

**FaR 2021****International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****STUDENTS OF AN AGRARIAN UNIVERSITY: SELF-DETERMINATION IN CONDITIONS OF INSTABILITY**

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**Abstract**

The paper is devoted to the analysis of the peculiarities of personal self-determination of students of an agrarian university (on the example of Omsk State Agrarian University). The authors consider personal self-determination to be basic for all other types of self-determination. The study analyzes different approaches to understanding self-determination and its nature. It was concluded that the identified theoretical approaches complement and reveal various aspects of self-determination. The analysis of the considered approaches made it possible to distinguish content characteristics of self-determination and formulate questions to study personal self-determination of students. To assess self-determination, the authors introduce notions “quality of self-determination” and “modus of self-determination”. The results of an empirical study showed that most respondents have a blurred idea of themselves. The problem of the meaning of life is considered relevant by less than a third of respondents. Extremely small number of students perceives their lives as a meaningful concept. The value dominants are generally formed. The priority values for the participants of the study include family, motherhood, fatherhood, childhood, and labor activity. The goals of the respondents are mainly concentrated round the near future. Professional self-determination for the majority of respondents is extremely unexpressed. Evaluation of these content characteristics from the point of view of the ratio of positive and negative moduses of self-determination made it possible to conclude that the quality of personal self-determination of students of an agrarian university is more negative. The empirical data obtained in the course of the study indicate a crisis of self-determination.

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*Keywords:* Self-determination, personal self-determination, quality of self-determination, positive self-determination, negative self-determination



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## 1. Introduction

The current situation of rural development is characterized by instability and high dynamism of social and economic processes. These changes manifest themselves in the transformation of the economic and technological structure of a village, in socio-demographic processes, the change of values of the population.

Demographic ageing of a rural community, a decrease in the percentage of people of working population, active migration of young people to the city due to the lack of good work and a comfortable living environment are becoming strategic threats to the development of the Siberian village. A likely scenario of the focus of the agro-industrial complex on the development of innovative, including digital technologies, may be, on the one hand, increased labor productivity, and on the other, reduced traditional professions for the agricultural sector and the emergence of new jobs (at the intersection with cybernetics, informatics, genetics, ecology), job cuts, employment difficulties.

Future agricultural specialists are the most important resource for the reproduction, development and renewal of the modern village (Kosenchuk et al., 2021; Shumakova et al., 2021). In the context of the transformation of social, economic, technological foundations of rural areas, the issues of self-determination of students of an agrarian university are becoming ever more important (Skosyрева et al., 2020).

## 2. Problem Statement

Young people are the most important resource for the preservation and development of the modern village, which is currently in a situation of socio-economic, demographic and technological instability. The dynamism and uncertainty of transformations in the society in general and in the agrarian sector in particular, the changing nature and conditions of employment and activity of agricultural workers, as well as the contradiction and blurring of basic meaningful guidelines and values in modern society in general, lead to difficulties in self-determination, especially among the younger generation.

Self-determination is connected with the personal and social context, and does not stop during life. However, it is of particular relevance and importance to young people.

It is at the age from 18 to 25 that a mature period begins in a person's life, which is associated with the personality crisis due to the need to develop a personal attitude to what is happening and choose a further life path. During this period, a clearer understanding of oneself is formed, its place in the world, in the structure of relations with other people and in activities is determined. Trends towards positive or negative self-determination are developing, i.e. self-determination takes on a positive or negative quality. The fundamental task of the educational process at an agrarian university is psychological and pedagogical support for positive and prevention of negative students' self-determination.

In this regard, there is a need to study the quality of personal self-determination of students of an agrarian university – the main source of reproduction, development, renewal of the rural community. To achieve this goal, a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon self-determination is necessary in order to clarify its characteristics and to analyze, on the basis of empirical data the quality of self-determination, both in an individual person and in a certain socio-demographic group.

