

Peculiarities of value-rational grounds of dispositions of actors of physical-educational space of a regional university in the new reality

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Abstract. The paper considers the problem of modern specificity of value-rational grounds of dispositions of actors of physical-educational space of regional universities. The empirical basis of the work results from sociological research conducted in 2019-2020 by questionnaire survey of the subjects of physical-educational space of universities in the Belgorod, Kursk, and Lipetsk regions (the Central Black Earth regions of Russia, which have close characteristics). It is argued that despite the importance of the value of physical development, the representatives of different groups of actors of physical-educational space of regional universities are included in this activity to a different extent. The main reasons for the differences are connected with the peculiarities of comprehending the value of physical development and determining the model of behavior within the physical-educational space on this basis. Two models of attitude towards this value are distinguished: the model of rational efficiency, which is used by the most of the administrators, professors and researchers; and the combined model, which composes the rationality of survival and imaginative rationality, which is most typical of students.

1 Introduction

Modern social reality gains a hybrid character, which, in particular, is expressed in the transformation of its constituent objects into complexly structured socio-biotechnical systems (SBT-systems) [1]. “These are open systems of non-linear connections and interactions”, asymmetrical, because “the human factor” plays a key role in them” [2]. The integrity of SBT systems is ensured by the unity of their social, technical-technological and bio-ecological elements.

Russian universities are increasingly being transformed into socio-biotechnical systems, that is reflected in the functioning of their structural components. These components include physical and educational space, an organized environment in which the tasks of physical development and health preservation of university actors are solved by specific means, which become especially important in modern society, characterized by increasing threats to the substantive foundations of human life activity [3-6].

This environment in the modern (augmented [7]) reality acquires qualitatively new characteristics, determined primarily by the processes of virtualization and digitalization.

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Virtualization transfers an increasingly important part of interpersonal and intergroup interactions into cyberspace. Digitalization, according to some researchers, leads to changes “in the educational paradigm” [8]. B.E. Starichenko presents digitalization as a process of providing the sphere of education with the methodology and practice of development and optimal use of modern information technologies, focused on the implementation of psychological and pedagogical goals of training and education [9]. According to R.M. Safuanov, in the course of digitalization, the structure of training and the organization of the educational process change fundamentally [10].

The changes taking place cannot but affect the dispositions of the principal actors of physical-educational space, which include students (mainly junior students, but also master’s and PhD students), professors and research staff, university administration, including its managers. However, at present, the specifics of these dispositions have not been sufficiently investigated, especially their value-rational grounds, which include the values interiorized by the actors, the nature of their comprehension, and interpretation by means of concepts. They represent the core of the system of dispositions of a personality. Adequate representation of the content of value-rational grounds creates opportunities for predicting the models of physical development chosen by the actors of physical-educational space, which is a prerequisite for regulation of this process.

This paper aims to reveal modern specifics of value-rational grounds of dispositions of actors of physical-educational space of the so-called regional universities. The regional universities are located in the provincial subjects of the Russian Federation, and usually differ in many of their characteristics (scale, resource provision, level of training of applicants) from higher education institutions located in the capital and megacities.

2 Materials and methods

The empirical base of the work comprised the results of sociological research conducted in 2019-2020 by questionnaire survey of the subjects of physical-educational space of universities in the Belgorod, Kursk and Lipetsk regions (the Central Black Earth regions of Russia, which have close characteristics). The research included a questionnaire survey of students (n=1000, multistage, quota sample), professors, and researchers of universities (n=300, multistage, quota sample), as well as employees of the administration (n=140, purposive sample). In addition, a focus group interviewing of professors and administrators was conducted (two focus groups; n = 24). Finally, an expert survey (n = 20) was conducted to discuss the findings. Scientists and managers in physical education and sport management were the experts.

It should be noted that the empirical data obtained cannot be uncritically extrapolated to all Russian universities. Firstly, it is explained by the differences from universities of capitals and megacities. Moreover, the study revealed noticeable differences in the organization of physical-educational space even between universities of the same region. Secondly, since the development of higher education has a high dynamics, the data obtained quickly becomes outdated and requires constant correction. Such correction is especially important in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the spread of which determines not only constant modifications of the organization of physical and educational work but also the attitudes of its participants regarding their health.

The results of the empirical study performed by the authors were compared with the results of other sociologists [11-13]. However, due to the differences in the methodologies, the possibilities of comparison are very tentative.

3 Results and discussion

The research concept is based on the fact that the content and results of physical development of actors in the educational space of a university are largely determined by their dispositions, i.e. predisposition to implement specific behavioral patterns. These dispositions can be assessed by several parameters, including rationally conceived values of actors in the sphere of physical development and sports; goals pursued by them in the course of physical education; motivation, and the level of awareness regarding the possibilities of self-realization in physical education and education environment.

