

Towards a Spatially Enabled Society



Very recently an attempt was made in Hungary to demonstrate the capabilities and socioeconomic benefits of use of geographic information for decision-makers and politicians. With contractual support based on a Memorandum of Understanding provided by the National Council on Communication and Informatics, the Hungarian Association for Geo-information (HUNAGI) agreed to arrange a national forum on the topic of a spatially enabled society (SES). The aim was to raise awareness of the role and importance of location-based geospatial information and related services, and to demonstrate benefits offered by advanced applications.

An excellent opportunity was offered by Information for Society (Infotér), a Hungarian NGO which organised its fifth annual e-government-related national conference from 5-7 November 2014. The event attracted over a thousand important players from the national information and communication market, members of the Federation of Entrepreneurs in Informatics, and high-level representatives from government departments and agencies. Infotér and HUNAGI agreed that two sessions at the conference would be devoted to the subject of SES.

In the first session the challenges, issues, best practices and future trends in SES were introduced by Roger Longhorn, secretary-general of the GSDI Association. This was also the theme at the GSDI World Conference held in Quebec City, Canada, in 2012. Hungarian speakers from industry addressed data-policy issues regarding location-based acquisition of business information, and the director-general of the Hungarian institute FÖMI discussed special features, results and opportunities of Hungarian progress towards a SES.

Government agencies and public service representatives approached the topic from the applications side. They highlighted the (r)evolution of the use of GI in time-critical applications such as disaster response and management, introducing micro-regional meteorological warnings using instruments available from mobile technologies and citizen involvement. The Budapest Transport Centre's GI project was also shown. Furthermore, this session saw the award ceremony of the HUNAGI Mobile Apps Challenge, with representatives from the four winners briefly presenting their apps to an appreciative audience. Roger Longhorn also made the first GSDI Mobile SDI App Award to eCamino, and this will become an annual prize from GSDI in future.

The second session of the afternoon concerned 'How can the government act?' in regard to issues ranging from INSPIRE Directive implementation to open data, public sector information access, use and reuse, and similar issues and challenges faced by government agencies, industry players and citizen stakeholders. The keynote speaker, Francesco Pignatelli from the European Commission's DG Joint Research Centre (JRC), introduced the synergy of GI and e-government actions reflecting on the EU Location Framework (EULF) initiative. Zsolt Sikolya of NHIT analysed the possible elements and relations of the Governmental Data Policy. Meanwhile the talk by the head of the Land Administration was devoted to INSPIRE implementation, mentioning related issues such as interagency coordination and supervisory tasks. The panel discussion that concluded the session investigated how government could offer further support, seeking experiences and opinions from Hungarian experts from the geoinformation industry, researchers and various government agencies, plus the EU. The audience learned much from an open debate on the range of issues and challenges involved and the progress being made.

The Infotér conference was very timely for these discussions, as the new cycle of the Hungarian government and the budget period in the European Union have both just started. This provides an opportunity for investors and decision-makers to better understand the societal, economic and political value of geoinformation and location-based data for all stakeholders: government, industry and citizens.

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