

Polytechnic Graduate Jose Bonivento Speaks about Studying in an SPbPU International Master's Degree Program

While some students are just enrolling to [Master's degree programs](#), others have already got their diplomas. SPbPU Master's degree programs in English have a continued success among both Russian and international students. Considering the essential trends and demand for professionals in the field of civil engineering, many students choose this difficult but popular and interesting specialty. There are two programs of international Master's degree program in this area: [Civil Engineering](#) and [Energy Efficient and Sustainable Building](#).

Jose BONIVENTO (Columbia) is a graduate of the [Energy Efficient and Sustainable Building](#) program. For two years he has been studying and living in Russia, and he admits that he feels sorry to leave our country. However, he is planning to go back to his country and establish his own company; he also is thinking about postgraduate studies. You can read in our interview about what was the most memorable for him in the years of his studying in the international Master's degree program at SPbPU and the student life in Russia.



- Jose, was it easy to dare to go to Russia from the faraway Columbia?

- Of course, I was quite anxious prior to coming to Russia. Once in a while I would come across articles about the severe Russian climate and unsociable people, but now I understand that this is no more than mere stereotypes, of which are remaining fewer and fewer with the years going by. All my concerns got no proof: St. Petersburg and its residents met me very warmly. I saw the same at Polytechnic University: all employees, professors, and teachers were always ready to help.

- What do you remember from the year of your studies?

- At SPbPU, I studied energy efficiency of buildings and constructions, applicable to that software, thermodynamics, and many other disciplines essential for my specialization. Upon graduation from the Master's degree program, I can say that I've got really valuable professional skills which I will undoubtedly use in my future career. During the entire educational course I had been working really hard, and I am extremely thankful to my teachers who had been supporting me all that time.



- We can congratulate you now: you are a Master! What was your Master's degree thesis dedicated to?

- My master's thesis was devoted to the thermal characteristics of bamboo walls. Bamboo is a well-known renewable material. It is not often used in Russia because it is a tropical and sub-tropical plant. However, you can see it in the south of your

country. And, of course, bamboo is broadly used in such countries as China and Japan.

In my thesis I have considered how bamboo can be used for building houses. Due to industrialization processes, energy expenses went up in thousand times, and the goals of their reduction became imminent. Constructions of bamboo wooden panels that are a natural material is one of the possible solutions. Bamboo grows in three years, while it takes about 15 years for the growth of ordinary wood. This means that we have cheap, low energy-consuming and easily renewable material. However, it has its drawbacks: for example, bamboo is not homogeneous and it should be modified to provide for production of solid and dense material.

- When choosing the Master's degree program, were there options of other countries?

- I got my Bachelor's degree in civil engineering at the National University of Columbia. Upon graduation, I had worked in my profession for several years, and after that I went to London because I wanted to improve my command of English. At that time I understood that I wanted to progress in the engineering and construction field, and I started looking for a university. Besides Russia, I had been considering such countries as the Great Britain, Spain, and Luxemburg. Most often, I was looking for the information on the websites of major rating agencies. I got very much interested in Russia, and I started reading about it more and more. And, lastly, I decided to come here.



- Tell us, please, why did you decide to study in Russia?

- To a certain extent, the trip to Russia was a challenge I put to myself: I did not know a single word in Russian and have never been to Russia before. But I love tough challenges. I already speak English and Spanish, and I decided to go to a country which I knew very little about. I think Russia becomes more and more attractive for tourists and for students: everybody wants to know in person what secrets are there in the enigmatic Russian soul. (Laughing).

- What other Russian cities have you been to? Was there anything that you remember the most?

- Besides St. Petersburg, I visited Moscow and Murmansk. This was one more challenge: they say, it is cold in Russia? Fine, I will go to one of the coldest cities and see what is going on there. I have always dreamed about seeing the northern lights, and I was lucky to see them. It was extremely cold, nearly minus 35 degrees, and unbelievably beautiful!

I was also impressed with Russian dachas. My friends from Russia had invited me to their dachas many times, and it seems to me that it was exactly there that I could feel the true Russian culture. I communicated with my friends' grandfathers and grandmothers, went out fishing, picked mushrooms and berries in forests, and all this will forever remain one of my warmest memories of Russia.

- Did you have any communication problems during your study in Russia?

- As I said before, when I came to Russia I spoke no Russian at all. All indicators, street names, labels at stores, everything was in Russian, and it was quite difficult for me then. For several times, I had even lost my way. But I could always find help and support: even without knowing English, people in the streets tried to explain to me my way: some were using gestures, some online translators in their phones. Each time I would lose my way, I would end up at some beautiful cathedral or a palace, and this way I was exploring the city. Today, I do not get lost in St. Petersburg; I admire just to wonder around its streets, scrutinize its attractions, meet my friends in the numerous city cafés.

- What are your plans for the future?

- I am planning to go back to Columbia and use in practice all the knowledge and skills I acquired. I am from a small city, and such things as sustainable construction materials and energy efficiency have just started to develop there. I am also thinking about further progress in my professional sphere, and I hope to come again to Russia or Europe.

- And what about postgraduate studies?

- I have been thinking a lot about continuing education at a postgraduate study program. Even more so, my academic advisor at SPbPU had recommended me to

do that, and I considered study options at partner universities. However, going back home is my priority at the present time. My dream is to establish a small company, and I need to work a lot to do this.



- SPbPU students can take internships and participate in various events abroad. Did you take part in any trips of the kind?

- During my Master's degree program I participated in an international symposium in Brazil; it took place within the frame of the [World Cities World Class University Network in San-Paulo](#). Besides SPbPU, ten other universities from all over the world were presented there. We had been working in teams, and our goal was to present our version of solving problems in a metropolis. The teams were allocated by particular topics: "Culture," "Health," "Eco-campus," "Business," and "Transport." We were working in the "Eco-campus" section. Our project was dedicated to solving the issue of favelas, the slums in Brazilian cities. The participants came up with numerous ideas: models of buildings and environmental infrastructure, plans for their realization, ideas for reduction of energy consumption. Upon our return, we wrote an article which was published in a journal dedicated to civil construction.

- Knowledge and experience exchange at the international level is very important. And how often foreign professors taught lectures to you?

- In the course of our studies we were taught by Russian and foreign lecturers. Quite frequently we had visiting professors from Mexico, Serbia, Czech Republic, Spain, Nigeria, and other states. For me, an important advantage of the Master's degree program is that along with the Master's degree, I've got the understanding of what I am going to do in my professional career. We have learned a huge amount of Russian and international standards, energy saving technologies, and many other important and necessary themes. I have noticeably improved my knowledge in the energy efficiency and sustainability of buildings sphere, and now I have a clear plan of what I should do in this sphere.

- What advice would you give to international students planning to come to Russia?

- If you are planning to come to Russia for a long period, I would advise to take a few lessons of the Russian language, learn the most simple sentences that could help you in the streets, in a shop, bank, etc. But most important: get rid of stereotypes. It is great here! Russia is a perfect country, and I am happy that I have lived and studied here for the whole two years, and I have got a lot of new friends here.

- Jose, thank you very much for the interesting interview! We wish you success and future accomplishments!

For the reference:

International Master's degree programs "Civil Engineering" and "Energy Efficient and Sustainable Building" have been implemented at SPbPU since 2015. The programs foresee teaching students, development and defense of graduation qualification theses in English. Each program lasts for two years. There are options of budget funded (for Russian citizens only) and contract forms of education. The study conditions for Russian and international students are the same.

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