

THE STRUCTURE AND METHODS OF STUDENT ORGANIZATION FOR IGSM2004

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ABSTRACT:

One week long IGSM (International Geodetic Student Meeting) was arranged in Espoo Finland in June 2004. In this paper we will present the structure of our student based organization behind all the various events of our meeting and essential facts relating to the successful arranging of this kind of international student meeting.

We will also present the four main phases of planning and realisation of our event: 1) preliminary announcing and free brainstorming, 2) specifying suitable categories and forming task-based teams, 3) action phase and combining results of teams' work and 4) collecting feedback and conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order the 17th IGSM (International Geodetic Students Meeting) took place in TKK (Helsinki University of Technology) in Espoo Finland 7-12 June 2004. IGSM is an annual and official event of the IGSO (International Geodetic Student Organization), non-governmental organization, whose purpose is to support international collaboration for the progress of geodesy in all fields and applications.

This paper will present you a comprehensive view into the processes behind the planning, organizing and realization of our IGSM, which finally gathered 120 participants from 15 different European countries. This paper is intended to be a somewhat of supportive guideline for all the forthcoming organizers of IGSM or other similar student activities.

In this way we want to thank all the previous IGSM organizers for their efforts in building and maintaining of our great and time-honoured international geodetic student organisation. We also want to express our gratefulness to all our professors, sponsors and other people who have greatly supported us through this demanding but also rewarding and educating process.

2. THE MAIN PHASES OF ORGANIZING

The organizing assignment comes always with a process. No matter what is the size and duration or the character of that particular event, there are always some general similarities involved with the process of the event realization. This kind of general phases are for example: 1) *the defining of the major goals of the assignment*, 2) *realization phase* and 3) *combining all the separate elements into one working combination*.

Our IGSM organizing process consisted from four more or less separate main phases. In this chapter we will give you more detailed description about these main phases and all or them will also be represented in the form of timeline with some essential facts in the end of this chapter.

2.1 Phase I: Preliminary announcing and brainstorming

The first phase of organizing our IGSM started right after the ascertainment of the fact that IGSM will be held in Finland in 2004. This ascertainment happened in IGSM 2002 in Ljubljana Slovenia.

After returning back to Finland we gave a preliminary announcement to the all the students and the personnel of Department of Surveying in Helsinki University of Technology (TKK). We told them that IGSM will be the biggest and the longest international student meeting to be arranged in our department so far. And therefore we will need a lot of help to get successfully through this challenging, but also very interesting assignment. We also started an e-mail list for all the people who had expressed their interest in arranging our event.

The first real meeting relating to our IGSM was arranged already in June 2002, almost two years before our IGSM. The idea of that meeting was to collect some useful ideas from the arrangements of the previous meetings in Ljubljana Slovenia in 2002 and Newcastle England in 2001. In addition to collecting experiences from the previous encounters we also used the method of free brainstorming for collecting all kinds of ideas popping up of our minds.

In the first phase we were just gathering up ideas, even quite strange ones, without any particular aim to categorize these things or to make any decisions about the responsibilities. Those free brainstorming meetings were open to anyone who

was interested in participation. In practice about 25-30 people participated more or less actively in this phase. It was also a good opportunities for surveying the personal interests and skills of the participants for the next phases of organizing.

2.2 Phase II: Specifying suitable categories and forming task-based teams

In the next phase after free brainstorming was summing-up. This summing up phase was carried out by much smaller group of people. Only 3-5 participants were mainly involved in this part of the organizing, where the most feasible and essential ideas were selected from all gathered ideas.

After this the next thing was to specify suitable categories, in which all the ideas could be fitted. Our aim was to find a good combination between descriptive and functional subject matters for all the ideas, however without getting too many separate categories. As said, this task was carried through by just a few people. That was because we thought that the more people we have involved, the more confusion we will have in preparatory decision outlining step.

