

European Education: Phenomenon, Myth, or Project?

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The paper discusses issues of reforming the system of higher professional education in Russia. The authors state that the main goals of organizing the European zone of higher education were alien to the Russian educational tradition and were not implemented in Russia over the past two decades. Moreover, these efforts have led to the destruction of the unified educational space of the country, a decline in the quality and accessibility of education, and the loss of value-based worldviews. Analyzing the situation, the authors of the article reveal the underlying causes of failure in the fundamental incompatibility of the socio-cultural paradigms of European and Russian education. A comparative analysis of the activities of European and Russian universities formed the basis for the statement about the necessary and reasonable formation of a national education system capable of a productive dialogue with the Euro-American civilization. The authors speak in favor of the approach would meet the Russian national features and ensure the sustainable development of the Russian educational system.

Keywords: university idea, education paradigm, worldview, cultural code, comparative studies

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the study is determined by the current situation in the world, which is characterized by the tension of global and local conflicts of a political, economic, environmental, socio-psychological, and mental nature (Asmolov, 2018), complicated by the pandemic. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that the growth and multiplicity of these contradictions have no analogs in the history of humanity and threaten the very existence of the *homo sapiens* on its planet. Clarifying the causes of tension and the possibility of a non-violent solution is a problem that requires the most serious attention of the scientific community of Russia and Europe.

The current research and critical assessment of the state of education allow one to identify a whole layer of problems: from legislative gaps and financial fraud to issues of social stratification and the decline in the teacher's authority, the ideological immaturity of higher school graduates. As a rule, experts note the lack of qualified personnel, the meaninglessness of quality digitalization procedures, the incompatibility of theoretical knowledge obtained at the university, and the practical skills required by the employer. The

problems of a few provincial universities, a decrease in budget places, and the lack of relevant training programs for teachers of schools and universities are spoken of. In the early 2000s, the above problems were already identified as important, but they can be solved through additional funding, personnel “optimizing” policies, innovative techniques, and technical equipment. However, then it became clear (Klyachko & Mau, 2007). that the primary source of evolutionary changes should be a purposeful correction of the structure and content of educational programs, a radical ideological and personal orientation of its goals. It is noteworthy that the discussion of educational problems by the Russian scientific, pedagogical and philosophical community became a significant trend in media in the first decade of the 2000s, with the most influential being the opinions of economists. Articles on this topic are published in the magazines “Transport of the Russian Federation,” “Notes of the Kazan State Academy of Veterinary Medicine named after N. E. Bauman,” “Economic Revival of Russia,” “Moscow Economic Journal,” “Theory and Practice of Service: Economy, Social Sphere, Technologies,” “Power.” There are also a lot of specialized research and publications. The journals “Public Education,” “Educational Policy,” “News of the A. I. Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University,” “Higher Education in Russia,” “Science for Education Today,” and others are regularly published (Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, n.d.).

The publication’s analysis on the implementation of the “Bologna process” allowed one to see supporters and opponents of this movement. They do not deny the need for modernization. However, the former are guided by economic considerations and formal signs of “renewal,” rating indicators of university success, while the latter pay attention to the content side of education, which is destroyed due to haphazard optimization steps prescribed to all universities. In theory, these measures are not meaningless and find a justification in increasing student mobility, freedom of choice in the construction of individual educational routes, opportunities for self-realization, and other benefits. However, in practice, achieving these goals remains impossible due to some administrative and economic contradictions. Opponents of “bolognazation” at the very beginning of the process pointed out several pitfalls and future dangers, such as the destruction of fundamentality and consistency (Demidova & Rybkov, 2012; Zapesotsky, 2005), the loss of scientific schools, and such a unique achievement of the Soviet system as the universal availability and compulsory nature of free secondary and higher education. Certainly, the most significant concern is the lack of control over the content of educational programs, their fundamental inconsistency. A lot has been written about the goals and values of education. However, this condition of the adequate orientation of a person in society, the condition of preserving and reproducing culture, remains an empty declaration or is interpreted in the spirit of pluralism. The authors agree that low technical equipment, dubious quality of textbooks that won the tender, due to low cost or corruption frauds, problems of personnel “optimization” (Voronova, 2015), the process of formalization and bureaucratization of the educational process – all of these are obvious, but secondary consequences of ill-considered political decisions. However, the urgent problem of the relevant and high-quality renewal of the national education system is profound, mental, and axiological. Studying the goals and values of the Russian tradition in the context of the dialogue of European and Russian education proves the reasons for the failures of modern modernization. It is not provided with an understanding of its own purpose, no clear answer to the main question of the state and university, which is what kind of person do they want to “educate” and raise (Letyagin, 1999). The consumer, “office plankton,” sociopathic individuals, faceless persons of the post-modernist society or conscious citizen, the creative person responsible for the destiny of the Fatherland, for its past and future, for their family? The history of Russian culture and education attests to the strength of the educational tradition of caring about the “soul and spirit of fellow countrymen,” about the main goal of education of “true Sons of the Fatherland and useful citizens.” This tradition is one of the qualities of the “Russian idea,” and today, it is to be hoped that it is still alive in the mentality of Russia (Ignatiev, 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of the article is to consider the nature and results of the processes initiated by the Bologna Charter (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum, 1988), which unfolded in Russia under the name of modernization. It must be admitted that over the past 20 years, the idea of organizing a common European

