

## HIGHER EDUCATION AS A FACTOR OF THE CITIES' PRESERVATION IN THE URAL MACRO-REGION

*The article is devoted to the problem of interrelation between the development of Ural cities and higher education organizations in them. The relevance of the study is due to the need to search for resources of socio-economic, demographic and socio-cultural development of medium-sized, big and large cities of the Ural Federal District (UFD). Many of these cities are in a state of crisis, and the authors consider the development of universities and university branches as one of the ways to overcome it. We focus on the interrelationships and dependencies between contradictory processes in higher education and constructive and destructive tendencies, which characterize the dynamics of the Ural cities. Conditions and obstacles of the implementation of the city-preserving function of higher education institutions are shown on a theoretical level and with a specific empirical material for the first time. This function is closely related to the "third mission" of the university. We prove that in conditions of social and economic uncertainty, universities and strong university branches in medium-sized, big and large cities of the macro-region can become a factor in the city preservation. A case study of three cities of the Ural Federal District—Nizhny Tagil, Surgut and Tobolsk—shows the need for feedback between the city and the university and the need to overcome the existing distance between them. The study of higher education in these cities confirmed the connection between the degradation of educational institutions and emerging negative trends: migration of youth, and, consequently, social and economic decline of the city. We have argued the need for mutual support of institutions of higher education and subjects of urban society. The city-preserving function of universities can be provided by university-preserving activities of university management, the public, the authorities of the city and the region. The authors argue that urban strategies should include provisions to preserve universities and use them as mechanisms, which allow cities to act as the main agents of socio-economic and socio-cultural development of the Ural Federal District. The results of the study can become a basis for the improvement of the UFD educational policy as well as strategies for the development of the medium-sized, big and large cities of the region.*

**Keywords:** higher education, Ural macro-region, medium-sized, big and large cities, higher education system of macroregion, universities, university branches, city-preserving function of higher education, students, teachers, city community

### Introduction

Higher education in Russia is shrinking, which is facilitated by reducing funding and restructuring. Many universities reduce in size, turn into branches of other universities or close completely. 200 universities were closed in 2014—2017, and now there are 769 universities in the country. The number of university branches decreased to 692<sup>1</sup>. The number of independent higher education institutions in the Urals macro-region (Ural Federal District—UFD) decreased from 71 to 53 in the same period [1, p. 184]. The number of full-time students decreases, the number of state-funded places in universities is limited. Small cities school graduates, who received high scores on the Unified State Examination (USE), are eager to enroll in prestigious universities in the capital or in megacities.

The objects of Our study is focused on the large, big and medium-sized cities of the district. In our study, we used the classification of cities proposed by official statistics. There are six types:

- 1) millionaire cities with a population of over 1 million people (2 cities in UFD);
- 2) largest cities with a population of 500 thousand to 1 million people (1 city);
- 3) large cities— from 250 thousand to 500 thousand people (5 cities);
- 4) big cities— from 100 thousand to 250 thousand people (8 cities);
- 5) medium-sized cities with a population of 20 thousand to 100 thousand people (71 cities);
- 6) small cities— up to 20 thousand people (28 cities).

The choice of type 3, 4 and 5 cities as a focus of the study is connected with the assumption that under the influence of the processes of higher education reform, Russian cities with a population

<sup>1</sup> Information and analytical materials on the results of monitoring the effectiveness of educational institutions of higher education. (2017). Retrieved from: <http://indicators.miccedu.ru/monitoring/?m=vpo> (date of access: 01.12.2017). (In Russ.)

of up to 500 thousand people undergo changes that can be defined as dangerous for their residents, especially for young people. Educational risks overlap with the deteriorating socio-economic, demographic, sociocultural situation in many peripheral cities of the country. At the same time, negative consequences of the transformation of higher education in the provinces, which can have a short- and long-term negative impact on the lives of cities and their people, are not counted and are not included in social forecasts.

