

## Conference Paper

# Students of the Middle Urals: The Transformation from Classical to Digital Community (Research Prospects)

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## Abstract

Students are one of the most studied communities within the sociology context and especially the youths' sociology and the sociology of education. Today, students are viewed both as the intellectual avant-garde force, leaders of social initiatives of the Russian youths and as a specific educational community. This study is based on the traditional method of document analysis, which allows us to identify key fields of the research. The research is devoted to the problems of changing students in the information society. The authors substantiate the need and prospects for studying students as a 'digital community'. A review of the social, political, sociocultural and other aspects of comprehensive students was conducted

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## 1. Introduction

Students are one of the most studied communities within the sociology context and especially the youths' sociology and the sociology of education. Today, students are viewed both as the intellectual avant-garde force, leaders of social initiatives of the Russian youths, and as a specific educational community. Since in the educational system and in the youth's socialization the higher education role grows. The sociology of youths today is undergoing major changes. It highlights the problem of building partnerships between youths and society [12, p. 12–14; 17]. In this regard attention is drawn to students as the youth community within the context of sociology branch and it is consequential (although due to the institutionalization of leveled-system education, it's no more a purely youth community. It rapidly changes.

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The concept of studying youth in a changing world and new theoretical approaches proposed by leading authors — V.I. Chuprov, Yu.A. Zubok, T.K. Rostovskaya, L.N. Smakotina, and others [1; 17], also fully meet the objectives research of modern students.

At the regional level, the problems of students began to be actively studied in the framework of preparing comprehensive reports on the situation of youth in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation (Mordovia, Sverdlovsk Region, Tatarstan, Udmurtia, etc.). The sociocultural dynamics of students is the subject of numerous scientific conferences discussions devoted to the problems of youth, which once again proves the importance of students issues in modern sociology [9; and etc.].

The sociology of education today has become one of the most important sociological branches [16]. Commonly students are those who are the most scrutable social groups for study, especially for academic staff from universities. In the monograph based on the results of the VII stage of student monitoring in the Middle Urals (2016) [14, p. 25–95] the authors have summarized these studies since 1995. Publications of recent years in the leading sociological publishing houses show the enhance of attention to the traditional and new problems of student life, as well as the importance of the student stage youths' socialization.

Over the years since the publication of Student 2016, a series of monographs and articles in leading sociological publications have appeared. Only the journal "Sociological Research" published more than 20 articles referring to this topic. It should be noted the conceptual work of M.K. Gorshkov, G.E. Zborovsky, G.A. Klyucharev, D.L. Konstantinovsky, N.G. Osipova, V.I. Savinkov, V.N. Stegnyy, F.E. Sheregi [2; 7; 11.] Scientists actively studied the interaction between educational communities, the social activity of students, value-motivational guidelines, civic identity, educational and professional strategies and life plans, human capital of the student community, updating fundamental and applied knowledge in an innovative economy, cultural needs and interests and other aspects. The problems of trust have been actively studied, both in knowledge in general and in higher education and its individual components. A relatively independent block of sociological research is devoted to the ideas of Russian students about various social, political, and sociocultural recent phenomena and processes.

## 2. Methods and Methodology

The research is based on the traditional method of document's analysis, which allows us to identify key fields of the research.

The research is devoted to the problems of changing students in the information society. The authors substantiate the need and prospects for studying students as a 'digital community'. A review of the social, political, sociocultural and other aspects of comprehensive students was conducted.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The paradigm of changing reality at the confluence of the youths' sociology and the sociology of education can be interpreted through the theory of postmodernism, the modernization of society and education, the development of the information (digital) society, the society of knowledge, global society, the society of uncertainty and risk have been much published in both domestic and foreign literature.

Particular attention was paid to those challenges and risks of society and its youths, that were determined to be by transformational processes. Researchers have intensively studied the processes associated with the high education transition to a two level system in the framework of the Bologna Process. The period 2010–2016 is the period of transition to multi-leveled-system education. Undergraduates today are a poorly studied group. In addition, graduate students previously studied as representatives of postgraduate education and today they can be studied as a peculiar group of students. Meanwhile, doctoral students (also regarded as the level of university education), as before, should not be classified as students, despite attempts to bring their preparation technology closer to graduate and even undergraduate programs.

Based on information and analytical materials as well as on the results of monitoring the effectiveness of educational institutions of higher education, a sample was calculated for a comprehensive study the Sverdlovsk region students in 2020. The total population in the Sverdlovsk region in 2019 is 120,319 people (excluding students studying in the interests of law enforcement agencies). In accordance with the sample used in a similar study in 2016 [14, pp.], the following initial data can be used for the survey (tables 1–2).

