Self-Organization Activities of College Students: Challenges and Opportunities

Natalia Shmurygina[a], Natalia Bazhenova[a], Ruslan Bazhenov[a], Natalia Nikolaeva[a] and Andrey Tcytcarev[a]

[a]Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, Birobidzhan, RUSSIA

ABSTRACT

The article provides the analysis of self-organization activities of college students related to their participation in youth associations activities. The purpose of research is to disclose a degree of students activities demonstration based on self-organization processes, assessment of existing self-organization practices of the youth, identification of factors having "deterrent" effect in development of self-organization processes of college students. As a result, a low percentage of establishing associations upon own initiative was identified, main reasons deterring this process, such as employment, information ignorance, reference group influence, and fear of unknown audience, were identified. The issues under consideration became the foundation for development of further events of in-depth study, which realization will contribute to development of corrective activities aimed to increase a development degree of college students self-organization activities.

Introduction

Today, a significant condition of the modern society development is formation of positive forms of self-demonstration of citizens providing for the opportunity and ability of people to establish associations and organizations. Such associations allow for the possibility of taking part in the public administration system, defending proper interests, satisfaction of wants, etc. (Keane, 2013). Creation of conditions for such kind of tendencies and manifestations of society members in the state will contribute to development of the civil society being able to provide structuring and self-organization of citizens (Tester, 2014).

Effectiveness of self-organization has different types of manifestation: organization, economic, and social. The social manifestation is related to achievement

CORRESPONDENCE Ruslan Bazhenov ✉ r-i-bazhenov@yandex.ru

of best results in development of personal qualities, improvement of labor efficiency, etc. (Stuart et al., 2011). The social self-organization as a process is based on activities on harmonization of public relations. It includes activities on changing priority of needs and interests, system of values, motives, and objectives of a human and a collective (Porta & Diani, 2006). In order to improve self-organization practices in society, it is necessary to build a systematic work with its members aimed to consolidate skills of teamwork (Ulrich & Probst, 2012)

Considering the students' environment as a sensitive period for self-organization activities development, it can be noted that study of such activities is necessary to realize motives of such associations, understanding of driving forces of these processes with the aim of creating conditions for self-organization processes assistance in a higher education institution and improving their level (Tyler, Kramer & John, 2014).

Self-organization can emerge at the personal and collective level (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Above characteristics show that high personal component part is a basis for active public, creative, and other activity. It can be asserted practically that efficiency of the collective level will depend on sufficient development of personal self-organization (Shmurygina et al., 2015).

Development of self-organization processes for students is an important factor, on one hand as for development of personality successfully proving itself in daily living activities of the higher educational institution, on another hand as for formation of personal and professional competencies of a future specialist. Studying of these processes is necessary to design elements of university services work on maintenance and creation of self-organization process conditions in the higher educational institution in order to prevent destructive manifestations of the youth (Leont`ev, 1977; Helbing, 2012).

Methods

A number of methods were used to achieve the objective: review and analysis of sources (Smith, 2015) dedicated to analysis of self-organization processes in the students' environment (Singleton & Straits, 2010), as well as results of the repeated analysis of empiric studies data within the context of this range of problems (Bryman, 2015). On the first stage, a method of observation was used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013; Stacey, 2013), with the help of which it was possible to obtain the primary information about the problem under consideration in educational institutions. It was acknowledged that a small number of youth associations was observed in colleges. Among such associations, there is observed a practice of establishing on the instruction of the administration, students have minimum knowledge about ways of cooperation, methods and forms of interpersonal communication arrangement. Statistical study was conducted in the form of a sociological survey using analysis, ranging method (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). Data received were used as showings of dependent variables. Students at the age of 16 - 20 in the number of 350 persons from Birobidzhan Medical College, Birobidzhan College of Culture and Art, Birobidzhan Industrial and Humanitarian College, Birobidzhan Mechanical and Technological Engineering School, Birobidzhan Polytechnic Engineering School were participants of the survey. Appurtenance to the faculty, year, sex was a quoted attribute. Sampling was formed at every faculty separately, randomly at the stage of respondents selection. Respondents were provided with a questionnaire containing questions of open and close types. They had to choose a variant of answer from suggested ones that most completely reflected the examinee's attitude.

This study was aimed to study self-organization activity of college students with the use of the developed proprietary methodology.

The study was conducted in the territory of Birobidzhan of the Jewish Autonomous Region in 2015.