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the study is the content characteristics of personal self-determination of students of an agrarian university as indicators of its quality (on the example of students of Omsk State Agrarian University).

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

The purpose of the study is to identify and give a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the content characteristics of self-determination, to determine the quality of personal self-determination of students at an agrarian university (using the example of Omsk State Agrarian University).

### **5. Research Methods**

The main methods of study include theoretical analysis of approaches to understanding of a phenomenon of self-determination in domestic psychology (S.L. Rubenstein, K.A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, E.F. Zeer, L.I. Bozhovich, M.R. Ginzburg, E.Yu. Litvinova, et al.) and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sociological survey conducted in 2021 at Omsk State Agrarian University named after P.A. Stolypin. The study base was compiled by a survey of 312 respondents – students of Omsk State Agrarian University named after P.A. Stolypin of various years and directions of full-time study.

### **6. Findings**

The interest in the issue of youth self-determination is particularly relevant in conditions of global uncertainty and instability, significant economic changes, the rapid development of technology and the transformation of society as a whole.

The problem of self-determination attracts the attention of both Russian and foreign scientists and researchers in the field of philosophy, sociology, psychology and pedagogy: Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (1991, 1999), Bozhovich (2008), Ginzburg (1996), Zeer (2003, 2014), Kon (1989), Leontiev (2002), Litvinova (1992), Pryazhnikov (2002, 2008), Rubinstein (2000), Stepanova and Zyryanova (2017), Stepanova (2018), Maslow (1999), Ryan et al. (2021) Sansone and Tang (2021), Vallerand (2021) Ryan et al. (2019), Chen et al. (2015).

Philosophical theories of self-determination see the systematizing property of self-determination in the moral responsibility of an individual. In sociology, the concept of “self-determination” is considered in the aspect of a person’s conscious choice of his place in the system of social relations, socialization, in the process of mastering the norms, values and attitudes adopted in the society. The problem of self-determination in pedagogical research is primarily associated with the development of pedagogical conditions for positive self-determination in the process of growing-up, formation of values, projects of life, and career choice. Psychologists note that the most sensible period for self-determination is senior teenage years and adolescence. Self-determination does not stop and continues throughout the entire life, therefore, it must be studied in dynamics, in the direction of determining the main trends, and not as a stable and completed process.

Scientific literature distinguishes personal, social, professional and other forms of self-determination. They are in continuous interaction. Despite the variety of existing approaches to the concept of self-determination by various authors, a more detailed analysis makes it possible to distinguish separate approaches to understanding personal self-determination.

In domestic psychology, the approach to the study of “personal self-determination” based on the principle of determinism is associated with the name of S.L. Rubinstein. The main link is self-determination – personal activity, personal meaningful formation of attitude to the world in which a person exists, to people around him and to himself. Self-determination is expressed in self-awareness. In the process of personal self-determination, a unique image of Self is gained, which is constantly developing and approved among others. “Self is a person as a whole in the unity of all aspects of being, reflected in self-consciousness” (Rubinstein, 2000, p. 565). It is the internal conditionality of human activity, through which external influences are refracted, that underlies the understanding of self-determination and, in this context, it acts as self-determination, the activity of a person per se.

Determination is directed by values that at the level of individual consciousness are represented in the form of ideals or ideal models of the life path of a person. To understand the path of its development in its true human essence, a person must consider it in a certain aspect: what was I? – what did I do? – what did I become? Thus, Rubinstein here is close to the existential understanding of man as an “sketch” or a “project”, as a creature open to the future, since in it “the existence precedes the essence” (Sartre, 2020) or, in the original formulation of Heidegger, its “essence consists in existence” (Heidegger, 2015).

Developing the ideas of Rubinstein, his student Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (1991, 1999) considers self-determination as a transition from an impulse decision-making to a conscious choice, a genuine self-determination involving the ability to consciously make decisions and act.

