

Changing FIG – Model for a Changing World

**Farewell speech at the Handover Ceremony
on 2 December 2006 in Münster, Germany**

FIG President Professor Holger Magel

A Milestone in the History of the FIG

Ms. Mayor, Presidents, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The carousel turns full circle: A little over four years ago we celebrated in Frankfurt am Main the handover from the American to the German FIG Council, and today the German Council leaves the leadership of the FIG and hands it over to – to whom, actually? – no longer to a national team, as was customary in the FIG for 128 years. For the first time the leadership is being handed over to an international team of individuals from six countries and four continents which is directly and impressively elected by the General Assembly. This Handover today is not only for the “outgoing“ and “incoming“ Council Members something special. No, it is also a mile stone in the long history of the FIG.

What could be more suitable than to celebrate this milestone in this Town Hall, with its world famous Hall of Peace (Friedenssaal), where history was once written for millions of people, for several religions, and for a whole continent? Perhaps it is a specially symbolic sign for the FIG and for the new leadership to be inaugurated in the surroundings of the Friedenssaal: our community of idealists and volunteers has dedicated itself to world wide peace; we want to make our contribution to peace through our numerous and –as we believe – important contributions in the fields of land, water and coastal management, settlement, the equal development of urban and rural areas, the guarantee of property and tenure, building of functioning market economies, of environmental protection through data acquisition and data processing as well as monitoring of measurements on land, from the air and space etc.

As surveyors, whether in the front line, this means with our “boots on the pavement“ on site with our clients or in ministries, public authorities, offices, undertakings or research laboratories and in universities etc we know that ultimately, and indeed throughout the world, it is a matter of not only doing our duty but always of doing more. This is the ethos of our FIG which I always experienced during my presidency. It is this ethos which makes the FIG so valuable for the world and for world organisations such as UN authorities, the World Bank etc, which also makes it so valuable for its over 100 member associations at the national and local levels. We have neither business nor power interests; we want only to help and to make our contribution in the hope of a more just, peaceful and sustainable world which, as we realists know, changes itself daily in both positive and negative senses.

A Big Thank You to the UK and US FIG Councils

It is to the great credit of our predecessor “governments“ in the FIG that they recognised at the right time that the FIG and its leadership structures must become more professional and more representative. Only in this way could the FIG be better able to meet the increased and ever increasing global and national challenges to our profession and to its own aims. The

appointment of a full time FIG director which was already discussed under the Australian presidency and implemented under the UK and especially Peter, your presidency, deserves the highest recognition, as does the change over from a structure of national teams and associated FIG Congresses to separate elections of Council members and the Congress venue which was consequently prepared under the American and Bob, your presidency. These achievements were a splendid starting point for the German team which had the task of implementing the not always easy changes in, and indeed reorganisation of, the whole system, including the associated more recent restructuring of the FIG Office.

It is therefore not only a happy coincidence or even a generous gesture that the two Presidents of the British and American periods, Peter Dale and Robert Foster, are with us today. No, it is only right and logical that they should celebrate with us today the “Change of the FIG”, which at least in structure and organisation as well as in the direct election of the Council Members, has now been completed, and that they should join us in entering into a new era for the FIG. This new FIG will naturally be spared neither further changes in the world and in the professional world of surveyors nor the answers which will be required of the FIG and its leadership, office and commission structures.

I thank you both, dear Peter and dear Bob, for your presence today, for your successful leadership of the FIG and for the fact that we were able to take over and carry on the leadership of a very healthy FIG. In German there is a very wise saying addressed to each successive generation, particularly to the successive heirs to a farm – and which is particularly appropriate here in the rural countryside of Münsterland – a saying which my first Minister, at about the time I came to the DVW and FIG, always held before me as an ideal:

“What you have inherited from your fathers, you must earn again, for it to become yours!”

“Shaping the Change”: Implementation of the Work Plan 2002-2006

We, the German Council, were passed a rich inheritance, and we sought, under the motto “Shaping the Change”, not so much simply to possess what we had inherited but to use and administer it as trustees. We wanted to guide and apply it and, in the light of continually changing global and national conditions, to shape and structure it so as make it able to meet crises and to be well equipped for the future. And where possible we sought to enhance the inheritance. It is for others, and particularly the General Assembly 2007 in Hong Kong, to make an assessment of our efforts and of the German period, but we are naturally – without being pure growth fetishists – a little proud to have enhanced our inheritance and to have carried out our work plan in a consequential manner under continual control, i.e. annual control by the General Assembly. We set ourselves from the beginning at the end of 2002 ambitious aims:

We wanted

1. to exercise intellectual leadership by clear and simple messages concerning the identity and role of surveyors (examples: “From surveying to serving society” or “well grounded specialised generalist”),
2. to continue and bring to a conclusion the structural reorganisation of the composition of the Council, Office and Commissions as well as to strengthen cooperation between the Commissions,

