

Opportunities



I prefer to talk about opportunities and chances, rather than problems, difficulties and challenges. Realistically, I know it's often necessary to identify the problem before talking about the solution or an opportunity, a chance. The problem identified in the article 'Opportunistic Multibeam Surveying' by Shannon Hoy, Laura Robinson and Veerle Huvenne on page 24 of this issue of Hydro International is the fact that only ten to fifteen percent of the ocean floor has been mapped at resolutions of 100-metre pixel or better. Of course this problem is known to the hydrographic community, from the surveyor on a vessel to the International Hydrographic Bureau in Monaco, where Robert Ward identified the same problem, which he shares in this month's Insiders View on page 6 of this issue of Hydro International. Captain Ward even mentions the 'uncomfortable fact that there are

higher resolution maps of the Moon and Mars than for many parts of our seas and coastal waters.' Ward advocates collection of bathymetry not as an activity in its own right, but as part of multi-disciplinary, multi-agency marine data gathering programmes. It is exactly this opportunity that Shannon Hoy et al. also see in their feature article, as the title already beholds 'Opportunistic Multibeam Surveying'. Making use of ships of opportunity could help contribute to optimised data collections in all areas in need of mapping – the Arctic, Antarctic and other remote areas of the world's oceans. Opportunistic surveying needs policymakers in hydrography that seek partnerships with leaders of research expeditions all over the globe, to be able to add multibeam surveying to the package of tasks the ships conduct when underway. Hoy names a few examples of cruises in the Drake Passage between Southern America and Antarctica and the lower latitude of the Atlantic where more than 100,000km² was surveyed, while this was not the primary goal of the cruise! It was therefore necessary to take indirect routes – requiring a flexible attitude and effective time-management within the research team. It's quite crucial that this flexibility is present. It's also necessary to tap into new markets outside of the research community. There are many more ships of opportunity out on the oceans, every day. If they had a multibeam echo sounder on board, the 100,000km² could easily be multiplied. But the hydrographic community would then also need to think about incentives. A commercial ship will not take a detour if they are not rewarded in some way. Risks of commercial loss are simply too high, as are higher costs. An opportunity for hydrography should also be an opportunity for the other party in the deal: the shipping company. This incentive will almost always be much cheaper than carrying out surveys ourselves and will always be quicker. Together with Hoy and Ward, I would like to agree that there certainly is a problem, but that there are reasons enough to also be very optimistic about the opportunities available for surveying all seas in the future!

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