

# THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY HISTORY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN RUSSIAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** Modern information society faces the relevant problems of development and improvement of university education. Thus, the appearance of special branch of social sciences and humanities - universitology - seems to be quite consistent. The subject field of this branch shows an interdisciplinary synthesis of university history, problems of higher education pedagogy, a socio-cultural approach, the formation of legal research, the study of sociological and psychological issues, and so on. The aim of this study is to analyze the interdisciplinary nature of universitology since it allows highlighting its role in the development of the modern system of higher education in Russia, as well as to develop practical recommendations for conducting research on the history of Russian universities. The research is of an interdisciplinary integrative character that considers the modern model of a Russian university as the center of the 'university space'. This broad methodological term includes institutional, anthropological, and socio-cultural approaches. This study also analyzes the widely used 'oral history' method, which has formed a significant database of retrospective interviews and other oral history sources. The authors study the practical research in universitology that has already been formed in Russia and abroad. The prospects for the development of this branch of socio-cultural knowledge and its current demand indicate further institutionalization of universitology. An integral feature of this process is finding new thematic blocks (legal, pedagogical and philosophic branches of universitology) and the introduction of new concepts ('university need'). The databases of oral and historical sources have been created, and evidence of university students has been recorded. The use of new research approaches would allow creating interdisciplinary works based on systematic, integrated approaches that can form a broad retrospect of the entire system of modern Russian universities. Based on the

systematic experience of conducting research in the history of Russian universities, the authors propose their own conceptual methodology with a description of separate stages of work. The research results can be used in preparing commemorative publications devoted to the history of Russian universities. In addition, they have educational potential. The involvement of student volunteers in interviews cultivates a sense of belonging to the university corporation in them. At the same time, the authors argue sticking to the interdisciplinary character of such research, which would eventually go beyond the official 'commissioned' memorial publications.

**Keywords:** University, universitology, interdisciplinarity, socio-cultural knowledge, anniversary, memorial culture, commemorations.

## Introduction

Research on the socio-cultural sphere today attracts the interest of representatives dealing with various fields of science: philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, history, historiography, pedagogy, psychology, etc. Of course, this is not by chance. This direction like no other allows identifying the maximum possible number of approximations to the real picture of the world, expanding the scope of the research field without losing the subject of the main study. This approach is initially designed for its interdisciplinary nature, which means that it directly assumes the constant prospect of expanding knowledge, increasing and diversifying its structure, and newly emerging discourses. Some practical result of this process is the formation of a number of new scientific subdisciplines. Among such popular subdisciplines of modern socio-cultural knowledge is universitology. It is possible to several prerequisites that cause the actualization of this direction in Russian science. The first of them is the interest of the society in corporate history. The studies as this one often come as the result of a direct order from the management of organizations, manufacturing and trading corporations, companies, etc. The publications dedicated to the formation and development of a company have become part of the corporate image that highlights a stable financial position, solid production experience and promising strategies. Over time, the number of the works naturally formed the need for quality. This is the short history how a discourse devoted to the study of organizational culture appears and became established in the Russian socio-cultural knowledge.

The second prerequisite, although of a more private character, is the relatively short-term emergence of national universities in some Russian regions in the 50s and 70s of the twentieth century. A direct consequence is the formation of a memorial culture for celebrating anniversaries of national universities. The celebration program usually involves writing the history of a particular university. However, the university history, having appeared as a specific manifestation of corporate history, almost immediately reached the level of understanding the potential opportunities for expanding socio-cultural knowledge. The reason for this is the specificity of the subject matter of the study. A university is a carrier and producer of scientific knowledge; it is qualitatively different from the vast majority of other organizations. Therefore, in this category of works (despite the fact that they are narrative) a constant search for new elements, knowledge diversification, semiotic innovations, etc. can be observed. The next stage of development of this scientific field was a natural emergence of universitology as a branch of socio-

cultural knowledge with its own categorical apparatus and methodology. Their use in practical works dedicated to Russian universities were to facilitate the solution of problems of research groups and allowing them to go beyond the simple accumulation of facts and events and to continue the trend of creative increment of the methodological base. Thus, the direct practical goal of this research is to analyze the interdisciplinary character of universitology, to distinguish it as an independent direction of socio-cultural knowledge and identify an effective algorithm for creating university history.

