

## University as the Space of Intercultural Communication



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All large-scale social transformations make it necessary to look again at such a socio-cultural phenomenon as the university, its role in the development of society and man. Today's world demonstrates a great number of new trends, which primarily change the institutional basis of higher education and the corresponding institutional status of the university. There are sweeping changes in teaching technologies, restructuring of the educational process and research organization, relationships between the university, the state and society.

At the same time, the role and place of universities in the civilization dimension of social development have not been sufficiently comprehended and adequately analyzed yet. As a result, the authorities and the public are guided mainly by simplified representations of the university functions, which are reduced to technocratic and economic postulates, to promoting economic growth and solving urgent technological problems. However, such an approach does not correspond to the socio-cultural mission of universities, which goes far beyond the economic and technocratic paradigm. In their long history, universities have never been merely the centers for knowledge production and training. They have always represented the centers of cultural life, the space of complex systems of human interaction, including also intercultural communication.

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Today, universities live in the world that is becoming more pluralistic, multicultural, and heterogeneous. Due to globalization, the harmonization of everyday standards of cultural life, homogenization of external cultural forms takes place. But the competitive relations between countries and peoples are intensifying; the problems of preservation and protection of ethno-cultural traditions, strengthening of patriotic and nationalistic sentiment are becoming relevant, without it the economic and political competitiveness of countries and peoples is lost. Therefore, the need to form a large-scale transborder and multicultural identity of the globalizing humanity is becoming more acute. We have to learn to live in different cultural spaces, to move from one space to another, without experiencing a cultural shock, without falling into chauvinism, xenophobia, and national narrow-mindedness. The universities, especially those that are actively entering the international education space face this problem today.

Globalization and massification of higher education have contributed to the rapid increase in the number of students studying outside their countries. About 0,5 million students left their countries for getting higher education abroad in 1975, nearly 5 million people did it last year. For thirty years, the number of foreign students in the world has increased by 10 times and continues to grow rapidly. The student environment is transforming into a broad, actually global space of direct interaction between large number of representatives of different cultural forms and traditions.

Millions of boys and girls find themselves in a different cultural environment, face problems connected with cultural adaptation, unfamiliar traditions and values, serious learning difficulties related to cultural barriers more than to a foreign language; all this makes their communication with teachers, local students and local population difficult.

Problems of intercultural communication also arise in connection with the intensification of international academic mobility within the Bologna process. They are exacerbated by the rapid development of on-line education on the basis of MOOC (mass open on-line courses). In addition, they are intensified by the migration crisis, which opened the flow of repatriates from the countries of the Middle East to European and American universities.

New technological, practical and ethical problems that require understanding of the role and functions of modern universities in organizing

intercultural communication between the students and the faculty arise. In this connection, the need to apply to historical experience of classical universities, to their cultural heritage, which includes various forms of intercultural communication, is actualized. *Because in the past you can find many characters, communities and events that fit into the modern concept of dialogue between representatives of different cultures, peoples, religions. These examples can inspire, encourage, and sometimes even direct how to continue the 'good practices' developed by previous generations.*<sup>1</sup> It is worth notifying that the problem of intercultural communication accompanies the university life from the early Middle Ages. Students from all over the world, representing various cultural and religious segments of medieval Europe, studied at the first universities. In addition, students of the early Middle Ages were characterized by a high level, in modern language, of academic mobility, propensity to travel and frequent changes of study places. A student began to study at one university, continued studying at another, and could get a degree at the third or fourth, or even at the fifth university. University degrees were recognized throughout Europe, the programs and books in use were not very different at different universities, and Latin was a universal language of the university communication.

Ukrainian students were no exception. Due to the absence of universities at the time in the Ukrainian lands, they traveled to Western European university cities to study either in a geographically close Jagiellonian University, or further to Paris, Padua, and Bologna. Many of them received academic degrees, taught and took administrative positions at various European universities. For instance, Ukrainian Yuriy Kotermak, from the city of Drohobych, received a bachelor's and then a master's degree at Kraków University and moved to Bologna University where he took a doctor's degree in Medicine, taught astronomy and even became in his time a Vice-Chancellor. He was also a Dean at Kraków University, made a significant contribution to astronomy, M. Copernicus was among his students. Ancient lists of those who studied at Bologna and Jagiellonian Universities show a significant number of students from the territory of Ukraine. *Since the foundation of Kraków University and by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, about two thousand Ukrainian students had*

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<sup>1</sup> L. Korporowicz, 'Jagiellońskie inspiracje dialogu międzykulturowego', in: L. Korporowicz, P. Plichta (ed.), *Mosty nadziei. Jagiellońskie inspiracje dialogu międzykulturowego*, Kraków 2016, p. 10.

