent on the implementation of state policy in the educational and cultural spheres, as well as on financing of maintenance costs, payment of utilities, transportation and communication services. Another serious risk is the resulting gaps in the single Russian educational environment as a result of the course for autonomization of some part of universities and scientific institutions.

7. Conclusion

In this situation the issue of establishing productive, objective and intelligible criteria for assigning higher education institutions to a particular group, granting subsidies from the federal budget and various grants is especially acute. When characterizing the activities of modern universities, it is necessary to modify the system of such an assessment and state standards in this area. The present system of uniform "standards" established by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, on the one hand, provides the possibility of carrying out a monitoring procedure and subsequent stratification, but on the other hand, shifts the emphasis in the activity of universities to formal indicators. Indeed, such priority criteria as the number of professors' and other university lecturers' published articles in scientific journals indexed in the international databases Web of Science, Scopus and the European Reference Index for the Humanities; the scale of extra-budgetary funds attracted by university professors for scientific research is not relevant to the quality of the real educational process.

Reflection of the identified risks of stratification policy of the Russian educational area and prompt response to them creates opportunities for the dynamic development of the domestic system of higher education and harmonization in this sphere of the Westernizational-liberal and traditionally-conservative strategies for implementing modern educational policies.

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