

Cooperation is Key - AGI NI Annual Conference 2016



A good mix of attendees and some interesting topics for the speakers, AGI Northern Ireland's annual conference was set for a successful day, reports Diane Sandeman.

After two really successful GeoBig 5 conferences, we felt the time was right to broaden the theme again. We had a good mix of public and private sector attending, and we were also heartened to have representation from 7 of our 11 new local councils, signs of the renewed importance being placed on location within this area. We were also very grateful to our four Gold sponsors: IMGS, Esri Ireland, Sopra Steria and Leica Geosystems, who enabled us to follow AGI Scotland's new cost model to make the conference accessible to more delegates in these financially difficult times.

The event was kicked off by AGI NI chair Simon Wheeler who reminded everyone that AGI in Northern Ireland is alive and kicking. To set the scene he introduced Joao Fernandes of Hexagon, Dr Anne Kemp of Atkins Global and Tim Williams of What3Words who looked at Future landscapes within the Location world. Joao looked at a world where the map of the future would be a dynamic platform telling users what has been, what is and what will be.

75% Will Live in Cities by 2060

Dr Anne Kemp reviewed the AGI Foresight 2020 report and why it is important to everyone. She outlined the challenges we face globally with ageing infrastructure, shrinking natural resources and urbanisation – with 75% of the world's population expected to live in cities by 2060. These challenges will drive the need for smarter solutions that can support Big Data, and an increasingly data-driven world, where we will need to switch from being data providers to data services.

Last but not least, Tim spoke about an alternative method for addressing: breaking the world down into 3x3m squares with a unique 3word address. Not only is everywhere on the globe included, but words are easier to remember than numbers and opens up a myriad of opportunities on a wide range of applications. To round up the session before coffee we were pleased to welcome Andy Murdock to speak about the highly successful Early Careers Network (ECN) initiative, which he has led for the past 18 months. The network has held some interesting webinars, and he was able to connect with student members and new professionals in NI during the day.

Improving your Positions

Positional Improvement of data will be one of the big challenges for Northern Ireland incoming years, and Sean O'Boyle and his team gave an excellent account of the challenges they faced when looking at a shift for NI Water's assets. Whilst PI would normally be seen as a dry subject, the team gave an excellent delivery which proved of interest to all delegates. Finally, before lunch, Brian Galloway of Land and Property Services spoke about the new LPS data model currently in release and how customers would benefit from the shift in how large scale base data is modelled. The new data model is simpler than its counterparts in GB and Ireland, while still providing a feature-rich dataset giving many benefits to both LPS and customers.

Joined up Delivers for School Transport

In the parallel session, Iain spoke about efficiencies in Scotland, from a joined-up approach by local government there, whilst Colm explained how their pilot approach to school transport assessment was progressing, and the benefits in both time and resources from using a web-based GI approach. Moira spoke about the use of Spatial NI from LPS to help staff assess eligibility for access to early years services through SureStart, a job made much easier through use of location services.

The final session of the day was for the full conference. This session was kicked off by Nathan Ward of Leica Geosystems who presented on digital realities. Nathan outlined the rapid developments in measurement technologies from wearable laser scanning to UAVs to mobile mapping of underground utilities. Quote of the day from Nathan was "you can't plan what you can't measure".

The final presentation from the day was from Paul Synnott of Esri Ireland who spoke on 'Reshaping our mindset - A Customer Value Perspective.' Paul explained that to understand value, it is important that we do so as it is perceived by our customers and stakeholders – not value as it is defined by vendors.

The day was rounded off with a panel session of the AGI NI Gold sponsors – Ciaran Kirk, Paul Synnott, Nathan Ward and Brad Fisher. Paul's view was discussed and the future was generally agreed to be bright for the industry with Ciaran Kirk predicting that "Geo will be a success when the technology is taken for granted and not seen as complex".

To round off a successful conference, delegates were invited to indulge in a few GeoDrinks to enjoy the last of the day's sunshine. All in all a very successful conference and as one of the delegates said "The conference made me realise the need for joined-up thinking and sharing of information and ideas, between all the industry professionals, both in terms of enabling us to meet our own objectives and those of our customers going into the future. Cooperation would seem to be key," John Corry, Omagh and Fermanagh District Council.

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