

Interview with KIAS Alumni Professor Filippo Morabito

1 Will you introduce yourself, focusing on your research interests?

I am an assistant professor of Mathematics at KAIST since September 2013. I joined KAIST after two years as a research fellow at KIAS and one year as an assistant professor at Korea University. My research interests include differential geometry and non-linear analysis.

2 Do you have any recent research progress aside from school activities you would like to tell us about?

Recently I turned my attention on overdetermined boundary value problems on Riemannian manifolds. I would like to mention an article written in collaboration with Pieralberto Sicbaldi (Univ. Aix-Marseille, France) where we show the existence of non-trivial domains contained in some product manifolds by a technique known as bifurcation.

3 Describe your typical weekday for us.

Usually I teach two courses each semester. As a foreigner, I do not handle any administrative tasks which require the knowledge of Korean language. So once my classes are finished (5 hours a week) then I can dedicate the rest of my time to research.

4 Do you have any episodes or thoughts you would like to share with us on your experience teaching Korean students? What do you think of Korean academic culture?

I would like to mention some differences which exist between the organization of the university studies in Korea (which adopts the US model) and in Europe (in particular in Italy).

In Korea, a student has a lot of freedom in choosing the courses to take. In Italy, at least when I was a student, most of the basic courses were mandatory, and students were asked to take exams in a certain order.

While the instructor of a Korean mathematics course teaches two classes (2 hours and 30 min.) over 14 weeks, Italian Math courses can be considerably longer (4 to 6 hours each week). Consequently, while the total number of courses to take in order to graduate is smaller in Italy, the amount of materials to study is larger. Another difference is that Korean exams are mostly written exams while Italian exams are always held in two ways, written and oral.

5 You have led an academic career in Korea for quite a long time. What is the main reason? How does your career at Korea relate to your overall career goals?

I got my Ph.D. in Mathematics in a French University

in 2008. Since I could not get a permanent job in Europe, I applied for a position of research fellow at KIAS. I joined KIAS in September 2010. Since then I have been working in Korea: indeed after two years I was hired as an assistant professor at Korea University and one year later I moved to KAIST in Daejeon.

6 How has your time at KIAS affected your career?

The two years I spent as a research fellow at KIAS allowed me to get acquainted to life in Korea. That would have been more difficult if my first job in Korea was that of assistant professor, because it is more time and energy demanding compared to a research fellowship.

7 I understand that you have visited KIAS several times a year after leaving. What brings you back?

My field of research is close to the one of a few members of KIAS: Prof. J. Choe, and a few research fellows (mostly his students). I give a few talks in KIAS each year.

8 How do you find living in Korea as an international resident? What are the pros

and cons? (Is life at Daejeon different from life in Seoul ?)

The major problem is of linguistic nature. My knowledge of Korean is very limited. Consequently I cannot communicate with people who do not speak English at all. Instead, I use some free online translators if I get some mail written in Korean. By the way, I dedicate some time to the study of Korean language.

Secondly I would like to mention that I do not like spicy food, which is often included in a Korean menu. In KAIST campus there are several restaurants among which I can choose, so it is in general possible to find non-spicy food. Alternatively I can cook in my apartment.

9 What are your goals and hopes, professional and personal, for 2015?

KAIST as well as other Korean universities evaluates its professors keeping into account their performances in teaching (through the evaluations of the students) and in research. In order to be promoted (i.e. to become associate professor or full professor) it is essential to publish articles in scientific journals of appropriate standard. That is my goal for 2015.



Filippo Morabito

Filippo Morabito is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST). Formerly a KIAS research fellow in the School of Mathematics, he now visits KIAS as invited speaker to seminars and conferences. His research interests include minimal surfaces, global analysis, and partial differential equations.