

2010 and Beyond

The Agenda for GeoDesign

Most professional conferences exist to support the needs of a mature community. But the purpose of the first GeoDesign Summit, held 06-08 January 2010 in Redlands, California, was quite different: to further refine the concept of GeoDesign, build a community around it, and task that community with creating an agenda for moving it forward.

By Matt Artz



What is GeoDesign? Diana Sinton of the University of Redlands defined it as “a planning approach that grounds design methods and practices in temporal and spatial knowledge of human and natural geographic contexts.” Michael Flaxman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology defined it as “a design and planning method which tightly couples the creation of a design proposal with impact simulations informed by geographic context.” Others provided alternate definitions. But the GeoDesign Summit was less about a common definition than it was about a common understanding: in fact, the biggest takeaway may have been a clear realization by most attendees of the important role that GeoDesign can play in leveraging geographic knowledge to effect positive change in our world.

Over the course of the three-day event, the more than 200 attendees heard from a variety of speakers on the theory and practice of GeoDesign. A number of “Idea Labs” were held—breakout sessions where participants could brainstorm on different elements of GeoDesign, such as theoretical research, public participation, the role of 3D, sketching, architecture and BIM, regional landscapes, urban areas, supporting technology, and educational curricula.

While GeoDesign as a discipline, a field of study, and a practice is still evolving, a number of action items were identified by the end of the Summit. This agenda, developed primarily out of the Idea Labs effort, includes such topics as:

- Obtain a broader consensus on the definition and application of GeoDesign. Everyone is invited to participate in this discussion at <http://participatorygeodesign.ning.com/> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/geodesign>.

- Identify the new geospatial functionality, tools, and technologies needed to support broader adoption of GeoDesign.
- Hold a “GeoDesign Challenge” with a significant cash prize, to encourage the development of real-world GeoDesign projects.
- Expand communication efforts for GeoDesign, to include the publication of articles, a book of case studies, and possibly a journal.
- Determine the optimal methods of teaching design principles to geospatial professionals and develop a GeoDesign curriculum.
- Hold another GeoDesign Summit in early 2011 to review progress. Jack Dangermond again offered to host the Summit at ESRI’s conference center and provide financial support for the event.
- Dangermond was adamant about de-coupling the vision of GeoDesign from ESRI. It was agreed that a broader cross-section of geospatial technology companies would be invited to participate in the 2011 GeoDesign Summit.

A survey of attendees showed that 95% felt that the GeoDesign Summit was beneficial, and the same number wanted to have another Summit in 2011.

Matt Artz is the GIS and Science Manager at ESRI in Redlands, California USA and edits the GISandScience.com blog. He can be reached at martz@esri.com.