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"IDEAL UNIVERSITY" AS VIEWED BY "UNIVERSITY PEOPLE": EXPERIENCE IN RECONSTRUCTING THE VALUE CATEGORIES OF RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES BASED ON INTERVIEWS IN THE 2010S

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The article examines the self-identification and professional values of the university community in post-Soviet Russia. On the basis of the corpus of the interviews, which were recorded by the Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (Moscow) in the 2010s, the authors analyse how the contemporary Russian scholars consider the problems of university autonomy and university management, as well as the criteria to define an ideal University and an ideal Professor. Instead of the unique perceptions on the specifics of research and educational characteristics of university space and people, the present investigation represents the problematization of the basic definitions of *university* and its purposes by the contemporary Russian scholars.

Keywords: oral history, history of post-soviet universities, university community, academic persona

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Introduction

The problem of the professional identity and the axiology of the scientific community has repeatedly become the subject of research by sociologists of knowledge and sociologists of science[4]. A significant stage was passed from the idealization of a scholar's image as a bearer of sacred knowledge, rooted at least in the Age of the Enlightenment, to the deconstruction of the academic community and its value characteristics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries[5]. However, the academic community does not seem to have developed a consensus on the key issues for its self-identification. Moreover, this self-reflection incorporates certain beliefs, which could be designated as obsolete or no longer relevant, according to the historiography of the issue. What is the role of a holder of an academic rank? What is the ratio of research and teaching components in a university scholar's career? What determines the forms of interaction within the academic community and, finally, (the issue that includes both the problem of recognition and the problem of science management) how should this community interact with the outside world?

It has long been a common place for a sociological scholarship of academic communities to appeal to the works by P. Bourdieu. We also consider the spaces of *academy* and *university* in the context of the concepts of *symbolic capital* and *symbolic power*. The question of the values and norms of the academic community cannot be investigated in isolation from Bourdieu's terminology too. What the French sociologist calls "outward signs of being scientific", "systems of collective defense" and "social effects of being scientific"[6], appears to help us understand what the doings and actions of scholars mean, as they represent certain social group with its own rules of the struggle for power (not always exclusively symbolic), movable boundaries of "scientific character" (when the variety of assessment scales and the multiplicity of hierarchies allow "avoiding too painful doubts that could be caused by the strict application of the proclaimed criteria") and legitimation algorithms (after all, the main stake of the symbolic struggle is precisely the "monopoly on legitimate nomination", for example, the recognition of a research as a scientific or as not fully meeting the scientific criteria).

However, Bourdieu's critical position has significant flaws, especially the reduction of social relations to the logic of struggle. As Bourdieu's critics L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot rightly replied to him, such optics does not allow explaining the individual choice and motivation of the characters[7]. Bourdieu's sociology is more relevant to the study of social groups and fields instead

[4] Merton R. *The Sociology of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973): 267–278; Barber B., *Science and the Social Order* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952): 126–129; Allchin D., "Values in Science: An Educational Perspective", *Science & Education*, no 8 (1999): 1–12; Lamont M., *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[5] Shapin S. *The Scientific Life: A Moral History of a Late Modern Vocation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[6] Bourdieu P., *Homo Academicus* (Moscow, 2018): 31, 41, 59.
[7] Boltanski L., Théveno L., *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur,* transl. by O.V. Koveneva (Moscow, 2013).

of individual trajectories, as scientific agents, their values, evaluative judgments and opinions are excluded from the investigation. In this sense, the concept of Boltanski and Théveno (who themselves once come out of the Bourdieu school, but took a critical distance towards it) is closer to us as it allows to see that in a scientific dispute the parties tend to resort not only to scientific argumentation, and not only to the struggle for symbolic capital being driven exclusively by selfish interests, in line with Bourdieu.

Instead of the sociology of social groups, the sociology of situations has recently come to the fore[8]. It is important that the description of the situation should avoid setting the boundaries of groups or communities predetermined by the researcher, as well as the processes of domination and subordination. It could be well qualified by the actors themselves, and not by predetermined research optics, what happens. This perspective allows us to describe and conceptualize various value and ethical categories that serve as a referent for certain respondents. Therefore, we can use the testimonies of academic people recorded in the interview format as material to reconstruct the ideas about academic ethics, academic values and an ideal university. They will help us to identify the main groups of ideas about value and ethics in the both, *university* and *academy* as a broader concept (the very answers to questions about the content of these concepts depend on the specifics of these appeals). The present paper aims to consider the multi-component nature of the university space and identify the value categories of a university person.

