

## ADVANCING RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: HSE ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT CASE

Ruslan Seletskiy<sup>1\*</sup> and Anna Davidovich<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student at the Department of Sociology, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia, ruslan@sociologist.com

<sup>2</sup>Student at the Department of Sociology, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia, davidovichannas@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

### Abstract

This paper aims to make an attempt (1) to investigate the advancements in Russian higher education system that have occurred within two past decades and (2) to analyse the gained academic experience of National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) for its future integration at Russian “traditional” universities. Beginning from the review of latest changes of higher education system in Russia, authors concentrate on the role of Russian institutional context as well as juxtapose both Russian and foreign experiences of educating in the context of globalization century. Looking at the advantages and disadvantages of Soviet higher education legacy, distinguishing key divergences within higher education systems of modern Russia and Western countries, analysing the institutional development experience of the HSE, authors consider two institutionalist ways as the most promising for developing the majority of Russian higher education projects in upcoming years: (1) full higher education system assimilation and (2) segmented assimilation with its preservation of local institutional context. Conducting an analysis of Russian higher education development trends, authors focus on the incompleteness of transition process to Western higher education model.

**Keywords:** Russian universities, Russian higher education, higher education research, higher education development, Higher School of Economics study

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the end of the twentieth century Russia faced with rapid and dynamic process of globalization that affected most of its domains. Responding to these challenges, as basic evidence demonstrates, Russian Science has drastically declined from its world leading positions in second half of the twentieth century to tenth place in the early beginning of the 21st century. At the same time, institutional policy differs from country to country impacting scientific development in term of both education services and research. Efficiency of the higher education system depends on the degree to which the system of government institutions is capable of (1) setting up strategic goals and (2) finding urgent solutions. Both require high-educated people, whose knowledge potential is broader than one narrow field-specific discipline. Obviously, it is not sufficient to train specialists who will be able to put their knowledge into one field of science and technology. Moreover, one of the key requirements of higher education system in a progressive country is to undertake a continuous training of specialists in both applied development and fundamental science. Other requirements for

substantial improving higher education system and distributing knowledge are academic mobility and granting system. Absence of grants could make scientific work impossible due to the fact that research funding of state budgetary system is not involved in research funding.

Nowadays there is a clear lack of research projects of Russian higher education system focusing on its institutional and structural specifics. In this paper special attention is paid not just to meeting these requirements, but to the particular Higher School of Economics divergence from institutional arrangement and organizational patterns of both high-ranked Russian and Western universities.

## **2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **2.1. Historical Background of Russian Higher Education Reforms**

The higher education system within post-industrial society becomes a vital resource not just of social adaptation, but of economical development as well. The education, as several studies demonstrate, is strongly interrelated with other systems of society such as economy, culture and science (e.g., Kwiek, 2001; Zajda, 2007). Thus, the mechanisms of education system can not be viewed in isolation from other social domains as well as out of local specifics and global tendencies in education development.

On the one hand, sustaining availability of higher education to the masses requires substantial financial support or carrying out alternative sources of funding such as basing on a students' tuition fees or business sector investments (Senashenko & Tkach, 2012). In the 1990s Russian government undertaken a lot of attempts to replicate Western institutional mechanisms as well as to apply new education service designs within economic and political reforms. It involved decentralization, rapid privatization and restructuring which consequently affected not just the educational patterns of "Soviet-transit" universities, but an academic profession with its role in modern Russia as well. As several authors argue, the changes in Russian higher education system reflected politico-economic changes within globalization and were substantially brought from "above" governance (e.g., Kishkovsky, 2000; Panova, 2008). The market-driven reforms in Russian higher education resulted to several positive as well as negative outcomes. The former promoted greater autonomy, structural and functional flexibility, self-governance, which involved higher education institutions to competitive market of education. Nonetheless, it increased the inequality between sufficiently funded universities that were more focused on research activities and preliminary "traditional" higher education institutions. As Joseph Zajda (2007) argues, market-driven reforms as well as distinct disparity in resources allocation between universities not just respectively risen the gap between higher education institutions, but also built distinct and sharp hierarchy in Russian universities' rankings table.

