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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**MAPPING THE UNIVERSITY SPACE: STRATEGIES OF  
SPATIAL ACQUISITION IN THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE**

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*Abstract*

Discussions about the university of the future currently being actively held in Russia are mostly concerned with educational programs and the professional trajectories of the alumni. However, the future also includes everyday experience, plays a role in all decisions and achievements. The authors analyze the university as a physical environment in the life of academic societies and offer algorithms of research of everyday life on a university campus. The paper presents the results of the field research of everyday life on a university campus from the students' point of view. The research was carried out in 2009-2018 among Saint Petersburg students (Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, St. Petersburg State University, Folk Arts State Higher School). The authors report that, in addition to the university's formal spatial structure, students construct a stable informal system of spatial and time axes, including sounds, smells, colors, objects, texts, and situations. On the informal level, students actively develop symbolic meanings of places attributing them with meaning important to the student society. The university space, as described by students, appears organized and differentiated; it also determines students' identity and the prescribed behavioral norms. During the research period, it was found that informal knowledge and spatial assignment methods could be transferred over time and passed on to future generations. The level of emotional and intellectual perceptions about such conflicts mainly depends on the existence of well-organized mechanisms of communication between the students' academic societies, teaching staff, and administration.

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## 1. Introduction

At the entrance to any university campus, there is usually a map showing the location of faculty buildings, administrative offices, libraries, etc. Formal spatial structure can be complemented by other “places”, which reveal informal, unobvious, but significant, aspects of student and staff life. In contrast to the colors that appear on the official map (yellow – buildings, green – garden, etc.), for the map of informal spaces another palette is needed. Some locations can be aggressive, others – friendly, mysterious, sublime or barely accessible.

Discussions about the university of the future, which are actively being held now in Russia, deal with educational programs, principles and the professional trajectories of the alumni. It seems as if the theme of everyday university life doesn't actually relate to the aims of the University 2.0 and 3.0, which are not mentioned in the National Technology Initiative project (Bylieva, Lobatyuk, Nikiforova, & Petrova, 2017). At the same time, half a century ago, ideas about what should be changed in the everyday life of the university in order to achieve desirable developments in the future were clearly stated.

The idea that the university is not only about academic programs and educational standards, but also involves a physical space – literally, a “physical environment” – that influences all decisions and achievements, dates back to 1968. Whisnant (1979) noted that student protests had destabilized the image of the university as a temple of knowledge and science, an “island” of knowledge. Its isolation from rapidly-changing modern life is generally represented in the historical architecture of the university complex (Whisnant, 1979, p. 545).

The attempts to understand the causes of the so-called “campus unrest” (Whisnant, 1979, p. 544) resulted in a simple discovery – the university is not only a place of study (work), but also a living environment. Human relations, sentiments, ideals, values and actions depend on everyday life. According to Whisnant (1979, p. 557), the spatial opposition of the university administration's “high” culture and the more “down-to-earth” culture of student life, including the “ghetto” of the dormitories, reinforces social inequality, promoting the paradigm of the struggle – and sometimes even the seizure – of power.

Sturmer (1972, p. 98) defined the university as a “total environment”: “composite of many diverse but interrelated activities – both sequential and random, symmetrical and disjointed – involving the convergence of man, his mental constructs, and a variety of inanimate objects. Together they shape the environment in which interacting students and faculty search for understanding, identity, and communal involvements”.

The discussion about the university of the future or the “sustainable university”, which took place in the 1970s and 1980s developed in parallel with the establishment of the so-called “new urbanism”, critical and human geography (Hopkins, 2011), and encapsulated ideas related to a spatial turn in human sciences.

The new “geography of education” analyzes unique aspects of educational systems in different regions and specific trajectories of mobility. It raises the question of how the university creates “socio-spatial identities and networks” (Holloway & Heike, 2012, p. 484).

The development of information technology did not eliminate the question about strategies of identification with real space. Digital space becomes a mediator in the university campus's acquisition strategies (Gashkova, Berezovskaya, & Shipunova, 2017). The disappearance of this traditional space

resulting from on-line and e-learning creates new forms of presence and emotional involvement in the everyday life of the university (Bayne & Sean, 2014).

