The event attracted more than 2,000 participants from all continents

'The Geospatial way to a better World'

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Asimina Syriou reports from the inaugural United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress (UNWGIC) held in Deqing County, China

In November 2018, the Satellite Applications Catapult participated in the United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress (UNWGIC). Numerous geospatial professionals from governments, non-governmental organizations, academic and research institutions came together over three days to advance the potential and usefulness of geospatial information for sustainable development and towards a better world that leaves no one behind.

The event was organised by the United Nations (UN) and the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and was hosted by the Government of Zhejiang Province and the Ministry of Natural Resources of China.

The purpose of the conference was to provide a participatory and inclusive environment to enhance the communication, understanding, knowledge, and application of geospatial information management to address local, regional and global challenges. This event brought together high-level stakeholders to address and ensure that geospatial information is fully utilised in the service of social, economic and environmental development.

The thematic streams mainly focused on strengthening the national geospatial information management and systems, and the national implementation of the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' The event included exhibitions, workshops, side events, and meetings, including the 7th Plenary Meeting of the Regional Committee of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Asia and the Pacific (UN-GGIM-AP), as well as the annual UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau meeting.

Some interesting keynotes

Vanessa Lawrence, Non-Executive Director at the Satellite Applications Catapult, chaired the ministerial dialogue 'Towards a More Sustainable World.' The aim of the dialogue was to connect geospatial information to national development leadership. Invited ministers from all corners of the world discussed the policy relevance, challenges, and role of geospatial technology and innovation in providing national implementations for measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring economic development and social prosperity.

Jack Dangermond, Founder and President of Esri, gave an insightful talk on the Science of 'Where,' explaining how Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are rapidly advancing, integrating and leveraging many innovations. He stressed the importance of

preparing for and responding to disasters, with a strong focus on smart city development, smart utilities and telecommunications, location intelligence, demographics and public health, public safety and security.

Simonetta Di Pippo, Director of UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), talked about how to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space to achieve SDGs. UNOOSA, as the only UN entity dedicated to space affairs, works with a range of partnerships across the space sector: national governments, national and regional space agencies, private entities, civil society and other UN entities.

Our participation in sessions

The plenary 'Building Smart Societies' hosted the Satellite Applications Catapult session with its title 'Innovative techniques for big Earth Observation (EO) data analysis.' Moderated by Steven Ramage, Head of External Relations at the Group on Earth Observation (GEO), the session was of interest to researchers and practitioners working at the frontier of EO data analysis and whose mission is to explore the full depth of big EO data made openly available by the GEO community. The session demonstrated new approaches to the analysis of big EO data that have been enabled by recent developments in information technology including machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing. I presented on EO and AI, giving an overview of the relevant activities we undertake at the Satellite Applications Catapult.

Another session of interest was 'Disasters will happen: How can we be better prepared'? moderated by John Kedar, Director of International Engagement and Head of International Policy & Engagement at Ordnance Survey. Elena Lobo presented on our IPP 'Common Sensing' project ... one that uses EO data to provide vital information on disaster and climate risks in the Pacific region (Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands). This session leaned on the experiences of panellists to consider some particular aspects of the recently-endorsed UN-GGIM Strategic Framework on geospatial information and services for disasters.

Encouraging future involvement

UNWGIC is a prestigious conference and Satellite Applications Catapult's presence is important for publicising and raising the visibility of what we do, what we have achieved over the past five years, and our future goals. Demonstrating a strong UK presence was important to the UK government, and the Catapult's participation was well received by the international community. Furthermore, the Catapult is aiming to greatly expand its international presence and this event provided a platform to extend Catapult's reach into new target regions, such as China and Asia Pacific.

For more information on the event please visit: https://www.unwgic2018.org/

A second Congress in four years' time will continue the task of promoting comprehensive and inclusive dialogue with and between Governments and all stakeholders