## Materials and methods

The need to form a modern methodology for conducting research in universitology has become very urgent. Most national universities in Russia have not been engaged in such research in the socio-cultural sphere of knowledge before. Thematic publications that were created earlier and continue to be created often do not go beyond brief historical and biographical references with unattributed photographic materials, the selection of which may also be random. An extreme consequence of this practice is the spread of simulacrum models of universities that are not related to real education and scientific research. Meanwhile, the best examples of works in university history differ significantly from this category of publications. [1; 2] One of the leading specialists is L. P. Repina. She highlights the following main models of these works: institutional, cultural or anthropological, the history of everyday life, and the study of 'university space'. [3, p. 12] There is no doubt that the development of this area of scientific activity takes in the university space and is directly related to the entire system of higher education in modern Russia. The origins of modern methods of studying the history of Russian universities are quite old. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the so-called classical model of research universities was established in Russia. This fact was reflected in the first attempts to understand their social significance and development patterns. In the conditions of universities in the Russian Empire, referring to the University Charter of 1884, most of these works were semiofficial. A number of new publications appeared during the Soviet period, but most of them were also carried out within the framework of the methodology generally accepted in Soviet historical science.

The current surge of interest in university history and institutionalization of universitology is directly related to foreign practices in this field. It was formed in a relatively recent period (the second half of the XX - beginning of the XXI century), so modern Russian works in this area are increasingly becoming independent and developing foreign research methods. In terms of methodology, the authors used a number of studies by recognized foreign experts. The early formation of foreign practices starts with the well-known work of the American historian, medievalist, an outstanding representative of American university corporation, Charles Homer Haskins 'The Rise of Universities'. [4] Dating the second half of the twentieth century, public interest in this area led to the emergence of the magazine 'Higher education'. It contained huge debates on the development of both public and private sectors of higher education. [5] A landmark event in the research of that period was an intergovernmental conference in 1981 that was directly dedicated to the development of the higher education system. Its participants actually conducted a comparative analysis of American, English, German, and Russian practices. [6] The methodology was based on an interdisciplinary approach, so the authors had to use the experience of a wide range of foreign scientists who studied the socio-cultural sphere of Western universities in its various manifestations. Among them

are Martin Trow, a specialist in the sociology of education [7], Clyde Barrow, a sociologist and economist [8], Clark Kerr, the rector of the University of California [9], Yaroslav Pelikan, a philosopher and pathologist [10], Burton Clark, a teacher and researcher of higher education [11], and Roger Geiger, an economist [12]. An extensive collection of documents on the history of American higher education programs 'The American curriculum: A documentary history' was published in 1993. [13]

A number of new works were published in modern period, which also enriched the methodological base of the research. [14; 15; 16] A major study of the history of universities was published in Cambridge and edited by the Swiss sociologist Walter Rugg. Volumes 3 and 4 of this study deals with the development of universities in modern times [17; 18]. The modern approach to the development of so-called flagship and multi-level universities is reflected in the publications edited by D. Douglas (University of Berkeley) and S. Marginson (University College of the University of London). [19; 20] It should be noted that in the modern period, scientists from South-East Asia, particularly from Hong Kong and Japan, have also joined the discussion on ways to develop the higher education system. These countries draw significant attention to training of high-level specialists. [21] Of particular importance for this research were the works of foreign historians directly studying the history of universities and colleges. A number of interesting studies on this topic have been published by American historians Joel Rosenthal [22], Paul Mattingly [23], Charles Dorn [24], and Andrew Jewett [25]. Robin Darvall-Smith is a recognized expert on the history of the College of the University of Oxford. The results of his research are regularly published and always draw great interest [26; 27; 28].

