

Universities and Cities in Provincial Russia

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Abstract. The analysis of higher education (HE) in Russia focuses on the complicated issues of the relationships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and provincial cities. The authors characterize different typologies of Russian HEIs and cities. It is suggested to distinguish between the HEIs related to the core of HE, semi-periphery, and to the periphery. The situation of peripheral HEIs that are located mainly in provincial cities seems to be the most complicated. Recently, about 300 HEIs and more than 800 branches of universities, a significant part of which belongs to the peripheral group, ceased to exist autonomously. Today the fate of some other provincial HEIs is yet to be defined. Meanwhile, the future of the young people is also tied to the HEIs's destiny as well as the future of the cities' population, where they are located. The analysis of the materials based on the authors' empirical research conducted in the Ural Federal District (UFD) revealed that the elimination of autonomous universities, their transformation into branches and weakening in such a way of the HE in the medium, big and even large cities of the Russian province lead to stagnation and depression of these cities. One of the main factors of this situation is the mass educational migration of young people. The study discusses certain ideas for positive solution of these problems regarding the relationship of provincial Russian universities and cities, which could lead to their preservation and development.

Keywords: higher education institutions, universities, cities, provincial Russia, peripheral HEIs, educational migration of youth, human resources

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Introduction

The burning issue regarding the today's Russian higher education (HE) focuses on the relationships between the universities and the cities, where they are located. Successful development of both higher education institutions (HEIs) and the cities depends on the level of strength and efficiency of these relationships. The more actively the universities are involved in solving economic, social, cultural problems referring to urban life, the more likely they are to get support from the city in order to promote their development. On the other hand, the cities themselves that become hosts for promising

and successfully developing universities possess good prerequisites for attracting talented and motivated youth to study and get new impulses for growth. Meanwhile, there is a serious problem that deals with conservation of existing HEIs within these cities in provincial Russia and the cities themselves [1–3].

What is meant by provincial Russia is the huge territory of the country, outside the two capitals (Moscow and St. Petersburg) and metropolitan areas. In Russian social science the issues of physical and social space development of the country have been traditionally considered from the perspective of comparing and con-

trasting the capital regions and the provinces [4]. For analysis of the modern HE space in Russia, this particular approach seems to be quite relevant. It reflects specific policy and management practices referring to HEIs located in different territories.

This localization is closely linked to the social differentiation of HEIs, social and status inequalities between the capital and provincial HEIs [5]. Today, the official policy and management practices are primarily focused on the HEIs located in metropolitan centers, while HE in provinces receives poor support. The shutting down (liquidation or transformation into branches and structures of the larger universities) about 300 HEIs and more than 800 branches of universities (in 2013–2017), most of which were located in the provincial cities serves as an evidence to the previous thesis¹.

We have taken into consideration the situation with HE and HEIs not just in the provincial regions of Russia, but in the Russian provincial cities. Almost half of the 600 (state) and 175 (private) HEIs are located in such cities. Statistical data analysis conducted in 2017 reveals that there are 65 medium (up to 100,000 inhabitants), big (100,000–250,000) and even large (250,000–500,000 inhabitants) cities, where only one or two universities are functioning. There is the same number of cities with the population exceeding 100,000 people, where there is not a single HEI².

The relationship between the HEIs and cities is strongly manifested in the province. That is what makes the situation different referring to the HE in provincial Russia and the one in the capitals and metropolitan regions. Our study was based on the hypothesis that the preservation of HEIs in big and medium cities of the Russian province becomes a source of strengthening

and self-development of those cities and regions where they are located, as well as the HE of the country. Conversely, the weakening and destruction of the HE in provincial cities leads to stagnation and depression of these cities. This, ultimately, leads to the reduction of potential of the non-capital cities and regions, deformation of the space development of the country.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the relationship between the HE and the cities of provincial Russia in order to solve the problems related to their joint development. The subject of analysis is the relationship and dependency between contradictive processes in HE and various trends (constructive and destructive) that characterize the dynamics of the cities.

The empirical basis, research design, and methodology

Two empirical studies in HEIs and cities of the Ural Federal District (UFD) were carried out by the research team of sociologists of the Ural Federal University in 2016–2018 in order to analyze the problems mentioned above and test the hypotheses. The first study was devoted to the examination of multi-dimensional relations between the universities and medium, big and large cities of the UFD. The second one dealt with the issues of formation of the non-linear model of HE in the UFD.

