

FIG TASK FORCE ON CULTURE AND LANGUAGES – FEEDBACK FROM THE BREAKOUT SESSION 7 MAY 2001

1. What is the situation at present?

Today the only working language is English. As a result several national delegations are missing in FIG due to the difficulty to find people speaking and understanding correctly English.

The selection of delegates attending the meetings is primarily done on their ability to speak English and not their knowledge and competences. Thus, professionals who are very competent often cannot express their experience in their own language, and even sometimes the head of delegations are chosen because of their ability to speak English and not for their representativity. As a consequence, FIG meetings and of course FIG commissions are more and more attended by people from universities and less and less from people from the professional scene, working on the field.

In scientific international associations (IAG, ISPRS, ICA, ...), the English language is a necessary standard : researchers have as a principal goal to put in common their work, and thus the use of a unique language must be understood as a necessity, without any major drawback. But the main goal of FIG is completely different: it aims at allowing any surveyor, from any country, to share his experience with others. Thus the linguistic difficulties are a basic aspect of FIG, and cannot be escaped. Dealing with such problems correctly is probably the highest priority to reach the objectives of the Federation, and clearly the FIG without basic surveyors would be completely useless.

The interesting work done in FIG commission is not enough spread in each country and to basic professionals, as the documents issued from various WGs are not easily accessible to the basic surveyors.

If we consider the actual GATT's negotiations, the liberalization of services is not taken in account in FIG works.

At present, in average, the age of the delegates is about 45 years and those are coming from generations which are not trained to speak English at university level. This generation and his elders is the one that has capitalized the professional experience which must be shared at the FIG.

Another important point: even if we may harmonize education and practise in our profession, it should include a very high consideration to the important weight of culture in each country. The different cultures are of course a real treasure, which is not used as a benefit by FIG.

2. After our meeting what are our proposals

Before giving proposals, we may consider four ways to explore:

- the general assembly
- the commissions
- the publications
- the web site

2.1 General Assembly

We have there two aspects:

- the oral expression of the delegations
- the accessibility of papers in various languages

Considering the problem of oral expression, we propose that every point of the agenda shall be presented under slides in as many as possible of the following languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic, Chinese. Doing so, we will open the debate to nearly any delegates from any country.

The written documents which concern the General Assembly must be translated from English in the 5 other languages.

Considering other languages our proposals are included in the workplan for the commissions.

2.2 The Commissions

The considerable and interesting work done by the commissions is not fully downloaded to the final users. That is to say that the colleagues working every day in our profession fields do not take any benefit from those important reports.

To avoid that negative aspects we propose the following:

1. We will send a questionnaire to each commission to see what are the languages spoken by the chair, the vice chair and each member of the commission.
2. Each commission will have the duty to organize a linguistic network (mainly based on university competences) devoted to spread correctly any information considered as important by the commission. These linguistic networks for various commissions will probably merge in many cases, but they must be triggered from the commissions, that are the most active part of FIG.
3. To give to each commission the ability to do so, a special budget will be dedicated to those translations.
4. All papers concerning the General Assembly to be translated in languages other than the basic ones may be translated using the same procedures.

2.3 The publications

The publications follow the same rules than the work in commissions, with several possible levels. The first level is that each publication will be accompanied with abstracts translated into the basic languages.

Every presentation which could be given in foreign language by somebody who is not speaking English will be accepted only on considerations of its technical interest, but will directly translated at the oral presentation by a colleague under his own responsibility. In this case the slides will be directly written in English.

2.4 The web site

Of course, every paper and every information in general, to be added to the web site will be given in the basic languages.

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