



## A student's perspective

*Alex Maddison, Vice Chair, ICES Network, UK Representative, FIG Young Surveyors*

**E**NGINEERING and survey students across the world are made aware of international events through magazine and web advertisements, but only a very small percentage attend. Pre-event advertisement and post event articles allow readers to form an impression of what is on offer and who may attend, but to students with busy work schedules and small budgets, international networking may seem best suited to those within the industry sponsored by their employers.

Efforts are being made to encourage young people and, as a result, the demographic is changing. Reflecting this, the International Federation of Surveyors Young Surveyors Network (FIG YSN) has quadrupled its members over the past four years. Representatives at the latest working week in Morocco were from Morocco, Nigeria, Austria, Germany, Italy, UK, Canada, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, America and Australia.

Much like the ICES Network for students and early career members, FIG YSN aims to facilitate networking, represent young surveyors' interests, improve awareness and encourage involvement. As vice-chair of the ICES Network, I had been in touch with FIG YSN for over a year. The opportunity to meet and get involved with the network was too good to pass up. With massive discounts offered to students and a keen desire to experience an international meet, I booked my place and arrived three days early in order to explore Marrakech's Medina and the conference venue.

Both the venue and hotel were grand in scale and architecture, with plenty of areas suitable for social meetings and formal discussions. The event began with a welcome reception where all were invited.

Canopies and drinks were provided in the vast hotel bar and for the first time it was possible to gauge the scale of the working week; a reported 1,400 from over 90 countries were present. The energy, excitement and sense of anticipation were almost tangible.

I took this opportunity to seek and meet the young surveyors with whom I hoped I would be involved throughout the week. Introductions complete, I sought advice about where I should be and when and learnt of the commissions from which FIG is comprised. With my hydrography MSc application sent just weeks before my arrival, commission 4 (hydrography) was my first port of call. Though one of the smaller commissions, I had been informed it packed a punch! At the commission's general meeting, just 25 or so individuals sat and discussed achievements and targets. As a student, I was made incredibly welcome and invited to contribute. Though not an established public speaker, the small scale, informal vibe and friendly faces of the commission put me at ease. I spoke with several members after the meeting and was invited to join their evening dinner later in the week.

The days consisted of morning plenary sessions followed by technical presentations broken up by coffee breaks and lunch. Over 500 papers were presented during the 90 technical sessions held over three days. Papers covered a broad range of topics from arable land consolidation to modelling cultural heritage monuments with laser scanning and photogrammetry. Young surveyors made several presentations that were well received by a healthy turn out of fellow students and delegates.

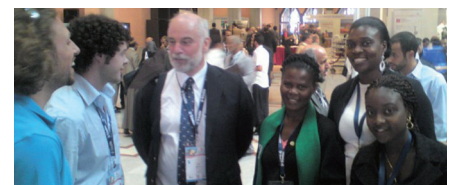
Even if you have not arranged to meet anyone, it is more than likely you will spot an earlier acquaintance. On one afternoon I was recognised as a student and invited to sit with others I had not met, eager to gauge my impressions and impart their knowledge as working week veterans. A pre-conference dinner shared with Singapore Land Authority's senior surveyor reinforced what young surveyors had told me. No amount of reading can compete with quizzing professionals on their recent projects, especially when they are so enthusiastic.

An evening spent with commissions 4, 5 and 6 illustrated the less formal side of the conference. Sat at the chair and vice chair's table, I enjoyed live music, fantastic cuisine, belly dancers and humorous conversation. The short walk to the restaurant took us across Djamaa El Fna, the market square. This cultural melting pot presented memorable experiences to share with new friends. Here, snake charmers, storytellers, food vendors and musicians gather to entertain locals and tourists.

Throughout the week, I spent time with members of FIG YSN at social and formal meets. Though reliant upon email and Skype, they meet officially every year. Sitting in this meeting I was struck by the global reach of the network and the wide-ranging engagement from such diverse delegates. Regardless of language barriers, attendees contributed and demonstrated their support for the common goal; to facilitate international networking and opportunities.

After an incredibly eye opening and rewarding week in Marrakech, any reserves or stereotypes I had about international conferences were abolished. In fact, I now believe it is students and young professionals who have the most to gain. I returned home as a proud UK representative with a suitcase full of tagines, djellabas, Berber leather bags and spices, but more importantly as an individual who had been enthused by the energy, passion and willingness of those I'd met from all over the world; gathered for the same cause within the surveying profession to bridge the gap between cultures.

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*From left to right: (i) Aida Opoku-Mensah, director of ICT, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and FIG president Teo, (ii) the opening ceremony attracted a packed delegate hall of 1,200, (iii) FIG commission chairs, (iv) some of the colours of Morocco, (v) FIG Young Surveyors chair Kate Fairlie gives an address, and (vi) Alex Maddison networking with fellow surveyors.*