higher education area has not been implemented, and Russian universities have been subjected to a destructive breakdown of curricula and scientific schools, the tyranny of “scientometric” criteria for evaluating the research quality (Pruzhinin, Arlamov, Azhimov & Dankova, 2018). The authors considered the questions of what went wrong and how, if at all, a productive dialogue between European and Russian universities is possible.

The authors believe that the conflict situation is based on mental contradictions. Their primary source is the type of education, the axiological charge of the worldview that determines the motivation, goals, and values of the individual, society, and the state. This thesis involves setting and solving three main tasks: to find out (1) the fundamental compatibility of European and Russian types of education, (2) the very possibility of organizing a common European educational space; (3) propose necessary and sufficient conditions for equal cooperation of educational systems on the Eurasian continent.

The entire research is conducted in historical, philosophical axiology to solve these problems. The conceptual framework is defined, which includes such terms as “type of education,” “image of the world,” “picture of the world,” “axiosphere of culture,” “personal values,” and “cultural code (Preobrazhenskaya, 2013). The definitions of the university of the medieval, new age, the 19th century, and the present day are given, with a brief ontological explanation of the change in the concept of the “Universum.”

A brief history of the development of university education in Russia with its European experience, which was interrupted with the formation of the Soviet state and Soviet higher education, is given. It was determined that the Russian type of education was influenced by the Christian culture: the heritage of the Byzantine spiritual practice, “the Word on the Law and the Grace” of Metropolitan Hilarion, anthropo-philosophic ideas of the Enlightenment, the theory of upbringing in 18th and 19th centuries - they all supported the values of the individual (dominant of their spiritual life) and, at the same time, the need to create a universal knowledge base (Valitskaya, 1983).

It was also established that the Soviet educational reforms, although anti-religious, radical, and oriented towards the training of professionals and specialists, were primarily aimed at the formation of a responsible citizen, a wholesome and determined individual, capable of altruism, heroism, meaningful work and creativity for the benefit of society in general.

As a result, the historical type of Russian education was determined, which includes both imaginative thinking, the integrity of the world picture, and moral self-reflection. It is significant that the relevant law *On Education in the Russian Federation* No. 273-F3 (Presidential Executive Office, 2012) only mentions “spiritual-moral values” as formal goals (Article 2), without in any way explaining this concept.

The comparison of the European and Russian types of mentality is carried out as a phenomenological study that shows the basic fundamental differences between the Romano-Germanic civilization and Russian culture. Recalling the historical dispute of Slavophiles and Westerners, one cannot fail to see the sad analogy with the events of “bolognazation” of the 21st century and the need to overcome the crisis, the roots of which are in the ideological failure of modern Russia.

RESULTS

Another question is where and when is the axiosphere of culture and the value world of the individual formed. The answer is quite definite: in the education field (Ignatiev & Letyagin, 2017). However, it must be understood that *education* is not only an institutional system controlled by the state but also the process of becoming an individual in the global information environment, with its necessary links to traditional and modern cultures of ethnicities, peoples, and countries. A contemporary educated person is the one who possesses a consistent and, if possible, a holistic *image of the world and themselves in it*, able to adequately *navigate* the socio-cultural situation, freely and responsibly, following their own capabilities and goals, choose the sphere of application of their powers (Valitskaya, 2021).

