

Accessibility of higher education and prospects of positive social dynamics

**Project team: E.M.Avraamova (Project Director),
M.G.Kolosnitsina, O.A.Aleksandrova, D.M.Loginov**

Institute of social and economic problems of the population, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Problem

Intensive vertical mobility is one of the factors providing social stability and public integration. Higher education is traditionally treated as condition for promotion on the status staircase. High educational level entails adequate status positions and respective wellbeing standards. To what extent such relationships are attributive of the Russian society which is currently phasing in? This issue was pivotal for this research.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to reveal possible types of social dynamics proceeding from the analysis of educational strategies of the younger generation which are formed on the basis of available social resources at household and individual life scenarios. The social dynamics was understood as variability of social behaviors and mechanisms of vertical mobility while educational strategies implied firstly a decision in favor of receiving higher education and secondly selection per se of an educational facility and motivation for such selection.

The following tasks were solved in course of investigations:

- Assessment of the availability of higher education of various levels from the viewpoint of diversified resources parameters (social status, wellbeing, place of residence, type of adaptation behavior) of households with students attending various institutes.
- Identification of differences in motivations of students in respect of higher education acquisition.
- Analysis of models of 'educational behavior' of students¹.
- Clarification of life scenarios of students.
- Comparison of matriculation practices and future job placement.
- Forming concept of routes of social dynamics.

Methodology

Information basis of the investigation was consolidated using returns of poll of 936 students from various higher educational institutions Moscow, Vologda and Taganrog (ratio 336: 300: 300), performed in 2003. Polling venues selection was based on the necessity to get an

¹ Educational behavior implies the behavior in course of the process of education (deep studies acquisition of supplementary skills and employment in course of education).

image of metropolitan developments and also of the provincial patterns as well (center of province, and a large- scale provincial city).

Results

1. Evident correlation was revealed between provision of the family with resources, availability of higher education facility and prospects which education opens up. The greater the resource potential² of the family, the higher the chances of the children to get high quality, market demanded higher education related to clear-cut material and social prospects. However the doors to medium and high prestige institutions of higher education are not closed before children whose parents do not have command either economic or social resources.

Prestige faculties provide education to students of whom 28% come of families with low resource potentials, 47% from families with average resource potentials and 25% from most well-to-do families in terms of provision of resources. Notable differences in household capabilities come to light in case of elite institutes where 47% of students belong to most well-to-do families, 41% from average and only 12% from families with weak resources provisions. Such situation is adequately tracked by public opinion: 60% of respondents are convinced that 'for talented but low income young people elite institutions are inaccessible'.

2. The image of benefits generated by the profession obtained at the institute is specified to a great extent by educational strategies of the household. Professions which in the opinion of respondents will never yield material or status returns are usually taken up by children from families least provided with resources. Professions with best prospects are mastered by those who come of families with high level resources backgrounds. It shall be noted that professions yielding high profits but disadvantaged by low prestige with the public or conversely highly respected, but bringing small income stayed out of interest with families of high resources potential. On the opposite such professions prove attractive to children from families with lower incomes.

3. There are three principal matriculation strategies. The first one concentrates solely on knowledge of entrants. It is implemented by 38.5% entrants. Most widely spread strategy (51% of entrants) is feature by intervening parents who involve money and/or connections while the entrant is really preparing for the examination. The third strategy (10%) solely relies on the use of money and/or connections of the parents.

Orientation on knowledge alone is least spread in Moscow where 65% of all parents use money and/or connections and one third of this amount resort solely to this resource. In province informal methods are widely spread as well but the strategy totally neglecting knowledge is represented more modestly. Informal matriculation methods are employed not only by well-off families but also by those whose social and economic resources are rated low. The strategy based on connections and money of parents gains momentum as the matriculation aims at more prestigious faculties.

Half of families irrespective of resources level spend for matriculation money or use connections in addition to the examination tests.

4. The research posed a problem to assess the attitudes of respondents towards alternative models of matriculation including:

² Resource potential of a household was estimated in form of integrated numerical score inclusive educational level of adult family members; evaluation of material assets; amount of savings; level of social self-appraisal; adaptation level.

- Matriculation on the results of entrance examinations. This model was rated best by 29, 5% of respondents.
- Matriculation of all applicants with subsequent sending down slow students (the Sorbonna model). This model was favored by 34,2% of respondents.
- Educating both who passed competitive exams and who paid for the training. Best model for 24,4% of respondents.
- Matriculation on the basis of uniform federal examination was preferred by 12,5% of polled students.

5. Principal motivations for getting higher education are: education for the sake of knowledge; education for the sake of money; education for the sake of prestige. Combined grouping of returns allowed singling out main educational motivations:

- 1) Intellectual and pragmatic - getting knowledge and converting knowledge into high profits – 31,5%;
- 2) Mainly intellectual – 23,0%;
- 3) Mainly pragmatic – 31,3%;
- 4) «Side» or extra-educational motivations – education as a token capital or as a tool to rid the problem (army draft, employment) or put it off – 14, 2%.

6. On the basis of obtained returns (data on attendance, selected additional books on profession, employment in course of education) educational behavior typology was arrived at:

- Studies and works – 20%;
- Studies – 55,8%;
- Works – 6,8%;
- ‘Doesn't study, doesn't work’ - 17, 4%.

Comparison of students' behaviors in course of training with respective practices of matriculation reveals that every fifth student irrespective of the effort spent on matriculation is involved into most active forms of educational behavior, combining education and permanent employment. The number of students in other groups to a great extent depends on personal inputs of a student into matriculation. Among those who spared personal effort by using the 'services' of parents the share of those belonging to 'doesn't study, doesn't work' reaches 30%. This indicator is twice higher than with the students who entered the institute all by themselves or using personal efforts and parental resources.

7. Identification of persistent type of social behavior was done with the help of cluster analysis³ which revealed that the majority of students (64,1%) demonstrates a conformist model of behavior. Supported by the reserve of knowledge and abilities of parents at a time, they are prepared to realize such practices which, providing demanded by emerged institutional environment, will be effective "here and now". Though understanding the fallacy of the existing mechanisms of vertical mobility they will feel bound to think that nothing could be changed. However if there is a change in the 'institutional matrix' proper they will find a possibility to update both their models and behaviors.

³ The following variables were used: strategy to enter a higher education institution, type of educational behavior, intended employment in Russia or abroad; placement strategy; comprehension of the employer's priorities; comprehension of the necessity to change the existing mechanisms of vertical mobility; social and economic orientations (comprehension of the role of the state in the development of economy and social relations); social and political orientations (comprehension of the role of the state in mass media activities).

Second large group (29%) has intents to reproduce informal social practices. Representatives of this group feel comfortable with the environments in which, as they strongly believe, they will work on their professional career even if the conditions do not match their concept of abstract 'due'. Their sole difference from the 1st group is that at changing institutional conditions when other behavioral models become feasible and effective (models based only on social relations) they will be the losers.

The third group puts together 'independent' individuals who support themselves with personal effort, knowledge and resources (6,3%). It is they who support individual-liberal vector of development. Representatives of this group may be considered as a power which will be instrumental for changing the 'institutional matrix' and remodeling the mechanism of social dynamics.