Meanwhile, the nature of the occurring changes speaks of the growing dependence of the economic, social and cultural trends in the city life on the processes occurring in higher education. Never before has such a dependence been observed. It seems that we are facing a new phenomenon that can become crucial for the future of cities and regions of the country. We assume that the aforementioned types of cities either already experience or will experience the consequences of the transformation of provincial universities. These processes indicate that higher education is becoming, or could potentially become, a factor in preserving or destroying such cities, depending on the presence or absence of universities and strong university branches.

The influence of universities on the city life is very differentiated. The general trend can be defined as follows: the larger the city (with a population of over 750 thousand people), the less its dependence on the presence of large and powerful universities, since there are other factors that have a significant influence. On the contrary, the smaller the population of the city, the more its fate and development depend on the presence of a good university (or universities). From this perspective, the cities of the Ural macro-region can be divided into two categories. The first group includes three largest cities of the macro-region (Ekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Tyumen), where universities are an important but not a crucial factor of their development. The second group includes cities with a population of up to 400 thousand people. The successful existence of such cities can be highly dependent on the effectively operating universities and strong university branches. We focus on the second group of cities in this article.

The purpose of our study is to reveal the contradictions between the various directions of higher education transformation and the socio-economic, demographic and sociocultural situation in large, big and medium-sized cities of the Ural macro-region. This will help clarify ways to overcome these contradictions and resolve a number of closely related problems.

**Methodology of the study.** Our study is based on a number of Russian and foreign theories and practices of connection and interaction between universities and cities. One of them is the theory of resource dependence [2]. It allows studying the resource capabilities of each party and their resource dependence on each other.

Studies show that universities act as an economic, social and cultural resource of the city. Universities pay taxes to the city treasury, develop an educational and cultural environment, enrich human and social capital [3, 4]. Cities, in turn, should strive to create favorable conditions for the functioning of their universities, increase their competitiveness and attractiveness, popularize university brands, and protect universities against attacks on their independence by various power structures.

The theory of resource dependence acts as a kind of exchange paradigm [5, p. 6]. According to this paradigm, the functioning of structures and organizations in society is based on the exchange of widely understood social benefits and forms of activity. From the point of view of our study, this means that the relationship between the university and the city implies constant and developing ties between them. In relation to our problem, the main thesis of the theory of resource dependence and the exchange paradigm is the desire of the university and the city for mutual preservation and development.

Another methodological approach is a communal one. It is important for our study, since the interaction of the city and universities takes place not only at the institutional and organizational level, but also at the communal level. Educational communities (students, teachers, university management) are part of a wider community of citizens [6]. Together they constitute intersecting and interacting social communities. Their main attributes are: relative integrity; awareness of one's belonging (identification and self-identification); similar conditions of life and activity; presence of certain spatiotemporal fields of being; realization of the function of an independent subject of social and historical action; behavior based on the possession and use of various resources. The city life largely depends on the quality of the human capital of these communities, their values, attitudes, expectations, the level of their social well-being and activity [7, 8].

In addition to the fundamental methodological approaches, it is necessary to turn to the methodology of specific studies of the influence of universities on the urban community. Particular attention is paid to universities and university cities as part of urban agglomerations. These works are devoted to the development of urban space and urban infrastructure due to the universities, to lobbying the university interests and obtaining political support in the local communities [9]. It is scientifically and practically proven that urban universities in the XXI century take on the active role of economic drivers and civil leaders. This allows solving urgent problems of society: normalize local and global binary contradictions, form the relationship between the university and the city as monolithic rational agents [10, 11].

It should be noted that most authors point out the multiple effects from the preservation and development of universities in medium-sized cities [12, 13]. According to them, the university's contribution to the development of the city is built in four directions: territorial, physical and spatial infrastructure, human resources [14], economic development and public participation [15]. The role of universities as a source of high-quality human capital is particularly important, as it provides the city with sustainable development in conditions of shortage of other resources [16]. This happens because the educational communities in such cities are highly professional and internally motivated. Their potential is fully revealed in the interaction and partnership with specific actors of the urban society [17–19]. This international experience of understanding the role of universities in the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of cities is in demand in Russia as a scientific justification of the significance of the problem.

