

Together Stronger and More Influential

International associations are often divided into professional and scientific organisations. In the surveying world there are several scientific associations, like the International Association of Geodesy (IAG) and the International Society of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS). On the other hand, there are professional organisations like the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG). In my experience, scientists and researchers sometimes fail to pay due respect to professionals, many of whom use the latest technology and results of scientific findings in their daily work, whether in the private or the public sector. The strength of FIG has been its ability to get these two groups together to discuss their common problems and to listen to each other's needs. Practical problems at conference level concern whether the papers presented will give enough scientific credit – even at the highest professional level – to the

academics and, at the other end of the scale, whether information presented at such conferences will ever impact working practice.

A lot of FIG people have, like myself, an educational background as a surveyor and geodesist. Since joining FIG I have listened to and regretted this kind of old-fashioned demagoguery in discussing the definition of surveyor. The first definition of surveyor was adopted by FIG in Beijing in 1991. During the past ten years the world has changed so that the definition needs to be revisited and not only because of technological developments and the rapid change in the use of geoinformation. Other updates include the goal of covering all surveying disciplines – or geomatics, if you prefer – with one definition. I think that geodesists, photogrammetrists and other traditional surveyors may now feel comfortable with the updated definition.

What is more important than definitions or bureaucracy is co-operation on practical issues. Even the biggest associations in our profession are too small to achieve big results alone. I have therefore followed with enthusiasm progress in co-operation between the classical surveying associations like IAG, ICA (International Cartographic Association), ISPRS, IHO (International Hydrographic Organisation) and FIG. Based on bilateral agreements, we have been able to proceed from attending each other's conferences to project-oriented co-operation that in the long run will provide more deliverables for all partners and individuals. I would like to mention as just one example the co-operation that FIG

FIG Working Week 2005 will be held together with the GSDI-8 Conference in Cairo, 13th to 17th April 2005.



has set up with the restructured IAG and its newly-appointed president Prof. Gerhard Beutler, both at commission level and, for example, with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs.

It is evident that this co-operation benefits from multilateral relationships, especially in discussions with policy-level decision-makers or international bodies like the United Nations. Or, as another example, when it comes to professional qualifications and education, with UNESCO, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and International Labour Organisation (ILO). Thus the recent development involving all spatial information societies has been positive – the joint board of these societies is now finding its real role as a link and main partner to the UN on geoinformation issues. This is needed because in voluntary organisations we will never alone have enough resources to get our agenda adopted within organisations like the UN. I look forward hopefully to our decisive meeting at the ISPRS Congress in Istanbul in July.

The modern FIG is not only about surveying. It is about much more. Thus FIG has been looking for partners also outside the traditional geomatics block, amongst planners, appraisers, architects, landscape architects,

lawyers and economists. For these sorts of activities we have other platforms, like the Habitat Professionals Forum for the implementation of the agenda on human settlements.

But FIG is all the time looking for new partnerships, for example in geoinformation. FIG has agreed to co-operate with the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI) by organising a joint conference to be held next year in Cairo from 16th to 21st April 2005. This will be the first FIG annual conference to be organised together with an international organisation. Depending on the result, we will consider other partners in the future. This partnership will be an experiment for both parties in terms of how a real, non-governmental organisation like FIG is able to co-operate on a practical level with an organisation whose members are mainly government bodies.

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