This district is one of the 8 Federal districts of Russia with a population of 12.3 million people. 115 cities and 53 autonomous HEIs are located in this area. The majority of them (39) are located in two cities—“millionaires” (Yekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk), and in one extra-large city (Tyumen). The research team studied the HEIs in the cities of the UFD with a population of up to 400,000 people. Some HEIs in these cities possess the status of autonomous HEIs (14), other – branches of HEIs (38). The total number of students in these autonomous HEIs is 54,600 people, the amount of teachers working in them is 3110. There are about 16,000 students enrolled in the branches.

We investigated the cases of four cities (Nizhny Tagil, Surgut, Tobolsk, Ishim), which includ-

¹ Information and analytical materials based on the results of monitoring effectiveness of higher education institutions, 2017. Available at: <http://indicators.miccedu.ru/monitoring/?m=vpo> (In Russ.)

² Russian largest cities by population in 2018. The list of the Russian Federation. Available at: http://www.statdata.ru/largest_cities_russia (In Russ.)

ed the analysis of demographic statistics, statistics on HEIs and the cities, as well as the content of the web-sites and forums. Three cities of the four turned out to be problematic referring to the development HE. That is where the autonomous HEIs were transformed into the branches of other universities. This, in turn, affected the situation in their cities.

For further interpretation of the situations observed in the framework of the case study, materials of the second research were used. 80 half-formalized depth interviews among experts (representatives of academic community, administration of HEIs, 2016), two mass surveys – teachers and students of the Ural HEIs (representative sample of the teachers – 810 people, students – 1860 people, quota sampling, 2017) have been carried out. We also used the results of the documentary analysis of web-sites, and social media pages related to the problems of HE (2018).

Moreover, in the framework of the second study a long-year research (2011–2017) of students' educational motivation and their readiness to study at HEI was completed. It was based on the surveys of teachers linked to the typology of students. Data on more than 200 academic groups (about 4,000 students) have been summarized.

Literature review

Examining the interactions between universities and cities in the world science referring to the HE has turned into a special research trend. The broadest interpretations of the problem allow to perform works on various understandings of “the third mission” of universities. In this respect, the conception of the social function of the university seems to be of high importance. Thus, according to D. Charles conception, the universities are considered as structures embedded in various types of urban communities. A complex political context is being formed around the universities, which forces them to pay attention to the possible difficulties of interaction with territorial authorities of various levels [6].

An important tool for the analysis of the interaction between HE and the city is the conception of the “Coordination Triangle” [7]. It allows to explore the interaction of the state, the academic community and the market at the city level. Clark's ideas were implemented in the study of the relationship between the authorities and the HE [8].

The important methodological principles in studying the relations between the universities and the cities were mentioned in the Triple-Helix Model [9] and Quadruple-Helix Model [10]. These conceptions offer classic models of collaboration, which is necessary for the cities and regions in order to promote their innovative growth. According to the researchers, interaction between universities, business, state and civil society plays an important role in creation and distribution of various goods and values [11].

The problems linked to the universities' integration into the urban environment have been investigated by other scientists. P. Benneworth and his co-authors marked out the following barriers: orientation of universities on the global context of HE, bureaucratization of university's life, lack of scientific interest to the city and its problems among the university staff, low level of awareness regarding the urban environment, fear of urban stakeholders of the university “experiments” and their lack of faith in their usefulness for the city residents [12].

Some researchers draw attention to the conflict relations between the students and the city community, which take form of the feeling of displacement [13]. Researchers are elaborating the problem of the new kind of gentrification of the urban space by the students – studentification [14; 15].

The influence of universities is regarded not only in negative, but also in a positive way. According to the researchers, the universities play a special role in the cities' development due to the high quality of human capital. The university communities are highly professional and internally motivated, they, therefore, represent a powerful human resource for the city development [16; 17].

