

SASTT represented at the ISTT international board meeting and *International No-Dig* in Rome

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Introduction

The International Society for Trenchless Technology could be viewed as the international federation of societies for trenchless technology. An individual or company can only join the ISTT if there is no national society in his own country. The ISTT is managed on a daily basis by the full-time executive secretary, John Castle, working closely with the ISTT's executive subcommittee. The international board of directors generally meets once a year, usually at the venue of the *International No-Dig* conference.

This year's *No-Dig* was held in September in Rome, Italy. The international board meeting was held one day before the start of the *No-Dig*. The writer was delegated by the board of SASTT to represent SASTT at both events. This story is a summary of the writer's impressions.

The international board meeting

The first person the writer encountered upon entering the meeting room was Pat Nolan, the membership secretary of the ISTT, whom he had not seen since 1991. They did not recognise each other, but when the writer gave his name, she promptly greeted him with a hug and a kiss - a good way to start the day!

The meeting was well attended, with several of the affiliated societies having sent more than one person, even though every society has only one vote.

The main matters on the agenda were the following:

- at the time of the meeting, the number of fully affiliated societies was 21
- the status of the societies based in China was stated to be in a state of flux. On account of the immense size of the country and its population, China had asked to be allowed to have separate affiliated societies in major centres, such as Beijing. The negotiations on this matter had progressed well, but then the Chinese negotiator became very ill. In China, negotiations are very personal matters and the talks had to be suspended until the negotiator had recovered. Since he was well again, it was expected that the negotiations would soon be concluded
- due to the resignation of Menno Henneveld of Australia, a new ISTT chairman and vice chairman were elected, viz Dec Downey of Jason Consultants and Sam Ariaratnam of Arizona State University
- a major item for discussion was the next *International No-Digs*. The representative of the conference organiser for the 2008 *No-Dig* to be held in Moscow, gave an outstanding presentation, in which he sketched what was envisaged and how the business plan had evolved. He dwelt particularly on the financial risks of the event and described how these had been quantified. He clinched the issue by announcing that sponsorships for more than the highest risk figure had already been tied up!
A call for papers for the Moscow *No-Dig* has been published on the SASTT website.

- The 2009 *No-Dig* will be in Toronto, Canada. The organisers have already issued a challenge: every affiliated society must submit at least one paper!
- in view of the difficulty of finding time slots and venues for *International No-Digs*, the Czech Society for Trenchless Technology had proposed that the ISTT board should have a planning time-scale of five or more years, to make the rotation of events around the world more regular, predictable and less likely to end in clashes of dates. They also tabled a draft for the programme, in which the *No-Dig* venues would be chosen by continent, by region and by country. Of note to SASTT was that the proposed venue for 2011 was Africa. However, the international director from the small Netherlands society, which had hosted the 1990 and 2005 events, remarked to the writer that any support from SASTT for an Africa-based event ought to be regularly reinforced, otherwise the big fishes would have their way. What will now be considered is that, in stead of the current situation where the ISTT invites bids to host *No-Digs*, the international board would in future decide where the events should be held. The ISTT would then carry the risk or pocket the surplus. It would also be free then, to pick a venue where there is no affiliated society, for instance, Singapore where a great deal of trenchless work is going on. This must be welcome news to smaller affiliated societies like SASTT, which have been wary of exposing themselves to high financial risks
- the ISTT had employed a technical secretary, viz John Heavens, a part-time consultant who had played a key role in writing the comprehensive *ISTT Guidelines* and developing the ISTT's web-based technical resource centre, known as the TRC. Heavens had recently been forced to resign due to poor health. It was agreed that due to the span of technologies to be covered in the future and the volume of work required to meet the aims of the society, the post of technical secretary would be replaced by a technical panel of experts, headed by the ISTT's vice chairman
- the official magazine *Trenchless Technology International* was not financially sustainable and the ISTT was considering alternatives, such as less frequent hardcopy issues, electronic distribution of the magazine, the distribution of an e-zine to all members who have an e-mail address, and posting the magazine on a website at fixed intervals, so that members could access it online
- the new ISTT website, viz <http://www.istt.com> was running smoothly, with 200 000 hits in 2007 so far. Since its start in February 2007, the TRC had had 4 000 working sessions (by ISTT members exclusively). The ISTT would consider offering TRC information for sale to non-members - at a rate higher than a membership subscription, obviously. From a SASTT perspective, the writer once again urges corporate members to provide their relevant information to the ISTT for inclusion in the TRC and the Directory of Services. "Advertising" on this international portal is free, after all
- consideration would be given to developing promotional material in the form of, for instance, *Powerpoint* templates, for the use of affiliated societies
- the UKSTT proposed that the individual websites of the affiliated societies should be hosted by the ISTT web-server, still with their own domain names. This would entail significant savings due to economy of scale. The matter would be studied by a working group under the leadership of Russell Fairhurst of the UKSTT

