



#GeoCom 2017: LEADING THE WAY

The AGI’s annual conference, #GeoCom, delivered an emphatic message of stronger advocacy and wider collaboration in order to take advantage of beckoning opportunities

The AGI’s annual conference took place on 26th October, at the Royal Geographic Society (with IBC) in Kensington, London.

After an Executive Briefing, chaired by Dr Mike Short, VP, Telefonica, the Ondaatje Theatre was the venue for 13 speakers taking up the event theme, “Smart Geospatial”. In attendance were some 220 delegates, with four AGI members making ‘lightning contribution’ presentations, plus 18 sponsor organisations.

The morning sessions were opened by **Charlotte Jee**, Editor of Techworld magazine, who hosted a panel discussion on the uses of technology and the pursuit of more-informed policy-making. Those contributing included:

John Abbott, Director of Digital Services, Land Registry. “At the Land Registry, we know that geospatial data is at the heart of how we can start improving Britain’s housing market and land management for the public’s benefit.”

Lisa Woodhall, Chief Enterprise Architect, Ordnance Survey: “I have discovered that we are collaborative by nature in this industry but the key message is we need to communicate the benefits of GI more clearly.”

Owain Hale-Heighway, Assistant Director Smart Cities and Government Affairs, Gaist Solutions Limited: “Collecting high quality data isn’t enough – we need to understand more about what we’re collecting and why we’re doing it, and then how to organise that data and communicate its benefits so that wider take-up and interoperability becomes a given.”

Following on were **David Johnson**, Deputy Director, Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange (ONS) Data Campus: “Geo is the key to everything: statistics do not make sense if we don’t understand where or what they relate to. We’re introducing geodata science into everything the ONS does.” Other memorable quotes of the morning sessions came from:

Dr Helen Ferrier, Acting Chief Scientist, National Farmers’ Union: “We must address the productivity gap. Farmers may get excited about technology, but the software has to be connected; interoperable; design-led and independent: the role for structured data here is clear.”

Phil Graham, CEO, National Infrastructure Commission: “We need to see more collaboration across the public and private sector – we could save up to a billion pounds if we could use data more effectively. It’s about availability, quality, and consistency: we need a lot more of all three.”

The afternoon featured a suite of ‘Lightning Sessions’ hosted by **John Alderson**, Chairman of Informed Solutions and a former AGI Chair. Those presenting included GI consultant **Andrew Zolnai**, **Ilya Klyachin**, Regional Development Manager at Habidatum, **Dr Michael Groves**, founder of Topolytics, and **Gareth Simons**, CEO at CitySeer.



The penultimate session was opened by **Javier de la Torre**, CEO, Carto: “Now is the most exciting time to be involved with geography, of any kind. We have new data; new analysis; new audiences – and this dynamic analysis, using geospatial data, is becoming an integrated part of the progressive business’s strategy.”

Professor Kate Jefferey, Professor of Behavioural Neuroscience at the University College London, closed the day’s sessions with a look at the progress being made in understanding navigation in humans: “We have to build a world that people can understand, so we have to understand people – we all have to collaborate, bringing our own expertise together, so that we can build navigable environments, navigable cities that are better and easier to live in.”

Two awards were presented. **Peter ter Haar**, AGI Council, introduced a video message from AGI Scotland Chair Bruce Gittings and then presented the AGI Award for Career Achievement to **Diana Murray**. **Abigail Page**, AGI Chair, introduced and then presented the AGI Chair’s Award for Outstanding Service to the AGI to **Rollo Home**, who also led the day’s events throughout as conference Chair.

In her closing remarks, **Abigail Page** looked back on the AGI’s accomplishments over the past year and pointed to the need for greater collaboration and advocacy moving forwards: “Improvements to data and the way it is used cannot come about easily without the influence and advocacy of people. We must come together and act now to influence that change: the AGI is already leading the way in this work, and we also have future leaders within our membership.”

This column was contributed by Marie Gallagher, AGI Administrative Officer