

# Surveyors and Politics – the Need for Dialogue<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

In this presentation I will discuss the relationship between surveyors and politicians and the need for closer dialogue between professionals and politicians. The presentation will be divided in following parts:

1. "Surveyors are having less and less influence on the shape of (their) future" as indicated by Dr. Peter Ellyard, CEO of Preferred Futures at the FIG Congress in 1994 in Melbourne). Has anything changed since then?
2. "Politics is such a bad thing – we do not like to get involved in it ...." as expressed by myself at my column in Geoinformatics, March 2004. Are we going to accept this for ever?
3. "Like it or not: we are part of the property profession" as David J. Powell, Chairman of the Geomatics Faculty of RICS wrote in the Geomatics World, September/October 2004. Or are we even of more?
4. "Can membership of FIG be justified?" as asked by Alan F. Wright and James R. Smith in the Civil Engineering Surveyor, September 2004. Is there any equal option?

### **1. "SURVEYORS ARE HAVING LESS AND LESS INFLUENCE ON THE SHAPE OF THEIR FUTURE"**

As a starting remark I would like to mention that all what I will say now is possibly not the full truth in the United Kingdom, but it is in most countries. And possibly it is the case even here.

As Dr. Peter Ellyard mentioned in 1994 "surveyors are having less and less influence on the shape of (their) future". Has anything changed in ten years' time?

Let me start with a very actual story of Bavaria: the biggest university in Munich has against the background of urgent reforms decided to close down the chair of Bavarian history with few students and obviously no great relevance.

What has happened? After the report in the newspaper there was a big protest and finally the minister decided that it will be his decision to close down or not – although the university was asked to make its own proposals.

A very small discipline was saved by the minister! Why? Because it stands for Bavarian identity and culture! What would happen if the board of Technische Universität of Munich had suggested closing down the chairs of surveying because of too few students and too little relevance to society?"

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<sup>1</sup> This summary is based on the purely orally given lecture of Univ. Prof. Holger Magel, President of FIG at the RICS as the "Christmas Lecture" of the Geomatics Faculty, December 2, 2004.

Fortunately we were up to now not urged to give the answer for Munich – but we already got the answer in some other cities and countries. And there we can ask about deficits and faults of professors and professionals – they were not successful to convince the board of university and the public about the need of existence ....

Additionally the surveying authority in Bavaria is restructuring its organization by closing down several offices, cutting down services and making big cuts in the number of staff.

These changes have also great impact on the situation and education of surveying and geomatics in my home country. What will happen with the surveying education in Munich? There is still no answer, but we already know about the development in Delft or Cape Town that is considering closing the geomatics programme, even though the demand on the market requires more and more professionals both for land administration and geomatics. Traditional surveying programmes in geodesy and photogrammetry are closed or under threat e.g. in Berlin and in Stockholm. It is not only because of fewer students, but it is mainly because of lack of marketing, advertisement and image of the profession – and in many cases because of lack of influencing politicians (e.g. in the cases of Berlin and Delft) and the public.

It is easy to add several newer examples to the list where surveyors have failed in influencing politicians – the examples can be taken from almost anywhere in the world:

- Bavaria: Failure in introducing the system of licensed surveyors because the non Bavarian and Bavarian lobbyists did not understand the political culture in Bavaria (the Parliament is more influential than the “Reform Minister” or other Ministers.)  
“Powerful and close connections to Members of Parliament have resulted in victory for the geodetic rural service which was threatened to lose its independent status”
- Malaysia: Requests from surveyors for FIG to help with the bad standing of surveying profession in Malaysia and the region and need to get professional qualifications standardized.
- Germany: Surveying services are of the lower level of remuneration because among other things there are no surveyors represented in the Parliament.
- FIG Conferences: As a profession we have given up to invite political leaders to our conferences. E.g. in Paris, Washington DC or at the German Intergeo there are not any more politicians as keynote speakers. In the former times the conferences were opened by presidents and sovereigns.
- Iran: Nobody knows what surveyors are what they do and that there even exists a surveyors association – in one of the countries that urgently needs e.g. effective cadastral system.
- Germany: At opening celebrations of new constructions like bridges, buildings etc. surveyors’ contribution is hardly ever mentioned in the media or in the speeches and publications.

