

## The Role of Institute of Higher Education in Solving the Issues of Socio-Cultural Modernization of Regions\*



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**Abstract.** The article deals with the issue of significance of institutional and regulatory components in the socio-cultural modernization of regions. The authors draw attention to the special role of institution of higher education as a factor affecting the level of social support for the actions of government authorities and mechanisms to ensure a high level of solidarity of the Russian society in addressing the issues of socio-cultural modernization. The purpose for the research is to scientifically substantiate and develop the procedures for identifying the degree of social support for the policy of the government and its separate units by social groups with higher education. In the context of implementation of Project on diagnostic study of the status and prospects of modernization in regions, a special research objective is to

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assess the correlation between the concentration of people with higher education in regional structures and types of modernization, the equilibrium in the process of regional modernization. The method of secondary analysis of the research results helps refine empirically meaningful hypotheses developed in the Project taking into account the social role of higher education in the modernization model of the regional management system. The article offers some theoretical and methodological aspects of a possible shift in the research and practice. The authors believe that purposeful regulation of the modernization process is necessary. And it is not just investing in the economy, but also the social aspect – the real increase in the quality of life and standard of living due to an increase in the cultural and educational potential of the population. Within this framework, the authors mainstream the issue of distinction and connection of a spontaneous processes of social change and programmable processes of social development. The authors characterize the theory of sociological management of education, design technology in higher education, innovative vision of the nature of future education and the choice of possible ways of its development in connection with the issues of managing modernization processes in countries and regions. New opportunities of the evolution of sociological views on the development issues of social management in higher education in Russia are interpreted by the authors according to the original concept of the socio-forecast approach as a special sphere of scientific knowledge integrating socio-humanitarian knowledge and scientifically sound development of solutions to future problems through the development of design technology. Theoretical generalizations contained in the article can be used as discussion materials in scientific debates. They can also be of relevance to scientific and educational activities.

**Key words:** socio-cultural modernization, regions, higher education, subjectivity, human capital, design technology.

There are people, including notable scientists, who strongly doubt that any modernizing changes in Russia are possible at all. They list dozens of socio-historical reasons why things are bad and will get even worse [4; 13; 15; 19]. However, only one circumstance is not considered: this issue has for more than a decade been among beyond idle speculation and apocalyptic constructs, in the category of complex scientific research, which currently include a collective research work “Modernization atlas of Russia and its regions: socio-economic and socio-cultural trends and issues” conducted by Center for Sociocultural Transformation Research at the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences [1].

The contents of the publication are presented by chapters reflecting the processes, trends and issues of modernization taking place

in federal districts and regions of the Russian Federation in 2000–2012. In each chapter, performance indicators of technological, socio-economic, socio-cultural, institutional, and regulatory components serve as reference points for matching the situation in regions’ modernization. Their characteristics are based on data from Russian and international statistics (for example, modernization indices in 130 countries including Russia since 2001 annually received by the Center for Modernization Studies at the Chinese Academy of Sciences [12; 20]), as well as on the results of sociological surveys in several regions. The emphasis is put on the socio-economic processes of the primary industrial stage of modernization, as well as the socio-cultural issues of its secondary, information stage including critical analysis of the phenomenon of quasi-modernization.

With all the importance of this fundamental work, describing, explaining and predicting social processes in the country is impossible with underdeveloped aspects of the institutional and regulatory modernization components. In particular, there is no provision for the fact that the modernization process depends on both spontaneous and organized, controlling factors of vertical (centre-periphery) and horizontal modernization (self-organization of actors of the socio-economic actions and interactions in and between regions). We should add that in the socio-cultural modernization, higher education is not only an indicator of regions' modernization (their specific index), but also an important social institution which, along with the system of power and control, is an independent factor of territory's civilization development.