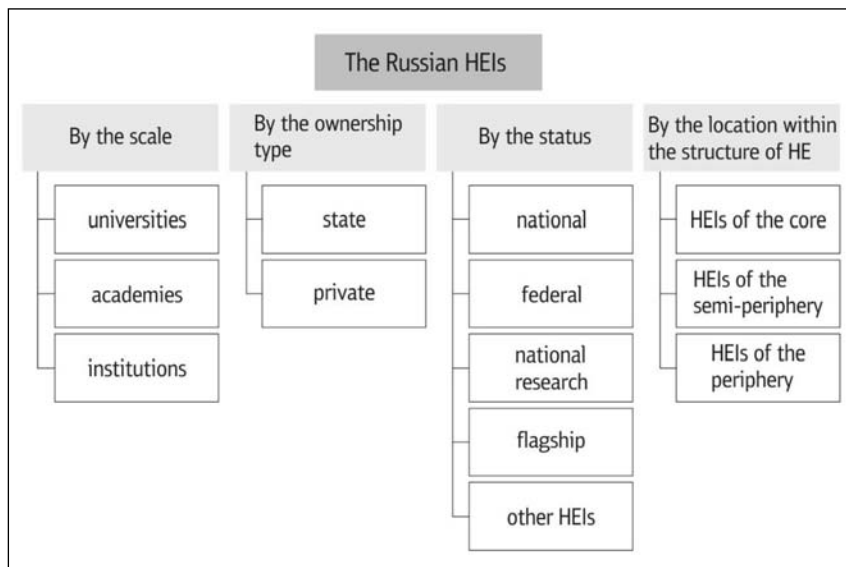


Fig. 1. Typology of the Russian HEIs

The studies of the universities and university cities as parts of urban agglomerations form a special scientific area. The authors show how the development of urban space and urban infrastructure is carried out by the universities [18], how the lobbying takes place, and how the political support in the urban community is being received by the universities [19]. In addition, universities that have adopted the role of economic drivers and civic leaders, mitigate social contradictions that are present in the urban community [20].

We consider the studies, revealing the links between HE and the strategy of development of medium and big cities, of high significance. Here, the cities and universities are regarded as mediators, which provide public goods (health, image, education) [21]. Special emphasis is placed on such social functions of universities as creation and preservation of human capital, construction of social hierarchy in the urban community [22], promotion of traditional economy and the knowledge economy, in particular [23].

Partnership between the universities and actors of urban society form a particular research field. Some studies have been carried out on the interaction between universities and city au-

thorities [24; 25], scientific and educational organizations in the cities [26].

Summing up the results of the studies, mentioned above, we can draw two conclusions. The first one is that HE and scientific researches can stimulate interaction of different social actors to change the mindset of the city community, creativity of the city authorities [27]. The second conclusion refers to the multiple effects of preservation and development of universities in the cities. Recently, the evolution of the of university campuses – from country to city – was recorded by the scholars. The consequences of this process are manifested in the optimization of material environment and physical space of the city and in the development of social space and its social structures.

In the Russian social sciences the emphasis is usually placed on the interaction between the universities and the regions, but not the cities. A large number of studies were devoted to this issue [28–31]. However, the relationship between the universities and the cities, particularly in the provinces, remains to be almost an unknown topic [32; 33]. There are no serious theoretical works or empirical studies dealing with this problem. Bearing in

Table 1

Ratio of the Universities and Cities in Russia*

Type of the city	Population	Number of cities of this type in Russia	Number of cities with autonomous HEIs	Types of HEIs			
				Federal	National research	Flagship	Others
“Millionaire”	More than 1 mln inhabitants	15	15	4	23	10	278
Extra large	From 500,000 up to 1 mln inhabitants	22	22	1	4	8	95
Large	From 250,000 up to 500,000 inhabitants	41	37	5	2	11	84
Big	From 100,000 up to 250,000 inhabitants	92	31	–	–	4	40
Medium	Up to 100,000 inhabitants	520	15	–	–	–	15

* Data Source: 6; 7.

mind this fact, we link it to the relevance of our research.

The structure of HE in Russia

The current system of HE in Russia includes types of HEIs with different scale, type of ownership, status and place which they occupy in the structure of HE (*Fig. 1*).

Various types of HEIs carry out different missions and possess different range of activity and potential. HEIs of different types are structuring the space of Russian HE, creating zones of condensation and depression of educational and scientific activity. There are also vectors of tensions and polarity in the relations between HEIs. In order to study the interrelation of the universities and the cities we pay a special attention to the typology of HEIs by the three zones which we call a core, semi-periphery and periphery.

About 50 universities which rank high according to the Russian national ratings are the core. This area includes two national universities (The Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University), some federal, national research ones, flagship universities and also several HEIs which don't possess such statuses and are located mainly in cities-“millionaires” and very large cities. Out of 50 universities 30 struggle to get into the “5-100 National Project”, which implies granting state support to the strongest universities in order to ensure their

development by 2020 and reaching (at least five of them) top positions among 100 best universities according to world ranking. About 20 more Russian universities try to get closer to this position in order to be included in this project.

The second big group of the universities located in a semi-periphery contains about 250 HEIs. They are situated in the capitals, cities-“millionaires” and extra-large cities with the population over 500,000 people. The majority of them are trying to get closer to the leading HEIs.

Lastly, there are HEIs (they are about 300) which we regard as periphery of the Russian HE. Some of them are located in very large cities. Over 110 HEIs are located in medium, big and large cities of the Russian province. These are the most problematic HEIs. Many of them have come under pressure of the Federal Ministry of Science and HE.

