

When I Go to Chile

Two weeks in November 2006 saw eight international events involving geo-information held in Chile, in particular in the two major cities Santiago and Viña del Mar. These events attracted professionals and scientists from all over the world. One was the 9th Conference of the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Association (GSDI) which took place in Santiago and focused on the subject "SDI a Tool Against Poverty".

SNIT

At no other event in our community are so many papers presented concerned with poverty and other socio-economic aspects in developing nations. Chile's Minister of Development pointed out to conference the aims and scope of the recently released SDI decree advancing the NSDI initiative in Chile; there called SNIT. Among the many papers, no fewer than 67 technical papers were from Latin America, 40% given by women. Papers focused in particular on SDI activities in Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil and Cuba. One of the main concerns expressed was the hindering of SDI expansion in these countries by a dearth of supranational datasets and restricted and uneven application of standards.

For the People

The conclusions of the SDI conference, issued as the *Santiago Statement on SDI and Poverty*, may be summarised thus: "Spatial Information is a public good". This clearly indicates current trends and the concerns expressed by a new generation of professionals. In the past GSDI conferences have contributed greatly towards pointing the global community in the direction of sustainable development. Yet the issue of poverty is new and most challenging for promoters of GSDI. Outgoing president of the GSDI Association Harlan Onsrud summed things up, "A dominant challenge in the next five to ten years will be to enable individual citizens, in addition to organisations and agencies, to gather and use local data to effectively meet their most pressing needs". Luis Alegria, director general IGM Chile and Rodrigo Barriga, PAIGH chair of the Cartographic Commission and their collaborators want passionately to become engaged in international SDI activities for the benefit of Latin America, and they surely should take the lead.

Ten Years After

Ten years after the first GSDI Conference held in Bonn in 1996, GSDI is well recognised as the Global Forum for SDI. When considering the "Digital Divide" and other elements associated with culture and diversity, it seems that basic concepts and definitions need to be revisited. For instance, Yola Georgiadou, professor at ITC, The Netherlands advocates more pluralism and diversity, understanding SDI implementation phenomena in developing regions and more "socio-technical" and "multidisciplinary" approaches.

It is really exciting to imagine what will come out of all the events that took place in November 2006 in Chile. *Cuando Pa' Chile Me Voy*¹

¹ Spanish, from a traditional folk song: "When I go to Chile"