



Canada's first Geospatial Advancement Conference was held this past week (March 3rd-5th) in Ottawa, Ontario. The goal of the conference was to bring together Canada's leaders in geomatics to further the discussion on developing a National Geo strategy in light of the country's rapidly accelerating Geomatics/GIS industry. The Geomatics Association of Nova Scotia (GANS) entered into a media partnership with conference organizers and in turn received two complimentary passes to the event. GANS offered the passes to the membership on a first come, first serve basis and awarded one to me, Lucie Kendell (VP, GANS Board) and Harold MacNeil (GANS Corporate Sponsor, Halifax Water).

Seeing as it was the first year for such a conference in Canada and the fact that it was organized by an international conference organizing company (Worldwide Business Research, WBR), attendance was small but mighty. I would guess approximately 150 people attended (including speakers & exhibitors). I would also guess that less than ¼ of attendees were women. Several federal and military departments were represented (i.e. NRCAN, DFO, CIS, DND, CAF, FIA, HRSDC, etc. – I apologize for the acronyms, these are really long named departments!). It was no surprise to see several attendees from Ontario, including representatives from the province, various municipalities, and some associations. We also met attendees from British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. There were several people in the audience involved with the Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table and there was a lot of buzz during the networking and in presentations around their strategy development. Other associations present included CIG (both national and local branches), OGC, GSDI, Ontario Association of Remote Sensing (OARS), and the president of both the European Umbrella Organization for Geographic Information (EUROGI) and the Irish Organization for Geographic Information (IRLOGI).



exploration efforts and general safety. The Canadian Ice Service and US National Ice Centre could be considered a model example of collaboration efforts in the Arctic. On a more local scale, the city of Calgary's EMO efforts around the flooding in Calgary last summer (2013); New Brunswick's EMO response during the train derailment in January 2014; and Quebec City's management of the legionnaires disease outbreak in 2012, all portrayed successful collaboration efforts under stressful situations and how important geomatics support can be in first response planning and solution building, in addition to post-disaster mapping.

Successful collaboration is founded in a common need.

It was also interesting to see the levels of support for geomatics technology development. Companies like Tecterra providing funding and tecconnect providing a unique "incubator facility" to help develop technology companies.

2) Data

One could talk data and only data for the full three days, I'm sure! The big topics that were mentioned in most talks were certainly 1) Open Data and 2) Big Data. Nearly everything we do and every decision we make has some kind of geo context. That makes for a lot of potential data being collected. But what do we want to accomplish with this data? Asking the questions upfront enables us to articulate business outcomes and leverage the true value of both small and big data. In large part, the question of open data boiled down to data literacy. We make data sets available but have we communicated effectively that they are available? Are they truly accessible? Are they useful?

Other hot topics included data management, distribution, authority, accessibility, high speed/real time access, REST endpoints, metadata, risk, how to develop appropriate metrics, internet of things, data literacy, and many more.

3) Education

Nigel Day, head of the geomatics section of the Eastern Region of Ontario suggested that "the Microsoft Mistake", whereby the word geomatics appears as a spelling mistake with a squiggly red underline in MSOffice products, is harmful and yet representative of the state of geomatics in Canada. While the majority of presenters from Canada comfortably used the term geomatics to encompass all things spatial (one even proudly claiming the Canadian term), it was acknowledged that there is a definite education gap where many youth entering post-secondary studies don't know what geomatics means and don't consider it a viable field for study. Beyond that, their parents have likely never heard the term and if that's the case, there's no way their children are going to study the field.

Geomatics professionals make mapping look easy and it becomes a question of needing a professional, or can "anyone" do it? This is once again an education point. As with all industries, we need key subject matter experts and trained analysts.

We've started to supply a vast amount of open data and data services/systems, but education on data/system literacy for the common citizen as well as department managers is crucial to success, funding, and further support.

4) The Future

Mladen Stokic, President of Hexagon Geospatial – Integraph suggested that as an industry we have failed to move beyond the modeling to actually communicate the results to the user. He said we need to close the gap between the data and the information. This is how we'll win over our managers and ensure senior level buy in. We need to support our efforts with better metrics and documentation. We need to communicate how the integration of geomatics in projects will improve bottom lines, timelines, and ensure a return on investment. We need to sell solutions tools rather than mapping tools.

Trevor Taylor, Director Americas with the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) told us that if you don't know where you're going, you're going to end up somewhere else. There were a lot of challenges put forward by each presenter and not a lot of solutions offered. I guess there's comfort in the fact that everyone is facing the same problems! There seems to be support of The Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table initiatives. There seems to be hope that improved collaboration efforts on a local to a national scale will help to define a shared Canadian geomatics vision.

I feel extremely fortunate to have attended the first Canadian conference on geospatial advancement. While a lot of challenges were presented, it was apparent to me that there is also a lot of enthusiasm and support for the future. Being in a room with so many leaders in the industry was quite a memorable experience. Thank you to GANS and Halifax Water for the opportunity!

Submitted by Lucie Kendell



Above left: Ottawa Convention Center, location of Geospatial Advancement Canada 2014

Above right (left to right):

Ross Findlay - Geospatial Fusion Specialist, City of Calgary, AB

Robert Harris – Geomatics Manager, Public Security & Corrections, Gov't of NB

Myrone Lopez – Enterprise Architect, SNSMR

Lucie Kendell – Geomatics Association of NS/Halifax Water