The Retrospect and Prospect of the Modern University Models: Russian Example

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Abstract

Many higher education theorists and practitioners agree that the university system is progressively becoming ineffective. The article explores the historical retrospect and prospect of the evolution of the modern university as a social institution, the successor of the medieval university and the university of the Modern Times. Humboldt's idea of a university outlined the design of the modern European university model and became the underlying concept for the Russian higher school, which, as compared to Europe, did not have any medieval predecessor-universities. As we can see, the Humboldtian model of the university comes into conflict with the present-day cultural environment and with the processes taking place in higher education: commercialization, massification, bureaucracy, etc. These processes, together with such trends in education as globalization, informatization, cultural space networking, changing youth socialization, etc. urge the revision of the conceptual framework of the university model. The three former university models: corporate (medieval); classical (Humboldtian); modern (pedagogical) are being replaced by new models of the university of the future: the "Open (hybrid) University", the Third Generation University, the Entrepreneurial University, the Research University, etc. Great expectations are pinned on new technologies to overcome the crisis of the modern university system. However, they should not be seen as the panacea – the viewpoint adopted by some university authorities who are fast in employing IT innovations, though they are nothing but a mere tool of no inherent value. As a tool, they have their own benefits that should not gloss over their limitations.

Keywords: Medieval university, classical university, modern university, J. H. Newman, W. Humboldt, online education, E-learning.

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Introduction

When addressing the problem of higher education in Russia, many scholars agree that it is losing its effectiveness. The signs of its crisis are as follows: "The declining quality of education due to its massification; the qualimetric approach to university performance as well as quality quantification, i.e. giving a numerical value to measurement of qualitative data; the ranking system splitting universities into elite and public schools; absence of a single, well-developed conceptual and value-based platform of university education; universities' growing dependence on government authorities, etc." (Bogdanov, 2015).

In the meantime, some scholars see the crisis of the higher education system as a Russian reality and look for a solution in its reorganization through the Bologna Process and the unified European system (though some scholars tend to blame the Bologna Process for the existing problems), while other scholars believe that we deal with the global decline of higher education.

The "idea of university" is questioned; new university patterns and models come into being. Since the late 20th – early 21st century concerns about the end of the "idea of the university" have been repeatedly voiced by education philosophers: The "collapse of the idea of the university" is announced by Jürgen Habermas (1994); the utopian nature of the idea is addressed by Robert Maynard Hutchins (1953); the overall crisis of higher education is discussed by Clark Kerr (1963/2001); the demise of higher education is brought up by Bill Readings (note the telling title of his book: *The University in Ruins* (1996)). Yet, not all scholars share the pessimistic views on university prospects. "The University is a ruined institution, but we do not have to dwell in its ruins. We can construct a new University" (Barnett, 2000, p. 2). Quite a few scholars, while admitting the overall critical situation in the modern higher education, think that the "idea of the university" should not be given up; instead, it should be adapted to meet the demand of the present-day postindustrial society, for example, within the models: the "Multiversity" (Clark Kerr's term), or the Third Generation University (J. Wissema (2009)), or the Entrepreneurial University (B. Clark (1998), G. Carrier (1996), C. Kerr (1963/2001)), or the Research University (Mohrman et al., 2018). Before we outline the prospects of the university, we should explore it in retrospect.

Historical Retrospect of University Models

The university as a full-fledged social institution first appeared in the Middle Ages or, more precisely, during the cultural and educational Renaissance in the 12th – 13th century. On the other hand, its forerunners can be traced back to ancient times (for centuries, education at medieval universities was based on the trivium and the quadrivium comprising liberal arts of classical antiquity) and can be found even in the Ancient Middle East where any knowledge extending beyond the commonplace and utilitarian limits was available only to the devotees. Knowledge and the process of its acquisition were elitist and even sacral, if they fell outside the scope of clerical requirements. Today, we tend to associate sacrality of knowledge with esoterism; however, if we

take modern scientific knowledge in all its complexity and look at social-humanitarian knowledge through the prism of its ambiguity, we can find sacrality inherent in it. Certain continuity of ancient European and Eastern education can be found in such a phenomenon as "schools of thought" run by a charismatic guru and promoting his ideas as well as in volunteer-run philosophical and scientific societies.

Medieval universities were founded, following the pattern of a trade shop or a craft guild where students and teachers joined into corporations to protect their academic interests; they had their own bylaws, symbols, rituals, statutes, traditions, etc. "…The name itself is significant, for *universitas* means a corporation. The universities were merely *universitates magistrorum et scolarium*, or corporations of masters and students…" (Le Goff, 1964/1992, p. 81).

