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## University Students' Personal and Professional Development: The Socio-Cultural Environment Effect

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### Abstract

Taking into account the role of socio-cultural environment in human development, the paper focuses on examining university students' subjective evaluation of their local settings in the context of basic values realizability. Being one of the main factors of human behaviour and activity, basic values from this perspective can be viewed as an indicator of the socio-cultural environment potential. The study presented involved methods of exploring one's personal potential, career orientations and subjective evaluation of basic values realizability in the local settings. The results obtained are discussed in terms of university students' personal and professional development.

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### 1. Introduction

As highlighted by Jenkins, Breen, Lindsay and Brew (2003), "the emerging knowledge economy is one that requires individuals with creativity and ability to develop, find and synthesize new knowledge" (p. 24). In other words, the transition from resource-based economies to knowledge-based ones seems to have been one of today's global challenges as well as can be considered as a call for countries' innovative development (OECD, 2007). In connection to this, it should be emphasized that the initiation of innovative activity is interrelated with the idea of potentiality, as shown in Klochko & Galazhinskiy (2009), Atamanova & Bogomaz (2011a), Atamanova & Bogomaz (2011b). According to Klochko and his colleagues, this form of human activity is associated with "going beyond the

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scope of existing attitudes and behavioural patterns” (Atamanova & Bogomaz, 2011a, p. 95). In turn, addressing the problem of university students’ personal and professional development in terms of their readiness for innovative activity in a number of studies carried out at Tomsk State University enabled to reveal a crucial role of personal potential in initiating such an activity (Klochko & Galazhinskiy, 2009; Bogomaz & Karakulova, 2010; Bogomaz & Matsuta, 2010; Atamanova & Bogomaz, 2011b; Kozlova, Levitskaya, Atamanova, 2011; Bogomaz, 2014).

Furthermore, it was shown that the educational settings where university students’ personal and professional development was taking place were certainly to have an effect (Kozlova, 2008; Kozlova & Atamanova, 2012; Atamanova, Starichenko, Bogomaz, 2013). Hence, there seems to be two interrelated strategies of regional development:

- encouraging university students’ personal and professional development via realization of their personal potential for achieving their meaningful goals;
- further development of the region based on future specialists’ personal potential.

It was also suggested that the subjective evaluation of basic values realizability in the local settings could characterize the socio-cultural environment potential in the context of one’s personal and professional development. The studies conducted (see, for example, Bogomaz, 2014; Bogomaz & Atamanova, 2014) revealed that the subjective evaluation of basic values realizability in the local settings may differ in its profiles depending on the regional factor.

Thus, the paper addresses university students’ subjective evaluation of their local settings in the context of basic values realizability from the personal and professional development perspective and presents some of the research findings concerning university students studying in Western Siberia, Russia.

## 2. Personal and professional development: The role of socio-cultural environment

Nowadays potentiality is being viewed as a key aspect of human personal and professional development. As shown in Bogomaz & Karakulova (2010), Bogomaz & Matsuta (2010), Atamanova & Bogomaz (2011b), Kozlova, Levitskaya, Atamanova (2011), Bogomaz (2014), it is personal potential that plays one of the leading roles in initiating innovative, scientific or entrepreneurial activity. In general, it is determined as an integral characteristic describing one’s ability to resist undesirable changes as well as to initiate and bring about desirable ones (Leont’ev, Mandrikova, Osin, Plotnikova, Rasskazova, 2007). In other words, personal potential can be interpreted as a combination of a person’s resilience and flexibility, and its role is connected with initiating one’s intellectual or creative activity and achieving meaningful goals (see, for example, Atamanova & Bogomaz, 2011b).