Zeer (2003) describes the process of self-determination as the choice of an attitude accompanied by reflexion of the situation, active search for a solution, as a certain conscious act of identifying and affirming one’s own position in problematic situations (p. 326). Self-determination is a continuing and lengthy process (Zeer, 2014, p. 10-14).

Thus, the position can be a generalized result of self-determination (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, 1999; Stepanova, 2018; Zeer, 2003). It determines the setting of goals, the choice of means for their achievement, influences the formation of readiness and the nature of activities. Personality always takes a certain position. Rubinstein (1976) claims that “unconscious, without the ability to consciously take a certain position, there is no personality” (p. 233). A person has to comprehend and rethink a lot of what is happening, developing his conscious position in relation to current and changing reality, to activity, to himself as a subject of activity and the bearer of current aspirations.

The study in the field of self-determination enriched the approach of Bozhovich (2008) on self-determination as a psychological neoplasm of teenage age and adolescence. Bozhovich (2008) emphasizes that during this period personal self-determination becomes the center of the life situation, around which both activities and interests begin to revolve. The researcher connects the need for self-determination with the ontogenetic need to solve questions: “Who to be?”, “What to be?”, “How to find your place in life?” – and the desire to understand yourself, your capabilities. In this aspect, the psychologist defines self-determination as “the directed ability of consciousness to analyze social and own mental processes,

experiences, characterized by an increase in understanding of oneself, its capabilities and aspirations, its place in society and its purpose in life” (Bozhovich, 2008, p. 290). At the same time, the author draws attention to the fact that personal self-determination involves both a choice of profession and a general search for the meaning of its existence, since the philosophical context of the worldview is just beginning to form in early youth.

In the concept of self-determination of Ginsburg (1996), the concept of the “life field of a person” can be considered the starting point understood as “a combination of individual values and meanings and a space of real action – current and potential, covering the past, present and future” (par. 1).

Self-determination is understood as the meaningful construction of his life field by a person. It includes two components: axiological and pragmatic, as well as three temporal dimensions: present, past and future. The past exists as experience, the present as efficiency, and the future as a project.

Based on the analysis of this dual structure and the comparison of the functions of self-determination in the past, present and future, the author identifies the characteristics of self-determination. He distinguishes positive and negative self-determination.

In terms of self-knowledge, positive self-determination is expressed in the presence of a value orientation and in the experience of meaningful life. In case of negative self-determination – values are not defined or differentiated as personally significant, one’s own life is perceived as meaningless.

In the aspect of self-realization, positive self-determination is characterized by activity (participation in various types of life activities, a wide range of areas of self-realization), flexibility (inclusion of the individual in various commonalities and expansion of his social roles and functions), “value saturation” (presence of a wide range of positive values significant for a person). Accordingly, the filling of these characteristics with the opposite content in meaning allows talking about negative self-determination.

Successful self-determination, self-realization involves the disclosure and manifestation of individuality, the creative (creating) beginning of a person. Thus, the imitation of thoughts and actions can be characterized as unsuccessful self-realization (negative self-determination).

Setting goals that streamline the future is also a factor of successful self-determination. Such a future becomes structured and more specific. The lack of plans and goals in a person’s life makes his future especially uncertain and amorphous. Positive self-determination also includes a vision of oneself as a professional in the future. Conscious choice of a profession makes the future meaningful and definite. Otherwise, self-determination is considered negative.

The identified theoretical statements of various authors do not contradict each other, but complement, enriching the theory of self-determination through the study of various aspects of this phenomenon.

The analysis of the main approaches discussed above resulted in the following content characteristics of personal self-determination:

- understanding your *Self* and your place in the world. Experiencing your own uniqueness, the uniqueness of your life path;
- finding and experiencing the meaning of life;
- presence of positive personally significant values, “value saturation”;
- setting goals in life and activity, including professional self-determination;

- projecting yourself into the future;
- activity, flexibility;
- individual way of thinking;
- responsibility for your life.