The collection of the interviews, which is investigated in this article, was collected as part of the Oral History Project on the Russian Post-Soviet Universities from 2011 to 2018. The interviewers with the Russian scholars were held by the students and staff of the Higher School of Economics under the guidance of Professor Elena Anatolyevna Vishlenkova and are stored in the database of the Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI, Moscow). Most of the respondents started their scientific careers in the Soviet Union, and thus they were able to identify different stages of the development of the Russian universities. Moreover, many interviewees at the time of the interview were not only researchers and teachers, but also held various administrative positions in the university structures or in the other academic institutions.

University Autonomy and Effective Management

The 2011–2018 interviews are distinguished by a clearly articulated statement of the internal transformations of the Russian universities in the 1990s and 2000s. The universities of the third millennium in Russia, in the opinion of several respondents, have lost their fundamental

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[8] Volkov V., Kharkhordin O., *Practice theory* (St. Petersburg, 2008): 224–242.

origin of the classical Humboldt university, the university autonomy[9]. Moreover, we are not talking about the lack of freedom of universities, largely ideological, that took place in the USSR. The problem of the 2000s was the internal management of the university, namely, the socio-anthropological component of this management. Two types of managers are contrasted, especially in key university positions in the dean's offices and administration, *university people* and *effective managers*[10]. The latter in this case are categorized as a kind of usurpers of the university administration, who, unlike the former, poorly understand the peculiarities of the functioning of the university system, research activities, and most importantly, the "needs of university people"[11]. The managers operate with the categories and priorities that are often different from those of university people, as well as they set irrelevant tasks (for example, a certain hourly load on a teacher). According to the historian Elena Vishlenkova, this is a conflict between university ethics and bureaucratic culture: "university bureaucracy should be university, academic. It is specific, even if it is an official bureaucracy. But it must be one that has emerged from the academic environment, [albeit] having acquired the skills of administration", because "the arrival of bureaucratic officials from the outside recodes university relations"[12].

This problem of internal misunderstanding, dissonance and inconsistency of actions has created, according to some respondents, a situation where the teaching staff feels more like a "qualified service persons" in a "knowledge trading supermarket", which a university appeared to be[13]. Marina Loskutova speaks of the consequences of such a mercantilization of education as a "degeneration of the system" as a whole: "When education turns into a service, a person in this system inevitably begins to feel like a waitress in a restaurant, who has a full room of customers, a beam of smoke, and she is on her feet since morning and generally does not know when it will all end"[14]. It was precisely in reducing the turnover of reporting within the vertical system of university management that Sergej Krikh sees one of the steps towards the "efficiency" of the functioning of both researchers and their leaders. Along with students interested in the learning process, the administration's favored treatment ("minimum red tape and accountability") is one of the key elements of professional activity at the university[15].

Such numerous descriptions of the problem of administration of scientific and teaching activities at the university correlate with the fact that B. Readings and A. B. Cabal called the crisis

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[9] About the institutional history of the post-Soviet university autonomy, see Bain O., *University Autonomy in Russian Federation Since Perestroika* (New York, 2003).

[10] Vishlenkova E. Interview. Authors' archive (2012); Krikh S. Interview. Authors' archive (2012); Loskutova M. Interview. Authors' archive (2018).

[11] Vishlenkova E. Ibid

[12] Vishlenkova E. Ibid.

[13] Krikh S. Ibid. Viktorija Antonova and Marina Loskutova also speak of university teachers as service staff, see Antonova V. Interview. Authors' archive (2013), Loskutova M. Ibid.

[14] Loskutova M. Ibid.

[15] Krikh S. Ibid.

of the classical model of the university and the transition to a rational administrative-bureaucratic logic of "perfection" and "efficiency" as the main parameter for assessing the results of its activities[16]. B. Readings, in particular, linked such a change in the role of the university and the emergence of an administrator (not a teacher or scientist) figure in the foreground with the collapse of the university's "national-cultural mission", which had previously "provided its raison d'être". The receding into the past university of art nouveau period was born within the framework of the ideas of German idealists about culture as the sum of all acquired knowledge that must be cultivated and developed in a particular person; research and teaching as functions of the university were supposed to serve the needs of the nation state, ensuring the formation and expansion of national identity (it is in this context that the German concept of *Bildung* takes root). Therefore, when the nation state loses its relevance[17], from the triad of research-teaching-administration, it is administration that "quickly becomes the main location of resources, and this expansion is a symptom of the breakdown of the agreement between research and teaching signed by German idealists"[18].