**Empirical basis and methods of the research.** The article is based on the materials of the higher education study in the Ural Federal District, conducted by the scientific team of Ural Federal University (UrFU) sociologists. The results obtained at the first and second stages of the project (2016–2017) [20, 21] made us pay attention to multidimensional and complex links between universities and the UFD cities that do not belong to the category of megacities and the largest urban entities.

At the third stage (2018), we studied UFD cities with a population of up to 400 thousand people, where higher education organizations are located. There are 11 cities with a population of up to 250 thousand people (3 medium and 8 big cities) and 5 cities with a population of 250 thousand to 400 thousand people. Some universities in these cities have the status of independent educational organizations (14), others are branches of universities (38). The total number of students in independent universities is 54 600 people, the total number of teaching staff—3 110 people. About 16 thousand students study at the university branches. Case studies of cities included analysis of demographic statistics, statistics on educational organizations, as well as the content of Internet sites and forums. To interpret the cases, we also used the assessments obtained at the previous stages of the study during expert interviews, as well as the results of mass surveys of students and teachers of the Ural universities.

**Functions of universities in relation to cities.** Along with traditional functions (education, socialization, vocational training, development of science, culture, etc.), higher education and higher education institutions also have other functions that are significant for the city [22–24]. There are city-forming, city-developing and city-preserving functions.

The city-forming function is not very prominent nowadays. However, it should be noted that it was very noticeable in the relatively recent past. For example, this is evidenced by the toponymy of Ekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk), reminiscent of the history of the construction of Vtuzgorodok in the 1930s — a large area of the city, the core of which was a complex of educational buildings of the Ural Polytechnic Institute. Later, in the post-war period, the buildings of the Ural branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR were added to it. In 1943, a large administrative district of the city with a population of more than 200,000 people — Kirovsky district — was established within the borders and on the basis of Vtuzgorodok. Even today, the Kirovsky district of Ekaterinburg concentrates the largest educational and scientific organizations of the city: several universities, the Presidium, scientific institutes and the library of the Ural Branch of RAS, as well as their informational and welfare infrastructure.

The city-developing function of higher education is rather weak in the Ural macro-region, although it is on the agenda. This is evidenced by projects for the construction of the UrFU university campus in Ekaterinburg and the combined campus of the two Surgut universities — classical and pedagogical. The implementation of these projects, if it becomes possible in the current crisis conditions, will be an important factor in the development of not only the universities, but also the cities themselves [25].

However, it should be said with certainty: the city-developing function of universities in medium-sized and even big cities cannot be realized today, since these universities have only one task—to survive in modern conditions. Hence, the city-preserving function is their main function in relation to the city. Its purpose is to solve the issues related to the preservation of the city, the implementation of educational and research activities in its interests, the orientation of students and graduates at solving problems of the urban economy and infrastructure, as well as the realization of cultural and sporting tasks in the life of the city. The popularization of the city's brand, work on its prestige and image is an important area of the university's activity in terms of the city-preserving function.

But this function can be successfully implemented only if there are mutual efforts of the city and the university to preserve each other. If there is the city-preserving function of the university, then there should be the university-preserving activities of the city and the region. However, we see it very rarely. The study of strategic plans for the development of cities shows that, as a rule, they do not include the support of universities and university branches. Another proof of this situation is the silence of local authorities on the closure of universities or their transformation into branches. Cases of several Ural cities, as well as their educational organizations (universities and branches), testify to this, so we turn to them next.

