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## “Journal of Economics and Social Sciences”



### Investigating student’s international education through a university’s mass sport activities as a scientific-educational problem

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#### Abstract

This article presents the topic of international education of students in Russia focusing on the socialization of students by means of mass sport activities and the problems associated with this in term of the scientific educational perspective. In the article, there is also a logical rationale of international education of students in Russian universities. The key terms are defined, which reveal the basic concept and meaning behind the article. The potential of the mass sport activities of the university is demonstrated as a productive method of socio-educational work with students within the international education framework. Most current tasks of the international education concerning both Russian and foreign students, who study within the national higher education system, are presented. The materials for the article have been collected by using the method of theoretical analysis, as well as, by analyzing the experience of the National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (NR TPU).

The article describes and analyzes the results of the empirical study conducted by using a survey method, with the respondents being foreign students who study at the NR TPU. The conclusions, based on the understanding and interpretation of the empirical research, are formulated and the perspectives of the development of this topic are presented.

*Keywords:* International education, universities, sport, students;

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#### 1. Introduction

The internationalization of the national system of higher education is of current importance to the country. The programmes of Russian higher education institutions have become increasingly attractive to international students, whose number has been continually growing. According to the statistics the number of foreign students, who came to Russia between the years 2004 and 2015, has increased more than tenfold [1]. At that, according to the data collected, representatives from Asian countries account for the largest share of international students who study in Russian universities, with China, India and Vietnam leading the list [1,2]. This situation makes it necessary to designate international education of students in Russian universities as one of the main current challenges.

#### 2. Discussion

By now the term «international education» (IE) has already been defined and specified in specialized literature. Most authors define IE «as educating students in the spirit of friendship among peoples, respect for cultural values of other nations and nationalities, tolerance towards national differences and aspiration for the national unity» [3]. The analysis of the literature on education, psychology and cultural studies makes it possible to identify the basic characteristics of the process of international education comprising a range of «regular purposeful activities directed at people's consciousness and emotions so as to instill internationalism in them, make it part of their everyday social and psychological attitudes and norms of behavior». These characteristics are: the reliance on international and humanitarian values, focus on the development of intercultural communication, purposefulness, consistency and methodological organization. The process of international education can be represented as a multi-level structure, which would cover theoretical (worldview), psychological and practical aspects [4]. The worldview level of the structure implies the formation of international values as the basis for the corresponding view on the world. The psychological level of the structure implies the development of judgments, attitudes, codes of contact (including norms and forms of communication) that are deeply internationalist both in terms of content and function. The practical level of the IE requires the establishment of the educational environment that assists students develop international competence as a scope of beliefs, conscious behavioural practices, everyday routines. This level necessitates such an organization of the educational process that enables encountering real life people, involvement in events and activities providing opportunities of direct socially approved forms of international communication. It is impossible to develop and instill internationalist values, as well as behavior, without the encouragement of national values and patriotic feelings of people. International awareness implies the presence of national pride and dignity of every citizen, the developed sense of patriotism and a respective public stance on various issues.

As an educational institution the university has a wide range of resources to infuse internationalism (IE) into an academic program for students, namely, the educational potential of core academic courses, academic exchange programs, student body government, various cultural and athletic events. This article focuses on the potential of the university mass sport activities (MSA) to be used to promote international awareness among students. Moreover, it also seems appropriate to consider the IE of students (both Russian and international) by means of mass sport activities as an educational and scientific challenge.

A topic for a scientific research project, as well as an educational problem. The analysis of scientific and practical papers over the recent years has shown that the potential of the MSA as a relevant and appropriate tool addressing the issue of students' international education has not been examined to the full extent.

Within the framework of the designated problem it is necessary to analyze the specific experience of the mass sport activities in the Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU). The mass sport activities in TPU, like in many other universities, have multiple goals, namely:

- to organize and hold compulsory lessons for all students in the academic discipline of «Physical education»;
- to organize elective classes and extracurricular training sessions in different sports;
- to provide students with necessary facilities and equipment to practice a variety of sports;
- to arrange the mass sport activities at the university;
- to provide students with every opportunity to participate in competitions outside the university.

The TPU offers mass sport activities in many (more than 20) types of sports, with team sports, such as football, basketball and volleyball being most popular with its students [5]. The basic TPU documents that outline the university's development strategy designate the mass sport activities as one of the key instruments of creating an environment that promotes students' all-around personal

development. The implementation of this direction in the work of TPU is one of the targeted vectors of its Integrated Programme and the road map of its development [5]. The analysis of the related literature and the practical experience of universities (including the experience of TPU) has made it possible to identify the current directions of the scientific-educational research in the area of international education of Russian students (Russian citizens) by means of MSA, as follows:

- to explore the possibilities of the available foreign language courses in the university to implement the Physical Education component of the IE challenge (for example, the inclusion of the module «Physical Education and sports » into the course of Foreign Languages for Specific purposes).

- to develop educational models, which activate the links between the academic, research, mass sport and cultural activities of higher education institutions in the process of the IE of Russian students.

We believe that one of the university's priorities in the area of IE of international students is to use the potential of MSA as a means of stimulating sociocultural adaptation of these groups of students. Sociocultural adaptation is a complex, multifaceted process of interaction between the person and their new sociocultural environment, during which some international students with their specific ethnic and psychological traits are forced to overcome various types of psychological, social, moral, religious and other barriers when learning new forms of behaviour and activities [6,7]. According to the available studies, the majority of international students experience difficulties in the sociocultural adaptation [1]. To overcome these difficulties it is of considerable importance for international students to learn the national traditions of the Russian Federation through the participation in SMA.

Within the framework of the problem considered we have conducted a survey (in a form of a structured interview) among the international students of the TPU (altogether 18 representatives of Vietnam, China, Mongolia, years 1-4), those who participate in the SMA and attend the physical education lessons at least 2 times a week. The results of the interview, which was conducted in Russian, are given below. The question «Do you think that your participation in TPU's SMA has significantly increased the number of your acquaintances, which is necessary for the socio-cultural adaptation?» got the following answers: 83% of all the respondents said that the participation in SMA had a significant influence on the process of their socio-cultural adaptation (SCA); with the 15% viewing the influence of SMA on the SCA process as insignificant; and only 2% of the international students stating that there is no such correlation.

The answers to the question «Does the involvement in the sport and athletic life of the TPU encourage you to participate in the mass sport activities of the city of Tomsk?» are the following: affirmative answers were given by 73% of the international students; 27% of the respondents gave a negative answer to this question.

The results of this empirical study allow us to draw the following conclusions about the current directions of the IE of international students (both in terms of practical and scientific research):

- The integration of international students into the mass sport practices and activities of the city and the region through the involvement of students into the SMA of the university (through fraternities and communities, networking, etc);

- The study of the history of the regional (municipal) sport by the international students;
- The adaptation of the foreign experience of IE of students to the Russian environment.

### **3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, SMA can be one of the tools of internationalizing the educational scope of the modern Russian university. In order to find effective educational approaches to the use of this tool

it is advisable to designate the issue of international education of students through SMA as a scientific educational problem.

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