Sociologists studied structural, institutional and content changes within the process of multi-vector and continuous modernization of higher education. Some issues had received coverage like commercialization and internationalization of higher education, online teaching, research and innovative activities of students and others related in any way to the modernizational changes in higher education [see, for example: 13]. None of these modernizational "branches" has been completed according to the research of "the Higher School of Economics", partially transformed into the regulations of the

TABLE 1: Number of students in a sample of 2016, for 2019 <sup>a</sup>

Category of students	Person, number	% of group	Sample, 2020, questionnaires
Total	106,697	100	2,002
Bachelors	75,515	71	1,417
Specialists	18,052	17	339
Undergraduates	13,130	12	246
<b>For reference</b>			
Graduate students <sup>b</sup>	2,323	—	44
Doctoral students	53	—	2
<b>University staff <sup>c</sup></b>			
Total including	14,583	100	274
Faculty	5,469	38	103
Scientists	509	3.5	10

<sup>a</sup> Counting D. Yu. Narkhov. Source: URL: <http://indicators.miccedu.ru/monitoring/?m=vpo>

<sup>b</sup> including adjuncts, interns, residents, trainee assistants

<sup>c</sup> Excluding external part-time workers and employees under civil law contracts.

TABLE 2: 2020 sample structure for universities compared to 2016

Name of the university <sup>a</sup>	2016, %	2020, %	2020, questionnaires, pcs.			
			Total	Bachelors	Specialists	Undergraduates
UrFU	23.1	31	628	460	59	108
USLTU	4.3	5	91	77	6	8
RSPPU	5.6	7	137	127	—	10
UMMU	6.1	4	90	2	87	1
USGAHU	7.2	2	37	29	4	5
USEU	6.7	14	288	266	4	5
NTGSPA	—	—	47	44	—	3
USMU	10.5	8	159	86	68	5
USPU	6.6	9	181	151	—	30
Ural State Law University	4.5	7	149	97	19	33
University of Humanities	2.1	1	28	23	—	5
WIU RANEPa	8	2	46	34	4	8
URGUPS	8.9	8	166	65	91	9
UIUP	2.1	0	1	1	—	—
Total	100	100	2002	1417	339	246

<sup>a</sup> in accordance with the accepted abbreviations.

National Education project “Education” [4]. The situation of continuous educational system “optimization” significantly affects the student community state and its further

development. In the future students appear to exist in the conditions of "modernization turbulence" for a long period.

Special attention has to be given to the scientific works studying the problems of the information society, digital society and virtual reality. We admit the transition from the futurological characteristics of the «knowledge society» to a description of real-life structures, processes and phenomena. The youth's socialization in this society has increasingly become viewed not as a prospect of social development, but as a new reality [10]. Scholars begin to use the concepts of digital society, digital natives and virtual community. Within the framework of "catch-up modernization" IT development processes are increasingly manifesting themselves in Russian reality and they have become the object of sociological analysis. But historically this analysis with regard to youths has been limited to generations X and Y. Generation Z has mainly remained the object of childhood sociology. There are original methodological approaches today that can successfully research this generation as students. This is a network approach in particular [54], as well as a thesaurus approach [6, p. 45–81] and the generational approach [8, p. 300], it's actively used in the sociology of youth.

L.N. Kogan's sociocultural approach made it possible to study a wide range of issues related to the culture of students such as family, religious, political, civil, information, culture security, and their leisure preferences in the arts, etc. We suppose this approach has significant heuristic resource for the further study of students as digital community since the approach due to the choice of present day cultural stage study allows identifying cause-and-effect relationship between worldviews, value orientations and their practical implementation.

## 4. Conclusions

The study has fixed that either domestic or foreign sociological literature are in great need of comprehensive complex sociological research of various students generations in the context of broad social transformations such as societal transformations, multi-vector education modernization, and social space digitalization. These processes significantly affect the students' communities. The study of students as digital community explores new horizons for the theoretical comprehension of a wide range social structure issues of the regional society and it has applied significance for the development and adoption of managerial decision-making in the field of higher education and youth policy.

The further study of the process and result of the students' educational community transformation under the influence of the social space digitalization should be focused on the following issues:

1. the transformation of community-forming features of "digital students";
2. structural, institutional and substantial transformations of the student community under the influence of the modernization of higher education;
3. transformations of educational and professional strategies of students, methods of their implementation at different levels of higher education;
4. identification of new trends in the current culture of students, the correlation of stereotypes and social practices in a changing world. The study of the impact of digital space on the culture of students, on his choice, his preferences, his interests. establishing dynamics in the following areas: the culture of the student family, "civic culture"; political, legal, valueological, everyday, informational, artistic, etc.
5. development of the problem of the sociocultural potential of students as a factor in information and social security.

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