

Sociocultural Constructs of the Higher School's Innovative Potential

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Abstract

Today for understanding of the higher school's innovative mission it is necessary to apply large-scale civilizational dimension, bringing together technological and humanitarian aspects of innovations, and embracing educational as well as cultural concerns. This dimension covers a range of central ideas in the history of the higher school development, describing such constructs of its innovative activity as: social-centered, theology-centered, anthropocentric, profession-centered, scientific-centered, ideology-focused, market-focused. Each of these designs is defined by influence of a certain cultural dominant which sets priorities for education and innovative practice. The sustainable innovative potential of the higher school can be provided by a simultaneous combination and an interlacing of various constructs. Meanwhile, the leading role has to belong to person-centered construct of the higher education which gives the chance for self-realization of the personality and for carrying out fruitful innovations. The results from a survey of the current situation at the higher school show destructive influence of monopoly of market-focused construct on its innovative viability. The main positive trend that provides this viability is connected with civilizational reconstruction of the higher school on a basis of expansion of its poly-cultural status and development of the personal value of educational and innovative processes.

Keywords: the higher school crisis, innovative potential, cultural dominant, sociocultural constructs of education

1. Introduction

Problems of the higher school excite today many researchers and are in epicenter of public consciousness. The future of the society and worthy life of citizens in many respects depends on what will be the higher education. In the modern unpredictable world the value of the higher school consists in its innovative function, in ability to produce progressive models and standards of civilized development. It is known that from the very beginning of the origin the higher school acted as the innovative project sent to the future. Throughout the centuries universities and academies generated progressive ideas and technologies which have provided dynamic growth of the developed countries (Barnett, 2011). Meanwhile, on border of two last centuries the innovative role of universities considerably decreased (Readings, 1996). The unprecedented mass character of the higher education, loss of universality of education led to that today the higher school turns into one of service structures in the market of educational supplies (Bok, 2004). According to scientists and thinkers, crisis of the higher school arose in an era of "manufactured uncertainty" (Giddens, 1990) and was connected with system crisis of a contemporary individualized society (Bauman, 2001). This society is characterized by wasteful consumer culture (Bauman, 2007), adherence to neoliberal values (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and postmodern mentality (Lyotard, 1979).

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Being strengthened by the going globalization these transformations undermined intellectual influence of traditional educational institutes including universities (Hutcheson, 2011). In our opinion, the main threats to the higher school proceed from attempts to impose on it the one-sided standards and the simplified approaches to an assessment of its own identity and a role in the real world overflowed with ambiguity and uncertainty (Bauman, 2000). In the current unpredictable and super complex world many expect that the higher school (and university especially) will realize its predictive function and innovative potential (Barnett, 2000).

2. Objectives and Methods of the Study

The objective of our theoretical study was to describe civilizational determinants of innovative mission of the higher school. We aimed to show dependence of the higher school development from a cultural vector which dominates in a social order. This research was conducted on the basis of method of socio-cultural determination which developed in fundamental works of famous scientists (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Searle, 1995). We consider that innovative potential of the higher school consists in its ability to offer society the perspective project of a sustainable development. And this project is intended to advance viable development of society at the intellectual-constructive level. In this sense the innovative potential of the higher education can be presented as a peculiar genome of culture self-reproduction (Gasset, 1999). Ensuring innovative practice at the higher school has to be based on its understanding as multivaluable and multilayered cultural process in which the unity of training and research is reached. This process can't be described and defined within unambiguous schemes, paradigms and concepts.