Typology of the Russian HEIs and their structuring by areas – core, semi-periphery and periphery – enables us to reveal high level of inequality between HEIs of different types. Serious gaps which are being manifested in the amount of funding, organizational and other forms of support from the state, exist not only between the HEIs groups (the ones of status and non-status, state and private, capital and provincial). Serious gaps could be marked out even referring to the HEIs of the same group.

Thus, the space of HE in Russia is uneven, broken off, and the HE system becomes dishar-

monious. We believe that the high level of inequality which is typical for the system of Russian education in general [34], is caused not only by the objective reasons, but is also a result of different relation of the federal authorities to the provincial HEIs.

Consider the ratio of the universities and the cities in Russia. Types of HEIs correspond to the types of the cities in which they are located (*Tab. 1*).

Table 1 shows that there are only 170 cities in Russia with population starting from 100,000 inhabitants and more. Out of this number about 105 cities have HEIs (from one and more). Only 15 medium cities have autonomous HEIs.

Among the most problematic are the HEIs of the periphery. These are located in provincial Russia, in the cities with population not exceeding 500,000 people. Normally, there are no more than 1–2 HEIs in such cities. The future of these universities is quite uncertain. At any time the license for implementation of particular educational program can be revoked (including Master and Postgraduate studies), the university can be deprived of the state accreditation, the status of autonomous HEIs can be taken away or the university can be turned into a branch or structural division of other stronger university.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that the future of the cities, where the HEIs are located, to a large degree depends on the future of the HEIs. The link connecting the universities and the cities is formed by the youth. Statistical data demonstrate that shutting down of the HEI in the city or its transformation into branch of the other university very quickly leads to educational emigration of the youth. Young people (especially graduates of schools and colleges) move en masse to the capital cities, cities-“millionaires” and extra-large cities in order to receive HE. Quite often, entire families together with the children of high school age would move away from the cities, where autonomous HEIs are being shut down. Parents in such families (as a rule, highly qualified professionals) are concerned about their children’s future and do not see any opportunities for them to develop and

apply their professional skills in the city, where the HEI is closed down.

The process of educational migration leads to reduction of population in medium, big and even large cities of provincial Russia. What is happening after all is the decrease of social, economic and socio-cultural capacity of the city and its transformation into the depressive zone, which requires subsidized financing. Thus, the following pattern could be traced: the university is being shut down (or turned into a branch) – loss of the human capital occurs (especially referring to the youth) – fast desolation of the city is going on (when the city is losing its appeal and the future).

The case of Nizhny Tagil: what happens to the city, where the university is shut down

The case of Nizhny Tagil can serve as a striking example of the implementation of the pattern, mentioned above. The city of Nizny Tagil is one of the largest industrial centres not only in the UFD, but also in the entire Russia. In 2013 the Nizhny Tagil Social and Pedagogical Academy was restructured and turned into a branch of one of the ordinary universities of Yekaterinburg. How did this effect life of the city?

Many residents regarded the reorganization of the Academy as a challenge to the independence, cultural identity, and to their future:

There are more than 20 universities in Yekaterinburg, and there was the only one and this one was shut down. Such a hard blow to the image of the city!!! A city with 380,000 inhabitants! We have been deprived of our dignity: the single university has become another low quality branch and the city has turned into an appendage of Yekaterinburg! We are the second capital of the area, aren't we? (O., social networks' user)

Besides affecting negatively socio-cultural memory and identity of the residents, the situation with academy reinforced negative social and demographic trends³. Within last five years

³ Looking through the demographic gap. The scientist warns Nizhny Tagil about the demographic catastrophe, 2016. Available at: [https://vsenovostint.ru/2016/08/09/vsmatrivayas-v-demogra-](https://vsenovostint.ru/2016/08/09/vsmatrivayas-v-demogra)

the population of the city decreased by more than 30,000 people, or by 10%. Migration of youth, which considerable part is made by high school graduates seems to be incredibly disturbing. Starting from 2012, the number of such graduates increased from 24% to 75%. About two thirds of youth of student's age left Nizhny Tagil in 2016 and 2017, having chosen HEIs outside their hometown⁴.