The works that highlight the practice of holding anniversaries of universities are also significant. The methodology of these works is continuously enriched by Western scientists, and the examples of memorial practices of European and North American universities described by them make it possible to use this experience in Russia. [29; 30; 31] In the modern period, the Russian research base of universitology has been no less intensively replenished. A large number of publications appeared due to the anniversaries of universities, some of which can be evaluated as independent completed monographs in the socio-cultural field, which are very significant for the methodological base of science. [1; 2; 32] Memorial events caused a wide discussion among specialists about the problems of research methodology, the definition of the subject and object of research, as well as the role and significance of universitology. The result of this discussion was a series of articles throughout Russia, many of which contributed significantly to the institutionalization of the new subdiscipline. [3; 33; 34] Some of them were directly devoted to the history and modern stage of development of individual universities. The opportunity for such publications has dramatically increased due to the anniversary conferences and subsequent publication of their proceedings. Another interesting category of research was creation of the chronicle of higher educational institutions. They also appeared due to the anniversaries in some universities. At the same time, the genre of chronicle itself has certain advantages that make them very specific.

## Results

The confirmation of the interdisciplinary nature of universitology as a branch of socio-cultural knowledge can be taken as the primary result of this work. The methodological framework discussed above justifies it. At the current stage, it is difficult to imagine writing the history of the university in the way it was presented just a few



decades ago. This method is now limited to retelling the existing official documents on the opening of the university, the academic council reports, and reports on the work for a certain period. Such content has been tested before, and it came out that it does not arise much interest among the specialists. Another fact, which is important for the management of a particular educational institution, is that this content can't form a public choice in its favor or strengthen the image of the university. Therefore, this work develops a certain research algorithm and a list of commemorations that contribute to the creation of qualitatively new publications. [34, p. 154-157] On the contrary, the use of interdisciplinary opportunities reveals the scientific and socially significant potential of universitology. Even the preparation of commemorative events, while observing the basic principles of this approach, turns into a large-scale memorial campaign with very specific practical goals. The entire university community including most of the students has been engaged in it for quite a long time: while someone acts as interviewers, someone collects archives, and someone processes them. There are authoring teams that can form separate groups and subgroups within themselves in particular university activities. The material is collected on the basis of faculties and structural divisions. There meetings with veterans of labor are organized permanently since communication with the young employees and students can be of considerable value. [34, p. 155]

This interdisciplinary approach generates public interest, making the educational institution the core of the educational space again. The use of an interdisciplinary approach allows talking about the direct interaction of universitology with the development of the higher education system. Formation of the discourse on the research topic develops the understanding of the development path, the search for the best organizational forms of higher education institutions, and qualitatively new understanding of university missions, without which it would be impossible to imagine the future of the entire higher education system in the country today. The actual holding of the anniversary celebrations in this case is the climax of the process; the circle of its participants at this moment is even more expanded. Regarding the practical prospects for further development of the university as a unit of scientific and educational activities in the all-Russian and in the international educational field (for the most successful institutions), this can only be welcomed.

Practical organization of the interdisciplinary research is possible only if the university management understands, supports and directly participates in it. In this study, the research was fully supported by the rector of the I.N. Ulianov Chuvash State University A. Yu. Aleksandrov, the administration of the educational institution and the team of staff and teachers. The research coincided with the 50th anniversary of the university, so all the necessary organizational measures, scientific search for the necessary materials, their record and analysis were based on the constant interest of both university leaders and ordinary insiders of the university corporation. It is possible to conclude about another indirect, but no less important practical result of the study: its integrated, interdisciplinary nature has become a means of strengthening the university corporation and making each participant aware of their involvement in the university community. At the present stage of reforming the entire system of higher education in Russia, mastering new practical tasks for different universities in the Russian and international hierarchies, this aspect is important. It emphasizes the role of university and the study of the history of universities in the development of higher education.

The research activities were summarized in the work 'Half century of Working in Education: The 50th Anniversary of I.N. Ulianov Chuvash State University', which had set

certain methodological principles and used them. [32] This publication was preceded by a number of articles on general and individual aspects of the problem; some of which are listed in the References. In addition to the main monograph, the team of authors prepared the album 'I.N. Ulianov Chuvash State University. 50 years. The significance of this publication is not limited to an illustrative appendix to the monograph; this project involved making photos of all staff in all university branches. Therefore, the main aim of this publication is a single-step global photograph of the current university corporation of the I.N. Ulianov Chuvash State University, its "human image". The very creating photos for the album became a certain solemn event, which is impossible without the direct involvement of the administration. The main methodological result of the conducted research was the identification of an efficient algorithm for creating university history. This algorithm can be used by any author's group at any university that faces the problem of researching its history.