3. Historical Prerequisites and Modern Challenges for the Higher School's Innovative Potential

A History of the European University shows that this social institute developed in a combination of various socio-cultural values: religious, civil, educational, research, corporate, communicative, technological, etc. (e.g., Rudy, 1984). Such values complex of university community provided the expanded range of its opportunities for innovative activity (that distinguished always the higher school from average and average special school). It is undoubted that the main value of the higher school is the knowledge. Since the time of Plato it is known that knowledge is light, the guide in learning the way that leads life from falsity to truth, from ignorance to wisdom, from mortality to immortality and for that reason it is value. Meanwhile, the value of knowledge can vary considerably depending on a cultural context and the social order. Different times and eras demand such type of knowledge which answers to necessary problems of society and can bring it to a new level of development. In this regard the innovative capacity of the higher school in many cases has a socio-cultural appointment, it consists in helping society to expand the horizons of awareness for a sustainable development. However, today these horizons are washed away by influence of de-constructive reformations in line with the postmodern culture. One of such trends is the tendency to *de-rationalization* of education as forms of devaluation of consciousness (Jacoby, 2008). According to conclusions of some authors, under cover of Bologna Process the Humboldt's classical model of national university is dismantled (as outdated and not answering to post-industrial society, etc.) (Schultheis, et al., 2008). The unified-service model comes to this place; this model is directed on formation of *competences* instead of *knowledge* (Barnett & Griffin, 1997). Such institutional shift leads to deviation of education from knowledge, from its fundamental and theoretical function, from culture of universal understanding and a whole reflection (Liessmann, 2006). So, in practice it is noted that on the one hand, there is a strengthening of a utilitarian component of education which focuses on assimilation not so much of knowledge, but procedures and technologies. On the other hand, there is a weakening of a scientific and fundamental component of training that stimulates unacademic forms of communication in educational sphere, and increases demand for unscientific schemes of outlook.

4. The Basic Constructs of the Higher School's Innovative Development

For understanding of a driving intensions of university innovative practice it is necessary to address to cultural values which dominate in society and set a certain human dimensions of education. These dimensions represent implicit system of coordinates that define priorities, goals, principles and the corresponding standards of construction of the educational sphere. Such system makes itself felt and finds an embodiment in educational policy, in formation of mission, the purposes and content of education, in a choice of criteria of quality of education, and also in forms, methods and technologies of training, in management of the higher school and educational process.

Depending on prevalent social idea which forms a mainstream and the cultural dominant, all variety of forms and models of the higher school design can be referred to several basic constructs: social-centered, theology-centered, anthropocentric, profession-centered, scientific-centered, ideology-focused, market-focused.

- In *social-centered* construct the higher school, first of all, is intended for educate of citizens which are capable to put into practice interests of society. As a cultural dominant the value of a public duty prevails. The higher education has to form competences of civil activity and been as the social elevator for active members of society. Innovative potential of the higher school consists in ability to generate progressive models of the social device.
- *Theology-centered* construct gives to the higher school and education the universal sense consisting in movement to the supreme values of a spiritual growth. This construct provides unity of belief, truth and knowledge. The medieval university was appeared in a bosom of this construct and its innovative role consisted in advancing of moral outlook and universal knowledge about reality and the world as a whole.
- *Anthropocentric* construct turns the higher school to the values of humanism, answering on predominating idea of the human being as crown of nature. Innovative potential of this construct is expressed in cultivation of a creative mentality and the progressive didactics directed on perfection of cognitive-active abilities, opening a way to Enlightenment.
- *Profession-centered* construct reflects a dominant of the specialization of economy and society with predominating idea of good. In this regard this construct determines value of education by its usefulness. The higher school has to form experience of effective functioning in installed system of division of labor, and its innovative potential is expressed in preparing of the advanced professionals and productive technologies.
- In *scientific-centered* construct the higher school is obliged to serve science and, first of all, natural science. The value of truth and search of essential nature of things as a cultural dominant defines Humboldt's university model. Higher school has to form experience of objective research, scientific search, experience of experimenting. In education it is important to teach students to subject thought to the analysis and scientific check. In line with this construct innovative potential of higher school is identified with its ability to carry out discoveries and development of breakthrough researches.
- *Ideology-focused* construct subordinates the higher school to political goals and tasks. This construct is built in compliance with a cultural dominant of the power as main value of existence. The higher school serves for strengthening of the power and has to form first of all experience and fidelity to a certain system. Its innovative potential consists in preparation of constructive ideologies and their conductors.
- In *market-focused* construct the higher school is considered as the commercial enterprise. According to dominant of monetarism in culture and economy the main task of the higher school is to make profit, and it's preferable in a money equivalent. Economic laws and mechanisms are moved to the sphere of higher education which is treated as a part of the market of educational services and scientific works. Innovative potential of the higher school is considered as ability to producing system of favorable offers and the schemes of education-as-consumption, corresponding to a market conjuncture.