In addition, addressing the idea of socio-cultural environment potential seems to be beneficial to a better understanding of university students’ personal and professional development. This is essentially important for regions with high innovative potential. For example, Tomsk is positioned as a modern and promising city being one of the country’s leading centres of science and innovation and the oldest educational one in the eastern part of Russia (the Imperial University of Tomsk, called Tomsk State University nowadays, was founded in 1878). Also of research interest are some other places of Western Siberia. This region covers a rather large territory from the Urals to the Yenisei River, so two interrelated questions are arising:

- How to enhance university students’ personal and professional development via realization of their personal potential for achieving their meaningful goals?
- How to contribute to further development of the region based on future specialists’ personal potential?

It should be noted that the role of sociocultural factors in human development is widely recognized. As Vygotsky (1934/1994) highlighted, “the environment’s role in the development of higher, specifically human characteristics and forms of activity is as a source of development” (p. 351). This means that the process of one’s personal and professional development is greatly affected by the socio-cultural environment because every human being, according to Vygotsky, “represents a certain historical unit living at a certain historical period and in certain historical circumstances” (p. 352). Furthermore, Sorokin (1947) pointed out that socio-cultural interaction should have been viewed as an inseparable unity of three interrelated modes, namely *personality*, *society* and *culture*. A theoretical analysis presented in Lapin (2000) also contributes to the issues in question. Lapin argues that the three aspects are fundamental forms of human being, existing in their integrity and continuity. Therefore, any economic, social or cultural transformations will certainly have an effect on both personal and professional development. In

connection to this, Landry's concept of *creative city* (Landry, 2000) is his focus on the idea of urban environment potential and his call for restructuring and rethinking cities' role and mission.

As mentioned above, it was shown in Kozlova (2008), Kozlova & Atamanova (2012), Atamanova, Starichenko, Bogomaz (2013) that university students' personal and professional development was affected by their educational settings. For instance, different career orientations were revealed among master's students and doctoral students depending on their university's orientation towards classical or engineering education (Atamanova, Starichenko, Bogomaz, 2013). Based on this, it seems reasonable to address the socio-cultural environment as a whole and its effect on university students' personal and professional development, especially in the case of regions with high innovative potential.

### 3. The study methodology

The paper presents some findings of the study aimed at examining university students' subjective evaluation of the socio-cultural environment in the context of their personal and professional development. It was suggested that basic values, which are one of the main factors of human behaviour and activity, and subjective evaluation of their realizability (Bogomaz, 2014) in the local settings could characterize the socio-cultural environment potential. 20 basic values listed in Table 1 were evaluated by the study participants in terms of their realizability in places of their studying. In addition, a number of questionnaires were used for exploring the study participants' personal potential, which normally incorporates hardiness, ambiguity tolerance, life satisfaction, basic beliefs, reflexivity, self-determination and self-organization of activity (for details, see Leont'ev, Mandrikova, Osin, Plotnikova, Rasskazova, 2007; Atamanova & Bogomaz, 2011b; Bogomaz, 2014), as well as their career orientations.

Table 1. 20 basic values

№	Basic values	№	Basic values
1	have a good job	11	be known and famous
2	be in good health	12	achieve desired goals
3	be financially secure	13	live full life
4	have a happy family	14	find meaning of your life
5	achieve success in a profession	15	know everything
6	be respected	16	be an example for others
7	achieve success in your career	17	assert yourself
8	love and be loved	18	be unique and original
9	be free	19	have power
10	feel safe	20	be fair

#### 3.1. The study sample

The total study sample was made up of 1180 university students of Tomsk and other cities and towns of Western Siberia, namely Barnaul, Irkutsk, Kemerovo, Kuibyshev, Lesosibirsk, and Taiga. The study participants' age varied from 17 to 25 years old, and their majors were either humanities or science.

#### 3.2. Data collection

The students were offered to fill in several paper-and-pencil forms in Russian in order to examine psychological parameters in question. As mentioned above, personal potential includes a number of subscales, research tools for measuring these subscales being described below. The data collected were then statistically treated by means of descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and analysis of variance.

