

FIG Working Week in Paris 13–17 April 2003

Still in the Frontline – FIG returns to Paris to celebrate its 125th Anniversary

The International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) organized its 26th General Assembly and Working Week in Paris, France 13-17 April 2003 just prior to Easter. This and the 125th Anniversary of FIG was the reason why not only 600 delegates but also almost 200 accompanying persons from more than 60 countries attended. Despite the very short preparation time, the high number of participants is a clear indication that attendance of the FIG Working Weeks has permanently raised to a level of 500-1,000. One reason for the increased participation of accompanying persons, in particular, was that the gala dinner to celebrate the 125th Anniversary was held at the Château de Versailles. More than 450 participants joined the dinner in the Hall of Mirrors of this perhaps most prestigious venue in France and even in Europe with champagne and an excellent dinner that followed a private visit to the royal chambers.

Paris was not selected to the venue of the 125th Anniversary till 10 months prior to the conference after it was agreed at the General Assembly in Washington to postpone the working week planned for Israel to 2009. The reason for selecting Paris for the venue was to have the celebrations in the city in which FIG was founded in 1878 by seven European nations. The two French member associations of FIG, Ordre des Géomètres-Experts (OGE) and Association Française de Topographie (AFT) in a very short time managed to organize an excellent working week with full technical and social programme.

The venue itself was the École Nationale des Sciences Géographiques (ENSG), which has been located in Marne la Vallée, one of the new cities in greater Paris since 1997. ENSG and IGN (Institut Géographique National), www.ign.fr offered modern and most adequate facilities both for the technical conference and for the commercial and professional exhibitions. Almost 40 firms participated the commercial exhibition. With some professional and conference stands they filled the main hall of ENSG for two days. ENSG showed that the FIG working week could be held in university surroundings if the facilities are favorable.

The opening ceremony was held at the Salons de l'Aveyron in Bercy close to the François Mitterand Library. At the opening ceremony welcome addresses were given by Bernard Bour, Chair of the local organizing committee, André Radier, President of OGE, Michel Kasser, President of AFT and Prof. Holger Magel, President of FIG. The audience was also addressed by Bruno Parent, Deputy General Director of the French Cadastre and Bertrand Levy, Director General of IGN.

The opening ceremony was followed by the 125th Anniversary Session with keynote presentations from Prof. Michel Godet, University of Paris, Mr. Jan de Graeve who spoke about the founding meeting in Paris in 1878 and Dr. Andreas Drees, who gave a vision of the role of FIG in a vulnerable world.

The three-day technical conference started every morning with a plenary session. The topics of these sessions were cadastre, public and private systems in geoinformation and future techniques. Keynote addresses were given by international experts like Concepción Camarero (Spain), Pierre Clergeot (France), Paul van der Molen (FIG Commission 7), Nick Land (Executive Director of EuroGeographics), François Salgé (France), Dr. Holger Schade

(General Manager of SICAD Geomatics) and Luis G. Hecht (Open GIS Consortium), Monika Sester (Germany) and March Bernard (Spot Image).

In addition to the plenary sessions there were 27 technical sessions running three at a time for three days. In these sessions 120 papers were presented. The interest in the conference was so big, that for the first time during a working week, FIG tried poster presentations. Despite smaller problems the concept proved to be successful giving opportunity to many authors to make their case studies broader known. Totally about 60 posters were briefly introduced in the sessions and then presented in the exhibition area.

The topics of the technical programme covered all commissions and the main topics of the current work plans. This allowed an effective start to several working groups in their work to prepare their final report to FIG 2006. It appeared that the concept of having more inter-commission sessions was successful, even though some commissions – commissions 3 and 7 mainly – from year to year attract much more papers than they can easily accommodate in their programme. All papers were published already prior the working week on the FIG web site which made it possible for the participants to select the most interesting sessions. The papers are available at http://www.fig.net/figtree/pub/fig_2003/.

The organising committee of FIG 2003 wanted to support students and young surveyors to attend. It was a great pleasure that almost 70 students were able to participate, in addition ten young surveyors (under 32 years) got a grant that covered free registration and support to travel and accommodation costs.

Technical tours during the week were not as well attended as one could expect but the main reason was that the working week programme with professional conference, administrative meetings, exhibitions etc. is quite hectic and many delegates have no time for “escape programmes” whether it is professional or social. Technical tours were made to Reims to see the high speed train LGV and visit surveying companies and to Le Défense in Paris.