As a whole, the resultant moment of action of various constructs is a certain type and character of the personality. Therefore for understanding of what kind of educational construct we deal, first of all it's necessary to pay attention to how it influences on a person. The higher school can prepare the person for community service, learn to bring benefit, to survive, to create and discover, but also can learn to obey and sacrifice, to use and adapt. And these patterns correspond to various aims, types and models of education which are reflected in some researches (Aldrich, 2010).

5. The Person-Centered Construct as Source of Higher School's Innovative Development

A rich centuries-old history of the higher school testifies that its sustainable innovative potential is maintained by means of a simultaneous combination and an interlacing in its design of the different kinds of socio-cultural constructs (Rudy, 1984). The main secret of the higher school's viability consists, in our opinion, in a variety of combinations and convergences described above constructs which create by their connection the whole institute for personality development. It is necessary just to understand what binds all these constructs together in general unity? The answer to this question can be found by detection of one more specific construct which we consider as a key factor in development of the higher school's innovative capacity.

There is a *person-centered* construct of education and innovative activity that represents an internal dimension and implicit axis of the higher school's functioning as the institute of civilization renewal. This construct is similar to a binding thread which passes through all sociocultural layers of higher education sphere. The special dominant generates and supports person-centered construct, it also determines all other values of education. It is a dominant of a culture in primary form. It is about culture as universal unity of outlook and behavior, life and consciousness, science and practice. Person-centered construct is the not unified model of the higher school creation with rigid structure and hierarchy. This construct represents a wide field and range of opportunities for determination of the higher school identity, offering plurality of various models and approaches of creation of the educational and scientific practice, aimed at the full development of the student as active participant of professional, civil, cultural, leisure, information and so forth types of activity. As soon as education moves away from the value of personality, all sociocultural constructs are disintegrated. Meanwhile attempt to build an educational and research process in the higher school without person-centered construct in a limited framework of the some one of construct leads to deformation and degradation of the higher school institute because it closes the sphere of opportunities and conditions for students self-fulfillment and for carrying out fruitful innovations.

6. Implications

The concept of socio-cultural constructs (reflecting action of cultural dominants) allows approaching to understanding of that difficult situation in which there was the Russian higher school at a turn of the last centuries. It was a real crisis situation which is caused by socio-cultural inversion in the educational sphere, made in the Post-Soviet period. Then in a short time was made a replacement of opposite constructs of the higher school (market-focused construct began to dominate instead of ideological) at simultaneous decrease and even cutting off other important orientations (social-centered, scientific-centered etc.). Such sharp tension drop of a socio-cultural dominant led to formation of institutional vacuum with the subsequent emission of destructive energy which caused negative consequences in the sphere of the higher education, having rejected the country on the periphery of a civilization scale of development in this sphere. As a result today we deal with monopoly of market trend in education that tries to establish exclusively commercial mechanisms and standards of the higher education functioning. Being guided by these laws the higher school purposefully turns into a certain educational supermarket in the global market of educational services and innovative production. This tendency especially clearly made itself felt at the beginning of the current century, then the market-focused construct actually forced out other approaches to educational process in Russia as well as in western countries (Roger, 2004). In market-focused construct the basis of educational activity is deformed, students lose opportunity to get experience of self-changes as it is demanded by psychological and pedagogical sciences (Davydov, 1999). In accordance to the principle of expenses minimization students are exempted from the need for self-modifying, the logic of person development in educational process is replaced by logic of consumption of a teaching material, the logic of intellectual effort is replaced by logic of satisfaction and the logic of educational activity is replaced by logic of service. As a result the basic educational principle ceases to work, namely, the principle of the *leading role of teaching* in psychological development of human being (Vygotsky, 1997). Thus, there is a process of alienation of the student from educational activity.

