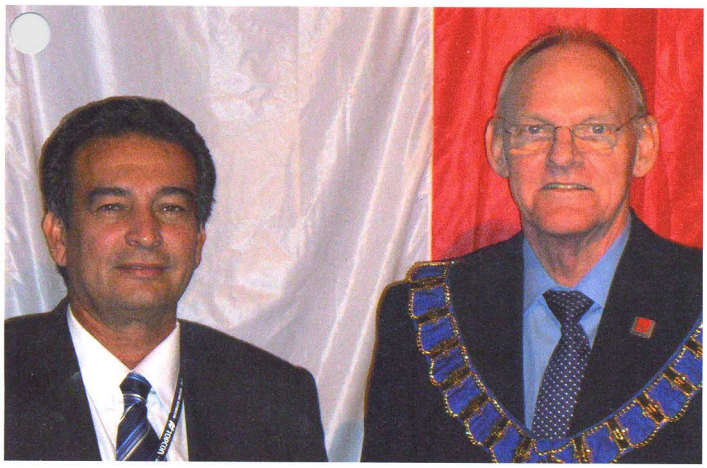
International Federation of Surveyors
Fédération Internationale des Géomètres
Internationale Vereinigung der Vermessungsingenieure

6th FIG Regional Conference in San José, Costa Rica

The sixth FIG Regional Conference was held in San José, Costa Rica, from 12th to 15th November 2007; the first time the event had been held in Latin America. The themes of this regional meeting, "Coastal Zone Management, Land Administration and Capacity Building" were selected focusing on the regional hot topics noted; environmental issues refer here especially to use and future of coastal regions. The conference was organised in close co-operation between FIG and the Colegio Federado de Ingenieros y de Arquitectos de Costa Rica (CFIA)/Colegio de Ingenieros Topógrafos de Costa Rica (CIT), the FIG member association in Costa Rica. Other international and regional organisations co-operated, including the United Nations and its agencies and international and regional spatial-information societies. About 250 participated in the event and about eighty papers were presented.



Juan Manuel Castro Alfaro, president, CIT, Costa Rica Association of Surveyors (left), with FIG president Prof Stig Enemark.

Human activity in pristine coastal environments means that a range of interests connected to both land and sea have to be managed. These involve a range of stakeholders within a framework of opportunity and risk. This implies that for access to and sustainable use of coastal resources there has to be a balanced approach, one involving social justice, between economic development/tourism, livelihood/fishing and conservation and environmental protection. The Marine Cadastral Concept is a framework for sustainable management of land, coastal and marine activities. The concept makes it possible to describe, visualise and realise such activities.

Summing Up

In his closing address FIG president Prof Stig Enemark presented the conclusions reached by the meeting, summarised here. As regards coastal-zone management, it may be observed that society across the world is moving towards the coast. The coastal zone is a dynamic environment where change is a constant. The development of this zone should be without exclusion of any group or use: 'we need to ensure social justice, both the extremely poor and the very rich occupy the coastal zone. We need to find an equitable balance between conflicting priorities, between rich and poor. It's a real issue in Costa Rica and in many other parts of the world'. Coastal zones were, said Enemark, highly vulnerable due to dynamic change, e.g. in climate or population and multipurpose use at the land/sea interface: tourism, ecology/biodiversity and traditional occupation/livelihoods. All are subject to land and hydrographic rights and restrictions. The result was most often an imbalance and one that leads to conflict.

We as surveyors had a duty of care to the citizen, to use our professional skills to benefit society as a whole. No activity should take place in the coastal zone without the footprint of a surveyor being involved, and surveyors should not be seen as mere technicians. Surveyors needed to engage with other professionals and professional bodies and politicians at every level. They needed to use their technical skills to collect and collate spatial data. Collection of data had become easier, but assessment, interpretation and management required a skilled professional. The role of the land surveyor did not end at the waterline: reliable spatial and hydrographic data was required for good, sound spatial planning, land-use management and decision making. Precise and persistent data collection provided reliable models for monitoring change and managing risk. This required commitment to building and maintaining geodetic and hydrographic infrastructures.

As far as land administration was concerned, a modern cadastre integrated the Cadastre and Land Registry; it must provide sustainability and affordability and access to all users. It must also be low cost, transparent, and potentially autonomous. It was important to recognise that reform of institutions required sound information systems, good governance and political will. Land administration supported working towards integrated spatial development, and here it was most relevant not to overcomplicate systems but to keep them simple and focused, e.g. on monitoring and evaluation, and establishing a baseline.

Concerning capacity building, there must be a shift from surveying education being seen very much as an engineering discipline. It must be research-based and interact with professional practice. Surveying education must be interdisciplinary, to include measurement science, land management and spatial-information management. And "learning for life" must be replaced by "lifelong learning", where professional organisations played a key role in providing professional development and regulating behaviour through a professional code of ethics. 'Academia and professional practice should walk together hand in hand'.

Publication

Based on the outcome of the conference, FIG is preparing a publication to identify problems and issues relating to coastal regions and analyse these in the context of integrated coastal zone management from the perspective of the role of the surveyor, supporting technology, capacity building and land administration. The publication will also examine recommendations and ways forward.

Websites
www.fig.net/pub/figpub/pub36/figpub36.htm