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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN
RUSSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS
(the experience of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia)**

Abstract

This article is devoted to the organization of the educational process according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) introduced as part of the Bologna process in Russia's higher educational institutions. The authors share their specific practical experience, accumulated by the Chair of Sociology at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR) during the decade of training specialists for bachelor's and master's degrees according to the new credit system, questions are raised over reaching high-quality education in the conditions of higher educational institutions' innovative activities in line with the credit transfer system.

Key words: Educational Process, Education System, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Sociologist Education and Training, Education Quality

**РАЗВОЈ ОБРАЗОВАЊА СОЦИОЛОГА У РУСИЈИ У
КОНТЕКСТУ БОЛОЊСКОГ ПРОЦЕСА
(Искусства Руског Универзитета дружба народа)**

Апстракт

У овом раду представљена је организација образовног процеса заснованог на систему кредита (ЕСПБ) који се, као део болоњског процеса, примењује у

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институцијама високог образовања у Русији. Аутори представљају своја конкретна практична искуства из десетогодишњег рада на Департману за социологију Руског Универзитета дружба народа, где се нови систем кредита примењује на основним и мастер студијама. Аутори разматрају питања која се тичу достизања високог квалитета у образовању, и иновација у институцијама високог образовања које је донео систем кредита.

Кључне речи: образовни процес, образовни систем, систем кредита (ЕСПБ), образовање социолога, квалитет образовања

The majority of articles on sociological education published in our country over the last several years have expressed a deep concern about its state and prospects in the light of Russia's joining the Bologna declaration. Largely sharing such a concern, we, within the limits of this article, will not enter into a discussion about the reform's positive and negative aspects, the pluses and minuses of the Bologna process, and its influence on higher education, including the sociological one. Russia joined the Bologna process more than a decade ago, so this step has already been taken, and there is no point in entering any discussion thereon. It is also our belief that the case in point here, without excessive pathos, should be, first of all, the specific experience of teaching, the achievements, difficulties and problems faced by the departments and chairs of sociology in Russia.

We hope that familiarity with the experience of the chair having a decade-long experience of teaching on the grounds of the academic credit system / credit point system (ECTS), which is still regarded as controversial, may be useful for our colleagues.

To start with, let us dwell upon the principles of the educational process organization at the department of humanitarian and social sciences, first of all, about so called "academic credits." From 2002 on, PFUR has conducted an experiment over using credit points in the educational process. From 2005 on, PFUR has been the head educational institution in studying and introducing the credit point system (ECTS) along with other higher educational institutions carrying out innovative activities on switching to the credit point system, for its subsequent introduction in all higher educational institutions¹. Its introduction is

¹ For details of the innovation activity of higher educational institutions, see: the order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation of July 29, 2005, No. 215. Retrieved from http://www.edu.ru/db-mon/mo/Data/d_05/m215.html; for details of conducting an experiment on the use of credit point system in the educational process,

motivated by the necessity to raise the level of specialist training, which is impossible without an efficient organization of the educational process stimulating students to quality knowledge assimilation throughout the entire process of education. Here, the credit system has shown, in our view, quite a few advantages as compared to traditional teaching methods used in higher educational institutions². The Chair of Sociology, too, takes an active part in the all-university experiment of switching to education using the credit point (academic credit) system. The chair is graduating and servicing simultaneously. Education of students in the "Sociology" course has been carried out at PFUR since 1993. From the very start (and for the first time in the practice of Russian sociological education) specialists-to-be have been educated at PFUR using the internationally accepted bachelor's/master's two-step programme. As a general discipline (a cycle of humanitarian, social, and economic disciplines), sociology is taught today at all the university's faculties (also with regard to credit education model's requirements).

The organization of the educational process in the new system has a number of specific features. First of all, the case in point here is the introduction of a non-linear curriculum and creation of opportunities for the students to independently determine individual educational trajectories. Here, taken account of are also the requirements of the new state standard now in force, established for the "Sociology" course.

Only a limited number of disciplines in all the cycles of general, professional, and special disciplines (GD, PD, and SD) are obligatory. Others have the status of optional courses.