The larger group of people is effective in creation of ideas, but the final categorization is better to do with less people involved. After doing this small group outlining, our suggestion was presented to the others and it was also accepted.

In our suggestion we ended up with four main categories: 1) *administrative tasks*, 2) *webpages/logo/video*, 3) *accommodation/food* and 4) *program*, which was soon separated further into two different, but still highly similar parts: 4A) *official* and 4B) *social program*. These main categories are presented in figure 1.

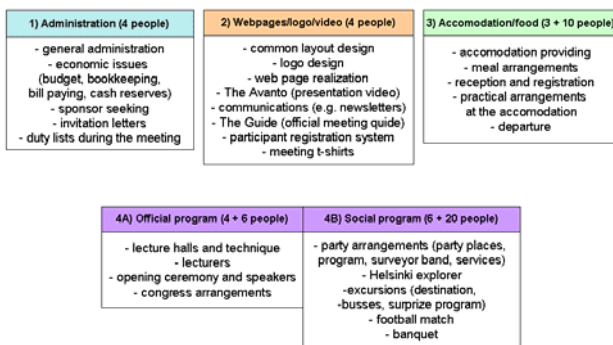


Figure 1. The main task categories

After specifying categories, it was time to situate all the ideas into them. When all the ideas were divided into the categories we wrote short descriptions and lists of tasks for each category. This way we had created good basis for forming of task-based teams and for the actual action phase.

Numbers after category names describe how many people were involved in each team during arrangements, in generally and during the actual IGSM week. There are also some individual tasks mentioned for each category.

Next step – *team forming* – followed. In this part it was important to find the right persons for the right tasks, which meant that the personal skills and interests of the each person were taken into account. In this way we could secure better motivation for each individual participant and therefore the

whole organization naturally worked in more efficient way all the way through the planning and realization process.

One of the most important things before starting the actual arrangements was to actually write down the goals and the tasks of the each individual team. This operation did not only greatly improve the inner efficiency of each individual team, but it also created a good starting points for the awareness between different teams. With good planning and open flow of information the major responsibility unclarities could be avoided or at least their risk was greatly reduced.

Of course we naturally had some disagreement and problems inside of each team, between the teams and also in the personal level during our whole organizing process. But because of the good preliminary planning these problems did not ever affect to the arrangements in whole. Therefore other things were always moving forward, even though there were some momentary problems going on in some areas at the time.

The categorization was carried out in the end of year 2002 and primary task-based teams were formed in January 2003. In practice this means that they were done already one and half years before the opening ceremonies in our meeting.

2.3 Phase III: Action phase and combining results of teams' work

In our case effective action phase lasted approximately one and half years, from the January 2003 until the beginning of our meeting. I think that for many people this may sound like a long period of time to spend for one week student meeting. But it's good to remember that in the beginning, working rhythm was much slover when compared to the very hectic last weeks before our meeting.

There were also a quite big differences in the activity levels of the different teams throughout the organizing process. For example 2) *Webpages/logo/video* team was very active before IGSM 2003, when our webpages were published and presentation video "The Avanto" was presented for the first time in Dresden.

Also the beginning of the year 2004 was also quite busy time for the Webpage/logo/video team, when the first round of the registration was opened in January 20th. This team was fairly active throughout the whole organizing process, for example by sending newsletters and keeping webpages updated. We think that the good information transfer and announcing in generally were the one of the strongest sectors in our arrangements. And we mean informing both in internal and external level.

The activity of the 3) *Accommodation/food* team was pretty opposite, when compared with Webpage/logo/video team. Everything was fairly quiet until the last month came and it was time to make the all the practical things work at the accommodation place. This was also one of the most active and largest teams during the actual IGSM week.

As mentioned before, our program team was quite divided into two separate but still quite tightly connected divisions: official and social program. These two teams provided quite much work throughout the whole preparing process, because they both are very critical for successful event.

