

REPORT

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A REPORT ON THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC UNION: 'CHANGES, CHALLENGES, RESPONSIBILITIES', KRAKÓW, 18-22 AUGUST 2014

One of major academic events in recent years concerning Polish geography has been the Regional Conference of the International Geographic Union (IGU), held in Kraków. For geographers from all over the world these regional conferences are the second most important after the international congresses which are held every four years. The previous conference of this type was held in Kyoto, Japan, in 2013 while in 2015 it will be in Moscow. On the other hand, the next IGU congress is planned to be held in 2016, in Beijing.

The IGU conference in Poland was held in 2014, a special year due to the 650th anniversary of the foundation of the Jagiellonian University, Kraków (the main conference organizer) as well as the 25th anniversary of free elections in Poland. Moreover, the date of the conference coincided with the 80th anniversary of the organization of the 14th IGU Congress which took place in 1934 in Warsaw. The Regional IGU conference in Kraków was held on 18-22nd August. It was entitled 'Changes, Challenges, Responsibilities' and stressed those changes taking place in the geographical environment which are a challenge for contemporary geography as a discipline and signify its responsibility for research. Kraków was visited by geographers representing each geographical discipline included in the commissions operating as parts of the IGU. The conference program was divided into plenary sessions for all participants and others related to the IGU commissions. Poster sessions and workshops took place as well. The conference venue was the Biology and Earth Sciences Faculty of the Jagiellonian University, situated on the premises of the new campus in the south-western part of Kraków.

The conference was opened in the *Auditorium Maximum* of the Jagiellonian University and, of the

many renowned official guests invited to the opening ceremony, descendants of the professors of Polish geography who had taken part in the IGU Congress in 1934 in Warsaw were included. They were represented by Prof. Leszek Kosiński who gave a speech entitled 'Relevance in Geography', referring to the main topic of the conference, and presented the reasons why we should be proud of the fact that we represent a discipline which has so much to offer a world affected by numerous environmental, socio-economic and political problems. During the opening ceremony, eleven laureates from a geographical competition were presented with awards and there was a piano concert of Chopin's music.

An additional event on the first day was the opening of an exhibition entitled 'The development of geographical thought in Poland', prepared and organized by the Jagiellonian University Museum in Collegium Maius and opened by Prof. Antoni Jackowski, Chairman of the Polish Geographical Society which had originally proposed the organization of a regional IGU conference in Poland. The society's role involved overseeing the organization which was, in fact, split among selected geographical research centres in Poland but including above all the Institute of Geography and Spatial Economy at the Jagiellonian University as the primary organizer. The Institute of Geography at the Pedagogical University in Kraków, the Department of Geographical and Geological Sciences at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the Department of Geographical Sciences at the University of Łódź, the Department of the Earth Sciences, University of Silesia in Sosnowiec, the Department of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, and the Institute of Geography and Space

Organization, Polish Academy of Science in Warsaw were all involved as well.

The following days of the IGU conference were filled with plenary sessions (one a day), and numerous presentation sessions of IGU Geographical Commissions which took place simultaneously. The plenary sessions took the form of lectures. During the first plenary session, Prof. Benno Werlen from the University of Jena (Germany) talked about traditional and new areas of geographical research. On the third day, plenary lectures were given by Prof. Zbigniew Kundzewicz from the PAN Institute of Geophysics, who discussed the current problem of global climatic changes, and Prof. Gideon Biger from the Faculty of Geography at the University in Tel Aviv (Israel), who asked the question 'Where is the Holy Land?' On the last day (22nd August 2014), plenary session lectures were given by Prof. Julie Winkler from the University of Michigan (USA), who again referred to research into climatic change and geographers' responsibility, as well as Prof. Andreas Faludi from the University of Delft (Holland), who gave a lecture on the human responsibility for nobody's sites.

The enormous scale of the event organized in Kraków was proved by the number of sessions and presentations. In total, 226 sessions organized by IGU geographical commissions were held, which filled both the mornings and the afternoons of individual days, and included a total of 1171 presentations. We should also remember the 227 poster and 4 workshop sessions. The number of participants was equally impressive – the conference hosted 1470 from 60 countries, mainly Germany, Japan, the Czech Republic, China and of course Poland.

Geographical conferences would not be important academic events without field sessions. The offer of field trips organized in connection with the regional IGU conference in Kraków was wide-ranging including many one-, three- and four-day tourist and academic trips offered before, during and after the conference. One-day trips took place in Kraków, Nowa Huta, as well as to Oświęcim, the former Nazi labour camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Wieliczka, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and Wadowice. Before the conference started (14-17 August 2014), a four-day excursion had been organized across Upper Silesia and the Western Carpathians (the Tatra, Pieniny and Beskid Sądecki Mountains) with a theme revolving

around the problems of natural environmental degradation and the attempts at restoration in an area of tourism penetration. The trip was organized and led by geographers from the Polish Academy of Science and the University of Silesia. The second trip took place after the conference, on 23-25th August 2014 to Central Poland, including Ojcowski National Park, Częstochowa, the brown coal mine in Bełchatów, Łódź, the Sulejów reservoir, Tomaszów Mazowiecki and Spała. The topics discussed during the trip included the origins, diversification and protection of the natural and cultural landscape of Central Poland, protected areas in Poland (example of Ojcowski National Park), the influence of the pilgrimage function on the development of cities (example of Częstochowa), the distribution and exploitation of mineral resources in Poland (example of the brown coal mine in Bełchatów), as well as the problems of the revitalization of industrial urban areas (examples of Łódź and Tomaszów Mazowiecki). The excursion was organized and led by the Institute of Urban and Tourism Geography at the University of Łódź.

The regional IGU conference in Kraków ended with a closing ceremony during which Prof. Marek Degórski from the Polish Academy of Science (Chairman of the Organizational Committee) and Prof. Anita Bokwa from the Jagiellonian University (Organizational Committee Coordinator) summed up the whole conference. The organizers of next year's IGU conference in Moscow and the IGU congress in Beijing presented their provisional programs and the venues where the sessions and accompanying events will be held. On behalf of the IGU, Prof. Vladimir Kolosov, the IGU President, thanked the organizers. The closing ceremony was crowned by the Jagiellonian University Choir, 'Camerata Jagiellonica', who sang the student's song 'Gaudeamus Igitur'.

To sum up, the Regional IGU Conference in Kraków enabled its participants to get acquainted with new research and methodological approaches in the field of geography. The scale of this event considerably exceeded the expectations of the organizers and participant. Both, Kraków with its historical, spiritual heritage and academic traditions, and the high standard of organization and content made the IGU conference in Kraków a memorable event.

Translated by Ewa Mossakowska