The distinguishing feature of medieval universities – those that emerged spontaneously and those founded by a papal or royal charter – was the recognition of academic freedom, which stemmed from the university autonomy. It was especially important because universities were positioned as international, mobile, and autonomous (though still not having institutionalized significance) corporations of intellectuals, which had a universal academic curriculum. "Nevertheless, the learning embodied in the university very quickly acquired the character of power or order. The university was the *Studium*, alongside the *Sacerdotium* and the *Regnum*. Academics consequently sought to define themselves as an intellectual aristocracy, endowed with its own specific morality and code of values" (Le Goff, 1980, pp. 144-145).

The medieval model of the university was focused on retention and transmission of existing knowledge rather than on research and knowledge acquisition (Rybin, 2010, p. 175). This approach eventually led to the devaluation of university education, which, in its turn, gave rise to universities of a new type during the Reformation. "Furthermore, after the Reformation and the triumph of the principle of *cuius regio eius religio*, universities were divided between Catholic and Protestant denomination, and the religious division tended to accentuate the nationalization or, at least, the regionalization of the university" (Le Goff, 1980, p. 148).

The universality of knowledge, being a core principle of the medieval university, transformed into the principle of knowledge fundamentality (Yampolskaya, 2014, p. 55). The international nature of universality gave way to cultural and national disunity going hand in hand with the growing importance of a national language and identity in science (for example, Lomonosov's fight against German dominance in the Russian academic community (Boyarintsev, 2011)). Practical, national and public interests were put on the front burner, triggering "the process of governmentalization of the university community" (Kozlova, 2005, p. 200).

During the Modern Times, the idea of the university gained new attention in the discussion of the choice between universal and utilitarian knowledge, the autonomy of the university and its dependence on the state, church, etc. Works of Cardinal John Henry Newman and Wilhelm Humboldt following pedagogical concepts of J. G. Fichte, F. Schleiermacher, and J. H. Pestalozzi were most illustrative and influential in this respect. J. H. Newman saw the best asset of university

knowledge in its theoretical nature, its "purity" and freedom from "basest" pragmatism. He referred to such knowledge as liberal, "because that alone is liberal knowledge, which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be *informed* (as it is called) by any end, or absorbed into any art, in order dully to present itself to our contemplations" (Newman, 1858/1999, p. 99).

The reform of the education system by Wilhelm von Humboldt who, unlike many philosophers and sociologists (K. Jaspers, M. Weber, E. Durkheim, J. Ortega y Gasset, J. Derrida), was not only a theorist but also a practitioner, strongly influenced the conceptual design of the new European university, most principles of which could be of value even today: "Education of an autonomous individual capable of self-determination; development of ability to think independently and spontaneously; curriculum syncretism and universality; special and largely parity relationships between the government and university administrations; combination of research and teaching" (Bogdanov, 2015).

Humboldt's brainchild – the University of Berlin – was founded in 1810 jointly with the Prussian Academy of Sciences and served as the model for reshaping not only all the other universities in Germany but also universities in other countries, first and foremost, in Russia. Russian universities are much younger than European universities (the first Russian university – Moscow State University was founded in 1755 by a decree of the Empress Elizaveta Petrovna); however, they also had to fight off (quite successfully even in imperial Russia) the government's attempts to limit their autonomy.

Despite some differences between the university models offered by Newman and Humboldt, they agree on the main message: The university must be granted institutionally guaranteed freedom from being used as a tool for meeting utilitarian and immediate needs of society and the state, "to the detriment of research and education" (Strogetskaya, 2009, p. 70).

Yet, the idealized visions of reformers of the 19th century regarding the mission and the purpose of the university did not protect the actual practice against the dictates of the time. During the Modern Times, the university was steadily and blatantly turning into a factory for producing workers to meet the needs of the growing industry and trade. Theoretical knowledge was valued by its application for practical purposes. Positivism came to the fore with its passion to identify truth with usefulness and to value truth only for its practical utility. The trend was picking up speed to reach the peak in the 20th century when technical universities started dominating the higher education landscape.

On the other hand, in M. Foucault's opinion, other social institutions – schools, prisons, families, etc. resemble factories. It means centralization, unification, standardization, and bureaucracy – the characteristics that are reinforced at the modern university instead of being eliminated. It also means strict regulation of nearly all aspects of university life, which may adversely affect the exploratory spirit that often needs an adventurous streak and freedom.