It will not be wrong to note that the respondents' reasoning about university management and their lamentation about the bureaucratization of this process somehow reflect similar ideas about the crisis of a modern university. The problem of university management in the sources we have considered largely accumulates the contradiction of the key characteristics of the university as an institution: in the classical form, its academic staff carries both teaching and research load. Both university spaces turn out to be the subject of "balancing" university people in the process of their professional activities. In the next section, we attempt to estimate which values determine the (un)desired ratio of these three elements for university performance as a whole. It examines, firstly, the (outside) institutional regulators of academic activity, and secondly, the ideas about the personality traits of a university person, related both to the sphere of professional competencies and to the area of professional ethics.

Community of Professionals

Many respondents emphasize the ability to conduct scientific research as a key value in academic life. This justifies, in particular, the importance of such an institute as the Academy of Sciences - the most famous and large-scale institution that provides the opportunity to be engaged

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[16] Readings B., *University in ruins* (Moscow, 2010); Cabal A.B., *The University as an Institution Today* (Ottawa, 1993).

[17] Today we can endlessly argue about the boundaries and consequences of globalization, but in 1994, when Readings' book was published, the crisis of the nation state was perceived as an obvious reality.

[18] Readings B., Op. cit.: 199.

in research activities without a teaching load[19]. However, the majority of respondents did not regard university teaching as unnecessary or negative. It is perceived precisely as a form of academic activity that may correspond (or may not correspond) to the personality of a particular *homo academicus*. "Combining work in an academic institution and teaching is right. It is known that scientists who do not teach are considered in some sense "flawed" in their habilitation. But, nevertheless, *I feel calmer when pedagogical life is something secondary*, by no means the main one" [our italics. – *A.A., K.K.*][20].

At the same time, many interviews emphasize the enduring value of *pedagogy* in the sense of *mentoring*, rather than emotionless transmission of facts. In particular, the modern university is distinguished from the 90s by the direct availability of a huge number of information resources, without the mediation of a lecturer, a seminarian or even a personal scientific advisor. In this sense, the core of the university is anthropological and is composed by people who are able to teach when the experience of personal interaction is important, as a result of which the skills of working with research material or professional behavior are transferred. Thus, the majority of the respondents name one or several professors who have been decisive in their choice of the professional track.

Here it seems appropriate to turn to Bourdieu's reflections on university doctrine[21] in the context of the problem of reforming the education system. Arguing about different teaching traditions, Bourdieu contrasts the *intellectual* approach ("from principles to practical application, from axioms to practice") and the *art* approach, which "seeks to lead to the acquisition and practical assimilation of principles by repeating their application". "The pedagogy of art" in his understanding refers to the same traditions of transferring *ars inveniendi* (ingenuity) by the master himself to the student, in this case the researcher transfers to the student "*arts* understood as practical (and theoretically rich) ways of saying and doing"[22]. Bourdieu calls this "research pedagogy", and in interviews of the 2010s we record the emphasis on the value of this very phenomenon as quite rare both in the Soviet and in the contemporary at the time of the interview reality.

Many respondents note that individual mentors are significant to them not only because they have taught them research skills, but became a meaningful example of avoiding doctrinal research tracks and submission to one or another (primarily ideological and managerial) conjuncture. It seems to explain why the extra-institutional practices of interaction of Russian researchers are given so great importance. The experience of the respondents in the field of history

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[19] Klyaus V. Interview. Authors' archive (2011).
[20] Klyaus V. Ibid.
[21] Social agreement about the categories of thought used by university actors. See: Bourdieu P., "University doxa and creativity: against scholastic divisions", *Socio-Logos'96. Almanac of the Russian-French Center for Sociological Research, Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences*. 1996: 8–31.
[22] Bourdieu P. Op. cit.

and philosophy, for example, indicates the circulation of meaningful knowledge within "home seminars" on reading and discussion, organized by teachers and gathering around the very tiny number of interested students[23].

