

GEODATA KEY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Intergeo-East

The third Intergeo-East, organised by Intergeo (Germany) and the Serbian Geodetic Authority, took place from 22nd to 24th February 2006 in Belgrade. There were four hundred participants at the conference, the theme of which was "Geodata - a key issue for sustainable national and regional development".

Intergeo-East aims at sharing knowledge between the private-sector, scientists and public-sector decision-makers in south-eastern Europe. To date the focus has been mainly upon countries of the former Yugoslavia. The event is based on the concept of the successful Intergeo in Germany and promotes exchange between Germany and the region and amongst countries of the region themselves; the organisers of the German Intergeo assisted local organisers. Belgrade was chosen as venue as it is the most central and the largest capital in the region. About three thousand people visited the accompanying trade-show, where 83 exhibitors showed products.

Conference

The conference, which attracted participants from Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Greece, Germany and The Netherlands, covered the whole geomatics spectrum, from land management and cadastre to GIS and remote sensing. During the opening session the organisers and the director of the Serbian Geodetic Authority, local organiser, emphasised the importance of Intergeo-East as an event that deserves continuing. Most papers and presentations were given in English, a token of the increasingly international orientation of the event. More than sixty presentations were planned. But in an attempt to attract more participants the conference was held on the floor of the trade-fair, so that it seemed the organisers had given this priority over the conference. Many presenters failed to show up, and others lacked a substantial audience; some had even only five or fewer attendees and some sessions were cancelled. Since there is real potential here for a truly scientific conference, the next Intergeo-East should better satisfy the scientific participants, taking Intergeo in Germany and AGI in the UK as its example.

Exhibition

After the opening of the exhibition on Thursday morning an overwhelming number of participants crowded the floor. However, many visitors were students of geodetic schools and by Friday afternoon the floor was nearly empty, so that exhibitors began dismantling their stands rather early. The attitude of both visitors and exhibitors seem to differ from those at the German Intergeo. Exhibitors from western countries, mainly looking for local partners, complained about the professionalism of their visitors; local exhibitors wanted mainly to meet their clientele rather than to offer the latest products.

Topcon, Trimble and Leica, represented by local partner Vekom Geo d.o.o., displayed their survey instruments. Thales presented its mobile GPS solutions. GIS vendors ESRI, Bentley, AED-Sicad and Autodesk, or their representatives, were also present on the floor. HP presented its printer and plotter. Several European companies here last year were missing this year, but there were other new arrivals, such as COWI A/S (recent winner of a tender in the region), Infoterra with its SAR X Services and ProDV Software AG with its disaster-management and distributed Web-GIS applications.

A consortium of German companies and research institutes, Geokomm from Berlin/Brandenburg, showed Web-based and distributed software applications including interfaces to Google Earth. Advanced, but not new on the world market, these solutions attracted attention because they contrasted with the products of most exhibitors presenting traditional solutions. This is an expression of the economic status of the region. The Croatian State Geodetic Authority shared its cadastral experiences with neighbouring countries. As last year, China once more showed a strong interest in the south-eastern European market; here with two stands and local representatives, it expects its low-cost but high-quality products may find fertile soil in the region.

Concluding Remarks

Intergeo-East is slowly growing. The focus is on the former Yugoslavia and its reputation among other south-eastern European countries seems to be increasing. Three years in existence, this event is still maturing towards becoming an internationally recognised forum for the region. But the initiative should be continued because the potential for success is high. The next Intergeo-East will probably be held outside the former Yugoslavia, perhaps in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria.