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Nina V. Popova, Anna V. Rubtsova

Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (Russia)

HUMANITARIAN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN MODERN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Conception of humanitarian environment in the sphere of higher education is considered against the globalization background of the XXI century. Humanitarian education and community engagement of students are evaluated with definite examples from the polytechnic university, such as legal clinic, centre for psychological assistance and linguistic tutoring to children and students. Three humanitarian projects uniting students for cooperation in global and urban settings are described: Russian linguists in rural Nicaragua, cultural heritage preservation, dialogue of cultures as a telecommunication project.

HUMANITARIAN ENVIRONMENT; STUDENTS; UNIVERSITY; HIGHER EDUCATION; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT; PROJECTS; GLOBAL AND URBAN SETTINGS

Introduction. The main appeal of the international educational community in the XXI century is that the education system provides not only the development of cognitive and intellectual aspects of the personality, which mainly results in learners' professional competence, but it also instils values and common cultural competencies necessary to maintain a peaceful, equitable, non-discriminatory, steady quality of life on Earth. The development of the global citizenship concept of education seems topical for meeting these challenges, with the leading role of humanities and liberal education.

Among the main challenges of the 21st century is globalization as a process of increasing international interdependence and interrelation of structures and cultures. This phenomenon appeared in the twentieth century, due to both the increasing acceleration of global interdependence and global awareness of the integration in all spheres of life. It is well-known that many of the problems and conflicts of our time are associated with globalization: migration, immigration, international and intercultural conflicts, terrorist attacks, military conflicts, environmental problems, etc.

In this situation, the humanities and liberal arts education as a human-oriented sphere of knowledge, is to propose specific ways and means of overcoming the consequences of globalization processes and to develop tools to prevent the negative effects of this phenomenon on various aspects of human life. Modern university is inevitably involved in engaging scholars in various fields of the humanities, such as philosophy, sociology, political science, pedagogy, psychology, linguistics, etc. in the search of the ways to teach learners how to adapt to the new realities of the global world.

Technical university seems to be one of the most vulnerable entities in the humanitarian process propagation, as technically-minded students are supposedly less likely to respond to humanitarian appeal. In view of this hypothesis it is especially vital to create a proper humanitarian educational environment in modern technical university and analyze the steps undertaken by us in this direction. To be more objective, we should also take into account the fact that modern technical university is actually an institution uniting both technical and humanitarian students, which will contribute to our endeavor of creating humanitarian educational environment in a Russian technical university.

General Idea of Humanitarian Environment in the Sphere of Higher Education. One of the topical issues concerning the development of contemporary universities in global context is research into humanitarian educational environment as the most evident link between university and urban environment, university and the outside world. Humanitarian educational environment is a kind of intermedium for universities to fulfill their mission of humanistic alignment with the outside world through a number of general public oriented activities. Understanding the conception of humanitarian educational environment is crucial for us, true protagonists of its development in international educational context.

Humanitarian environment draws on such principles as tolerance, democracy, diversity, competitiveness, humanism and patriotism. The unity of various environmental constituents may include education itself with certain humanitarian disciplines embedded into technically-oriented curricula, training in the atmosphere of creativity and support of student initiatives in all divisions of the institution; use of the classroom potential and extracurricular types of student involvement in the wider cultural context; improvement of living conditions, recreation and leisure; introduction to physical culture and sports; participation in the conferences, "round tables", discussion clubs.

To ensure that modern education is not going to lose the essential humanistic continuity, it is important to adhere to humanization and humanitarization of higher education. The first involves acquiring by students not only professional knowledge, skills and abilities, but also developing the general world culture outlook, tolerant perception of human values in individual requirements for independent and free choice of their life position. Humanitarization of higher education is aimed at the enrichment of educational training programs through the development of various disciplines in the sphere of humanities, such as: philosophy, sociology, political science, cultural studies, ethics, aesthetics, history, psychology, science, history of art and world religions. Students of technical universities should be involved in the process of human knowledge assimilation with the aim of understanding cultural and historical mission of science and technology in the life of mankind and their own place in the implementation of this mission.

