

FIG's Work Week was another reminder of the strengths of our profession but too often we do not realise it.



## EDITORIAL

### Our diversity is our strength

**F**irst of all, apologies for the delay in bringing this issue of GW to you. Staff changes and a busy schedule of events have caused problems. Please bear with us and we'll be back on track by the next issue.

Back in March I happened in one day to find two contrasting items on the BBC's News Website. It was reported that scientists had managed to accurately weigh an atom of material; at the same time an audit was published on the state of the planet's environment, and it was not good. Devastating data confirmed our worst fears about where we were heading if we didn't reduce our insatiable demand for hydrocarbons, timber and agriculture won from virgin rain forest and other pristine wilderness with the consequent loss of plant and animal species. It seemed that while one group of scientists had given great thought to the state of our planet, another had given up trying to persuade governments of doing anything about the environment and had instead opted for the fascination of extreme navel gazing.

Surveyors and those in geomatics are capable of measuring all kinds of things, not quite at the atomic level but fine-scale metrology involves measurement skills which we possess in abundance, just as we can measure and evaluate land and what's on it on a very large scale. We are also the people who understand measurement data, can analyse and present it in such a way that decision makers, whether at the UN or the local council, can make informed decisions. This was very apparent from the recent FIG Working Week in Cairo where I have been.

#### At every level others depend on our skills

I was struck by the enormous diversity of papers presented at this annual event between the four-yearly congresses. Although straplined "From Pharaohs to Geoinformatics" it might just as appropriately have been called "From plate tectonics to low cost housing". It seemed that at every level of human activity surveyors were out there using their skills to provide the essential measurement data on which others could act. Whatever your interest or specialisation there was something at Cairo to whet the appetite.

I was particularly struck by a paper from Daniel Roberge, an academic from Quebec, who examined the role that geomatics should play in the post-tsunami reconstruction. It was vital, argued Roberge, that our advice and involvement was

sought before the inevitable informal settlements again encroached on the ravaged coastlines of the Indian Ocean. I spoke in support of his paper's aims and was glad to hear that FIG President Holger Magel was taking on board Roberge's proposals. If we want to be noticed in the world and gain greater respect for our profession we have to show what we have to offer in mitigating not only the world's natural disasters but manmade ones too, such as urban sprawl, informal settlements and inappropriate and over development in the flood plains of Europe. Throughout the world, cadastral and construction surveying is the backbone to our profession, it is only by engaging with the political and governmental process which drives development that our profession will be enhanced. Getting out on site is one of the great attractions of surveying but it is only a means to an end. It's what we do with the data, how we analyse and present it that counts in the end.

#### Future leaders

Another lasting impression I took away from Cairo is the important role that women are playing in the profession in the developing world. There were many female delegates from the Middle East and Pacific Rim countries; and they were not passive in the sessions I attended, questioning speakers and contributing to the debate. Western Europe and especially the US, needs to re-examine the way it characterises and pigeon-holes women from these regions. They are educated, articulate and will lead our profession one day.

In this issue we have two articles (quite accidentally!) which manage to link farming and survey technology. One is historical and the other bang up to date, showing how a former site engineer has developed a new career along with a unique system to help market gardeners maximise crops. We also preview yet another new tool for data capture. Pictometry is an airborne camera system that comprises one downward looking sensor and four oblique ones. The resulting imagery enables users to view scenes in much better perspective than conventional stereo pairs and thereby gain high quality ortho photos.

Finally I am off to Ireland as GW goes to press. Survey Ireland is always an interesting event and the camaraderie of Irish surveyors has to be experienced. Expect a report in the next issue.

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