STATUS OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN RUSSIA: SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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The paper considers the relevance of student government in the modern Russian society. The definition of "student government" category has been given and the levels of government in higher education institution have been identified. The authors describe features of student government in modern society, and its dominant model. Based on the results of empirical sociological research, they show the opportunities for students to influence different spheres of university life, outlining the conditions and possibilities of student government from the students' perspective. The paper considers the scope and degree of students' participation in various forms of student government, describes motives of participation and non-participation of students in self-governance, personal factors affecting the degree of students' participation, and factors constraining the development of student self-government. New trends in this process have been identified.

Keywords: higher education, student government, model of management

INTRODUCTION

Student government is defined as the result of independent association of students for the purpose of implementation of their own interests. Among its features are: independent goal-setting; discretionary decision-making; participation of student groups in management decision making; independence in the management of the students' own group.

Youth is a social group which is deemed to play a key role in the future development of the society, based on its social capital and potential (Gorshkov and Sheregi, 2010). The Russian youth is being developed in the conditions of changing values, technology and life meanings (Pilkington, 1994).

Among young people, a special group are those who go into higher education, representing the most mobile and active part of the youth. They are going to be the bearer of social change and progressive society development (Tishkova et al., 2014). It is this group of young people - students as the main representatives of the future innovation and information society – that the premium is placed on by political power and economic actors (Konstantinovskii *et al.,* 2014). Today a great importance is attributed to the status characteristics of students, their culture, values of life, awareness, lifestyle choices, moral consciousness, national consciousness, free time structure, social feeling, and especially the participation in public and

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political life, where the major role is played by their attitude to student government (Stegniy and Kurbatov, 2009). In this context, the purpose of this article is to identify new phenomena in student government in the modern higher education institution. Especially because in the last decade, many universities have undergone significant reorganization: there are federal and national research universities, some of universities have been fused. Student government is significant both for the students, as it facilitates their socialization, and for university administration using it for organizational and image purposes. At the same time, there are not so many sociological studies revealing the features of the student government.

BACKGROUND

Modern society, in contrast to the societies of the past, is focused on youth, as the knowledge possessed by the older generation becomes outdated in the post-industrial society (Mead, 1970; Rosenmayr, 1971). At the same time, the student revolutions in Western Europe and the United States have shown that such values as freedom of choice, independence and self-determination are meaningful for today's young people (Weinberg and Walker, 1969; Lipset, 1969).

As far as in the 1960's, the USSR political authorities began to pay attention to the need to expand the student government; and from the period of the mid-1980's we have observed its democratization in higher education. Student government gradually acquires a certain power and legally regulated freedom (Belotserkovsky, 1992). In a university team, the student government operates in two social groups: in the academic staff group having its essential features, and in the student group. This form of student government in higher education institutions is considered as part of the educational process, combined with democratic management methods, the result of independent association of students for implementing their interests (Stegniy, 2015b; Johnson and Deem, 2003; Andrunik, 2008).

The main characteristics of the student government include independent goal-setting; discretionary decision-making; participation of student groups in management decision making; independence in the management of the students' own group. This is an exemplary model of student government (Menon, 2003; Khrulkova, 2009).

Student government does not mean total independence of students from the management of the educational institution. It implies interaction, partnerships with faculty and university administration. Typically, it involves: a) representation of the students' interests before the faculty and the university administration; b) social activities, the organization of extra-curricular activities; provision of information concerning the student life (Stegniy, 2015a). The result of the student government should be the creation of conditions for self-realization, meeting the person's cultural, professional and social needs.

Under modern conditions, student government is functioning in the absence of the university youth organizations that existed during the Soviet period. Therefore, it is not by accident that it is understood by today's students as another bureaucratic system and is negatively described using the concept of "permissiveness", "anarchy", "discretionary powers", etc. (Popov, 2010).

However, the student government at modern university acquires new content (Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999; Antipyev 2015). The social composition of student government participants of is being fixed (Lazukova, 2015). There is a search for not only new content, but also new forms of student government (Dermer *et al.,* 2015). In recent years, such a form of student government as volunteering has gotten widespread among students (Pevnaia, 2012).

In general, social science has not stood still in the study of problems of the student government, but at the same time, some questions about it remain open, such as: its content, functions, forms, new phenomena at different universities, especially at national research universities, the students' attitudes toward it and its effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article analyzes and uses the results of sociological research conducted in 2014 and 2015. The first study, "The professor in the university management system", was held at Perm National Research Polytechnic University in all nine schools and in one branch. Sample frame consisted of 600 people: 50% of men and 50% of women aged 25 to 70; by post: deans, deans deputies, heads of departments, professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, assistants, chiefs of educational and methodical work; work experience of respondents was from 1 to 40 years; 60% of respondents had a scientific degree and 40% had no scientific degree.

The second study titled "Student government at the National Research University" was conducted in 2015 and was aimed already at the students. Students of both technical and humanities schools were interviewed. 18 profiles were rejected. The sample was random, significant characteristics were: course, gender, type of educational program, student performance, living in a hostel, rented or own housing, and level of personal income. Questionnaire was made up on the basis of the need to fully reveal insights into the problem (Tiryakian, 1958; Schaeffer and Presser, 2003; Yadov, 1998).

