

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-FWF-LFUI
Conference Title:	Submarine Paleoseismology
Dates:	11-16 September
Chair:	Daniela Pantosti and Eulalia Gracia
Rapporteur:	Geoffroy Lamarche

General Comments

The theme of the conference was the study of past activity of geological submarine faults from direct and indirect seafloor and sub-seafloor observations. Whilst study of onland active fault is a well developed field of research in its own right, to my knowledge, this was the first international workshop dedicated to the specificity associated with studying active faults offshore.

I counted up to 65 people (unofficial number) attending the 4-day workshop. All sessions were very well attended. All attendees were hosted at the Innsbruck University centre in Obergurgl to which transport was organised from Innsbruck by bus. There was a half day social excursion organised on day 3.

I was invited by the conference convenors to present the expertise and finding of my research group on submarine active faults in the New Zealand region. I have been involved in marine geology and geophysics for 25 years and more specifically on active tectonics on the New Zealand continental shelf for at least 15 years.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

The programme included 41 oral presentations, most of them 30 minutes in length and a smaller number of 15 minute-long presentations. Most presenters also brought posters that were displayed in the same room as the oral presentations, allowing discussion during breaks and evening poster sessions. The conference programme was very full with sessions starting at 9 am and finishing at 10 pm! However, ample time for meals and breaks, together with the very high quality of the speakers meant that this programme was actually very manageable. Discussions were essentially done during the breaks and the poster sessions, i.e. there was only limited questions and discussion during - or immediately after - the presentations.

Clearly the convenors had done an excellent job in choosing key-note addresses as the presentations were excellent, varied and covered many aspects of submarine palaeoseismology as well as a great variety of geographical location and geological settings. All presentations, except possibly (and arguably) 4 of them, were perfectly suited for the workshop. The scope of the meeting was therefore very well followed and focused upon for the four days.

One point could have been improved a little, in that the initial requirement for speakers to keep to their allocated time (30 or 15 minutes) was not respected. Most - if not all - speakers run well over their allocated time, some speakers by more than 15 minutes. Although the presentations were very interesting, this resulted in very long sessions. It was also somewhat unfair and discourteous to other speakers and resulted in shorter breaks and time for general discussions. This is the role of the session chairs to make sure the speakers keep to their time, but it is the role of convenors to brief both speakers and chairs about their vision of the meeting. In this case, I think the chairs were happy with talks running overtime. This is a minor issue.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

The site of the University Centre in Obergurgl, a high Alpine environment surrounded by magnificent vistas and the quietness of the region, together with all attendees staying in the same place was favourable to informal as well as professional discussions. This situation resulted in much time devoted to discussion between attendees. My feeling is that young scientists felt very much part of the workshop. I myself engaged with many of them and saw many more engaging with senior colleagues. So, although the days were very busy with lengthy sessions, I think there was ample time for interacting both professionally and socially.

The atmosphere was social and pleasant at all time, yet very much focused on the topic of the paper.

Balance of Participants

There was a good balance of senior and junior scientists as well as tertiary students. There was a widespread representation of European countries. The North America scientific community was under-represented, considering their knowledge and expertise in palaeoseismology, with only five scientists presenting at the workshop. Asia and South America were almost not present with 3 representatives for the former and 1 for the later (albeit 3 presentations were about South America). This is surprising considering the importance of the subject for Japan, Indonesia, and Chile. The Middle East was well represented, with representatives from Israel and Turkey, which is to be seen as a very positive point. There was a strong bias toward southern Europe (Spain, Italy and Greece), which is understandable considering that these countries are recognised leaders in the field of seismology and the workshop was organised in Europe, by an European institution and by Spanish and Italian nationals. I am confident that the organisers took every actions they could to optimise the balance of national groups.

A large variety of themes - albeit within the geosciences overarching thematic - was covered with an understandable bias toward sedimentologists, but seismologists, marine geologists, geochemists and geophysicists were well represented.

Outlook and Future Developments

I have no doubt that new collaborations could emerge from this meeting within the next 1 to 3 years. Personally, this meeting enabled me to meet new colleagues as well as colleagues I had lost touch with. My PhD student, who attended the meeting, had some very constructive interactions with several scientists, and the level of the presentation was certainly insightful for him.

During the forward looking discussion on Wednesday evening, many ideas were proposed. These will take both leadership and funding to be implemented, in particular the idea of a recurring meeting on submarine palaeoseismology will require funding for the next one or two meetings before it is implemented as a truly recognised yearly (or bi-yearly whatever be the case) workshop. ESF funding would be critical.

Hosting a dedicated website could be a very positive and supporting action from ESF.

A special issue about submarine palaeoseismology in a scientific journal has been suggested and strongly supported by the attendees. ESF could make sure this is carried to the end by supporting it financially.

Follow-up

Several actions were suggested during the Forward Look Plenary Discussion:

- Creating and maintaining an email list and a dedicated Web page for forum discussion. Such ideas are valuable and can be very efficient and useful but require one dedicated person to be responsible for its implementation and follow up to effectively work and last through time.
- The next meeting has been suggested in Crete in 2012. This will have to be confirmed soon, so that the advertising can be done properly.
- Publication of a short article in AGU's EOS journal and a special issue on Submarine Paleoseismicity in the EGU journal Natural Hazard and Earth System were suggested. Both suggestions are certainly judicious, but only with leadership from the guest editors, will they eventuate.

Organisation and Infrastructure

The venue was truly excellent. I personally have no complain whatsoever about it. The ESF on-site administration was efficient and pleasant, thanks to Jean Kelly expertise and presence.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Overall, I was very impressed by the scientific level of research and the overall organisation of the workshop. This was an excellent meeting, scientifically challenging, novel, socially invigorating and with much potential for future developments. Few meetings have left me with such positive feeling.

Thank you to ESF, the two convenors Drs Eulalia Gracia and Daniela Pantosti, and to Jean Kelly the ESF coordinator, for making this excellent meeting so successful. It is the success of this very first meeting and the communicating of its success to the scientific community that will make it a recurrent, regular and successful event, and eventually have submarine palaeoseismology recognised as a genuine and respected area of research.

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences