INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL UPBRINGING ON THE EDUCATION OF SOVIET PEDAGOGICAL INSTITUTE STUDENTS IN THE 1960S

INFLUÊNCIA DAS CONDIÇÕES SOCIAIS E DA FORMAÇÃO IDEOLÓGICA EM ESTUDANTES DO INSTITUTO PEDAGÓGICO SOVIÉTICO NA DÉCADA DE 1960

INFLUENCIA DE LAS CONDICIONES SOCIALES Y LA EDUCACIÓN IDEOLÓGICA EN LOS ESTUDIANTES DEL INSTITUTO PEDAGÓGICO SOVIÉTICO EN LA DÉCADA DE 1960

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ABSTRACT: The study is carried out within the framework of the developing trend in Russian historical science—the history of everyday life. Particular attention is paid to the study of various organizational forms of life of the Soviet student community in a provincial town, as Gorky was at that time, during a difficult and intense period in both domestic and foreign policy in the history of the USSR. The authors use the local method of historical research, showing the history of the country through the prism of the history of a particular locus. Materials of the periodical press devoted to student life and the most troubling problems of students are involved in the study. The novelty of the article lies in the introduction of several previously unpublished sources shedding light on some aspects of the life of the student community, combining the local method with the history of everyday life.


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RESUMO: O estudo é realizado no âmbito da tendência em desenvolvimento na ciência histórica russa — a história da vida cotidiana. Particular atenção é dada ao estudo de várias formas organizacionais de vida da comunidade estudantil soviética em uma cidade provinciana, como Gorky naquela época, durante um período difícil e intenso na política interna e externa da história da URSS. Os autores utilizam o método local de pesquisa histórica, mostrando a história do país pelo prisma da história de um determinado locus. Materiais da imprensa periódica dedicados à vida estudantil e aos problemas mais preocupantes dos alunos estão envolvidos no estudo. A novidade do artigo está na introdução de diversas fontes inéditas que lançam luz sobre alguns aspectos da vida da comunidade estudantil, aliando o método local com a história do cotidiano.


RESUMEN: El estudio se lleva a cabo en el marco de la tendencia en desarrollo en la ciencia histórica rusa: la historia de la vida cotidiana. Se presta especial atención al estudio de las diversas formas de organización de la vida de la comunidad estudiantil soviética en una ciudad de provincias, como era Gorki en ese momento, durante un período difícil e intenso en la política interior y exterior de la historia de la URSS. Los autores utilizan el método local de investigación histórica, mostrando la historia del país a través del prisma de la historia de un lugar particular. Los materiales de la prensa periódica dedicados a la vida estudiantil y los problemas más preocupantes de los estudiantes están involucrados en el estudio. La novedad del artículo radica en la introducción de varias fuentes inéditas que arrojan luz sobre algunos aspectos de la vida de la comunidad estudiantil.


Introduction

What remains quite a promising direction in Russian historical science is the history of everyday life, which focuses on the comprehensive study of repeated, normal, and mundane, which shapes the lifestyle of representatives of various social strata, including their emotional reactions to life events and the motives of their behavior (VORONKOVA, 2021; SOFRONOVA; KHAZINA, 2020). As noted by I. B. Orlov (2010), it is the everyday life that eludes reflection that is the main subject of the social and human sciences, embodying that which remains unchanged over long periods. Alf Lüdtke (2010), one of the founders of this branch of science, in his works calls to abandon the one-dimensional perception of history and pay attention to the multidirectional nature of the real historical process. He urged reconstructing the everyday life of certain micro-objects, which could be small labor collectives, military units, or even a theater troupe.
In Russian historical science, this direction of research is relatively new. In the Soviet
time, the problems associated with everyday life and its various aspects were not of primary
importance. In one way or another, daily life was reflected in historical research, but rather as
supplemental to the study of global themes and processes. In scholarly councils, this issue was
often disparagingly referred to as a shallow topic. As a result, by the end of the Soviet era, the
problem of the history of everyday life was among the understudied topics. Nevertheless,
starting from Perestroika, this issue started to arouse public interest. The attention of
researchers is drawn to various aspects of public and private daily life, the rules and ways of
communication, and perceptions of oneself and one’s community. According to one of the
founders of historical anthropology, the very subject of research contains in itself the relation
between daily life and mentality and experience of the world, thereby, scholars’ attention is
attracted to not only living conditions but also behavioral patterns, habits, rituals, and the
comprehension of subjective life experience by the contemporaries of the events under study
(KROM, 2003). Examination of these aspects will allow revealing how a person’s reactions
and inner world are influenced by the objective historical conditions of the specific era. Thus,
as noted by Pushkareva and Liubichankovskii (2014), the primary object of the history of
everyday life has become the identification of the ways and mundane actions exercised by an
individual.

