

RUSSIAN ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHERS JOIN TOGETHER

"The theory of socioeconomic geography: current state and development prospects" international research conference

(May 4—7, 2010, Rostov-on-Don)

Over the last decade, socioeconomic geography has faced numerous challenges, which affected its fundamental principles. The object of the science — the territorial organisation of society — is becoming more complex, its architectonic and dominant evolution factors are transforming. All this emphasises the need for upgrading the existing and developing conceptual approaches, theories, and methodologies of scientific research. Unfortunately, in the framework of socioeconomic geography, little attention has been paid in the last decades to the formulation of this problem and the search for relevant solutions. The conference organisers set a task to assess the existent theoretical potential of socioeconomic geography and encourage the interest in theoretical research, without which valuable practical research would be simply impossible.

The conference attracted more than 70 leading Russian economic geographers from education and research institutions from twenty four Russian cities. 18 international scholars from Hungary, Germany, Moldova, Slovakia, France, and Ukraine took part in all the conference events. 73 plenary and workshop presentations were dedicated to the topical issues of the development of the theory of socioeconomic geography. The conference materials were published as a collection of papers. "The theory of socioeconomic geography: traditions and innovations" workshop for young scholars was held in the framework of the conference; it attracted participants from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Perm, Rostov-on-Don, Ulyanovsk, Ufa, and Paris.

What value does the theory developed by the Soviet school of economic geography provide in the modern context? How to assess the last (post-Soviet) decades in terms of theoretical knowledge production? What is the potential of theoretical borrowings in the modern Russian socioeconomic geography under the conditions of the "import of ideas" and more active interdisciplinary contacts? How to formulate and effectively apply the "Theory-Methodology-Practice" scheme in socioeconomic geography and how to develop the modern instruments of socio- and economic-geographical research? And, finally, what are the boosting and impeding factors, conceptual approaches, and growth points of economic geography? All these questions were considered and discussed during the conference.

The conference was interesting not only due to the very subject but also because of its wide range of participants. In fact, the conference became an interregional network project bringing together university and academic researchers. The North Caucasus Institute of Economic and Social Problems of Southern Federal University collaborated as the host party with the Faculty of Geography of Moscow State University on organisational issues. The Faculty of Geography and Geoecology of Saint-Petersburg State University, the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Pacific Institute of Geography of the Far East branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Russian Geographic Society took an active part in the organisation of the conference. The Baltic region was represented by scholars from Saint-Petersburg and Kaliningrad.

The expert survey-based publication "The theory of socioeconomic geography: the spectrum of Russian scholars' opinions" (compiled and edited by A. G. Druzhinin and V. Ye. Shuvalov)¹ was presented in the framework of the conference. The volume did not only indicate the growing concern for the current state of the theory of socioeconomic geography and outline the problem field, but also made possible the identification of theoretical achievements and pointed out both problems and "growth points" of the theorisation of the science.

The delegates adopted a resolution, which reflected the concerns for economic geographers paying less attention to theoretical aspects in the last twenty five years and set a number of targets for short- and mid-term perspective regarding the further development of the theory of contemporary socioeconomic geography.

The inaugural meeting of the Association of Russian social geographers took place in the framework of the conference. The meeting approved the concept and charter of the organisation and elected the coordination council chaired by A. G. Druzhinin, Director of the North Caucasus of Research Institute of Economic and Social Problems of the Southern Federal University. Regional branches of the Association, including the Baltic branch, are planned to be established. The priorities of the Association are to consolidate Russian professional economic-geographical community, to encourage the development of socioeconomic geography in Russia and introduce its achievements into practice, to popularise the ideas and approaches of economic geography, to contribute to the development of the economic-geographical professional training, to strengthen international cooperation and to protect professional rights and interests of Russian economic geographers.

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¹ *Теория социально-экономической географии: спектр взглядов российских ученых / ред. и сост. А. Г. Дружинина, В. Е. Шувалова. Ростов н/Д: Изд-во ЮФУ, 2010. 166 с.*