

IGU REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN KRAKOW

On August 18–22, 2014, the IGU Regional Conference was held in Krakow. It was the major event for the world geographical community this year and gathered 1335 participants from 64 countries. The host country, Poland, was represented by the largest number of participants (357). Six other national groups included more than 40 persons each: Germany (about 100), Japan (79), the Czech Republic (60), UK (59), China (Beijing, 50), and Russia (40). Forty participants came from each of three other countries: the USA, France, and Hungary. The total attendance considerably exceeded the expectations of the Polish Organizing Committee and of the IGU Executive Committee. The meeting in Krakow turned out to be of particular interest for geographers from the neighboring European countries. It matches the very idea of the IGU Regional Conferences.

The conference's motto was "Changes, Challenges, and Responsibility". Its program was rich and diverse: it included keynote lectures, sessions organized by the IGU Commissions, thematic sessions initiated by groups of scholars, poster sessions, and business meetings. Thirty-six, out of 41, IGU Commissions used the conference in Krakow as the venue for their meetings. It is

particularly important for the development of cooperation between them and the progress of interdisciplinary studies. The Commissions on Urban Challenges in a Complex World (urban geography), on Political Geography, on the Dynamic of Economic Space, on Cold Regions Environment, on Gender and Geography, and on Geographical Education held the largest number of sessions. Altogether, there were 1171 oral and 227 poster presentations.

Keynote lectures were offered by Professors Zbigniew Kundzewicz from Poland and Julie Winkler from the USA, who spoke about climate change and uncertainties associated with it, and by Professor Andreas Faludi from the Netherlands, whose presentation shed a new light on the concept of geographical place. Professor Gideon Biger from Israel discussed the boundaries of the Holy Land as a problem of historical and contemporary political geography.

Special sessions were devoted to IGU projects. A keynote lecture by Professor Benno Werlen (Germany) was about the IGU most ambitious initiative – the proclamation of the UN International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU). This initiative has been unanimously approved at the UNESCO



General Conference in December 2013 and is now submitted to the UN General Assembly. YGU aims at bridging the gap in awareness between local actions and global effects, encouraging everyone to make daily decisions in light of global challenges, and contributing to bottom-up initiatives that connect individual and local actions and global sustainability. The goal of YGU is to strengthen collaboration between natural, social, and cultural sciences, to identify how local actions yield results on the global scale, and to empower individuals to manifest local-scale change with global effects. Another IGU project is called "Our Sustainable Cities" and is being implemented by Chinese and Dutch experts, whose goal is to connect academic geography with municipal authorities and business communities, and to disseminate good practice of sustainability in the cities of different size all over the world.



IGU pays special attention to geographical education. The conference in Krakow marked a new step in the implementation of the joint project of IGU, EUROGEO (the European Association of Geographers), and EUGEO (Association of European Geographical Societies) concerning the improvement of geography's place in school curricula. The objective of this project is to promote the basics of geographical knowledge for each citizen in our century, to find new evidence and arguments for a large audience and decision makers showing the importance of geography, and to disseminate the best practice of teaching geography at secondary schools, universities, and other institutions, including schools of management and technical universities.



The conference symbolically took place in the year of the 650th anniversary of the Jagellonian University in Krakow, one of the oldest in Europe and in the world. This date is widely celebrated in Poland. On the day of the conference's opening ceremony, an exhibition was also formerly opened in the historical building of the university. The exhibition demonstrates that geographical research in Poland has been always in-tune with societal needs and had a strong impact on the development of the statehood and identity. It presents history of Polish geography and closely related disciplines – cartography, topography, meteorology, and other subjects; persons and artifacts; and the unique collection of maps, atlases, and globes.

The conference was perfectly organized: everything was going exactly according to the program and the schedule, and Polish geographers accommodated all numerous requests and various interests of their guests. The hosts will keep the best souvenirs of a memorable excursions' program and of the friendly gala dinner in the exclusive environment in the depth of the former salt mine of Velichka, which is on the list of UNESCO world cultural heritage. The success of the conference is, of course, a result of long and hard work of the Polish Organizing Committee headed by Professors Marek Degorski, Anita Bokwa, and Boleslaw Domanski.

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