It should be noted that the image of the mentor is not identical to the image of the ideal professor. The question about the characteristics of the latter was directly posed by the interviewers, and in most cases this image was associated with a certain idea of an "intellectual". According to one of the respondents, an ideal professor is made up of a combination of "intellectuals" (ethical qualities of a person, namely respect, decency, tolerance) and "formulas of a good specialist" (skills of knowledge transfer)[24]. Another scholar noted that the ideal professor is determined precisely through working with students[25]. One of the interviewed historians, Irina Karatsuba, describes the task of an academic persona as more moral than purely scientific. In her opinion, the value of the university is the opportunity to implement *an educational project*, "university in itself", which is carried by every person of the academy. Thus, Irina Karatsuba identifies herself with "people of the University," and explains her formal departure from institutionalized educational and scientific institutions: "... the main thing for us is an educational project. Each of us is one or another educational project. It is tailored to our taste, temperament, ways of communicating with the surrounding reality. For me, this is expressed in the form of public lectures, interviews, endless comments in the media and two of my own radio programs. This is my educational project"[26]. And although the respondent emphasizes the inadmissibility of the moralizing use of history (the respondent's research field), the researcher herself cannot avoid questions of morality, which, in fact, constituted the main difficulty for her in academic science.

Summarizing the respondents' answers, we can conclude that the "ideal professor" is determined by professional competence, an extraordinary level of "knowledge", as well as responsibility for the correct transfer of this knowledge to students. On the other hand, this is someone who teaches "from the heart", understands the interests of students and "respects" them[27]. As a rule, one's own teachers become a reference point here. "He was always very respectful of the audience", Antonova recalls Professor Grigoriy Perelmuter, "any real professor should always feel the connection between generations and understand" that he has his colleagues in front of him, "and he wants to reach their own level, and even more", he gives them all of himself so that they could surpass him[28]. In the appeal to respectful relations with the student public, we again see an

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[23] Dobrokhotov A. Interview. Authors' archive (2012).
[24] Arkhipova T. Interview. Authors' archive (2012).
[25] Vishlenkova E. Ibid. On the connection of universities with the project of the revival of the intellectuals and their values, see: Tromly B., *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev*. (Cambridge, 2014): 3–12.
[26] Karatsuba I. Interview. Authors' archive (2012).
[27] Salakhov M. Interview. Authors' archive (2012).
[28] Antonova V. Ibid.

appeal to the idealistic view of the university in the spirit of Fichte, when teaching is conceptualized as a "self-disclosure" of a professor and students to each other in the course of a kind of a dialogue that endows both sides with a "community of spiritual existence" in which they, "having first learned to deeply understand and respect each other, proceed in all their thoughts from an equally well-known and non-objectionable foundation"[29]. It is this dialogue that constitutes the university community as a corporation. It is characteristic that such ideas sometimes refer to the image of a pre-revolutionary professor - a "thinker", a "bearer of advanced ideas" and "the most intelligent person"[30].

Along with individual manifestation, the anthropological component is important at the collective level. In this case, we are talking again about a rather *supra*-institutional *professional community*, people who are not united by a community of joint work in one institution, but who share primarily a professional doxa. If the academy or the university are spaces that experience the problem of interaction between researchers and managers, then the professional community is distinguished by self-regulation through sharing the criteria for assessing quality and the formats of research activities themselves. It is noteworthy, that none of the respondents indicated the existence of such social self-regulating space, however, it is the statement of its absence and necessity that determines its value. The professional community of Russia is too fragmented, that prevents the formation of single research space with internal norms and requirements: "There is no single expertise, there is no single space in which everyone knew that if this person plagiarizes or works poorly with sources, everybody will know it, and he will not be able to advance anywhere"[31].

Ideal University in Temporal Dimension

Speaking about the university, many respondents in one way or another single out two periods of their existence in the academic community, comparing the Soviet and post-Soviet experience of staying and functioning in it. Moreover, to make such a comparison, this experience should not be necessarily personal, as some respondents "entered the science" after the collapse of the USSR. The characteristic features of the post-Soviet university (and the "academy" as a whole) are commonly supposed to be *openness* and *tolerance*, desirable attributes of the ideal university. On the one hand, we are talking about the ethics of scientific research: the university allows you to become a scholar, and it is here that you can acquire the qualities and skills suitable for this: "read more, discuss more, be able to accept someone else's point of view, become