Results

Initially, in the study process, it is necessary to clarify the understanding of "self-organization" term meaning by the college students.

Analysis of answers to this question showed that 70% of respondents understand self-organization as themselves, 24% - establishing, restoration or improvement of an organization, 5% - aseity (emergence), 1% - spontaneous processes of establishing the organization.

Data analysis shows the understanding of the source term, in the first instance, as a personal characteristic that takes into consideration internal growth of a person enabling him achieving objects, status, meeting needs, etc. Such understanding is prevailing, to our opinion, also due to popularity of modern methods of achieving personal results and efficiency in work. For example, with the use of time-management methods (Zampetakis, Bouranta & Moustakis, 2010), transmitted through information transfer channels available for students (Internet, social networking sites).

Understanding of the term "Self-organization" as a process makes it possible to distinguish a complex of activities aimed to create such relations in the collective that relate to stable, working, and interpersonal relations focused on fee choice, voluntary acceptance of rules and procedures. Such perception of the process supposes personal and active component that bespeaks connection of the collective and personal self-organization.

Studying the self-organization activity, let's turn attention to analysis of students participation in the activity of youth associations to separate a degree of self-organization practices presence, in particular.

When asked "Are you a member of a students' organization(s)", 14% of respondents answered Yes, and 86% - No. Results obtained denote the connection with the first question of the questionnaire. Understanding of the self-organization as a process is observed in 24% of respondents only that testifies prevailing of personal over collective.

In the study process, a question was set to respondents about connection of the occupation selection and students' activity in associations. 51% of respondents remarked on the presence of a distinct connection ("when you are at your own place, everything holds pleasure"), the availability of indirect connection was remarked by 30% ("yes, even if you mistook the profession, you can compensate it"), 19% of respondents remarked on the absence of full connection of the selected occupation and the activity degree. When asked of degree of awareness when selecting a profession, 38% pointed out their own selection based on their abilities, 31% selected this specialization because they considered it prestigious, 19% went by parents' advice, 12% were oriented not on appropriate strivings, but an image of an educational institution. Results obtained concerning ratio of a correct occupational choice and participation in students' associations must explain a high degree of collective activity of the youth. However, answers to the previous question showed comparatively low indices of activity degree.

Reasons "braking" students activity in associations activities can hide in their understanding of the purpose and objectives of different type of youth organizations.

When asked "Why students have to unite into organizations", such results were obtained: 71% of respondents show the importance in circle of contacts expansion, 13% are focused on the moral satisfaction, 10% determine it as a method of avoiding loneliness, 4% point at importance of achieving popularity, 2% are focused on obtaining material satisfaction. Taking into consideration psychological peculiarities of the age, expansion of the circle of contacts is a popular variant of answer, because it is a leading type of young people's activity when passing from the childhood to early youth (Leont'ev, 1977). The moral satisfaction considered as realization of need for accessory and social interaction, respect and recognition from outside can become a basis for origin of collective forms of activity. Desire of communication as way of overcoming of loneliness, can indicate a failure of implementation of students' interests, lack of information on a possible place of use of their abilities to satisfy their needs.

It is possible to make analysis of answers to a question on studying of principles influencing youth associations. Following principles were allocated as significant: common interests (63%), joint activity (30%), high activity (11%), uniform values (6%). Common interests can be personal and public. Personal interests - are the need defining the individual's orientation, his activity. Public interests represent the interest of community connected with ensuring its wellbeing and stability, these interests function through activity only. Nature of activity depends on understanding and acceptance of public interests by members of the group. However, personal interests not always coincide with interests of the group, and not always provide group interaction for achievement of objectives. Options of the answer "joint activity" and "high activity" can be referred to the result of acceptance and understanding of public interests by members of the group.

It should be noted that when asked "What mission of the student's organization (in general) do you see" 28% of respondents noted implementation of good public deeds, 21% - participation in various administrative processes of the college, 20% - building a positive image of the educational institution, 17% - protection of interests. Data analysis denotes some "one-sided" vision of the target importance of associations. Despite prevalence of a personal component, the public mission of the organization is chosen as significant. Perhaps, that is why the author observes low interest of youth activity in activities of associations. In confirmation of this fact, it is possible to provide answers to a question of the implemented youth activities in the educational institution. The most part of activities falls within the plane of creative activity, carrying out non-learning activities - 50% of answers, whereas personal interests of students in associations are satisfied for 20% only.

