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“The Idea of a University”, its Spiritual-Humanitarian Values and Content

Galina I. Petrova^{a*}, Vladimir M. Smokotin^b, Svetlana K. Gural^c, Valeria Ye. Budenkova^d

^{abcd}National Research Tomsk State University, 36, Lenin Ave., Tomsk, 643050, Russia

Abstract

The article considers the changes taking place in a contemporary university under the influence of globalization processes. The authors note the following contradiction: on the one hand, according to the logic of globalization processes, “the idea of a university” today must assume a purpose to ensure a new world linguistic, cultural and national order. What choice lies in store for a university if it cannot ignore globalization processes and, at the same time, it cannot give up its national spiritual distinctiveness? A solution of the contradiction is linked to a search for new forms of existence of culture and spirituality as a humanitarian component of the university’s life and the content of its “idea”. The contemporary “idea of a university” finds itself in the unity of universal and individual, global and local.

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1. Introduction

Is there a need for and a possibility of speaking about preserving the classical “idea of a university” in the conditions of a culture that is characterized in terms of “rhizome” (Deleuze, Guattari, 2005), “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2006), constant “transition” (Smirnov, 2014), crisis and “chaos”? Has the very notion of “the idea of a university” been retained in philosophy and practice of university education? Questions of this kind arise in connection with those changes that have taken place under conditions of globalization in the world in general and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: (3822) 412492.
E-mail address: seminar_2008@mail.ru

including changes in educational practice. One can answer these questions in the tonality of nostalgia but the very fact that these questions are set shows that they are initiated not accidentally. These questions are linked to the traditionally spiritual content of “the idea of a university”, the spiritual character of the knowledge and the truth that have become the specific emblem of the university but which are becoming today less noticeable.

The “idea of a university” in its spiritual content was formulated by Wilhelm von Humboldt. His formulation proceeded from his philosophical directions and was based on his teaching about the “Volkgeist”, elevating to which, as to an enlightening source, was the purpose of education. The “idea of a university” contained in itself the specific character of the nation’s spiritual state, provided the national and personal identity and formed a person’s spirituality in its concrete national content. However, what national content one may speak about today, and which people’s spirituality can represent the content of the “idea of a university” if ethnic groups, peoples and nations find themselves drawn into the common and single area of globalization? National identity and, correspondingly, the “spirit of the people” undergo profound changes in globalization inter-exchanges and communicative “space of flows” (Castells, 2004). Both the concept and practice of ethno-national development undergo a change, the ethnic, “native”, language is problematized, and possibilities arise of forming the global language, global culture and, therefore, “global spirit”.

Therefore, it is impossible to give an unambiguous positive answer at present to the questions that were posed above. The reality attests to blurring the borderlines of a single national identity, which is replaced by a “multiple identity”, multilingualism, multiculturalism and “multispirituality”. All this, of course, poses the question about the “the idea of a university” traditional spiritual-humanitarian content in a new way. Obviously, the contemporary university and its “idea”, if they are preserved, assume the purpose of ensuring a new world linguistic, cultural and national order. Will this order be a triumph of contemporary Anglo-Saxon English or its new language variety, which will forego its ethnocentricity and emerge as the universal language used for overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers? Will spirituality be retained (and if “yes”, then what national image will it take) as the content of the “idea of a university”? Will this spirituality be the spirituality of “situational”, “contextual” or “multiple” national identity? So far, answers to these questions present an open prospect for research. But, in any case, all of them are linked to new existence forms of the university’s culture, its spirituality, and its “idea”; all of them lead us to the notion of the common world communicative area, in which the contemporary university finds itself. What choice does the university face if it cannot but take into account the conditions of the world undergoing globalization and, at the same time, it cannot give up its national spiritual distinctiveness? It is in a controversial unity of universal and individual, global and local that the contemporary “idea of a university” presents itself. From what positions and in which methodological key can one speak today about the “idea of a university”?

The present article addresses as its major research problem the comprehension and resolution of this contradiction. The object of research is the “idea of a university” in its spiritual content. The aim of the article is to research into the form of preserving/non-preserving spirituality as a content characteristic of the “idea of a university” in conditions of contemporary globalization processes.

2. Globalization and changes of the “idea of a university”

In the contemporary globalizing world, essence-based changes of spirituality (it is the same whether the meaning of this notion is religious, in which case spirituality is understood as communication with the Holy Spirit, or it is philosophical, when spirituality is identified as rationality of thinking) and, therefore, changes of the spiritual aura of the contemporary university, of its “idea”, which is spiritual in its content, are the reality. And again the questions arise: do these changes speak about the rejection by the university of its “idea” or do they testify to this “idea” assuming another form that is relevant to new socio-cultural conditions? If, however, the “idea of a university” remains, then does it retain its traditionally spiritual content?

We will proceed from the following hypothesis. Traditionally, the “idea of a university” has always been associated with the production and cognition of scientific truth. It was this understanding that initiated not only the gnoseological direction of the “idea” but its spiritual filling. The fact is that since the times of antiquity truth in philosophy was understood in unity with its humanitarian (spiritual) context. In such understanding, it prepared historical, cultural and epistemological prerequisites for the emergence of the university in the specific character of its idea’s humanitarian content.

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