Before the start of each semester, a student is supposed to study detailed descriptions of the courses prepared by the teachers and placed on the faculty's portal, listen to orientation lectures, and consult the course's tutor. Then, a choice of disciplines is carried out and an individual semester curriculum is formed, which may not be subsequently changed. Each discipline has a certain "weight," measured in credits, thanks to which the total academic load accounting for one student in a semester is taken stock of. In doing so, special attention is paid to a student's extracurricular (independent) work, carried out under the control of the teacher in charge of the discipline. The share of independent work in the total number of hours accounting for the academic course, in average, makes up 50%. For the purposes of time

see: the order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation of July 2, 2003, No. 2847 - Retrieved from http://www.edu.ru/db-mon/mo/Data/d_03/2847.html

² For the details of PFUR's experience on introducing of the Bologna process principles into the educational process, see material on the PFUR's official website (the section "PFUR and the Bologna process," <http://www.rudn.ru/?pagec=143>, in particular: <http://www.rudn.ru/files/org.htm>).

optimization and better assimilation of the material, many disciplines are taught in an intensive “self-contained mode.”

The hours of obligatory group and individual consultations are envisaged for a teacher. So, seminars are largely becoming free from the commenting and explaining function, which increases the efficiency of knowledge control making room for a lively discussion.

Each professor, when describing the course, formulates his or her own requirements to the students (and has to spell them out very coherently) and indicates the criteria to be guided by when assigning marks. However, a number of general principles are valid here establishing the forms of academic accounting. There is not examination sitting as such: the students get marks by the results of their work during the semester. Within the semester, a mark-rating system is in force, which takes account of the results of students' work at the seminars, the results of current, intermediate, and final / written appraisals, writing report, essays, etc. Marks are assigned according to a scale of letters (A, B, C, D, E, FX, F). Throughout the academic year, the students write term papers on basic general disciplines, which are publicly defended by them in the end of the spring semester, during weeks specially freed for this purpose from any other academic load.

The formation of an individual curriculum is not done chaotically. Students get comprehensive information on priority educational trajectories and the logic of their determination at group and individual consultations from tutors and curators and from the faculty's internet portal. Those wishing to finish education in the bachelor's programme and also doubting in the choice of the majority of disciplines have a chance to study according to a standardized curriculum, specially created with regard to the requirements for specialists of this particular level. However, those students who plan to subsequently continue their education in the master's degree programme are recommended, when forming the curriculum, take account of the content-related features of their future profession.

Organization of the educational process within a two-step (bachelor/master) system has long since become traditional for PFUR. Within this system, it goes without saying that a bachelor's programme is a fully fledged form of higher education. Therefore, it is exactly in a bachelor's programme that our students get the basic store of professional knowledge. When graduating from the university, they must (and they really do) see themselves as competent and competitive professionals. By no means all bachelor graduates enter a master's programme, but only those who are oriented towards serious research activity. Nowadays, many Russian students do not consider this path a priority one, and one should not criticize them for that. But if a youngster shows interest in research work, he / she should be given a chance to continue his / her education. The above-mentioned individual trajectories of curriculum

formation are designed to help him / her ascend to higher steps of the educational ladder.

Technically, the choice of the subjects takes place in the following manner. Each student has his / her login and password on the faculty's internet portal. He / she may check out a local computer network, familiarize himself / herself with discipline description and requirements for mandatory and optional courses, teachers' personal pages, those of the readers, have a look at a standardized curriculum, "modify" it with regard to the courses chosen. At the end of each semester, all mandatory classes are cancelled for a fortnight. It is exactly during that period of time that a student listens to overview lectures, works with a tutor, studies course descriptions, and finally forms his / her individual curriculum. Then, the curriculum shall be signed by the student and the dean, and may not be subsequently changed: all the chosen courses become binding on him / her.

Thanks to such a system's introduction, a more active, and moreover, responsible participation of students in the educational process is reached. It is indicative that the number of students taking a standardized curriculum diminishes progressively each year, thereby making their conscious choice.