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[29] Cit. by Readings B. Op. cit.: 195.
[30] Antonova V. Ibid.
[31] Vishlenkova E. Ibid.

broadminded, tolerant to people, positions, and concepts"[32]. On the other hand, the Russian university is finally becoming a part of the world scientific community again. The tragedy of Soviet science, according to the HSE professor Nina Belyaeva, lies in the impossibility of belonging to a broader research tradition. It is impossible to be a part of the world science, speaking the "bird's language", "it is important to be a part of an open space in order to absorb and process all this, probably, this is the only way to develop further"[33]. Spontaneity and academic freedom are the most important values, which, according to the respondents, were absent during the Soviet era (which is considered here as a whole, without specifying concrete periods)[34]. In addition, difficult material conditions and the need to teach to the detriment of research activities are perceived as a significant factor constraining academic freedom: "We were in secluded conditions", Nina Zaigrina recalls her work at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and the Maurice Thorez Institute. "…strict discipline, the workload of teachers "in the amount of" about 20–22 hours a week only speaking classes, we worked five days a week, rarely four"[35]. Of course, the work at the Academy of Sciences could help to avoid such a load, in this sense, one can speak of the greater prestige of work in the latter from the point of view of the academic career of a Soviet scholar.

However, skepticism towards the Soviet university life, no matter how often it is seen in the respondents' answers, does not mean romanticizing or idealizing the post-Soviet period. Thus, according to Marina Mogilner, having broken with the Soviet past, the Russian universities were unable to fit into the new reality and become part of the open system of international higher education[36]. The swiftness of the changes gave rise to skepticism about their necessity: the university should now be a more conservative structure[37]. On the other hand, according to Vitalij Kurennoy, even such a progressive university as the Higher School of Economics, due to its dependence on the government, still faces the dilemma of maintaining autonomy in the name of a research university[38].

The break with the Soviet tradition is sometimes also interpreted in terms of the desacralization of the teacher's role[39]. However, even here there is no unity in views and in the image of the ideal university model: one cannot fail to notice that the image of the university intellectual in the spirit of German romanticism leaves no room for a dialogue between a student

[32] Antonova V. Ibid.
[33] Belyaeva N. Interview. Authors' archive (2013).
[34] Kurennoy V. Interview. Authors' archive (2018).
[35] Zaigrina N. Interview. Authors' archive (2013).
[36] Mogilner M. Interview. Authors' archive (2012).
[37] Alekseeva T. Ibid.
[38] Kurennoy V. Ibid.
[39] Kharitonova V. Interview. Authors' archive (2012).

and a professor. This deprives the university of its civil, almost educational function[40], another reminiscence to the idea of the crisis of a modern university as a part of the nation-state system. Another way of criticizing the romanticization of the teaching role, a pragmatic one, is the idea of authority based on knowledge (by a teacher and a scientist in their subject area) rather than the status[41].

Conclusion

Turning to the materials of the interviews with representatives of the academic profession and the university community in order to reconstruct the main value categories within which these professions and the community are conceptualized allows us to talk about several main motives and ideal images in this context. The university in its institutional aspect is most often understood as an infrastructure for scientific and educational activities, which is managed (or should be managed) in a special way. Hence follows the question of the university autonomy and the specifics of the university life in the context of rethinking the traditional model of the university that emerged in the 19th century and existed in one form or another until the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries. At the same time, the university is still, first of all, a community of professionals (established or just becoming) with their own ideas about the "ideal professor", the "ideal teacher", the "ideal student", etc. One of the main questions here remains to what extent the university should perform civic or educational functions, or serve only for the almost mechanical transfer of knowledge from generation to generation. Finally, all the considered plots are somehow interpreted in the context of the historical process in the horizon of at least the last Soviet generation. It means that comparisons between the Soviet and the post-Soviet ones are inevitable, and none of the compared periods is explicitly idealized or romanticized. The material we have analysed does not imply the identification of statistical patterns and the establishment of deep trends. However, it clearly shows the lack of unity in the ideas about the ideal university among the university people, revealing, perhaps, among the community members the only common feature, namely their self-reflection presupposes the problematization of classical ideas about the university and the formulation of the problem in the basic ones, and, as it seemed some time ago, transparent definitions.

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[40] Belyaeva N. Ibid.
[41] Levinson K. Interview. Authors' archive (2017).

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