Creating a humanitarian educational environment of the university is the way of making professional education more humane. This may be facilitated, for example, by the inclusion into a foreign language course of the new content aimed at personal humanistic upbringing. Given the activity-oriented approach practiced

in foreign language teaching in higher school, we propose to realize the humanistic approach, using project work as a method of problem-based learning, which is most appropriate for the purpose of humanistic education. The role of the foreign language in creating a humanistic educational environment through the careful selection of authentic reading and listening and comprehension materials cannot be underestimated.

The humanitarian environment of a technical university is nourished by particularly important social projects in humanitarian sphere, oriented at objects outside the university and demanding students' attention. Certain segments of the population who may need students' help should be found and thoroughly analyzed for the sake of possible future cooperation in their support. Project activities in such cases acquire a social character, which is due to social contextuality of the project selection issues. Contemporary students should not be indifferent to the surrounding world, they are supposed to develop the need for self-determination not only in their professional sphere, but also in socially conditioned project activities aimed at socially significant results.

Humanitarian Education and Community Engagement. The main objectives of humanitarian education are the development of students' intellectual curiosity, their critical thinking and global awareness, their commitment to lifelong learning, and their civic leadership in their chosen fields. The Saint-Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU) Institute of Humanities is setting an example of how to foster student engagement in volunteering [6] beyond traditional academic settings.

The main activities carried out at the SPbPU Institute of Humanities' student center have been of literary, historical, philosophical and linguistic nature as conducted in clubs such *Literature as a mirror of our life*, *Modern politics and history*, *Issues of modern national culture* and *Spanish language and culture club*. All these activities support the social enrichment of students, and ensure that student's identity becomes more multi-faceted, that they grow more receptive to diversity by embracing a variety of perspectives and behaviors, that develop a wide range of interests, and are able to spend their leisure time indulging in intellectual and culture-oriented activities. Cultivating the social development of students [9; 10] requires also enabling them to connect with communities beyond the university context so that they can be active members of society, and improve not only their lives but also the lives of others -particularly those in need. Thus, one of the most important activities of the student center at the SPbPU Institute of Humanities is the organization of community engagement projects that connect students with local organizations assisting and representing underprivileged populations. The center's commitment to support community engagement responds to our desire to create conditions for developing students' social responsibility in real settings that are connected to their area of specialization. The main community service initiatives coordinated by the Institute of Humanities are a *legal clinic*, and *centers for psychological assistance and linguistic tutoring*.

The *Legal Clinic* is a subdivision of the Institute of Humanities, committed to advice and assist underprivileged local populations in legal matters, and train

volunteers in supporting the legal needs of these communities. The clinic provides judicial help to citizens living on minimum wage, and underrepresented groups such as disabled and senior citizens. It also provides student volunteers with the opportunities to perfect their legal skills, learn first-hand about judicial processes, and collaborate with judicial and law enforcement authorities. Volunteers engage in actual court and law enforcement practices, and contribute to developing effective mechanisms for exchanging information between the public, media and legal clinic.

The *Center for Psychological Assistance* operates under the auspices of the Department of Engineering Pedagogy and Psychology. The main purpose of the center, serving mainly undergraduate students, is to create a psychologically safe environment for emotional development and social adaptation to university transition. The Center involves graduate students as volunteers, and among the activities carried out are team-building trainings, development of communication skills, prevention of risky behavior, and self-organization and stress-resilience workshops. Special sessions on time management, strengthening memory and attention, and cultivating self-responsibility and assertiveness are offered on a regular basis. The diagnostic work administered by the Center is focused on organizing and conducting psycho-diagnostic research -targeting group and individual aspects-, with the objective of nurturing students' leadership potential and offering career guidance.

A specific example of a socially relevant project arranged by Psychology students through the Center involves conducting classes based on Maria Montessori's educational philosophy and pedagogy at a target kindergarten. This method emphasizes a student-centered approach that celebrates the uniqueness of every learner, and aspires to create conditions conducive to child self-development and creativity. Another interesting initiative is an outdoor event where participants engage in a special personality *rope training* in controlled natural conditions. This event is aimed at first-year students, who need support in overcoming challenges as they transition to the university life, as symbolized by the rope labyrinth. Volunteers from the graduate program in psychology work with the younger peers in developing their teamwork skills and leadership abilities.