The connection between reorganization of Academy and migration of youth is obvious. It is mentioned in the statements of both – ordinary residents of Nizhny Tagil and high school graduates and representatives of municipal authority. Here are some examples published in the media and social networks:

1) The situation with development of the HE system in Nizhny Tagil is critical. The number of training places declined, most educational institutions have been turned into branches and have lost their autonomy. It is the main problem for the city. It turns out that the higher the quality of training at school, the more chances are that graduates will leave their hometown and will start looking for academic opportunities in other cities. It is necessary to reverse this trend, and raise the prestige of education in our city. (S. Nosov, mayor of Nizhny Tagil, 2017)

2) I do not really enjoy life in Nizhny Tagil. It does not go in line with my ambitions. There is no good infrastructure and no universities. I would continue to live here, if there were a university with good reputation. (V.M., high school graduate)

Today the number of the entrants from Nizhny Tagil coming to study at the branch is five times lower. Their places are occupied by the residents of neighbouring settlements. Nizhny Tagil is under the risk of being left absolutely without talented youth. The official forecast

of social and economic development of the city proves that by 2030 there won't be enough labour force even for the local enterprises.

The presented case of Nizhny Tagil illustrates a typical situation with the HE in medium, big and large cities of provincial Russia. However, there are 65 more cities with the population over 100,000 people where there are no HEIs at all, and in some of them – not even a branch. These cities are also subjects for a slow decline (or, perhaps, not slow, minding stagnation of Russian economy).

Scylla and Charybdis of the state policy in the sphere of the HE in Russia

The main cause of universities' crisis in the Russian provincial cities is the state policy imbalances regarding the HE. The ones that are at stake are the universities of the core area that possess high potential. Under the economic stagnation the state redistributes financial resources by reducing them within the HEIs of semi-periphery and periphery.

As a result, a contradictory situation takes place. On the one hand, the HE is hounded by Scylla – the danger of leading HEIs' competitiveness going down. On the another hand, there is another threat, represented by Charybdis, which is the risk of the higher education collapse in provincial Russia. This is going to detonate the devastation of the basic elements of the society – the regions and the cities. The huge Russian territory demands a large number of the centres to foster its preservation and equal development. The cities, where educated youth is living today, should become such centres.

The country's development today relies not on the rural settlements, but rather on the cities with the population from 100,000 up to 500,000 inhabitants. There are 155 such cities in the country (that makes 91% of 170 cities with the population over 100,000). In many of them considerable part of the population is made up by the persons younger than 30 (30%, and sometimes more). Our study shows that the future of the youth to a large degree depends on the opportunity to receive HE and become suc-

ficheskuyu-yamu-uchyonyiy-urbanist-preduprezhdaet-cto-v-nizhnem-tagile-nastupaet-demograficheskaya-katastrofa/ (In Russ.)

⁴ The citizens of Nizhny Tagil sound the alarm: two thirds of high-school graduates are leaving the city, 2017. Available at: <https://newdaynews.ru/ekb/592958.html> (In Russ.)

cessfully employed upon graduation. The case of Surgut city has shown that preservation and successful functioning of the universities make possible to retain up to 40–50% of high school graduates.

By being enrolled in the local HEIs, the graduates ensure their adequate functioning and reproduction of the city's population. Of course, there are cases when the most talented high school graduates still decide to leave the city and continue their studies outside of Surgut in top Russian and world universities. However, this is quite natural: the best graduates should be pursuing their academic career in the outstanding HEIs. The issue is that it should not have a serious impact on the city's development. This is exactly what happening in Surgut.

The case of Surgut shows what important regulating function is being performed by the state policy in the sphere of the HE for preservation of the city. It is worth mentioning, that both Surgut HEIs are of regional submission. The regional government has already held and still do hold ambitions for rating indicators' increase [35] as well as projects on their reorganization. Since 2009, the idea emerged on bringing two universities together in order to provide their optimization. The project on creation of the united university campus for both HEIs of this city has now been approved. At the same time, HEIs maintain their status and keep autonomy. In many respects, positive role in this situation was played by the rectors, who expressed their opinion more than once during public hearings, in the personal addresses to the governor of the district. The leaders of the district demonstrated a strong ability and managerial flair to listen and understand these views. Thus, the cases of Surgut and N. Tagil show how important the support of the regional and city authorities could be for the provincial HEIs, which receive limited attention of the state. This kind of support was provided for the HEIs of Surgut.

We can conclude that it is crucial to assure kind and wise attitude of the local authorities to the provincial HEIs. Today many of them can be shut down since they do not meet high national

and international standards for HE. However, these decisions may have tragic and irreversible consequences. The lack of the necessary state support for the HE in province cities enhances the risk of devastation of the huge and poorly developed space, and, respectively, territorial vulnerability and safety of the entire country.