An important achievement attained during the experiment was a considerable increase in the level of the chair's teaching and guiding activity. Previously, too, virtually each course lectured would be supplied with some tutorial materials (as a rule, with a programme and plan of lectures and seminars). However, course descriptions existing at present on-line³ are much more detailed and complete compared to earlier available guidelines. Also there, a student can find through databases other tutorial materials prepared by professors, lecture texts, the themes of essays, term papers, and graduate works, special scientific literature. The choice system, by itself, stimulates the professor not to give way to complacency, to constantly improve himself / herself, and keep himself / herself updated about his / her science achievements. The knowledge control system also becomes transparent: a student knows distinctly what and to what extent is required from him / her, and what mark he / she can lay claim to, if he / she meets (does not meet) the professor's pertinent (spelled out) requirements, etc.

The basic principle of the evaluation of students' knowledge and their academic advances is as follows: they carry out the bulk of what is to be evaluated in the written form. The mark is assigned to him / her

³ All course descriptions are built roughly using the same scheme: aim, content, organization and methodical building of the course, mandatory and optional literature, criteria of the assigning of marks, rules for performing written works (essays, reports), academic ethics, etc. However, they may considerably differ both in content and requirements.

according to the results of him / her work throughout the entire course on the basis of a points-rating system. Students' knowledge control is based on information technologies: a special computer-aided performance control system has been created, and each student has an electronic record-book, which is posted on the internet portal. It is indicative that with the introduction of the credit point system and computer-aided monitoring of students' knowledge, the number of excellent students has decreased, which is surely evidence of the criterion of students' knowledge evaluation being raised, subjectivity going down, and the students aiming at continuous and meticulous work throughout the academic year.

At PFUR's Chair of Sociology, preparation is carried out in three directions of the master's degree programme: "The sociological theory: history and modernity," "The sociology of management and social management," and "Modern methods and technologies in studying social problems." Throughout the entire educational process, students are offered special courses and special seminars fitting into the framework of the above three trajectories. In the end, general educational trajectories are designed to unite teaching, scientific and practical components in the work of the Chair of Sociology.

The starting positions for the subsequent building of educational trajectories are defined by the mandatory disciplines of the professional cycle (PD). Here we have: general sociology (semesters 1-2), the history of sociology (semesters 3-5), and the methodology and techniques of sociological research (semesters 4-6). Also mandatory are some other (mainly, "sectoral") disciplines, e. g. the sociology of management. Out of this basis, vectors diverge in three directions, respective to the master's degree specializations available at the chair. Reference subject lists are formed choosingly for three priority trajectories. It looks like the following:

(A) For those planning to continue education in the master's degree programme in the course "The sociological theory: history and modernity," the choice of the following disciplines is recommended: culturology; politology; the history of world religions; the basics of anthropology and ethnology; philosophy of 20th century; the history of present-day system of international relations; a study of the fundamentals of cognition in the German classical philosophy; the history of economic doctrines; the theory of anthroposociogenesis; the theories of social stratification and social mobility; the history of empirical sociology; the history of psychology; the phenomenological sociology; the sociology of Marxism; the sociology of the central and eastern European countries; a study of the crisis of culture in Russian sociology; E. Goffman's sociology; the sociology of M. Weber; economic and sociological views of J. Schumpeter.

(B) For those planning to continue education in the master's degree programme in the course "The sociology of management and social management," the choice of the following disciplines is recommended: jurisprudence; psychology and pedagogy; politology; economics; language and business communication; the history of economic doctrines; the theories of social stratification and social mobility; gender sociology; the sociology of M. Weber; economic and sociological views of J. Schumpeter; business (innovative) games; sociological methods in mass communication; ethnosociology; the peculiarities of economic behaviour in various types of socio-economic systems; organizational culture studies of social management; conflictology; a social psychological analysis of conflicts; manipulating public opinion and its social consequences; a social study of elite formation in present-day Russia; the psychology of business communication; deviations and social psychological adaptation; psycholinguistic studies of social communication; modelling of social and economic processes using the computer packages of applied programmes; sociological databases.

