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A Social Portrait of Students at Ukrainian Universities in the 19th century

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Abstract

The article is devoted to a comprehensive study of the social composition of the student body of Kharkiv Imperial University and St. Volodymyr's Imperial University in Kyiv during the nineteenth century. Based on the analysis of statistical materials, university reports, and official documents, the article reveals the dynamics of changes in the social structure of students, mechanisms of access to higher education for different social groups, and the peculiarities of the formation of the educated elite of the Ukrainian lands within the Russian Empire.

The study demonstrates the evolution of the social composition of the student body from the class-oriented system of the first half of the nineteenth century, dominated by nobles (60-65 %) and clergy (20-30 %), to a more democratic structure at the end of the century, characterized by an increase in the share of students from peasant families to 16-19 %. Particular attention is paid to the impact of the Great Reforms of the 1860s and 1870s on the transformation of the university environment and the expansion of the social base of higher education.

A comparative analysis of the two universities reveals both common patterns of development, driven by a unified state educational policy, and regional peculiarities that reflected the ethnic and religious composition of the population of different regions.

The article reveals the mechanisms of state regulation of the social composition of students through the system of scholarships, class restrictions and criteria of "political trustworthiness". The internal social stratification of the university environment is analyzed.

The study confirms the role of universities as important channels of social mobility, especially for representatives of non-privileged classes. Statistical analysis of academic performance shows higher rates of students from peasant and clergy families compared to noble families, which is explained by their greater motivation and more serious attitude to learning as a means of social advancement.

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The materials of the study expand the understanding of the processes of formation of the intellectual elite of Ukraine in the nineteenth century, the mechanisms of social integration in a class society, and the role of higher education in transforming the social structure of Ukrainian lands within the Russian Empire.

Keywords: social structure, students, higher education, nobility, clergy, bourgeoisie, social mobility, educational policy.

1. Introduction

The 19th century was a period of intensive development of higher education in the Russian Empire, particularly on Ukrainian lands. The establishment and functioning of universities in Kharkiv (1805) and Kyiv (1834) marked a new stage in the formation of the region's intellectual elite. The social composition of the student body of these educational institutions reflected not only the peculiarities of the social structure of the era, but also the state policy on access to education, regional differences, and the evolution of social processes over the course of the century.

The relevance of the study of the social composition of students lies in the possibility of tracing the process of formation of the educated stratum of society, the mechanisms of social mobility and the impact of educational policy on the transformation of the social structure of Ukrainian society in the nineteenth century.

2. Materials and methods

The study of the social portrait of students of Ukrainian universities in the nineteenth century is based on a comprehensive methodological approach that combines the principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematic analysis.

The principle of historicism involves considering the social composition of students in the context of historical development, taking into account the evolution of the social structure of society during the nineteenth century and the impact of government reforms on access to higher education.

The principle of objectivity is ensured by the use of a wide source base, including official statistical materials, university reports and regulatory documents, which avoids subjective interpretations.

The systemic approach allows us to consider the social composition of students as an integral system that is formed under the influence of various factors: economic, political, social and cultural.

Statistical analysis is used to process quantitative data on the social background of students, their regional and ethnic composition, and their financial situation. This method allows us to identify the dynamics of changes in the social structure of students over the course of a century.

The comparative-historical method is used to compare the social composition of the student body of Kharkiv and Kyiv Imperial Universities, to identify common patterns and regional peculiarities.

The sociological approach provides an analysis of the university environment as a special social group with its inherent characteristics, internal structure and mechanisms of functioning.

The research is based on various types of sources, such as official documents: university statutes, annual reports of the Ministry of National Education, statistical reviews; university documentation: annual reports of universities, lists of students, information on scholarships; periodicals and other official publications; reference books, biographical dictionaries, historical overviews of universities.

3. Discussion

The study of the social composition of the student body of universities in the Russian Empire has a long tradition. As early as the pre-revolutionary period, the first works devoted to the analysis of the student body appeared. Among the most important works of that time are "History of Kharkiv University for the first 100 years of its existence (1805–1905)" and "History of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir".

A comprehensive study of the development of the university system in the Russian Empire was conducted by A. Avrus (Avrus, 2001). The author analyzes the evolution of the university system, the legal status of universities, and the relationship between the government and academic corporations. Special attention is paid to the social composition of students, their rights and obligations.