Since education is a social and human process that ensures the continuity and development of national culture, society, and the state, the type of personality are determined by the type of education that the individual has received, *the picture of the world* which guides him, describes a specific era and depends on the ethnonational, genetically inherited *cultural code* that defines the understanding of the world, purpose,

and motivation of action (Pruzhinin, 2019). It is possible to describe with sufficient certainty, for example, the image of the world of an Athenian citizen, a man of the European or Russian Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the New Age. Such a description - in the algorithms of the general, unique and singular world of universal, national and individual values - is possible as a reconstruction in the material of culture and art, texts of a philosophical, historical, memoir, artistic nature. Comparative analysis reveals similarities and differences between national types of education ideas about (1) space and time, (2) forces that control nature and human destiny, (3) good and evil, (4) power and right, (5) freedom and duty, (6) crime and punishment, called universal, national, and personal values, form the axiosphere of culture and are formed in the consciousness of a person in the procedures of education and control his fate.

The university phenomenon (lat. *universitat* - *sum*; *Universum* - *summa rerum* - the world as a whole) was born in European culture at the moment of its maturity as an integral synthesis of existing knowledge of the world, the realization of the need for self-preservation and the translation of a picture of the world, defining the essential characteristic of the historical era in its ethnonational identity (Ignatiev et al., 2017). It has proved to be a highly stable form of education and science, which, undergoing the necessary changes, has been preserved for more than five centuries, gradually expanding its regions of presence on all continents of the planet.

The idea of the knowledge *universum* and, consequently, the structure and content of university programs can be traced quite clearly in three scientific (and cultural) revolutions. The Medieval *Universum* of knowledge was built in three stages - from the lowest to the highest, from grammar and arithmetic to philosophy and theology; the *Universum* of Enlightenment - the space-time continuum of nature, comprehended in the vector of search work of the mind; the third stage of the epistemological *Universum*, experienced today - the “life world” of human, positivist “experience” in all its forms and socio-psychological practices (technologies).

Turning to the history of Europe and Russia, one would discover the continuity of educational exchange, which unfolds in the cultural axiosphere (Ermichev & Preobrazhenskaya, 2020). And Russia treats European universities with constant reverence, mythologizing the very fact of European education, sees a socio-cultural value in it, and strives, if not to copy, then certainly not to fall behind (Tsirulnikov, 2001).

The high authority of the European university was established in the 5th–8th century (The first was St. Petersburg University, part of the Academy of Sciences, 1726; Moscow, 1755; in 1916, there were 11 universities, in the USSR – 66), during the Enlightenment, when the young Russian Academy of Sciences actively invited European colleagues. The image of European education was mythologized and inspired by romanticism with its “Göttingen soul,” “domesticated” by Russian manor culture, (“valiant studiosuses” of K. Prutkov), “iron” 19th century, when “nature was not a temple, but a workshop,” cherished the image of a European-educated engineer, chemist, and physician Mythologization is actively promoted, on the one hand, by the rationality, practicality, mobility of Europeans, and on the other - by Russian openness, willingness to listen, hear, and accept.

Statistics show that before the First World War (winter semester 1913–1914), only in Switzerland there were 434 Russian students at the University of Zurich, 560 - in Bern, 709 - in Geneva, 29 - in Lausanne (not including the auditors). In France, Germany, England, Italy, and Portugal, Russian students filled the auditoriums. Thus, it is safe to say that there was a European higher education area in the first decade of the 20th century, which organically includes Russia.

The “Iron Curtain” interrupted the direct presence of Russians in the educational space of Europe, but the structure and educational practice of Russian universities preserved the European tradition; the myth of its exclusivity and superiority was more than alive. The idea of Russian higher school (as well as philosophy) being second-tier lives inextricably in Russian history, but it needs to be substantially corrected, clarifying the origins and peculiarities of the national educational tradition.

Models of Enlightenment, types of education both in the Western European tradition and Russia had a clear continuity with the perception of Christian truth. For the Western world, this perception was closely connected with rationality as the “natural light of reason” (as I. V. Kireevsky once noted). For the Eastern Christian tradition, which the “Russian world” inherited, it was interpreted through the artistic and

axiological world of Orthodox worship, architecture, spiritual images of iconography and homiletics. The symbolism of “the Words of Law and Grace” of Metropolitan Hilarion resonates through the centuries in the fundamentals of Russian culture, for which earthly history is the search for a spiritual path not measurable by categories of right or external well-being, and true knowledge comes through the depth of the heart’s knowledge.