The outlined approach is being developed by the Center for Sociology of Management and Social Technology at the RAS Institute of Sociology in 2015–2017 in a special *Project on the diagnostic study of the state and prospects of modernization in regions* given a combination of factors in management and education. The study “Civil examination of reforming the vertical power structure amid processes of socio-cultural modernization of regions: from monitoring of state to forecast modeling” is supported by the Russian Science Foundation grant. The research *subject* is the degree of social support for the power structure and its separate units from various population groups and categories in regions with different types (levels) of modernization, where we assume exist different models of social development. The degree of subjectivity of different population groups in the solution of regional

problems, their role in feedback with authorities and management, the degree of solidarity with small (including protest) groups, with regional communities, and with big communities such as the Russian Federation as a whole is taken into account. *The specific objectives* include testing the degree of functionality of the power structure in specific historical conditions and based on this, predicting the controllability of processes of territorial development through the explication of the structure and content of evaluations of activities of governing bodies by various population groups. The testing refers to the procedure for identifying the degree of public support for the ability of the authorities to successfully implement their current and potential functions. This procedure acts as “civil” as the respondents represent both participants of modernization and citizens who assess the modernization process in terms of changes in the country [14].

#### **Stating the research problem and searching for objective of the study**

We pay attention to the special role of the *factor in higher education* in the socio-cultural modernization of regions can affect both the level of social support from power structures and mechanisms and mechanisms ensuring a high level of solidarity of the Russian society in addressing modernization objectives. Russia is currently among the countries with the highest number of people with higher education. This, in the age cohort of people aged 25–64, 54% of the population have a high school diploma, among people aged 25–34 – 58%, 55–64 – 50%. *The total enrolment rate of the youth in higher education is 33%, although the situation in the regions varies greatly* [8]. It is important for us that the model of implementation

of the quota sampling (N=500 for each region involved in the empirical study) is formed at the intersection of *characteristics "gender\*generation\*education"* by the share of respective groups in the 2010 census in the Russian Federation (model) and in regions (implementation) per 100 people. Each quota corresponds to the share of the group in the general population per 1000 people with electoral qualifications. The results of assessing data validity show that the general population (N=2002) in four pilot regions (the Moscow Oblast, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Belgorod Oblast and the Republic of Kalmykia) is characterized by *a shift towards more educated population and reducing number of people with incomplete secondary and lower education, as well as with general secondary and vocational education*. A specific search objective during the pilot stage of the study is *to assess the correlation between the number of people with higher education in regional structures and the types of modernization, balance in the process of regions' modernization*. The results of analysis of socio-economic indicators of regions' development taking into account the indicator of the working population with higher education demonstrate a significant share of the working population in the regional structures: from 26.8% in the Republic of Bashkortostan to 43.6 % in the Moscow Oblast (with 33.0% in Russia as a whole). In absolute terms, it is 471.6 and 1339.0 thousand people respectively. We believe that in some regions of the country the potential of population groups with higher education in addressing development (modernization) issues is clearly not disclosed.

Analysis of the social role of the institution of higher education in the modernization of the

system model of management in regions fits into an empirical testing of *three heuristically important hypotheses* put forward in the Project.

*The first hypothesis.* The system of management in regions depends on the social organization and self-organization, on the hierarchy of social groups formed around the bodies of power and control, on the ties of local elites with "the center" and on their objective interest in modernization. The hypothesis explains the dependence of the style and nature of management, its deformation on "elite groups" (groups of social dominance) formed in the region which in some extent replace the functions of management with power and property relations. We assume that the mechanism of formation and functioning of these groups depends on the state and trends of the socio-cultural modernization process, which differ from one another in certain regions. Testing the hypotheses about the correlation between the modernization process of regions and the degree of development of their management systems taking into account higher education helps consider its influence in the development of relevant legal acts during the implementation of the institutional reform in Russia.