Although the spatial dimension of the university has already been recognized and accepted, there is no common study algorithm of the everyday modern university campus life. Furthermore, such a study becomes a special type of experience - both for the researcher and the respondents. This article focuses on one approach dealing with the spatial aspect of everyday university life.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In stating the problem of the field study, we first decided to specify the algorithm of the socio-cultural analysis of space. Diverse studies have examined cultural space and cultural memory, and the space and time of myth-related, sacral, literary and art spaces share similar characteristics.

- These spaces are discrete and hierarchic; they are described as a complex of “locations” imbued with meaning (Stepanov, 2016); “locations” are familiar to the representatives of the community and are involved in everyday practices, and they rich in meaning.
- In such spaces, “locations” represent not only spatial objects, but also personalities, situations, statements, texts and things around which everyday interactions are built.
- The description of multiple and diverse denotation practices is an important part of the research.

Each university campus inhabitant undergoes everyday experiences, but in order to analyze them, we need to take the observer’s position and actually “enter the research field” (Kuprianov & Sadvnikova, 2009, p. 373). An important aspect in the role of the observer is the “intellectual scenario of meaning formation” (Shipunova, Mureyko, Serkova, Romanenko, & Romanenko, 2016, p. 6). Moreover, students have a high level of reflective thinking. Thus, a preliminary step of introspection for our respondents became the absorption of the theory of cultural space in a compact, but academically proper form, including the reading of several texts (Nikiforova, Ron, Tihomirov, Makashova, & Poddelkova, 2011). We assumed that rather than a technological discussion – with all of the semantic plasticity of the term (Nikiforova, 2015, p. 184) – the theory itself can also have a stimulating effect. After discussing the theory, the students were asked to make their own lists of “locations” on the university campus and comment on them.

## **3. Research Questions**

The article addresses the following questions:

- Which places are meaningful to students, and how do they describe these places?
- Is it possible to classify places in terms of their spatial and temporal characteristics, as well as in relation to the objects that people deal with there?

What are the strategies of space “acquisition” from everyday experiences?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to present the results of the research, which examined everyday campus life from the students’ point of view. The research was carried out in 2009-2013 among the

students of Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, St. Petersburg (faculties of Geography, Mathematics Information Technologies, Music, Fine Arts, Philology and Human Philosophy); in 2009-2011 at St. Petersburg State University (faculty of Philosophy); in 2014-2018 at the Folk Arts State Higher School (faculty of Applied Art). A total of 541 respondents took part in the research.

## 5. Research Methods

- 5.1. Focus group method
- 5.2. Participatory observation method

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Territory

A university is a type of megalopolis, similar or even equivalent to city (*“The square in front of the main campus building is like our own Palace Square; Herzen University is like an entire town with its own squares, streets, yards”*). However, in contrast to Western-European campuses, which are usually “island-like” and separated from the outside world by a clearly perceived visual border (Whisnant, 1979, p. 546), the space of Russian universities flows more gently into the city space. From university campuses, you can easily escape into the bustling city space: respondents from the Folk Arts State Higher School said they often “go to the city” during lunch time to “take a walk in the park”, “admire the architecture of Petersburg”, and to “watch and discuss brides” taking photos in front of major tourist destinations. In addition, students often specified the green zones of university campuses as the most friendly spaces – indeed, universities often reproduce “the ideal of a pastoral utopian village” (Chase, 1992, p. 585). If a university doesn’t have its own park, students “appropriate” the nearest city parks.

Students’ perceptions of university space are supplemented by city points internship locations, neighboring supermarkets and coffee shops, which can play both a purely pragmatic role – “grab a quick and cheap lunch” - and serve as leisure activity locations or places to meet friends, etc. Urban modes of behavior, as respondents indicated, are reproduced at university campuses: for example, people-watching and filling the space with private memories, which are referred to and re-actualized in different communicative situations.

However, the acquisition of university space by students involves the creation of symbolic borders: various concepts, such as “entrance gate”, “turn-gate”, “reception desk”, and “security desk” mark the borders of the university campus.

