



GIS Europe

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Europe's Geographic Information Systems magazine

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EUROPEAN
GEODEMOGRAPHICS

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THE OBJECT-ORIENTED
APPROACH (PART 2)

Potential for the user interface

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Graphics also found the degree of co-ordination unimpressive. 'I have to give a presentation this evening,' she said, 'and I've already been to four or five information desks without being very sure about anything but the location of room in which it will be held.'

Peter Savleda of Genasys Madrid expressed surprise to find 'so many visitors from Eastern Europe and so few from Spain' and blamed it on a 'repressed' Spanish GIS market. However, he said he was pleased with the degree of knowledgeable ability of visitors. 'The days of people asking: "What is this GIS?" seem to be over,' Savleda said. 'People stopping at our stand know what they are looking at and, generally, what they are looking for—even if not many of them are end users.'

Added Aline Duplaa of France's Scot Conseil: 'We are finding that visitors who stop at our stand know about GIS and want demonstrations and information relevant to their own business needs.'

Though the European-French dichotomy was very apparent (for instance, the ESRI stand, though staffed by people from seven nations, was clearly French while the Intergraph stand

was pan-European in feeling), some French exhibitors were clearly looking outward. Catherine Le Cochenec of SPOT IMAGE pointed out that 85 per cent of her firm's revenues are from exports, and was very pleased to find SPOT IMAGE's stand visited by 'non-experts from all over Europe who realize that remote sensing and GIS are becoming more and more linked.'

One innovative aspect of MARI/EGIS '94 was a marathon (five hours plus) special session co-sponsored by SPOT IMAGE and ESRI, Inc., which tested both visitors' endurance and Anglo-French linguistic amity. Though instantaneous translation was available, and some papers were delivered in English, the tone of the event was defiantly Gallic even to the point of one member of a culminating 'round table' apologizing for using an English word where a French one wouldn't quite do.

Although the session was co-sponsored by ESRI, Larry Ayers, executive vice president of Intergraph Corporation, stuck it out on stage for the entire marathon in order to deliver a 15-minute talk illustrated by four slides. 'I was darned,' he said, 'if I was going to

let ESRI steal the day without getting a word in for Intergraph.'

Another innovative aspect of MARI/EGIS '94 was an all-day conference on Road Navigation and Database, sponsored by Ortech and presenting a multinational range of experts on the subject. According to Franck Bleuzen, this conference—aimed at commercial and industrial types, not boffins—is a precursor for future special MARI-allied conferences including one on geo-marketing next year.

To sum up, MARI/EGIS wasn't so much a show as two shows—one French and for the most part quite domestic in feeling and the other pan-European—coexisting quite happily in a single venue. Where the two intersected—SPOT IMAGE, for instance—one got a glimpse of the super-Euro show which could be. But not yet.

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Conference report: where are the lost leaders—and presenters?

BY SEPPE CASSETTARI

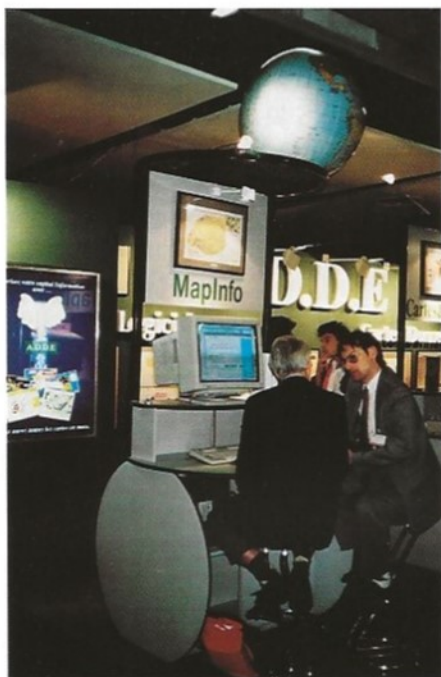
The fifth EGIS conference, set in the context of an expanding European Union and more fully integrated continent, demonstrated a GIS community which is also extending its reach. It was attended by over 700 delegates from 45 different countries. A total of 301 papers were submitted and

the two-volume proceedings have a staggering 2,145 pages. The GIS community is as prolific with the written word as it is geographically diverse.

