

Alīda Zigmunde

29th Baltic Conference on the History of Science in Vilnius

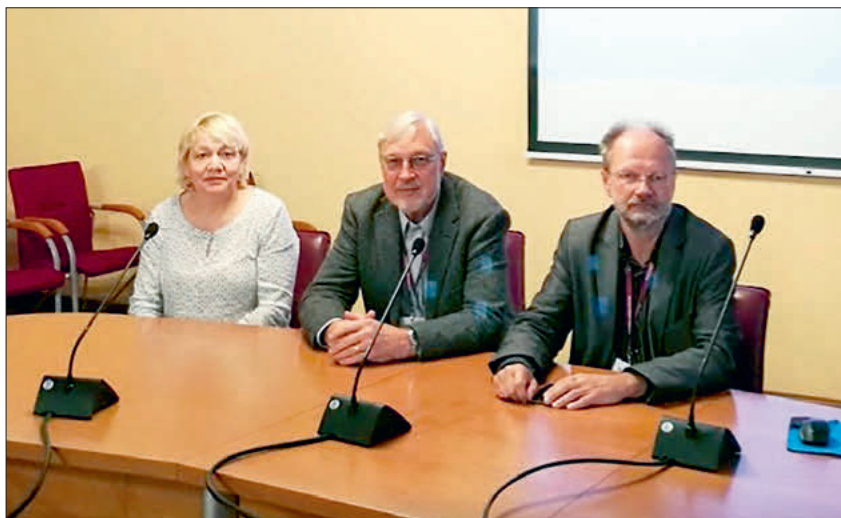
The 29th Baltic Conference on the History of Science took place between September 19 and 21, 2019 in the capital city of Lithuania – Vilnius. The conference was dedicated to the 440th anniversary of the founding of Vilnius University in 1579; the main subject of the conference was Science and the University.

The main subject unfolded on the first day of the conference. In the plenary session, scientists, members of the Association of History of Sciences from three Baltic states delivered their lectures. The President of the Baltic Association of the History and Philosophy of Science¹ and the Lithuanian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science, Director of the Museum of the Vilnius University Dr. Ramūnas Kondratas presented the oldest university of Lithuania with his lecture “Four Centuries of Science at Vilnius University”. The participants of this congress felt very strongly that Lithuania is very proud of its 440-year-old university not only through this lecture but also while visiting this university and the old town of Vilnius.

There is also an old University in Tartu, Estonia. Nevertheless, for Estonians the history developed differently when in 1919 its university became an Estonian-language institution, after Estonia became an independent state in 1918. The lecture was held by the historians Erki Tammiksaar (University of Tartu and Estonian University of Life Sciences) and Ken Kalling (University of Tartu).

¹ Baltic Association of the History and Philosophy of Science. <http://www.bahps.org/> [retired 20.10.2019].

In 1919, University of Latvia was founded as well. The newly independent Baltic states, after their declaration of independence, founded their own national universities where lectures were held in their state languages first time in history. This was also the case in Latvia. The associate professor Andris Šnē shed light on this development in his lecture “The Formative Years of Latvian National Higher Education: Management, Research and Studies at the University of Latvia in the 1920s–1930s”. One hundred years ago, the University of Latvia was founded realising the long-hedged hopes of many Latvians. They could build on a very strong foundation which was Riga Polytechnic Institute which was founded in 1862 and had served the Russian state to educate engineers to drive the technological development of tsarist Russia, including the Baltic districts as well. As it had to become a national institution of Higher Education, the Polytechnic Institute was closed down and in its premises the new University of Latvia was established taking up some of the technological matters into its wider body. The state did not have its borders yet, but it already had its university.



The 29th Baltic Conference on the History of Science, meeting of the General Assembly. From the left: Secretary of the Latvian Association of the History of Science Dr. Alīda Zigmunde, President of the Estonian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science Dr. Peeter Mürsepp, President of the Baltic Association of the History and Philosophy of Science and the Lithuanian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science Dr. Ramūnas Kondratas



Opening of the 29th Baltic Conference on the History of Science.
From the left: A. Šnē, E. Tammiksaar, from the right:
R. Kondratas, A. Lignugariene

The Organising Committee of the University of Latvia hoped that the alumnus and professor, rector of Riga Polytechnic Institute and world-renowned chemist Paul Walden would become its first rector, but he moved to Germany. Some of the participants of the Congress in Vilnius lectured about the difficult start and development of the University of Latvia.

In the plenary session, Asta Lignugariene presented her lecture “The Establishment and Development of the University of Lithuania”. The university was founded in 1922 and since has been working under the name of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. In 2019, it celebrated its 30th anniversary since its reestablishment.

Historians of science of Latvia were represented by its long-serving participants of the conferences of the History of Science, especially by the historians of Medicine. The professor of Rīga Stradiņš University Juris Salaks together with Kristīne Zirne delivered a lecture with the subject “An Evaluation of Rare Medical Book Collections in Latvia According to the Grolier Club List One Hundred Books Famous in Medicine”. The historians of medicine and specialists of the Museum of Anatomy Ieva Lībiete and Diāna Klešnika delivered their lecture on “Publish or Perish: Traces of Undocumented Medical Studies of the 1920s Captured in the Anatomical Collection of Rīga Stradiņš University”. In the section medicine, further lectures were held by Maija Pozemkovska (“Elizabete Jakovleva: The First Female Latvian Medical Professor in Latvia”), Zane Alika and Mārtiņš Vesperis (“The Scientific Work and Private Practice of Professor Pāvils Muceniēks”), Vineta Blitsone and Mārtiņš Vesperis (“Faculty Members of the Department of Medicine at the University of Latvia during World War”), Mārtiņš Vesperis (“Kārlis Barons’ Service in the Russian Empire Army in Šiauliai in 1892”), Valentīna Gordjušina, Ērika Lūse, Zane Zalužinska (“Historical Review of the Development of Pathology at the University of Latvia’s Medical Faculty”). Professor Alīda Zigmunde presented her research on the subject “University Staff without Diplomas: Exceptional Cases in the History of the University of Latvia”.

Fifty lectures had been announced by 63 scientists of the history of science for this conference in Vilnius². One third represented Lithuania while the others were from Estonia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, USA. They represented the following scientific institutions: Vilnius University, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, University of Tartu, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Tallinn University of Technology, Odessa National Medicine University, Sumy State University, Medical University of Warsaw, Russian Academy of Sciences, S. I. Vavilov Institute for the History of Science and Technology, University of Łódź, Jan Długosz University etc.

The following Latvian institutions were represented by their scientists: Rīga Stradiņš University, Pauls Stradins Museum of the History of Medicine, Riga Technical University and University of Latvia.

² *Abstracts of the 29th Baltic Conference on the History of Science* (Vilnius: Vilnius University, 2019), 6–86.

After the lectures, excursions were organised to visit museums and the bell tower of St. John's Church.

On the last day of the conference, the meeting of the General Assembly and editors and members of editorial board of international scientific journals was held. The Lithuanian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science together with local programme committees had organised this conference very well. The participants of this conference can now continue with new ideas and insights with their research and prepare to participate at the next Baltic Conference on the History of Science in Finland.

Alīda Zigmunde

*Dr. paed., profesore, Rīgas Tehniskās universitātes Humanitārais institūts /
Professor, Institute for Humanities at Riga Technical University*