3. to generate more income for the FIG, inter alia by events involving or arranged by the FIG as well as by attracting financially strong Corporate Members,
4. to increase substantially membership of the FIG and at the same time to become more truly global (e.g. we could attract 19 new member associations thus increasing the membership by more than 20 per cent),
5. to promote a professional presentation of the outcome and results (including publication) of the work of our Commissions (e.g. reference library) and of our events, and to give them more appeal to a wider public,
6. to increase our commitment for the weak in the world by stronger cooperation with the UN and World Bank and by intensified cooperation with sister organisations (I draw attention to the foundation of the Joint Board of GIS, to its African initiative and the urgently necessary coordination in the area of the Disaster and Risk Management),
7. to have a greater presence on the spot and in the regions (see the Regional Conferences and the many visits of the President and Council Members) as well as greater communication between the FIG leadership and members (see the Newsletters, excellent web pages, Presidential Letters etc.), and a greater communication between our profession and politics,
8. to strengthen the bridging within the FIG between practitioners and academics as well as to put on a new footing the partnership with purely academic oriented sister organisations such as the IAG,
9. to broaden the definition, activities as well as the training and advanced training of surveyors (capacity building), and
10. to acquaint young persons and the coming generation at an early stage with the FIG. Here I have good reason to thank the German, as well as the Swedish and Danish Presidents for their splendid support of student attendance at FIG events.

Although not set out *expressis verbis* in the Work Plan, there was another theme which became the central concern of our presidency and of many of my speeches. I am thinking here of the all-important theme of the urban-rural inter-relationship. We wanted to encourage, on both sides of the relationship, the shift from a too urban perspective to a perspective which is also rural, or at least more balanced. This corresponded, and corresponds, with my own, as well as with the European, and increasingly – as the example of China shows – with the non-European way of thinking and acting.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we wanted, we wanted to do so many things ... but I will stop recounting what we wanted to do, as I would undoubtedly come soon to one or more points where it would be clear that there were some things which we did not achieve which may now fall to the new Council to pursue.

If the FIG did not already exist ...

It must be left to the new Council to set other and newer focal points which reflect changing times. In the light of the time which I have already spent with the new leadership, I am confident that those factors which have brought success to the FIG will continue to be pursued and indeed strengthened, namely

1. close contact with members and Commissions,
2. high professional competence and awareness of the real on site problems (“on site specialists”),

3. the overall leadership and cooperation on the global stage above all in all questions of land and tenure, motivated by the endeavour for a better world.

(Only) in this way can the FIG be truly a model for the world, because we practise it daily: we are present in all five continents, we combine almost all world religions, cultures, different forms of ownership and tenure, state organisations etc. At the same time we are able to engage in peaceful dialogue and are able to work with each other as experts in our subjects and to contribute successfully to the solution of global as well as local problems. One can therefore without exaggeration say, **“If the FIG did not already exist, it would be urgently necessary to found it!”**

A magic dwells in every beginning ...

So the time has come to take our leave and say farewell

- from the Presidency of the FIG
- from a successful and highly valued team and from such wonderful fellow warriors as Andreas Drees, Ralf Schroth, Thomas Gollwitzer, TN Wong, Stig Enemark, Ken Allred and Matt Higgins (and previously also Gerhard Muggenhuber)
- from the loyalest of co-workers, to name in the first instance Markku Villikka, and also Per Wilhelm Pedersen and Tine Svendstorp
- from the whole FIG community for which we have all in the past years invested so much time, mostly our free time, and so much effort – often at the cost of our professional work and above all at the cost of our wives (who deserve our very special thanks), our families and friends.

We say *“thank you”* also to the DVW and its bodies which elected the “German Council” and entrusted it with the leadership of the FIG. It would appear that we have not disappointed the DVW.

Was it all worth it? I believe that the answer is yes. There are not so many opportunities in life to work beneficially in a global context and at the same time to get to know and to understand so many cultures, religions and countries and to be welcomed in such a friendly manner and to be accepted by persons in so many parts of the world. My FIG years – and I speak here in the name of all the members of the Council – were strenuous but at the same time wonderful years. They were years of cultural and professional enrichment and of receiving so much from personal contacts.

My thanks, the thanks of all of us, go from this hall to all our member associations, to all their presidents and representatives, who together make the FIG such a harmonious orchestra and make it such a polyphonic instrument, which now receives a new chief conductor and new solo violinists, solo viola players, solo cellists etc.

The German Council now leaves the stage and the conductor’s podium and adheres, or at least seeks to do so, to the wise words of Hermann Hesse, who in his famous poem “Stages” (“Stufen”) has expressed what is valid for all time:

“At life’s each call the heart must be
prepared
To take its leave and to commence afresh
Courageously and without hint of grief
Submit itself to other newer ties.”

“Es muss das Herz bei jedem Lebensrufe
Bereit zum **Abschied** sein und Neubeginne
Um sich in Tapferkeit und ohne Trauern
In andere, neue Bindungen zu geben.“

And Hesse’s much quoted maxim applies both for the **old** and for the **new** Council:

“A magic dwells in every beginning
And protecting us tells us how to live.”

“Und jedem Anfang wohnt ein Zauber inne
Der uns beschützt und der uns hilft zu
leben.“

May this magic of a farewell **and** at the same time of a new beginning, which encompasses us today in this hall, both guard my parting colleagues and friends and their families and benevolently guide the new Council, which I wish from my heart all success in their new high responsibilities for the well-being of our FIG, “the mother of all surveyors and surveying”.