Cases of Nizhny Tagil, Surgut, Tobolsk. Until 2013, the Nizhny Tagil State Social Pedagogical Academy (NTSSPA) was the only independent university in the Sverdlovsk region located outside Ekaterinburg. According to Tagil's residents, their city had an informal status of the "second capital" of the region, partly reinforced by the presence of its own university with a rich history and high achievements. The university was popular among the residents of the northern regions of not only the Sverdlovsk region but also the neighboring regions of the UFD<sup>2</sup>. The reorganization of the academy was perceived by many Tagil residents as a challenge to their independence, cultural identity, and the future.

In addition to a blow to the socio-cultural memory and identity of the city's residents, the situation with NTSSPA has strengthened the negative demographic trends observed in the city since 2003. The population of N. Tagil has decreased over the last 14 years, from 386 500 people to 355 693 people (in 2017). Demographers identify the following reasons for this situation: general population decline, distortions in the demographic structure, and migration of specialists of working age into the "millionaire cities"<sup>3</sup>.

Migration of youth from Nizhny Tagil is of particular concern. This is mainly high school graduates who are striving to enroll in the universities in other cities. If they succeed, they do not return to Nizhny Tagil. Since 2012, the number of such graduates has increased from 24 % to 75 %. Approximately two-thirds of college-age youth left the city in 2016 and 2017, choosing universities outside of the city<sup>4</sup>.

The connection between the reorganization of NTSSPA and the migration of youth is obvious. It is observed by ordinary Tagil residents, school graduates themselves, as well as representatives of local authorities.

Here is the statement of the city's mayor: "*The situation with the development of higher education in Nizhny Tagil is critical. The number of educational places has reduced, and most of the educational institutions have become branches and have lost autonomy. This is the main problem from one-company towns. Nowadays, it turns out that the higher the quality of school education, the higher the probability of the graduates leaving Tagil to study in another city. It is necessary to change this negative tendency, to make education in our city prestigious*" (S. Nosov, mayor of Nizhny Tagil).

Thus, the result of an ill-conceived decision to reorganize the NTSSPA is obvious: the interest to the educational organization has sharply dropped, the number of state-funded places has decreased, and the profile of educational programs has changed. The number of enrollees among Tagil's residents has decreased five-fold. Their places are now filled by residents of the surrounding towns and villages. Nizhny Tagil risks remaining without talented youth. The official forecast of the socio-economic

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<sup>2</sup> Approximately 80 % of the teachers of educational organizations of N. Tagil and the northern part of the region were graduates of NTSSPA.

<sup>3</sup> Peering into the demographic hole. A scientist warns Nizhny Tagil about the demographic catastrophe Retrieved from: <https://vsenovostint.ru/2016/08/09/vsmatrivayas-v-demograficheskuyu-yamu-uchyonyiy-urbanist-preduprezhdaet-cto-v-nizhnem-tagile-nastupaet-demograficheskaya-katastrofa/> (date of access: 25.02.2018). (In Russ.)

<sup>4</sup> Nizhny Tagil is alarmed. Two-thirds of high school graduates leave the city. Retrieved from: <https://newdaynews.ru/ekb/592958.html> (date of access: 01.02.2018). (In Russ.)

development of the city clearly shows that by 2030 there will not be enough workers at existing enterprises.

Let us turn to another case—the situation with higher education in Surgut. This administrative center of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug—Yugra belongs to the same type of cities as Nizhny Tagil. It is an industrial city, comparable with Nizhny Tagil in terms of population, its socio-demographic structure and the level of economic development. However, the profiles of their main industries differ: Tagil is the center of metallurgy and railcar building, while Surgut is the center of oil and gas industry. In 2011, Surgut was ranked among the three richest cities in Russia with a high standard of living and positive demographic trends. At the same time, the city is in more severe climatic conditions than Nizhny Tagil (60° north latitude), which determines the difficult conditions of life and work there.

Two state universities with more than 10 thousand students and 700 teachers successfully operate in Surgut. Every year, all educational programs are filled to full capacity. Non-residents have the opportunity to live in good dormitories.