Foreign experience shows the way in which the universities can become the basis for development of modern cities. The strategy of social and economic growth of some of them is related to the transformation of HE into a main social and economic profile of the city. These cities specialize on university education as others do on metallurgy, trade, tourism, etc. The growth of such cities is achieved through active educational internal mobility, immigration of the large number of foreign students, involvement of world-class outstanding scientists.

No doubt, it seems to be a very interesting and attractive development model regarding not only capital, but also provincial cities. Unfortunately, there are no such cities in Russia. And hardly they can appear in the country in the near future. Therefore, other model of development due to the deep integration of the universities into socio-cultural and economic space of the city is suitable for medium, big and large cities of the Russian province.

Such approach is based on sustainable, thorough and flexible support of the provincial universities. It implies mobilization of their own abilities, use of resources of the local communities and stakeholders. Refocusing the educational policy of the federal centre should become the basic condition for implementation of this model. In the framework of this policy, specific situation and tendencies of the concrete cities development should be taken into consideration. These are the qualities that the educational policy of the federal centre is missing at the moment.

Our study has shown what barriers can arise while introducing the model of mutual preservation and development of the cities and universities in province. Two main types of barriers can be marked out: 1) rather passive attitude of the provincial universities struggling for preser-

Table 2

Opinion of Teachers on Type of Management of HE*, in % from the total amount of respondents

In your opinion, which management type will become a priority in future?	In near future	In the distant future
Pressure «from above», bureaucratization and forced dynamics of changes within the HEIs	83,7	24,1
Development of strategic initiatives “from below” on the university level and social partners’ level	16,3	75,9
Total	100,0	100,0

* Data Source: the authors’ research.

vation; 2) the city, regional and federal authorities are not providing these HEIs with sufficient support.

Let us take a look at the first barrier. In the framework of expert interviews informants have mentioned that the scientific and pedagogical community and university management cannot resist any decisions of the Federal Ministry of Science and HE. HEIs barely got any autonomy regarding key issues of university management. Their autonomy to a large degree is limited or strictly regulated referring to educational and scientific activities. The experts consider that creation of organic HE system in the macro-region could be maintained through delegating some of the administrative functions to the UFD level:

We are the federal state, and the federal principle of the state structure is a sign of strength, not weakness. In all federal countries – Germany, Canada, the USA – who runs the HEIs? The region! ... There is a canton, a state, there are territories, whatever. Why not give HEIs to the regions? Let the region manage it. We could start from those regions with sufficient budgets, not the subsidized ones. There are ten of them in Russia. ... This would be interesting for our country. (G.K., Academic Adviser at the University)

Meanwhile, according to our research, 76.8% of teachers believe that today the main type of HE management in Russia is pressure «from above», bureaucratization and the forced dynamics of changes within the HEIs. They don’t think, that in the nearest future sources of self-development of HE system and the universities will be updated. 83.7% of teachers believe that

the preservation of former model of administrative vertical will be present in the near future (Tab. 2).

The position of provincial HEIs has been severely weakened due to low quality of the students. This problem, typical for many Russian HEIs, is especially the case for the provincial HEIs. The HEIs of the core as vacuum cleaners suck out talented and motivated young people from the province. Therefore, their share in the provincial universities is low.

Our study of the students’ motivation shows that 4 groups could be marked out based on 2 criteria – motivation for education and readiness for education in HEI (Fig. 2).

We will highlight the fact that the third and the fourth typological groups altogether constitute nearly half of the entire student body. Those students pose a threat as their influence becomes “contagious”, corrupting and demotivating. According to our research nearly half of students (48.2%) are quite content with the knowledge they receive during the class hours. 13% of the respondents do not really consider this knowledge valuable at all, since for their future life and career getting a diploma is just enough. Less than one third of the total amount of students of the Ural HEIs (29.4%) stated that the knowledge they get at the university is really valuable for them. They try not to miss any opportunity to be immersed in scientific studies and self-education. Thus, our researches show that the problem of preservation of the universities in the cities of provincial Russia deals with such an issue as motivation for study at the university, particularly for studying at the University, not just getting a diploma.

		Motivation for education	
		Want to study	Do not want to study
Readiness for education in the HEI	Ready to study in the HEI	Type 1 Want and can study 15 %	Type 3 Can study, but do not want to 30 %
	Are not ready to study in the HEI	Type 2 Want to study, but can't study 40 %	Type 4 Do not want and can't study 15 %

Fig. 2. Typology of students of the Russian provincial HEIs

We are going to take a look at the second barrier that hinders strengthening of the universities in provincial cities, which is weak support by their cities' authorities. Why is this happening? Our research shows that many universities of the UFD still represent "an ivory tower". They barely fulfil their "third mission", have been pretty much keeping to themselves, are concerned about their own problems, educational process, scientific research, publications, etc. They are not actively included in interaction with the city authorities, city communities, are not involved in satisfying the cities' needs.