Massification and Commercialization of the Present-Day Higher Education

Higher education has become mass-scale, following the example of secondary education. The trend towards massification was facilitated by the increasing institutionalization of higher education in the 20th century, which, as most of the scholars think, has aggravated the situation in higher education. Today, Russian universities accept up to 80% of school graduates. Yet, it is not the loss of elitism that devalues the system of higher education. In France, for example, the number of applicants equals the number of school graduates. The weeding-out process comes into action later, when they start studying at university. On the other hand, France did experience the consequences of higher education massification in 1968. In Russia, after the fee capitation system had been adopted, the weeding-out process at universities came to a standstill. Students have to try hard to part with their beloved university. The government finds it increasingly difficult to finance mass-scale higher education, which is subsequently becoming more commercialized. It brings forth a new model of the university, which is no longer a factory of the Modern Times (though still retaining some of its features), but a commercial institution providing "educational services" and having the respective infrastructure: marketing and advertising of the above services, public relations and promotions when every effort is made to enhance the stature (visibility) of a university. "…The greater part of public discourse about universities at present reduces to the following dispiriting proposition: universities need to justify getting more money and the way to do this is by showing that they help to make more money" (Collini, 2012).

The mass-scale university is characterized by pedagogization of higher education: University professors have to give priority to teaching over research, as the higher education system, as stated by R. M. Hutchins in the middle of the last century, is shifting the focus from education to tutelage. "Studying at universities and colleges ranges from "acquisition of knowledge" to "prevention of unemployment", being an artificial delaying of "stepping into the real world". The decision of young people to study at universities is lacking (…) motivation (university years mean essentially an age and culture-specific "pre-adult" lifestyle, a social opportunity to live another life – enjoying student hangouts and having hardly any responsibilities and duties)" (Sogomonov, 2002, p. 103).

Massification of higher education turns the teacher into a "talking head". The teacher does not disappear from the university environment; the teacher acts as a facilitator and tutor (advisor). "Lately, too many votes have been supporting the idea to move the teacher to the fringes of the educational process or even replace the teacher with advanced technologies, which give priority attention to software and hardware" (Kislov, 2017, p. 11). "…The role of teachers should be reduced from a "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side", and (…) such a transformation takes place naturally in online settings" (Guri-Rosenblit, 2018, p. 93).

The teacher "who used to be the creator and interpreter of knowledge is turning into a mere retransmitter of knowledge" (Bagirova, 2016, p. 25), while students' learning activity, which used to be productive (constructive), is gradually becoming reproductive. Medieval education is coming back.

Information and communications technology (ICT) has been adopted and integrated into education to overcome the crisis of the present-day university. "Currently, the introduction of e-learning and distance learning technologies is no longer debatable, especially with the release of the Federal Law 273 on Education in the Russian Federation" (Karpenko et al., 2019, p. 88).

Online Education: Pros and Cons

In the education sector, the possibilities offered by ICT are seen as high-potential and sought by authorities of academic institutions (from school to university) as well as by the general public. Undoubtedly, ICT offers once-unthinkable advantages, which, with all love of "traditional teaching techniques", should not be neglected. First of all, it helps implement the concept of open education providing lifelong learning opportunities, flexible schedules and loads. However, the above advantages come with limitations, which are usually downplayed.

The main advantage is mobility, instant transmission of a message to any number of addressees, over all distances and in any format – text, video, or audio (through multimediality). It is very important for physically challenged people as well as for people living in remote communities. On the other hand, we tend to smooth over the problem: Instead of developing the environment accessible to the above people, we hook up their computers to the available educational resources, while neglecting the fact that education implies not only information but also direct communication. Otherwise, disabled students have to turn into the hikikomori shutting themselves off from society and full-featured socialization. The illusion of loneliness, abandonment, and rejection can develop not only in disabled but also in physically healthy students: Online contacts are good when they complement real communication, rather than substitute it. Even telepresence is nothing but imitation and illusion. The aforesaid can bring forth problems regarding the sense of identity and affiliation with the alma mater and student community. The university will be perceived as a provider of educational services and nothing else. It can be of little importance for those who opt for online education (first of all, distance learning) to receive further education or to acquire knowledge and skills required in the life and career. However, other university students and staff may not want to see their university turn into an institution deprived of identity. Logos, slogans, anthems, and dress codes do not provide "corporate spirit".

