



Universities as Centers of Science Diplomacy: Case of Volgograd State Technical University



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Introduction

Special attention is paid to science diplomacy in Russian academic circles. Science diplomacy was discussed during a whole series of international events, which were held with an assistance of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) that is a self-governing nonprofit public organization in the form of a federal organization which main goal is to provide assistance to activities in all areas of basic research, including qualification upgrade programs for scientists, and financial support for international scientific cooperation in the field of basic research. The Fund is financed through funds from the federal budget. First of all, it is the International Seminar «Scientific Publication: Where, Why, and How» and first «Russia-Korea Science and Technology Day» (June 5-6, 2017).

University as Core of Science Diplomacy

Universities, especially regional ones, should be at the core of science diplomacy, in our opinion. Universities nowadays, primarily engineering and technical ones, are the main source of innovation and advanced scientific and technical developments. In addition, universities are centers of cultural and sports activity for youth. Higher education institutions are complex institutions that have a diverse influence on the development of the territories of their location.

With a developed scientific, leisure and entertainment, social and information infrastructure, universities can become

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not only a factor in the effective innovation development of regions, but also become drivers of their positioning in international markets by attracting stakeholders (students, academics, business communities, public figures, athletes, representatives of creative specialties, etc.) from another regions and countries. As E.V. Saburova rightly notes, “universities are able to bring popularity to a city, region, and can easily contribute to developing the image of a place, but only if a program of joint marketing development is developed, and if the city and the university exist as a whole and support each other’s capabilities” [3, p. 144]. In this regard, it is necessary to talk about the importance of collaboration between university administrations and representatives of regional authorities in developing institutional mechanisms for the formation and transmission (positioning) of territories from the standpoint of the availability of a scientific and educational resource.

Volgograd State Technical University (VSTU) is the largest scientific and educational center in the South of Russia and a leading regional university. VSTU differs from other regional universities in having a wide range of educational services, both technical and humanitarian, and active cooperation with enterprises and organizations of the region. The university is registered in 5 ratings, national and international:

- Times Higher Education (one of 35 Russian universities);
- IC Superjob technical universities of Russia in 2017 (19th place);
- Webometrics Ranking of World Universities (52th place);
- National ranking of universities (66th-67th place);
- ratings of the analytical center “Expert”, directions “computer science” (28-30 place), “engineering science” (45 place), “economy” (19-21 place), “inventive activity” (46-49 place).

The main characteristics of the activity of VSTU (data as of 01/01/2018)

Educational activity	
The total number of students enrolled in undergraduate, specialist, graduate programs	19912 people
including:	
full-time education	7753 people
part-time (evening) form of education	879 people
correspondence courses	8815 people
The total number of international students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs	714 people
Number of educational centres	68
Scientific activity	
Articles in Russian magazines	2210
Foreign publications	639
Publications in BD Scopus	339
Security documents received from the Russian Federation	257
Staff capacity	
The total Staffing Levels	1132 people
including:	
Doctors of Science / Professors	191 people
candidates of sciences / associate professors	698 people
Academicians Corr. RAS and other state academies	7 people

Source: VSTU, 2017.

VSTU is an important actor in the socio-economic development of the region. The University acts as a communication platform for the implementation of constructive interaction with representatives of business, government, science, education, the public, being the initiator of holding negotiations, meetings, conferences, conventions, symposia, etc. Thus, in 2018, a representative Volgograd delegation headed by the Governor of the Volgograd Region paid a working visit to the province of Mazandaran of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It included representatives of the regional administration, chambers of commerce and industry of Volgograd and Volzhsky, business community, tourist industry, heads of Volgograd universities, among them the rector of VSTU. The trip resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Volgograd region and the Iranian province of Mazandaran. The document defines the development of international and foreign

economic relations in the trade and economic, innovation-technological and socio-cultural spheres.

In addition, Volgograd is the center of public diplomacy in Russia. The Center for Public Diplomacy began its work in Volgograd in 2015 with the support of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia and the Governor of the Volgograd Region. At the center of the site is carried out exchange of experience of specialists in various spheres of international projects. Experts in various spheres have opportunity to exchange of experience and realize joint projects. Permanently acting Public Diplomacy Forum "Dialogue on the Volga: peace and understanding in the XXI century." The delegates of foreign countries, representatives of authorities, public and scientific organizations of Volgograd discuss global world agenda, the prospects for cooperation in the economic, social, humanitarian and scientific spheres.

As the scientists of the Faculty of Economics and Management of VSTU rightly point out, "under the conditions of the active development of Volgograd State Technical University and the formation of a supporting regional university on its platform, the mission expands towards increasing the influence of the university's performance on the regional stakeholder environment, education, innovation, social and cultural development of the region". [4, p. 130]

The University has many channels of communication and information distribution into the external multi stakeholder environment for its positioning and promotion of the region:

- non-residents and foreign students (attracting talented youth; activating the socio-economic life of the territory);
- scientists and representatives of the expert community (development of cooperation ties; formation of innovative potential);
- figures of culture and art (formation of creative space; informational background);
- public figures (social initiatives; significant events);
- representatives of the business community

(attracting investment; forming the entrepreneurial climate);

- officials of the region, country and foreign countries (institutional support for transformations), etc.

The scientists of Volgograd State Technical University annually participate in international internships (DAAD, Fulbright, Open World, the National Scholarship Program of the Slovak Republic, etc.) and participate in the implementation of European scientific projects under the Erasmus + line. VSTU has a close partnerships with several international universities, such as Hanoi University of Science and Technology (Vietnam), University of Anbar (Iran), Waseda University (Japan), Matej Bel University (Slovakia), The Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (Germany) and others.

Universities are places with a unique atmosphere and the logic of building internal space, ensuring an effective process of generating and transmitting new ideas and innovations. However, in itself, the presence of universities in the region does not provide any advantages without a scientifically based and systematic strategy of positioning external opportunities for the target audience that regional universities can provide to the territory's stakeholders.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, a number of conclusions and practical recommendations can be formulated:

- on the basis of international and domestic experience, it seems very promising to use universities as centers of science diplomacy for positioning the region in terms of creativity and openness to the outside world;
- to multiply the number of significant events organized and held on the territory of universities (scientific conferences and workshops, business forums, industrial exhibitions and fairs, socio-cultural and sports events, etc.), which will contribute to the formation of a positive information field and will allow presenting the potential of the university and the region;

- positioning is advisable to build on the principle of “ambassadors of the territory” (place ambassadorship), which will contribute to the formation of a positive image from external stakeholders. “Ambassadors of the territory” can be non-resident and foreign students, representatives of the scientific community, entrepreneurs and businessmen, public organizations and the media who, one way or another, interacted with the territory through universities;
- the positioning of the region must be accompanied by qualitative changes in the structure of the regional economy and infrastructure development. The promoted image of the territory must coincide with its real content. The discrepancy between the expectations of consumers of the territory and reality, can level all efforts of stakeholders to form a loyal attitude to the territory.

References

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