

Editor Stephen Booth introduces reflections and reports on the Munich FIG Congress in October.



FIG Munich – Reflections & Reports

By Stephen Booth, Ruth Adams and Nick Day

Trying to cover even a tiny fraction of the many sessions at FIG last year was all but impossible. The accompanying Intergeo event was an added but essential distraction for us to cover. Therefore to my shame, I managed to attend only one full FIG session. I did attend the opening ceremony and I do concur, generally, with Malcolm Draper's comments in last issue's *Undercurrents* about the proceedings not being in English. It was unclear when we entered the hall that proceedings would be in German and the translation sticks offered at the entrance might, for all we knew, have been translating the proceedings into German! Let's move on.

Outstanding presentations

The session I attended was on hydrography and it heard three outstanding presentations; one is published as a written article in this issue. Aably chaired by Steve Shipman (a former chair of the Geomatics Faculty), it heard papers from **Dr Volker Böder**, **Ed Danson** and **Ruth Adams**.

Optimisation of hydrographic positioning and attitude determination is a project to develop an integrated sensor system that will respond to severe sea states and reduce the error budget. Dr Volker, whose university in Hamburg is the only one in Germany to offer a two-year post grad in hydrography, showed us a robotic arm with sensors able to test for a variety of sea states up to 20° above azimuth (beyond which it becomes unstable).

Ruth Adams introduced the new FIG *Guide on developing vertical reference frames for hydrography*. The document has four case studies including the UK's new VORF, which allows survey without directly measuring tides. She paid tribute to those who helped over the two years it took to prepare the guide. It must have indeed been a labour of great love as one critical respondent sent an email longer than the final publication! There is more on this in Ruth's own report below of Commission 4's work and activities at FIG.

Ed Danson's paper on *Understanding LiDAR bathymetry for shallow water and coastal mapping* was very much focused on the economics and technology of this technique. You can read more on this in Ed's excellent article on page 30 of this issue.

Nick Day is also critical of the planning of the event, which saw delegates having to travel by train (including a change) each day from Munich city centre to the out of town conference and exhibition centre. This arrangement reduces contact time and networking possibilities (although subway cars did throw up odd bedfellows at times). The simultaneous holding of

the Intergeo (which itself always has a busy conference for local German surveyors) was a mistake in my view. It was a major distraction and, together with its own conference, meant that FIG as an event was diluted. It is always inevitable that at FIG there will be more delegates from the host country than any other but in Munich it was overwhelming. The combining of the congress with local events is to be avoided in my view.

I appreciate, perhaps more than most, that the economics of FIG only works if there is an accompanying exhibition. The global (and local) supplier companies to our business do look on it as an opportunity to launch major new products but they do need a significant audience to justify the heavy expenditure of building stands and funding staff for international travel. For the future, there seems no reason why the FIG congress exhibition should not be open free of charge to visitors (local or international) while reserving the congress for fee-paying delegates only.

Nick Day

For me, the most interesting papers' session was on Project Management (**Commission 1 – TS 57**). I lap that stuff up! There were excellent presentations from **Prof Ralf Schroth**, **Dr Tom Kennie**, **Rob Mahoney**, and **Leonie Newnham**. Prof Schroth dealt in depth with organisation of international engineering projects, citing current political and marketing trends; he followed with tendering processes, pre-qualification phases, protected markets, on-line bidding and risk factors – hedging, futures and tax regulations, etc. A must read for any serious businessman! Dr Kennie's paper concerned strategic planning and practice and questioned the seriousness of many company's plans, vision and mission statements. Were they just going through the motions (usually in my experience!)? Were they really adding value or were they just rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic?

Why, oh why, did the organisers think they could stuff as many as eight papers into a 90-minute session? A question asked by many delegates. Quantity ahead of quality? Often, even if not all speakers turned up, there was minimal time for questions. Surely this is one of the major benefits of these get-togethers. Otherwise, one might just as well stay home and view the proceedings on the CD. And, please organisers, don't arrange for FIG to be in conjunction with anything as massive as Intergeo again (18,000 attendees, I understand).

Although it gave us a flavour of Munich life, the many evening events, including the RICS bash,

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