This August, Moscow will host the 2015 International Geographical Union (IGU) Regional Conference. It is being coordinated by representatives from Lomonosov Moscow State University (LMSU), the Russian Geographical Society, the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Geography, and the National Committee of Russian Geographers. We recently interviewed prof. acad. Nikolay Kasimov — president of the Faculty of Geography of LMSU, first vice-president of Russian Geographical Society — about conference preparations as well as current developments in geographical research and education in Russia.

Field season 2015 was very fascinating. However, as always, the network of Research Training Centers (RTC) and Research Stations of our faculty covers all the variety of landscape conditions: from highboreal mountain range to Central Russia and the Caucasian highland. Currently, the Faculty has five Research Training Centers and one Research Station: Krusno RTC (founded in 1948); Krainoiovodovo RTC (founded in 1945); Satino RTC (founded in 1968); Elbrus RTC (founded in 1969); Arkhangelsk RTC (founded in 1992); Torgubovo RTC (founded in 1999).

Geography field trainings of first and second-year students are given in Table 1. Field training in the first-year curriculum is integrated within mandatory theoretical courses making a kind of dual “theory-field training” courses in topography and geodesy, geomorphology, soil science, biogeography, hydrology, climatology, and landscape science. This multidisciplinary field training program requires two months of residential fieldwork, which is broken up into a series of 6–10 field training courses. The main goal of multidisciplinary field training in the first-year curriculum is to support theoretical courses and broaden students’ understanding of interlinks between the different branches of Physical Geography. Field training emphasizes research methodology (i.e. in situ measurement, observation, recording) and prepares students for fieldwork through the elaboration of work rules. Residential field training consists the first-year curriculum and is held at Satino Research Training Center (RTC). The Satino RTC is located 100 km south-west of Moscow in a diverse rural area, which contains useful combinations of natural and anthropogenic landscapes for study. Formally covered by mixed forests of oak and fir, today about 50% is boreal mixed forest, 40% is agricultural, and 10% is occupied by settlements. The second-year curriculum use a variety of training modules — residential studies and fieldtrips, observation, and participation, which in various proportions depend on the specialty and size of the student group.

Field practice of third-year students and MSc students as well as graduate students is more diverse and often takes place in places and / or organizations which are connected with their research papers, graduation papers, dissertations. This involves summer work in the student’s specialty in an academic, commercial, governmental or other institution. This could be a tourist agency, geological exploration, or meteorological service of an airport. For students of Physical Geography, internship usually involves fieldwork...
Nikolay S. Kasismov
President of the LMSU Faculty of Geography since 2 April 2015; dean of the LMSU Geography Department from 1990 to 1995; head of the Landscape and Soil Geography Department of the LMSU Faculty of Geography; professor, full-member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Nikolay Kasimov has been part of the LMSU Faculty of Geography for his entire academic career. He graduated from the faculty in 1966, continuing on to defend his candidate of sciences dissertation (on geographical landscape concepts) in 1972 and his doctoral dissertation (on the paleogeochemy of steppe and desert landscapes) in 1984. The Russian government has awarded him for outstanding work on science textbooks for secondary schools (2012), a national grant for environmental orientation (2000) and natural resource assettes (2004) and development of educational programs in tourism curriculum (2015).

Professor Kasimov’s scientific work combines organizational and methodological aspects. He is first vice-president of the Russian Geographical Society and a chairman of the Public Council for Russia’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. He is also chief editor of the journals: Moscow University Bulletin (Geography); Geography, Environment, Sustainability, as well as a member of the editorial board for many others. He has authored over 300 scientific publications, 8 monographs and numerous textbooks. He is also a frequent honorary guest at geographical conferences and congresses.

— Very soon, the IGU Regional Conference “Geography, Culture and Society for Our Future World” will take place at our university. Can you tell us more about the event?

— The IGU conferences are held annually between congresses, which occur every four years and host presidential elections. At the 2012 congress, in Vienna, Russia was represented by the first president from Russia. Regional conferences are known for showcasing new developments in geography from around the world. The 2013 conference was in Kiev, and last year’s was in Krakow. In Moscow there will be a huge IGU conference entitled “Geography: Social and natural—geographical disciplines from physical to social (see www.igu2015.ru for details).”

— Will the conference shed light on potential roles for geography, as an interdisciplinary science, in processes that substantially impact the planet’s future?

— The conference is entitled “With the Future Earth!” This initiative, this year’s conference will promote international collaboration in pursuit of shared objectives — including understanding the social and natural-resource depletion. Addressing these issues through interdisciplinary cooperation, the conference aims to potentially strongly influence the future’s planet.