V. Andreev provides a general overview of the development of the educational system in the Ukrainian lands as part of the Russian Empire. The author examines the creation and functioning of educational institutions of various levels, including universities, analyzes the social composition of students of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa universities, shows the dynamics of changes in the social structure of students during the XIX century (Andrieiev, 1998; Andrieiev, 2000).

A valuable source for studying the environment in which students of Ukrainian universities were formed is the work of D. Bagaliy, V. Ikonnikov, M. Vladimirskii-Budanov, and others. They describe in detail the peculiarities of the organization of the educational process, the composition of the teaching staff, the peculiarities of student life at imperial universities, etc. (Bagalei, 1904–1906; Vladimirskii-Budanov, 1884).

A. Ivanov analyzes in detail the social composition of students, their financial situation, everyday life, political attitudes, and conducts a comparative analysis of different universities of the Russian Empire (Ivanov, 1999).

L. Ivanova explores the role of students in the national and cultural life of Ukraine. The author examines the participation of students in cultural and educational societies, their contribution to the development of Ukrainian culture and science, and analyzes the formation of national consciousness among student youth (Ivanova, 2006).

P. Pirog in his works analyzes the peculiarities of the economic situation of students, shows the standard of living of students of different social strata, analyzes the issues of social origin of students, their financial situation, everyday life and political sentiments. The evolution of the student environment over a long period is analyzed (Pyroh, 2009; Pyroh, 2010).

S. Posokhov analyzes the quantitative and qualitative changes in the development of university education in Ukraine. The author shows the growth in the number of students, changes in their social composition, and the expansion of the geography of student recruitment. The mechanisms of state control over universities and social policy towards students are considered (Posokhov, 2008; Posokhov, 2009).

Posokhova L. studies the students of provincial universities, which included Ukrainian universities. The author analyzes the peculiarities of the formation of student corporations, their differences from the capital's universities. The role of provincial students in the cultural life of the regions is also considered (Posokhova, 2009).

Contemporary Ukrainian historiography seeks to objectively cover the social structure of the student body, using a comprehensive approach to analyzing archival sources and statistical data.

4. Results

Kharkiv University is one of the oldest universities in Eastern Europe. It was founded in November 1804 on the initiative of the prominent educator V. Karazin, in accordance with the Charter of Tsar Alexander I. The grand opening of the university took place on January 29, 1805. The founding of Kharkiv University was the result of educational reforms of Alexander I and met the needs of the empire in training qualified personnel for the civil service. Karazin proposed to start with a university staff of 60 teachers and 200 “state-funded” students. He also managed to convince the nobility of the need to support the new educational institution.

The number of university students in the nineteenth century was constantly changing: in 1805 there were 57 of them (33 of them studied at the expense of the state, the rest at their own expense). Such a small number of students was explained by several factors: the novelty of the institution, the limited material capabilities of the population, and the lack of secondary education in the region. Already in 1810, the number of university students was 118; in the 1860s – about 450, in the 1880s – more than 1.5 thousand. These statistics demonstrate the rapid growth in the popularity of higher education and the expansion of the social base of the Imperial Kharkiv University.

The social composition of the Imperial Kharkiv University in the first half of the nineteenth century was as follows: nobility and officials (60-65 %); clergy (25-30 %); bourgeoisie and merchants (8-12 %); peasants (3 %). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of students were representatives of the nobility. According to university reports, nobles accounted for about 60-65 % of the total number of students. This was due to several factors:

- 1) The material capabilities of noble families to provide education;
- 2) The traditional orientation of the nobility toward public service, for which higher education was a must;
- 3) The existence of privileges for nobles when entering university, etc.

Among the student nobility, representatives of the petty and middle nobility predominated (about 75 %), for whom university education was a way of career growth and social affirmation. Large landowners rarely sent their sons to the Imperial Kharkiv University, preferring metropolitan educational institutions or home education.

A significant portion of the student body came from clergy families. According to statistics, representatives of the clergy accounted for 25-30 % of the total number of university students. This was explained by the traditionally high level of education of the clergy; the existence of theological seminaries that prepared young people for university; and the desire of some clergy for secular education and careers. An important factor was also economic motives, such as the opportunity to get a better-paid position.

Students from religious families often chose medical (40 %) and law (35 %) faculties, and less often philosophy (25%), reflecting the practical orientation of their educational interests.