Of course, a certain part of young people (about 30 %) leaves Surgut, especially those who studied well in school. However, most of the graduates of local schools stay in the city and enroll in Surgut universities. According to the city's statistics, the proportion of young people leaving Surgut to study in mega-cities has been decreasing in recent years, albeit not very much.

This favorable trend was noted by our informants: *“In previous years, 70 % of schoolchildren planned to leave for other cities. Those were the results of the survey of students. This percentage was much smaller this year. We are very happy about this. For our part, we make every effort to ensure that local universities meet the requirements of students and employers”* (T.O., head of the department of education).

It should be noted that both Surgut universities have regional subordination. Regional authorities were planning to raise the rating indicators of these universities, as well as to implement projects for their reorganization. Since 2009, it has been planned to merge the two universities in order to enlarge and optimize them. However, the universities retained their status and independence. In many respects, the protest positions and opinions of the rectors, voiced more than once at public hearings and in personal appeals to the governor, played a positive role in this situation. The leadership of the district had enough of insight and management instinct to listen to them. Thus, the cases of Surgut and N. Tagil show the importance of support from regional and municipal authorities when the state pays limited attention to provincial universities. We see such support in Surgut.

Being in such conditions, Surgut universities are active in the search for ways to improve their effectiveness. This is evidenced by the case of Surgut State Pedagogical University, which formed the network interaction with other strong universities of the Urals Federal District. In 2013, it signed a cooperation agreement with UrFU to develop academic ties. This is an example of the interaction of two different types of universities—federal and regional, high-resource and low-resource, located at the core and on the periphery of the higher education of the macroregion. The network interaction of these universities contributes to the creation of a system of higher education in the Urals macroregion, which has the potential to turn it into a driver of the economic and socio-cultural development of the Urals Federal District.

A case of another city of the district—Tobolsk (Tyumen region)—deserves special attention. It has a difficult situation with the once independent university—the Tobolsk State Pedagogical Academy named after D.I. Mendeleev. This is an old educational institution, which, like NTSSPA, has a rich history and honors. In 2013, it was turned into a branch of the Tyumen State University because of the failure to comply with one of the accreditation indicators.

The reorganization of the university caused a wave of protest from its scientific and pedagogical staff, students, and the public. The main claims were formulated by local activists in a petition addressed to the President and the Minister of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. It pointed out the destructive nature of the processes taking place in the university after joining the Tyumen State University. The document noted: a sharp reduction in the number of scientific and pedagogical staff, a decrease in wages with increasing workload, discontinuation of admission of students for Master's and postgraduate programs, etc.

The management of the branch and the head university assess the ongoing processes differently. They justify these processes by the necessity to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science. Tyumen State University is a participant of the project “5–100”. Thus, all target indicators and optimization processes taking place at the head university are also applied to the branch.

According to the management, joining the Tyumen State University opens up new opportunities for Tobolsk Academy in the form of internationalization, mastering new educational methods and technologies, involving students in research & development, and encouraging the scientific creativity of teaching staff.

Many arguments of the university's management are not consistent with the true mission of the Tobolsk Academy. For example, it is not clear how the strategy of strengthening the scientific potential of the university is reconciled with the destruction of the historical school of the Tobolsk Pedagogical Academy, known among the professional community throughout the country.

Here is one of the statements: *"It is a pity that all this, together with the traditions of the Tobolsk education, which were laid down by the Decembrists, have now fallen victim to bureaucratic "restructurings" and "optimizations". As a historian, I feel sorry for the virtually destroyed historical education in Tobolsk. How could something strange called "The Department of History, Philosophy and Teaching Methods" be made from the Faculty of History? Does the management really fail to understand that you need specialists-historians to train a historian?"* (T. K., Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor).

In addition to weakening of the scientific and pedagogical staff of the Academy, which occurred instead of its strengthening, the local intellectual elite notes the administrative despotism of educational authorities and a serious damage to the cultural and social status of Tobolsk by the reorganization of the Academy.

