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The Socialization of Young People and the Prospects of the Development of Higher Education

Research on the values of Russian youth attending higher education institutions suggests that the trend toward a more individualistic and personal-success orientations is linked to increasingly antisocial and amoral attitudes.

The system of education exerts a substantial, positive influence on all social processes in society, and that includes upbringing. Owing to a number of specific causes, however (in particular, inadequate material, technical, and organizational support), the system has not performed that function very well for about ten years. Moreover, various sociological surveys have made it possible to discern other factors that present obstacles to the revival of the systemic character of upbringing in educational institutions.

Because of the influence of current processes, and owing to the

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virtual absence of a state ideology, people's political, ideological, moral guidelines, perceptions, and values are changing in contradictory ways in different social groups and regions.

The crisis situation in Russia has had an especially painful impact on the fate of the rising generation. The most active period of the socialization of today's younger generation is characterized by difficult conditions of economic instability. Traditions that seemed to be unshakeable are breaking down, and the social structure, as well as people's views, conceptions of life goals, and ways to achieve those goals are changing. As a result, there are dangerous deformations in the development of society.

The survey and its results

We carried out sociological surveys in 2005–6 and 2008–9 in the territory of Iaroslavl oblast. The surveys covered 1,258 students in four institutions of higher learning: Iaroslavl K.D. Ushinskii State Pedagogical University (ISPU), Moscow State Academy of Water Transportation, Rybinsk branch (MSAWT), Rybinsk P.A. Solov'ev State Academy of Aviation Technology (RSAAT), and the Volga–Viatka Academy of State Service, Rybinsk branch (VVASS).

Questionnaires were used to conduct the surveys among the following students:

—those who went on academic leave in the 2005–6, 2006–7, 2007–8, and 2008–9 academic years ($N = 61$);

—those expelled due to uncompleted academic work in the 2005–6, 2006–7, 2007–8, and 2008–9 academic years ($N = 304$);

—those expelled for violating the institution's laws in the 2005–6, 2006–7, 2007–8, and 2008–9 academic years ($N = 97$);

—those who did not have any incompletes on examinations and tests in the 2005–6, 2006–7, 2007–8, and 2008–9 academic years ($N = 796$).

We also carried out a content analysis of official documents ordering expulsions and criminal proceedings, materials on the decision not to institute criminal proceedings, and protocols on the institution of administrative proceedings.¹

A series of focus groups was organized. In preparation, in-depth interviews were conducted with instructors ($N = 53$) and specialists in the sphere of youth policy ($N = 14$).

We agree with E. Durkheim, who believes that “the system of education is the instrument of socialization that takes over the supervision of what has already begun in the family, for the purpose of preparing new members to enter society. The role of education used to be the maintenance of public order and control” [1].

We are witnessing a considerable shift in the value orientations of the rising generation. For example, the surveys have found serious changes in life orientations and a deformation of social values and perceptions among a substantial number of students in the higher educational institutions of Iaroslavl. The values of personal consumption are growing in importance. Personal financial well-being is becoming the chief factor that determines respondents’ behavior, and this inevitably leads to the destruction of the customary moral human relations, in particular an active civic stance. The relation of consumption is turning into their way of thinking and social behavior.

In the student community the sociological surveys found the dynamic of their life values, oriented toward consumption as the sole purpose in life, as shown in Table 1.

The increase is basically taking place on the basis of the activation of the consumerist moods among students in higher educational institutions enrolled on a tuition basis in the city of Rybinsk; and they are characterized by a striving to set themselves apart, to be different from the others, to show that they belong to the elite. From our analysis of the way of life of a substantial percentage of expelled students it is clear that complex sociocultural needs are becoming eroded (31 percent). Many are just living for the moment: they do not foster their physical development and health (or lack the opportunity to do so), nor are they drawn to the arts.

Our surveys have confirmed the conclusions of a number of sociologists, attesting not only to the loss of morality among a substantial portion of respondents but also to desocialization, increased individualism, and the tendency to focus on personal problems.

The data show an ongoing process of “objectification” of social

Table 1

Dynamic of Life values, Oriented Toward Consumption as the Sole Purpose in Life (%)

	2008	2009
Iaroslavl K.D. Ushinskii State Pedagogical University	10	13
Rybinsk P.A. Solov'ev State Academy of Aviation Technology	11	9
Moscow State Academy of Water Transportation, Rybinsk branch	14	18
Volga–Viatka Academy of State Service, Rybinsk branch	15	27

relations; the predominance of material values over spiritual and intellectual values is, to a certain extent, leading to the antisocial orientation of the individual.

Of the students expelled for violating the institution's laws and for academic failure, administrative proceedings were instituted against 93 percent, and criminal proceedings were instituted against 59 percent. When it comes to this category of students, everything is understandable in principle. We have written earlier about their needs, motives, interests, and values [2]. Of particular interest to us here are other data (see Tables 2 and 3).

The results shown in the tables provide confirmation of conclusions drawn in 2003 [3]: the system of education is a factor that to some extent deters crime.

In addition, it takes a lot of time for the mechanism of adaptation to the market conditions to be formed in today's students. It is encouraging to note that young people have an inclination for entrepreneurship. But the respondents are not confident that the situation can improve, since Russian society is undergoing a protracted economic crisis.

The experts (college instructors and specialists in youth policy) think that for the system of higher education to continue to serve as a powerful means by which to instill moral attitudes and ideas in college students, it is necessary to:

- raise the salaries of college instructors;
- raise graduate students' stipends;
- provide more varied leisure activities for college students;

Table 2

Dynamic of Institution of Proceedings Against Students Who Have Gone on Academic Leave (%)

Academic year	Students subjected to ...	
	Administrative proceedings	Criminal proceedings
2005–6	87	7
2006–7	85	5
2007–8	89	9
2008–9	94	4

Table 3

Dynamic of Institution of Proceedings Against Students Who Do Not Have Academic Incompletes on Examinations and Tests

Academic year	Students subjected to ...	
	Administrative proceedings	Criminal proceedings
2005–6	7	2
2006–7	9	1
2007–8	12	2
2008–9	14	4

—make the procedure for enrollment in higher educational institutions more transparent;

—impose tougher requirements on the licensing and accreditation of higher educational institutions.

Conclusion

The goals, methods, and institutions of the socialization of the rising generation during the current period of transformations have changed, although the problems that seem to be unique to us existed in the distant past. These include the “struggle between the

generations”—parents and children, and information overloads (an excess of information leads to the suppression of independence and gives rise to standards that level the personality²). It is not possible to understand the moral socialization of young people and their goals, the institutions and methods of achieving those goals, and their failures without long-term surveys of public opinion. This is why it is necessary to carry out sociological surveys in the institutions of higher learning periodically, once every three years.

Notes

1. Data from the Administration of Internal Affairs for Iaroslavl oblast.
2. We agree with the opinion of G. Achkasova that “whether we like it or not, the institutions of knowledge have become elements of the global information system. It used to be that the schoolteacher was essentially the sole source of knowledge; today, neither the teacher nor even the educational institution is that sole source” [4].

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