Features of interaction between the Russian education system and student environmental organizations

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Abstract. The author examines the features of interaction between the Russian education system and student environmental organizations. The article analyzes the current state of the environmental student movement on the example of the Association of “green” Universities of Russia and student organization ReGreen Polytech. The author identifies the key trends in the development of student environmental organizations.

1 Introduction

At the Global Technical Meeting on Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda, it was announced that one billion volunteers would be mobilized to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [1]. The environmental agenda, which occupies one of the key positions in the SDGs, is relevant for most world states, including Russia. This is evidenced by the emergence of the national project "Ecology".

The national project "Ecology" is aimed at the effective management of production and consumption waste, including the elimination of all identified unauthorized dumps within the boundaries of cities by January 1, 2018; a radical reduction in the level of atmospheric air pollution in large industrial centers, including a reduction by at least 20 percent of the total volume of emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air in the most polluted cities; improving the quality of drinking water for the population, including for residents of settlements that are not equipped with modern centralized water supply systems; environmental rehabilitation of water bodies, including the Volga River, and the preservation of unique water systems, including lakes Baikal and Teletskoye; conservation of biological diversity, including through the creation of at least 24 new specially protected natural areas. The implementation period of the national project: from 2018 to 2024.

It is noteworthy that one of the indicators for assessing the effectiveness of Federal projects within the framework of the National Project "Ecology" is the number of people involved in environmental protection measures (for example, Federal project 4.7 "Preservation of unique water bodies", p. 1.1; Federal project 4.9. “Conservation of forests”, p. 1.1), including as volunteers [2].

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The development of environmental initiatives occurs at various levels: federal projects, NGOs, public organizations, private activities. In particular, environmental topics penetrate into the sphere of higher education and science.

2 Object of research and methodology

The purpose of this article is to analyze the interaction of the Russian educational system with student organizations in the field of ecology.

First, volunteering as a phenomenon often arises as an initiative from activists. Usually, an atmosphere of freedom and democracy prevails in volunteer organizations. Therefore, it is important for the university leadership to strike a balance between management and human relations in interaction with student volunteer organizations that arise within the university system.

Secondly, it is important to take into account the features of the development of volunteering in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the role of volunteers has grown significantly. On the other hand, the structure of volunteers' work has undergone major changes: the transition of activities to online, the cancellation of public events, etc.

Thirdly, despite the fact that environmental volunteering, along with social and sports volunteering, is one of the most popular areas in Russia, nevertheless, it is a relatively new phenomenon, and the methods of interaction with volunteer organizations are not finally settled as a state one, as at the local levels.

The methodology is based on the study of data from open sources. First of all, this is an analysis of the websites of universities that are part of the Association of "green" universities in Russia, as well as a group of student environmental organizations in social networks representing these universities.

Separately, Russian and world legislative and regulatory acts in the field of ecology and interaction in this area with public environmental organizations are studied.

The author has significant experience in environmental volunteering and, by the nature of his work, interacts with numerous student organizations of Peter the Great St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University, and considers the experience of creating and developing the student organization ReGreen Polytech as a successful case of joint work of the university and the student organization in the field of ecology.

3 Result and discussion

Youth volunteering, regardless of the direction, is an important element of the university's work with students. Grönlund H. and colleagues emphasize the role of volunteering as a career advantage for students in the future, which can be used by educational institutions in extracurricular work with students [3]. This point of view is supported by Khasanzyanova A., noting that "volunteering contributes to the expansion of the professional experience of students," in connection with which "volunteering can provide "added value" for students" [4].

Brewis G. and Holdsworth C. write that many students get their first experience of volunteering through university and student organizations. Their survey data show that university-supported students report better volunteering experiences and are more positive about the benefits of volunteering than unsupported volunteer students [5]. This shows the importance of volunteering for students as future professionals and members of society, as well as the importance of supporting the university's student volunteer organizations and providing close attention to them.
Speaking about the history of the environmental volunteer movement in Russia, first of all it is worth mentioning Professor of Moscow State University Grigory Aleksandrovich Kozhevnikov, who in 1924 became one of the organizers and the first chairman of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP). The purpose of the creation of the VOOP was the need for a voluntary association of scientific forces and the most progressive-minded public for the restoration and rational use of the country's natural resources in the post-war period. The VOOP was one of the first organizations to attract volunteers and worked actively throughout the Soviet period.

In 1960, at the initiative of students and teachers at the Faculty of Biology of Moscow State University, a Nature Protection Squad (DOP) was created. Since the beginning of the 70s, a movement of nature protection squads has been formed from the departments of various universities throughout the USSR, whose participants have been engaged on a voluntary basis and continue to be engaged in the fight against poachers, illegal deforestation, forest fires, conduct scientific research, organize environmental education events for schoolchildren.

