

Open Source GIS conference



Besides listening to the range of presentations, delegates got plenty of opportunity to network during coffee breaks.

The first Open Source GIS conference at the University of Nottingham (arguably the finest, and most open, campus in the country) attracted 150 people. The UK chapter of OS Geo was only set up in January but the level of interest and the number of contributors was impressive. The Centre for Geospatial Science (CGS) at the University of Nottingham hosted the meeting, which had 29 presentations from nine different countries and four workshops, not to mention introductions and lots of networking.

Dr **Suchith Anand** and Professor **Mike Jackson** from the CGS welcomed the delegates and set the scene.

Norwegian national spatial data infrastructure (one of the most advanced in the world); several environmental applications including the British Geological Survey and the British Atmospheric Data Centre. But there was also a strong academic contingent and some private sector end users and intermediaries. Several presentations dealt with individual components of the Open Source "stack" and yet others took an almost philosophical view of the issues. One common issue for academics is that they are torn between the need to teach fundamentals (for which "getting dirty" with the innards of OS is ideal) and the need for training, manifested by students choosing proprietary GIS courses in the belief that they will be more immediately employable.

Reliability and support As with the AGI Open Source meeting in March in Cambridge, several contributions mentioned the greater reliability and the better support for OS GIS software as compared to proprietary versions. Nevertheless, it seems that in-house expertise is essential for the development of useful applications – OS software

Open Campus opens door to OS

Open source software will mean getting dirty with the innards of GIS, as **Robin Waters** discovered when he attended the first UK conference dedicated to the topic.

Note: for clarification readers should note that where the abbreviation OS is used it stands for "open source" and not Ordnance Survey!

Tyler Mitchell, Executive Director of the Open Source Geospatial Foundation, explained how the OS Geo concept has taken off and how it is now becoming a major source of software for serious applications. He claimed that there were now over 400 people working on the software with some 2000+ person years of effort accumulated. Interestingly, ESRI estimate about 13 million lines of code for their current product suite (volunteered by an ESRI employee who had obviously wandered into the meeting by mistake!).

Tim Martin from the Ordnance Survey described their Open Spaces toolkit, which is entirely open source and which provides a platform for developers to exploit different types of Ordnance Survey data in their prototypes. They have already had more than 400 downloads in since it was announced.

Hands-on workshops helped delegates get to grips with OS software.



Up a gum tree? Professor **William Cartwright**, President of the International Cartographic Association, was the final speaker in the opening plenary session. His team at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology is working on 3D visualisation – mainly of urban areas but he noted that they had to create specifically Australasian flora (gum trees, etc) to give their models credibility in their home town!

Observers would have been struck by the eclectic range and official nature of the applications introduced in the two streams of presentations after coffee. Health service facilities and statistics in Ireland; the

does not come, in general, "out of the box".

Workshops in the morning introduced Mapwindow and demonstrated the use of gvSIG Mobile as a mobile client of SDIs. In the afternoon they covered Perl, Python and Ruby (programming languages) and the support of GI datasets through their complete life cycle.

Szabolcs Székács, from the European Commission, explained how they supported OS through the Open Source Observatory and Repository (OSOR www.osor.eu). By trying to get all suppliers to accept a common licence that was available in all official languages of the community, it should lead to much easier procurement and reduced litigation. OSOR also issue guidance for public authorities contemplating the use of open source.

The OSGeo UK AGM that followed the main meeting was attended by about 50 but did not reach any firm conclusions. **Jo Cook**, from Oxford Archaeology, is the Official Representative of the UK Local Chapter of OSGeo and has been largely responsible for promoting it in the UK. There is obviously great interest and there is already a tentative plan to host the FOSS4G Free and Open Source Software for Geospatial in the UK in 2012. This could bring a thousand delegates to Liverpool or Edinburgh following conferences in Sydney (October 2009), Barcelona (Sep 2010). Facebook and LinkedIn groups have been established as well as the website: <http://www.osgeo.org/uk>.

• Images courtesy of Suchith Anand, <http://picasaweb.google.com/suchithanand76/OSGIS2009#>