On the other hand, these drastic changes created a new context where the market forces may allocate the financial resources to non-academic purposes and therefore decrease the role of academic domain. From this point of view, students may be forced to redefine them as "consumers of educational services" as well as change the role of higher education in their career from "gaining knowledge" to "investment for the future" (e.g., Tomusk, 1998; Lebedev, 2014). Moreover, some universities become fully commercialized, in which salaries and academic promotions are highly interrelated with its role and hierarchical position in the competitive market of higher education services. Notable is that economic inequality between universities as well as social inequality may play a role of mirroring cultural reproduction patterns that significantly affected higher education inequality in Western countries during the 1970-1980s (e.g., Smolentseva, 2003).

Considering institutionalist and structural specifics of modern Russia, this paper is aimed (1) to undertake an attempt for structural analysis of National Research University Higher School of Economics and (2) to retrospectively investigate the HSE academic development track, which is considered as transplant example of Russian higher education system evolution. As one of the first established Russian education organizations in 1990s, HSE provided sufficient amount of funding and grants for research activities. Notable is that Higher School of Economics focuses on the special research courses that are given not only by professors who give students main lectures, but by research staff members with plenty of research experience. Considering the lack of research projects in 1990s and trying to create opportunities for research activities, HSE made balance of academic staff load between teaching and scientific activities. Putting the academic mobility into practice, Higher School of Economics created the prosperous context with its attractive study and research programs for academics from other countries (e.g., Oleinik, 2012). The realignment of Russian higher education system toward two-level student training allowed foreign academics as well as international universities to successfully break into the Russian market of education and science. For example, annually around 35% of bachelor graduates of International College of Economics and Finance (HSE part) apply for their Masters and PHD's degrees to the leading foreign universities. On the one hand,

two-level education system on the case of ICEF HSE facilitated the international academic mobility for some of ambitious and talented bachelor graduates, that have obtained their preliminary degree in Russia (see also Forbes, 2011). On the other hand, the majority of bachelor graduates will continue their education by way of studying master's or PHD's degrees in Russia, while some will be, for instance, hired on field-related work at local departments of international corporations.

## 2.1. New Academic Inquiries and HSE Establishment

Preliminary established as "scratch project", changes in the operation of the National Research University Higher School of Economics tend to be significant. Notably, HSE founders lobbied for the set-up of Unified State Examination (EGE), which was preliminary designed with the usage of West European exam templates. The new system of admission contrasts with the previous practice inherited from USSR higher education system, whereby each higher education institution selected applicants on the basis of its own tests and setting its own admission requirements (e.g., Novakovskaya, 2013).

According to recent research, Unified State Exam has significantly increased the mobility of students among the various cities of the country as well as upturned the differentiation in terms of admissions (The International Bureau of education, 2010). "Nevertheless, the introduction of the Unified State Examination (EGE) has been a very important step in the Russian education system, encouraging universities to work more transparently and permitting the students' mobility to increase significantly since its introduction" (Denisova-Schmidt, 2014). Nowadays, the HSE admission department attracts applicants across Russia and post-Soviet countries with the highest EGE scores (Forbes, 2010).

As several authors argue (e.g., Denisova-Schmidt, Leontyeva, 2014), HSE institutional model divergence could be explained by (1) prevail role of power relationships (Oleinik, 2012), (2) Russian institutional context of 1990s (Kuzminov, Yudkevich, 2006). On the one hand, institutional transfers at HSE have a highly selective manner. Not all relevant formal rules constituting the North American or the Western European higher education institutional environment were transferred to HSE education and research activities. Furthermore, HSE by adapting foreign institutional environment attached a new meaning to these selectively imported rules. A new meaning may frequently depart from the original one. Nevertheless, catch-up modernization of higher education could generate two exclusive tendencies: (1) promoting the replication of liberal Western model of education (Oleinik, 2012), (2) focusing on authoritarianism as the unconstrained exercise of power within process of making institutional changes.