The analysis of the existing independently specified youth organizations showed prevalence of associations of a creative orientation, on the second place - public.

When asked "Are/were there students' associations in your educational institution that were established spontaneously, on their own initiative, if yes, then what kind of them" only one type of collective self-organization practices – club of the merry and inventive that can be referred to as a creative association.

In the course of questioning, respondents were asked a question of existence of desire to participate in activities of student's associations, results showed that 35% answered distinctly – no, 35% favored temporary or situational participation in activities, 19% would like, but do not know where to go, 11% answered distinctly – yes. On the one hand some emerging contradiction can be observed – low percentage of students participating in activity of youth organizations and presence of respondents who are potentially wishing to participate.

The analysis of the following question can become an explanation of such fact: "What is an obstacle for entering a students' association?". Work activities became an obstacle for 39%, negative influence of friends – 30%, lack of information on where it is necessary to address to enter for 20%, fear of unfamiliar audience – 11%. Obtained data have to become a reference point of activity of adjacent services of a university to increase a degree of self-organizational activity of students.

The analysis of answers to the question "What participation in a students' organization gives or will give to you personally" showed that the association as the possibility of self-realization is considered by 50%, the development of professional qualities that will be necessary in the future – 20%, moral satisfaction – 11%, recognition - 8%, career development in higher educational institution - 6%, material remuneration - 5%. Possibilities of the association specified by students lie within the plane of satisfaction of personal needs of respondents. Existence of common interests can lead to establishing of an association, but they cannot be the guarantor of longevity and productivity of existence of such youth organization.

Discussions

Being a social group, students possess necessary prerequisites for development of self-organizational processes, because it has a constant process of knowledge exchange, purposeful getting of information, change of composition. Constantly increasing educational space brings system out of stable equilibrium.

Development of self-organizational processes faces certain barriers in practice. In the course of study, we managed to allocate:

- early involvement of students in work activities;

- lack of information on activity of existing student's associations, about where it is necessary to address to enter the organization;

- influence of a reference group which renders a negative effect directed on the friends' not entering the associations;

- fear of unfamiliar audience, as a result of lack of developed skills of communication of interpersonal, group communication at students;

- established wrong ideas of need of associations and absence of force in them to change the surrounding reality;

- prevalence of personal interests over public.

The analysis of cross-cultural researches the carried out by E. Walsh (2010) , allows adding specified obstacles for development of self-organization processes - is the existence of language difficulties of students, in the international groups sometimes bewildering foreign students wishing to become members of the association.

Characteristic manifestations in the course of establishing of students' associations is that initially they are based on individual preferences of some people connected by general ideas, values. And already in the course of functioning, other groups, collectives identifying themselves with their activity join them. Results of studies by P.Tierney & S.M.Farmer (2011), J.S. Mueller, S. Melwani & J. Goncalo (2012), etc. show that structural identity of a group increases a creative generality and promotes improvement of skill of cooperation in a group of studies. This improvement is possible due to overcoming of a barrier of "a deviation from creativity" in the course of the group cooperation promoting development of the personality qualities.

Development of processes of personal self-organization assumes personal qualities developed in a due measure, valuable orientations, motivation which can

become a basis for development of processes of collective self-organization. As the confirming example, it is possible to give the study carried out by a group of scientists, such as K.F. Robertson et al. (2010). Results brought by them designated the importance of influence of personal preferences, abilities, at choice of profession, groups, the directions of a course of life, etc. When making a choice, special importance needs to be given to the established personal qualities, representations, abilities to one or another business. The choice according to one's internal parameters will favor activity of the student. This point of view was reflected in the course of the study conducted by the authors. Respondents specified that their activity can have both stimulating role, allowing strengthening of the right choice awareness ("When you are at your own place, everything holds pleasure"), as well as a compensatory role ("Even if you mistook the profession, you can compensate it") that will promote at the same time the development of personal skills and abilities.

However, considering the "barriers" allocated by the authors, not always the community of interests can promote unity and productive existence of a group, because of prevalence of personal aspirations and desires only, without public interests. In this situation the personal self-organization can not assume collective and become an obstacle for development of processes of collective self-organization. According to M. Tsay & M. Brady (2012), collective self-organization is capable of influencing on the formation at students of certain skills, new ways and forms of communication, behavior in group in the course of interpersonal interaction. Results of their researches show that young people within association could increase the level of communication abilities, despite students who do not belong to them. Special importance of this sort of participation in the youth organizations, is allocated for foreign students as a way of mastering a new language, breaking barriers arising in the course of communication (Tsay and Brady, 2012).

