

Dear Mr.Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and honour for me to deliver a welcome address to the participants of the 2006 Conference of the Association of Geographic Information Laboratories in Europe.

My message is to underline the beneficial role that horizontal networking plays towards geographic information on a national level. It strengthens the cohesion between the institutions and organisations working in different disciplines, especially in the fields of Research and Technology Development as well as Education and Training.

More than ten years ago, when Jacques Delors's White Book on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment – the challenges and ways forward into the 21st century was published by the European Commission, and the European Umbrella Organisation for Geographic Information (EUROGI) was established, committed representatives from seven Hungarian professional organisations formally agreed to establish the national GI association called HUNAGI. According to the legal prescriptions from the court registration, five additional institutions were invited to join in 1995.

The 12 Founding Members were the following:

College of Geoinformatics, University of West-Hungary
gita Hungary Geospatial Information & Technology
Association

Hungarian Academic and Research Network Association

Hungarian Association for Settlement Development and
Renewal

Hungarian Association of Public Administration Informatics

Hungarian Geographical Society

Hungarian Society of Surveying, Mapping and Remote
Sensing

Hungarian Space Research Office

Hungarian Urbanistical Society

HUNGIS Foundation

John v. Neumann Society for Computing Sciences

Technology Transfer Center

Since that time this Hungarian umbrella association on GI became an organisation with over 100 institutional members and plays beneficial role, not only for the public and private sectors strengthening PPPs, but for the academia and organised civil societies as well.

The mission goals are

- to promote, stimulate, encourage and support the development and use of geographic information and appropriate information technology,
- to foster the institutional links and cooperation between the multidisciplinary GI communities in Hungary and in abroad.

HUNAGI is a coalition of R+TD institutions, data and service providers, facilitators, as well as added-value and solution providers. It also comprises the end user community, usually a network of academic institutions, industry, governmental and non-governmental organisations. It speaks out on behalf of local communities and citizens. The geographical location of its members are well distributed throughout Hungary. Communication is a strong aspect of HunAGI and members benefit from steady knowledge transfer and dissemination of user-tailored information. The main communication tool is the Internet, using web-based Newsletters, interactive newsblog and frequently maintained website, which strengthens status and competition.

HUNAGI is non-profit and is significantly dependent upon the dedication of volunteers. The umbrella nature guarantees a wide variety of GI sectors due to horizontal networking.

Many of the incorporated professional organisations, education and research institutions and public agencies offer a long tradition of experience, good reputation and rich knowledge. Among the Founding Members, the Hungarian Society for Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year. Another one has even longer tradition: the Hungarian Geographical Society was founded in the 19th Century.

Additional advantages include HunAGI's political independence whilst having close links to governmental agencies, and HUNAGI's flexibility in domestic and international cooperation. These values empower HUNAGI to act as an efficient mediator, lobbyist, coordinator, advisor and consultancy partner especially in policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

During the past several months, HUNAGI was invited to discuss initiatives and actions related to GEOSS, to review documents related to the National Development Plan and recently, to formulate an opinion on the Lisbon Strategy implementation at the international conference organised by the European and Hungarian Economic and Social Committees.

HUNAGI was invited to the DG JRC Conference – arranged by the National Technology Development Office hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. All these actions and events are reflected on the website www.hunagi.hu and the newsblog <http://hunagi.blogspot.com>.

HunAGI was recently mandated by the Strategic Planning Subcommittee of the Interministerial Coordination Committee on Information Society, to facilitate the formulation of Hungary's Strategy for a National Spatial Data Infrastructure and its implementation, according to the INSPIRE Directive (which by the way is expected to be in force in 2007). The Draft Strategy document was released for public debate on the Internet, after being announced at the GIS Open 2006 Conference held in Székesfehérvár on March 16-17.

HUNAGI is a registered Spatial Data Interest Community for the DG JRC with the strength to articulate the user's views and to provide case studies directly or via the Webcastle service of EUROGI. Most recently HUNAGI was invited to serve as correspondent in the Hungarian Board delegated to GEO, the Global Earth Observation Office hosted by WMO in Geneva.

HUNAGI is proactively working on European level in topics such as R+D (EU Framework Programmes), European Spatial

Data Infrastructure (INSPIRE), Public Sector Information (eContentPlus), GMES and GALILEO. There is a close collaboration with EUROGI, advising their Secretary General and offering HunAGI experts to their Working and Advisory Groups related to Data, Applications, Users and International Affairs. HUNAGI had a seat in the EUROGI Executive Committee between 1998-2005. HunAGI also has strong links with other Pan European associations including the Permanent Committee on Cadastre, GISIG, and some European Institutions including DG JRC, DG InfSo, DG Envi, Eurostat and DG Research. Moreover, HUNAGI members are directly linked to renowned organisations and institutions including EuroGeoSurveys, EuroGeographics, AGILE, EARSeL, EuroSDR, EFITA, EEA and the European Space Agency.

On a global level, HUNAGI is a member of the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Association, with a seat on their Board and actively participating at all of their conferences since 1996. Other fora where HUNAGI and its member representatives are active includes ISDE and ISPRS. HUNAGI core member representatives received leading positions in the international organisations FIG and ICA.

Beyond the AGILE 2006 Conference, HUNAGI members are preparing internationally acknowledged events on Earth

Observation (CEOS WGISS/WGCV), e-Governance and Knowledge Management (FIG) this Spring.

All these activities are carried out in line with the mission goals of HUNAGI. They improve the efficiency of exchange of views and ensure more visibility on the state-of-art of the use of geographic information and its latest advances in research and technology.

This is also the aim of the high profile AGILE conferences and in this sense I wish all participants a good meeting and a remarkable stay in Hungary.