— The programme focuses on global climate change and human societies, including human impacts as well as spatial economics, population mobility and other topics. Also, the theme of the conference is “Think global, act local.” Along with geographers, there will be people from a variety of fields — including biology, physics and chemistry — who are studying these processes. The geographical sciences are inclusive enough to unite these studies, covering an extensive range of issues and approaches. However, the relatively low participation of Russian scholars in world initiatives — for example, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme — Global Change — has impeded scientific progress in our country.

— How does the geographical sciences in Russia different from those in other parts of the world?

— Geography in Russia and many other post-Soviet countries is oriented more toward the physical sciences and production use of natural resources — with significantly less emphasis on social sciences for many years. There was no electoral geography in the Soviet Union until 1989. Economic and social geography especially urgent need for change in response to new priorities. Other differences — such as those associated with background data or research questions — have led to different methods and study trends. Now it is our duty to remember this event. It came through our Soviet forebears’ profound sacrifice. Next, it is our duty to remember the sacrifices of our Soviet forebears.

— What are some of the major trends that have emerged in Russian geographical sciences over the past decade?

— Among the most prominent is a longstanding “ecologisation” of geographical sciences, which is particularly apparent in the discipline’s trends. His origin can be traced approximately to the UN Conference on the Human Environment, which took place in Stockholm in 1972. Heightened awareness of environmental problems during the 1970s led to new policies and changes for environmental conditions. As a geochemist, I’ve seen evidence of this in data for Europe as a whole: levels of contamination peaked in the late 1960s to early 1970s and then gradually declined. Ecologisation has influenced many geographical sciences in our country, the government established a Ministry of the Environment in 1977 to develop ecological standards. Ecology is now an essential part of the geographical exam that Russian students have to pass well in advance. Another trend that comes to mind is the “humanisation” of geography, with social problems becoming a primary focus of attention. This extremely important process has yet to gain full momentum in Russia.

— Geoinformatics revolutionises a major trend as well, especially now that computing the earth’s surface and atmospheric processes.

— Are there any significant obstacles to the development of geographical sciences in Russia today?

— There are many obstacles, but the most important is the lack of funding for some research, especially new ways of studying the earth and its atmosphere from space. We have the pool of qualified teachers.

— How would you describe LMSU’s role in the development of geography in Russia?

— Obviously important (laughing). We have the largest geographical faculty. The university has established rigorous geographical programmes that are well known in Russia. Their emphasis is on two related pursuits: research and education. Based on these priorities, the LMSU Faculty of Geography is a national leader from quantitative and qualitative perspectives. There are also leading geographical programmes at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg State University, Kazan Federal University, Southern Federal University, Voronezh State University and other locations. About 50 Russian institutions offer higher education in geography.

The LMSU Faculty of Geography is responsible for coordinating geographical and environmental education in Russia. It is the source of many textbooks as well as government education standards developed in collaboration with representatives from other institutions. Education councils linked to LMSU and our faculty manage the complex standardisation process in this entirety.

— People often express uncertainty as to what, exactly, geographers do. Are there steps being taken to spread awareness about geography as a profession in Russia?

— We’ve been working to solve that problem for quite a while. Reaching out to the media — appearing on radio and television, for instance — has been helpful, but the situation changed most radically after key developments in the Russian Geographical Society (RGS). It is now actively promoting geography through an enhanced public information component, which has included producing high-quality multimedia resources and establishing the My Planet channel. Now it’s easier for geographers to coordinate with government and business leaders. As the RGS catalogues support in a variety of fields, the atmosphere is improving for geographical research and education in Russia. For me, the most important sign of progress is an increasing number of students who take the geography exam! I hope this will continue.

Honours of our fallen soldiers

May and victory — these two words are inseparable in Russia today. Yet victory did not come automatically like springtime blossoms. It came through our Soviet forebears’ profound sacrifice. It is our duty to remember the millions of lives given to this cause, to prevent the “forgotten curve” from ever descending towards oblivion.

The heartrending list of geography department colleagues who gave their lives to defend our homeland, we understand that they all deserve eternal gratitude. The honours they earned serve as vivid testimony to their sacrifice and heroism. Let us all be deserving of this legacy!

— Transitioning to postsecondary education, how would you describe LMSU’s role in the development of geography in Russia?

