TN LIAISON DON WERTLIEB ADDRESSES RUSSIAN COMMUNITY UNIVERSITY NETWORK CONFERENCE IN MOSCOW

TN regional partners in the Russian Federation’s Community University Network gathered on May 24, 2013 in Moscow for their International Conference “Education in Russia: Social Mission & Territorial Development.” TN Senior Liaison Donald Wertlieb participated in the proceedings with an opportunity to orient a wider range of leaders to the work of the Talloires Network with his presentation on “Engaged University, Enhanced Education.” This international conference advanced collaborations initiated just a few months earlier when 15 Russian university faculty and administrators spent a week in Boston on a study tour “Entrepreneurial Strategies of U.S. Universities: Best Practices and Partnerships for Community Development” co-sponsored by TN, [Massachusetts Campus Compact](http://masscampuscompact.org/), and New Eurasia Foundation.

Problem-solving and innovative thinking energized the conference participants as they examined initial progress in dramatic reforms underway in Russia’s education policy. With the advent of a new tier of 10 federal universities explicitly charged with service missions including civic engagement, community development, and social responsibility, a full range of challenges and opportunities emerge as traditional strengths in research and teaching missions are complemented and rebalanced. While these federal universities exercise special levers in this reform process, Russia’s well-established and prestigious universities participate as well in the exchange of good practices and launching of new pedagogical methods, research models, and community engagement strategies.

Because the conference sponsors [New Eurasia Foundation](http://www.eurasia.org/network/new-eurasia-foundation) and [Charles Stewart Mott Foundation](http://www.mott.org/) also nurture service-oriented “community schools” at the secondary level, the opportunities for conversations including both levels of the education system served as an especially enriching theme of the conference. As TN Liaison Wertlieb observed, “the secondary school graduates experiencing the innovative and progressive education now being provided in community schools will become valuable resources and catalysts as they enter new community universities, adding powerful texture to both student leadership potentials and faculty-student learning and interaction.”

These new ventures in advancing the quality of education in Russia are certainly not without challenges. Keynote speaker I.A. Arzhanova, Executive Director of the [National Foundation for Workforce Training](http://eng.ntf.ru/), framed the dilemmas quite well in noting the demands for defining and measuring the social benefit of university education.” Education is not a cheap thing, and we know that.” But conference participants offered a wide-range of avenues for constructing better research, better teaching, and better citizenship in these emerging contexts where service to the community is both expected and fulfilled. Katri Raik from [University of Tartu](http://www.ut.ee/en) (Estonia) encouraged and inspired her Russian colleagues with her articulation of how the emergence of “smart” jobs and “smart” workplaces reinforces our embrace of community engagement and service as a third mission of a thriving university. Specific initiatives evident in the work of Russian universities already engaged in the Talloires Network – [Vladivostok State University](http://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/vladivostok-state-university-of-economics-and-service-russia/) and [Voronezh State University](http://www.vsu.ru/english/)—provided examples such as “volunteers” club to organize and support student and faculty engagement with the community; “university without prejudice” to build more welcoming, inclusive, and hospitable environments for international students; and financial literacy services to enable more community members to succeed in emerging economic scenes. The conference concluded with enthusiastic appreciation of the day’s sharing and learning, along with commitment to next steps in both the national and global networking of engaged universities.

While in Moscow for the conference, TN Liaison Wertlieb was also able to confer with colleagues and partners at the [Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/) and a prominent NGO [Center for Curative Pedagogies (CCP).](http://www.ccp.org.ru/en/)  RIAC includes a network of Russia’s federal universities among its stakeholder constituencies thus is well-situated for fostering educational reform and global cooperation. CCP, as a well-developed community-based advocacy and service system for children with disabilities, exemplifies the opportunity for mutual benefit as universities engage community partners for the benefit of all. The TN secretariat welcomes opportunities to participate in conferences convened by member institutions or partner networks as we all strive together toward educating leaders for change.