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Why Are Surveyors so Thinly Represented in the Planning Processes?

I recently came across the following news item: "Bavarian surveyors want to be involved as urban planners." What was the background to this? The Chairman of private Surveyors in Bavaria, in the light of the ever smaller numbers of commissions in the traditional field of surveying, announced that his Association would now seek recognition as planners in negotiations with the Council of Architects. In this connection the requirement of a years study in town and regional planning in addition to the Surveying Diploma would be accepted.

Irrespective of whether or not this arrangement would make things easier and would encourage many surveyors to take this step, the question arises whether surveyors should only seek to become engaged in planning when their traditional market has long disintegrated, that is whether they will only want to become planners from necessity. Naturally not – the ETH Zürich would say, which only recently has established its own masters course in geomatics and planning. Naturally not – would perhaps be the answer of some Scandinavian or British universities or professional associations – but that would be the end of the matter. Surveyors throughout the world are far too little involved in planning and creative fields. Too many are still involved or mainly involved (only) in supporting fields.

The 1996 FIG vision of the Surveyor in the 21st century as someone who is responsible for "Land, Property und Construction Management," which involves independent planning and decision making aspects, has not yet been realised. The personal and competence coverage in the FIG was and is correspondingly thin, where the Commission 8 responsible for spatial planning continually had manning problems. The two Chairs of the new Commissions, Diane Dumashie (UK) and Spike Boydell (Oceania), promise a new wind.

It is quite simple: where only few surveyors are involved in planning, this is reflected in geodetic teaching institutions and in their teaching programmes. The reverse is also true: where universities provide little teaching in the field of planning or where this is not highly regarded in the light of "too much geodesy and surveying", the students will not be interested in the subject and later will not (and will not be able to)

work in this field. If we are to break out of this vicious circle, the start must be made in the universities, and it is the universities which must provide for more balance: it must be made clear that every surveyor needs a basic knowledge of planning, irrespective of whether he surveys large scale canal networks and dams, provides data for complex environmental planning, or undertakes the readjustment of plots of land as required by urban planning. It would however be even better if he also possessed planning competence, as he could then apply his GIS skills, which will be compulsory in future, to advantage in carrying out his own planning. He will then be in advance of his competitors, as is the case of the few planning geodesists in the areas of Land Consolidation und Rural Development.

What I want to say is this: the new tool GIS offers many surveyors the chance, on the basis of an acquired and reliable competence in spatial planning, to develop from being (only) a provider of data and information to becoming a shaper of decision making and development processes in the field of town and country planning. The current depression in the surveyors' traditional work market calls for urgent action.