The analysis of the situation shows that the Tobolsk Branch of the Tyumen State University has performed its function of training pedagogical personnel for the Tyumen region so far. However, the case of Nizhny Tagil shows that the destruction of higher education in small cities does not have an immediate effect, or has an indirect and latent nature.

One of such dysfunctional consequences is the increased distrust of the quality of education in the transformed Tobolsk University, as well as distrust of the competence, honesty and social responsibility of the leadership of universities and local authorities which have not taken any measures to protect the university.

Other consequences of the described situation in Tobolsk can be predicted based on the cases of Nizhny Tagil and a number of other Russian cities in which the same "university catastrophes" occurred. It should be noted that the fate of the Tobolsk Academy was shared by another formerly independent university of the Tyumen region — the Ishim Pedagogical Institute. The consequences of its transformation into a branch of Tyumen State University are identical to those that have occurred in Tobolsk.

Presented cases of three Ural cities reflect situations which are different in their scale, nuances and directions of the consequences. They show that the bureaucratic understanding of the "effectiveness" of higher education institutions, which is based on narrow economic interpretations of the organization's productivity, is detrimental, since it tears universities out of the organic socio-cultural and socio-economic space of their cities. Such a narrow understanding runs counter to the interpretation of efficiency which includes social and cultural aspects in addition to economic ones.

When rational and economic logic is superimposed on social systems and objects which have different nature and dimension in comparison to industrial organizations, a risk zone is formed with the potential for its development into a humanitarian catastrophe of cities.

### **The higher education space of the Ural Federal District.**

In order to present a general picture of higher education in the Ural macro-region, we provide quantitative characteristics of the cities and higher education institutions of the Ural Federal District (Table 1).

The Table 1 data shows the uneven development of the higher education space in the cities of the Ural Federal District. Only 4 out of 5 large and 3 out of 70 medium cities of the district have independent universities. If the absence of independent universities in most of the medium cities is understandable, their absence in large cities remains incomprehensible. There are 8 big cities in the Urals Federal District, 3 of which — Pervouralsk, Nefteyugansk and Kopeysk — have neither universities nor branches. Other 5 big cities — Kamensk-Uralsky, Zlatoust, Miass, Novy Urengoy, Noyabrsk — only have branches.

Approximately 1/6 of the students and 1/6 of teachers of the UFD study and work in the cities listed in Table 1. The universities of these cities account for 26 % of the total number of higher education

The population of large and medium cities of the Ural Federal District and the quantitative characteristics of the universities located in them, 2017

City	Population, thousand people / demographic trend <sup>*</sup>		Size of the city	Number of independent universities			Number of teachers and students, 2017	
				total	state	private	teachers	students
Magnitogorsk	418	↓	large	2	2	—	874	12 981
Surgut	361	↑	large	3	2	1	605	9 545
Kurgan	322	↓	large	3	3	—	588**	11 495**
Nizhnevartovsk	275	↑	large	2	1	1	178	4 190
Khanty-Mansiysk	99	↑	medium	2	2	—	308	6 245
Troitsk	75	↓	medium	1	1	—	400	6 274
Shadrinsk	75	↓	medium	1	1	—	157	3 871
Total				14	12	2	3 110	54 601

\* ↑ — population growth trend; ↓ — population decline trend.

\*\* The number of students and teachers of the Kurgan Border Institute of the FSS of Russia was not taken into account because of the lack of data in open sources.

institutions in the district. The quantitative characteristics of these universities allow us to typologize them as follows. These cities do not have very large universities (with more than 20 thousand students).

One university (Magnitogorsk State Technical University named after G.I. Nosov) belongs to the category of large universities (10 to 20 thousand students). Four universities (5 to 10 thousand students) can be categorized as medium-sized. The other 9 universities are small (up to 5 thousand students). This leads to the conclusion that most universities in the studied cities are low-resource and require special attention and support from the city, regional and macro-regional authorities. Especially since 12 of the 14 universities are state-owned. Two small private higher education institutions (with less than 100 students) fall into the risk zone (liquidation).

