

Task Force on Establishing a FIG Peer-Review Scientific Journal

FIGWW'2016 - General Assembly

Christchurch, New Zealand

At the GA during the 2015 FIGWW in Sofia, Bulgaria, it has been decided to establish a Task Force aiming to examine the possibility of initiating a new peer-reviewed scientific journal within the framework of FIG. This brief summary reports on the main topics concerning the establishment of the journal. These topics are planned for discussion during a specific session (Wednesday, 4 May 14:00–15:30) of the working week in Christchurch.

Background

Following the discussion and comments received from participants at FIG, the existing peer-review process for papers sent to FIG's annual conventions (working weeks and congresses) has not yet produced the desired results. First, the level of review is not consistent (particularly in light of the claim that some of the reviewers are not strict enough about the level of review and that papers of inferior standard pass the filtering process and are accepted). Second, although the peer-review process started as far back as 2008, this process does not benefit members of the academia when it comes to assessing their achievements (towards academic appointments, promotions, etc.) since their accepted publications under FIG are not quoted in the citation databases of peer-reviewed literature.

Formal Requirements of the Citation Databases

We have received the formal requirements of the two main citation databases: (i) Web of Science, and (ii) Scopus. The requirements of these two citation databases are not identical; however, most of their requirements are quite similar, and are:

1. Issues should be published at set times and at regular intervals throughout the year (although Web of Science is willing to consider including a periodical procedure, which is only published intermittently – in which case they have additional specific requirements).
2. A number of issues should be published before considering whether a journal should be included in a citation database. The specific required number was not provided. We assume that initially there will not be more than 3-4 issues per year, and therefore the process towards inclusion in one or both of the databases can

only start 1-1.5 years after the journal is first published, and would last several months thereafter (completing the process in ~2 years).

3. There are no restrictions on including an open sourced e-journal (vs. a printed journal) in a citation database.
4. Appointing an editor (and co-editors), as well as an editorial (advisory) board, all of which are internationally diverse, and are leading academic/research personnel.
5. A broad international diversity of the authors/co-authors of papers.
6. A comprehensive (high standard) and objective review process.

There are a few additional - less significant - requirements, such as having an ISSN number, identifying the authors of the papers by their addresses, publishing concise resumes for authors, and more.

Limitations/Difficulties and Interim Conclusions

The current level of review process of the full-peer-review papers within the annual working weeks is not consistent:

➔ (1) To establish a permanent review mechanism which will be nominated by the council and be composed of:

- a chief editor;
- co-editors;
- 7-10 members of an editorial (advisory) board

(2) To initiate, within the FIG annual working weeks and congresses, three levels or channels for submitting papers, rather than the two current channels:

- Papers of which only the abstract is reviewed.
- Full papers sent for comprehensive review with the aim of being published in a journal.
- Full papers sent for comprehensive review for publication only in the FIG DB.

To minimize the financial expenses involved in establishing the FIG Journal:

➔ Since there are no proven advantages in setting up a printed journal, it appears that establishing an e-journal is the preferable solution

The need for a reasonable number of published issues of the journal and a significant number of high-level papers (accepted via a peer review process) in these issues - all which as pre-requisites before recognition by the citation databases can be achieved.

➔ (1) Based on the citation databases' info and our estimation: 8-10 papers per issue; 2-3 issues per year; 1-1.5 years as running process – we have to reach a capacity of around 25-35 reviewed papers a year (which have passed the review process) – that means about 40-50 accepted papers before the recognition of the citation databases can be achieved.

(2) We will need to expand the network of authors for the journal and not settle for only the papers submitted to our annual conferences (i.e., contacting the academic members of FIG directly)

Previous experience of journal publishing within FIG framework

FIG commission 3 (SIM) has established more than 10 years ago a full-peer-review-process at its annual workshops.

Based on a strict review process, the review results were adopted by several journals and their editors have agreed to publish the accepted papers in their journals without requiring an additional review process. These journals are:

- Survey Review;
- Surveying and Land Information Science;
- Nordic Journal of Surveying and Real Estate Research;
- Computers, Environment and Urban Systems (to some extent)

At the FIG commission 3 annual workshops about 20-25% of the submissions were via the full-peer-review process, and only 40-50% of these submitted papers were accepted after the review process (for comparison, leading journals mention a 25-50% acceptance rates for publication).

Intermediate Recommendations: Alternatives

At this point in time, 3 main alternatives are on the agenda to be analyzed and discussed by the Task Force until the next 2017 annual working week in Helsinki:

1. Despite all the difficulties described above, establishing a new journal within the framework of FIG immediately after an affirmative decision at the GA next year, where the recommendation will be for an e-journal rather than a printed journal.

2. In light of the difficulties described above in establishing the journal, postponing the decision of establishing the FIG journal to a later date, perhaps even for several more years (2-4 years?).
3. An interim solution of reaching an agreement with several existing journals to publish special issues within their framework, according to the following principles:
 - 3.1 To establish an editorial staff within FIG (as abovementioned editor/co-editors/editorial board) acting as an independent journal for all purposes – an editorial staff which will be recognized by these existing journals.
 - 3.2 This editorial staff will abide by the rules of leading journals in the field, and will handle the review process of papers sent for publication during FIG annual working weeks and congresses (and perhaps also during the commissions' workshops – if the commissions are willing), as well as submissions by other authors (from academic members of FIG?)
 - 3.3 The existing journals with which we shall reach an agreement will approve our new review process, and will not apply an additional review.
 - 3.4 The papers accepted through our review process will be published as special issues from time to time by these journals.
 - 3.5 We shall hopefully be able to reach the capacity for at least 3-4 special issues a year (i.e. reach a capacity of around 40-50 reviewed and accepted papers during the first 18 months).

Recommendations

The GA authorizes the Task Force to continue its activity, analyse all the implications, and submit final recommendations to the GA in Helsinki in 2017.

The Task Force is asked to examine the implications of establishing three levels (channels) for submitting papers, rather than the two current channels, to FIG annual working weeks:

- Papers of which only the abstract is reviewed.
- Full papers sent for comprehensive review with the aim of being published in a journal.
- Full papers sent for comprehensive review for publication only in the FIG DB.

In case of a recommendation to adopt alternatives #1 or #3, the Task Force is asked to:

- Recommend the structure of the editorial staff.
- Recommend the structure of the review process (including detailed guidelines).
- Propose a financial framework and an initial budget for the first 2 years (immediately after implementing the accepted solution).

Yerach Doytsher, Chair

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