*The second hypothesis.* The composition and activity of social groups that are dominant in the regions depend on objective trends in regions' socio-cultural modernization; on relations between the center and the local elites, which can be of different nature. The fact is that the science is currently going back to ideas about forming *a new cultural and historical type of personality* in Russia [2; 6; 7; 16; 17; 18]. The Center for Management Sociology and Social Technology at the RAS Institute of Sociology

has experience in empirical measurement of the phenomenon of “average culture”. There is an assumption that the electorate with average assessments of social and political activity now plays an important role in social management, and the issue of double standards can move from the virtual sphere into the socio-structural realm. Analysis of the phenomenon of dual sovereignty enhances the forecast role of data on the development of problem situations in regions with different levels of socio-cultural modernization and different levels of education in the so-called “average groups”.

*The third hypothesis.* The lag of Russia’s management system in addressing the modernization objectives is explained by historical and socio-cultural characteristics of regions, which influence the formation in each of them of a unique and undeclared model of organizational development and social management with interests of elite groups. It is only not clear what role is and can be played by people with higher education. Specifically, this can most likely be explained by reluctance to use the potential of Russians with higher education in solving problems of modernization, as well as by their deliberate ousting from the narrow circle of people making strategic decisions.

We assume that a radical solution to the problem of establishing *a Russian model of organizational development* and management in modern conditions might be optimization of performance of administrative bodies, law enforcement agencies, business groups, and interested communities based on joint efforts of educational institutions of higher education at the federal and regional level. It is not impossible that there would be hybridization of

Western and domestic experience of high school performance, intensification of development processes at local levels of their own standards of educational and professional competences aimed at forming and coordinating public interests in the implementation of regions’ modernization potential. This framing of the problem requires both recognition of the spontaneity and historical necessity of a new stage of modernization in Russia, and a burning sense of conscious participation in this process of both power structures and all social groups under the leading role of a social group mostly trained in terms of education and science.

**Some theoretical and methodological aspects of a possible shift in research and practice**

In 2000–2008, rapid growth of indices of regions’ primary modernization took place when the country faced an economic crisis. In 2010–2012, a secondary modernization model (in its preparatory phase) developed. Ironically, this “breakthrough” level corresponded to level of modernization in world’s developed countries at the beginning of the 1960-s. Uneven domestic interregional development was 2.5 times sharper than the corresponding inequality between world’s countries [1]. It is clear that the process of modernization in Russia is rather spontaneous than controlled, and thus occurs against the wishes of their corrupt leaders. The fragmented role of management after the adoption of strategies and federal programs, in fact, does not provide balance of interaction between key social modernization variables. They include: *technical and technological* (transition to new technological mode), *socio-economic* (changes in the shares of main economic sectors), *socio-cultural* (a set of social and cultural changes), *institutional and*



*regulatory* (changes in regulatory institutions) [10]. Modernization slowdown is explained by the structural, social, material, moral, and cultural factors. We assume that *targeted regulation of modernization process is necessary*: not only in terms of investment in the economy, but also in the social aspect – the real increase in the standard of living and the quality of life through the growth of population's cultural and educational potential.

In this situation, there is a need for revising the main guideline of historical materialism about the socio-historical laws of the society and replacing it with an idea about the socio-historical laws with human activity being the leading force. Sociology is focused on categories such as *the nature of social*, laws of genesis and transformation of the *social order*, *the mechanisms of its establishment and change*. Attention to the social mechanisms means the aspiration of sociology, just like in the classical period of its development, to discover the laws of social transformation, but this time natural-artificial, given the goals and ways to achieve them deliberately set by human activity. In science this is a well known *problem of distinction and connection of spontaneous processes of social change and programmable processes of social development*.

Today it is impossible to say that social institutions develop only in a natural way. They reflect the growing management issues, and help develop and approve necessary and sufficient mechanisms. But institutions do not descend “from above”, they are constructed by creative people and supported from “the bottom” provided that they appear adequate to oppose to the real challenges and threats. And if it does not happen in time, the society is faced

with disasters as occurred twice in our country: at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century.

*The institution of higher education* engaged in production, preservation and enhancement of scientific knowledge, spiritual values, and cultural standards ultimately determines the level of scientific, technical, economic, and cultural progress in the society. It must not only meet its needs, but also be able to prepare public systems to rapid development, proactive adverse circumstances including through training highly qualified specialists for the economy and workers for science. Here it is especially important to understand the following aspects.