(C) For those planning to continue education in the master's degree programme in the course "Modern methods and technologies in studying social problems" the choice of the following disciplines is recommended: language and business communication; the fundamentals of anthropology and ethnology; information science; the internet in culture, art, and education; the basics of using applied statistics programmes (SPSS) in sociological studies; using computer technologies in education; mathematics: science, culture, art; the history of empirical sociology; sampling methods study in sociology; survey methods in sociology; business (innovative) games; sociological methods in mass communication; induction and inductive logic as a method of cognition in sociology; a multidimensional statistical analysis in applied social studies; qualitative methods in sociology; the sociology of public opinion; sociological databases.

The choice of disciplines is regulated by a multitude of parameters. Various cycle disciplines are chosen in various (fixed) volumes and at various academic years (GD, mainly, in years 1-2, while PD and SD, mainly, in years 3-4). The requirements may also be set as follows: some subject A may be only chosen, if the subject B has earlier been attended, etc. Certainly, the offered discipline titles are much more in number than the number to be chosen by a student throughout his / her academic years. But the principal thing is that the chair-determined educational trajectories only define a "reference point," since the particular student's actual choice (even distinctly motivated towards education in a specific master's degree specialty) always deviates from them, more or less.

Educational trajectories represent the priority directions of the chair's scientific and pedagogical activity, guided by which students form their own individual curricula throughout their academic years. Mandatory trajectories define a vector determining a student's choice of a specific list of academic disciplines and also the themes of their term papers and graduate works. Building trajectories has as its ultimate aim meeting the employer's requirements, who determines the nature and content of the career of a young professional-to-be. This principle underlies a competitional approach to preparing students for their future careers.

The above-mentioned three educational trajectories, offered by the chair, have different goals. The specialization "The sociological theory: history and modernity" implies the training of staff, demanded mainly in higher educational institutions and basic research institutes. Therefore, a special emphasis here is made on the fundamental and theoretical component of sociological knowledge, which implies, in the first place, a profound study of primary sources, i. d. texts forming the "gold portfolio" of the sociological classics. The specialty "Modern methods and technologies in studying social problems" is both research- and practice-oriented. The basic order for professionals in this particular field is formed by organizations engaged in applied sociological and market studies. The main thing for professionals in the field is the knowledge of the methods and techniques of collecting, processing, and analysis of data used in empirical sociology. The course "The sociology of management and social management" is professional and managerial, aimed at the graduation of social engineering professionals. Here, professional are prepared in the field of management and management consulting, oriented towards working both in state institutions at federal, regional, and local levels, and private businesses. The practice of social engineering, a scientifically-based managerial decision-making, strategic planning in various-type organizations, settlement of labour disputes, etc., - such is the spectrum of applying professional expertise for the graduates of this course.

An indispensable part of the educational process, irrespective of the learning trajectory chosen by a student, is practical (year 3) and pedagogical (year 4) training. Practical training is designed to form in professional sociologists-to-be the practical research skills. Practical training is interconnected in the curriculum with attending the basic course "Methodologies and methods of sociological research" (MMSR) and also an auxiliary discipline, "Training in MMSR." Doing practical training implies participation of each student in conducting a sociological research, the theme for which is formulated in a sociological laboratory. Pedagogical training is oriented towards preparing students for teaching.

In the process of learning, students (years 1, 2, and 3) write term papers on basic general and specific disciplines. Here, the works' themes are determined with regard to a student's interests and the education trajectory chosen by him / her. In the 1st year, all students choose term paper topics from the extended recommended list on "General sociology," in subsequent years, from the core discipline lists, which are priority ones for future master's degree specialization ("The history of sociology," "Methodologies and methods of sociological research," and "The sociology of management"). Notably, a paper on the respective discipline may be written not earlier than this discipline appears in the curriculum: "The history of sociology" and "Methodologies and methods of sociological research," not earlier than in year 1, while "The sociology of management," not earlier than in year 3.

The educational process is concluded with a graduate work and State examinations. The graduates receive bachelor of sociology diplomas with the European Diploma Supplement⁴. The topics of bachelor thesis are determined (for students wishing to continue their education in the master's degree courses at PFUR) with regard to the above-mentioned three educational trajectories. State examinations in "Sociology" for the bachelor degree graduates consist of three parts: primary (test), written, and final (oral). For the purpose of preparing for the examination, the chair organizes in due time numerous consultations (both on the content and procedure of all the three stages) and also trial testing.