In turn, the representatives of city communities are not taking an active interest in the universities' life. The only exception is the case of the strongest and resource-based HEIs that are capable of implementing large-scale regional and city social and economic projects. Within the UFD these are the universities that constitute the core zone (there are only four of them). The rest of the HEIs, that are part of semi-periphery and periphery are barely involved in the life of the Ural cities.

The representatives of authorities and businesses explain such lack of involvement by the fact that HEIs, being subsidized by the federal budget, are not really connected with the city, in terms of financing and organization. Some leaders declare their readiness to provide HEIs with financial support, through the city budget.

However, they won't be able to implement this idea, as there is no regulatory framework that will enable to carry out such an action. Thus, any kind of financial aid to the universities will be regarded as non-earmarked funding and may lead to judicial process.

Expert interviews with authorities and businesses have shown that continuous and productive interaction of HEIs with stakeholders can only be possible when there are personal interest and personal relationships between the heads of the universities, authorities and enterprises. Quite often, this happens when the heads' children are enrolled in these universities or they themselves graduated from these HEIs.

Discussion of the research results: differentiation or inequality of the universities?

As our study has proved, the problem of interrelation of the cities and the universities in provincial Russia is closely linked to the problem of inequality of the universities within the HE system. Our conclusion is an answer to the question: what does the state educational policy have to be focused on? Is it necessary to increase inequality of HEIs and encourage competition among them? Or, does it have to be directed at differentiation (and differentiated support, respectively) of the HEIs which hold different positions and fulfil various missions within the HE space?

We are more inclined to the second option, based on the results of our own research and international experience related to the development of HE systems. Deep differentiation of HE is an absolutely normal and widespread phenomenon in modern world. Actually, it is a world trend. A famous American expert on HE G. Rozovsky, characterizing the system of the universities in the USA, which appears to be the most developed in the world, states the following: «The label “American universities” has little meaning when our country is home to more than 4,000 tertiary institutions, ranging from those that might actually be the envy of the world to those barely distinguishable from high schools – with a tremendous variety in between» [36, p. 60]. The author provides data referring to the number of the top American state and private universities. There has been around 125 of them, speaking about recent years.

In Russia, the total number of universities is lower, than in the USA (at least, by 6 times), and there are less differences between them, in comparison with the American ones. However, some specificity can be attributed to the Russian universities: there is close connection with the nearest social space. While the American universities are mainly located in campuses, the Russian ones are situated in the cities. This seriously affects the processes happening within the universities, and vice versa. The smaller is the city and the HEI itself which is located in the city, the more they depend on one another. This dependence becomes risky for the city in case when autonomous HEI is being shut down, merging with other institution occurs or it becomes a branch of a different university.

We believe that the problem of the universities and the cities in the Russian province may be solved through formation of non-linear model of HE [37]. This model differs from the dominant linear model by the following: changes regarding the type of management within the HEIs and doing away with authoritarian principles; developed structure of network interconnections among the HEIs of the macro-region based on their typology; active use of new forms

and formats of HE; transition to new types of relations between HEIs and various types of economic and social stakeholders that acquire a status of their partners; synthesis of educational, scientific, entrepreneurship innovativeness.

Transformation of the state educational policy regarding provincial universities should become the most important prerequisite for the formation of the non-linear model of HE within the UFD. Summarizing the data of expert interviews, we can come up with some concrete principles of such policy.

1. First of all, a unified approach should not be applied to all provincial universities. Instead, a differentiated approach should be introduced as a tool to define the future and set the development strategy regarding each HEI. The primitive method of shutting down of the “inefficient” HEIs should be replaced by the methods of anti-crisis university management. The system working on diagnostics and prevention must be carried out within each HEI, in cooperation with the experts. Moreover, while elaborating efficiency criteria for the semi-periphery and periphery universities it is necessary to consider their functions on formation, preservation and development of the medium, big and large cities of the Russian province.

2. Considering rather rigid standard basis of functioning of the Russian HEIs, it is necessary to provide a legislative framework that will enable regional and city stakeholders and authorities to assist the universities. Almost all the experts mentioned the need for elimination of legislative barriers regarding financial and organizational support of the provincial HEIs that are regulated federally. Today, all the power and competences concerning HEIs of provincial regions are concentrated within the federal centre. Not delegating authority to the regions and the cities, where these problematic universities are located, will make any attempts to save them inefficient.