*studied and lived there.*<sup>2</sup> According to some sources, about 800 students of Ukrainian origin studied at Jagiellonian University during this period. Many of them later became influential figures in cultural life both in Ukraine and in Poland. Kraków was the place of active international and intercultural communication of both students and professors, where the models of tolerant understanding of bearers of different cultural mentality were born. The center for such communication was, of course, Jagiellonian University, which for six centuries remained a space and environment that facilitated contacts between people, different in many respects, in accordance with the peculiarities of their people and cultures.

Later, in the fifteenth century, the universal character of the university life was becoming less evident. Its national and regional components were intensified. There appeared new universities in which students were united by their regional and national affiliation. Mobility (pilgrimage) of students sharply weakened, it was kept within the domestic national cultural boundaries. In the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries there appeared universities, formed on the common denominational basis (Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinistic), which further strengthen the cultural homogeneity of university life.

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there appeared universities that served the needs of industrial economies and nation-states. One of the important functions of universities then was to ensure the national-cultural identity of the society within the state borders. Intercultural communication under these conditions was largely transformed, and its quality and intensity changed. However, it still remained an essential feature of academic life. For example, at Kharkov Imperial University, founded in 1804, the vast majority of professors were of foreign origin; they were invited from Germany, France, Poland, and other countries. They had language problems in communication between themselves and their students, as well as problems related to cultural differences and to different political preferences. On this ground, often there were sharp conflicts between teachers, united by their origin into different academic factions. At that time foreigners were the majority of university professors, with the Germans prevailing in number the immigrants from all other countries. Russian subjects, then Slavs from the Austrian Empire, French, and others followed them.

University professors, divided into small parties and groups, carried

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<sup>2</sup> V. Mykytas, *Davnoukrainski studenty i profesory*, Kharkiv 1994.

on a long, endless war. The Germans opposed the French. Foreigners often united against the Russians.<sup>3</sup>

During the long university history, the ethno-cultural structure of the teaching staff changed several times, but even until the Soviet era, representatives of other countries and cultures were present in the academic community, among whom there were the Poles such as Mickiewicz, Tsenkovsky, Psheborsky, the prominent Bulgarian scholar M. Drinov and many others. An important legacy of this period is the fundamental values that gradually crystallized and formed the corporate ethos of the university.

During its history, the University has accumulated valuable experience, created a special spiritual space, imbued with understanding of its mission, relations both within the university community and with the outside world. This is an important spiritual heritage that permeates the university statutes, documents of professorial collections, presented in the speeches of the Vice-Chancellors and Deans, in the books and articles of professors and graduates, and, most importantly, personified in the life of the outstanding university figures, embodied in their affairs, in their attitude to science, culture, and public life.

Appeal to these materials opens a tense, sometimes acute and dramatic struggle of ideological positions, political views, group and personal preferences.

In 2017, we attempted an axiological interpretation of this heritage, which allowed the Assembly of Scientists to adopt the Code of Values of Karazin University, among which the value of openness and tolerance was given an important place: the university is open to a world-wide intercultural dialogue, free exchange of information, publicity of scientific discussions, tolerant communication with different civil societies, expansion of international scientific, educational and cultural communication and cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

Today Kharkiv University faces a difficult problem of organizing training for more than 4,5 thousand of foreign students who have come from more than 70 countries and who represent different, sometimes quite different, cultures. Almost every fourth student of the university is a foreign citizen and therefore the problem of intercultural communication

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<sup>3</sup> Ch.-D. Rommel, *Spohady pro moie zhyttia ta mii chas*, transl. V. Kravchenko, Kharkiv 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *Kodeks tsinnostei Karazinskoho universytetu*, Kharkiv 2017.

in the educational process, in the daily life of these students is quite pressing.

Intercultural communication stipulates both direct and indirect communication of representatives of different cultures in different social areas. It is the subject of interdisciplinary research (ranging from philosophy and cultural studies to sociolinguistics and ethno-psychology) aimed at studying interaction among the bearers of different cultures in various socio-cultural contexts.

Nowadays, intercultural communication takes a variety of forms: direct contacts of the representatives of different cultures, communication mediated by other social actors, assisted by technical means, implemented in the texts on different carriers – paper, electronic, audio, video, etc. Studying intercultural communication in modern social sciences is based on three main paradigms: information (with the emphasis on the process of exchanging messages); interactive (with the emphasis on producing and reproducing meanings); post-nonclassical (with the emphasis on discursive and narrative aspects of communication).<sup>5</sup>

Among many spheres of human life which are involved into intercultural communication, education is of supreme importance. Modern education is undergoing the process of rapid internationalization which leads to the intensification of intercultural communication in regard to different aspects of academic instruction and academic mobility.

