

AGI Changes

The UK Association for Geographic Information (AGI) year has been one of great success. Membership income has grown by 17%. A greater diversity of members is evident. A strong events programme, including a sell-out AGI conference in Stratford upon Avon took place and a great deal of activity in the countries under 'the AGI umbrella' occurred along with the emergence of several new AGI special interest groups. All the financial and non-financial evidence shows that at 18 years old, the AGI is fit for purpose, but will it remain so in the years to come?

The mission of the AGI is "to maximise the use of geographic information for the benefit of the citizen, good governance and commerce". It does this through "influencing, informing and acting". Is this mission relevant to the future we face?

What is that future?

AGI has seen big changes; previously the market was dominated by big 'professional' systems, with specialist datasets, and expert users. To coin a phrase used at this year's conference 'paleo geography'. We see a move now to user applications where the user may be unaware of the concept of 'geographic information'. Developments such as location-based services, integration of GPS positioning in other devices such as mobile phones, the provision of free web map services and user-created content have moved the power away from the traditional big players and government as the main data supplier, with many new players entering the market. Geographic information is becoming less 'special', with the move to considering the geographic aspect of all information, as demonstrated by the introduction of geographical searches on Google - the 'neo geography' as it is described.

Changes within the AGI

In keeping with the changes in the GI industry, there have been many changes in the AGI. Where previously the GI community was mainly restricted to specialist areas in survey and mapping, central and local government, utilities, environmental organisations, it now has a much broader range of members, with many more commercial bodies and non-specialist users.

The AGI has responded to this by creating a regional structure with groups in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and well as creating Special Interest Groups (SIGs) in several new areas. The new INSPIRE working group is an excellent example.

AGI has become more established in terms

of its role as a respected body, and now regularly gets invited to submit responses to government consultations. It is invited to sit on various bodies such as the UK government's advisory Geographic Information Panel, the National Underground Assets Group as well as being an INSPIRE SDIC and running the UK Geographic Standards Committee, IST36.

The membership structure is likely to expand to multiple levels of membership, with different categories receiving different level of service. In particular, there will be 'professional' members, as a result of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) scheme and Chartered Geographer, and this is likely to be a major focus for membership.

The organisation will become more 'virtual', with more meetings and discussions carried out by electronic means and telephonic conferencing. This will require an expanded website with more facilities for greater interaction with members. This should lead to greater participation of members in the decision making process.

AGI has established a public position whereby it is seen as an independent voice not representing any vested interest. This will

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be expanded to provide expert advice and commentary to government and others. In particular, there will be much to be done as regards implementation of INSPIRE, involving education, provision of expert advice and consultation with users and other aspects of data availability. AGI's links with mainland Europe will be ever important.

The AGI is and will continue to be a leading proponent of the correct use of geographic information by the wider community both in the UK and mainland Europe. The mission remains the same.