There are a lot of emotional, aesthetic overtones in how students perceive historical university buildings: *“Old architecture creates a special flavor for the whole space of the Herzen University. Everything looks as it was two centuries ago, though signs of modern life are also visible. The architecture allows us to feel we are part of the university’s history ...”* However, it is interesting that quoted texts cannot convey the deep knowledge and historical past of the place.

The historical buildings that house the faculties can generate mysterious reflections: *“The fire ladder is always closed, and if opened no one knows where it comes from or where it leads”*; *“There is a ‘drawing pad monster’ at the university, which eats or discards drawing pads”* (here, the student is

speaking about the rule stating that students-artists should not leave their drawing pads unattended); “The ghost of the cursed lace-maker haunts the bookcase in classroom 225; she always hits on one of the freshers, accompanying him or her throughout the whole year” These types of ironic statements sometimes parody the style of urban legends or refer to the texts of mass culture. The university space is planned in a very rational manner (which is depicted in signs, signboards, escape maps, the strict layout of functional zones, etc.), but it can be “revived”, mythologized, in the narratives of the student society. The canteen, as a functional zone, becomes the space where “diverse energies are gathered: antagonism, sympathy, indignation, rumors, news, and finally, hunger”.

Elements of university space define behavioral habits (“flop down at the desk and drop your bag”; “it is forbidden to write on the desks”; ... those who like to share their thoughts do so on the drawing easels”), but also demand specific knowledge and behavior from the students. One of students’ text mentioned: “The reading room in the faculty of philology library is nice because there are desks for four people. The desks and benches are very old and are dangerous for girls wearing nylon stockings”. In other words, interaction with a specific space requires specific routine knowledge about it (probably based on experience – a run in one’s stockings because of an “incompetent” interaction with an old bench) and special physical choreography (one’s physical position at the desk should be careful enough to allow four people to read a book simultaneously, without damaging one’s clothes on the old furniture). Students challenge the rationality of the university space and make their own revisions, thereby enriching the space with a specific perspective of perception and action.

In this way, another type of university “spatiality” is configured – anthropological and mythopoetic spatiality (Fleury, 2009, p. 31). Although university space is public, it is, at first, unfamiliar to the students-newcomers. Thus, they need to familiarize themselves with the space, domesticate and acquire it, and gradually discover their own special places (“the cubbyhole”, “the smoking room”, “the red sofas”). The informal naming of spatial objects leads to the domestication of one’s spaces. Classroom names – “the Hearse”, “the Bookcase”, “the Refrigerator”, “the Steam Room” – are not only a way to express emotional attitudes, but also to solve the problem of identifying standard rooms and saving on language resources (there is no need to remember complicated room numbers). Thus, students create not only borders, but also different personal landmarks. Interviews show that students do not only explore the best ways to navigate the space, they are also very attentive to small details and curiosities (“Classroom 67 is opposite classroom 19”, “...the classroom with the computer with Rembrandt going green on the screen”). Such details and curiosities are documented both verbally and visually (in the form of photos).

The gathered material allows us to conclude that the shaping of the university space’s image is a gradual and long-term process. New generations discard certain images and landmarks, and add new ones, constantly developing the texture of the university space.

Each university has its own space. In many ways, this uniqueness is generated by university communities, which enrich and build up the space using contents, meanings and behavioral strategies. Students’ everyday experience is colored by spatial specificities (the university as a place to study and live (Whisnant, 1979, p. 544), “like home for several years of our young life”). Therefore, it is fair to say that the identity of the student society (*who* are we?), constructed from social roles and cultural prescriptions, can be successfully enriched by spatial characteristics (*where* are we?).

## 6.2. Time

Time, in the everyday life of the university campus, is structured according to the academic calendar, which consists of terms, repeated and unique events, both official and unofficial.

In the educational life of a student, his history can be traced as follows: freshman year – The Equator (the middle of the academic course of study) – The Final Year – final exams and graduation paper presentation. For many students, the first semester is a complicated period of adaptation to the university's rules. Freshmen must familiarize themselves with the various buildings' locations, schedule changes, and the various functions of the different administrative departments. Therefore, students often feel lost. However, this feeling is short-lived; after the first exams they usually feel more confident.