The first stage of research should be the creation of a university chronicle. At the same time, the authors should strive to the best description of the events from the life of the educational institution throughout its history. It is desirable to result in a complete chronology avoiding significant gaps in the presentation. Naturally, the general approach to the chronicle is the yearly principle: the events are arranged within the calendar year chronologically. The apparent simplicity of this form of work should not deceive the researchers who are at the beginning of the path: the process of collecting data even on major events, their precise attribution and correlation with other events can cause a lot of difficulties. Sources on this issue may be incomplete, fragmentary and even contradictory, which is unexpected when dealing with the official documents. This stage of work is a must, since its components are the preliminary acquaintance with the facts, its collection and accumulation. During the initial processing of the received data the contradictions are identified. Their elimination sometimes requires broad public participation, interviews with eyewitnesses, and the search for additional information. The work on the chronicle reveals the problem areas that need special attention and explains the range of sources search. An equally important feature of this stage is the search for patterns in the development of the university and the main trends, and the identification of secondary, less significant aspects that once might have seemed to their participants the most significant in terms of ensuring the future of the institution. Finally, making a chronicle is the best way to conduct subsequent periodization, as an integral feature of the analysis of historical material.

The second stage (which is essentially simultaneous with the first one) is the formation of a comprehensive database of sources that cover the activities of the university with varying degrees of completeness. The simultaneous beginning of these two stages is easily explained due to the need to work with sources already during the preparation of the chronicle. However, even after the compilation of the chronicle, the expansion of the range of sources would continue until the publication of the final version, and the authors should be prepared for this. The main task at this stage is to determine the source categories used by the research group. They include government resolutions, ministry orders, current reports at the university at its branches. It should be borne in mind that the official nature of these documents is reflected in their content. They were often based on a specific cliché that did not contain a real description of events. It is possible to carry out a kind of 'decoding' of official documents, finding out the real background of events when using data obtained using the 'oral history' method described

above. Interviews can naturally contain subjective interpretations of events, controversial judgments, and mistakes; therefore, they should also be compared with other sources. Moreover, the interviewees, as well as family members of university corporation insiders, may have interesting and significant personal documents. Another source category that is accessible and easy to process is periodical materials. Periodicals published the resolutions of state bodies, orders of ministries and departments, speeches of heads and professors of universities. The subject of special interest is the materials of small-circulation newspapers, often directly reflecting the corporate spirit of the university. When processing these sources, one should take into account the ideological control over the content of the press that was in effect during the Soviet period. Another category of sources is film, video, and photo shoot, which are often underestimated by researchers. Their active inclusion in the scientific process requires achieving the maximum possible attribution. If this task is successfully solved, the effect of using these sources increases significantly. For example, they significantly facilitate the task of finding out the external features of the socio-cultural space of universities.

The third stage of work is selection of collected sources and their initial editing. These activities are carried out almost simultaneously, and it is desirable to engage the active participation of contemporaries of the described events. In some cases, this is almost the only possible way to conduct a qualitative attribution of the source, for example, for the photos aged 40-50 years that are difficult to correlate with specific dates and people of the past.

The fourth stage is the preparing and publishing the scientific articles on certain aspects of the university's history. This stage is particularly valuable for its interactive component. Participants of past events and acting insiders of the university corporation respond to publications, clarifying the facts specified by the authors. It is equally important to evaluate the preliminary results of the work by colleagues who is experienced in scientific research in this area. Their amendments and clarifications of the methodological plan provide better results. At this stage, it is desirable to carry out scientific conferences and seminars on relevant topics, as well as to participate in scientific events outside their educational institution.

