

GEO Week 2018

The GEO plenary was held this year in Kyoto. Two days of side-events were followed by the 2 day plenary session. It was the first for Gilberto Câmara, the new director of the secretariat following the term of Barb Ryan who reached the end of her mandate in June.

We organised a side-event on the Value of Earth Observations which became a joint event with GeoCradle. It was very hard to put together this year due to late designation and difficulty of taking contact with potential speakers. Whereas last year in Washington there was a strong participation from the US side encouraged and led by NASA and NOAA, this year there was little connection with the hosts and the GEO secretariat were stretched. Maybe the success in Washington led to an overstretch as there were too many side-events taking place at the same time so spreading the audience very thin.

The workshop was around the importance of regional initiatives to demonstrate value to stakeholders. GeoCradle has been very successful in pulling stakeholders together in the Balkans, Middle East and North Africa. Our workshop had 4 sessions dedicated to the role of regional initiatives, how to pull more research results into business, how to demonstrate the value of EO, and finally how to develop a future approach. We had a good participation and good audience even if we had hoped for more.

The success probably comes from the group which it creates and to maintain momentum around the 2 initiatives. GeoCradle has now been accepted into the GEO work-programme and, even if the core project funding ends in November, various means will be used to sustain the network which has been built up, and this workshop placed some foundations for this. In the future, the goal will be to increase the spread of the network to other countries in the region.

The maturity indicators and its overall methodology has been one success of the project which is being proposed into other projects and to various organisations. It is useful for understanding the gaps which exist in resources and where to place the focus of energy to increase EO uptake.

In terms of the Value of Earth Observation, for us, it is centred on the Sentinel Benefits analysis which we work on. New cases are being developed including short cases which focus on the story rather than analysing benefits in economic terms. The first short case was published on Peatland Management in the UK and further cases will appear at regular intervals.

A workshop is being planned on this very important topic, to take place in the first week of July next year. It will be hosted by ESRIN, Frascati and will include an open review of our project work on value-chain analysis. More information will be posted on our web-site as it becomes available.

During the plenary several topics stood out. The focus on EO to support the UN SDG's attracted a lot of attention. There are many initiatives going on here and a call was made for the GEO secretariat to make a stronger co-ordination between them. EARSC is following the activities especially that led by UN-GGIM and the project work under ESA with the goal to promote the industrial contribution and seek to increase commercial opportunities.

A new category of membership of GEO is foreseen. At present, only nations and international organisations can be members or participating organisations. For some time, GEO has wished to bring the private sector more into the picture. Hence an Associate member can be a company or national body. The rules are to be worked out with the goal to have many Associate members present at the next plenary which will be in Canberra, Australia next year. EARSC will participate to the working group looking at the rights and obligations of Associate members.

Gilberto sprung a surprise during his presentation launching his vision for GEO. He announced his goal to focus on in-situ data and to make this available through a curated cloud data-centre. He also announced that Amazon had made \$1.5m available to start this process and an open call would be launched shortly to attract bids of up to \$100k to contribute to this. It is a massive new departure for GEO which will bear watching very closely. It raises many questions on the future direction.

Alongside the plenary, we were able to hold a business event bringing European and Japanese companies together. The theme was on platforms and I'll write about that next time.