### 3.3. Research tools

First, a set of questionnaires was applied to evaluate the study participants' personal potential. The study was focused on examining the following parameters of university students' personal potential: *satisfaction with life*, *self-organization of activity*, *self-determination*, *reflexivity*, and *basic beliefs*. The Satisfaction with Life Scale by Diener (see Diener, Emmons, Larsen, Griffin, 1985), translated into Russian and adapted by Osin & Leont'ev (2008), was used to measure the participants' satisfaction with life. The Self-Organization of Activity Questionnaire developed by Mandrikova (2007) was applied for evaluating their tendency to self-organization of activity. It is a 25-item research instrument enabling to measure a person's ability to plan and organize his or her own activity. It has 6 subscales that estimate one's inclination for planning, purposefulness, persistence, fixation, self-organization and orientation in time. The Self-Determination Scale by Sheldon (1995), a 12-item tool adapted and modified by Osin (see Osin & Boniwell, 2010), was used for examining one's tendency to function in a self-determined way. The Reflexivity Type Assessment Test by Leont'ev (see Leont'ev, Lapteva, Osin, Salikhova, 2009) is a 30-item instrument developed for measuring reflective processes. The World Assumptions Scale by Yanoff-Bulman (1989), translated into Russian and adapted by Kravtsova (see Soldatova, Shaygerova, Prokof'eva, Kravtsova, 2003), was applied to evaluate the participants' basic beliefs. It is a 32-item scale which identifies one's assumptions about the benevolence of the world, benevolence of people, luck, justice, randomness, control, self-worth, and self-control.

Second, the study participants' career orientations were evaluated by the Career Anchors Questionnaire, a 5-scale research tool modified by Bogomaz (2012). This modification was based on the Russian adapted version (see Nikiforov, Dmitrieva, Snetkov, 2001) of the Career Orientations Inventory developed by Schein (1985). The questionnaire modified enables to identify five career anchors, namely dedication, challenge, entrepreneurship, freedom for, and freedom from (for details, see Bogomaz, 2012).

Third, a research tool was developed for examining a person's subjective evaluation of basic values realizability in the local settings (Bogomaz, 2014). The Basic Values Realizability technique is a 20-item instrument based on the semantic differential method originated by Osgood (see Osgood, Suci, Tannenbaum, 1957) and analogous to the Noetic Orientations Test (Leont'ev, 1992). It contains 20 items corresponding to 20 basic values (see Table 1). Taken together, each basic value and its opposite represent one item of the technique. Respondents should evaluate each bipolar set using a 7-point Likert-like scale (3-2-1-0-1-2-3). In addition, the mean value of the 20 items is calculated and denoted as the basic values realizability index.

## 4. The study results and discussion

The descriptive statistics showed that for the total sample the mean values of subjective evaluation of basic values realizability were the following. The highest scores were obtained for such basic values as *love and be loved* ( $6.29 \pm 1.26$ ) and *have a happy family* ( $6.13 \pm 1.33$ ). The lowest scores were obtained for the following basic values: *be known and famous* ( $4.58 \pm 1.72$ ), *be financially secure* ( $4.60 \pm 1.99$ ) and *be unique and original* ( $4.84 \pm 1.98$ ). This means that university students found that the region of their studying was favourable first of all for love and marriage and only then for their professional development and career perspectives. This result was rather unexpected, especially in the case of Tomsk because, as mentioned above, it is positioned as an educational, scientific and innovation centre. On the one hand, there is a high level of assurance that Western Siberia is a favourable place for realization of such basic values as *love and be loved* and *have a happy family*. On the other hand, there seems to be minimum possibilities here, according to the respondents, for realization of such basic values as *be financially secure*, *be known and famous* and *be unique and original*. Likely, such a profile may be explained by the metropolis-centred social and economic life in Russia.

Correlation analysis revealed that high scores in the subjective evaluation of basic values realizability were related to a high level of personal potential with focus on the following parameters, positive basic beliefs, and specific career orientations:

- inclination for goal setting and planning;
- inclination for self-determination, self-organization of activity and reflection;
- career orientations to challenge and entrepreneurship;
- positive basic beliefs about the world, other people and self as well as controllability.