By the end of 1969, the squads were already operating at the universities of Yerevan, Leningrad, Tomsk, Kharkov, Kiev, Bryansk. The first meeting took place during the 10th anniversary of the MSU Faculty of Biology squad in November 1970. In November 1971, representatives of four DPS took part in the conference "Organization of mass recreation of workers", held by the Moscow State University Faculty of Biology team. Since the spring of 1971, the MSU Faculty of Biology has been searching for emerging squads almost constantly, supplying them with methodological materials. As a result, when in September 1972 The MSU Faculty of Biology convened the first seminar of youth environmental organizations in Moscow, it was attended by representatives of 28 universities from 22 cities of the country.

The conference in Kazan "Youth in the struggle for nature protection" (1974) begins a new stage in the development of the Movement. It can be noted that this stage is characterized by the transition to work on research programs common to many squads.

In the 90s, most of the squads and volunteer associations were disbanded, but along with this, international charitable foundations appeared that finance the activities of non-governmental organizations.

At the moment, there are a number of large associations that are engaged in environmental volunteering and present projects at the international level.

The volunteer centers that exist today are mainly focused on young people and, as a rule, are based in universities, but there are more and more organizations that are ready to work with older and "silver" age volunteers.

Along with promotional short-term volunteer projects in modern Russia, there are also program projects that last from two weeks to a year and a half, and there are also clubs of friends of parks and protected areas that work on a permanent basis and help a certain territory.

Based on the studied sources, the author notes that in Russia there is a tendency towards the consolidation of student environmental organizations, as evidenced by the creation of the Association of "green" universities in Russia, which was established on February 17, 2017 as part of the all-Russian program "Green universities of Russia".

Today the Association of "green" Universities in Russia unites 117 members from 56 regions. Over three years, 990 events were held with the participation of 323 student teams. 62,789 people took part in the actions. One of the priority areas of activity of environmental student organizations is the introduction of a separate waste collection system and a campaign for the collection of recyclable materials. Through joint efforts, 97 tons of recyclable materials have been collected in three years.
Peter the Great St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University is represented in the Association by the student organization ReGreen Polytech, which arose as a private initiative of caring students, and since 2020 has become a department of the student trade union committee of the Peter the Great St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University. The student organization ReGreen Polytech has the full support of the university, which made it possible to implement a number of large environmental projects on the territory of the university.

The members of the ReGreen team consider the introduction of a separate waste collection system on the Polytechnic campus to be one of their main achievements. Activists are sure that the introduction of separate waste collection on the territory of the university is a serious step in the development of environmental consciousness among young people, rational waste management, conscious consumption and responsible production. This has a positive effect on people's lifestyle: it allows them to adequately assess their expenses, reduce spontaneous purchases and the amount of unnecessary packaging, and save money on things that are not really needed. For the university, the introduction of separate collection allows to save significant money on garbage disposal. From the contract, posted in open sources, it follows that to date, about 8 million rubles have been saved.

A stationary system for separate waste collection has been launched for the first time at the university level. Many universities have initiatives to install containers, but the territory of the Polytechnic University has its own characteristics, and it was necessary to propose a systemic solution. Separate collection, along with the usual waste collection scheme, is enshrined in the main university waste management agreement.

Since February 2020, 15% of waste, namely waste paper and plastic (bottles of marking 1 - PET), are transferred for recycling. Blue and orange metal nets are placed at each container site of the university. Such points on the territory of dormitories are especially relevant, since the campus is the place of the greatest accumulation of solid waste. The first batch of containers has been installed in some administrative premises. In the future, other buildings will also be equipped with special containers for separate waste collection.

Representatives of the ReGreen organization pay great attention to educational work. So, thanks to their initiative, Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University hosted the "Green Lecture Hall" - a series of lectures and master classes dedicated to the environmental awareness of students and university staff. The participants learned what the future holds for our planet, how to introduce environmental habits into their lives, and also how large Russian and international enterprises implement environmental management programs and implement a “sustainable” agenda in the work of the company.

As part of the eco-educational event, the activists held four educational meetings with invited experts from various fields of activity: separate collection and recycling of waste, sustainable fashion, plant-based nutrition, innovation in entrepreneurship. The listeners got acquainted with the real projects of the speakers and actively participated in the general discussion, where they asked questions and, together with the speakers, looked for answers.

In addition, two workshops on recycling and upcycling of things were held as part of the "Green Lecture Hall". Participants were engaged in the recycling of paper and the manufacture of eco-friendly household items with their own hands.

4 Conclusion

It is important to note that volunteers are often the most active and progressive sections of the student community, they have their own view of the world around them and are able to offer outstanding solutions to emerging challenges. The gradual understanding and adoption of the SDGs is prompting university leaders to be more attentive to the environmental initiatives of students and to provide them with universal support. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the strengthening of the status of volunteers, however, it changed the structure
of the activities of volunteer organizations, in particular, shifting the emphasis to online events, educational projects, to reflection and exchange of experience.

References


