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Politics is Such a Bad Thing - We Don't Like to Get Involved in It

Surveyors, geoinformatic experts, architects, planners and other professionals are high-level experts in their specific fields, but very often amateurs in selling their knowledge and competence to the decision-makers and especially politicians. Why is this and how can this be improved?

The problem is most obvious in the area of risk and disaster management. Decision-makers ask the opinion of professionals after disaster has happened, but not when it is still possible to prevent. Flooding is a prime example. Surveyors and other professionals have much knowledge about these issues, but why do they keep quiet or when they speak their message is not heard? Is their mentality of 'old civil servant' to the 21st century? If people don't speak then they don't make a mistake and put their position or head in danger. Or are we just incapable of getting our message heard? Perhaps surveyors do not have the appropriate "soft skills"?

In the course of political changes, global UN campaigns on security of tenure, urban governance or on disaster and post conflict management (e.g. wars, earthquakes, floods), the services of surveyors and other professionals have increased in economic and societal importance, while this silence has continued. Often, professionals are not interested in political issues connected to their work. This is especially true for both civil servants and from the perspective of universities. There even exist opinions like "politics and politicians are such a bad thing, that we do not like to get involved with them". Unfortunately there is no interest or even a priority in university education to make students more aware and sensitive to political decisions and the need of contacting and convincing politicians about the indispensable services of our professions.

It is very significant that there are almost no surveyors in most European parliaments. It is delighting, however, that in the countries in transition and in the new EU member countries, where land policy and land management is a hot topic, surveyors are more visible in the political field – even as ministers in cabinets. Who would know the land issues better than a professional surveyor and the need for the use of geoinformation better than a geomatics professional!

In the "old Europe" this reluctance of professionals to play a more crucial part in the political game is wrong. Examples from land registration, cadastre, geo-information, geodata systems and land management show; that in times of global challenges, changing professions, and the increasing overlap with neighboring disciplines that surveyors need politicians and their support. This is true for universities, administration, economy and private sector. Society also needs surveyors' services and their advice with regard to (re)construction, transformation and sustainable planning and development.

The first need is to educate our students and young professionals with a sense of being "well grounded specialized generalists," who are able to understand the "world outside of their own discipline" and are willing to openly and self confidently communicate with political and financial decision makers. As Ortega y Gasset once said: "To be a good technician it is not enough to be a good technician only".

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A second need is for FIG and all surveying member associations to become inspired and to strengthen communication with and to respond to the calls and needs of politics and politicians internationally and nationally. The FIG 2nd Regional Conference in Marrakech is an example of this, where 3 ministers of the Moroccan government have attended the opening ceremony. This is one way for surveyors to become more influential and visible to the political and public world!