3. The increase of university autonomy referring to the management, educational, and scientific fields needs to become the crucial principle. This will enable provincial universities to take

initiative and be actively involved in searching for the ways to increase their efficiency. This will be implemented via deep and flexible integration into socio-cultural, social and economic space of province cities. In the conditions of relative autonomy the restoration and building-up of the potential of provincial low-status universities by their introduction in the network interaction with other HEIs, business, enterprises, authorities will become possible.

Thus, the problematic provincial HEIs should receive comprehensive assistance from the state. However, help and support provided by the state is just one of strategy directions aimed at saving them. The other equally important aspect is stimulation of activity of provincial HEIs and various subjects of the city life.

The studies that we have conducted in the HEIs of the medium, big and large cities of the UFD have proved that there is a need for elaboration of university programs regarding interaction with the city – its authorities, business community, state and commercial enterprises, non-profit organizations, and cultural communities. We assume that for each HEI it is important to have a special program with the code name “The University – to the City”. Its content has to be defined regarding the specifics of the city life, requirements for the development of particular areas, possible involvement of the students and teachers in the solution of city problems.

At the same time, it was mentioned by the experts that a strategic plan has to be included into a sub-programme with a code name “The City – to the University”. The city strategy has to provide a legal framework where interaction with HEIs would be seen as a development mechanism of the municipalities. This will allow even provincial cities to act as agents of social, economic and socio-cultural development of the UFD.

All steps and decisions mentioned here are actually the specification of “the third mission” of universities, where one of the vectors is close cooperation with the cities. Traditional interpretation of “the third university mission” assumes that they fulfil a socially important function of “serving society”. Regarding the studied problem of

provincial HEIs, we can consider “the third mission” as serving the city and the city community.

Conclusion

In the framework of our research we tried to look at the consequences of transformation of HE in Russia in order to provide social, economic, demographic and socio-cultural development of the universities and the cities of the Russian province in their interrelation. It is obvious, that under the conditions of social and economic uncertainty the universities in the medium, big and large cities of the province can become a key to their preservation, and the cities (their authorities and city communities) are going to turn into important factors of preservation and development of HEIs.

Based on the cases of several cities within the UFD we have found that there is a need for feedback between the city and the HEI, as well as the need to overcome dissociation. While studying HE in the cities within the UFD we can reaffirm the existence of the correlation between degradation of HEIs and negative trends arising during certain periods of time – emigration of youth, and as a result – social and economic decline of the city.

The main conclusion that we made in the course of our research is that conservation of HE in the Russian medium, big and large cities is possible provided that these cities are preserved. The effective system of interaction between the HEIs and the cities has to be elaborated. It will become a significant and necessary condition of constructive functioning of the cities, opportunity to meet the demand of their residents, especially young people, for HE. Existence and development of the universities is always a symbol of prestige of the cities, a way to become more attractive for the youth and population in general.

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается одна из актуальных проблем отечественного высшего образования – отношения между университетами и городами, в которых они расположены. Акцент делается на сложных вопросах взаимосвязи вузов и городов в провинции. Авторы приводят различные классификации российских вузов и городов и предлагают выделять вузы, относящиеся к ядру (высокостатусные), полупериферии (среднестатусные), периферии (низкостатусные). Наиболее проблемным оказывается положение периферийных вузов, расположенных в основном в провинциальных городах. В последние годы прекратили своё самостоятельное существование более 200 вузов, значительная часть которых принадлежит к периферийной группе; под вопросом судьба ещё некоторых. Между тем за ними стоят судьбы молодёжи, в целом населения городов, в которых находятся эти вузы. На основе анализа материалов эмпирических исследований в Уральском федеральном округе удалось установить, что ликвидация самостоятельных вузов, превращение их в филиалы и ослабление таким путём высшего образования в средних, больших и даже крупных городах российской провинции ведёт к стагнации и депрессивному состоянию этих городов. Один из основных факторов такой ситуации – массовая образовательная эмиграция молодёжи, которая ведёт к истощению человеческого капитала городов провинциальной России и снижению их потенциала. И наоборот, сохранение самостоятельных вузов в этих городах является важной предпосылкой как их укрепления и роста, так и развития университетов в них. В статье рассматриваются некоторые пути позитивного решения проблем взаимосвязи провинциальных российских вузов и городов, которые могли бы привести к их сохранению и развитию в условиях экономической и социальной неопределённости.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, университеты, города, провинциальная Россия, периферийные вузы, образовательная миграция молодёжи, человеческий капитал

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