

UDMS: A Personal Perspective

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UDMS as a Valuable Event

It has been 36 years since my first UDMS, which was also the founding and first Symposium of UDMS. Since then I have attended almost all of the symposia and have observed many changes over that time in technologies, their uses, the people involved and EU GIS activities. Each of the events was of both great professional interest and personally enjoyable. My professional interest is to learn what's new and how it's used, problems to avoid and perspectives as seen from other countries and cultures. These experiences and differences have provided insight of value for my own activities.

I have also found the events entertaining, from banquets in castles, town halls and historic buildings; to cruises and centers of culture, along with enjoyable regional foods. I have found great value in developing enduring friendships and opportunities to discuss topics of interest face to face with those who have experienced them. I have experienced some disappointment also as interesting and enjoyable people have failed to return to subsequent events for one reason or another.

Formal and informal polls of participants taken have consistently indicated positive experiences and value from those who have attended. Over 4000 persons have participated over the years and have gained valuable benefit from UDMS.

Observations on the Most Recent Symposium in Stuttgart

The Symposium itself was well organized with a range of topics including 3D, Remote Sensing, Public Participation, Data Issues, Environment, Risk Management and Logistics with high-quality presentations on a variety of investigations and experiences within each of them.

Workshops, with in-depth presentation and discussion of specific topics, have been a part of most symposia and this year's included 3D Urban Models and Pervasive Mobile Information Systems presented by world-class experts

This year's event also included a new special attraction with the proceedings being published in the format of a formal hardbound book by Taylor and Francis. A special edition of CEUS will also be published containing a selection of papers of particular interest from the symposium.

On the entertainment side, there was a very enjoyable and informative reception with a presentation of VEP and tour at the spectacular Mercedes Benz Museum. A second social event was an evening of dinner and camaraderie, as we cruised the Neckar river.

Volker Coors, the host from Stuttgart University of Applied Science, and his local committee and Massimo Rumor, President, and Elfriede Fendel, Executive Secretary, of UDMS are to be congratulated and thanked for their extensive efforts in organizing this successful Symposium.

Specific Issues of Interest

Observations of a 3D convert

While I have seen the potential value of 3D visualization for urban data management for quite some time, I admit to certain skepticism on the practical usefulness at this time and stage of maturity in my world of local authorities and disaster management. During my participation in the UDMS in Stuttgart however I have been converted to a positive view of the usefulness now and increasing usefulness in the near future. The VEPs tools in particular, demonstrated at the Symposium, are very impressive and opened my vision to many potential uses. One of the primary concerns I have harbored was the difficulty in providing data to support realistic 3D visualization, but I have been convinced that high-quality 3D models can now be developed within days rather than months in many cases. And the quality of the visualization, including images of actual structures, is impressive.

Risk Management

Risk and emergency management are of growing importance in this age of increasing threats from nature, such as those from global warming, and man-made threats of terrorism!

As I sit writing this article, my home area of Southern California is suffering through perhaps it's worst conflagration in history! At a minimum, the largest number of simultaneous forest fires and number of people who have been evacuated in the history of California. Forest fires, ignited by over 1,000 lightning strikes, fueled by a long-term drought, and winds of record intensity are burning vast areas that include an unprecedented number of homes. At the UDMS I also learned of similar crises in Greece, Austria and France and the growing risk of development in areas vulnerable to wild fires. Global warming surely plays a significant part in this phenomena and poses a challenge to emergency managers and responders to prepare for increased numbers and intensity of natural disasters. In the past six years, since 9/11/01, an overwhelming array of new and adapted technologies have become available for emergency management and response, some of which were described at UDMS. There is a challenge to future UDMS to provide useful information on these

technologies and, most importantly, how they can be employed effectively in the chaos of an emergency to minimize loss of life, injury and property damage.



Relationships of Academics and Practitioners

The relationship of academics and practitioners has been an important aspect of UDMS meetings and in the evolution and use of UDM technologies. One of the phenomena that I have observed over the past several UDMS is an evolution from primary attendance by local authority and governmental practitioners to a primary focus on academic participants. Over the years, I believe these two groups have benefited from mutual interaction at the events. There are several reasons for the lowering of local authority participation, including limited funding, restrictions on travel and language limitations. However, the participation by this segment is critical to provide the academic community with the perspective of practical reality in the use of technology that can be overlooked in the rush to develop new and exciting technologies. Conversely the interaction serves to open the practitioners' vision to the benefits of new developments from the academic community. My personal experience has included, unfortunately, exposure to too many "great ideas" that have failed to provide practical usefulness, especially in the "heat of battle" during emergency response. I encourage UDMS, and the planners of future events, to take all measures practical to ensure a reasonable balance between the practitioner and the academic participation.

IT Infrastructure for Urban Data Management

It is interesting that there was very little discussion at UDMS of IT infrastructure or advances in the field that are dramatically enhancing the potential for urban data management. Advances in the areas of Enterprise Architecture,

Interoperability, Enterprise Service Bus, web services and others are improving the way that urban data, including GIS, can be managed, shared and delivered. Sharing of data has long been a desire among urban data users but the technologies available have seriously limited the realities of sharing. New technologies and new deployment methodologies are overcoming many of the barriers, both technical and organizational. This UDMS focused primarily on subjects regarding the use of technology rather than aspects of the technologies involved.

The Next UDMS

I look forward to our next gathering, Spring 2009 in Ljubljana Slovenia, the preparations for which are already getting underway. I would like to offer a few suggestions to the Ljubljana organizing committee for their consideration. The presentation and demonstrations at the evening reception can be an impressive enhancement to the conventional eating and drinking of receptions and might be repeated at the future event. Personal discussion among participants is an important aspect of UDMS and the inclusion of time and environments for discussion in the program is recommended. And, as a practitioner rather than academic myself, I encourage as much participation by local and national government practitioners as practical.

I encourage all to plan to attend what offers to be an equally interesting and enjoyable symposium in 2009 in Ljubljana, a very inviting location.