One of the understudied issues is the daily life of student youth. Meanwhile, students
deserve the utmost attention, first, as the source of the intelligentsia, and second, as one of the
most active social groups. Of special interest is the Soviet student community of the studied
period. The 1960s were the time of radical changes in the socioeconomic structure of Soviet
society and of important events in international politics that directly affected the students of
those years as well. In particular, in October 1961, the 22nd Congress adopted the Moral
Code of the Builder of Communism (MORAL’NYJ… 1961), which had a great impact on the
daily life of the student body.

The exploration of the everyday life of student youth provides an opportunity to study
the mentality of Soviet society, to understand the practices of everyday behavior that
determine the choice of one or another decision. Everyday life allows us to comprehend not
only the rules and prohibitions but also the ways of evading them (ORLOV, 2010).
Materials and methods

The study is based on the analysis of unpublished sources from the State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast (SPI CANO) and the State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast (SPI SSPANO), as well as the materials of central and regional periodicals. The main body of archival materials is composed of record-keeping sources: progress reports, protocols of teaching staff meetings, results of sociological surveys of students, reports and protocols of the trade union committee, as well as other structural subdivisions of the Gorky State Pedagogical Institute. The analysis of this group of sources allows revealing the main aspects of the life of the student community and their distinguishing features, as well as ways of interaction between students and the university administration and party-university leadership. A special group of sources is formed by ego-documents: autobiographies and recollections of students and teachers, which provide material for the study of their attitudes toward certain issues. Another group includes data from the periodical press. We studied a selection of newspapers “Za Uchitelskie Kadry” (“For the Teaching Workforce”) and “Uchitelskaia Gazeta” (“Teacher’s Paper”) of the decade. The press materials allow tracing a kind of feedback, the most acute and worrying issues, and the reactions to them. In addition, periodicals were another way for the student and teacher communities to communicate. One of the methods employed in this study is the local historical method, which is closely related to social history and allows for a more accurate and detailed description of phenomena, showing the phenomena characteristic of the country through the prism of local territories. As a result, based on a comparative analysis of the data obtained, we reconstruct the history of the development of the student body in the 1960s and identify the socioeconomic and ideological factors affecting their education.
Results

Student youth is the most dynamic and motley social group. In its composition, the student body of the provincial Pedagogical Institute is more homogeneous than that of other universities. Its bulk is made up of people from rural areas and district centers of the region. According to the academic department, 51% of first-year students in 1968 were graduates of rural schools (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, November 20, 1968, p. 2). The Soviet government not always reasonably pinned their hopes on the fact that, having completed their studies at the Institute, these young people would have returned to the region’s schools. In fact, in this matter, the state proceeded from the social standards of the 1930s, according to which getting higher education and a clean profession was the limit of many villagers’ dreams. For the 1960s’ youth, this was not enough. University education remained a way to improve one’s social status. At the same time, many students were not willing to leave big cities (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932, Inventory 1. Case 192. List 78).

Various factors influenced the educational process and student life in general. One of the most influential was the distribution system that existed at the time, i.e., assignments to work in different, sometimes very distant, areas of the country for long periods (SLEPENKOVA; AKSENOV, 2021). The news reaching students about the lives of graduates in the countryside was not encouraging. A large proportion of the graduates tried various ways to avoid assignments, and many were leaving the profession. Sources noted that “every year, we graduate hundreds of teachers, but only a few of our graduates stay in the countryside, and there is a shortage of teachers” (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, February 17, 1962, p. 2, our translation).

The students’ position was also reflected in the pages of the Institute’s press: “Young teachers will gain a lot of life experience, but not pedagogical experience. There is no one to get it from in the middle of nowhere. In the wilderness, where there is no radio, no light, no books” (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, April 14, 1962, p. 2, our translation).

Evidence of the difficulties of working in rural areas and remote parts of the country is recorded in the reporting documentation: “the first half of the year is over, and some trainees have only just been delivered wood. Few people will be warmed by this attitude to a teacher when you go to bed as if in a snowdrift” (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, February 17, 1964, p. 2, our translation). At times, graduates experienced the disdainful attitude of the local leadership: “Sort out your housing and food as you can. I have a collective farm: plan for cotton... As
easy as you came, you will leave. We lived and will live without you. If you don’t like our rules, go away” (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, August 22, 1963, our translation).

In 1971, the rector’s office summarized the data on the work of graduates of the university in rural schools in 11 northern districts of the Gorky region in 5 years. Of the urban graduates, 15% remained to work in rural areas, and of the natives of rural areas – 50% (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 193. List 36).