For those attending master's degree courses, the master's scientific research (MSR) appears as an important component of the educational process, as its individual, creative constituent. The preparation and writing of the master thesis takes all two years and is accompanied by "interim reports" in the form of a publicly defended essay (semester 1) and abstract (semester 2), and also routine statements made at the mandatory methodological seminar on MSR, which is held weekly during the first two semesters for each of three courses of master degree specialization.

Some years ago, many professors, mildly speaking, were skeptical about the very idea of the Bologna educational innovations, apart from the mechanisms of its implementation. By now, however, the psychological barrier had been overcome. Certainly, many difficulties arise, while introducing the new system. First of all, it was the coupling of experimental curricula with the existed State educational standards. Then it was about the possibilities of the chair's potential implementation within the framework of the new Federal state educational standard of the

⁴ For more details of the materials on a Diploma Supplement and the ECTS system, check out the website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ects_en.html

3d generation (generally, this standard represents a thorny issue, which still needs a broad professional discussion). At present, we deal with the ratio of the teaching load and the students' independent work, the adequate information supply of the educational process, student mobility, competition between professors, discipline choices, methods of calculating salaries, etc. The university's administration and staff have carried out an enormous amount of work on the above and other issues concerning the implementation of Bologna process principles. Here, solid achievements have been attained, and a considerable experience accumulated. All this shows that one not only has to, but also is capable of successfully working in the new conditions.

What are the major results of this principal change in the organization of the educational process on the basis of the credit system, which crucially differs from the traditional model thereof?

If we agree, that the quality of education should be made a cornerstone of the educational process and that the first and foremost here should be not the final control of students' knowledge, but an efficient organization of the educational process stimulating students to quality knowledge assimilation throughout the entire educational process, the credit system has shown a number of advantages compared to the traditional higher learning. First of all, it means active, moreover, conscious participation of students in the organization of the educational process, raising their level of responsibility, and also increasing the share and role of their independent work. This is manifested in an opportunity for the students to independently determine their individual educational trajectories. Only a limited number of disciplines are mandatory for all the students. The rest are optional.

Another positive development is a dramatic increase in the level of the chairs' teaching and guiding activities. Course descriptions now placed on the local area network are much wider and largely more complete than the previous ones. Also there, students can find through databases other teaching and learning aids, lecture texts, essay, term paper, and graduate work topics, and specialized scientific literature. The "choice" system itself urges professors to continually engage in self-improvement and stay up to date with scientific developments.

As an important step forward came introduction of up-to-date information technologies not only in the education process proper, but also in its resourcing. The educational process is now inconceivable without searching information on the internet, the links to the sites, computer programmes, and many other things. This entire process of control of students' knowledge is based on information technologies: a special computer-aided system of academic performance control has been created, and each student has an electronic record-book.

An important achievement was the improvement of the educational process's economic indices, including an increase in the professors' average

salaries. A professor, who delivers a chosen course, strives for more students enrolling themselves in it. His / her motives are not only moral: the more popular the course is, the more students he / she will manage to involve, and, respectively, the higher salary he / she is going to get.

Surely, there are many difficulties and problems in switching to the new system. There are psychological aspects here, too: many professors, mildly speaking, were skeptical about the idea and still are, to say nothing of the mechanisms of its implementation.

An attempt to bring the Russian higher education system to a quantitative conformity with the European one leads to the problem of general amount of the accountable educational time. Our country's educational standards envisage a considerably larger expenditure of time for preparing students for careers. They imply much more time needed to learn a discipline, and it is exactly this parameter that underlies the credit system. Moreover, an average Russian college student learns some 10 subjects during a semester and, respectively, has to pass exams and tests, which is about twice as much as his / her European counterpart. We believe that some subjects can and even have to be taught during 2-2.5 months, according to the module system. This especially concerns the subjects chosen by the students.

The second problem is tightly connected with the first. It is the ratio of the teaching load and the students' independent work. In Europe's all educational systems independent student work is paid very much attention to. There, much more time is allocated to reading sources, preparing written materials, scientific work, preparing for exams, than to lectures and seminars. Therefore, when forming curricula by the credit point system, we have tried to balance these basic components of the study time.

