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**FROM “TRANSIT” TO “TRANSITIVE” UNIVERSITY: RISKS  
AND RESOURCES OF TRANSITION STRATEGY**

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*Abstract*

The term “transitive” suggested by the research team, means “being in transit”, “transformational”, devising constant and efficient new models of strategically important interactions of all regional stakeholders. The analysis of regional university development versus global, national and regional challenges resulted in identifications of most crucial developmental problems. Insufficient financial resources, outmoded infrastructure and facilities, non-compensated educational and professional migrations, outflow of young professionals and aging of highly-qualified staff, lack of perspective for professional and career growth, low regional initiative, concerted project development are recognized as the most critical issues to be debated. Building region-oriented infrastructure, aiming to develop innovative culture of local community, should be the mission of a regional university. Lack of such culture decreases the demand for high-tech products and services, their manufacturing and selling. To achieve this goal any regional university should devise the developmental programmes by taking into account an existing demand and, on top of that it should develop university enhancement strategies in the region and beyond. With the operational management major risks of transition to transitive university are connected with Human Resources Management. Management strategies of self-contained isolationism is the highest risk for the development of university eco-system.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern higher education develops alongside with globalization processes, organizational modernization of a number of social institutions, (known as the “the concept of New Public Management”), and marketing transformations. Inevitably, it triggers massification of higher education (Schofer & Meyer, 2005), the development of strategies for “world class universities”, (Krishnan, 2005) and even organizational expansion (Marginson, 2016). The latter implies the reinforcement of roles of large, multidisciplinary and multitasking universities – “multiversities” as science-oriented and research-intensive world-ranking universities having global and inter-university presence and exchanges (Marginson, 2017). It allows the introduction of new terminology for such phenomenon as “global research university” (Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008) that embraces diverse functions and tasks performed by a large modern university.

Controversially, the intensification of educational competition can lead to stratification (Denis, 2015) and deterioration of smaller universities’ positions that are located in smaller regions with limited opportunities, resources and restricted labor markets. Being centers of attraction, central universities gain human resources, high technology and equipment that results in wider opportunities to meet the needs of local labor markets and markets of goods and services.

Regional universities, in contrast, lose highly-qualified staff, prospective students (university applicants) and financial backup from the federal government and other stakeholders because they are not able to successfully compete with large universities located in a big metropolitan area. Yet regional universities are required to prepare highly-qualified professionals and to provide advanced research and technology, like world leading universities do. It is observed from general criteria of university ranking and from high expectations of populations related to the quality of education and training.

Constant practices and ability to permanent change as such can bring to a higher reinforcement of large universities and permanent deteriorating of status positions of regional universities, exhausting their resources and overextending themselves at work. Above all it requires from regional universities to seek transformational strategies to transfer from transit universities as a place of temporary undergraduates’ stay to a multitiered transitive university that engages integrative region-driven tasks with the engagements of key regional stakeholders.

## 2. Problem Statement

Modern transit situation in most Russia’s regional universities can be seen as a basis for educational and labor migration of a large proportion of most successful undergraduates wishing to continue their education in Russian and foreign large cities. This situation may bring to the loss of one of the basic university functions, which is integration of education and research, alongside with the increase of outgoing non-compensated mobility of most advanced young population and their immediate family members. This may also be a high risk for the region. Currently, the solution to this key problem is to provide reinforcement of university, the city and the region. Here a university can initiate a new type of transitive transformations to encourage partnership interactions. To implement these transition it requires

concerted complementary strategies that will embrace transitional resources, calculate potential and risks, mainly for regional universities.

### **3. Research Questions**

The issues of transforming a regional university from transit to transitive type are allocated in this research into two groups. The first one focuses on identifying critical problems and potential of the university development to meet global, national and regional challenges. Literally large research universities and smaller regional universities encounter different technological, environmental, and social challenges globally and nationally. The second group of issues is related to the assessments of risks and resources needed to develop innovative ecosystem of a regional university that manages the transition to transitive interactions engaging permanent positive developmental transformations for each regional stakeholder.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Accordingly, the purpose of the research is to identify critical challenges to regional universities alongside with risks and resources of strategic and operational management in transit to transitive university model.

### **5. Research Methods**

The research tends to apply mutually complementary theoretical, methodological and empirical analysis, namely, expert focus groups as well as expert interviews with Udmurt State University administration and directors of the university institutes.

### **6. Findings**

Previous research and publications proved that modern university in most Russia's regions is approved as a charter research and educational center, which is cross point for growing non-compensated educational and professional migrations of university students and faculty. To indicate this phenomenon, the term "transit university" was suggested and introduced into research thesaurus (Boguslavskiy, Ladyzhets, Neborskiy, & Sannikova, 2018a, 2018b). The interpretation of the term gives the understanding that with growing severe competition, diversity of university models and restricted resources, processes of educational, academic and technological migration is getting a showcase for most competitive and effective institutions. To solve the problem regional universities are bound to transform from transit to transitive universities.