Modern university occupies a special position in the realm of intercultural communication since it generates all main situations of intercultural communication, such as: continuous staying in the zone of another culture; interaction with modern texts of another culture; interaction with the texts of other historical periods; interaction with the texts of professional, domestic, social, political character, etc.; direct communication with representatives of another culture in their language; communication in mother tongue via translator in artificial conditions (classes in educational establishments, special events, etc.); monitoring communication of bearers of another culture both in real life and in media space, in literary works, at various public events, etc.; different forms of modifying texts from other cultures, such as full translation, abstract, or annotation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> V. Vasilkova, V. Kozlovskiy, A. Khokhlova (ed.), *Social'nye kommunikacii: professional'nye i povsednevnyye praktiki. Sb. statej*, Sankt Peterburg 2010.

<sup>6</sup> P. Donets, *Osnovy obshhej teorii mezhkul'turnoj kommunikacii: nauchnyj status, ponjati-*

Proceeding from this, we believe preparing students for intercultural communication predominantly through the means of foreign languages and polycultural education to be unreasonably limited.

Intercultural character of social communications, including educational ones, requires tolerance which provides for efficiency of intercultural communication. The level of tolerance in university environment, motivation of tolerant social behavior among the agents of university education, as well as barriers on this way characterize the involvement of a university into the sphere of modern intercultural communication.

University education which hails tolerance is to master new principles of social interaction, according to which both domestic and foreign students are granted the opportunity to participate in the resolution of important questions of university life which immediately affect their rights and duties. In this context, it's hard to overestimate the role of students' self government which is to be viewed as a social technology of shaping an active and tolerant individual as well as creating corresponding atmosphere of intercultural communication.

We believe that it's necessary to distinguish two aspects of university's role in the process of increasing tolerance as a characteristic and a factor of successful intercultural communication: one – connected with practicing tolerance inside university environment, the other – in society in general. Thus, we can speak about perceiving the life of foreign and domestic students inside university environment through the prism of correlation between tolerance and intolerance; as well as about the possibilities for the university education to exert influence on the state of tolerance in relations beyond university walls.

We should also take into account that foreign students are bound to get through the hardships of adjusting to unusual life conditions as representatives of their own culture with its peculiarities, traditions, customs, stereotypes of behavior and system of values; as personalities with certain psycho-physiological characteristics; as objects of influence by the new ethnic, social, and cultural surrounding.

It's important for them not to just get adapted to new cultural contexts which admit preserving alienation and even negative attitude

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*jnyj apparat, jazykovej i nejazykovej aspekty, voprosy jetiki i didaktiki*, Kharkiv 2002.



towards another culture, but also to accept this culture, to assimilate both its outer forms and inner values, to get interested in it and to learn to respect it.

The process of intercultural integration has an intricate structure and is characterized as an interaction of different forms of cooperation (psychological, social, cultural, domestic, etc.), not just those connected with overcoming cultural and language barriers.

Foreign students, who found themselves in a new cultural surrounding for the first time in their lives, often fall in the state of mental dissonance and feel like they lead a double life: in private situations remaining within their domestic culture limits, but in social life – trying to follow the norms of a foreign culture. The reason for this lies in both insufficient knowledge of the language of their new socio-cultural surrounding, and inability to learn different social roles assumed by the participants of different situations, to cope with the implications understandable to the native speakers.

The practice proves that intercultural integration is connected with five stages that foreign students get through on their way to entering a new cultural environment: first stage is compared to 'honeymoon' as it doesn't last for long and is characterized by excessive enthusiasm and great expectations; second stage begins when euphoria fades away and a person faces mutual misunderstanding with locals and cannot accept them due to the lack of linguistic skills and cultural habits which may result in a string of communicative failures and, consequently, cause negative emotions and even depression; third stage is the hardest one and is characterized by an educational migrant's cultural shock which may lead to serious health problems, loss of control, feeling of helplessness. People who didn't manage to get adapted to a new cultural environment often return home before completing their education; fourth stage is marked by the gradual change of emotional state from depression to self-assurance and satisfaction with the situation when a person feels more adjusted and integrated into social life; fifth stage occurs when the process of adaptation comes to an end and a person feels completely accommodated to cultural specifics of a new environment.

Modern research dealing with the issue of foreign educational migrants' integration most often single out three groups of communicative problems: academic (connected with educational process); personal



(connected with individual traits); socio-cultural (connected with interaction).