With the development of trade and industry, the proportion of students from bourgeois and merchant families increased. In the first half of the nineteenth century, this category accounted for 8-12 % of the total number of students. People from these social groups had sufficient material resources to finance education; they understood its importance for future commercial activity and sought to improve their social status through education. Like representatives of the clergy, burghers and merchants mostly chose law and medical faculties for further practical activities.

The least represented group among the students of the Imperial Kharkiv University during this period were people from peasant families - less than 3% of the total number of students. Among the reasons for this phenomenon were the limited material resources of peasant families; lack of educational traditions in the peasant environment; restricted access to higher education, etc.

Let us now consider the social composition of the student body of the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr and compare the positions of the two universities in this regard. The university in Kyiv was founded in November 1833 by a decree of Emperor Nicholas I, who supported the proposal of Minister of Education S. Uvarov to establish a university on the basis of the Polish Kremenets Lyceum, which had been moved to Kyiv.

At the end of July 1834, the university was opened, and 62 students were admitted to its only faculty (the Faculty of Philosophy). The first students of the university studied at two departments of the Faculty of Philosophy: History and Philology and Physics and Mathematics.

The peculiarities of the social composition of the students of the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr should be considered in the context of Polish influence in the region. The foundation of the university in Kyiv had special circumstances that affected the social composition of the student body. The basis for the imperial decree was the submission of the Minister of Public Education S. Uvarov on the establishment of the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr on the basis of the Vilnius University and the Kremenets Lyceum, which were closed after the Polish uprising of 1830–1831.

This circumstance led to several important features. In particular, some students and teachers came from liquidated Polish educational institutions, which created a specific social and national structure of the university – in the first years of its existence, Polish students accounted for about 30-35 % of the total number.

The social composition of the student body of the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the first two decades had the following structure (Table 1).

Table 1. Social structure of the student body of the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the first half of the 19th century (*Zhurnal...*, 1834–1899; *Obzor...*, 1863; *Obzor...*, 1886; *Otchet...*, 1876; *Otchet...*, 1881)

Nobility, %. (65-70)			Clergy, %. (20-25)		The bourgeoisie and other classes, %. (8-12)		Peasantry, %.
Polish	Russian	Ukrainian	Orthodox	Catholic	Burghers	Merc hants	
25-30	20-25	15-20	15-18	5-7	6-8	2-4	2

As for the confessional composition of the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr and its features, it directly reflected the religious diversity of the region. The vast majority of the university's students were Orthodox (60-65 %), mostly ethnic Ukrainians and Russians. Catholics (mainly Poles) accounted for 25-30% of all university students. Protestants from among the German colonists made up 5-8 %. Jews – 2-5 %, and then with certain restrictions.

Comparing the social composition of the student body of two Ukrainian universities in Kyiv and Kharkiv in the first half of the nineteenth century, we can note an approximate coincidence in the proportion of social groups represented (Table 2). Although there was some regional specificity that determined the social portrait of the universities, it was mostly determined by a number of common factors. These include the central government's policy of unification in education, social opportunities and preferences for higher education, etc.

Table 2. Social structure of the student body of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the first half of the 19th century (Zhurnal..., 1834–1899; Obzor..., 1863; Obzor..., 1886; Otchet..., 1876; Otchet..., 1881)

	Imperial Kharkiv University, %.	Imperial University of St. Vladimir, %.
Nobles	60-65	60-65
Clergy	25-30	20-25
The bourgeoisie and merchants	8-12	8-12
Peasantry	3	2

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a transformation in the social composition of the student body of both universities. The changes were caused by the government-initiated Great Reforms of 1860–1870. They significantly altered the social structure of the Russian Empire and, accordingly, the social composition of university students. Thus, the abolition of serfdom opened access to education for new social groups. In particular, the share of students from the peasantry increased significantly (Table 3).

Table 3. The share of students from peasant families at the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the second half of the 19th century (Zhurnal..., 1834–1899; Obzor..., 1863; Obzor..., 1886; Otchet..., 1876; Otchet..., 1881)

	Imperial Kharkiv University, %.	Imperial St. Vladimir University, %.
1860	2,3	1,8
1870	8,7	7,2
1880	12,4	11,6
1890	18,9	16,3

The judicial reform of 1864 created a demand for university-educated lawyers, which increased the prestige of legal education among various social groups.