The tasks of the 4A) *Official program* team consisted mainly of the two main things: opening ceremony and lectures, which both were located into the beginning part of our meeting. The good thing with the official program is that it do not need so many workers during the IGSM week. Just two people could easily manage with all the lecture arrangements. Another good thing with lectures is that they are pretty economical to arrange.

The 4B) *Social program* was very opposite to the official one – arrangements always needed a lot of workers and expenses were quite high. One big challenge with the social program was: How to provide enough changing program throughout the whole week? Or actually: How to provide good social program with reasonable price? That was the biggest problem with the social program.

After a lot of calculations, optimizing and abandoned ideas we finally think that we still managed to provide quite satisfying and also informatic view to the Finnish style of life.

Then finally last but definitely not least there was also the 1) *Administration* team, which was of course one of the major elements through the whole organizing process. After all, their responsibility was to bring all the different parts and elements finally together into one complete and smoothly working combination, economically and according all the other aspects as well.

2.4 Phase IV: Collecting feedback and conclusion

When the event itself is finally over, there still some duties to be taken care of before all the official arrangement of the meeting are finally over. For example all the bills had to be paid and also the budget and bookkeeping had to be completed. After the finance was concluded, the remaining money was forwarded to the next IGSM organizing committee.

After finishing all these economical aspects it was also important to draw some kind of conclusion of the event also in personal level, from the perspective of the participants and also from the viewpoint of the organizers as a whole. In practice it is good to collect feedback already during your meeting. This can be done for example in form of feedback form in the end of the event. Also direct discussions with the participants are good source of information.

It is also important to gather and share the thoughts of the organizers as well. This way you can more clearly analyze what was good during the event and what could be improved in the future.

Overall conclusion phase is one of the most important parts of the whole organizing process. In this part you can learn a lot of yourself, from the other team members and of the organizing process as whole, when you share and compare your own thoughts and experiences with others. In some cases summing up can be the hardest part of the whole process, but it also tells a lot of the true capabilities and incapacibilities of the organization.

2.5 The phases and essential details presented on timeline

We have now described all four main phases of our IGSM organizing, their contents and goals. Now it's also good to visualize how these different phases are located on timeline

which in representing the two years time period of our IGSM arrangements. This timeline can be seen in Figure 2.

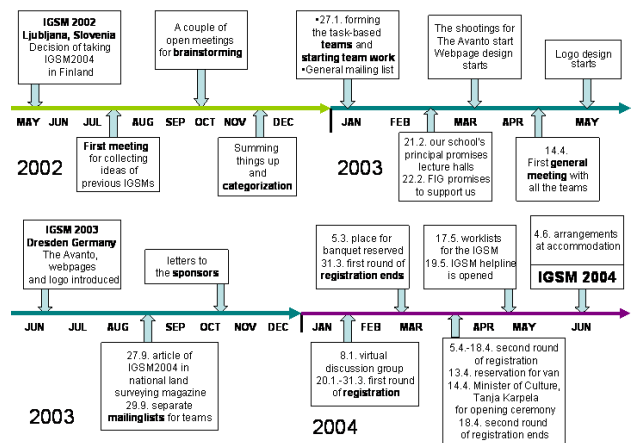


Figure 2. The main phases of arrangements and essential details presented on timeline

First two phases including: free brainstorming, specifying categories and forming task-based teams lasted only a very short period of time, only three months, as you can see from the timeline. But still we created a lot of important basis for the successful realization of our IGSM organization, during that well spent time.

We have also mentioned some of the important and essential details of our IGSM planning in this same figure. From the figure you can easily get a somekind of quick overview to the things relating to the sponsor seeking, accommodation, two separate registration rounds, webpage design and other practical arrangements.

3. THE STRUCTURE OF OUR STUDENT BASED ORGANIZATION

In this chapter we will present some of the main aspect in our student based IGSM organization. We think that our organization represents Finnish and as a whole quite Scandinavian way to get things organized. Some of these aspects may be different from the ones you are normally using in your country.