These characteristics of self-determination are taken as the criteria for its assessment. The questions to the questionnaire were formulated on the basis of these characteristics to determine the quality of personal self-determination of students of Omsk State Agrarian University named after P.A. Stolypin. The category “quality” reflects a set of essential properties, characteristics and features that give certainty and integrity to a particular phenomenon. In this work, the quality of self-determination is considered as a set of content characteristics that give self-determination certainty and integrity. The quality of self-determination is assessed by establishing the ratio between the positive and negative moduses of the selected aspects of the content characteristics of self-determination. The modus of self-determination is a variable property of a separate content characteristic of self-determination, which depends on current life situations.

The following results were obtained during the study of personal self-determination of students of Omsk State Agrarian University.

The content characteristics one’s *Self* varies from complete uncertainty, the inability to define, describe, characterize itself to sufficiently detailed individualized definitions. 3% of respondents could not answer the question “who am I, what am I”. A significant number of respondents (31%) were limited to impersonal characteristics, such as person, individual, personality. 53% of respondents perceive themselves through an average set of social roles such as “student, son, brother, etc.”. 11% of students have a unique, individualized understanding of their *Self*. 2% of respondents gave negative self-characteristics such as “I am nothing”, “I am an empty place”. It can be argued that in general the idea of oneself is poorly expressed in most students, the unique experience of one’s own *Self* is inherent in an extremely small number of people (36 out of 312). This content characteristic of self-determination is dominated by a negative modus.

Contradictory statements were obtained regarding the problem of the meaning of life: on the one hand, there is a certain set of respondents for whom this topic is extremely important and relevant (32%), on the other hand, there are those who consider the question of a meaningful definition to be insignificant and do not require special reflection (such a majority, 68% respectively). 17% of respondents experience their own life as meaningful. 10% of students do not find much sense in their existence. Currently, 9% of respondents are in an attempt to discover the meaning of life and find it difficult to answer this question. It should be noted that the majority of respondents express the meaning of life in the goals that they set for themselves – 72% of respondents. At the same time, these goals are concentrated around material well-being, which, in turn, is not a solid meaningful foundation. In such a situation, the individual may face senselessness and devastation. That is, in the content characteristic of meaningful life, students of Omsk SAU are dominated by a rather negative modus of self-determination.

Regarding to value dominants a generally formed certainty can be observed (89%). Priority values for students of Omsk SAU are family, motherhood, fatherhood, childhood (87% of respondents) (while some respondents noted that they would like to have three or four children). This is certainly a positive moment, considering the destructive impact of modern mass culture and the propaganda of homosexual

relations and a childfree life. Also, students consider important the values of realization in work (83%) and personal development (15%), assistance and support to relatives, parents (59%), service to society (13%), some respondents highlighted aesthetic values (4%) and values of knowledge (6%).

If we analyze the value aspect from the point of view of the breadth of the spectrum of personally significant positive values, then we should recognize a fairly low “value saturation”. The multiplicity of values is noted in only 16% of students. That is, in each individual case the respondents have a relatively poor value range (84%), which is also not a positive modus of self-determination.

It should be noted that for a significant number of students the values of material well-being come first (84%), the opportunity to “work less, while receiving a lot”. Some respondents would prefer not to work at all, but to live, rest and travel (17%). Most likely, such a vision is due to stereotypical trends that generally characterize the consumption society recited by modern media, advertising, marketing and blogosphere industries. This image is largely idealized, which, of course, is associated with the rather immature age of the respondents. At the same time, such data indicate a lack of understanding and responsibility for one’s life and future.

The objectives of the respondents are mainly concentrated around the near future and relate to graduation (95%). Long-term plans are mainly related to the search for “highly paid work” (72%) and the formation of their own family (87%). At the same time, the goals of “continuation of the genus” are quite often manifested within the meaning of life (39%). Socially significant goals as to “contribute to the development of society”, “help people”, “help homeless animals”, “do something good for this world”, “make the world a better world” are extremely weak (only 13%). The existence of goals in life should be attributed to the positive modus of self-determination, but it is obvious that most of the goals of students are self-centered.