It was assumed that the core of dispositions were value-rational grounds. This is consistent with the dominant view in sociology that values are the most important regulators of individual behavior, and their regulating role can be realized subject to rational reflection.

The study showed that physical education classes are formally declared as a value by the majority of students and employees of the university. The students evaluated the importance of physical development in 8.1 points out of 10 possible, which, according to expert opinion, is a high indicator and gives grounds to consider it as a terminal value of student youth. Moreover, 80% of experts also agreed that physical development is among the most important student values [14-16].

All focus group participants stated the necessity of engaging in their physical development. Typical were the following arguments: “Of course, physical education plays an important role in human life, I always try to take part in the sports life of the Institute, especially since it helps to organize my students” (woman, 41 years old, professor). Or: “I like to take part in passing the “Ready for labor and defense” exercise complex, I like to shoot and swim, it makes me feel a little younger” (woman, 46 years old, professor)” [17-18].

The administrators were equally unanimous: “The state of health directly depends on physical activity, I understand it perfectly” (man, 37 years old, an employee of the university administration). Another quite typical judgment is ‘It is obvious that physical education is a value for a person, it is our health’ (woman, 42 years old, an employee of the administration of the university).

However, no more than half of the representatives of each status group regularly practice physical activity. Even among students (for whom physical education is an obligation and physical development needs are conditioned by age specifics), activity in this sphere is quite low. For example, only 51.2% of students attend the elective part of the “physical education” discipline in free time [19-21].

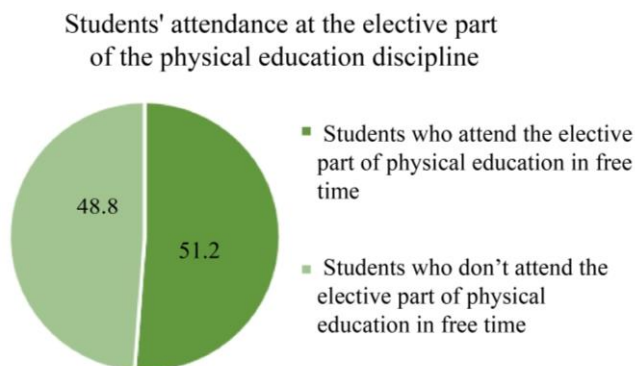


Fig. 1. Students' attendance at the elective part of the physical education discipline

Half of the professors and administration staff rarely visit sports facilities.

Attendance of sports facilities
by the university professors and administration staff

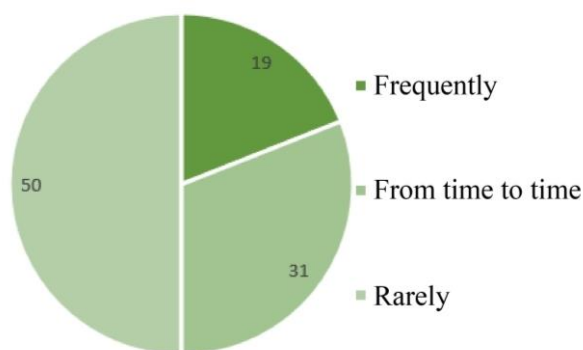


Fig. 2. Attendance of sports facilities by faculty and university administration staff

The adult respondents more or less reasonably explain their passivity by the lack of free time, which is indeed the case. However, the apparent contradiction between the importance of physical education and the limited real practices demands a deeper explanation. It should be noted that this contradiction is typical not only for the surveyed universities; the study conducted by the Center for Social Support of Students of ITMO University in 2015 showed that 19% of students were active participants in sports, while 51% of students didn't take part in it [11].

We attribute this to the manifestation of a general trend toward the loss of the regulatory role of values in the real life processes of modern youth and their increasingly visible transformation into purely symbolic phenomena of consciousness. The operation of value-symbols consistently shifts to virtual reality, which reflects the general trend of modernity [22]. In the virtual environment, it takes on the character of peculiar "mind games" that do not require significant effort and have a pronounced image component. At the same time, virtual practices of mastering the world of values do not lose their rational content, but, in fact, mean the formation of a new type of rationality. A. Etzioni singled out rationality of efficiency and rationality of survival, but the new rationality can be defined as rationality of imagination. It represents the subject's reflection of social reality in the context of representations formed in the process of presence in virtual space and subordinated to the goal of forming, popularizing, and using a virtual image.

In this reality, it is important to be able to present oneself to the environment, using the skills of information and communication technologies as effectively as possible. Here it is important not to "be, but not to seem", but, on the contrary, to "seem, but not to be", which determines to a large extent the attitude, orientation and, ultimately, the goals of students in the physical-educational space.