The term "transitive" suggested by the research team, means "being in transit", "transformational", devising constant and efficient new models of strategically important interactions of all regional stakeholders (Boguslavskiy et al., 2018a; Boguslavsky et al., 2018b). The research illustrated that the transformations from transit to transitive university seek to get federal, regional, and municipal backup

and require multifaceted initiative of the university itself in all dimensions of project-oriented collaborations.

The analysis of regional university development versus global, national and regional challenges resulted in identifications of most crucial developmental problems. Insufficient financial resources, outmoded infrastructure and facilities, non-compensated educational and professional migrations, outflow of young professionals and aging of highly-qualified staff, lack of perspective for professional and career growth, low regional initiative, concerted project development are recognized as the most critical issues to be debated. These problems were frequently sounded in focus groups, and in expert interviews with Udmurt University administration.

The research also identified risks and resources in strategic and operational management in transit to transitive model of the regional university. They were submitted versus critical challenges to regional universities, and in the context of new trends in global university community.

In particular, in the global university discourse one may trace the growing awareness that regional universities should strategically decline the races to the top national and international ranking positions that unreasonably exhaust university resources. Above all, for world top universities financing is not a goal as itself, but the means to enhance reputation (Vught, 2008). In other words, the ranking position should not be viewed as a major goal in university strategic management. Yet the awareness of own limitations and opportunities is seen as vital. This allows university planners to rightly allocate university finances, in many cases very modest, to take the advantage of opportunities that are unique for the particular regional university.

Differentiated approach to university models and activities was discussed in Hamburg Transnational University Leaders Conference, where it was suggested to decline assessment ranking in competition between research and regional universities (Altbach, 2017). This is the sign of that the academic community revisits the context and content of competition between universities: it steadily goes from institutional to subject-oriented discussions where leadership is related to regionally crucial particular dimensions.

Building region-oriented infrastructure, aiming to develop innovative culture of local community, should be the mission of a regional university. Lack of such culture decreases the demand for high-tech products and services, their manufacturing and selling. To achieve this goal any regional university should devise the developmental programmes by taking into account an existing demand and, on top of that it should develop university enhancement strategies in the region and beyond.

Developing the strategy of region-oriented infrastructure and making it as priority strategy of regional transitive university primarily means to realize the importance of initiative development of university ecosystem, involving local community to the process of mutual collaborations. One of the instruments to diminish risks of the involvement can be separate projects aiming at outcomes important for the region. They may engage a variety of organizational forms, providing that there is a clear understanding of benefits of collaborations for each stakeholder of the local community. With this in mind it may enable implementations of collaborative strategies for positive change that are initiated by a transitional manager, i.e. transitive regional university.

Basically, world top universities compete for the best foreign students and faculty and staff while retaining close social, political and economic links with the cities they are located (Morisson & Szumilo, 2019). For this purpose universities set up global research centers that allow to invite foreign visiting faculty, compete with other universities from abroad (Cattaneo, Malighetti, Meoli, & Paleari, 2017), develop own infrastructure and be engaged in diverse projects for the development of the city infrastructure.

With the operational management major risks of transition to transitive university are connected with Human Resources Management. The role of the university administration in strategic decision-making in transit to transitive model is critical for several reasons. These factors include: acquisition of advanced information and communicative technologies, involvement in informational space, flexibility, adaptability, project-oriented thinking, and efficient marketing of science-directed innovations, strong management team, systemic approach to university ecosystem, expansion of multifaceted interactions between partners and factor monitoring so as to provide sustainable development of the university and other stakeholders involved in educational and research collaborations.

Management strategies of self-contained isolationism is the highest risk for the development of university eco-system. This subjective factor turns to be an objective one because it tends to empower the university administration over its term of office. The future of regional universities, which are not supported from federal funds, depends on professional skills of university management team, which are supposed to be initiative and able to manage regional innovative ecosystem. By this it is likely to help keep the territorial autonomy of the regions intact, as entities of the federal state.

In some cases university strategic breakthrough and the administration backup for certain innovative activities can tackle with inefficient management – that is university grants to attract leading professors and researchers, inflows of incoming compensatory educational migration and incoming mobility of foreign student groups. Such components of the strategy, devised by university departments tend to be welcomed by local communities. Provided that authorities and businesses have long-term vision it is even likely to develop counter-initiatives and business community support.

Breaking down administrative burden and impediments can diminish risks in operational management. To eliminate negative effects from academic inbreeding – university staff replacement from recruiting of own university graduates – the university should enhance transparency of recruitment methods (Horta & Yudkevich, 2016). At the initial stage of the university development academic inbreeding can undoubtedly have positive influence, however, negative tendencies may dominate afterwards.