Because of these national differences we think that it is important to present some of our main planning aspects in more details. Perhaps this way you can find some new and useful ideas for your own coming organizing needs. Or hopefully you can atleast understand better our systematic and beforehand planned Finnish style of organizing things in the future.

3.1 The four main aspects in establish our organization

3.1.1 Autonomous student based planning: In Finland we have very long traditions for student based decision-making and self guided activities. For example the Guild of Surveyor in Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) became already 105 years old this Spring 2006. All this history creates good basis for the individual and valuable student based decision making.

By this student autonomy we mean that our IGSM organization was planned, created and controlled fully by students all the way from the beginning. This autonomous student planning doesn't mean that the professors and other school personnel

would have been totally ruled out of decision making. But their role reminds more like a consultant instead of organization leader.

So, what was the role of our professors in this kind of student based process then? Their role was to stay on the background, until the students really felt that they needed some guidance. Available and ready for discussions when students feel like it, but not giving students too direct and ready made suggestion for the actions from their own personal aspects.

Of course this kind of trustful attitude on both sides takes time and needs efforts to develop. And it also creates a lot of kick-backs and occasional frustration when student try to find their own and personal ways to solve problems. And this way may definitely not be the fastest one to get result.

But after the certain autonomous level has been reached, with a good combination of responsibilities and freedom of choice, it starts to finally benefit the both sides. Students have learned to work more individually and as a result professors don't have to pay so much time in direct guiding for all the things.

We think that our student based IGSM organization reached already a quite high level of autonomy, when in many cases the only task for our professors during the whole process was to accept our ready made plans by saying: "Looks good. Carry on!"

3.1.2 Effective and flexible working teams: The effectiveness and strong flexibility of our working teams we based on two main things: 1) good preliminary planning and 2) effective information exchange. When all the organizers were all the time more or less aware of each others actions and achievements, it was easy to direct resources where they were needed and when they were needed.

Sometimes during the organizing project we had a feeling that everyone was doing everything. Especially in the beginning, when there were not yet so many people involved in arrangements, it was more like a one team doing all the separately categorized tasks together.

But as the arrangements moved forward and when realization went more into details and more people joined to the arrangements, our organization moved very flexibly into more task-based way of actions.

3.1.3 Democratic decision making: In our Finnish culture democracy is very important aspect. In our IGSM arrangements this appeared so that everyone in our organizing team had a similar right to bring out their own ideas. And this right was equal to from the General Secretary and Treasurer to the temporary accommodation assistant.

Of course the people who were more involved with the arrangements, knew more about the matters and were therefore more capable to make the actual decisions based on their wider knowledge. But despite of these differences in background knowledge, all the organizers were on equal level for giving out ideas and proposals for democratic decision making.

3.1.4 Aim survey – securing fundamentals – integrated realisation: When planning anykind of event, no matter how big or how long, it's always easy to come up with remarkably fabulous ideas of all that could be done. But the tricky question is: "How could we realize at least a part of all these great ideas?"

Basically a successful event arrangement depends only from three very simple things: 1) time, 2) money and 3) effort. And all of these three are closely connected together and everything else is more or less related to them.

It's very simple: if you have time and effort, you can save money in arrangements. If you have money, you can just buy things and services and thereby save time and efforts. If you won't save your efforts for example in good planning in beginning, you will have more time in the end. And if you put your efforts and time in sponsor seeking, you will most probably have more money to spent.

But how can you find a good or at least fairly functional combination between all these three things to be able to provide a succesful event? In our organization we approached this problem in three different steps, which are now presented in very simplified way in figure 3.

