

Disruption in Space

I have spent the last week at the Geospatial World Forum (GWF) in Hyderabad. During that time I met many new people and had many illuminating conversations. There was a fantastic gala dinner with inter-continental music (Indian Jazz) and of course a lot of delicious Indian dishes. Overall, a demanding but rewarding trip.

The highlight of the week for us was the signing of an MoU between EARSC and the Association of Geospatial Industries for India (AGI). We are extremely pleased and proud to have the opportunity to work more closely with AGI and the companies which are their members. It represents a great achievement in our internationalisation strategy where we seek to help our members find new partners to develop business together. The agreement which was brokered by our good friend Sanjay Kumar, was signed by each secretary general of the respective associations. We were joined by members from both associations who witnessed the occasion.

It is just the first step and our next goal will be to set up one or two specific projects to work on. The agreement offers many possibilities building upon the EU Copernicus programme and that for EU-India for Action 2020.

Whilst in Hyderabad, I participated to the GeoBuiz summit which is the pre-event to the GWF. Here business leaders came together to discuss the geo inspired 4th industrial revolution (GEO4IR). In our panel we addressed the changes taking place in the space sector which are certainly no less significant than those taking place elsewhere. Satellites and space-based observations have a crucial role to play in the evolution of the geospatial business and the shift to on-line services will transform many business models.

I carried this theme also into the AI and IoT summit. Firstly, I observed that the promotional video exposed farm vehicles, homes, cities, cars and many other sensor platforms but not satellites! There are now thousands of satellites generating data and offering connectivity both for other sensors but also between them; satellites are definitely a part of the Internet of Things. Laser links, new sensors, on-board processing are all changing the way satellites work and communicate together. Onweb will have 900 platforms in low earth orbit. Meanwhile, on the ground, new digital technology based on big data, cloud processing, machine learning and blockchain offer new services.

The traditional EO services businesses based on consultancy business models (one product-one client), risk to become replaced by those offering one service to many clients. How will this shake up the value chain will be interesting to see. Will the VA companies establish their own niche? Will they get absorbed in the upstream sector? Will the large digital players become dominant or will we see even further integration with more traditional sector-leading companies increase their span of operations with their existing customers.

It is clear that the next few years will be extremely exciting; a view expressed throughout the GeoBuiz summit! For the many new start-ups and existing value-added companies there will be some fantastic opportunities. The move towards services is getting stronger and it is clear that many are now positioning to take advantage of this trend.