The second important event in the student's university history is "The Equator" – the exams that take place in the middle of the student's academic course of study. This period is usually celebrated together with one's classmates. In spite of the festive atmosphere, and the understanding that half of the academic course of study has passed, many students ask themselves questions, such as: "*Why am I here?*", "*Have I chosen the right university?*", "*Have I chosen the right profession?*".

Other significant events in university life include the graduation examinations (or *state exams*, as they are called in Russia), and the preparation and defense of one's graduation project. Opinions about these events differ: for those who graduate with a BA degree and then continue on to an MA program, there is no such worrying feeling about leaving the university. This is in contrast to those who leave after receiving their BA degree. Many of these students mention feelings of anxiety about their impending changing social role.

In this cycle, for the most part, the events of official and everyday life coincide: the initiation ceremony, the state examinations, and the graduation ceremony.

A one-year university cycle is as follows: at the end of August, students come to the city, find accommodations, and receive their study schedule. Classes begin in autumn, followed by the anxious exams period. During these periods, the time flow changes: it becomes irregular, filled with diverse emotions and events, and students' sleep schedule is often disturbed (many students prepare for their exams at night and sleep after the examination period has finished). All Russian students know the proverb: "*Students have fun when there is no exam.*".

An especially striking period is the winter exam session, which in Russia falls close to the New Year. Many students look upon this overlap of dates tragically, because students from other cities can't celebrate the New Year at home. The end of the exam period falls on Tatiana Day or Russian Students Day (January 25th).

The winter exams period was referred to by students as follows: [The winter] exam period is a "*stressful situation that promotes the development of neuroticism in emotionally unstable personalities*". The winter exam period is an extremely stressful time, described by students as: a "*test of strength*", a time of "*collectivity*" and "*mutual help*", where one can "*show one's individual characteristics*".

The exams period is a moment of encounter – where one experiences the rational and the irrational. Students understand the importance of "*systematic knowledge checks*" but, at the same time, the examination score is often interpreted as "*lucky*", or the opposite - "*total bad luck*".

After the difficult examination period, the student's life calms down for a while (winter holidays). In the second semester, there are several state holidays and, as a result, students have some time off: – February 23rd, and March 8th, the “May holidays” and, at the end of the academic year, yet another examination period.

In the smaller cycle of the academic day, students particularly commented on the beginning of the first lecture at 8 o'clock: *“It's hard to get up at 6 o'clock, run in the morning cold to be on time before the doors are closed”*. It's *“a punishment for freshmen to understand what student life is”*, and *“Every year they promise there won't be any more 8 o'clock lessons”*. Lunch hour is also perceived as a time to talk and make plans for the evening. The last lecture was also mentioned, because many students are already tired and it is difficult to work well.

Under today's conditions of distance education (via the internet), the university campus life's calendar becomes an important way of identifying with the university (Bayne & Sean, 2014).

Each university builds its own “temporal program”, which is partially congruent with state holidays and city rhythms, and which to a great extent defines students' behavior, sometimes even transforming their circadian rhythm (i.e., sleepless nights during exam periods)

### **6.3. Things**

Sturmer (1972, p. 100) pointed out the discretization and, at the same time, the connectedness of diverse components of university campus space, highlighting “bicycles, dances, books, swimmers, voices, bare feet, clusters of people, typewriters, poetry readings, visual and audio surprises, songs, kites, chalk, guitars, disputations, and itinerant bands of ball players”. Indeed, experiencing space involves a lot of interaction with small objects. Moreover “material objects are not only resources for interaction, they are not only incorporated, built into social interaction – they play a key role in how these interactions are regulated” (Vakhshayn, 2017, p. 6).

Artifacts of educational processes include: *“receipts – an attribute of the fee-paying student”* (anxiety about paying tuition fees on time), *“notification that the student is excused from work during the exam period – this is a document that gives distance-learning students the chance to take a one-month break from work”*. Some of the artifacts of the educational process may be “unique” (indicating the specific character of the faculty – for example, *“an invisible pin in the hall of the Faculty of Arts that you will surely step on”* (meaning, drawing pins, which are used to fix paper onto pads)), or “common” – for example *“the academic schedule”*. This object was included in the lists made by students of different faculties and universities. In the beginning of our study, students mentioned staying on top of the schedule. Now that the schedule is accessible on-line, they mention a routine inconsistency of online and offline information regarding their schedules. Moreover, names of disciplines often require interpretation: *“If the schedule says: “Actual problems of linguacultural studies”, it means that most likely you will be studying the rituals of primitive African tribes”*.