The vision of truth as a task of earthly life orients Russian thought to affirm a figurative, symbolic vision that does not coincide with external formulas of rationality, and this model of internal knowledge becomes a driving force for the development of science and artistic creativity in Russia.

Figurative thinking determines the quality of Russian culture: Russian literature philosophes about human, history, the world, and God, and “poet in Russia - more than a poet.” One of the encyclopedically educated Russians, “our first university” (in the words of A. S. Pushkin), was M. V. Lomonosov. His fate can illustrate both the sensitivity of the Russian spirit to Western achievements of scientific knowledge and the potential that the Russian enlightenment tradition itself carried. In his autobiography, M. V. Lomonosov confessed: “We have much evidence that there was no such great darkness of ignorance in Russia as many external writers depict.”

The 18th century is an era of Enlightenment in Europe and Russia - the birth of the national theory of education, which accentuates anthropo-philosophic ideas that affirm a close relationship between spheres of knowledge and “abilities of the soul.” The ideas of “integral knowledge,” which in the 19th century were embodied in the works of Slavophiles, V. S. Solovyov and his followers, were partly expressed already in the philosophical studies of G. N. Teplov, who notes the need for systematic use of research tools where it is necessary to acquire “perfect knowledge” (Teplov, 1751).

Continuing the theme of “perfect knowledge,” - it is not only about the search for a scientific methodology that would meet different spectra of reality in Russia but also about the justification of the spiritual, axiological vector of knowledge of the world. Ya. P. Kozelsky emphasizes the importance of artistic and aesthetic perspectives for the formation of holistic knowledge (Kozelsky, 1768). N. I. Novikov, in turn, outlined the boundaries of a new education theory that will create conditions for the cultivation of “happy people and useful citizens” (Novikov, 1784).

The state education system in Russia was formed gradually, passing through a series of reforms of the tsarist period (Peter’s, Catherine’s, Alexander’s, Nicholas’, etc.), as well as the Soviet reforms of the 1920s and 30s, which determined the creation of a unique educational system. At the same time, one should not forget Russia’s positive experience of higher women’s education (Smolny Institute of Noble Maidens), the system of professional pedagogical education was born (Main Pedagogical Institute in St. Petersburg, 1804), and the unique project of the Pushkin Lyceum took place.

Analyzing the history of the development of Russian education, it is possible and necessary to identify those cultural constants that not only distinguish it from the European one but are the cornerstones in the formation of the mentality of the nation:

- Priority of figurative thinking over the analytical one (Ignatiev et al., 2017). and the integrity of the picture of the world;
- Recognition of knowledge as a value and openness to other cultures, arts, and sciences;
- Search for the meaning of life and moral self-reflection.

The Soviet education system mostly preserved and even strengthened the national features of the Russian type of education, adding to them its image of the world. The advantages of the Soviet system are undeniable: free “universal education,” which gave Russia universal literacy; the consistency and continuity of educational stages from kindergarten to university - a “social elevator,” provided with constitutional equality in the right to free education; the foundation of natural science knowledge at secondary and higher levels, which led to the success of the military-industrial complex and space exploration. Finally, special attention is paid to the education of collectivism, citizenship, and patriotism: for all the rigidity of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, it turned out to be the worldview dominant, which ensured the stability and integrity of the image of the world, really organized a “historically new community” - the multinational Soviet people, and ensured its victory in Second World War.

With the collapse of the USSR, in Russia, under different names, the processes of destruction of the Soviet system began: “perestroika, “ “reform, “ “modernization,” “bolognaization,” etc. In the absence of any clear idea of what should be done, what the goals and values of the national education are, an old *myth* about perfection, and the undoubted advantages of European education “woke up”: in 2003, Russia signed the Bologna Convention.

Coming to Europe, a post-Soviet tourist will undoubtedly go to famous universities. Coimbra, the Sorbonne, Cambridge - they have been here for seven centuries: the stone walls covered with ivy, the sunny splashes of fountains, the solemn silence of libraries, rows of ancient volumes in clean cabinets, calm, dignified faces of professors, businesslike students. This is a “*holy*” place of *pure* thought, which never existed in Russia. Is it possible to imagine that they will be upgraded, standardized, certified, or otherwise “shaken”? This was the case back in the 1980s when the Bologna Process changed the situation: see, for example, The Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, which deals with “standards for transnational education” and the direct orientation of educational programs to the labor market. The modern Sorbonne consists of more than two dozen departments scattered on the outskirts of Paris, working according to uniform programs. They set their own educational programs, offer students author’s courses on a voluntary basis; here, there is a strong tradition of self-governance, and comfortable conditions for life and work have been created. European universities value and protect their independence from officials; here, the state needs a university much more than a university within the state.