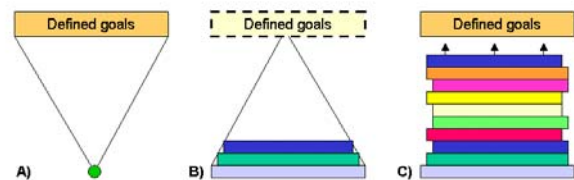


Figure 3. a) aim survey, b) securing fundamentals and c) integrated realization

First of all you have to have an *aim survey* step to get some kind of overview of the final goal you are aiming for, figure 3 a). You simply can not start planning your event efficiently before you have clearly defined wider overview of what the main goals are for the current event.

During the arrangement process it is also important to stop now and then and consider if you are still heading for your predefined goals. And if not, you have to decide how to change your actions and methods to achieve your goals better. Sometimes you may also have to change your original goals as well, at least partly.

Next step in the process is called *securing fundamentals*, figure 3 b). There are always some fundamentals, some basic things that just simply have to work or else your event might end up with disaster. Just imagine a situation of having several world class lecturers, but no suitable lecture halls at all for them to speak. Or hundred arrived participants, but sleeping place only for half of them.

The last and very crucial step is *integrated realization*, which takes place right before the beginning of the event, figure 3. c). No matter how well things have been planned beforehand and how well the individual fundamentals have been carried out during the preparatory phases, things can still go wrong without good final integration.

3.2 Our organization as a hierarchic organization chart

This headline is fairly misleading on purpose. As you can see from the figure 4, there wasn't so much hierarchy at all in our team based student organization.

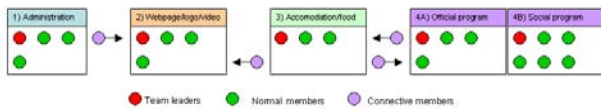


Figure 4. Hierarchic structure of IGSM2004 organization

Because we were the group of students, working together for the same shared project, we thought that there is not need for many specific hierarchic levels in our organization. As a matter of fact the only proper hierarchic instance was that there were team leaders in each working team.

Instead of having a vertically high organization we concentrated more in good communication and cooperation between different teams in horizontal level. In practice this happened so that some of the organizers were more like connective links between all the teams, instead of just being stable members of one specific team.

Of course and especially in the end of arrangements it was also important to have most the people working all the time only for one purpose, like contacting potential lecturers or planning social program excursions. But because we had some of the organizers constantly working as contact persons, we were able to keep different teams sufficiently aware of each other's actions all the time.

In addition to this constant communication between some of the organizers, there were also general organization meetings arranged once in 1-2 months. In these meetings all the teams regularly presented their accomplishments publicly to the others.

4. THE SCHEDULE OF OUR IGSM

The structure of our IGSM week's schedule is presented in figure 5. Schedule shows all the different events which we provided within our meeting.

	Monday June 7th	Tuesday June 8th	Wednesday June 9th	Thursday June 10th	Friday June 11th	Saturday June 12th
7		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
		Opening ceremonies	Lectures		Group work	
12	From 10 o'clock onwards Participants arrive	Lunch	Lunch	Excursions	General Assembly	Participants leaving before 2 o'clock
		Lectures	Lectures		Lunch	
					Football Sports	
18	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner			
	Welcome Party	Helsinki Explorer	Different choices of program	Dinner	Banquet	
		Party		Sauna&Sea Party		

Figure 5. The schedule of IGSM2004

This kind of basic structure for schedule has already proven to be very functional in several previous IGSM events, e.g. Dresden 2003, Ljubljana 2002, Newcastle 2001. Therefore we

decided to respect this working tradition and use the same basic principles in design of our IGSM schedule.

4.1 Official and profession-related program

In our opinion every professional meeting should have an official opening ceremony and so was the situation also with our IGSM. Opening ceremony started with the speech of the IGSO General Secretary Mr. Mika Eskelinen. And in the end of ceremony IGSM2004 was officially opened by Treasurer Ms. Seija Vinblad.

