

FIG-INTERGEO: the World Cup for Surveyors

Barriers exist throughout the world when different languages, cultures, and even industries come together. Finding common ground where these barriers do not limit productive engagement is challenging.

While attending a World Cup soccer match in Germany this year, I quickly came across a language barrier, since I do not speak German and many locals did not completely understand English. When I tried to explain where I was from in the U.S.—originally from Maine, but recently relocated to California—they did not fully understand. They knew the location of California, but didn't know where Maine is and asked me to draw a map and point to it. I did so and explained that from central Maine to southern California is about 5,000 kilometers driving distance. With a significant language barrier, we were able to communicate with a distance and a map sketched on a scrap piece of paper. How was this possible?

The language of mapping and surveying has provided a means of communication that transcends languages providing common ground. This has evolved through history and continues to evolve. Christopher Columbus, an Italian credited with the discovery of America, was sailing for Spain. John Cabot, another Italian (Giovanni Caboto) is credited with the discovery of Newfoundland while under the charge of England. These early means of communicating were with maps, latitudes and longitudes, log books, sextant and octant observations, among other means.

Today there are many more users of geographic information other than ship captains and explorers. As the number of geographic information users grows, so do the language of geography and the uses of geographic information. In order to meet the needs of the world to communicate geographically, increased collaboration among geographic information professionals becomes critical.

The INTERGEO DVW and the FIG XXXIII Congress meeting in Munich October 8–13, 2006, provides a venue for this collaboration. Conference themes include Professional Standards and Practice, Professional Education, Spatial Information Management, Hydrography, Engineering

Surveys, Cadastre and Land Management, Spatial Planning and Development, Valuation and the Management of Real Estate, and Construction Economics and Management.

Along with this collaboration, an increase in geographic information users and uses leads to a demand for more data and more accurate data. Geographic information that spans across large areas introduces complexity with geographic communication. Geographic data types are not the same. Coordinate systems, datums, and spatial reference systems are not necessarily designed to operate with each other. This drives the integration of traditional and modern survey measurements and geodesy with geographic data management technology and GIS - and increases the ability to communicate geographically. Held during Geodetic Week in Germany, FIG-INTERGEO is a great place to learn of these new technologies and trends.

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The trend of collaboration in the interest of geographic communication continues in North America following the FIG-INTERGEO model. In 2008, the Geospatial Information and Technology and Association (GITA) and American Congress on Surveying and Mapping (ACSM) will co-locate their annual conferences in Seattle. This can be viewed as a North American FIG-INTERGEO. As with FIG-INTERGEO, this cooperation of professionals yields great benefits to the conference attendees.



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This geographic collaboration has grown beyond cooperating professional associations and is being modeled in North America with the Geospatially Enabling Community Collaboration (GECCo) initiative by GITA. This initiative assists communities with emergency response and recovery by developing methods and procedures at the local level to communicate geographically. Initiated in Honolulu, Hawaii, by GITA and supported by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC), GECCo is now beginning in half a dozen North American communities and continues to spark interest both in the US and internationally. This collaboration leverages the ability to use the common language of geography to overcome typical obstacles to cooperation in emergency situations. As the FIG-INTERGEO model is being replicated in other parts of the world, so will the GECCo model.

In the spirit of the 2006 World Cup hosts, Germany, FIG-INTERGEO promises to be a world-class event. Attendance is expected to be more than 15,000 with over 500 exhibitors, and at least 80 countries represented. This event is the World Cup for surveyors.

Ich hoffe, Sie in Deutschland zu sehen. (I hope to see you in Germany.)

Olé!