The Department of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication offers *linguistic tutoring to children and students*. Volunteers [5; 6] work with youth and peers to support their development of foreign language skills and cultural competence. Specific projects include:

- English language tutoring for children living at the Orphanage #3 of the Kalinin district in Saint-Petersburg. Volunteers also foster a nurturing culture of individual development and self-esteem through the use of educational games and workshops designed for 10-11 years old learners;
- providing linguistic assistance to students with disabilities; this project is embedded in a special topics course in *English for Blind Students* developed at SPbPU;

- supporting the adaptation of foreign students coming to SPbPU on university exchange programs; activities include organizing social gatherings, film nights and conversation roundtables on contemporary issues, and conducting tours of the city of Saint-Petersburg in English.

Additionally, the Department of Social and Political Technologies recently started offering free-guided tours of museums, and hosting publishing workshops in collaboration with the Department of Russian Language.

The volunteering activity supported by the Institute of Humanities at SPbPU is aligned with the mission of the *World Cities, World Class (WC2)* organization, developed at the City University of London with the objective to gather leading universities located in major cities around the world – including SPbPU – to address the cultural, environmental, social and political issues of common interest to both the cities themselves, and their universities.

3. Humanitarian Projects Uniting Students for Cooperation in Global and Urban Settings. The awareness raising project activities at the Institute of Humanities in Peter the Great St. Petersburg polytechnic university also match the mission of the *World Cities, World Class (WC2)* organization.

Russian linguists in rural Nicaragua. Driven by an earnest commitment to understand the world from a myriad of perspectives, and aware of how essential language is in defining identity and bonding across differences, a junior class group of SPbPU Linguistics majors, aspire to deepen their cultural sensitivity by transcending classroom boundaries, and learning from real-life experiences through community engagement practices that matter. Learners often struggle with the idea of how to impact communities with the knowledge and skills acquired at school, how to respond to their responsibility toward the world, and enact change so societies become a peaceful place for the future generations. Inspired by the work of NGO *Waves of Hope* in Nicaragua, this project envisioned partnering with North American students in a service-learning project that would allow participants to lead an art literacy camp with rural Nicaraguan youth, to learn by immersion about the life and heritage of the local community, and to practice a model of international cooperation that nurtures respect, fosters civic responsibility and provides opportunities to grow as world citizens [2, 3].

This project intended to foster deeper cultural awareness and a sense of community that challenge the widening gulf between cultures. This project exposed participants to different facets of cultural immersion – within the Nicaraguan local community as well as within the student community to be formed abroad, blending perspectives from the east and the west that will collide in the common objectives of serving, learning and connecting.

In the world that aims to be borderless, we are separated more than ever. As representatives of a young generation of Russian university students engaged in the study of languages and cultures, *Linguists for Peace and Cooperation* group believe they have the responsibility to overcome cultural barriers and clear misconceptions. They believe they must foster within local communities and abroad the understanding that we belong to a pluralistic human culture. Involving

Russian college students with English and Spanish linguistic backgrounds in the literacy week project we co-developed with Waves of Hope proved valuable –as it offered an additional perspective to the kaleidoscope of experiences we are weaving from different angles, and it enriched the variety of expertise and personal strengths brought into the partnership.

Eventually, the Nicaraguan project was implemented through existing crowdfunding opportunities [4] in 2015, with the leader of the project being Alonso García, Nuria (USA), an invited scholar in polytechnic university. Russian students demonstrated sensitivity in understanding intercultural relationships and a keen interest in engaging with youth in international rural settings that are foreign to their mostly urban experiences.

Project on cultural heritage preservation. The undergoing project is aimed at emphasizing a global mission of a modern university through participation of students and faculty in mutually beneficial cultural activities. The main issue to be addressed within the framework of the project is raising cultural awareness of the participants involved through their familiarization with cultural heritage preservation in different countries, such as Italy, Russia, USA, etc. Contribution into cultural heritage preservation of such international organizations as UNESCO, ICOMOS and ROERICH PACT should be carefully studied for the sake of future generations' better understanding of our culturally rich past [7].

