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AGI NI Conference 2016

May saw the spotlight fall on AGI Northern Ireland (AGI NI) and its annual conference at the Riddel Hall in a sunny Belfast. Ciaran Kirk reviews the proceedings

With the sunshine came a record attendance of more than 120 delegates, all eager to engage in presentations that ranged from the Map of the Future to the impact of change and the drive for value, with some innovative public and private sector customer stories thrown in for good measure. Support from Gold sponsors IMGS, Esri-Ireland, Sopra Steria and Leica Geosystems helped AGI NI follow AGI Scotland's new cost model, thereby making the event accessible to more individuals in these cost-conscious times.

Future landscapes

AGI NI Chair Simon Wheeler kicked-off the proceedings by welcoming delegates and introducing Joao Fernandes of Hexagon, Dr Anne Kemp of Atkins Global, and Tim Williams of What3Words, all of whom explored future landscapes within the location world.

Fernandes predicted a world in which the map of the future will be a dynamic platform that tells users what has been, what is and what will be. Kemp reviewed the AGI Foresight 2020 report and its importance to all, outlining the global challenges of ageing infrastructures, shrinking natural resources and growing urbanisation. These will drive the need for smarter solutions that can support Big Data, and an increasingly data-driven world in which suppliers will need to switch from being providers of data to providers of services. Last but not least, Williams introduced an alternative method for global addressing that breaks the world down into 3x3m squares with a unique three-word address. With words easier to remember than numbers, it opens up a myriad of opportunities across a wide range of applications.

To round-up the session, Andy Murdock reviewed the AGI's highly successful Early Career Network (ECN) initiative that he has spearheaded over the past 18 months. The network has held some interesting webinars, and he took the opportunity of his visit to connect with student members and new professionals.

User experiences

Following coffee and networking, the event explored local examples of GI use on both sides of the Irish border. Brad Fisher of Sopra Steria highlighted the importance and success of the user experience for farmers when managing single farm payment claims to the Department of Agriculture, while Sean O'Boyle and his team from NI Water gave an excellent account of the challenges they faced when looking at map shift for NI Water assets ... not such a 'dry' topic after all!

The author of this month's column outlined the major integration of SAP and GI within utilities provider ESB, and was followed before lunch by Brian Galloway of Land & Property Services (LPS) who explained the organisation's new data model, currently in release, and its change in how large scale base data is modelled. The



Photos courtesy Ciaran Kirk & Simon Wheeler, AGI Northern Ireland Committee

new model is simpler than its counterparts in GB and the Republic, but retains a feature-rich data set that has many benefits for both LPS and its customers.

Following lunch, the conference split into two parallel sessions dealing with technical matters and customer experience respectively, with presentations from Natural Resources Wales, Open Data NI, Ordnance Survey, the Improvement Service Scotland, the Education Authority and the Health & Social Care Board.

Quote of the day

The closing plenary featured Nathan Ward of Leica Geosystems who outlined rapid developments in measurement technologies, from wearable laser scanning to UAVs to mobile mapping of underground utilities. Quote of the day: "you can't plan what you can't measure". Not to be outdone, Paul Synnott of Esri Ireland looked at how suppliers are reshaping mindsets to understand value from the perspective of customers and stakeholders, rather than as defined by vendors.

To round off the event, delegates were invited to indulge in a few GeoDrinks and enjoy the last of the sunshine. John Corry from Omagh and Fermanagh District Council summed it up. "The event made me realise the need for joined-up thinking and the sharing of information and ideas, both to meet our own objectives and those of our customers. Cooperation would seem to be key"