Thus, a regional university graduates, appointed for a position in the university administration, will participate in academic mobility as at the same level as at the beginning of his/her university career. That decreases possibilities to extend external links and corporate collaborations. Information and communicative space will be limited, partly for that reason university ranking and status positions will be lower and the university seems less attractive for regional and international counterparts. Therefore intentional development of mutually complementary areas for outgoing and incoming mobility must be an integral part of operational management in regional universities and a commitment for university

administration, university faculty staff, and university students. However, for the majority of Russia's universities this goal is unlikely to be attainable (Sivak & Yudkevich, 2014).

In expert interviews of informants (university administration), this problem is evaluated as critical, on the other hand, the strategy of transit university is not recognized as having likely risks for the university and the region.

*"Yes, the problem is critical... No doubt... But I wouldn't say that regional universities are restricted to such extent".*

*"Yes, really crucial problem, both for the university and the region... Graduates with lower level of education and professionalism do not add to intellectual potential of the region, although they should make a contribution to it".*

*"Yes. The major threat is diminishing of intellectual potential at all levels".*

Middle management, namely directors of institutes, who deal with the issues of institutional operational management, did not demonstrate any worry. Recognizing a number of negative factors, they do not show any comprehensive approach to assess growing risks.

*"For the university the threat may be in reducing enrollment quality that will complicate educational process and will make it inefficient".*

*"I do not consider this problem as critical".*

*"This problem is not crucial for our qualification".*

*"No doubt, this problem exists and is rather critical. For the region, it means reducing well qualified personnel, for the university, this is the problem of staff replacement, the problem of quality education. On the other hand, the desire to leave family home for another city and be independent is natural for potential applicants".*

However, a solid majority of interviewees had a similar answer to the set questions of resources that would help solve the problem. They addressed initiative and the solution to federal and regional authorities.

*"How to affect these processes? I think it is hard for universities, they cannot influence directly. However, we can somehow influence the choice of applicants. We should approach to this problem holistically, providing conditions for self-realization. Parents, schools and governments should be proactive".*

*"These processes may be affected. The initiative should belong to regional and municipal authorities. First of all, employer-sponsored enrollment should be increased as well as employer-sponsored education. In addition, it is vital to lobby this issue in federal departments so as to increase the number of state-financed openings to universities in Udmurt Republic".*

*"Innovative management is vital. This issues should be implemented at all levels, universities inclusive".*

*"It is possible to influence the processes. But it should be done through all levels in the region. This is a common goal and a joint activity. The grass-root of the problem is in the fact that there should be conditions appropriate for graduates' employment. Current conditions are far from being ideal".*

*"We can and must influence. Initiative should come from regional and municipal authorities, local trade unions and public organizations. The key role may be played by Regional and Municipal Public*

*Chambers. But the situation cannot be dramatically changed without relevant and applicable federal decisions”.*

*“All levels of administration should be engaged: Republic, employers, the university”.*

*“Necessary to start from university graduation. And particularly from the answer to the question: Where in the region can a graduate find a job? Jobs can create labour market, but it must be regulated and managed. ... A unified comprehensive programme should be devised by higher education institutions and regional administration. Such programme of regional policy aims to retain university graduates and human capital in the region. Alongside with this there should be the programme to provide good investment climate to attract applicants and university graduates from other countries and other regions of Russia”.*

The interviewees’ answers from both groups of informant-managers are rather typical. They demonstrate that multi-levelled support of regional universities is vital in current situation, however, it is recognized that the university cannot manage transformations without comprehensive initiatives. Steady transitive transformations in modern situation imply strengthening of “university third mission” – that is active interactions at all administrative levels, successful high-tech and science-oriented businesses, local populations and local communities. Only such transformations that prioritize project collaborations, can create a trend and a new image of the region and new positioning in the market, develop new innovative trends, create science-driven jobs, high potential for graduate career growth and enhance quality of life in the Republic.

## **7. Conclusion**

In conclusion it should be recognized that regional universities encounter a number of challenges and tasks to meet that require reviewing university own position. Efficient intra-university management, development of innovative ecosystem and innovative cluster, sustainable partnerships with external stakeholders, preparing professionals to meet regional expectations etc. are to be implemented in practice by regional universities. The regional university will not be sustainable if it is not proactive and is not able to develop innovative culture in the region, as the lack of it will cause the outflow of professionals, technologies, and innovations to other science-oriented universities in a larger city.

Regionally-based universities have to perform special commitments that are significant for a particular region. Yet it determines the vector of its development without strategic restrictions. This condition is frequently not taken into account when concepts and strategies are developed. Transforming labour market structure is feasible with the introduction of new ways of launching goods and services, the development of high-tech industries and refurbishment of traditional regional industries. University as a driver of regional development may design updated strategies, which hold the structure of labour market as a ground for further regional development, and have a clear vision of how the labour market will be structured in the future alongside with transformations in the region and in the world.

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