The sample included 247 technical school students, and 229 humanities school students. Of these respondents, 175 persons lived in the hostel, and the level of personal income of 160 persons was less than 5,000 rubles per month. The age characteristic was not considered principal due to the age uniformity of students.

When interpreting changes in student government, the emphasis was laid on the analysis of the variables related to the young people's involvement in the

management process, social and political life. We focused not just on student participation in management, but rather on their motivation concerning their participation or non-participation in the activity, as well as on their future plans in relation to it.

RESULTS

Student government can be understood in different ways by students and university administration. Even within the student environment, the attitude to participation in student government and its influence on the processes taking place at the university is not uniform.

Among the surveyed students every second believes that their opinion can influence various aspects of university life. However, the degree of this influence was evaluated by 4% of respondents as significant, and by 41% as insignificant. But nevertheless, it is still a fairly high degree of consideration of the opinion of students regarding the university life, despite the fact that 55% of respondents said that their opinion did not influence the collective life.

As per the students' opinion, their position may influence the university life to the following extent: leisure activities – 33%; learning process – 32%; participation in sport - 31%; participation in amateur performances – 95%; students' living conditions – 24%; participation in decision-making concerning the university life – 12%. So, the students mentioned not one, but several areas of the university life, which they could influence. This shows their systematic approach to the understanding of the problem-solving concerning the collective life of higher education institution. In this process, they see their place, especially in such aspects of university life as: a) cultural and social; b) learning process; c) adoption of strategic decisions relating to the university life. Therefore, the degree of influencing different areas of the university life is naturally differentiated. The students' opinion is mostly taken into account when dealing with cultural and social issues and much less in the educational process and the adoption of important decisions concerning the university life. In general, the role of the faculty in decision-making in higher education institution has weakened; the students' powers are even smaller.

In this context, the students come from the status of higher education institutions that play different roles in their lives and each performs its mission. Students believe that the maximum and minimum impacts on the intra-university life are produced by the following social institutions (the distribution of responses is shown in %).

Since each respondent has mentioned several sources, the sum is greater than 100%.

Maximum impact on the university life is naturally produced by the rector's office with its management structures; faculty, by virtue of its status in the team. Minimum impact on the university life is produced by students, due to their status, but the most important thing is that this impact is indeed made by students, which

TABLE 1: DEGREE OF INFLUENCE OF INTRA-UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONS.

University institutions	% of respondents	
	Maximum influence	Minimum influence
Administration and other social management structures	60.5	11.8
Local faculty management structures	49.8	14.8
Faculty	28.1	18.7
Students and student government structures	22.7	42.6

they estimate by both maximum and minimum scales. It is possible and necessary to compare their influence on intra-university life with other social institutions, if only to determine the fact of such an influence.

If the students feel that they can influence the intra-university life, then they are already thinking of creating their governments for the purpose of organized management. Therefore, it is not by coincidence that 23% of respondents believe that the student government bodies may influence the daily lives of the students in their higher education institution. The truth is 50% of them believe that it is real and 33% think that it is possible, but hardly feasible. Students who are skeptical about the impact of students on the university life make 17%, but at the same time their opinions are also differentiated within this parameter: only 3% believe that it is not possible in higher education institution, and 14% of students have also a lot of doubts about it, but admit it to be possible.

Concerning the possibility of the development of student government, students believe that it is possible under the following conditions (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: CONDITIONS FOR THE REAL STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.

Conditions	% of respondents
Students' interest	74.2
Permission given by the rector's office	47.7
Real students' representation in the university administration and their right to vote when making certain decisions concerning the university life	32.6
Support by majority of students	28.2
Ability of student government bodies to afford the implementation of their projects	24.6
Support by reputed professors	13.2

Since each respondent has mentioned several sources, the sum is greater than 100%.

Students have mentioned not one condition, but a whole system of conditions in which the real student government becomes possible. Among these prerequisites, the priority is given to the students' interest, readiness and support of the student

government. This was pointed out by 3/4 to 1/4 of respondents. In second place is the permission given by the rector and deans. This was indicated by 1/2 of respondents. In third place is a real students' representation in the university administration. 1/3 of respondents drew attention to the presence of such a possibility; in fourth place – this was pointed out by 1/4 of respondents – is the availability of funds for the implementation of the students' projects and programs. The support of reputed professors was put by the students in fifth place. Only 1/10 of them mentioned it. Of course, the student government in higher education institution does not appear by accident, and its development and functioning depend not only on the above mentioned but also on a number of other factors (Lazukova, 2015; Razinskii, 2015).

Student government should be based on the legislative framework, certain regulations, being the basis of the university life. In this regard, students showed a certain level of awareness and knowledge of major regulators of student life (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF NORMATIVE AND OTHER REGULATORS
OF THE UNIVERSITY LIFE

Activity regulators	% of respondents	
	Yes	No
University Charter	22.7	61.1
Collective Agreement	12.2	86.3
Rights and obligations of students	69.1	29.0
Rights and obligations of professors	33.4	62.9
Work of the student government bodies	36.1	62.6
University extracurricular activity bodies	21.6	76.7

Since each respondent has mentioned several sources, the sum is greater than 100%.