*The first aspect* is national interests which, amid the changed development conditions of the Russian society, are associated with the search for solutions to “big challenges”. Among them are: exhaustion (amid the development of digital economy) of opportunities for extensive economic growth through exploitation of natural resources, human-induced load on the environment, social and health issues associated with population ageing, etc. High school is one of the institutions which ensure that our country participates in global processes where the quality of human capital comes to the fore, in particular in the Strategy for scientific and technological development of the Russian Federation up to 2030, in programs of the Ministry of education and science, other ministries and organizations of executive authorities including institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS).

*The second aspect*. Turning to social forecasting meets the fundamental prospects of the socio-managerial knowledge. The fact is that a significant trend in the development of

modern sociological theory and practice is a shift a re-focus from analytical, theoretical and epistemological functions to the diagnostic and prognostic ones, to social transformation (or even social engineering or socio-engineering). The society is already mature enough to shift from influencing the environment (and nature as part of it) to influencing itself, to self-improvement and self-retention of their evolutionary mechanisms within the range of controllability.

The development of a special sociological theory of managing the sphere of education where social needs are increasing rapidly, is based on the recent trend of people's abandoning the sphere of manufacturing economy and their transition to the rapidly expanding segments of service economy associated with meeting spiritual and cultural needs of different population groups (children, the youth, middle aged people, the elderly). This also implies successful solution to a series of social objectives to modernize higher education. These include: a shift to universal free education at the undergraduate level; a decline in traditional educational load on teachers and its replacement with scientific work together with the students; the transformation of the class-lesson system into a particular research organization of teaching; transition to universal life-long education and teachers' distance employment without strict time limits for working and resting; inclusion of research work and thesis presentation in the list of duties of post-graduate students. From the standpoint of successful solution by the country and its regions of the issue of socio-cultural modernization and reaching the current stage of global civilization development, it is

particularly important, in our view, to ensure the consolidation of federal state educational standards and professional standards, which would make *the need to shift from research coordination to the coordination management paradigm in higher education relevant*.

We assume that in the Russian sociology, the classic triad of *scientific knowledge "analysis – diagnosis – forecast"* is no longer limping in the last of its components. Sociologists in general learned to *analyze* describing the existing social processes and phenomena. They can make a *diagnosis* explaining the cause of their emergence. Not so long ago, they were rarely taken for *forecasting* the development of socio-cultural processes. This is the reason for concern, for example, for organizers of the VII Sociological Grushin conference "Facing the future. Forecasting in sociological research" (Moscow, Ranepa, 2017) who formulate basic requirements to the professional sociological community: "*How much do modern Russian sociologists know about the technological innovation which should appear in the next two decades, have they tried to at least assess the social consequences of the emerging opportunities, forecast the changes in the social environment, social relations, and the very essence of a human?*"

The thing is that in a relatively short historical period the world shifted to qualitatively new living conditions formed due to *accelerating and increasingly complex dynamics of human communities and natural phenomena* which require individual interpretation. In this regard, innovative views on the nature of the future, including the future of higher education, and the choice of possible ways to achieve it are in demand. These include: *the unity of complex*

*socio-natural phenomena, pluralism of time and network space, "the butterfly effect", "reflexive reality", modeling of the future by using virtual reality, determinism of the future by social and natural phenomena, a new social type of a happy person* [9; 21]. This is well known from the literature which is characterized by opening of new "possible" and "impossible" worlds. However, to answer the question "What do we need to do?" it is necessary to firmly adhere to certain academic criteria in all spheres of scientific knowledge, including sociological, as do modern natural scientists. For science, the "possible worlds" are important if the new processes and phenomena meet the requirements of observability, knowability, consistency, predictability, and determinism as manifestations of the properties of objective reality [3]. Nowadays, the sociological idea of a community as a relatively simple, naturally occurring and self-developing system is replaced with the idea of a community as a complex, natural-artificial social and *natural phenomena* of global-local nature. Created by man, they increasingly exert their "will" which becomes an important indicator of *non-linear development* involving the *normalization* of reflective determinism, bifurcations, unintentional consequences. It has already been accepted that complex systems have self-reflexivity and include diverse virtual world and trans-social networks.