Based on these correlations, it can be concluded that parameters of personal potential have a significant effect on subjective perception and evaluation of the socio-cultural environment. In addition, the higher is personal potential, the more possibilities young people find out in their local settings for their personal and professional development. The relationships revealed verify the idea that not only the socio-cultural environment affects university students' personal characteristics, but also their subjective perception of this environment as a factor of their personal and professional development depends on their personal potential. The university youth with leadership qualities, purposefulness, inclination for self-organization of their activity and inclination for reflection on it evaluate the realizability of basic values in their socio-cultural environment higher. Also, they are more positive in their perception of possibilities for their development and self-realization.

It was also found that the correlation between parameters of personal potential and subjective evaluation of basic values realizability had some specificity depending on the socio-cultural environment. For example, in the sample of young people studying at Tomsk universities there were statistically significant correlations between self-determination and subjective evaluation of realizability of such basic values as: *have a good job* ( $r = 0.334, p < 0.000$ ); *achieve success in a profession* ( $r = 0.479, p < 0.000$ ); *achieve success in your career* ( $r = 0.377, p < 0.000$ ); *be free* ( $r = 0.300, p < 0.000$ ) and *be known and famous* ( $r = 0.337, p < 0.000$ ). In the case of university students studying in Barnaul statistically significant correlations were found between self-determination and subjective evaluation of realizability of the following basic values: *live full life* ( $r = 0.318, p < 0.000$ ); *find meaning of your life* ( $r = 0.330, p < 0.000$ ) and *know everything* ( $r = 0.314, p < 0.000$ ). This difference can be attributed to peculiarities of the local socio-cultural environment and the industrialization level of these places.

Furthermore, the study findings revealed that master's students and doctoral students, in general, evaluate basic value realizability in Tomsk positively. Therefore, it can be concluded that the city, in their opinion, has an essential potential for their professional and personal development. However, they also took the city of Tomsk, first of all, as a place favourable for love and marriage. The results showed significant between-group differences among the samples under study in the following Basic Values Realizability scales: *achieve success in a profession*; *achieve success in your career*; *achieve desired goals*; *find meaning of your life*; *assert yourself*; *be unique and original*; *have power*.

Finally, the between-group differences identified indicate that the same environment is viewed differently by young people with different majors (a humanitarian or science profile). Arts-oriented university students feel more optimistic about the city (likely, their evaluation is more illusory). The study samples did not differ greatly in their scores on the Self-Organization of Activity questionnaire and that of Career Anchors. However, they are specific as indicated by the results of correlation analysis carried out separately for each group. It has been revealed that science-oriented young people with career orientation towards *dedication* perceive Tomsk more positively in terms of its potential. Thus, the results obtained enable us to put forward a hypothesis that the socio-cultural environment of Tomsk can meet the needs of arts-oriented individuals to a greater degree. It has been shown that personal characteristics of science-oriented university students can significantly affect their evaluation of basic value realizability and, hence, their evaluation of the socio-cultural environment potential of Tomsk. Meanwhile, the more they are inclined to planning, purposeful and persistent, the more positive Tomsk is viewed in the context of possibilities for their professional growth and career development, self-assertion and making sense of life.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be concluded that university students' subjective evaluation of their local settings in the context of their personal and professional development based on basic values realizability depends on young people's personal potential, their career orientations and their socio-cultural environment. In general, university students studying in Western Siberia (Russia) believe that their local settings are first favourable for love and marriage and only then for their professional development and career perspectives. It seems to be essentially important in the case of such places as Tomsk, which is positioned as one of country's leading centres of education, science and innovation. Therefore, it is necessary to provide university students with adequate psychological support to enable them to become more aware of the local environment potential. Further research perspectives will be connected with examining possible relationships between subjective evaluation of basic values realizability in the socio-cultural

environment and young people's character strengths because the same sociocultural environment can be evaluated different depending on leadership manifestation in university students, as revealed.

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