Similar aspirations can demonstrate variety (polymery) of creation of student's associations on the basis of self-organization process, that such way of creation can pass in several conditional forms (polymorphic) and subject-object (object-subject). This process is connected with the individual (private), group, collective and public (general) choice of a trajectory of change, logic of improvement of the person, society and state (Sztompka, 1993). For example, according to M. Moussaïd et al. (2010), increase in density of the group, will promote the need of making a compromise decision of a group, advancement and simplification of a social exchange. The described understanding of the situation, indicates on arising restriction not only in physical distinctions of participants, but also in the field of communicative restrictions, lack of sufficient skills of interaction in the group that coincides with obtained author's data during the study.

Within educational institutions, it is possible to determine by some reference points in activities for increase of processes of self-organization:

- design of sociocultural space of higher education institution taking into account the greatest inclusion in sociocultural practices of students;

- development of characteristics of the personality potentially significant for self-organization processes;

- arrangement with students of address work of psychologists;

- monitoring, coordination of role arrangements.

The presented reference points mean development and carrying out practical work, during joint activity of the college services working with youth. In this aspect activities can become:

- acquaintance to the existing positive social practices;

- creation of conditions on inclusion in everyday life of social practices on transfer of positive experience of participation in associations activities;

- creation of conditions for an exchange of positive experience of participation between students from other colleges, other regions;

- carrying out diagnostics of qualities of the personality, carrying out training lessons aimed at the development of the qualities of students' identity;

- diagnostics of valuable potential of students, studying of educational conditions of the environment of higher education institution;

- carrying out a number of social and psychological trainings directed to acceptance, liberation, obtaining skills of communication, overcoming of barriers of "fear" , "and what will others say", etc.;

- introduction of various, modern and available to students forms of informing on activity of student's associations.

As a result of interaction of all components of association, there is a self-organization phenomenon (positive or negative). It means, if structural components do not suit each other, then there is a negative synergetic effect, if adequate – positive. For example, at inclusion of a new member into the group it is necessary to pay attention to qualities which form compatibility of this person with other participants. Because of a high standard of knowledge and different values a new member does not manage to be integrated into the group and to prove himself completely that leads to emergence of a dissonance in activity of all collective.

In relation to practice of educational institutions (colleges), social self-organization will promote increase of level of personal self-organization and social activity of students. The youth organization promoting association of all supporters, creating conditions for participation in the common collective will promote the spiritual growth of students, development of reference points for statement of specific goals of the future, directions of the choice in the present, will help to understand the importance of collective activity in achievement of objectives of the social development, formation of the civil society (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2010).

It is possible to achieve increase of self-organizational activity of students due to overcoming of "obstacles" allocated in this work, when coordinating activity of college services in the field of development of personal qualities, the valuable bases, motivation, interests, considering of typological features, etc.

Conclusion

The analysis of a current state of self-organizational activity of students of the educational organization is given in the article using an example of colleges. On the basis of analysis of scientific literature and the conducted empirical research, the authors drew conclusions on a condition of self-organizational activity of college students:

- low involvement into participation of the youth organizations;

- "the hidden reserve" of persons wishing to join associations;

- barriers to join organized groups.

Not only internal factors, but also conditions created in college exert affect the development of processes of collective self-organizational activity of students. The optimum combination of external and internal conditions is important for the development of processes of collective self-organization of youth.

Generalizing, it is possible to state that efficiency of self-organizational activity of college students is defined by change of social-economic and educational reference points of the modern Russian society, the increasing requirements to the personality and professional competence of experts, introduction of the latest social technologies into the educational process. Being guided by inquiries of the society, the state in general, it is impossible to lose sight and neglect processes of self-organization of students as they act as an element of development and formation of the civil society.

The directions of further research can be:

— in part of the theoretical research – further deepening and expansion of scientific search in the context of a subject;

— in part of an empirical component – carrying out of questioning on studying of self-organizational activity of students in higher educational institutions of the city for the purpose of allocation of features of self-organization process of college youth, the analysis concerning the received specialty (humanitarian or technical);

— development and use of a specialized technique that will act as the regulator of necessary connections of external manifestations of the students, taking into account results received during research and also with involvement of specialists of all services which are responsible for work with youth in a college.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Natalia Shmurygina, PhD, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Service, Advertising and Social Work at the Faculty of socio-cultural activities and service of Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, Birobidzhan, Russia.

