

Social Modeling of Eco-Systems in the Perspective of the Development of Rural Communities in the Near North of Russia

Program of the International Conference

Statement of Intentions and Goals. The impact of environmental changes on the life of rural communities is closely interrelated with prospects for agricultural development in the context of the wildlife economy, conservation of the natural environment, modernization of agricultural business and risk management in rural areas. What will happen to the rural population of Russia and other countries during the coming decades? How and by whom will rural communities of tomorrow be made up? How to maintain and expand the environmental potential the rural areas? These tasks are at the center of discussions of sociologists in Russia, Europe and the rest of the world.

Theoretical Concept. The critical state of rural society in the Near North of Russia (the fall in agricultural production, drastic depopulation, devastation of rural settlements and infra-structure, loss of traditions and traditional folk cultures, etc.) sets the task of finding possible solutions and identifying existing current trends in this crisis. One of these trends is associated with the transformation of the rural economy in the context of information technology, the development of advanced revenue-generating services, and the emergence of new waves of migration of active urban population into the rural areas. In these circumstances, particular focus is on natural and environmental capital and its multiplication and use.

Background of the Conference. During the years 2002-2011 a group of leading Russian social scientists, representing the HSE, Moscow State University, the Institute of Geography and other academic centers of Russia, have been conducting a study under the title "Cellular Globalization of Rural Communities in the Near North of Russia" (www.ugory.ru). In this study, continuously supported by grants from the Russian Fund for Basic Research and HSE, an interdisciplinary survey of rural communities of the Manturovo District in the Kostroma region is being carried out. It has developed a model of long-term development in the Near North of Russia in the broader context of innovation processes. During this period, results of the research have been published in annual reports of the expedition, in scholarly journals and on websites, and discussed at international conferences in Russia and abroad, particularly in a session of the World Congress of Sociology, and at conferences of the European Sociological Association.

Objectives of the Proposed Conference. It is proposed to organize and hold an international scholarly conference under the title "Social Modeling of Eco-Systems in the Perspective of the Development of Rural Communities in the Near North of Russia." The proposed conference will bring together the interdisciplinary efforts of various scholars, theoretical sociologists (theory of cellular globalization, the globalization processes, innovation and information technology, etc.) and specialists in rural regions of Russia and foreign countries, social ecology (social geographers, biologists and others) as well as experts in the field of nature conservation and many other professionals.

Organizers of the Conference. The founder and chief organizer of the Conference is the Society of Professional Sociologists (SoPSo). Among other organizers are: the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences, HSE, Moscow State University (the Department of Economics and Faculty of Public Administration) and other research institutions. The conference is supported by grants from the Russian Fund for Basic Research.

The head of the Organizing Committee and Program Committee is Nikita Pokrovsky – the head of the expedition in the Kostroma Region; Doctor of Sociology, Professor and head of the Department of General Sociology at HSE; President of the Society of Professional Sociologists; member of the board of the International Sociological Association; and a board member of the European network "Environment and Society (ESA).

Potential Participants of the Conference. The conference is expected to be attended by international scholars, mostly from the network "Environment and Society" of the European Sociological Association and universities of Canada and the United States, Russian scientists and young participants – undergraduate and postgraduate students of Russian universities.

Venue of the Conference. For the first time a conference will not be held in one of the Russian capital's universities, but specifically in a rural area, namely the area of the expedition, i.e. in the Manturovo Area in the Kostroma Region of Russia. Participants will be able to experience the living conditions of rural communities in the heartland of Russia, examine firsthand the problems of conservation and use of natural environment, now and in the long run, as well as witness the evidence of innovative trends in the Near North of Russia.

Conference Program. The conference includes a plenary opening and closing, as well as four sections:

- The natural capital and socio-environmental aspects of conservationism and wildlife management
- Social and economic development in perspective of innovational transformation of rural regions
- Traditional and contemporary culture in rural communities: social and landscape/architectural planning
- Governance, self-governance, and civil society in the countryside. Social and economic development

The conference program may also include "field" cultural orientation and environmental activities.

Location of Meetings and Sessions. Plenary sessions are held in the village cultural center, sections will take place in the log barns converted into modern meeting halls (with all modern facilities).

Accommodations: 25 conference participants are to be housed in a 3-star hotel in the district center of Manturovo; other participants are based at the expedition base in the Village of Medvedevo in the homes of villagers, as well as in the Taiga Station of the Severtsov Institute of Ecology of the

Russian Academy of Sciences. Young participants will stay in the camp on the Unzha River, a tribute of the Volga River.

Duration of the conference. 3 full days.

Dates: 27-29 May 2011.