Analysis of the higher education space of these cities should be supplemented by the characteristic of the branches. Up to 2010, there was a branch network in the district. A significant part of the branches was liquidated in order to optimize higher education. The remaining branches are difficult to consider as a network. Table 2 presents the quantitative characteristics of the branches of higher educational institutions in the studied cities of the Ural Federal District.

The Table 2 data indicates that the maximum number of branches is concentrated in the two largest regions of the Ural Federal District — Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk. In general, branches belong to higher educational institutions of engineering and technical profile, which corresponds to the economy of these regions. Almost half of the branches belong to the universities located outside the Ural Federal District.

N. Tagil is the leader in the number of branches, a “branch” capital (after Chelyabinsk). There are 5 branches with over 4 thousand students and about 250 teachers. If the integration of these educational organizations took place, it would be possible to create an independent university with different training profiles that correspond to the needs of the Sverdlovsk region and the Ural Federal District.

We also add some of our observations to the analysis of the data in Table 2. There are two trends in the development of branches. On the one hand, there is a transformation of independent universities into branches (Nizhny Tagil, Tobolsk, Ishim). On the other hand, there has been a noticeable reduction in the number of branches in recent years. As a result, even big cities (Pervouralsk, Nefteyugansk, Kopeysk) were left without them.

Meanwhile, the preservation (or creation) of branches would facilitate the growth of positive demographic, socio-economic and sociocultural tendencies in some cases and would inhibit the intensification of negative processes in other cases.

The data of our survey conducted in 2017 among teachers and students of universities of the UFD is of great interest for the development of interaction between universities and cities<sup>5</sup>. According to

<sup>5</sup> 53 universities of the region were included in the general totality. A quota sample was implemented. Within each UFD region, quotas were administered by the areas of training (engineering, natural sciences, humanitarian, socio-economic). The sample of teachers consisted of 810 people, students — 1860 people.

Characteristics of university branches in large, big and medium-sized cities of the Ural Federal District, 2017

Subject of the Federation	Cities / number of university branches			Number of branches			Contingent of students, people*
	Large	Big	Medium-sized	Total	Ural universities	Universities of other subjects of the RF	
Sverdlovsk region	N. Tagil (5)	Kamensk-Uralsky (1)	Lesnoy (1), Novouralsk (1), Nizhnyaya Tura (1), Verkhnyaya Salda (1), Krasnoturinsk (1)	11	7	4	4 687
Chelyabinsk region	Magnitogorsk (2)	Miass (2), Zlatoust (1)	Troitsk (2), Ozersk (1), Snezhinsk (1), Trehgornyy (1), Satka (1)	11	6	5	5 508
Tyumen region	—	Tobolsk (2), Ishim (1)	—	3	3	0	3 674
Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area	Surgut (2), Nizhnevartovsk (4)	—	—	6	5	1	1 653
Kurgan region	Kurgan (3)	—	Shadrinsk (1)	4	1	3	565
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District 3	—	Noyabrsk (1), Novy Urengoy (1)	Gubkinsky (1)	3	2	1	431
Total: 25	16	9	13	38	24	14	16 518

\* Due to the lack of accurate data on the number of students of branches in open sources, we use the data on the contingent of students obtained in the course of monitoring of the performance of higher education institutions in 2017. Retrieved from: <http://indicators.miccedu.ru/monitoring> (In Russ.)

the data, the degree of involvement of educational communities of universities in interaction with various subjects of the urban environment (business, authorities, non-profit organizations) is not very high. This is due to the lack of interest of urban and university communities in each other and a focus on solving only their own problems. Thus, only 14.7 % of the surveyed teachers noted the fact of participation in the activities of public councils and expert groups under the authorities. Only 6.8 % and 6.2 % of teachers participated in activities of socially oriented non-profit organizations and public actions, respectively. Only 3.7 % of teachers worked as volunteers. But the university teachers expressed their readiness to participate in various projects with the city business (25.6 %) and regional and municipal authorities (20 %).