Similarly, the creation of zemstvo institutions in the context of the 1864 zemstvo reform required educated personnel, which also stimulated an increased interest in higher education among the local nobility and bourgeoisie.

These and other factors determined the peculiarities of the social portrait of students at the universities of Kyiv and Kharkiv in the late nineteenth century, which changed significantly. In particular, there was a steady decline in the number of people from the nobility among higher education students and an increase in the share of representatives of peasant families. At the same time, the representation of the clergy, bourgeoisie, and merchants is more or less stable (Table 4).

In order to objectively study the peculiarities of the social portrait of the students of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the period under consideration, it is advisable to consider it taking into account regional and ethnic characteristics. Each of the universities had its own specifics in terms of the regional and ethnic composition of the student body (Tables 5, 6).

Table 4. Social structure of the student body of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the late 19th century (Zhurnal..., 1834–1899; Obzor..., 1863; Obzor..., 1886; Otchet..., 1876; Otchet..., 1881)

	Imperial Kharkiv University, %.	Imperial St. Vladimir University, %.
Nobility and bureaucracy	45-48	47-50
Clergy	18-20	16-18
The bourgeoisie and merchants	22-25	20-23
Peasantry	18-19	16-17

Table 5. Regional characteristics of the student body of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the 19th century (Zhurnal, 1834–1899; Obzor..., 1863; Obzor..., 1886; Otchet..., 1876; Otchet..., 1881)

Imperial Kharkiv University, %.	Imperial St. Vladimir University, %.
Kharkiv governorate, 35-40	Kyiv governorate, 30-35
Poltava governorate, 15-18	Podillia governorate, 18-20
Chernihiv governorate, 12-15	Volyn governorate, 15-18
Kursk governorate, 8-10	Chernihiv governorate, 10-12
Voronezh governorate, 6-8	Poltava governorate, 8-10
Another governorate, 12-15	Another governorate, 10-12

Table 6. Ethnic composition of students of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the 19th century (Zhurnal..., 1834–1899; Obzor..., 1863; Obzor..., 1886; Otchet..., 1876; Otchet..., 1881)

	Imperial Kharkiv University, %.	Imperial St. Vladimir University, %.
Ukrainians	55-60	50-55
Russians	25-30	15-20
Jews	8-12	5-8
Poles	3-5	20-25
Other	2-3	2-3

As we can see, there is a correlation between the ethnic composition of students at both universities and their geographical features. This can be seen most clearly in the difference in the representation of students of Polish origin and, to some extent, Russian origin.

We can also observe certain correlations at the level of the financial situation of students of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr and its impact on the social portrait of students. In particular, students of both universities had different sources of funding for their education, which to some extent determined their social composition.

Among the main sources of funding for education was family support. For the most part, this source was typical for people from noble families, partly for the clergy, and minimally for other groups. In total, up to 65 % of the total number of students at both universities received family support for their studies.

Slightly less than a quarter of students received state scholarships that to some extent covered their tuition costs (Table 7).

Table 7. Scholarships for students of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the second half of the 19th century ([Zhurnal..., 1834–1899](#); [Obzor..., 1863](#); [Obzor..., 1886](#); [Otchet..., 1876](#); [Otchet..., 1881](#))

	Imperial Kharkiv University, hon.	Imperial University of St. Vladimir, hon.
State scholarships	150	130
Special scholarships	60	60
Benefits for excellent students	100	90

The state actively used the system of scholarships to influence the social composition and attitudes of students. Appropriate criteria for granting scholarships were developed. They took into account the applicant's social background, political trustworthiness, and academic success. There was also a regional component to the scholarship award (preference was given to local applicants). Thus, financial support from the state took into account various aspects of a student's life. And in part, academic success was not the only criterion for granting it.

About half of the students at both universities were actively engaged in tutoring, which was the most common way to earn money. However, depending on social background, tutoring took on different forms and content. In wealthy families, tutoring was primarily done by students from noble families. Those from clergy families were engaged in preparing for admission to seminaries. And peasant students taught elementary literacy and numeracy to children of the lower classes of the population, such as bourgeois and peasants.