The students surveyed showed high level of awareness only concerning their rights and responsibilities. This was mentioned by 3/4 among the respondents. 1/3 of them said that they were aware of student government and the rights and duties of professors. Other regulatory documents are familiar to 1/5 of respondents. As can be seen from Table 2, almost 3/4 of students do not have information about the University Charter, Collective Agreement, university authorities, and extracurricular work of the student government, the rights and duties of professors. There is an evident correlation between the level of students' awareness of a problem and their activity in a particular area: high level of awareness, as a rule, leads to a higher activity and vice versa. This is especially true for the university team, the interaction of professors and students (Belova and Goryachev, 2011).

Despite the low level of students' knowledge of regulations, 75% of respondents believe that the activity of student government is objectively necessary, and only

11% disapproved it. In addition, 70% of respondents are aware of the existence of the university student government, and only 18% do not know about it.

Among student government bodies the following were mentioned.

TABLE 4: STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT BODIES AT THE UNIVERSITY.

Student government bodies	% of respondents
Student Board	86.8
Student monitors	43.7
Student labor union organization	29.2
Student team headquarters	12.0
Student union	5.7

Since each respondent has mentioned several sources, the sum is greater than 100%.

Therefore, there is not only one student government body operating in today's higher education institution, but a system of such bodies, and the higher education institutions are involved in their organization and development (Stegniy and Puchkov, 2013). A number of universities have accumulated some experience in the development of student government (Belova and Goryachev, 2011).

Noting a certain awareness of students of the formation of student government, its forms (approximately 90% of respondents), nevertheless, only a little more than 1/4 of respondents are involved or would like to participate in this process, while 70% do not participate and do not want to participate. At the same time only 10% of respondents declare about their active participation in some form of student government, more than 1/3 of them are ready to be outside observers and 55% of respondents do not participate anywhere.

In this connection, the question is: what are the causes of non-participation of students in this area of university life? According to students, they are as follows:

TABLE 5: CAUSES OF NON-PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Causes	% of respondents
Passivity of students	82.8
Lack of skills for participation in the university management	25.8
Dominance of authoritative and conservative tendencies in administrative structures	15.3
Unwillingness of university management structures to share their powers with students	14.5
Lack of technology and shortage of personnel for the implementation of student government	12.4
Prevalence of paternalistic and dependency attitudes among students	9.7

Since each respondent has mentioned several sources, the sum is greater than 100%.

This group of factors is related to the state of the student government itself, willingness of students to participate in this activity, their understanding of its place and role in the process of preparation of the expert. Another group of factors is related to the control system at the university, the Ministry of Education and Science, the student's future workplace. A special group of factors affecting the student government consists of social conditioning of participation and non-participation of students in the university life.

Speaking of the role of personal factors, depending on the year of study, there is a following tendency: in the first year the students become involved in the student government. They adapt most quickly to participation in sports, cultural and media life. The second and third years of study are the peak of their participation in the student government: they are the major members of different elective bodies of student government. In the fourth year, there is a decline of participation in student government, as the students are preparing for final exams, so in the second semester of the 4th year their participation in this activity comes to an end. There are almost no masters participating in this activity.

As to the field of study, there are no fundamental differences between students of technical school and students of humanities school, but the latter are still more involved in student government. This trend is especially evident among undergraduate students of management, economics, sociology, state and municipal government.

As to the sex, the girls take the most active part in student government, although the boys are also involved.

In terms of academic performance, the most active group consists of those who get "Good" and "Good"-"Excellent" grades. There is no significant difference between those who get "Excellent" and "Satisfactory"-"Good" grades.

In terms of social origin, the most active students are representatives of intelligentsia, students coming from families of employees and workers are somewhat inferior to them. Students being peasants by origin are inferior to the above groups in the 1st and 2nd years of study; in the 3rd year they catch up, and in the 4th year they often overtake and pull away.

CONCLUSION

The study has made it possible to consider in details the functioning of the student government in higher education institution. Based on the data analysis, it should be noted that the majority of students – 3/4 of respondents – have shown good awareness of the student government in the modern university, whereas only 1/10 of them are actually involved. There is a contradiction between the level of students' awareness of self-governance and the active participation in it. A passive attitude of students has been determined.

The students understand that they can influence the university life through student government, and while there is yet time, this position should be strengthened and implemented into the practice of the university. The administration of the university has a prerogative power.

Student government has not yet become part of the democratization of student life and part of the educational process in conjunction with democratic governance methods. On the one hand, this is due to a weak real influence of students on the administrative process in higher education institution. On the other hand, today's youth has its own characteristics, including student government in higher education institution, associated primarily with the peculiarities of their social orientations, attitudes and culture.

The main vector of development of student government should be large-scale involvement. As for its content, the pride of place should be given to a competence approach. When it is implemented, an engineer, for example, should be prepared for the following activities: production, technical, organizational and management, design and engineering. This new content must give impetus to a formation of new types of student government.

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