

SURVEYORS AND STANDARDS – THE INTERRELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In early 1998, the then FIG Bureau set up a Task Force on Standardisation. This is a far from fashionable subject. It is, however, one which was becoming increasingly relevant to the surveying profession and one, indeed, which threatened to overwhelm surveyors if they did not make any ameliorating input. The Task Force was FIG's initial response, with a remit to understand the issue of surveyors and standardisation more clearly, and to advise the Federation how most effectively to become involved in and influence the complex processes.

It terms of the importance and benefits of standardisation, recent research undertaken by the Technical University of Dresden and the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovations has found that:

- The benefit to the German economy from standardisation amounts to more than US\$ 15 billion per year;
- Standards contribute more to economic growth than patents and licences;
- Companies that participate actively in standards work have a head start on their competitors in adapting to market demands and new technologies;
- Transaction costs are lower when European and International Standards are used; and
- Research risks and development costs are reduced for companies contributing to the standardisation process.

The FIG Task Force on Standardisation has spent much of the first three years of its existence understanding how the standardisation process works. This has included active involvement in relevant ISO Technical Committees, attending meetings, commenting on work in progress, and reporting on FIG activity. Bodies such as FIG are recognised as providing a useful input to the standardisation process. The reasons for their limited impact to date include a limited understanding of the processes of standardisation bodies and how to influence them to best effect; a fragmentation of the surveying communities voice, with limited coordination between FIG, ISPRS and the other bodies; and not using even the full range of communications possible through the various internal FIG groups such as Task Forces, Commissions and Bureau. There has, perhaps, also been a tendency to give up in the face of perceived lack of understanding of FIG's point of view by the ISO, without fully appreciating the situation as ISO (and the individuals involved) see it.

In light of the learning to date, and recognising that FIG's funds are limited in the face of the vast range of standardisation activity in hand at any time, the Task Force has created a draft FIG policy for this area.

At this stage, it is fair to say that FIG's increased focus on standardisation has created a higher profile for FIG within this field, and for standardisation within FIG. Much greater coordination of activity, within and beyond FIG, is however needed if the efforts to date are to build into meaningful, concrete progress.

The key areas in which FIG needs to continue to work are:

- Interpreting and promoting published standards:
To achieve FIG's stated policy, FIG's Commissions, Task Forces and Permanent Institutions need to work closely with the relevant standardisation bodies (including the Technical Committees of ISO) so that any informative or explanatory material that they create which supports the use of standards is produced at the appropriate time, has clear references to the relevant standards, and can be published and marketed in a coordinated way with the published standards.
- Influencing the existing work programmes of standardisation bodies:
FIG needs to coordinate the inputs it makes to the creation and development of standards by the various standardisation bodies. This is both at international level (through FIG continuing to work with ISO and IVSC) and at national level (through FIG's member associations lobbying their national standardisation bodies).
- Proposing new work areas for international standardisation:
FIG must review the needs of the market in terms of published standards before drawing up Commission and Council work programmes, and should liaise with the Secretariats and Technical Committees of standardisation bodies over particular gaps in activity. Wherever possible, these gaps should be filled through the development of material by FIG, in close liaison with the relevant standardisation body, so that the completed FIG work can successfully be fast-tracked to become a standard, and so that the timing of the production of FIG's deliverables fits with the needs of the standardisation body (and the market).
- Coordination of activities:
All of this requires discipline on behalf of FIG and its Commissions and Permanent Institutions, with appropriate coordination of the development of work plans so that FIG's work has the greatest possible impact in the world of standards. This may require a slightly greater planning horizon for Commissions and Permanent Institutions, and greater coordination of effort, which will be facilitated by the use of strategic planning. This will be particularly important over the next year, as work plans for 2002-06 are drawn up. It is also important for FIG to co-ordinate its influencing and informative efforts with other international NGOs to ensure that the combined efforts are coordinated to best effect.

In essence, FIG needs to see itself, and the activity of all of its constituent parts, as part of a larger picture which includes key bodies such as the UN and its agencies, standardisation bodies and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This has been a key theme of recent FIG Bureaux, and progress is now being delivered on a number of these fronts. As a result, the realisation is growing that surveyors need standards, and standards bodies need FIG – but the realisation is a fragile plant which needs continuing nurturing and attention.

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