Charitable assistance made up a certain part of the material support for students. It was expressed in the form of patronage, church and zemstvo support for gifted students, etc. Material differences created the internal social structure of the university environment. This to a certain extent determined their lifestyle and attitude to learning. The children of large landowners, government officials, and wealthy merchants constituted the so-called “golden youth”, who accounted for approximately 10 % of the total number of students at both universities. They led luxurious lifestyles, enjoyed influential family ties, but at the same time showed minimal interest in learning.

Representatives of the petty nobility, clergy, and middle-class merchants made up the so-called “middle class” of students, whose number varied between 50-60 %. This group of students was characterized by a more serious attitude to their studies and a focus on a professional career.

One third of the students were poor students. These were people from poor families who were active in political movements and wanted radical changes in society.

The social composition of students significantly influenced the nature of academic life, including the level of academic performance ([Table 8](#)).

Table 8. Academic performance of students of the Imperial Kharkiv University and the Imperial University of St. Volodymyr in the late 19th century ([Zhurnal..., 1834–1899](#); [Obzor..., 1863](#); [Obzor..., 1886](#); [Otchet..., 1876](#); [Otchet..., 1881](#))

	Imperial Kharkiv University, grade point average	Imperial St. Vladimir University, grade point average
Nobility	3,2	3,1
Clergy	3,8	3,7
The bourgeoisie	3,6	3,5
Peasantry	3,9	3,8

It is worth noting that the government actively intervened in the processes of shaping the social composition of students through a system of legislative and administrative measures. In particular, the University Statute of 1835 established the preferential right of admission to universities for nobles, limited this opportunity for people from the taxed classes, prohibited education for serfs without the permission of the landlord, etc.

The University Statute of 1863 somewhat liberalized access to university education. It abolished direct class restrictions, introduced uniform requirements for educational attainment, and declared equal opportunities for education for all segments of the population.

5. Conclusion

The study of the social portrait of students of Ukrainian universities of the nineteenth century allows us to draw a number of conclusions about the peculiarities of the formation of the educated elite of the region and the mechanisms of social mobility in the Russian Empire.

The social structure of the student body of Kharkiv and Kyiv Imperial Universities during the nineteenth century demonstrates the evolution from a closed class system to a more democratic system of higher education. The first half of the century was dominated by representatives of the privileged classes – the nobility (60-65 %) and the clergy (20-30 %), reflecting the class nature of Russian society and the limited access to education for the lower classes.

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by significant changes in the social composition of students under the influence of the Great Reforms of the 1860s and 1870s. The abolition of serfdom and the liberalization of educational policy led to an increase in the share of students from peasant families from 2-3 % to 16-19 % by the end of the century, which indicates the expansion of the social base of higher education.

A comparative analysis of the two universities reveals both common patterns and regional specifics. Common features include the similarity of the social structure of the student body, mechanisms for financing education, and criteria for academic success. The regional specificity is most evident in the ethnic composition: the significant Polish presence at Kyiv University (20-25 % vs. 3-5 % at Kharkiv University) reflected the peculiarities of the region's historical development and the consequences of the Polish uprisings.

University education was an important channel of social mobility, especially for members of the clergy and petty nobility. The system of state scholarships and benefits allowed talented representatives of the lower classes to obtain higher education, although this process was regulated by the state through the criteria of “political trustworthiness” and class origin.

The state educational policy significantly influenced the formation of the social composition of the student body through a system of legislative and administrative measures. The university statutes of 1835 and 1863 demonstrate the evolution from strict class restrictions to relative liberalization of access to higher education, although the system never became fully democratic.

The study reveals an internal social differentiation of students: “golden youth” (10 %), “middle class” (50-60 %), and poor students (30 %). This stratification influenced the lifestyles, attitudes toward learning, and political attitudes of different groups of students.

Statistical analysis shows a correlation between social background and academic achievement. Students from peasant (3.8-3.9 points) and clerical (3.7-3.8 points) families demonstrated the highest academic performance, which is explained by their greater motivation and serious attitude to learning as a means of social advancement.

The formation of the social portrait of students at Ukrainian universities in the nineteenth century reflects the general processes of modernization of society at that time and the formation of a new social structure. Universities were not only centers of education, but also important institutions of social integration that contributed to the formation of the general imperial elite while preserving regional characteristics.

The study confirms that the social composition of the student body of Ukrainian universities in the nineteenth century was the product of a complex interaction of state policy, socio-economic processes, and regional characteristics, which together determined the specifics of the formation of the region's educated elite and the mechanisms of social mobility in a class society.

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