The General Assemblies on April 13 and 17 were well attended. In both sessions 52 member associations out of 89 were present. Number of participants to these open meetings was about 200. The General Assembly adopted following new members as member associations: the Chamber of Surveyors and Cartographers from Slovakia, the Sociedade Brasileira de Cartografia, Geodesia, Fotogrametria e Sensoriamento Remoto (SBC) and the Collegio de Ingenieros Topografos de Costa Rica. At the same time it was recorded that the second member associations from Malaysia and Israel have resigned from the membership. The General Assembly was obliged to expel the former Yugoslavian association because the association has been dissolved.

FIG has got several new corporate members since the congress in Washington, DC. These are: Intergraph Mapping and Geospatial Solutions (category A), Sicad Geomatics (B), Geoexpert (E) and the Institut Cartogàfic de Catalunya (F). Further ESRI has upgraded its membership category to level A.

Fourteen new academic members were recorded since Washington congress. This increases the number of academic members from 39 to 62 countries. Constantin Bah from Benin was admitted as a new correspondent.

The General Assembly appointed Robert W. Foster, the immediate past president an honorary president of FIG. Dr. Tom Kennie from UK was appointed an honorary member. They have both served not only in two councils but also made great contributions to the federation as members of task forces and working parties in the very interesting time when FIG changed its administration to a more democratic and persistent. The General Assembly further confirmed the end of term report of the US Council.

The remaining members of the German Council Vice President Bettina Petzold and Congress Director Thomas Gollwitzer were introduced to the FIG delegates. The election of further two Vice Presidents will take place in Athens in May 2004 at the same time when the election of all Commissions chairs elect will take place. Therefore the Nomination Review Group to prepare these elections was appointed in Paris. It will be chaired by Robert Foster.

The German Council will prioritize international co-operation including good relations to the United Nations in the coming years. The new UN network that will be in charge of this work is chaired by President Magel. The General Assembly recorded its best thanks to Prof. Ian Williamson who has had the leading role in the UN co-operation for several years.

The General Assembly used quite a lot of time to learn from the Commissions. They have made good progress in implementing their work plans which were adopted last year in Washington. The meetings in Paris were the first for the new chairs and they were very pleased with the large attendance at the meetings.

To create more discussions and change of experiences at the General Assembly the Council had invited five speakers to make presentations on regional activities. These included reports on regional co-operation within the Francophone group, in the newly established Arab Federation of Surveyors and from Africa, Asia and South America. FIG was challenged especially to create models to create surveying curricula and to increase the level of professional qualifications in Africa and Latin America. Support for regional organizations dealing with the main problems got support. Unfortunately the tight schedule did not allow much discussion.

One of the new initiatives in the FIG work plan 2003-2006 is the FIG World Report on Good Practices. This concept is based on a database that will include good or even best practices and case studies of all disciplines of the surveying profession covering all ten FIG commissions. There is a lot of material already from the commission projects and conference papers that can be included, as well as policy level guidelines like the Bathurst Declaration and the Nairobi Statement and e.g. ethical codes, FIG agenda 21. The other part of the database will consist of reviewed papers from the conferences and seminars. The third level will consist of structured national reports and answers to ten "hot questions" on each commission expertise that will give a global overview on basic questions in surveying. The World Report is planned to be published online on the FIG website and as a CD.

The FIG Foundation has managed to start its work. First thirteen grants were given in December 2002 and another seven grants were decided in April in Paris. The Foundation managed to get good response to specific donations in conjunction with the 125th Anniversary. Three member associations namely DVW from Germany, SVVK from Switzerland and DdL from Denmark each donated more than US\$ 1,000 to the Foundation. Together with voluntary donations and donations from the registration fees and Foundation Dinner which was combined with the Gala Dinner in Versailles well over 15,000 euros were

collected to the Foundation to help young surveyors in the research. In addition to grants from the funds the Foundation has managed to establish special software grant programmes with the corporate members. The latest concept is donation to the Foundation from sales of ESRI software purchased by members at a reduced fee.

The Working Week 2008 was admitted to Stockholm, it will be part of the 100th anniversary of the Swedish member association SLF. Next year the Working Week will take place in Athens 21-27 May 2004. Already before that FIG will continue to organize regional events. The 2nd Regional Conference will be held in Marrakech, Morocco December 2-5, 2003. The next regional conference is planned for Jakarta, Indonesia in October 2004.