

Russian flagship universities: development features in comparison with foreign experience

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Abstract—The paper explores problems the flagship universities network's introduction in Russia is accompanied by. The study concludes that the Russian practice has similar features with foreign experience, but at the same time it differs in many respects, particularly, it differs from the experience of the USA, where this type of university appeared for the first time. The main difference lies in the peculiarities of the higher education sphere public management in Russia, currently fully concentrated at the federal level of state administration. As a result of this it becomes difficult for universities to profile their activities in accordance with the features of regional economies.

Keywords—education, flagship universities, regions, regional economy, regional development

I. INTRODUCTION

The presence of federal-type device in some states may be due to their territory considerable length, multinational composition of population, historical features of development and other reasons. This type means that management functions are assigned to federal and regional levels of government and corresponding distribution of power between them, as well as tax system specific nature and financial resources of the country and regions distribution procedure. Any reforms carried out in the public administration field in countries with this device type inevitably mean changes in these particular components distribution between the federal and regional levels pattern. Education sphere management in Russia, like management of any other public sector branch, is realized both at federal and regional (as well as at municipal) levels of government. Accordingly financing for educational institutions is executed at the expense of relevant budgets in accordance with budget legislation norms. At the same time, the higher education institutions position have been looked somewhat dually for a long time. On the one hand, the jurisdiction of Russian Science and Higher Education Ministry and funding from the state federal budget, the uniform educational standards, as well as uniform system of indicators used to assess universities activities quality and to determine their place in various international and inner ratings. On the other hand, the presence of universities in concrete regions inevitably aligns their activities to local labor markets and forces them to take other regional development features into their accounts. This paper aims to identify the features relatively new type of universities - flagship universities - introduction into Russian higher education system is accompanied with in comparison with foreign experience.

II. METHODS OF RESEARCH

The paper uses the method of literature analysis and methods of economic comparative studies. For achieving this goal, first it's necessary to turn to foreign practice, identify the main patterns in the development of flagship universities network in different countries, in particular, in the USA, and the features that its development has in Russia.

Currently, 33 regional flagship universities have been established in Russia. The flagship university, in the Russian sense, is meant as an educational organization with regional importance, created by merging of one or several universities located in this region, and having as its objectives not only educational and research components modernizing, developing human resources, modernizing its own infrastructure, but also active participation in local communities, urban and regional environment development. Thus, all concerned parties get their benefits from having a flagship university: students get opportunity for receiving education in prestigious university, employees - for developing their professional competencies in accordance with new requirements, the leadership of the region, in its turn, receives a reliable partner for solving promising development tasks.

The flagship universities system's development in Russia has many similarities with foreign practice. The concept of the flagship university as the leading national or regional university originated in the American network of public universities emergence in the mid-1800s [1, p. 1; 2, p.5]. Primarily, in this emerging system, emphasis was placed on academic research, which, along with teaching, should purposefully contribute to territories economic development and people socio-economic mobility. One of such universities working main principle was a significant social orientation. This fact means that from the outset, the flagship universities used to be considered as a phenomena, much broader than just an educational organizations. As it's pointed out by J. Douglas, by the 1870s, most states had established one or more public universities, and that fact can be considered as a first try for developing mass higher education system, open to a wide range of citizens from different economic, social etc. backgrounds, as opposed to many private colleges and universities associated with religious communities and social classes [1, p. 2]. The wide range of educational programs and focused interaction with local economies as well as leadership in public education development serve as American flagship universities distinctive features.

Usually, one university used to play a leading role in the public institutions growing network. Historical features of USA contributed to the fact that in concrete states government activities for purposeful development of education were different so various states could equally be characterized by appearance of private or state universities

The formation of universities with leading role in territories development process extended to another regions in the world. For example, many universities in England - universities in Birmingham (formed in 1900), in Liverpool (formed in 1903), Bristol (formed in 1909) and universities in another cities also formed in the early XX century - also adhered to similar principles in their activities. Attempts of using the flagships university concept at various times had been made in a number of other countries, in particular, in South Korea, in Hungary, in Japan, in African countries with varying degrees of success[2, p.6; 3, 4].

Obviously, the very idea of flagship university is based on the academic autonomy principle: if we are talking about the possibility of impact on social processes and determining the course of their development (as well as economic development), therefore the freedom from any generally accepted common assessment criteria for such university is a necessary condition for its functioning. The reason is that separate territories for which universities are called upon to become flagship ones can vary greatly in terms of standards of living, features of any industry and services sector branches development. Also there may be lot of different historical and cultural differences between regions (as it is typical, for example, for USA and Russia). Flagship universities are forced to take these features into their accounts, respectively any attempts to define some common criteria for their assessment may be associated with certain difficulties. Accordingly, it seems to be reasonable to talk about leadership among the flagship universities not by any unified indicators, but by hallmarks and by characteristics correlating with concrete regions of specific features. In this sense, the existing and growing nowadays contradiction between two global ideas in higher education - between concepts of a flagship and a world-class universities - is justified [5]. World-class universities studies are also given a lot of attention in scientific literature. Criteria this type of institution should meet can be grouped as follows: a large number of talented students and teachers, sufficient resources for effective educational and research activities, a management system providing effective forecasting, strategic vision and ability for the university to implement change flexibly without unreasonable bureaucratic procedures [6,7].

A common feature with the flagship universities is the focus on being the economic development engine. However, if flagship universities for this purpose should focus on some unique features of domestic regional development, then world-class universities, by contrast, are focused on active competition with universities located in other parts of the world, and in this sense they may look in some measure apart from internal problems of the region and even of the country they are located. Most of higher education institutions rankings, inclusion in which means recognition of university as a world-class one, are built precisely on quality assessment indicators unified system using. As it was mentioned above, any applying of such system is difficult for assessing the flagship universities work. World-class university is aimed at

attracting students and teachers from another countries, while flagship university is forced primarily to solve regional development problems; thus, it possible to observe a certain contradiction between the objective processes of globalization and the aim of increasing national (and regional) economy competitiveness.

