

Government policy on higher education does not create more choice for the majority of students. Instead, the diversification of the institutional setup of higher education institutions in China appears to be a by-product of the overarching aim of increasing student numbers. Choice can only be exercised by higher socioeconomic groups.

The recent establishment of private and independent colleges has resulted in a significant new sector, shifting the higher education system in China from being almost homogeneously public to one where a significant proportion of students are enrolled in nonpublic institutions. However, the ever-present institutional hierarchy in the Chinese higher education sector emphasizes vertical diversity, with strong differences in the prestige of the institutions, at the expense of horizontal diversity of institutions offering different types of education. While this form of diversification has created new opportunities for accessing higher education, it has also led to new inequalities in terms of the relative cost and prestige of education at different types of institutions. ■

In Search for World-Class Universities: The Case of Russia

ANNA SMOLENTSEVA

Anna Smolentseva is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Educational Studies at Moscow State University, Russia. Address: 5/7 B. Nikitskaya, Moscow, 125009, Russia. E-mail: asmolentseva@yahoo.com.

Innovative development in Russia toward building a knowledge-based economy has become a national priority. While it is recognized that Russian higher education and research fall behind the world leaders in higher education, nostalgia for Soviet achievements in education and science remains relatively strong in the society.

GLOBAL RANKINGS

As in some other countries, in Russia global rankings have stimulated a critical analysis of the current state of higher education and research. Leading Russian institutions did not succeed in global rankings. Moscow State University moved between the 66th and 76th positions, and St. Petersburg State University is listed within the 400-to-500 category of the world's top institutions by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking during 2004 and 2008. The *Times Higher Education* version of the top institutions was also disappointing: since 2004, Moscow State University's ranking varied from 79 to 231.

For one part of the academic community the lower positions of Russian institutions in the rankings have not become a surprise, only serving another signal of the troubles in Russian higher education and research. For other sectors it was difficult to accept such a low ranking position of Russian higher education. The national response to the global challenges was manifold and reflected the lack of social consensus regarding higher education.

As in some other countries, in Russia global rankings have stimulated a critical analysis of the current state of higher education and research.

A RUSSIAN RANKING

The dissatisfaction with the methodology and mainly the outcomes of the global rankings have generated the design of a new global ranking declared to be more correct and objective. In 2009, the Russian independent rating agency, RatER, presented a new version of global ranking. The authors emphasize that in contrast to existing rankings it pays more attention to the indicators of the quality of education and teaching. Data collection methods include survey of universities, educational statistics, universities' reports, and Scopus® data. The indicators include the number of educational programs (fields of study), patents and certificates of discoveries, performance of the computer center, number of publications and citations, international awards, university budget per student, presence of university on the Web, and international students. As a result, in this Russian global ranking Moscow State University occupied fifth place, ahead of Harvard, Stanford, and Cambridge. The academic community criticized the ranking and its methodology for numerous flaws. However, to some extent the Russian version proved to be appealing as an alternative or addition to the available rankings.

NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES' PROGRAM

The Russian government is concerned about modernization of Russian education and including several Russian institutions in global rankings. The policy-related response to the international challenges has involved supporting a selected group of universities. The first steps to establish leading institutions were undertaken in 2006 when the Ministry of Education and Science merged several regional institutions to found two federal universities, Siberian and Southern, to strengthen higher education in their respective regions. From 2006 to 2008, in the framework of the national priority project, 57 universities on the competitive basis received federal funding to develop their innovative programs (up to US\$33 million per institution). In 2008 the president of Russia signed a decree to grant a status of national research university along with the funding over the next 10 years for a National Research Nuclear University and technological universities in Moscow. In 2009,

the Ministry of Education and Science launched a competition for the status of national research university and 10-year financing, and 110 applications were accepted. Federal funding (up to US\$60 million) for the first 5 years will support the innovative development programs in priority fields selected by universities. Finally, a dozen universities have received the national research status—the majority of them (9) technical universities and the others classical universities in Nizhny Novgorod and Novosibirsk and an economics university in Moscow.

National research universities are expected to change their legal status from educational establishment to an autonomous educational organization that provides more economic freedom, although this change is not compulsory. In the meantime, the Russian Parliament is about to accept the legislation on the special status of Moscow State and St. Petersburg State universities, which are to become federally funded universities able to employ additional admissions examinations and issue their own diplomas. The rectors are to be appointed by the president of Russia, although this policy is not yet decided.

In 2009, the Russian independent rating agency, RatER, presented a new version of global ranking. The authors emphasize that in contrast to existing rankings it pays more attention to the indicators of the quality of education and teaching.

Thus, Russia followed the path of some other countries in defining elite (or to-be-elite) institutions and providing them financial support. The competition regulations imply the control over the groundwork of innovative programs and an abrogation of the status of the national research university if an institution fails in the success of the program.

However, Russia has not elaborated a policy of building a world-class university. It is unclear which criteria the innovation would meet and how such a university should be built. How will the success of the project in the international arena be evaluated? How will the progress toward a world-class university be measured? No answers to these questions have yet been determined. Anyway, it would be unreasonable to expect that the positions of Russian universities in global rankings will notably improve over a five-year period. In particular, the ratings of publications and citations cannot grow so fast (by the way, by publications and citations the staff of the Russian Academy of Sciences outpace universities' staff).