Contrary to the bad news there are also some encouraging news how surveyors – especially in the developing countries, is this a trend or surprise? – have managed both to create contacts to the political leaders and to the media. As examples I can mention the FIG

Regional Conference in Marrakech which was organized under the patronage of the king and where the conference was attended by three leading ministers; the first FIG Regional Conference in Nairobi, where President Daniel arap Moi personally opened the conference; and from this year the international conference in Beirut where President Gen. Emile Lahoud invited all international participants for a private reception in his palace as well as the latest Regional Conference in Jakarta attended by leading Ministers despite the recent change of the leaders and the simultaneous negotiations of the new government. I hope that the trend has changed permanently when we will have the Egyptian Prime Minister to make a keynote speech at the opening ceremony at the next FIG Working Week 2005 in Cairo.

In Cambodia recently the Prime Minister gave a one hour farewell speech to the outgoing German geodetic consultant praising his contributions to build up a new system of cadastre and land management.

In several countries in transition surveyors have their representatives in the Parliament or even as Ministers. This is also the case in Greece, the home of democracy. What is the situation in your country?

With a good reason we can ask whether the surveying profession is only appreciated in developing countries. And whether there is a *division* between Central/East European and Western European countries?

Contrary to the failures in the traditional surveying profession there have been success stories in GIS also in Germany and German parliament, surely not because of surveyors or geomatics professionals but more likely because of the width and many other disciplines and people affecting character of GIS!

As a conclusion I would like to emphasize that if we are convinced that our services are of great importance and if we are realistically recognising that societies and politicians do not know enough about this importance, then *we must firstly change our attitude and mind* but especially *our education!*

It is for sure that the world does not come to us – we must go to the world! We must explain our services for human beings (direct service like e.g. in the village renewal). The politicians and clients are not interested in our technological expertise; they want to know what we can do for their needs. John Leonard, the FIG Congress Director 1998, has expressed this opinion very clearly several times during his term of office as the Secretary General of the EuroGeographics. As David Powell once has noticed: “Lawyers whilst often bored by surveying in general perk up once they realise what surveyors do.”

After all it is just normal that not only lawyers are usually bored ...

## **2. “POLITICS IS SUCH A BAD THING THAT WE DO NOT WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN IT” – COLUMN IN GEOINFORMATICS 3/2004**

I have tried to explain some reasons for my point of view as a surveyor breaking borders (once started from the university, moving on to the private sector passing through to ministries and now landed again at the university).

As I see it, one of the bad things that now causes problems to the university life is the academics' *dislike* to politics and politicians in general and an incapability in their genes and interest to communicate with the public – and to sell our competence and services.

A result of this attitude is that the young students have no interest and at the same time they are not properly trained in the field because of deficits in their education, which is *too* one-sided scientific.

As academics and in the interest of the future of our profession (not only of the discipline) we should focus to attract not only those students who are excellent in mathematics, but have no talents for PR or who may even be anti-PR-talents, with no rhetorical nor communication or any other soft skills.

In addition we must widen the focus from national to international view. And: we have to consider broadening the education to become more project-oriented with more interdisciplinary focus, extend the training in “soft” or humanitarian skills. At the moment the education we offer to our students is too theoretical and it has too few links to the daily political and social life and priorities.

The result is pure technicians who are incapable of speaking to the world or to give sufficient and quick answers to unexpected disasters or developments.

As my favourite philosopher José Ortega y Gasset has expressed it: “*To be a good technician or engineer it is not enough to be a good technician or engineer only*”.

## **3. “WE ARE PART OF THE PROPERTY PROFESSION”**

So the question is, what can we do and what should we do? We as surveyors must become more attractive, more interesting people for journalists, for the media and for the politicians!