Academic problems include contradictions between the level of foreign students' communicative competence, their abilities to perceive educational information, and requirements of higher educational system, as well as the lack of knowledge of academic stereotypes of the country-provider of educational services. For example, Chinese students find psychologically inadmissible and unacceptable an emotional and expressive manner of presenting information in a loud voice, with sharp gestures and declarations that someone knows the world better than they (even if the teacher speaks the language they learn). Their consciousness operates a system of values that differs from that of Europeans. Academic grades from 1 to 5 or a 100-point system of evaluation are still alien to their self-appraisal. So, if an experienced teacher is able to show to a student like this that his/her level of knowledge 'today is better than yesterday', it will become a much better form of appreciation than '5' or '100'.

The problems of socio-cultural interaction embrace the sphere of a person's dealing with national and cultural society represented by local population. That's why, adaptation processes should involve not only educational migrants, but also representatives of the country providing educational services, that are encountered by foreigners in different communicative situations.

The necessity of integrating foreigners, in particular, foreign students determines the main aim of educational process – to provide for the maximally favorable conditions for individual growth, that is, for the creation of an *efficient educational environment* as a multifactor polycultural formation that guarantees the conditions for cultural and educational growth of a person and contributes to his/her creative development.

Educational environment should be individually-oriented and capable of creating conditions for a person's self-development and self-realization; helping foreign students adapt themselves to the new living conditions and take an active part in intercultural dialogue. Forming creative educational environment in conditions of educational establishments can take place as a responsibility of linguo-socio-cultural adaptation center for foreign citizens. The center's work lies in:

- developing methods of communicative competence necessary and

- sufficient for professional communication on different levels;
- developing programs for courses and trainings that teach tactics of speech behavior ensuring foreigners' integration into the sphere of social, group and interpersonal relations as well as their adaptation into Ukrainian social and cultural area; these programs should be directed at overcoming cross-cultural differences in both verbal and non-verbal communication;
  - establishing courses for training social pedagogues that could oversee foreign citizens at the initial stage of their stay in Ukraine;
  - working out new and correcting already existing textbooks and other kinds of teaching material for the abovementioned courses;
  - developing software for the needs of educational process.

As experience shows, the process of intercultural integration is facilitated by special trainings that help foreigners penetrate the sphere of social relations in Ukrainian society (legal, health care, etc.).

The meaning of such trainings lies in organizing intensive interactive teaching during which the participants not only acquire some information but also learn how to act in typical situations.

The possibility of providing qualified psychological aid reduces considerably the terms of psychological adaptation. For this purpose, psychologists are involved to monitor foreigners' objective and subjective state on different levels and to give them effective correctional assistance.

The necessity of developing adaptive psychological-pedagogical technology of teaching foreigners requires the implementation of 'tutors' institute'. Tutors will provide continuous supervision of students in solving social and home problems. This 'institute' comprises tutors – teachers that work with foreign students all the time till their graduation, public tutors – Ukrainian and foreign students selected from among the group-mates of foreign students, or if there's no such an opportunity, from among other interested students (e.g., future psychologists).

Social-pedagogical supervision of foreign students' socialization in University's educational and cultural environment is aimed at protection, assistance and support in the process of acculturation through cooperation of a supervised person (foreign student) with his/her supervisor (social pedagogue, tutor, psychologist, or any other person providing supervision); contributes to creating optimal conditions for effective development of foreign students' sociality (its intercultural and professional components).

For the sake of providing continuous social and psychological assistance it is necessary to ensure information support of educational migrants in problem situations. This kind of assistance can be provided by the service of psychological consulting, 'hot lines', web-sites, etc.

All foreign students of preparatory department at Karazin University are obligated to have the course in Ukrainian studies aimed at their involvement into a new social-cultural environment. They also take part in different extra curriculum activities (thematic lessons, musical evenings, tours, national culture presentations). Foreign students also have an opportunity to choose from among different courses especially developed for their needs, such as History of Ukraine, Linguistic and country studies, Ukrainian culture, etc. Extra curriculum work is concentrated in cultural centers which function at the University as independent administrative units, such as: African Center, Bulgarian Center, Polish Center, German Center, French Center, Confucius Institute.

Difficulties of intercultural communication are determined not only by such linguistic reason as the lack of a foreign language competence. They also lie in the fact that people's ethnocentrism makes them perceive communicative situations (consciously or subconsciously) through the prism of their own culture's mental schemas and cognitive, emotive and evaluative stereotypes. They cannot always realize cultural peculiarities of their communicative partners, their worldview, normative and evaluative standards, general specifics of seeing the world. In order to integrate foreign students in a new cultural realm successfully, a lot of work is to be done as to the purposeful organization of various forms of intercultural communication.



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