On the other hand, elements of the institutional environment that relate to power relationships should play a prior role within the process of designing and setting up policies of catch-up and intensive modernization (e.g., Androushchak, Yudkevich, 2012). From this point of view, a new institutionalist solution to the problems related to continuous institutional transfers, as it clearly shows in the case of HSE, suggests that institutional transfers have a chance at succeeding only if the formal rules, brought from foreign institutional environment, are compatible with the "previous" informal rules of organizing and performing institutional transplants (e.g., Oleinik, 2006; Guruz, 2011).

## 2.1. Possible Future Directions of Russian Higher Education Reforms

The recent changes in Russian higher education system, as authors suggest, could be considered as signals of prospective directions for its development in the future. One vector of development is called full education system assimilation, which means classical assimilation of foreign education system, with its values, programs, structures, goals, managerial experience, finance allocation, etc (e.g., Guruz, 2011). By fully assimilating the higher education system of foreign country, government alleviate all differences between local and foreign "just-assimilated" education systems. For example, Malaysian higher education system perfectly illustrates this phenomenon (Schwartzman, 2011). Other one is named as segmented assimilation of education system and is purposed not just to save the most effective specifics of local education system, but to gain new, more effective practices and managerial strategies for organizing educational process. An empirical example of segmented assimilation is Czech Republic. During the 1990s Czech government started the process of intensive assimilation of USA higher education experience with its study programs syllabus, and, in the meanwhile, substantially adapted curriculum language and assessment rules to existing local regulations (Chan, Brown, Ludlow, 2014).

## 3. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The accumulated evidence presented above clearly demonstrates that the performance of Russian higher education system is not just interrelated with globalization forces and educational space unification within

Bologna process (Oleinik, 2012), but substantially depends on the activation of both international and intensive academic collaboration as well as on the expansion of the market in innovative services (e.g., Efimova, 2014).

Despite the negative consequences of education reforms in 1990s, they had strong positive effects such as (1) development of international links with foreign universities, (2) experience exchange within international projects, (3) useful ties with leading scientific and business partners from the Western countries. Recognizing the explicit and undeniable success of a few Russian higher education projects in international education and research cooperation, it is vital to acknowledge that the goal of integrating both higher education and science into the global scientific world with its high standards for the present has not been achieved (see also Androushchak, Yudkevich, 2012).

While little of Russian universities succeeded in international scientific market, the most of Russian higher education institutions still continue to adapt Western methods to specifically Russian institutional context. Providing sufficient funding for scientific research as well as giving research opportunities for current graduates may not just bring Russian science into line with world standards of high-quality scientific domains, but substantially facilitate the establishment of strong interconnection between academic domain and business sector. The cooperation/merger between education traditions and institutional structures of both Russian and Western systems will inevitably include such elements as assimilation (Chan, Brown, Ludlow, 2014), contradiction (e.g., Oleinik, 2012) and competition (e.g., Kwiek, 2001; Efimova, 2014). The continuous development of Russian universities and other higher education institutions may be impacted by the external factors such as (1) international academic relationships with foreign scientific organizations (e.g., Efimova, 2014), (2) extent of inclusion of Russian higher education institutions in Bologna process (Senashenko, Tkach, 2012), (3) political relations between Russia and Western countries (Guruz, 2011), (4) rate of growth within Russian economy system (e.g., Zajda, 2007), (5) institutional development of Russia (Oleinik, 2012).

In fact, two of possible implications for facilitating Russian higher education system advancements are (1) to achieve the level of social and economical development that will sustain the status of higher education system of Russia in global education market, (2) to ensure strong national security of it's citizens which will facilitate the rapid development of higher education market in Russia.

Follow-up descriptive research on what direction of development the Russian higher education system follows within 5-year term will also yield useful insights. However, an important responsibility not just of both public and private universities, but of the state is to economically support both fundamental science and applied research (e.g., Oleinik, 2012; Androushchak, Yudkevich, 2012). As authors argue, the state should also be responsible of providing decent employment for current graduates of higher educational institutions. Employment opportunities could evoke the students' real initiative to study as well as to work for science and economic prosperity of their own country. Finally, the deep theoretical comparison within historical perspective of Russian higher education development will help to shed new light on (1) how assimilation of foreign education system impacts the educational practices at universities and (2) the role of pattern divergence within the continuous process of Russian higher education system advancement.

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