DISCUSSION

What are the goals of the Bologna Process, and how are they implemented in Russia? The Bologna Declaration states: “The viability and effectiveness of any civilization are determined by the attractiveness that its culture has for other countries. One must be sure that the European higher education system is gaining a worldwide level of attraction that corresponds to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions” (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum, 1988). The wording is on point, but it is about the Romano-Germanic civilization, and the Russian cultural and historical experience belongs to another type.

The goals of the Bologna process are well-known and deserve respect, but none of them is fully implemented in Russia: the availability, quality, and attractiveness of Russian universities leave much to be desired; there is also nothing to be said about the mobility of students and teachers as a norm of the learning process, as well as the free choice of students’ educational routes; educational services are expensive; the quality of higher education, according to numerous expert testimonies, has declined, since its fundamental nature and continuity have been destroyed; universities do not provide access to the actual labor market. Engineering and working specialties have disappeared (vocational schools have been eliminated), neither economics nor education or culture requires new bachelors or masters because they do not know practice. And who is the “employer” with a clear overproduction of psychologists, managers, and lawyers of all kinds? It is unlikely that government initiatives to create targeted projects for elite schools (Skolkovo, Sirius, etc.) or organizing competitions for leaders, managers, and the best in the profession can solve the problem.

To achieve the stated goal (including Russia in the European higher education space), one would need “modernization”: standardization, informatization, multilevel education, radical reconstruction of programs and curricula (modular structure, competence approach, credit system, alignment of quality indicators (ratings) (Leontieva et al., 2008). It is easy to see that all these technologies are destroying the traditional Russian education, fundamental character, consistency, continuity, and ideological integrity of higher and secondary education. “Scientometric” (Asmolov, 2020) criteria for assessing the quality of education and scientific creativity, alien to the nature of these humanitarian processes, for example, such as a certain (by whom and why?) number of English-language publications, notorious Hirsch index, “rating” universities and individual scientists – all these technologies, in fact, provide bureaucratic control and competitive advantages of Europeans (Bolotov, Motova, Navodnov & Ryzhakova, 2020).

Today’s world is on the threshold of a new educational paradigm, which presupposes such a dialogue of national systems when they try not to absorb each other, but rather form the “blooming complexity”

necessary for civilized development (Asmolov & Guseltseva, 2019). The task of the new school is to eliminate the spiritual and moral lag of modern humanity behind its scientific and technological progress, restore its sense of self-esteem and power over technology, and ensure the ability to navigate the socio-cultural circumstances of the modern world adequately.

CONCLUSION

Modernity is characterized by a contradiction between two trends: on the one hand, globalization initiated by scientific and technological progress and an information breakthrough, and on the other, anxiety for national cultural identity, which ensures the stability of the value bases of mutual understanding and planetary cooperation. Conflict resolution is in education, designed to ensure the ecology of consciousness and good orientation in the information chaos (Preobrazhenskaya & Shelonaev, 2014).

Education is a qualitative state of individual and social consciousness that corresponds to *the picture of the world and the person in it*, which is characteristic of the ethnonational type of culture at a particular historical stage of its development.

The idea of the universality of knowledge - the substantiation of the university as a cultural *phenomenon* – has passed three historical stages: The Universum of Divine Creation (Medieval); The Universum of Nature and Its Sciences (Enlightenment); The Conglomerate of Human Practices (modern epistemology of positivism). The condition for preserving civilization is a new educational paradigm, value orientation, and dialogue of national systems (Letyagin, 1999).

Russia recognizes European education as a cultural *myth* (always a model, but never a copy) (Stepin, 2017). treats it differently depending on cultural and historical circumstances: *negative* when it comes to contradictions between Orthodoxy and Catholicism (“Latin”); actively *present* in it and builds its own universities (from Enlightenment to the beginning of 20th century); “after a break,” in Soviet time, makes an attempt to participate in the Bologna *project*. This decision was unsuccessful for political, economic, socio-cultural, and mental reasons.

Equal cooperation between universities and educational systems in Europe and Russia is possible on the principles of *dialogue*, given that the national education system is built based on the values of national culture, the peculiarities of the mentality, the goals of state development, and the challenges of the time.

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