

The UK on a World Stage



Whether or not you're a fan of the boat race, Cambridge becomes the centre of the universe at least once every four years – even when it morphs into Oxford. I'll explain.

The Cambridge Conference is an event that invites geospatial leaders from around the world to meet, share ideas and developments, and renew their enthusiasm for the innovative use of geography in person. This year, the conference was held in Oxford at Keeble College, and hosted by the Conference's originators, Ordnance Survey. I was honoured to be invited along, to take part as a guest at the Cambridge Conference dinner. Quite by chance, I sat next to former AGI Chair, Alistair MacDonald.

He told me some fascinating stories about his time in the Directorate of Overseas Survey. Even though geo-technology was in its infancy 25 years ago, the Directorate of Overseas Survey still had an important remit to export UK geospatial survey expertise. Today, despite the increasing competition of global geospatial offerings, there is clearly just as much interest in what the UK has to offer. [Geospatial Media](#) ranked the UK in March 2017 as second to the USA in a worldwide study of geospatial readiness. In June 2017 the Open Knowledge Foundation updated the index tracking the state of open government data (<https://index.okfn.org/place/>), and we still see the UK in second place –but of course, there are many ways to measure geospatial adoption or maturity, most of which are subjective and open to debate!

My ambition as Chair of the AGI is to see us coming out on top on the world stage – but that will take time. How can we make sure the UK is taking advantage of our homegrown expertise, knowledge, and insights? We have some of the world's most detailed geographic information at our fingertips; we've become great advocates for opening up access to data, and you'll find Brits on the programme at many international geospatial events.

But how can we ensure that citizens benefit from what we do? And that our country thrives on the world stage by getting more from the data its cities have already generated? We all know that national policy decisions depend on a contextual understanding of what will be affected, how, when and where – but perhaps it is time to remind ourselves how these four elements could be better connected, and thriving, as a result of using geospatial data.

At any and every opportunity, it's important for AGI members – and the wider community – to advocate the value of geographic information. In every scenario, cross-sector. I am delighted that, on this front, AGI has been able to make significant progress in recent months.

Damian Testa has been appointed as Senior Public Affairs manager, a jointly funded role with the Royal Geographical Society with IBG under our memorandum of understanding. He's ideally placed to position our message on the value of geospatial information, and has already met some of our leading industry bodies in land and property; engaged with the Geography in Government Group, and looked at the use of GI across the network of Local Enterprise Partnerships.

In consultation with AGI Scotland and the RGS-IBG Transport, Economic Geography and Urban Geography Research Groups, Damian is also compiling a response to Transport Scotland's call for Evidence for their National Transport Strategy and he's been reviewing the recently drafted briefing note on Earth Observation prepared by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.

At the AGI, we're determined to make ourselves heard: geospatial is essential, and the UK has a lot to offer. If you're curious about getting involved with our advocacy work, or you'd like to stay updated on what we're doing to support you and your work, I urge you to stay in touch – and, of course, to come along to Smart Geospatial (#GeoCom17) in October 2017.

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