University Geoportals Consortium (UNIGEO) was established in April 2011. It currently brings together 31 universities of the Russian Federation, in which there are more than 20 centers for reception and processing of satellite images (space monitoring centers). Data received by the university stations from more than a dozen RS satellites, have been actively used in education, scientific research and production activities.

The primary goal of the Consortium is the unification (integration) of intellectual resources and advanced technologies of Russia higher education institutions in remote sensing and geoinformatics to improve the education quality and promote public access to new knowledge and technologies of using remote sensing data.

The Consortium is actively promoting the development of the university-based space monitoring centers networks and supports the basic directions of their activities:

- educational: training and refresher training of professionals with advanced knowledge in the field of remote sensing and GIS used in decision-making support systems;
- research & development: implementation of fundamental and applied research works on cross-sectional areas; the development of innovative technological solutions
- science & production: monitoring of the region and the provision of information in near-real-time to support decision-making by business entities; pilot production; commercialization and technology introduction; creation of small knowledge-intensive industries.

A few words about the activities of the participants, about how they can be helpful to each other and how they may contribute to the common space of activities.

1. Association, coordination, advice to universities in the use and development of modern technologies

“SCANEX” Holding, the associated Consortium member, is engaged in the development of training programmes for highly qualified specialists, in refresher training advanced retraining of specialists in the sphere of Earth remote sensing and geoinformation technologies. Courses on remote sensing data interpretation have been conducted regularly since 2006. During this period, over 35 courses were completed, more than 1000 people have successfully passed the trained and received certificates. Students from the UNIGEO universities get a substantial discount when paying for their tuition.

2. Promotion of fundamental and applied scientific research works augmentation at universities

On the initiative of the Lomonosov Moscow State University a separate special topic “Environmental studies technology through the creation of geodata with the hyperspectral data of Earth remote sensing and geoinformation cartographic functions of their processing” has been assigned in main competition of the Russian Foundation of fundamental research on relevant cross-disciplinary themes starting from 2013 that allows UNIGEO participants to place both individual applications and to unite into interregional working groups in order to create larger and more successful projects.

3. Combining material and intellectual resources of participants and cost optimization with respect to unique space data

Based on the agreement achieved between the associated Consortium member “SCANEX” Holding with the Research Center for Operative Monitoring of the Earth of the JSC “Russian Space Systems” (Roscosmos) the Consortium participants have the opportunity to receive free satellite imagery data acquired from the Meteor-M №1 satellite for use in the educational process.

Interaction of the Consortium with the Federal Space Agency is still ongoing to develop the terms and conditions of the university-based centers of space-related activities integration within a Unified geographically distributed information system (ETRIS) of Earth remote sensing.

4. Assisting universities to use their potential and modern achievements of geoinformation technologies in education, science, industry and region development management.

Consortium universities disseminate knowledge and experiences among colleagues. For example, in May 2015 the Perm State National Research University delegation held a series of lectures in the school of natural sciences of the Far Eastern Federal University (Vladivostok, Russia). During this visit an exchange of views on the use of the Earth remote sensing data took place with the prediction of both current state of the atmosphere and features of dangerous hydrometeorological phenomena manifestations. Guests from Perm city got acquainted with modern solutions and ideas on creating hydrologically and meteorologically-oriented GIS, saw the operations of the atmosphere and hydrosphere automated monitoring equipment of the Far East of the Russian Federation.
For the second year the UNIGEO Consortium supported by "SCANEX" Holding conducts the academic competition on thematic interpretation of remote sensing data and the use of modern geoinformation technologies. The first competition on ERS was held in 2014 spearheaded by UNIGEO and the Department of Cartography and Geoinformatics of the Perm State National Research University. Huge interest of students to this event urged the creation of a summer school in 2015 together with the academic competition, where students of different universities could under the guidance of leading professionals learn how to solve practical tasks of thematic interpretation in the disciplines of interest to them. This year the academic competition school is hosted by another university - the UNIGEO participant - the Reshetnev Siberian State Aerospace University.

The principal information and communication resource of the Consortium is the www.unigeo.ru portal. The aim of its operation is to create an active environment for communication of like-minded persons, popularization the use of remote sensing data in the social environment and the business community. With the support of "SCANEX" Holding the UNIGEO newsletter is regularly published informing about the news in the world of Earth remote sensing and geoinformatics, about the participating universities, which includes a detailed calendar of scientific and practical conferences in Russia and abroad. The newsletter is circulated via e-mail to all interested persons and is posted at the www.unigeo.ru portal.

Interaction of higher education institutions within the Consortium allows for the most efficient use of the higher school potential for development and introduction of satellite-based remote sensing and geoinformation technologies in the Russian education, science and industry.

If your university has a space monitoring center, then the curriculum must include training of specialists in the field of Earth remote sensing, the ERS data are used in educational, scientific and production processes or you plan to develop these areas, promote active involvement in these processes or initiate the process of joining the Consortium. Consortium members can be legal entities — higher education institutions of Russia. Information on how to join the Consortium can be requested by e-mail at info@unigeo.ru.