The survey showed that students also have a sufficiently high potential for interaction with the urban community, especially through inclusion in public and volunteer projects (Table 3).

Table 3

Forms of participation of students in public activities, % of the number of respondents\*

Form of public activity	%
Assisted in the organization of mass sports events	31,1
Helped organize and conduct performances, concerts, film screenings	26,1
Helped in kindergarten, school, leisure facilities	25,7
Participated in cleaning and landscaping of their yard, house building	23,9
Taught strangers for free	23,1
Participated in social projects, helped children, the elderly, disabled and ill people through specific actions	19,4
Participated in organized environmental projects	13,6
Participated in elections as an observer, agitator, journalist	13,1
Participated in events aimed at helping people in emergency situations (fires, floods, etc.)	5,1
Helped staff of non-profit organizations in their main activity	4,5
Total	185,6

\* The result is more than 100 % since respondents could choose several answers.

The data shows that the higher educational communities have sufficient potential, which is not yet implemented at the necessary level. Using the potential will help solve problems of interaction between educational institutions and urban structures in the interests of both the city and the university. This “compatibility” will become the key to their preservation.

### **Conclusion**

The first and main conclusion from our study is that the preservation of higher education in medium-sized, big and large cities of the UFD is possible only in close connection to the preservation of these cities themselves. An effective system of interaction between higher education institutions and cities is necessary. It will become a significant and necessary condition of the constructive functioning of cities and meeting the need in higher education among the population, especially among youth. The existence and development of universities or strong university branches is always a prestigious symbol, an opportunity to increase the city’s attractiveness for young people and the general population.

There are several ways of solving the problems related to the implementation of self-preserving and city-preserving functions of higher education in the Ural macro-region. Some of them are connected to the purposeful activity of educational organizations aimed at the preservation and development of cities, while others are connected to the efforts of urban communities and authorities, as well as regional and macro-regional structures.

In our opinion, every educational institution should have a special program, which can be called “University for the City”. Its content should be determined by the specificity of the city’s life, the development needs of its various areas, the possibilities of including students and scientific and pedagogical community in solving the city’s problems.

At the same time, activities of medium-sized, big and large cities of the macro-region aimed at the preservation of higher education (so-called “The City for the University” program) should include multilateral support for all independent universities and strong branches in cities with a population of up to 400 thousand people. The position of municipalities and regions regarding the preservation of branches, or their liquidation in the case of inefficiencies, or their possible enlargement (joining other branches and universities), is essential. The issue of creating strong consolidated branches, which could be of interest for big and large cities and the region as a whole, requires discussion.

These problems require considerable attention from representatives of the city, as well as regional and macro-regional authorities, even when the situation is beyond their control (since higher education is mainly financed by the federal or, in rare cases, regional budget). Hence, the improvement of the regulatory, legal and financial aspects of the interaction between the city and the university is another factor in their successful operation.

The results of the study make it possible to consider a credible hypothesis that the existence and development of educational institutions of higher education in medium-sized, big and large cities of the macro-region can be an important factor in preserving these cities.

It is necessary for these cities to seriously consider this hypothesis before the process of liquidation or transformation of independent universities begins. After that, it is too late to measure the temperature of dying educational organizations. A systemic diagnostic and preventive work is required with each of the institutions. It should involve experts in the field of higher education to make important decisions regarding plans for the preservation and development (or, in some cases, liquidation) of educational organizations.

Various strategies of cities as main agents of socio-economic and socio-cultural development are being developed at the federal, regional and municipal levels. Including the provision on the key role of educational institutions of higher education in these strategies would be an important and necessary condition for the successful interaction of the city and higher education.

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