The fifth stage is the compilation of the preliminary research results in a monograph and its publication. This stage is very difficult due to the vigorous organizational activities and the high level of responsibility of the authors. As a rule, the latter has quite strict and clearly stipulated terms, directly timed to the anniversary events. Therefore, it takes place with the direct participation of the university administration.

## Discussion

This research initially focused on its interdisciplinary character. The reason for this assumption was the most successful development of predecessor: anniversary publications of the Kazan Federal University and Omsk State University named after F. M. Dostoevsky. The solution was based on the socio-cultural discourse of the problem, so the result was highly appreciated by specialists in universitology. [35] At the same time, the use of three main approaches - institutional, anthropological and socio-cultural - was an objective need for each of them. Thus, neither of these approaches can prevail. Each of

them assumes the achievement of its main task. The institutional approach is aimed at studying a university as a scientific and educational organization; the anthropological approach examines the basic concepts of 'a man of university' and university corporation; the socio-cultural approach deals with the problem of the university space that forms the educational environment. It should be borne in mind that the direct focus of an approach on achieving a specific goal does not preclude its application to other tasks. The study of 'a man of university' is combined with the use of an institutional approach. The anthropological approach used in the study of biographies of university leaders and prominent representatives of the university corporation, should take into account their specific contribution to the formation of universities, the formation of their management principles and administrative apparatus, as well as material and technical base.

Another striking example of the dispersion of these approaches is the study of the university socio-cultural space. It is impossible to study this concept without paying attention to the personalities of scientists, teachers, and science organizers. In addition to the importance of such people in science and professional activities, many of them had pronounced personal qualities and an emotional coloring. This category of scientists and organizers of educational activities formed the university medium and university corporation, setting a kind of rules of the game. Some insiders were free to reject these rules; the rules themselves could evolve during the development of the university, or be replaced by new ones due to social upheavals. However, this does not mean that they are completely absent, or that there is a line of succession, especially in those universities that had famous scientific schools. It is quite difficult to identify the 'emotional coloring' of the rector, dean, or professor, whose names seem to be widely known within the university. However, this should be done, since the study of such informal details allows for a more accurate picture of what happened and returns the content to these names. Achieving this goal, in turn, results in a certain guarantee of preserving the names in the collective memory of the university corporation. It is also to some extent an emotional incentive for a certain part of the existing teaching staff. Not all of them, but many would also like to preserve the memory of themselves in the university space, at least in the interests of their direct successors, family members, etc.

This difficult task may be solved using the oral history method. Keeping in mind that a large group of regional national universities was established in a fairly compact period of the 50s-70s in the twentieth century, it is still possible to collect the necessary material from the insiders of the university space by interviewing them. This type of work should be carried out immediately, accumulating a source base and not waiting for the announcement of the company anniversary. The methodological plan should assume that the interviewing is conducted according to the prepared list of questions, as well as in a free form of conversation. Such systematics was developed by the classical scientist in the field of oral history method P. Thompson. [36] The effectiveness of both methods can be equally high or unexpectedly equally low. In this case, one should be aware of the old age of the interviewees and their state of health, for they sometimes create considerable practical difficulties. This makes even a small piece of information that one can get from them more valuable, especially since it is usually irreplaceable. If combine the described method with the study of educational and regulatory documentation published or stored in the archives, an interesting result may be obtained. The main result of the research is an effective algorithm for creating university history. Implementation of this algorithm is possible only if the interdisciplinary nature of the universitology is observed. It allows using a wide range of different categories of sources.



The starting point for this research is the scientific conference 'University education in the multi-ethnic regions of the Volga region' held in 2015. [37] The final stage was the international scientific and practical conference 'Paradigms of university history and prospects of universitology (dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the I.N. Ulianov Chuvash State University) VII Arsentiev readings', held in October 2017. [38] The participants confirmed the interdisciplinary nature of universitology in socio-cultural knowledge in a number of articles published in the proceedings. An important organizational result was the creation of the center of oral history at Chuvash State University; the center develops its research activities in new directions. The history of universities has become a manifestation of memorial culture, which clearly traces cultural and anthropological motive, which is also present in the form of studying the popular history of everyday life, besides the more well-known institutional motive. [3, p. 12]