The idea of this educational project emerged as the result of St. Petersburg Polytechnic University's professors' and students' participation (3 master degree students of linguistics and two faculty members) in *Romualdo Del Bianco* foundation workshop in Florence, Italy, 2015, which stimulated our further consideration of educational cultural heritage value. The Romualdo Del Bianco foundation works together with the *International Life Beyond Tourism Institute*, which is one of the best forums for reflection, active research and development of relevant professional practice in the sphere of culture, embracing its past, present and future [1].

International youth workshop united the students from Russia (the University of Culture and Art and SPbPU from St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk state university, Vladivostok university), Poland (Krakow Business school) and Italy (Florentine university), who shared their presentations on cultural heritage preservation issues in their native cities and towns. The students looked into the history of certain cultural objects on the UNESCO list and exchanged ideas on their protection under the umbrella of the above international organizations.

The groundwork for the project was thus laid through SPbPU participation in the international workshop and further continuation of the cultural heritage preservation mission through the creation of elective course syllabus and study manual to the benefit of heritage and territorial conservation. The target audience of the elective discipline, created as pedagogical course project by SPbPU master degree students studying linguistics, will be Bachelor and/or Master degree students, who will get familiarized with the most important contemporary materials on heritage value in terms of their local and global significance for all people. The work on elective course syllabus and study manual has already started in SPbPU.

The significance of the proposed project is seen by us in engaging Russian students in thrilling culturally motivated activities in our own countries and in other foreign countries having interesting experience of dealing with cultural heritage preservation issues. Students should become aware of these globally important cultural challenges through their familiarization with case studies of UNESCO, ICOMOS and ROERICH PACT's influence in resolution of various culturally significant issues. These cases will hopefully make learners aware of their own role as mediators of cultures in the issues of preservation.

Realizing the importance of this project for the sphere of higher education in Russia, we intend to contribute to the sustainable development of its mission of fostering human relationships, knowledge and respect for cultural diversity by means of a widespread heritage value education.

The fact that St.Petersburg, Russia, is the main venue of the project activities is of special significance, as the city center of St.Petersburg is included as Number 1 item on the UNESCO list for Russia. Case studies of the support rendered by international organizations to the famous historical buildings of St.Petersburg and its well-known museums damaged in the World War II will not leave anybody indifferent. The participants of the project will realize their mission of preservation to the fuller extent after their forthcoming familiarization with Moscow, Suzdal, Novgorod and some other places of interest in Russia.

Dialogue of cultures as a telecommunication project. One of the possible forms of the dialogue of cultures in the context of a technical university is an educational project as a telecommunications information and educational technology. The format of telecommunication project is currently undergoing the stage of formation and active development. Telecommunication project provides the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of the global Internet, helping to understand the cultural differences of participants and to bring them a sense of belonging to a common humanitarian environment.

Organization of the dialogue of cultures in the educational context is not yet a sufficiently developed didactic task. One of the possible forms of dialogue of cultures is a telecommunication project as educational technology. In the sphere of education telecommunication projects usually refer to joint educational and creative activities organized on the basis of computer telecommunications, having a common goal and coordinated learner-oriented methods aimed at achieving a mutually beneficial result. Telecommunication project format [8] is currently undergoing the stage of active development, providing the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of the global Internet network. In particular, it helps to understand cultural differences of the participants and brings them a sense of belonging to a single global community. Organized for the first time, a teleconference between the Financial University in Moscow and St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU) was a landmark event in 2015.

Under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Languages in the Financial University of the Russian Federation Government (Moscow), an interactive dialogue of cultures was held through a teleconference with St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. Such economic categories as money, credit and

banks were discussed. From St. Petersburg it was attended by graduate students of the Institute of Engineering and Economics in SPbPU. In the entertaining, interactive format, we have managed to summarize students' professional knowledge in the field of commercial bank activities in different countries (England, Australia, USA, China, Spain) and different time periods (from the time of Theodore Dreiser to the present day). The telecommunication project was attended by those interested in the basic rules of communication in the field of banking, which accumulates the experience of credit institutions, reveals binding principles of the banking sector organization and monetary policy in various countries of the world. The project was conceived like traveling to different countries and acquiring some banking experiences, getting familiarized with the specific national features of banking business. In two hours of telecommunication between the two universities, students made a virtual journey to England, Spain, India and some other countries [8].