The significant role of material and spiritual culture in the mechanisms of regulation of the social life in such a world is reflected by designed control mechanisms which can have a significant impact on the transformation of complex socio-cultural processes. We proclaim the possibility of their artificial construction.

This is an important clarification as the shift away from the traditional idea of the society as the process of only natural transformation and recognition of opportunities of its development through the non-traditional reactions of the humanity to the implementation institutional transformations in the public system. For this reason, we consider social management as an *intentionally constructed personalized socio-cultural mechanism of achieving goals embedded in social process and able to combine management and self-management, formal rules and informal standards of behavior of poly-subject participants of joint life and activity.*

New opportunities for sociological interpretation of social management of higher education in Russia are developed according to the original concept of the *socio-forecast approach* as a special area of scientific knowledge integrating socio-humanitarian knowledge and scientifically sound development of solutions to future problems through design technology. The approach gives special attention to both organizations and entities whose activities create and change them. Along with the representatives of business and power structures, the dominant actor is *Russians with higher education*. They are included in a coordinated system of actions and interactions that structurally change the social order in communities in the context of national culture, without violence or manipulation from other participants of joint activity, support social standards capable of socio-cultural modernization in the country and regions.

Thus, we expect the emergence of actors whose actions are comparable to the activity of social institutions. They not only internalize standards and values of the society, but also



affect their components in accordance with the new needs and interests with increasing (due to scientific and technological progress) resource endowments of both group and personalized activities. The empirical interpretation of this phenomenon introduces the term of *subjectivity* as an evidence of existence of a new quality in the relations between the subjects of social action and interaction in the development of innovative solutions in given circumstances. Such a view helps better understand sociologically and empirically explore the real trends of the transformation of relations between the power vertical and Russians with higher education amid the increasing role of spontaneous non-linear relations in the processes of formulation and solution of modernization problems.

For successful work in this area it is required to restructure the theory and methodology of research of management problems in high school in Russia on the basis of *forecast paradigm* with the use of specially designed means of social diagnostics and predictive design. The socio-forecast approach integrates a number of research concepts. Among them are: *the eco-anthropocentric paradigm of social cognition and management* by T.M. Dridze, *the socio-anthropocentric concept of sociology* by N.I. Lapin, *the algorithmic concept of management stages and phases* Zh.T. Toshchenko, *the concept of socio-cultural management models* by A.V. Tikhonov. The chosen approach involves the use of design technology of social forecasting and social design. It is extremely necessary to study the future needs of the Russian society, identify the determinants of social change and creative transformation of social reality [11].

The specific features of the Russian network of social and labor relations is a relatively high cohesion of subjects horizontally and in informal, often latent, opposition to vertical relations. This contradiction is sometimes considered as a specific feature of the Russian culture, but this is true in the part where management relations are replaced by relations of power and property. This leads to the necessity of the *program for management modernization in higher education in order to release management functions from the extrinsic relations of power and property*.

Modernization in Russia and its regions is the intensification of all aspects of social life. The power management vertical is not productive without population's social participation and active support of the policies and practices of federal, regional, and municipal authorities. The current and future situation implies further development of Russia's educational institutions of higher education, especially universities which are actively involved in modernization processes and take on the role of both modernization objects and subjects, as centers for innovative development of the country and its regions. It is not only personnel training, but also the emergence of *a new educational ecosystem*, encouraging the creation of high-tech innovative companies at universities, which was widely discussed at the 4th Moscow international education fair (MIEF 2017). All this will require restructuring, involvement of a wide range of subjects in the system of university management and in the educational process – students and adults undergoing retraining, business representatives and public organizations [5].

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