The university had groups with advanced study of English, German, and French. Students from these groups were sent to work in their specialties in foreign countries: Algeria, Somalia, Kampuchea, Ghana (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, October 22, 1971).

Another important factor affecting the learning process was the level of housing and financial support for students. In 1963, only 21% of students were provided with a dormitory, while 70% of young people entering the Pedagogical Institute were from rural areas, that is, needed housing (State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 2734. Inventory 9. Case 320. List 8).

Since the dormitory fund was insufficient to provide for all those in need, many young people had to rent private housing. The rent was 10 to 15 rubles per month. The students who lived in private apartments were paid 3 rubles a month by the Institute. The trade-union committee and the Komsomol organization conducted raids on private apartments. If necessary, students were given bedding (State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 2734. Inventory 9. Case 870. List 100).

The way to improve the financial situation of students was the appointment of individual scholarships. Since 1961, the best in studies and science were awarded a Lenin scholarship of 80 rubles per month, a Gorky scholarship of 60 rubles per month, and a Korolenko scholarship of 60 rubles per month (State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 2734. Inventory 9. Case 193. List 71). Meanwhile, the regular scholarship was 30 rubles a month, and the cost of lunch in the student canteen averaged 30–50 kopeks. In 1962, more than 300 students, 10% of the total number, spent their vacation on the shore of the Volga Reservoir at the recreation center for students and faculty of the Institute, which was certainly another measure of material incentives (State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 2734. Inventory 9. Case 193. List 17).

Another significant factor in education during this period was the upbringing process. The university administration was concerned about the rise in disciplinary violations among
students. In the first half of 1967 alone, 30 students were detained by the militia or fined. Three were expelled from the university for violations of labor and social discipline. At the same time, the dropout rate for failing grades gradually decreased. In the 1964–1965 school year, 210 students were expelled for that reason, while in 1966–1967, the number dropped to 136 (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 187. List 42).

The upbringing work at the Pedagogical Institute highly emphasized the ideological training of future teachers since they were the ones who were to raise the next generation of Soviet citizens (KHANOVA, 2021). The teachers had serious concerns about the apolitical orientation of some of the students: “Unfortunately, many students are not interested in anything, do not respect anything, and in the minds of some, there is a kind of political vacuum” (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 187. List 187, our translation). The teaching staff was urged to take an active part in the struggle against bourgeois ideology, to develop immunity to it in young people: “This task is primarily for the teacher, and we must prepare him for it” (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 187. List 187, our translation). For this purpose, in 1970, lectures “On the struggle of two ideologies”, disputes “On my contemporary”, “What is the beauty of life”, and meetings with the Komsomol members of the 1920s and the partisans were held (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 189. List 133, our translation).

At the same time, the leadership of the Institute and the party bureau were content with the fact that the students of the Pedagogical Institute were not affected by the opposition sentiments, which, to a greater or lesser degree, had swept over the students in connection with the entry of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968. There was also no enthusiasm for the ideas of the new left characteristic of some students of nonpedagogical universities, which was noted in the report of the Party Bureau of the Institute: “We can note with deep satisfaction today that in our Institute, among our students, there has been no manifestation of ideological and political immaturity, distribution of politically harmful literature, and similar phenomena” (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 189. List 15, our translation). Future teachers were less involved in the ideological quest of the 1960s, being guided by the resolution of pragmatic problems.
However, it needs to be noted that special measures were taken to prevent the dissemination of opposition sentiments among students. In September, extensive explanatory work was carried out on the events in Czechoslovakia. Ninety-eight Communist instructors were sent to the student groups to give speeches on this subject. In October, a permanent institute of political informers was established, and political information hours were included in the class schedule (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 189. List 15).

Nevertheless, the political trends of the 1960s did affect future teachers. At an open party meeting on March 26–28, 1963, the debate about the literary work of the “politically unreliable” poets A. Voznesensky, E. Yevtushenko, and R. Rozhdestvensky organized by philology students was heavily condemned. Its participants were accused of unilaterally praising these poets (State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 2734. Inventory 9. Case 870. List 2, our translation).

Overall, students expressed their dissatisfaction with mainly everyday problems, sometimes in an extravagant form. For example, in 1968, several anonymous leaflets entitled “Yaroslavna’s Cry” criticizing the order and living conditions in the dormitories were distributed in Dormitory No. 2. The party bureau of the Institute demanded that the student committee “identify the authors of these slanderous leaflets and severely condemn their concoctions” (State Public Institution Central Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 2734. Inventory 9. Case 870. List 126, our translation).