WORLD-CLASS CULTURE

It is important to mention that a world-class university does not only involve research achievements, huge budget, higher internationalization, and excellent facilities, although these

aspects are undoubtedly critical. In a democratic culture, excellence in research and teaching has had some prerequisites: academic freedom, transparency and collegiality in decision making, and open competitions. These values are endangered in many developed and developing countries, but remain important. In Russia, practices of academic freedom, peer review, and transparency in decision making and competitions are still insufficient; and such a cultural component might become an obstacle in a search for excellence. The change toward excellence requires adequate compensation for faculty, clear demands, an incentive reward system at institutional and societal levels, stimuli and opportunities to do research, integration into the international academic community, and English proficiency, among other issues. These changes would attract “best and brightest” faculty and students and form an academic culture, where excellence and therefore world-class institutions become real.

DIVERSIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

For Russia it is also important that universities, at least in the near future, cannot specialize in a single mode of research. The Academy of Sciences trains graduate students and is able, at least at some research units, to develop internationally recognized research, while universities still produce less R&D. Due to the organization of higher education and research, it would be important to establish and expand horizontal networks between universities and research institutions and

National research universities are expected to change their legal status from educational establishment to an autonomous educational organization that provides more economic freedom, although this change is not compulsory.

between universities. Also, the diversification of universities, now a formal initiative, should not lead to the deterioration of the majority of institutions. Most institutions not only fulfill important social functions in their respective regions but also supply talented students to the leading institutions and might demonstrate potential for innovations as well. The demographic decline is decreasing the number of students as well as, thus, the financing from tuitions, which might encourage universities to search for new sources of funding through innovation and research. The knowledge production seems to move toward higher diversification and, therefore, to a partial decline of some elements of the universities' system and Academy of Sciences.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, by selecting technological universities (former Soviet polytechnic institutes) the government tends to foster innovations in applied research and development and underestimates the strategic priority of basic research in various fields, while building a new economy of a knowledge and democratic society. Also, the amount of program funding could hardly provide dramatic changes.

However, as an experiment with a new autonomous organization, this program could be quite stimulating in the development of Russian higher education, by opening new opportunities for R&D at universities. Participating institutions will not be able to appear among top world institutions in the near future but will indicate if innovations are possible in the routine construction of Russian higher education. ■

Russian Universities' "Midrange" Collaboration Strategies

IGOR CHIRIKOV

Igor Chirikov is a researcher in the Laboratory for Economic Sociology, National Research University—Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: is@gorod.org.ru.

An intriguing trend in the change of modern universities is the engagement in forms of collaboration, especially regarding cooperation strategies on the international level. In Russia, two opposing strategies are commonly used by universities: first, the establishment of formal relationships and councils that in reality do not produce any collaborative projects or programs; second, large-scale mergers of regional universities initiated primarily by the government despite university objections. However, some universities have chosen to undertake a "midrange" cooperative development—a consortium of several educational and science organizations with a participation of regional government and hi-tech enterprises.

UNIVERSITY MERGERS IN RUSSIA

Connections and mergers within the Russian higher education system are influenced by the historical context of state policy development. In the 1990s drastic social and economic changes forced Russian universities to operate under insufficient state financing and weaker connections with industry. At the same time, the marketization and commercialization of higher education formed the main impetus for university development. Since 1991, the relative number of students per 10,000 of the population increased 2.5 times (to 475 in 2008).

Universities started to expand enrollments, trying to respond to the demand of all prospective groups. Almost all strong universities initiated regional expansion, establishing branches (oriented toward fee-based programs).

As the market became saturated, there was no need for effective collaboration. Every university tried to concentrate as many resources and students as possible within the institution. Models of interaction and structural forms produced during the Soviet period lost relevance to university strategies. Industry-based educational activities were limited to infrequent exchanges of professionals and the widespread practice of professors being simultaneously employed at several universities. Therefore, many councils and associations of universities had become organizations offering merely a veneer of cooperation, with no real projects and outcomes.

Mergers were rarely initiated by universities. The two most important mergers executed in Russia (Siberian Federal University in Krasnoyarsk and South Federal University in Rostov-on-Don, both founded in 2006) assisted development in certain Russian regions. In both cases four universities were integrated into one organization; the resulting institutions faced similar problems and obstacles during the merger process. The resulting organizational structure is inflexible and characterized by excessive centralization. Moreover, the mergers have resulted in an increased heterogeneity of the university, which encourages the creation of groups disconnected with the new institutions' overall objectives. Finally, the occurrence of serious legislative gaps undermines the establishment of large projects. As a result, the federal universities are currently not performing as expected.

CONSORTIA: PROFILE OF THE MODEL

A consortium of universities represents an alternative model to both weak and formal contractual forms of collaboration and to the rigid model of institutional mergers. Currently, four leading universities located in Tomsk are starting to implement this model. The participating universities include a tradi-

Connections and mergers within the Russian higher education system are influenced by the historical context of state policy development.

tional comprehensive institution and a medical one and two polytechnic institutions with strong participation by local government, the scientific centers of the Academy of Science, and hi-tech enterprises in the planning process.

Universities and other participants of the consortium have identified a set of common problems possibly to overcome with the help of intensive arrangements: in the sphere of education—doubling of courses, unfair educational competition in the region, low proportion of young teaching staff, and decreasing competitiveness for the most talented school-