Natalia Bazhenova, PhD, Associate Professor, Rector of Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, Birobidzhan, Russia.

Ruslan Bazhenov,. PhD, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Information Systems, Mathematics and Teaching Methods at the Faculty of mathematics, information technology and techniques of Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, Birobidzhan, Russia.

Natalia Nikolaeva, PhD, Associate Professor of the Department of Service, Advertising and Social Work at the Faculty of socio-cultural activities and service of Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, Birobidzhan, Russia.

Andrey Tcytcarev, PhD, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of philology, history and journalism of Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, Birobidzhan, Russia.

References

Astin, A.W., Astin, H.S. & Lindholm, J.A. (2010). *Cultivating the spirit: How college can enhance students' inner lives.* Ney York: John Wiley & Sons, 240 p.

Bryman, A. (2015). *Social Research Methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 784 p.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research methods in education.* London: Routledge, 267 p.

Finn, J.D., Zimmer & K.S. (2012). *Student engagement: What is it? Why does it matter?* New York: Springer, 131 p.

Helbing, D. (2012). *Social Self-Organization: Agent-Based Simulations and Experiments to Study Emergent Social Behavior.* New York: Springer, 305 p.

Keane, J. (2013). *Civil society: Old images, new visions.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 23-25.

Leont'ev, A. (1977). *Activity, Consciousness and Personality.* New York: Prentice-Hall, 62 p.

Moussaïd, M., Perozo, N., Garnier, S., Helbing, D., & Theraulaz, G. (2010). *The Walking Behaviour of Pedestrian Social Groups and Its Impact on Crowd Dynamics.* Direct access: http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0048151

Mueller, J.S., Melwani, S. & Goncalo, J. (2012). The Bias Against Creativity Why People Desire but Reject Creative Ideas. *Psychological science*, *23,* 13-17.

Porta, D. & Diani, M. (2006*). Social movements an introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 465 p.

Robertson, K.F., Smeets, S., Lubinski, D., & Benbow, C.P. (2010). Beyond the threshold hypothesis even among the gifted and top math/science graduate students, cognitive abilities, vocational interests, and lifestyle preferences matter for career choice, performance, and persistence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *19(6),* 346-351.

Shmurygina, N.V., Bazhenova, N.G., Bazhenov, R.I., Lutsenko, E.L., & Konovalenko, O.L. (2015). Self-organization of the Student Body: Social Order and Realities. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, *6(5),* 502-508.

Singleton, R.A. & Straits, B.C. (2010). *Approaches to social research*. New York: Oxford University Press, 33 p.

Smith, J.A. (2015). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods.* London: Sage, 160-185.

Stacey, M. (2013). Methods of Social Research: Pergamon International Library of Science, Technology, *Engineering and Social Studies. Elsevier, 5,* 30-35.

Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L. & May, S. (2011). The Impact Of Engagement With Extracurricular Activities On The Student Experience And Graduate Outcomes For Widening Participation Populations. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *12(3),* 203-215.

Sztompka, P. (1993). *The Sociology of Social Change.* Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 225 p.

Taylor, S.J., Bogdan, R. & DeVault, M. (2015). *Introduction to qualitative research methods.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 340 p.

Tester, K. (2014). *Civil Society.* LondonL Routledge, 196 p.

Tierney, P., Farmer, S.M. (2011). Creative self-efficacy development and creative performance over time. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *96(2),* 277-293.

Tsay, M. & Brady, M. (2012). A case study of cooperative learning and communication pedagogy: Does working in teams make a difference? *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *10(2),* 78-89.

Tyler, T.R., Kramer, R.M. & John, O.P. (2014). *The psychology of the social self.* London: Psychology Press, 73 p.

Ulrich, H. & Probst, G. (2012). *Self-organization and management of social systems: Insights, promises, doubts, and questions.* New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 36 p.

Walsh, E. (2010). A model of research group microclimate: environmental and cultural factors affecting the experiences of overseas research students in the UK. *Studies in Higher Education*, *35(5),* 545-560.

Zampetakis, L.A., Bouranta, N., Moustakis, V.S. (2010). On the relationship between individual creativity and time management. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *5(1),* 23-32.