- John Castle, the executive secretary, wanted to retire. His routine tasks such as bookkeeping would be outsourced and his replacement, to be called executive director, would concentrate on expanding and promoting the work of the ISTT. The job would be advertised and a candidate would be selected to be in post by mid-2008.

The writer gained fascinating insights into the work and the plans for the future of the ISTT. He endorses Alaster Goyn's conclusion, following his attendance of the 2006 board meeting, that continuity in attendance of ISTT board meetings would be of immense value to SASTT.

The ISTT secretaries' meeting

John Castle and Pat Nolan organised an informal meeting to which the secretaries of the affiliated societies were invited. The writer attended the meeting. John and Pat provided interesting insights into the issues which are occupying their minds and invited comments and suggestions from the others.

They reiterated their puzzlement about the poor response from the members to the offers of publishing their information, *gratis en verniet*, on the ISTT website.

In view of the financial problems of the official magazine, ie *Trenchless Technology International*, a lively discussion ensued about the ISTT's external communications and the publication of the magazine. The writer suggested a cascaded approach to the proposed online issues of the official magazine, viz

- a list of contents to be e-mailed to every member
- "executive summaries" of articles to be available from the national secretaries on request
- full articles to be made available to members for downloading from the web.

ROMA07 Mediterranean NODIG XXVth international conference and exhibition

The conference was held in a large suburban hotel which had flexible function rooms and indoor and outdoor exhibition facilities. Every delegate the writer spoke to expressed his or her disapproval of the haphazard arrangements of the (outsourced) conference organisers.

The registration desk was so chaotic that there was a perpetual queue of delegates in front of it. Only on the last day were they able to set up a system to receive payments by credit card.

Delegates had no advance information about the rooms where particular papers were to be presented. Since most of the time there were parallel sessions, there was often a milling crowd trying to find the room to which they wanted to go. During the lectures, it was hard to follow the speakers because the wrong types of microphones had been installed and the speakers' voices faded if they moved half a step away from the lectern.

Going by the regular enquiries he receives from client organisations and from discussions with SASTT members, the writer has a perception that there is a general and urgent need for efficient, cost-effective tools for facilitating condition assessment and the management of underground assets. This (perceived) priority was not reflected by the exhibition in Rome. With a few exceptions, the exhibition covered primarily drilling and pipe lining.

As happens at such conferences, the papers were a mixed batch, many of excellent quality and others mere reports of "work-in-progress".

The writer has the papers in digital form. Copies on CD are available from SASTT (director@sastt.org.za) at R 150,00 and R 650,00 per CD for members and non-members resp.

Conclusion

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to the board of SASTT for the opportunity to attend the events in Rome.

He gained valuable insights from his participation in the proceedings of the international board. He will make it his business to keep close track of the inside workings of the ISTT and to disseminate the value and the benefits of affiliated membership to SASTT members.

In the writer's estimation, the cost of attending events such as *International No-Dig* is considerable. If it were to become necessary to prioritise expenditure on facets of ISTT events, he is of the opinion that representation at the international board meetings should carry more weight than attempting to attend as many lectures as possible at the *No-Dig* conferences. After all, the nuances of the board meeting and the informal discussions during breaks do not find their way into the minutes. The conference papers, however, can be downloaded from the ISTT website.