As an independent interdisciplinary branch of socio-cultural knowledge, universitology began to acquire new thematic blocks: pedagogical, philosophical, and legal. It can be assumed that the appearance of these blocks would be the subject of repeated subsequent discussions of specialists in universitology. For example, the content of the missions of individual universities that should reflect their special role in professional training, regional, or national significance, and the specifics of the staff structure, is of particular importance. The solution of this complex problem is possible only after studying the history of a particular university, which allows to better understand its place in the general higher education in Russia. As a result, there is a constant increment and diversification of universitology, as a relatively young scientific subdiscipline by creating new concepts. To the concepts of 'university space' and 'man of university' that are already used in science, the concept of 'university need' was not used before; it was added to express the public need to create universities. Such a rapid process of creating new concepts in science is a clear sign not only of the relative youth of the subdiscipline, but also of its interesting prospects, relevance, and viability.

Another subject of discussion should be the already manifested trend of artificial 'aging' of individual universities. In terms of methodology, determining the start date of higher education institutions in the form of such a model should have a clear justification. The initial stage of scientific knowledge development in any field has a high degree of dispersion. Nevertheless, the use of new research approaches (which are already forming a relatively young socio-cultural tradition) would make it possible to create interdisciplinary works based on systematic, integrated approaches that can create a broad retrospect of the entire system of modern Russian universities.

## Conclusion

The study of the history of the I.N. Ulianov Chuvash State University is now based on many years of experience, since some of the authors have been dealing with this issue for more than 10 years. Work in this direction is still in progress, as well as in related research topics; the main work carried out at the center for oral history established within the university. The developed experience allows drawing a number of conclusions that can facilitate the research task for other scientists who are just beginning this path and planning an appropriate system of organizational measures. Without claiming absolute universality in this issue, it is riskful to offer the recommendations. The research algorithm is as practice-oriented as possible. It should be noted that in most existing higher education institutions in Russia, the subject of such works is updated directly on

the eve of memorial events. It is during this period that it is possible to get maximum support from the administration of universities and regions that determine the financing of the work. However, the preparation, consulting the recognized experts, and development of their own methodological base can and should be carried out in advance. It is necessary to take into account the limited time for collecting research material; for example, the effective use of oral history methods involves direct interviewing of various insiders. The advanced age of many of them does not allow to hope that researchers can postpone the interview.

Preliminary collection of this material is possible, for example, in the framework of smaller memorial events: anniversaries of faculties, departments, specific scientists (especially heads of scientific schools), etc. Individual structural divisions of higher education institutions can store this material on their websites. The subject of this type of research is focused primarily on collecting the material and can be offered as a final graduation work. Thus, the research group can collect the necessary 'starting' material that would allow conducting initial analysis and organize the work at a different level of quality. Another strong recommendation is to complete all the steps of the algorithm stated above. The collection and analysis of materials and preparing final texts are a logical process that does not raise any questions. However, the need for scientific conferences should be emphasized. Difficulties with the organization, funding and publication of results are justified from the viewpoint of the development of the scientific side of the research problem. The methodological increment of the research base occurs during the conferences, and the novelty and scientific relevance significantly increases. Therefore, despite all these difficulties, this stage of research should not be abandoned. Moreover, modern technologies allow to go beyond the traditional ways of organizing and make the most of online communication.

Please note that the ultimate goal of conducting research should not be to collect narrow illustrative material on the history of the university. Universitology is a young branch of socio-cultural knowledge, and it allows any researcher to introduce new structural elements, basic concepts and scientific approaches. Within it, it is possible to form new scientific schools and directions based on an exceptionally broad discourse that already exists both in Russia and abroad. The institutionalization of a relatively young scientific discipline in Russia is at an early stage now, thus this research area has high prospects and is particularly attractive for young scientists who face choosing the direction of their work. Conducting specific research in individual higher education institutions should be viewed through this prism too. The study of their history should eventually enrich the understanding of their socio-cultural significance in public life, and contribute to the placement of certain priorities in the further development of the national higher education system as a whole.

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