

2 days in Maynooth

Last week I spent a very stimulating 2 days at the 8th Irish Earth Observation symposium (IEOS2014). I was impressed at the organisation and strength of the EO community over there. Tim McCarthy had done a great job to bring together around 120 experts from academia, research institutes and agencies, public users and, with the aid of Barry Fennel, from industry. I was told that it was by far the largest symposium which had been held. In addition there were trade exhibits from several organisations. Both Techworks Marine and Treematics impressed me with their business ideas.

It is good to see this sort of meeting and maybe as EARSC we shall try to attend more. I am not aware of such community meetings in many countries so would be pleased to hear about any which you might be involved in. Whilst EARSC is a European organisation, where there is no local industry association we can stand in at the national level. We have recently played this role in the Netherlands and helped the local industry construct a new programme.

In Ireland, they would like to establish a Collaborative Ground Segment as part of the Copernicus programme. It seems to me that this is a useful step since access to the data is far from yet being assured. A national CGS acts as a focus for all the actors and whilst there is the enthusiasm in Ireland, they still search for the next step to take this forward into a national strategy since there is no level of political support. There is a strong academic interest but this maybe goes along with the fact that the Irish participation to ESA comes under the Ministry of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. Hence a CGS could help rally the various interests and provide a lever for growth on the back of Copernicus.

How to establish a national strategy was a key question addressed during the symposium. The largest panel to which I have ever participated - 37 people in total - discussed the question showing good buy-in from the whole community. It was agreed that a political interest must come first and hence the case must be developed. The ACEOBS concept proposed last year can form the hub of a strategy with a progressive approach to putting it in place. Given that Copernicus is designed to benefit the whole of Europe by providing crucial geo-spatial information to national administrations, we consider that an industrial policy is needed to go alongside the public investment. At EARSC we fully support the Irish industry and the wider EO community to establish a national strategy and are ready to work with any other national organisation which wishes to put a strategic plan in place, as one way of helping the industrial sector to grow.