However, since today's social reality is multilayered, these goals are also internally contradictory. University students are forced to fulfill compulsory requirements (in particular, to attend classes, pass exams and tests). This formal side of learning, in their opinion, motivates about a third of the respondents to make physical trainings. For example, 24.6% of students indicated that the main purpose of doing physical activity for them is to get credit or a grade, 8.1% indicated the desire to avoid problems with professors and administration. 35% would like to improve their health in this way, 40% would like to get a beautiful figure.

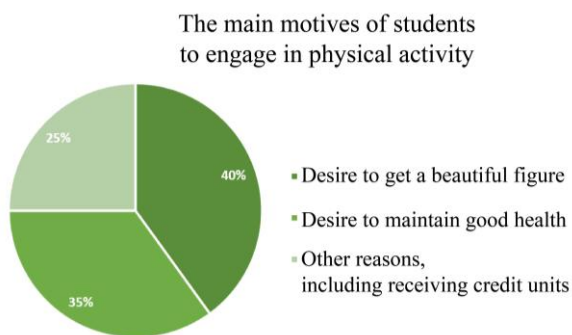


Fig. 3. The main motives of students to engage in physical activity (in percent)

But according to 70% of the experts, formal motivation to engage in physical education is the predominant target in the student environment during physical education classes, and the respondents are not sincere enough in their answers, which is quite possible because the survey is quite often perceived by young people as a kind of control by the university administration, and the so-called “wrong” answers will entail sanctions.

However, something else is remarkable - the relative majority of the study participants indicated a purely image-oriented goal of their physical activity. In our opinion, this quite clearly confirms the thesis about the imagination of rationality, especially typical for the youth environment. A beautiful figure in students' consciousness is seen as an important condition for life success, quite adequately reflecting the specifics of modern society, in which images and ratings play a huge role. Students' disposition in this case is quite reasonable, but at the same time it often does not get reinforcement in the form of self-regulating and self-organizing actions, remaining a kind of a good wish, a declaration. And this is well within the general context of virtual relationships and connections.

For the adult audience this contradiction is less typical. Its representatives prefer to think within the traditional rational paradigm.

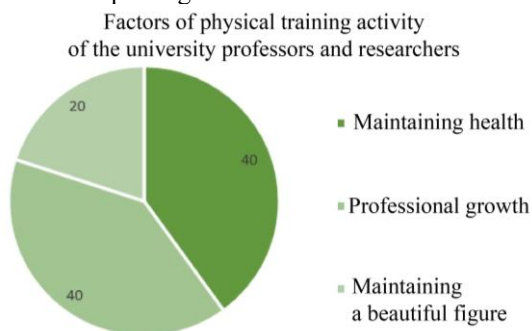


Fig. 4. Goals of physical activity for professors and research staff of the university

More often it is the rationality of effectiveness. The majority of professors and researchers consider their participation in physical activities as a condition of health maintenance and a prerequisite for professional growth (most importantly). In this respect, our study has generally confirmed the conclusions obtained by sociologists from the Surgut State University in 2009. They showed that the main factors of physical activity of university professors are: 1) possibility of professional growth; 2) self-realization and self-actualization; 3) manifestation of creative beginning; 4) status movement; 5) belonging (integration) in the professional group [23].

In administrators' perceptions, physical education is necessary to keep oneself in a beautiful figure, which is extremely necessary due to the specifics of university management, implemented in conditions of high social dynamics and stressful situations associated with the need to constantly search for innovative solutions. "The conditions of competition in higher education are getting tougher and tougher, and university management today is change management" [24].

Administrators make regular physical training, which is usually done individually and not always at the university where they work. Their attitude toward physical education is as pragmatic as possible.

4 Conclusions

Thus, the study showed that physical development is currently a terminal value for the majority of students and staff of the university. However, it has different regulating effects on the behavior of individual groups of actors. For administration employees this value is converted into regular physical activity, and it acts as a similar regulator only for half of the professors and students.

The reasons for the identified differences are determined not only by the limited capabilities of the latter two groups, although they certainly occur. To a much greater extent these reasons are connected with the specificity of comprehension of the value of physical development and determination of the model of behavior within the physical-educational space on this basis. For adult groups, the rational and pragmatic approach to solving these tasks is most typical. At the same time their attitudes are defined by the rationality of effectiveness, usually determined by the understanding of the role of health for professional development (career) and successful solution of complex managerial problems. The factor of rational efficiency is less manifested among professors and researchers, it is usually associated with their disappointment in the prospects of reforming higher education, with a feeling of their social outsider.

For the majority of students a contradictory attitude to the value of physical development is typical. It also has a rational and pragmatic character, but, firstly, it is the rationality of survival (preservation of student status), secondly, it is the imaginative rationality focused on creating a positive image, first of all, in virtual space. These types of rationality stimulate a predominantly formal attitude towards physical education classes and a shift in emphasis in defining their goals to purely formal indicators.

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