— Obviously important (laughing). We have the largest geographical faculty. The university has established rigorous geographical programmes that are well known in Russia. Their emphasis is on two related pursuits: research and education. Based on these priorities, the LMSU Faculty of Geography is a national leader from quantitative and qualitative perspectives. There are also leading geographical programmes at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg State University, Kazan Federal University, Southern Federal University, Voronezh State University and other locations. About 50 Russian institutions offer higher education in geography.

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Honours

Mikhail E. LEVINTOV,
chief specialist in oil and gas at the KA Research Institute on the Geology of Foreign Countries, graduate of the Lomonosov Moscow State University Geography Department in 1970.

Names, ranks and positions

Honours

Order of the Patriotic War (1st and 2nd class)

Order of the Red Star

Medal of Honour

Red Army Badge of Excellence

Order of the Patriotic War (1st class)

Order of the Patriotic War (2nd class)

Order of Alexander Nevsky

Order of the Patriotic War (2nd class)

Order of the Patriotic War (2nd class)

Order of the Red Star
Another important concern is global conflict. In this case we’ve had to be especially circumspect. Issues of this kind, including those associated with territory, can generate intense and sharply divergent points of view. The conference shouldn’t be a platform for fomenting political disputes, so we carefully monitored abstracts to avoid raising suspicious points. Many of the programme is dedicated to arctic studies. This, one might say, points to Russian national interests, concerning environmental processes, sustainability, territorial organisation and other matters.

The conference programme generally reflects the main scientific and corresponding fields. Half a century ago, scholars focused more on utilisation of natural resources, since then, conservation and sustainable development are more actively promoted. Forecasting and mitigating natural disasters, including those induced by human activity — are also top priorities. Every year brings new causes: the 2013 flooding in Amur Oblast, for that cause, the programme of the conference is the only inconvenience to me, although it seems fair, considering the importance of the conference.

Jelena Milankovic
(Serbia)
Graduate student of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural sciences, University of Novi Sad
For me, as for all other participants, it is an immense pleasure to be present at the conference. I had the opportunity to present my work, to show their professional skills and to share with other scientific knowledge. Certainly, a certain quantity of creative solutions is inherent in every participant. In my opinion, the conference is an opportunity to meet young scientists and professionals in their field from all around the world.

Michael Sascha Bonninger (Germany),
Head of Physical Geography, Department, Kaiserslautern University of Technology
Every year I try to take part in the regional conference of the IGU. I am particularly happy that this year the conference will be held in Moscow, in a beautiful city that I visited for a long time. Regarding the scientific program, I am keen on everything that relates to physical geography. I am interested in issues of climate, meteorology and, of course, city climate and urban planning, because I am an expert in these areas.

The greatest interest in the program for me is the migration issues. I would like to get acquainted with scientific results in these areas.

The IGU 2015 conference themes. The programme will feature a variety of meetings, sessions on joint projects.

Beatrix Barbé de Oliveira Santos (Brazil),
The aviation routes strategic analyst of the Azul LinhasAereas Brasileira company, the master of the Campinas State University
I was informed about the IGU Conference in Moscow by my scientific advisor, colleagues recommended to take part in it. The decision was made quickly, so the IGU Conference is one of the most important events in the world of geography which covers all aspects of research and unites thousands of participants from all over the world. The IGU 2015 is an opportunity of growth and an exchange of knowledge. Moreover it’s an excellent chance to share our own researches! In the scientific program I am interested in issues associated with the natural disasters, climatic changes and the geography of air transport systems (GIS) technologies. These are subjects on which the theoretical part of my master’s thesis was focused. First of all, I’d like to hear from the Professor Gordon McBean among all experts.

Svetlana Budnik
(Ukraine),
Head of the Department of Zhitomir National Agroecological University
I was interested in the forthcoming conference concerning the problems of erosive, fluvial and estuarial processes. The Inter-University scientific coordination council is interested in the diversity of the scientific program. All Conference themes worthy of attention that’s why I plan to visit as much reports as possible. I hope to have an opportunity to speak with colleagues from many countries and different scientific interests to learn more about new geographical researches and to acquire new knowledge.

Gumoscow 2015

— The official languages for the conference are English and French. Why is Russian not included?

— It’s not generally recognised as the lingua franca for international events. The organizing committee can’t change this worldwide state of affairs. This is one of the official languages so as to avoid changing the conference identity and accessibility. Our colleagues should understand that if we were to switch languages to accommodate our few sections, it wouldn’t be authentically international in scope. Moreover, from other countries wouldn’t be able to participate in the conference without extra translation services for certain sessions is a drawback, as the conference is a great opportunity to expand my knowledge on the profile topic. Besides, participation in the IGU 2015 is an opportunity of growth and an exchange of knowledge. Moreover it’s an excellent chance to share our own researches! In the scientific program I am interested in issues associated with the natural disasters, climatic changes and the geography of air transport systems (GIS) technologies. These are subjects on which the theoretical part of my master’s thesis was focused. First of all, I’d like to hear from the Professor Gordon McBean among all experts.