The policy of material and spiritual motivation carried out by the university administration also served as a factor affecting education. To uplift the prestige of studies, an honors student card was introduced in 1970. Its holder had a preferential right to receive a place in the dormitory and received vouchers to recreation centers and sanatoriums. Students who remained excellent students for the entire period of study were included in the Book of Honor of the Pedagogical Institute (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, November 12, 1970).

A significant part of the life of the student community was student brigades. In 1968, six construction brigades were created from among the Pedagogical Institute students and sent to various construction sites in the city of Gorky and Gorky and Irkutsk Oblasts (Za Uchitelskie Kadry, May 15, 1968). Seven student construction brigades with over 300 students worked in Ukhta, Kostroma Oblast, the Crimea, Uren, and other areas of the region and the country (State Public Institution State Sociopolitical Archives of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Fund 932. Inventory 1. Case 189. List 88).
Discussion

Students of the Pedagogical Institute in the 1960s lived a full and versatile life. Their activity was not limited by the educational process. The everyday life of provincial students in the 1960s was filled with daily hardships, various forms of social activities, participation in educational and ideological work. However, the data of sociological research conducted at the Pedagogical Institute in the second half of the 1960s show a decline in interest in community work. If in the first year, 80% of students participated in public activities, in the fourth year, it was only 20%.

Considerable assistance in overcoming the daily hardships was provided to students by the university administration and public organizations. It is noteworthy that the sources do not record any serious contradictions between the student community and the university administration. The Rector’s Office tried to respond promptly to student inquiries or receive feedback by organizing discussions and anonymous sociological surveys. The relations between students and faculty members were quite appropriate and generally benevolent. A great role in the establishment of informal relations between students of different courses was played by public organizations of the university, which engaged students in public work, being a kind of a school of communication skills and a way of socialization and consolidation of the representatives of different social strata of Soviet society having different statuses and life experiences. The university structures and organizations imparted to students the managerial and organizational skills highly required in the practice of the educational process. Public organizations of the university, as well as the university newspaper “Za Uchitelskie Kadry” served as effective forms of feedback between students and the university administration and allowed to successfully resolve a variety of conflicts arising in the educational process. That being said, several problems faced by students in the 1960s were systemic and could not be resolved at the level of the institution. On the other hand, it has to be noted that students’ activity in public organizations was highly formalized, which eventually caused irritation and rejection among some of the young people.

A critical problem was the employment of future teachers. The state and the Soviet village in many cases were unable to provide the graduates of the Pedagogical Institute with the conditions necessary for successful work. A survey conducted in 1969 shows that out of the 494 surveyed students, 30% were not willing to return to villages. Among the most often indicated reasons for the reluctance to return to the rural areas are the uncomfortable everyday life, the lack of career prospects, as well as the absence of opportunities to realize one’s
abilities, and difficulties in creating a family. This, in turn, was compromising students’ motivation to succeed in their studies. At the same time, despite the various problems and rich extracurricular life, the dynamics of academic performance and student involvement in the life of the Institute were generally positive and contributed to the formation of a fully developed personality.

Final considerations

The article presents the results of a study of the daily life of the student community of future teachers in the 1960s and identifies the distinguishing features of its development and the main directions of the public activity of university students at the time, which allows drawing substantive conclusions on the degree of students’ involvement in the academic life of the university. The social composition of the students of the Pedagogical Institute is revealed, over half of is composed of young people coming from towns or villages of the Gorky region. For them, studying at the university was an important launching pad, an opportunity to raise their social status.

It is convincingly demonstrated that the majority of graduates of the Pedagogical Institute were unwilling to work in rural and remote areas of the country. The university administration’s desire to provide rural schools with a sufficient number of teachers was countered by the objective processes of urbanization and a strong gap in the socioeconomic conditions of life between the urban and rural areas. The benefits and privileges that the Soviet state provided to graduates were insufficient to retain teachers in rural areas.

Archival data indicate that the low standard of living and financial insecurity strongly influenced learning, and not in the best way. Educational activities were actively combined with educational and social work, which had a very wide range: from lecture and tutoring to construction as part of the student construction brigades. An important organizing and mobilizing role in this work was played by public youth organizations of the university. This type of activity also fully contributed to the formation of the future teacher and was an important factor in learning.

Special attention is paid to the financial status of students in this period. Overall, it was satisfactory and allowed students to live reasonably well off their scholarships. Characteristically, student part-time work was received very negatively by the university administration. The most serious problem for students was housing, and the most socially vulnerable category of students was student families. The state and the university
administration provided students with financial support: partial compensation for renting private housing and increased personal scholarships were paid, a mutual aid fund was organized, and discounted trips to a tourist recreation center were provided.

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