



Univ. Prof. Dr-Ing. Holger Magel (magel@landentwicklung.muenchen.de), is the President of FIG, Full Professor and Co-Director of Institute of Geodesy, GIS and Land Management and Programme Director of the International Master's Program Land Management and Land Tenure in Urban and Rural Areas at the Technische Universität München, Germany. He is chair of the working group "landmanagement and land economy" of the German Geodetic Commission (DGK) at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences.

Strengthening the Voice of Surveying and Geospatial Information Societies

One may regret or welcome the fact that through the course of history many, some say too many professional societies have been established. This is the case in the field of geodesy and surveying and in the broader range of geospatial information societies as well. This separation and specialization has brought undoubtedly a lot of advantages – e.g. outstanding results in research and practice - but also some obvious disadvantages.

These include unclear profiles of the profession as a whole along with a weakened position against global powerful customers and institutions like UN-Authorities, World Bank or international donors. A third danger exists: single societies deal simultaneously with the same "hot issues" – currently the best example is the topic No. 1 "disaster prevention and risk management", with whom FIG, ISPRS, ICA and IAG are intensively committed, naturally with different views, approaches, methods and tools – but without regular or even interdisciplinary cooperation or coordination. Everybody knows the inefficiencies.

Against this complex background, mainly because of the request of the UN Statistics Division for a focal point of all geospatial information societies and because of deficits in representing the geospatial aspects at the World Summit of Information Sciences, the representatives of FIG, IAG, ICA, ISPRS, IHO, Global Map etc. met in Istanbul on occasion of the XX ISPRS Congress 12 – 23 July 2004. The preliminary title for this informal meeting or body is "Joint Board of Geoinformation Societies". Lesson learnt from the failure of the preceding International Union for Surveys and Mapping (IUSM) is to be careful in building up a new umbrella of all respective societies and professions.

Presidents agreed to support bottom up processes, i.e. led by the commissions and to respect the different cultures and mentalities. But also seek to "strengthen the voice of all surveying and geospatial information societies" to avoid marginalization and losing profile and political influence. More surveyors, geodesists and GIS-partners than before must highlight that they can deliver a unique service: that is the geo-referenced data and information.

According to Jack Dangermond's keynote address to the ISPRS Congress surveyors,

geodesists and partners must do more than only providing, modelling and describing data; they even must go on to produce or create geographic knowledge. Instead of a pure descriptive geography we should move on to a process geography like it is already practice in the field of land management. Dangermond asked all experts to "find better ways to represent, understand, manage and communicate our world as a system". This systemic view and challenge could be the common philosophy and strategy of the intended new umbrella body of all "geo-societies".

FIG will support this new joint initiative and is also willing to serve the web portal. Before this will happen the goals, structure and working mechanism must be clarified. This should happen next year in Monaco under the chair of IHO President.

FIG will refer to its positive experiences with a similar informal umbrella, the Habitat Professionals Forum (HPF), which was established on request of UN Executive Director (e.d.) Klaus Töpfer. HPF is the umbrella of all planner professions – it works well and is highly acknowledged by UN-Habitat and even by the UN General Assembly. As a representative of the Forum I attended the 19th Session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council in Nairobi last year. As recognition to the Forum I was further invited to give a keynote address about "The future of cities" in a parallel event. The next highlight in representing the profession in a high profile will be the 2nd World Urban Forum in Barcelona in September 2004.

In my opinion the HPF could be a model for the new umbrella of all surveying and geospatial information societies and experts. Clearly, this new umbrella will only work if all members are totally inspired in enhancing our mission jointly and are willing to cooperate!