Events and Sightings

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Conference Report on Russian/Soviet Computing

The first IFIP international conference on ''Perspectives on Soviet and Russian Computing'' (SoRuCom) was held 3–7 July 2006, according to the SoRuCom Organizing Committee. Hosted by Petrozavodsk State University, the conference gave an overview of computing developments in Russia and the former nations of the USSR. The conference was organized by: John Impagliazzo (IEEE History Center member and IFIP chair of the History of Computing Working Group), Russian Federal Agency of Education, Russian Foundation for Basic Research, Government of the Republic of Karelia, Petrozavodsk State University, National Foundation for Professional Training, State Research Institution of Information Technologies and Telecommunications Informika, and Council of Virtual Computer Museum (www.computer-museum.ru).

The first-ever academic event of its kind, the conference drew more than 170 participants from eight countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, US, France, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico), representing academic institutions, leading universities, and industrial and research communities in information and telecommunications technologies.

The plenary papers described how Soviet computing developed, contemporary problems in this field, and approaches to teaching the information and telecommunications sciences at universities. The latter topic was featured at a special roundtable. Representatives of IBM, Microsoft, and Cisco shared their vision of future development and cooperation with universities.

Papers by Soviet computing pioneers portrayed a historical panorama of early development aspects of hardware and software in the USSR. Particularly interesting to attendees was the paper by Zinovy Rabinovich, one of the team who developed the BESM—the first computer in the USSR and continental Europe. Other presenters included Yaroslav Khetagurov, Nikolay Brusentsov, Tamara Alexandridi, Yury Rogachev, Alexander Tomilin, Yulia Nikolskaya, Gennady Egorov, and Zoya Alexeeva.

Papers focusing on a variety of computing development issues in various fields were presented by Andrey Gagarin, Vitaly Shteinberg, Igor Lisovsky, Vladislav Shirikov, Boris Matyukhin, Vladimir Krivoruchenko, German Oganyan, Margarita Badrutdinova, and Tomas Jimenez Lopez.

Yakov Fet, Lev Malinovsky, and Natalia Ruzanova presented overviews of the computing history in Siberia, Ukraine, and Karelia respectively. Alexander Tomilin, Vera Karpova, and Viktor Smirnov presented the history of the AS-6 and BESM-6 machines, considered the best computers of their time in Europe. Efforts to preserve the history of computing were discussed by Marina Smolevitskaya, Natalya Chechel, Eduard Proydakov, Yury Polyak, and Viktor Kasyanov.

Contemporary problems in the computing sciences were analyzed by Yaroslav Khetagurov, Vladislav Shirikov, Vyacheslav Klimanov, and Alexander Zemliak.

The roundtable ''Two approaches to Computer Education: East and West,'' chaired by John Impagliazzo, discussed contemporary issues and approaches of professional training in information and telecommunication technologies. These problems were also touched on by Yury Bogoyavlensky.

In other sessions, Alexander Marchuk, Viktor Kasyanov, and Irina Krayneva discussed the history of academician Ershov—who significantly influenced the development of computing in the USSR—and described computing development in Siberia. Igor Agamirzyan presented a paper on Sergey Lavrov's importance to programming development. Yulia Vladimirova addressed the trinary dialectic approach to informatics.

In a conference section devoted to computer education, Olga Parakhina, Andrey Sokolov, Tatyana Tikhonova, Alexander Rogov, and Azat Yarmukhametov analyzed different aspects of teaching.

Participants' abstracts and preliminary papers were published in two volumes. A select number of the papers will be published in a separate IFIP Springer edition. For more information, see http://sorucom.karelia.ru.

A resolution made at the conference recognized that Soviet computing had achieved intellectual and technological success, compared to other leading industrial nations. Many systems designed at that time are still in use. The resolution stressed the special importance of introducing a regular academic course on the history of computing. This course will help to instill national pride in such significant achievements, to preserve the countries' unique knowledge and cultural heritage, and to foster an understanding of informatics' trends and future.

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