Opening ceremony included also welcome greetings from the Ms. Tanja Karpela, Minister of Culture, Mr. Olavi Nevanlinna, Vice Rector of TKK, Mr. Olavi Louko, City of Espoo, Prof. Kauko Viitanen, Head of the Department of Surveying at the TKK, Tiina Kauppinen, Guild of Surveyors and Mr. Markku Villikka, Director, FIG.

Because IGSM is the meeting of the international geodetic students, it should be self-evident that at least within the official program, there should be enough profession-related programme available. Only this way we can maintain the original idea and status of the IGSM as an annual event directed to all the geodesy and land surveying related students. This aspect is also important issue to remember in the future, if we want to remain the current professional status among our sponsors.

When designing IGSM as a whole, it is also good to remember that the official program is in many cases much economical to produce when compared to the more open social program. Therefore by providing lectures with good quality, you are also saving some money to provide better quality social program as well.

One development for the future IGSMs would be to provide student participants a chance to give their own scientific presentations as a part of professional program. This would also bring even more student point of view into the official parts of the event.

We were considering having this kind activities as a part of our official program in our IGSM2004, but because of the lack of time with arrangements we finally decided to give up this idea. Therefore we were very delighted to see that this kind of activities were available in IGSM-GHG 2005 in Istanbul Turkey. And the same progression seem to continue in IGSM 2005 in Crakow Poland.

General Assembly is also one important part of the IGSO (International Geodetic Student Organization). There is a detailed description of General Assembly in IGSO's statute, so you can find more detailed information from there (IGSO Statute).

4.2 Social program and excursions

Social program is also a very important part of IGSM as a counterbalance for the official program of our meetings. The main idea behind IGSO is to bring together geodetic students from all around the world and to encourage them to make relationships in both professional and friendship level with each other. Social program provides good starting point for al this.

The social program is of course more open for different kinds of activities than the official side of our meeting. For example

excursion trips with alternative resorts, football match and other sport activities have long traditions in our IGSO organization. Hopefully these traditions will be taken into account also in the future, maybe in slightly up-to-date way.

Many of the participants of the IGSM have a chance to stay only one week of IGSM in arranging country. Therefore it is good to provide them a possibility to get to know also some other parts of your country in addition to the organizing center and lecture halls. Therefore it is good to keep in mind that the social program is the part of the meeting, where you can introduce your country, its' history and customs to the participants.

All the great meetings have also a somekind of high point. In IGSM we have had a tradition of having a banquet in the end of the meeting. This is most probably the last ceremony of the meeting and the thing that people will definitely remember from your IGSM, so it is always good to pay some extra attention in arrangements of the banquet. Even if the some of arrangements of IGSM haven not been so successful, people will forget easily at least some of those setbacks, if they will get a good last expression of your meeting because of the successful banquet.

It is also good to keep in mind that in many cases the most expensive is not the best. By using your imagination and creativity, good planning and elegant small details you will give much more sophisticated impression, instead of just using a lot of money. One should also remember to mention the dress codes in good time in IGSM info. This way participants can prepare themselves for this ceremonies and other events in the right way and therefore enjoy more of the ceremonious atmosphere.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We hope that we have accomplish to give you a general overview into our IGSM2004 arrangements and the structures behind the event in this paper. One of the main goals for writing this paper is help the forthcoming organizers of the IGSM in the future. We also hope that this paper could be somekind of guideline for other similar events regardless of size, duration, meaning or subject matter of the event.

Another aim for this paper is to document what, how and why we have done within our event arrangements. As a conclusion we might say that the main aspects in our IGSM realization have been good preliminary planning and the flexible task-based team work. Also you can not ever overemphasize the meaning of the good communication between the organizers, when you are working together for the shared goal. We hope that you can find at least some new ideas and useful advices for your coming organizing need in the future from this paper.

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IGSO Statute, defined in Graz, May 10th 1991 and complemented in Ljubljana, May 2nd 2002 <http://www.igsm2006.agh.edu.pl/statute.html> (accessed 31 Mar. 2006)