The pursuit of ratings can lead to certain negative consequences. Recognized deviations in world rankings lead to alternative assessment models searching. For example, the international consortium Universitas21, realizing the importance of national context in education, seeks to assess the overall effectiveness of national systems, rather than their individual components [8]. At the same time, the pursuit of such formally measured indicators may lead to ambiguous consequences for universities internal environments. The reality is that the management of many industries is increasingly moving to result-oriented financing, and it is often accompanied by large-scale restructuring of the institutions, including their merging [9,10]. The characteristic component of ongoing processes is quasi-market relations development and the principles of new managerialism introduction into the regulation of public sector institutions practice [11,12]. In educational institutions internal pressure on workers created by numerous administrators and managers performing managerial and control functions acquires a tendency to constantly increase [13]. For ordinary lecturers, this results in a significant intensification of their activities and stricter job requirements. These requirements especially concern the need to increase the number of papers in high-rating editions [14].

Another example for negative effects of educational institutions external evaluation is the following. Competition between universities as element of spreading quasi-market relations leads to the situation that in order to attract students many universities begin to spend their resources on expensive, easily observable factors of their functioning that are not directly related to educational activities. For US universities, such signals may be, in addition to publication activity, having the high-quality campuses that provide a variety of cultural and another services, some prestigious sports teams maintenance etc [15,16,17]. Often the connection that such indicators have with the ultimate goal of education and their influence on it are controversial.

III. RESULTS

The component fundamentally new in the practice of higher education system managing in Russia is exactly the emphasis on universities role in the region economies development. At the same time, Russia is absolutely focused on the state higher education institutions; that is due to insignificant share of non-governmental organizations in the total number of universities. Problems accompanying the flagship universities system in Russia are unique in comparison with foreign practice and they are the following.

1. The higher education state regulation is characterized by its absolute centralization when it's necessary to regulate a significant number of subordinate organizations. This system is very different from the one existed in the Soviet Union, when communist party institutions organized on territorial principle participated in state universities management. Nowadays, only in a small proportion of regions there are government departments responsible for higher education.

Therefore, the issue of improving organizational and structural conditions that allow for linking of universities with regional hallmarks, and of management by regional governments remains relevant. Currently, this problem of universities state regulation's delimitation between government levels is not solved.

2. Demographic problems, covering the entire territory of Russia and aggravating the competition between universities located in different regions as well as enrollee's corresponding outflow. According to the study conducted by National Research University Higher School of Economics, many regions where flagship universities have been established had low indicator value of higher education regional system's being in demand. For example, the Kemerovo region was in 48th place, the Komi Republic - in 60th, the Tambov region - in 65th place (out of 81 total number) [18]. This study was conducted for 2015-2016; unfortunately newer data is not freely available.

3. The impossibility for a higher education institution to concentrate efforts only on the intraregional labor market. This is especially true for technical universities. Once more we can make a reference to the Soviet Union period, when a significant proportion of training in certain narrow professions was concentrated in a limited number of universities. Under conditions of graduates distribution system existed at that date, trained specialists often used to be sent to the regions where such workers had never been trained. Attempting to train specialists in all possible profiles within the region (not only in professions being in demand at the present time, but also in professions going to be in demand in the future) does not seem to be effective. Therefore, with the declared (and prevailing) focus for the flagship universities on inner regional needs, a certain proportion of their openness to the entire country's economy needs will always remain.

4. Due to claimed connection of flagship university's functioning with the regional development indicators, the economy's prediction begins to have an especial significance. The flagship universities development plans should be made in accordance with forecasts results. Also it seems to be important that such relationship is based on the premise of regional economies sustainable development for a long time. This premise is necessary because an educational organization functioning specificity means that making radical changes into it is not always possible in a short time. For example, making a decision on the termination of provision for educational services in concrete profile means the fulfillment of obligations to those students who have not completed their studies yet. If this decision was caused by a decrease in demand for this group of specialists (and this, in its turn, could have been caused by the economy structure changes), these students may not be able to get a job in the training profile after their graduation.

5. A similar feature with foreign practice is the introduction of new public management principles in the Russian higher education system regulation [19]. Similarly, for ordinary lecturers, this is also expressed in the their activities intensification and the strengthening of administrative control.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper has summarized the problems and features of the flagship universities network's development in Russian regions. Performed analysis suggests that administrators of this reform are clearly oriented to foreign experience, in particular, in introducing fairly new forms of new public management. Such elements may be difficult for the professional community to perceive, since new conditions inevitably mean increasing of work's intensity, especially in publication activity. While the flagship universities phenomenon is of interest to researchers, this contradiction between the stated goals of their creating and new public management principles, as a rule, remains outside the framework of consideration. Due to unrealized reform of public administration in the education sphere (in terms of delegating some authorities to the regional level of management), the mechanism of profiling universities activities in accordance with regional economies demands remains unclear. At the same time, there is no comprehensive view of how flagship universities interaction with major regional employers and members of the society should be structured. Also, in the author's opinion, a system of evaluating the flagship universities activities should be worked out. Such system cannot focus only on formal, easily measurable indicators. However, the complexity of these contradictions is explained by the fact that the development of the flagship universities network is ongoing process. It seems to be early for talking about any concrete results of this reform, especially since the change of higher education system's management in terms of transferring part of administrative powers to the regional level of government is not implemented. Obviously, experience of the next 5-10 years is going to bring noticeable results in this sphere.

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