



POST-RELEASE

18-20th October the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Museums in the Northern Dimension” was held by the Karelian State Museum of Regional History.

The conference was devoted to the 135th anniversary of the Karelian State Museum of Regional History's foundation. The purpose of the Conference was to orientate the professional community in the modern difficult situation during the process of economic change in Russia in the context of the northern (northwestern) regional component and development of horizontal international and interregional relations. This idea was reflected in the Conference's emblem. The shape of the Pomor compass cartouche from the Museum's collections was used to create this emblem.

The representatives of museums and universities from the Republic of Karelia, Tretyakov State Gallery, the Russian Museum of Ethnography (St. Petersburg), the Museum of History of Revolutionary-Democratic Movement in the 1880-1890s (St. Petersburg), Mining Museum of St. Petersburg State Mining University, St. Petersburg State University of Culture and Arts, Kirovsk and Monchegorsk museums (Murmansk region), Museum of Cultures (Helsinki, Finland), Museum of Yuvyaskyulya (Finland), Westerbotten Museum (Umeo, Sweden) participated in the programme. There was also the group of cultural politicians, representatives of the State Committees from the Republic of Karelia, St. Petersburg, Archangelsk region.

The problematic sessions and round-table meetings of the conference included the following:

“Museums in cultural space of the North Europe”

The conference and this session were opened by Ildiko Lehtinen with the paper “Cultural heritage and identity” (Museum of Culture, Helsinki) and Olga Fishman – “Mutual stereotypes: from the experience of international exhibition project “Russia-Norway” (The Russian Museum of Ethnography, S-Petersburg). Both of papers touched upon some stereotypes of perception and international relations in the context of the terms “identity”, “common memory” etc. The next papers were devoted to development history of museums coming into being in the European North territory specific context. The representatives from Petrozavodsk State University in particular told about the period of the 1920s when local studies and museum activities were increased in Karelia.

Round-table meeting “Museums in cultural policy of the Northern Europe”

(Presenter: Vasilij Pankratov, vice-president of the State Committee on Culture and Art of the St. Petersburg City Administration)

What do the state and government expect from museums and how do they regulate the sphere of culture? Museums as a cultural institution are both objects and subjects in the field of cultural policy. How did museums change of late years and how did these changes have to become apparent in cultural policy? Museums started to pay less attention to their collection and more – to their visitors. Museums position themselves as some social and economical institutions which play the role of social centers. Now museums think how to promote and advance themselves. That dictates changes in cultural policy of government. The central theme of the round-table meeting was the question how should modern museums work in poly-ethnic society, how do they have to respond on conflicts between national groups?

“Museum as a brand of territory, town, place”

The papers about the museums’ role in creating new public values, regional ideologies and cultural brands making as well as summing up were focused on the following problems: should museums keep themselves as a research institution in its traditional meaning or take over actively business-technology, for instance PR and marketing? And in what degree?

Is it possible to use, for example, a scandal as technology to attract attention? Should museums aim to become a brand of place? Or it is more organically for them to be like a factory or some laboratory that produce brands? Vladimir Sorokin (Association of Cultural Managers, Moscow) delivered the speech on these subjects. Ilona Lebedeva (Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow) noted that if business organizations need strong emotions and impressions to promote their products, museums create these emotions and impressions directly as the main product. Museum specialists from Karelia gave some examples of territories, cities and places identification through museum interpretation and their specific presentations, assets revealing.

“National museums and museums of indigenous peoples ”

This session devoted to museums and national policy, features and problems of museum activities within national regions and indigenous people residence territories was held in Veps Ethnographic Museum in the village of Sheltozero (60 km to the south from Petrozavodsk).

Natalya Ivanovskaya (Russian Museum of Ethnography, S-Petersburg) offered her valuable review of the specifics of ethnographic collections and their meaning for museums in the North Russia. Participants from Karelia presented the regional museums’ experience of

working within the area where the Veps and the Southern Karelians live. The determinations of “national museum” were discussed; the exclusive role of enthusiast-founders of local museums and importance of small museums as a cultural and social center were underlined. The main issue raised during the discussion was about the status of “national museum” – actually is it only a brand for local museums in national regions?

“Museums and immovable objects of heritage”

The papers of Russian and foreign participants and the final discussion covered a wide variety of the theoretic and practical issues of museum management and inclusion of archaeological, natural and historical monuments in cultural tourism activities etc. The speakers came to the general conclusion that it is necessary to develop international co-operation between museums to share experience and implement joint projects. Anton Lagutin (The Russian Institute for Cultural Research, Moscow) attracted attention to negative aspects of cooperation between business organizations and museums, to problems connected with possibilities of investment projects in the light of growing interest to immovable cultural heritage interpretation that is the most important for cultural tourism development, for evolution of business-processes in culture, in the finest sense of the word.

“Museum and intangible cultural heritage“

The topics discussed by participants included involving literature and folklore in the museum activity; establishing based on traditions significant events for local community; innovative projects. The most interesting was the report prepared by Varvara Lebedeva (the Karelian State Museum of Regional History) who spoke about museum interpretations of poem “Kalevala”.

Round-table meeting “Museums in the process of reforms”

(Presenter: Galina Lapteva, vice-president of the Committee of culture of Archangelsk administration)

The topic was defined by the theme of the conference on the one hand and by the demands of modern life on the other. The meeting provided the opportunity for the participants to talk about municipal museums’ problems in the context of reforms of municipal government.

A wide range of questions dealt with external and internal reformation of museum sphere. Participants discussed the situations with taking museums at another level during reforms of municipal government in Archangelsk and Murmansk regions, the Republic of Karelia. Ildiko

Lehtinen (Finland) and Anders Karlsson (Sweden) shared their models of museum organization and management in their native countries.

Reforms of municipal government emphasized the questions: do local communities need museums and what interests do they have? The relevance of municipal museums in many respects depends on their employees, effectiveness of museum activities. Also the participants spoke about possibility for professional associations of museums and their specialists to influence on legislative processes.

At the final plenary session the participants noted with satisfaction the fruitful character of working. They emphasized that the problems and issues discussed during the conference were timely in whole as well as there is a need to hold new museum congress to discuss the question how museums should work in unstable economic and social and cultural conditions. According to conclusions from the sessions and round-table discussions participants adopted the conference resolution.

At the end of 2006 the papers and materials of the round-table discussions will be published by the Karelian State Museum of Regional History in book form.