The second important advantage of online education (especially for working people and for work-study students) is an opportunity of time management, which, in its turn, entails a problem of self-organization. While freelancers and other remote workers are motivated by the need to earn "daily bread", the need to study has little to do with that "bread" and lacks strong motivation. Therefore, it is important to have well-developed feedback and the teacher's control of the learning process. The objective is achieved with the help of a learning management system (LMS). In Russia, Moodle is the main Internet-based learning management system.

Another advantage is diversity, abundance, and availability of information on the Internet. However, the capabilities of the Internet are sometimes clearly exaggerated. "Previously, the well-known phrase stated: "Who owns the information, he owns the world." Today, it has changed: "Who

is the first to find the required information, he owns the world." You don't need to memorize anything. Just press the button, go on the Internet and you will know everything," (Granina, 2015) Vladimir Filippov, the former RF Minister of Education, said in his interview. "The Internet enables access to boundless information of any nature, but there is an immense difference between imparting information versus constructing knowledge. The traditional role of educational establishments at all levels, from kindergarten up to university, has been to assist their students to construct knowledge through guidance, tutoring, and personal attention, and not merely to impart information. Children could have studied at home from encyclopedias and books, at the pre-digital era, instead of going to school, if the main purpose of education was to acquire pieces of information" (Guri-Rosenblit, 2018, p. 94).

Before any search, you should know *what* exactly you are going to look for and, more importantly, you should understand, be able to analyze and use what you are going to find. After you find information on the Internet, you should handle it. Types of handling (and acquisition) differ. Didacticians talk about several levels, in ascending order: 1) reproductive; 2) comprehension; 3) application; 4) analytical; 5) creative and evaluative (Gavrilova, 2006).

The common assumption is that fact-based, reference or illustrative material does not need being handled at upper levels; reading it will be sufficient. Memory and intellect should not be wasted when dealing with such material. The latter was well demonstrated by Einstein when he was not able to answer the questions prepared by Edison for an applicant for the position of his assistant. However, sometimes it looks like that reformers of the higher education system think that knowledge is mostly fact-based and, as such, does not require upper levels of acquisition. In addition, reliance on the Internet atrophies students' ability and willingness to handle the found information in a critical manner (online information is not free of flaws, inconsistency, and mistakes), let alone any analytical or creative approach. Dependence on the Internet becomes especially obvious when students are given a mind-numbing task, which has no ready solutions on the Internet (contrary to the false assumption that one can find anything on the Internet, "just name it"). Talks about the all-encompassing Internet and information availability should be taken with a pinch of salt. If new materials or books were published not later than 5 years ago, not to mention video-materials, they become available mostly on a paying basis (and rightfully so: The copyright is still effective); as compared to the allegedly 100-percent accessible Internet, libraries are much more liberal in this respect.

However, this fact does not undermine the significance of the Internet; rather, it emphasizes the importance of creating a customized content meeting the needs of the specific educational community. Visual and dynamic presentation of information in a video format is easily absorbed and retained by present-day students having the so-called "clip thinking and perception". Online communication is efficient in self-tuition activities: in discussions (forums, chat sessions), in the portfolio method (creating a collection of works representing students' performance), in group projects, though with some reservations (in "networked collaborative learning" (NCL) or "E-learning 2.0"), and in case studies). Such methods as business games, role play, and brainstorm need

classroom and direct participation. On the other hand, multimedia technologies creating a simulated reality are much more efficient than physical mockups, let alone traditional training devices, in training skills of operation in dangerous and unfamiliar situations.

Should we keep contrasting online and offline education? After all, they are merely forms of education; their content is much more important. They should be used *integrally* rather than *alternatively*.

Conclusion

Present-day education philosophers assume that innovative technologies can change the profile of social institutions, including universities; they will make them more flexible and better prepared for continuous transformations resulting from the increasingly rapid pace of life of postindustrial society. However, present-day Russian education clearly demonstrates quite an opposite trend: Innovative technologies are primarily used for the preservation of the traditional and considerably outdated model of the university of the Industrial Wave. Although the new institutional and network university model, which will fundamentally expand academic freedoms, has been proclaimed, it is being planted in the old ground. Has there ever been a time when the university could enjoy full autonomy? "In the Middle Ages, education was censored by the church; in the Modern Times, it was controlled by the state. The contemporary university is firmly integrated into the market-oriented social system" (Dmitrishin, 2013, p. 16).

The fundamental upgrading of the education system, which does not go hand in hand with creating new jobs for graduates, competitive labor remuneration and improving quality of life, will result in a "brain drain".

It is not enough to introduce and adopt innovative technologies and education methods, it is not enough to upgrade the education system; much more fundamental changes are required – in the life as such or in the approach to it.

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