— Why do Russian citizens make up only 40 percent of registrants? Are there special conditions for them?

— It’s actually less expensive. Russian Geographical Society gave a special grant to the conference. It’s for Russian participants from $400 to $100, but for many that’s still very high. The language barrier also plays a role: people often call the organising committee to ask for help filling out the registration form in English. Finding an economical solution to this problem is another challenge. For scholars based in the Far East, it may be easier to attend the conference, for instance, in China. Many of them have connections in China.

— What are some of the most pressing issues in the conference programme?

— There are many urgent topics on the agenda. Climate change, for instance, has been the focus of groundbreaking papers in recent years. Related events include a plenary lecture by prof. Gordon McBean, who is president of the International Council for Science and a Nobel laureate for collaborative work on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

— Can you briefly us on some of the Russian and international experts who will participate in the conference?

— Quite a lot of acclaimed scientists are planning to attend. There will be Russian participants from major research institutions throughout the country. The famous polar explorer Arct Chichagov, for one, also serves as deputy chairman of the IGU Moscow 2015 organisational committee.

In addition Gordon McBean international participants include John Loughn, an expert on climate change and geopolitics; Alexander Murray, well-known for his work in political and cultural geography of Europe and the Middle East; George Garrick, an eminent cartographer; and Salomon Kronenberg, who is currently working with Russian scientists on a long-term basis for the Corporation. Of course, young scholars can also join any event in the main programme at the discretion of the organising committee.

— What are your personal expectations for the event?

— How will you spend the first year of my main interest is in successful planning and execution. I hope our guests found the conference truly valuable, inquiring about the organisational process and saying “thank you” in Russian. I also hope there will be plenty of time for interaction with friends and colleagues with whom I’ll be holding sessions on joint projects. Developing international ties is of great importance in the sciences; however, without cooperation across borders there are extremely limited possibilities for new ideas. Above all, the regional conference will help establish connections between participants that bolster understanding and peace in the world.

This interviews by Evgeniya FROLOVA, deputy director of CTO Congress

Participants feedbacks

The regional conference’s participants of the International geographical union (IGU 2015) which will be held at MSU on August 17-21th, told about why they go to Moscow. Scientists and the beginning researchers from different countries shared their expectations and reflections from the forthcoming event.

Genghe Gao (China)
Professor of Henan University of Economics and Law
For the first time, I heard that the IGU Conference will be held in Moscow. It is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the Russia's Far East. Of course, I am very happy that this year the conference will be held in Moscow, in a beautiful city that I visited for a long time. Regarding the scientific program, I am keen on everything that relates to physical geography. I am interested in issues of climate, meteorology and, of course, city climate and urban planning, because I am an expert in these areas.

The greatest interest in the program for me is the migration issues. I would like to get acquainted with scientific results in these areas.

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Geographical field training

Field practice, department

Area

Contents

Landscape Geochemistry and Paleo-Geography

Sub-tropics: West Caucasus, Utrish RTC

To study the biodiversity, vegetation and animal population. The study of spatial distribution of rare and endangered species of birds and mammals.

Department of Geography and Geoinformation

To familiarize with the morphological features of zenosforming representatives of flowering plants biological families.

Department of Geology and Geophysics

To study the main geoenvironmental problems of the East European Plain central part flat regions and ways of their decisions, development of skills of studying modern landscapes, etc.

Department of Department of Geology and Biochemical Geology

To study the soil cover features of the studying area and development the field large-scale mapping methods.

Department of Geography and Geoinformation

To acquire the competency of modern ways of primary data processing supervision, including use of personal computers, and analyze the operation of hydraulic engineering constructions.

Department of Geodesy and Geomorphology

To study the relations between the diversity of natural landscapes and related types of territorial organization of society. A study of socio-economic development problems of the region - the city - Municipal District.

Department of Geography and Geoinformation

To study the subregion features of soil formation, the main types of landscapes and their components, and methods of the preliminary analysis of forwarding materials. Acquaintance with the regional features of structure and dynamics of coastal waters of the Black Sea.

Department of Geography and Geoinformation

To study the zone features of soil formation, the main types of landscapes and their components, identification geochemical features of the soils located in various phyogeographic conditions.

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