*Art objects* are important landmarks of university space. Thus, a monument to Ushinsky is a symbol of the Pedagogical University; a copy of *“School of Athens”* represents the Faculty of Human Philosophy; while gypsum Laocoon represents the Faculty of Fine Arts. Students may have special relations with each of these objects: *“Gypsum head of David, which drew during the exam and then detailed during practice (nose, lips, ears, eyes). After graduation, I will always remember the*

*omnipresent David, which is in every classroom*". The most symbolic monument is the monument to K.D. Ushinsky, located in front of the university's main building. This statue causes a contextual desynchronization in students' minds (a monument to Ushinsky, although the university is named after the writer, A.I. Herzen). This fact is a common theme in student folklore: *"The monument is not dedicated to Herzen; this is why it is famous, because this fact is noticed. Why not Herzen?"*

Analyzing everyday experience, students note acoustic, olfactory, tactile and color-related phenomena: *the heavy door of the main library, the wine-red tile in the Faculty of Philology lavatory*. A small number of detailed statements on this theme may indicate that contemporary students "see" more than they "hear" or "smell". Yet, there are exceptions, like *"the smell of buns...sometimes the space near the Dean's office is filled with the tasty smell of fresh-baked buns. Contrary to reason, there is no such smell from the canteen, located on the floor below. This situation is both annoying and intriguing"*.

The most "sonorous" space is the Institute of Music, Theatre and Choreography (a department of the Herzen University): Russian speech is mixed here with Chinese; from behind the classroom doors, one can hear the voices of opera singers, and the sounds of the piano, violin, flute, and bass-viol... Singers are warming up, but their voices are dominated by the sound of tap-dancers' heels and the voices of actors rehearsing their lines. And against the background of this polyphonic chaos, "choreographers" are silently making fouettes".

Students' onomatology is a part of their everyday experience. One of the strategies of "absorption" and "acquisition" of a space involves the practice of the informal naming of different objects. The self-designation of disciplines and professional fields also plays a special role: for example, *"tic-tac-toe" for the course's "artistic education" (the Russian abbreviation of this is "XO")*; *"tourists" for "ecotourism"*; *"madmen" for the Faculty of Psychology*. Proper nouns, archetypes, historical personalities (Herzen, Lomonosov, Betskoy), administration employees, security guards, surnames or nicknames of lecturers and fellow students – all become part of the toponymics of the university space. Before admittance cards were introduced, gatekeepers were included among the university's "popular characters" – *"creatures living near the entrance door. They can only say one phrase: 'Show me your student identity card'"*. If the image of the gatekeeper has become history, irony about administration employees still exists: *"The Dean's office has a high concentration of women with names finishing in-ina (Katerina, Irina, Marina, etc.), whose IQs are under 85 and whose heels are over 10 cm. This is why girls graduating from a pedagogical university understand that education is pointless"*. The students' texts show a deep thematic continuity of students' folklore. In such texts, probably taken from the times of the goliards, the opposition between students and teachers, as well as university staff, was very important.

## 7. Conclusion

7.1. The general strategy of acquisition of the university space involves the assimilation and appropriation of unofficial places, usually inherited from previous generations and left for the future ones. Each new generation deals with this creatively, discarding certain images while adding new ones.

7.2. Disparities between formal and informal structures of university space are a common feature of everyday university life. Feeling these disparities emotionally and intellectually is an essential component of student life.



7.3. The means to experience and master the space involve creating boundaries; paving roads; and creating a system of symbolical landmarks, including onomatology; seeing the university campus as a micro-city (analogous to Saint Petersburg, for instance); and being aware of the existence of mysterious places.

7.4. The highest degree of congruence between these formal and informal regimes is found among the time rhythms of the university campus. Nevertheless, the same events can have different interpretations on the administration and student levels.

7.5. An important part of everyday experience is the interaction with small objects, sounds, smells and colors. This is the level of everyday life that shows the highest diversity of experience and which requires the most creative attitude towards space.

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