Our *image must be changed*. We are not only the notaries of the world (Karl Rinner, Graz), we are not only the pedantic millimetre experts with an own precision theory (we talk about error theory and are the profession which obviously talks about own mistakes!). We are not only “grey cadastre mice” or the minor slaves to serve the major disciplines like architecture or civil engineering. No, we must clearly point out *that we serve and respond directly to the urgent needs of politicians and society* as a whole. The needs of politics and society include e.g.:

- secure tenure
- access to land and resources. *Therefore it is not only property, it is also about land!* (Land Consultancy Group!)
- disaster prevention and risk management
- geospatial data information for political decisions
- conflict solution in land use and land management fields (e.g. by land readjustment)
- urban and rural and urban-rural development including infrastructure or village renewal.

I would like to repeat my slogan about the future role of surveyors: “Surveyors or geodesists or geomaticians must be(come) well-grounded specialized generalists.” We should move from a pure *homo technician* to a more *homo politician*.

We can become more influential and more powerful by networking within universities and outside the profession.

We will become more appreciated if we contribute to socio-political processes like strengthening civil societies and participatory planning processes and if we become members of CBO’s, NGO’s etc.

We will get more response if we make popular articles in newspapers or write contributions to books with politicians etc.

We must invite politicians to our conferences or vice versa we must go to their conferences.

We must catch up with actual political topics and trends and try to give our responses. That has nothing to do with opportunism.

#### **4. “CAN FIG MEMBERSHIP BE JUSTIFIED?”**

The answer is given almost daily by looking at our work. Ask our FIG office director Markku Villikka about the services we provide to our members and the service they ask for.

I will here give some answers with regard to the premier topic of our profession which in my mind is *to improve our standing and reputation*.

The increasing cooperation with UN shows the high reputation of FIG and the surveying profession in the leading world organization. I only mention the meetings in Vienna next week with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs here. Unfortunately many surveyors at national level do not appreciate this work enough because they are still too much focused and interested in what is happening in their neighbourhood.

I feel that this is totally wrong! We all benefit from the international activities and cooperation. In a globalized world nobody can step aside, even if you would like to. The globalisation affects our profession more and more (mutual recognition of education, standards etc.) and our working conditions at home. FIG can help the members to become aware of these developments in time!

I can again say based on my background as an international consultant or as the Programme Director of the post graduate Master Program Land Management and Land Tenure at the TUM or from my experience as the FIG President: It is possible to improve the reputation of our profession within politics if we show this *international flag!*

An example of this: we are going to experience an outstanding FIG Working Week 2005 in Cairo by cooperating with GSDI and we will present the Egyptian Prime Minister as a keynote speaker.

We are working to get a sufficient role at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in November 2005.

We are strengthening surveyors' contribution and role as an indispensable and equal part of the global planning profession within the UN-Habitat Professionals Forum.

But that's not enough to rely only on FIG:

Even if you feel that you are safe and protected in your daily surroundings you must follow my predecessor's Peter Dale's advice "*Local professional bodies in particular need to target politicians and the general public and explain to them why investment in geomatics brings wealth*" (Dale 2000)

We must further give up a too splendid division within our own family that is the family of cartographers, photogrammetrists, geodesists and some more. FIG wants to contribute to a closer and more fruitful cooperation with IAG, ICA, IHO etc. and welcomes for example the new President of ISPRS, Professor Ian Dowman, as a highly respected person and as a long-standing friend of FIG.

So let me come to the end and to my hope that I, as the current FIG President, and my Council and our very competent commissions with a lot of wonderful British colleagues and leaders can fulfil the wishes of our predecessors Peter Dale and especially Robert Foster:

"We must embrace the whole spectrum of surveying in its broadest definition and we must speak to the world (e.g. to the politicians) with a single voice of clarity and unity." (Robert W. Foster, FIG Honorary President)

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