

SUPPORTING RESEARCH IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA

Cartography and GIS Conference

The first international conference on Cartography and GIS took place at the ski-resort of Borovets in Bulgaria from 25th to 28th January 2006. The main goal was to introduce modern cartographic research in the Balkan peninsula and wider region.

Organised by the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy of Sofia in collaboration with the International Cartographic Association (ICA), the conference, which was widely supported by industry and the Bulgarian government, offered an excellent forum for exchange of ideas among researchers. Participants from Eastern European countries were in the majority, but participants also came from South Africa, Hong Kong and Nigeria. Over twenty countries were represented and about fifty papers and fifty poster-presentations were given. ESRI Europe acted as major sponsor and others included the Czech Geodis Brno Ltd, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and the Bulgarian companies Datamap Europe Ltd and Ursit Ltd. The notion of this being a "first" implies that there will be follow-up conferences and a second will in fact take place in 2008, also in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian ski-resort of Borovets, with its mountains, snow and cold offered an ideal venue for intense working sessions in the morning and late afternoon and the chance to enjoy nature during the afternoon.

Children's World Map

An address by the rector of the University of Architecture of Sofia opened the conference. He was followed on the podium by ICA president Milan Konecny, who emphasised how poorly understood was the link between Information Society issues on the one hand and Cartography and GIS on the other. He underlined his point by quoting examples, such as the i2010 initiative of the European Commission, recent developments in the UK, and other initiatives such as INSPIRE and GMES. According to Konecny, the most dynamic streams in today's cartography were visualisation, ubiquitous mapping, internet maps and cyber maps. Cartography was a science necessary for the further development of mankind! Representatives from various ministries of the Republic of Bulgaria also addressed the conference. An important feature of the opening session was the announcement of the winner of the Barbara Petchenik Children's world map competition 2005. She is Diana Hadjiiska (12) from Bulgaria, who received an award from the sponsors. During the conference all submitted drawings were on display and children from the nearby town of Samokov sang Bulgarian folk songs.

Research Papers

Professor Georg Gartner, Technical University of Vienna, presented a visionary paper entitled "From Mobile Internet Mapping towards Ubiquitous Cartography". Ulrich Boes from URSIT, in his keynote speech discussed collaborative cartography as a new research area influenced by recent internet developments. Dariusz Dukaszewski of the Polish Academy of Sciences presented research aspects of animated maps. Other issues addressed in the mostly research-oriented papers included GIS technologies, educational aspects, Spatial Data Infrastructures, disaster management, ecology, electronic atlases, map design and production, visualisation, GPS and remote sensing. Other presentations discussed research aspects of maps in education. Application-oriented papers addressed historical maps, maps for ecology or for disaster management, and combining cartography with GPS. During the commercial presentations ESRI focused on its current products, including applications in education, and gave an outlook for cartographic extensions to their products. Regrettably, although announced in the conference booklet, the organisers had neglected the poster-session and some presenters failed to show up.

Final Remarks

This conference would seem to have been an Eastern European spin-off from the general ICA conference, and with it the organ-isers have discovered a market niche that receives support from ICA and attracts enthusiastic participants. The second conference should more clearly specify the geographical and technical focus. May the success continue and even increase during the second edition of this conference in 2008!