The team from St.Petersburg was as international as the world of banking. In SPbPU group there were foreign students from India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Ecuador, China and Russia. English played a truly unifying role, creating a comfortable environment for the dialogue of cultures. As for technical support, video conference at the Resource Center of the Polytechnic University was conducted with the use of professional Polycom equipment, which was compatible with the technical equipment of Moscow. The whole organization of the event was at a fairly good level, with the video and audio communication being flawless, and helping to create a relaxed atmosphere of the event.

An important educational issue that we have yet to comprehend, is the awareness of the importance of learning in collaboration, where all the participants come together to pursue a common goal. Though the first rehearsal of the play based on the novel "Financier" by Theodore Dreiser, which was staged by polytechnics, was without any enthusiasm, the very last rehearsal and performance of the group during the teleconference were very significant as acting attempts. The Polytechnics worked in retro style and got closer to the financial problems of the last century, whereas the Muscovites showed a critical attitude to the interpretation of the current economic problems and tried humor to talk about serious matters. In short, the cross-cultural celebration was really successful, with the dialogue of cultures becoming a kind of polylogue.

Conclusion. As a kind of conclusion, we should emphasize the crucial role of foreign language studies for the implementation of any humanitarian project. Mastering any foreign language is a way of introducing a different culture, learning a new socio-cultural content, and in this context, foreign language learning is seen as a dialogue of cultures in a common format of intercultural communication, i.e. equitable cultural interaction between members of different communities drawing on their identity and originality.

It should be particularly emphasized that all the community engagement activities and humanitarian projects in global and urban settings have been a continuation of students' curricular activities in their professional field. For example, *legal clinic* resulted as law students' practice with general public being

their target audience, whereas *dialogue of cultures* in urban setting was the result of the economists' communication in the field of banking. Linguists' participation in two of the above projects was also stipulated by their professional interest in intercultural communication as it is a way of acquiring professional maturity in the chosen field of knowledge, a way of building their polycultural competence.

Even though the above description of our community engagement activities and humanitarian projects in global and urban settings is not enough to get a complete idea of the humanitarian educational environment in modern technical university, we hope that our examples are, to some extent, demonstrative of the humanitarian endeavor at our university. We are planning further development in this direction, including research into humanitarian educational environment as the main link between university and urban challenges, as well as further students' involvement in community engagement activities and humanitarian projects enhancing both humanitarian and technical learners' participation.

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Попова Нина Васильевна – доктор педагогических наук, профессор кафедры «Лингводидактика и перевод» Гуманитарного Института, Санкт-Петербургский политехнический университет Петра Великого, 195251, ул. Политехническая, 29, Санкт-Петербург, Россия; e-mail: ninavaspo@mail.ru

Popova Nina V. – Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University; 195251, Politekhnikeskaya Str. 29, St. Petersburg, Russia; e-mail: ninavaspo@mail.ru

Рубцова Анна Владимировна – доктор педагогических наук, профессор кафедры «Лингводидактика и перевод» Гуманитарного Института, Санкт-Петербургский политехнический университет Петра Великого, 195251, ул. Политехническая, 29, Санкт-Петербург, Россия; e-mail: annarub2011@yandex.ru

Rubtsova Anna V. – Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University; 195251, Politekhnicheskaya Str. 29, St. Petersburg, Russia; e-mail: annarub2011@yandex.ru

ГУМАНИТАРНАЯ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНАЯ СРЕДА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ ТЕХНИЧЕСКОМ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

Концепция гуманитарной среды вуза рассматривается на фоне глобализации XXI века. Гуманитарное образование и вовлечение студентов в социальную жизнь оцениваются примерами из Политехнического университета: это юридическая клиника, центр психологической помощи и лингвистическая поддержка студентов. Описаны три гуманитарных проекта, объединяющих студентов для сотрудничества в глобальных и городских условиях: российские лингвисты в селах Никарагуа, сохранение культурного наследия, диалог культур как телекоммуникационный проект.

ГУМАНИТАРНАЯ СРЕДА; СТУДЕНТЫ; УНИВЕРСИТЕТ; ВЫСШЕЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ; УЧАСТИЕ В ОБЩЕСТВЕННОМ ДЕЛЕ; ПРОЕКТЫ; ГЛОБАЛЬНЫЕ И ГОРОДСКИЕ РАЙОНЫ

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