The third problem (and the stickiest one) is the professor / student ratio, and the professional training of the teaching staff. Naturally, reducing the teaching load implies certain cuts in the teaching staff. But virtually everything depends on the professors: if the students do not choose courses delivered by the same professors from year to year, the respective solutions come to mind.

The fourth problem is an adequate supply of methodology and information for the educational process. For a student to independently get knowledge from various sources, he / she must have an open and direct access to them. In present-day conditions, college libraries may not have the needed literature available, above all, in foreign languages. In the meantime, this is important not only for providing students with the latest editions, but for the Russian higher learning programmes to be recognized as meeting the European standards. Nowadays, we are only starting to solve this problem, which partly involves creating database,

where there is the needed literature, and the students' access to the Internet computer network.

The fifth problem concerns the control and evaluation of student knowledge. At issue here is not only various methods and forms of assessing student knowledge in Russian and European higher learning institutions, but also the mutual trust between those institutions. When European higher education institutions, operating on the basis of the credit system, make a decision of the inclusion of a new one in their network, then, apart from other things (presenting curricula, educational activity type descriptions, education quality systems, etc.), the institution also needs to describe its ways of checking students' knowledge. Proceeding from the credit system, a mark is given to a student subsequent to the results of his / her written works throughout the entire course. The academic recognition in Europe in accordance with the unified ECTS system is based on the possibility to check student knowledge by the persons or organizations concerned at any time.

It is indicative that with the start of applying the credit point system, the number of excellent students has considerably decreased, which is surely evidence of the criterion of student knowledge evaluation being raised, subjectivity going down, and the students aiming at working continuously and meticulously throughout the academic year.

The experience of PFUR's Chair of Sociology shows, in particular, and, maybe, in the first place, that the credit system provides a student with a possibility to become himself / herself, in many respects, the subject of the educational process. Whereas in the old days there was a slogan: "to learn, learn, and learn," which was then transformed into "to teach to learn," nowadays we believe that the main objective of high learning should be "to teach a student to take responsibility for his / her fate." This is the only way to ensure high-quality education, which is so much needed for our Russian society. While realizing that in this article we have managed to elucidate only part of the problem and touch upon only certain aspects of education according to the Bologna process principles, it appears to us that time has come to move on from "theoretical reasoning" about the state of affairs with preparing sociologists to a specific analysis and searching for ways to improve it.

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RAZVOJ OBRAZOVANJA SOCIOLOGA U RUSIJI U KONTEKSTU BOLONJSKOG PROCESA (Iskustva Ruskog Univerziteta družba naroda)

Rezime

U radu je prikazana organizacija obrazovnog procesa Evropskog sistema prenosa bodova (ESPБ), koji se pod okriljem Bolonjskog procesa uvodi u visoko-obrazovne ustanove u Rusiji. Autori dele svoje desetogodišnje konkretno iskustvo sa Katedre za sociologiju Ruskog univerziteta prijateljstva naroda, na osnovnim i master akademskim studijama po novom sistemu prenosa bodova. U radu se, između ostalih, razmatraju i problemi organizacije obrazovnog procesa (na primer, mogućnost uvođenja modularne nastave ili pojedinačnih nastavnih planova), metodološke i informacione podrške, smanjivanja broja studenata na časovima, i ocenjivanja studenata. Istovremeno, autori zaključuju da sistem prenosa bodova ima određene prednosti u odnosu na tradicionalno visoko obrazovanje, među kojima su najznačajnije: aktivno i nadasve svesno učešće studenata u obrazovnom procesu uz povećanje njihovih odgovornosti, značajan porast nivoa nastavnog i metodičkog rada katedri, aktivna primena savremenih informacionih tehnologija ne samo u obrazovnom procesu već i u obezbeđivanju obrazovnog procesa, i poboljšani ekonomski indeksi obrazovnog procesa. U radu se takođe razmatraju pojedina pitanja ostvarivanja visokog kvaliteta obrazovanja u uslovima inovacije visokoobrazovnih ustanova u okviru pristupa zasnovanog na kompetencijama.