

About the FIG Foundation, Conference

Interview with John D Hohol

If you attend most geo-related conferences it is most probable that you know John D Hohol, head of delegation ACSM FIG Forum and president of the FIG Foundation. At the International ESRI User Conference in San Diego we had the opportunity to exchange thoughts on the FIG Foundation, the importance of conferences and the relationship between traveling and appreciation.

By Sonja de Bruijn



John D Hohol, head of delegation ACSM FIG Forum and President of the FIG Foundation.

FIG Congress

Hohol's first experience with FIG was in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1981 as an exhibitor, when he was vice president of Berntsen, a company producing survey instruments. Since that time he attended every FIG congress and all FIG working weeks. He was involved in the American Bureau where the administration of FIG during 1999-2002 was seated, which ended with the FIG congress in Washington D.C. in 2002. Besides this he was also deputy congress director and as such responsible for the exhibition. At that time he was also on the Board of Directors of the FIG Foundation and became president back in 2003.

Promoting Education

And there is more, namely the FIG Foundation. The organization aims at promoting education in surveying to those people that don't have access to it. Hohol: "One of the goals of the Foundation is to raise funds and also provide products that we can distribute to students and programs that we can help further their progress in education. This might be computers but also textbooks in their native language or a, to us, simple surveying instrument. Because each country or region approaches surveying and surveying education differently it is difficult to determine general needs."

Professors, teachers or students wanting to travel to a different country to attend a conference, present a paper or do research, or those who are interested in attending a course or class abroad can also apply to the FIG Foundation. Primarily the funding comes through donations from people involved in FIG. "We solicit donations at each working week and each congress", adds Hohol. "Jack Dangermond, founder and president of ESRI, for example is the honorary chairman of the Foundation helping to gather donations and so on. Both ESRI and Intergraph have a program where they provide a funding through a discount in software where we get a funding in as well."

The FIG Foundation normally receives 10 to 15 requests a year. Who thinks the grants are enormous is mistaken. "We limit them because we are trying to grow the foundation amount so that in the future we can grant larger grants", explains Hohol. "Until we reach that level we give smaller grants of which the largest would be 2,000 euros. This is in fact quite a lot of money in most cases."

From 2004 FIG is taking administration of the meetings and working groups and future congresses. The idea is to have representation on the continent globally so that FIG has representatives from different regions such as Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Currently Holger Magel is president of FIG. The new structure will be applied with the election of the new FIG president and vice presidents at the INTERGEO/FIG congress in Munich, Germany.

ferences and Global Communities

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In some cases we feel we can do more with many smaller grants.”

All Aspects

This year Hohol will also be present at INTERGEO, an exhibition he has seen growing exponentially over the past 16 years since he has been attending. “There are now exhibitors from all over the world and they represent all aspects of surveying and mapping and geoinformation.” Hohol says another big change has been the involvement of FIG. “Since 2001 we are part of the INTERGEO program. This means a combined program with presentations in English and German, as such broadening the spectrums.” Does Hohol think conferences are still important, in spite of the fact that there is the Internet where you can easily find all kinds of information? “Definitely”, is his reply. “The Internet is an amazing resource and you will always find the information you need, readily

available. But if you are looking for a product you can only see it as a two-dimensional representation. At a conference you can test and try out software, play with it, or get the look & feel of a GPS station or a survey instrument.” Nevertheless there is also a problem. Hohol: “There are so many conferences nowadays that it is getting more difficult for people to get the funding to go there. A broad conference like INTERGEO means finding everything in one place. The boundary between surveying and GIS is fading which means conferences like these offer good opportunities for networking between the two professions.”



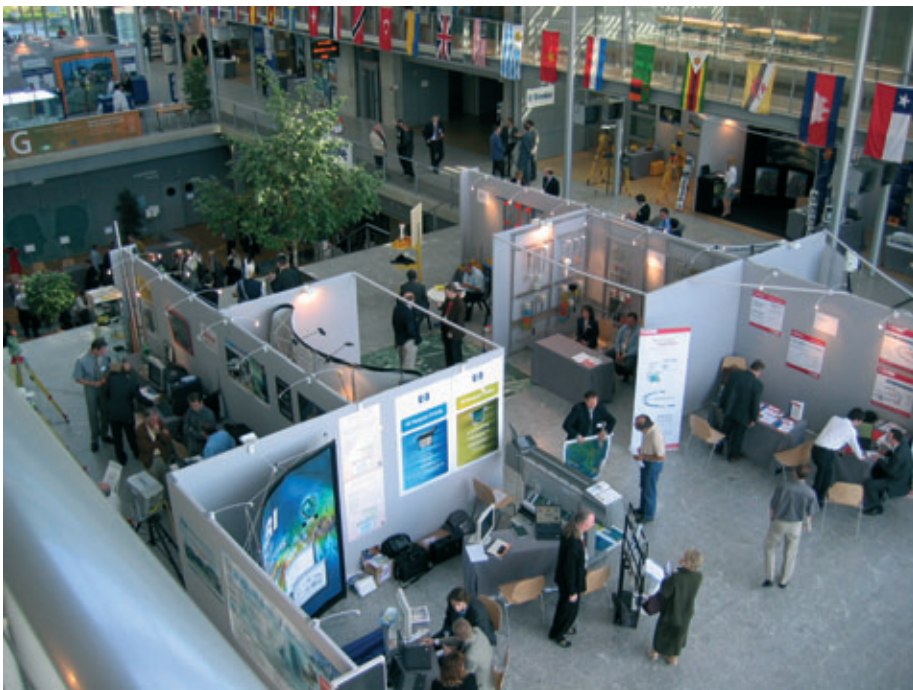
2003 Working week: part of the exhibition.

Travel Around the World

Hohol's wants to finish the interview with a message to the readers of GeoInformatics. “In my involvement in FIG and the surveying community in general there is one thing that I found in my travels around the world: even though there are language and cultural differences, you have the same problems everywhere in terms of technical issues and approaches. So I think it is extremely important to use FIG as a resource to be able to come together and share ideas and discuss and find solutions and to network. You get a good appreciation of the culture and issues such as what the challenges are for fellow practitioners in a different country as well as appreciation for what you have. I would like to encourage people, especially surveyors, to go out in order to fully understand and realize that we are a global community.”

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The International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) can be found at www.fig.net.



2003 Working week: part of the exhibition.