Aspiration, the projection of the individual into the future, the setting of goals aimed at the future, was analyzed, including in the aspect of professional self-determination. It is important to point out that during the study it was found that professional self-determination is not fully formed and is often extremely uncertain. In the answers to the question about future work, in most cases there are abstract formulations of the following type: “work which I will enjoy”, “maximum profit with minimum labor costs”, “good work”, “interesting work”, “work next to the house”, “work”, etc. That is, the professional area itself is not specified, the specific area of activity is not clearly defined. This cannot be attributed to the positive modus of self-determination.

It should be especially emphasized that in many respondents the category of the planned professional sphere is radically different from the specialty they acquire (69% of respondents). In general, the goal related to further self-development, self-improvement, improvement of qualities and skills is slightly expressed (15%), which is a negative modus of self-determination.

In general, content characteristics of projecting oneself into the future among the students participating in the survey is not strong enough due to the fragility of the meaning and value foundation, as well as due to the uncertainty in terms of professional self-determination and the low desire for further self-improvement, unlocking the potential of their personality. Given that these characteristics directly correlate, inter alia, with the assumption of responsibility for one’s life, for one’s present and future, it can be argued that negative moduses prevail in these aspects of self-determination.

The flexibility parameter, i.e. inclusion in various commonalities, is not significantly expressed, i.e. most survey participants show themselves within the standard set of social roles (76%). 24% of respondents have non-trivial social experience.

The factor of activity of the personality received the following characteristic: some of respondents show active participation in various spheres of activity, having additional opportunities for self-realization in the field of hobbies, development of other educational forms and forms of activity. But this group is small (33% of respondents). Therefore, if we analyze the breadth of the range of areas of self-realization, then in most respondents it is limited (mainly this is the current university education of 67%), which should be attributed to the negative modus of self-determination.

The qualitative analysis of respondents' questionnaires also made it possible to assess the presence or absence of an individual way of thinking (namely, a unique vision of oneself and its path, special personal goals and values, a vision of its purpose and its role in social activities). A creative (in the broad sense of the word) approach to understanding and updating one's personality is typical for a small number of students (11%). In most cases, a more imitative way of thinking, understanding your place in the present and future (89%) should be recognized. Therefore, in the individual aspect of the method of thinking, the negative modus of self-determination is dominant.

Summing up the overall analysis, we can state a significant lack of positive moduses of personal self-determination of students of Omsk State Agrarian University named after P.A. Stolypin. A quantitative analysis of the ratio of negative to positive moduses indicates the predominant negative quality of student self-determination.

## **7. Conclusion**

The results obtained during the study can be qualified as a crisis of self-determination of a studied group of agrarian students. These results cause some concern for the prospects of rural development as a form of organizing life space and preserving the rural way of life as a whole. However, it is important to bear in mind that these results largely reflect the general social trends.

According to the authors of the study, the complexities of self-determination of the younger generation are mainly related to the current situation of general uncertainty, instability, unpredictability, loss of foundations and guidelines of existence, which cannot but affect the mindsets of youth. Modern consumption society exploits momentary goals and forms of behaviour, maintaining the generally infantile character of a person, in many ways unable to take responsibility even for his own life.

Thus, the predominance of negative personal self-determination of Omsk SAU students can presumably largely reflect the general trends, which requires verification in further studies among students of other universities and youth who are not studying at universities. Such studies will allow describing the general dynamics of self-determination and comparing its quality among various groups of youth: rural and urban, studying and not studying at universities, as well as depending on the form of study, the chosen specialty and other separation criteria.

The main means of overcoming the crisis of self-determination can be psychological and pedagogical support of the younger generation, which can help young people form clear life goals and values, as well as create a positive image of the future even in a situation of global uncertainty.



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