But what did it all achieve? Will the proceedings be used for more than rather expensive, environmentally-unfriendly doorstops? The EGIS conference is essentially a gathering of those of the academic persuasion, and therefore I was looking for some academic validation of GIS applications and pointers to future conceptual and technical developments. The former was there in abundance but the latter seemed to be lacking.

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Where are the Jack Dangermonds, Michael Goodchilds and David Rhinds of tomorrow?

Looking forward

There were many interesting and valid papers on the application of GIS to a wide range of problems. Few of the contributors had a background in geography, a fact which confirms the interdisciplinary nature of the subject—something the GIS community rightly wishes to promote. But it was also clear that GIS is currently characterized by the 'reinvention of the wheel'. The problem is that many current GIS users are not from the 'traditional' GIS disciplines and remain either unaware of the body of work on these subject areas or else do not have access to the literature.

The GIS industry has some fundamental issues to tackle and resolve. These range from the application of true spatial statistics in a user-friendly environment to generic decision-support strategies. A key area is the issue of metadata. We still have little idea how to tackle accuracy and currency in geographic databases. These subjects were, to a large extent, avoided by the conference, no doubt because they are difficult to solve.

In many ways the structure of the conference and the type of papers it attracts exacerbates this problem. The number of really innovative and new contributions is few. Perhaps the organizers need to be more selective, to exercise a degree of control and to stimulate those areas not otherwise developed.

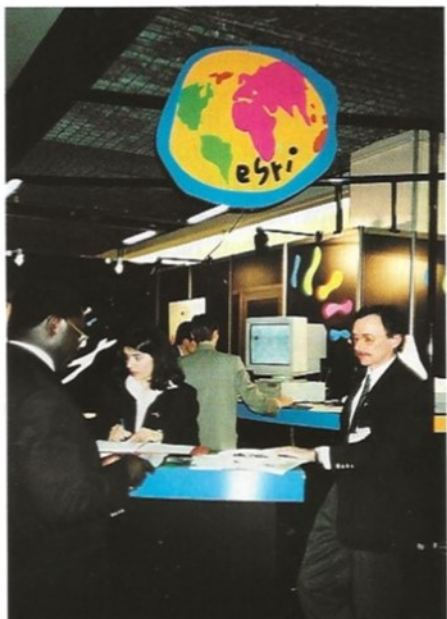
GIS is currently characterized by the 'reinvention of the wheel'.

Leadership

What is also clear from this conference is that GIS lacks innovative, forward thinking and progressive leadership. Where are the Jack Dangermonds, Michael Goodchilds and David Rhinds of tomorrow? We need to see their like presenting and inspiring the next generation of spatial information solutions.

The quality of contributions varied greatly, both in terms of written content and presentation. I admire those who tackle any such undertaking—particu-

larly when they do so in a second language—but as a lecturer, I do not appreciate lack of preparation, poor visual aids or a reading from the text.



Finally, can I add a plea to all those who were scheduled to be present but failed to arrive at their sessions? The credibility of the GIS community is undermined by what is becoming an all too prevalent disdain for the audience. We spend too much time and effort attending conferences to learn from those who, as presenters, hold themselves up as leaders of the European GIS community, only to be disappointed much of the time.

Future directions

EGIS could help GIS become the conceptual home for integrated technologies in the latter half of the 1990s. For this to occur, however, EGIS's development must be nurtured and guided. The organizers must take a pro-active role. The integration of UDMS and AM/FM with EGIS in 1995 is a positive step forward and one most EGIS '94 attendees seemed to welcome. □

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