The paradox of the higher education today is that owing to its commercialization and a mass character now not graduates of schools fight for their receipt in higher education institutions and vice versa. Moreover, universities by means of Unified State Examination are actually deprived of possibility of selection of suitable students personally. Such institution dislocation is a logical consequence of new rules of the game which were imposed to the higher school and do not answer of its cultural appointment and mission. According to these rules, the higher school turns into the primitive supplier of "educational services" and independently surviving in the mythical market of "educational offers" and innovations. The one-sided format of services devaluates the value of the higher school to level of a temporary haven of the young people unclaimed fully by culture and society. In this haven people doesn't develop as the personality because services can't form someone, they just can satisfy only those who consumes them without critical judgment and intellectual tension. Psychologically outcome of this pseudo-educational situation consists that the age logic in student's years of life demands intense cerebation, but education in a format of service ceases to be difficult, ceases to load. As a result during the time of training in higher school young people receive an irreversible development gap, which cannot be compensated in the next years.

The person loses chance of fruitful development not only in professional, but also in the intellectual, personal relations. Economic invasion into the higher school affects the nucleus of educational process, causing corrosion and corroding of such its bases as: aims of education, content of education and methods (technologies) of education.

1. Market-focused construct belittles the general idea and the aim of education in the higher school, to be exact lack of principles and aimlessness is offered as the basis for new identity. Therefore the general vector of development is lost, there is no advance to over-personal values. The target image of the human as a creator is no good because of his impractical nature and is replaced with the pragmatic human-user whom problems of reproduction of society and culture do not worry.
2. In regard of content of higher education, the pragmatism of learning forces out the universal and fundamental content of training. The level of education standards is lowered to tightly applied things, and the higher school gradually goes down to the level of a craft school of mass preparation of a cognitariat and a consumtariat with a necessary set of competences. The intellectual basis of education is replaced by operational, which instead of knowledge forms technical skills. Mass character of education (as a result of its commercialization) finally forces out Humboldt's research university model, leads to weakening of the intellectual resource of the higher school which in most cases becomes absolutely available. Thus, the higher school actually stops being elite (in cultural sense), turning into a step after secondary education with necessary specialization for broad use. In regard of the education content there are not qualitative differences between secondary school and higher school.
3. As for technologies of education, the market logic demands application of the facilitated forms and methods of preparation, which suit for market mechanisms of supply and demand. The main goal of education is to prepare for effective functioning, "to pack into a profession", therefore it is necessary "to train" (i.e. to pass through system) as much as possible students with the smallest expenses. In this regard, universities stake on a wide use of formalized courses, detailed didactic software packages (educational complexes, modules, etc.), as much as possible detailed technologies of education possessing high "capacity" at the rate of number of students in unit of training hours. There is also a great need for distant and virtual educational forms on the basis of new informational and communicative technologies.

7. Conclusion

Innovative crisis of the higher school at the present stage is a logical consequence of monopoly of market-focused construct which breaks universality of the higher school's cultural design (aimed historically on eternal values) to conform to the current requirements of the market. Being guided by the market values, the higher school ceases to open heights of scientific knowledge, to pull to perfection, to promote internal moral development. Education and knowledge, being transformed into subjects of use, lose the sacred and timeless essence, becoming consumer goods in the structures which are called today as universities, academies and so on. As a result we have crisis of the higher school which captured not only Russia, but also the Western world as a whole where its signs were shown slightly earlier owing to natural dissemination of the economic values fed by traditions of capitalist society. The exit from this situation can be found in the civilizational reconstruction of the higher school on the basis of expansion of its poly-cultural status and development of its main socio-cultural constructs which are grouping round the personal value of educational and innovative processes.

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