ISSMGE FOUNDATION
REPORT ON CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

Your Name: Savannah Canto	***Your Organization:*** Zutari	***Date of report:*** 7/27/2026
Conference Title: 8iYGEC 2026 – 8th Young International Geotechnical Engineers Conference 2026	***Location of Conference:*** Graz, Austria	***Dates of Conference:*** 11-14 June 2026

What you learned:

I learnt how diverse the field of Geotechnical Engineering is and the conference left me with inspiration for my work and my master's degree studies. One of the highlights was learning about interesting conditions in other countries that I would never encounter in my own country – such as the challenges of sea ice for offshore wind farms in Finland. It was also interesting to hear about ground conditions that were similar across regions, for example my presentation on karstic risks in South Africa prompted conversations with a representative from Nepal, who told me of similar challenges in his country.

People you met:

Sergei Terzhagi gave an interesting presentation to kick off the conference on the progression of the geotechnical field during his career starting from use of calc pads to making use of present day's AI and BIM infrastructure. It was an honour to speak to him after and learn about his work in various countries.

I met many inspiring young engineers from around the world – Derek Acquah from Ghana, Stephanie Salim from Australia, Ihab Malaeb from Lebanon, Johannes Stamm from Germany, Rajan KC from Nepal, among many others. It was also a pleasure to meet the conference organisers, including Haris Felic and Johannes Leo. I even got to know my fellow South African attendees, Ruan Murison and Duan Swart, much better through the conference.

Main features of conference:

The first day of the conference comprised the keynote lecture by Sergei Terzhagi as well as the welcome function. This was followed by two full days packed with conference presentations by the different countries' young engineers and the keynote lecturers. On the final day, the young engineers headed to Vienna and were treated to a tour of the Terzaghi archive at TU Wien. It was incredible to see the first oedometers, and even some of the oedometer testing sheets/records written by Terzaghi himself. There were even Austrian stamps that had been printed to commemorate his contributions to society that were on display as well as university exercises that he had designed for his students.

Your comments on the conference:

The conference was a valuable and enriching experience, and I can say with certainty that it is one of my career highlights thus far. One of the best parts of the conference was getting to know the other attendees and being inspired by the other young engineers and the keynote speakers. The conference was also extremely well-organised. Communications with the other young engineers and the organisers was set up so that we had a smooth arrival in Graz, which helped me feel at ease even though the trip was far from home.

Please attach short report (maximum 400 words) suitable for publication in the ISSMGE Bulletin:

The conference spanned over 4 days – the first day included a welcome function and lecture on the progression of the geotechnical field by Sergei Terzhagi. The next two days were filled with presentations from the fellow delegates as well as with key-note lectures by Prof. Lidija Zdravkovic, Prof. Kenichi Soga and Dr Robert Thurner. The president of the ISSMGE Dr Marc Bellousz was also in attendance on the first day and gave an inspiring talk on the accomplishments of the ISSMGE during his tenure, of which I found the GeoEngineers without Borders really inspiring, and something that I hope to one day be a part of. One of the special features of the conference was that it was hosted at TU Graz, where Karl Terzhaghi, the father of modern soil mechanics studied, and also commemorated 100-years since the birth of modern soil mechanics.

The keynote lecture by Dr Robert Thurner focused on the risks of being a practicing geotechnical engineer, which I found to be very valuable. Since I am a practicing engineer who recently registered as a Professional Engineer in South Africa, aspects of this resonated with me as I am often struck by the realisation of the importance of geotechnical engineering and the risk that comes along with it.

I gave my presentation titled “A Study of the Formation of a Sinkhole on Eccles Formation Dolomite in South Africa” on the final day of presentations. I presented my analysis of data that I had collected during a sinkhole rehabilitation project in which I had been based on site for the geotechnical site supervision. Going into the conference I had felt incredibly nervous about presenting, but the kindness and interest shown by the other attendees made me feel more confident and at ease.

One of the best parts of the conference was sharing and exchanging experiences with other young engineers who shared the same passion for the field of geotechnical engineering. These conversations and encounters left me with so much inspiration for the future.

The 8iYGEC was my first international conference, and thanks to the ISSMGE Foundation I could be a part of this exciting opportunity and represent South Africa. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the ISSMGE Foundation for making my attendance possible and I will take the memories and insights from this conference forever with me in my career.

Photographs of the conference:





Ready for the next four days of the 8iYGEC after receiving my name tag (left) and the welcome lecture presented by Sergei Terzaghi (right).



Presenting my work at the 8iYGEC.



The South African delegates at the 8iYGEC (myself on the left).



An early morning climb up Schlossberg (using the stairs cut into the dolomite!) on the day of departure yielded this beautiful view over the city of Graz!