Crossroads

A few years ago, I decided to tear down an old shed in my backyard and erect a new one on a more practical spot. Since I live in the centre of an old town, my plot was compact, at around 170 square metres, and surrounded by land owned by others. I discovered some inconsistencies between the cadastral map and the actual situation, to my disadvantage. I was very keen to revert to the cadastral situation and called in a surveyor. In the end, my little shed was built in the most practical place, and while – unfortunately for him – my neighbour had to clear part of his backyard, it gave me much more space and added value to the plot. Nowadays, I live on the outskirts of town and have a much bigger yard and fewer concerns about a few square metres that may or may not be visibly attached to my plot.
This example illustrates precisely the crossroads the discussion about crowdsourcing and survey accuracy has reached. On the one hand, when land is scarce and hence expensive, survey accuracy will be of the highest priority; on the other hand, when land is abundant but not allocated to owners (who might have been living on, and working, the land for decades), crowdsourcing is much more important whereas accuracy is initially somewhat less of an issue.
Daniel Roberge, director of the Office of the Surveyor General of Québec, Canada, and chair of Commission 7 of FIG, elaborates on this topic in an interview in this issue of GIM International on page 14. Roberge sees that there are 4 billion land parcels throughout the world without land tenure security. There will never be enough land surveyors to fill this gap quickly, while people living on such land are in need of legislation, giving them rights and therefore visible economic existence, to help them escape from poverty. Citizens will need to be involved to help the cadastral organisations identify natural and artificial boundaries: hedges, walls, rivers and streams. It is evident that survey accuracy is not of the highest priority in this case – speed is the factor that counts. In 1992, the Québec Office headed up by Roberge decided to resurvey all four million private parcels at the highest possible level of accuracy – a measure that could be viewed as very wise, in order to have clear-cut rights laid down in a country so rich with natural resources.
On a completely different matter, it has been one year since the devastating earthquake and tsunami hit the east coast of Japan. You've read about the consequences and the role our field played in measuring, forecasting and recovering from this disaster. One of our oldest correspondents in Japan, professor Shunji Murai from the Tokyo University, wrote a book on the east Japan tsunami and the meltdown at Fukushima nuclear power station that held the world in its grip for months. Geomares is proud to announce that the English version of this book has now been published. Professor Murai succeeded in documenting stories of survivors of this immense disaster respectfully, while at the same time extracting lessons for policymakers, government workers and school teachers. The book, Higher Ground: Learning from the East Japan Tsunami and Meltdown at Fukushima NPS, stands testimony to the disaster's victims and survivors, and is a must-read publication for anyone who needs to be prepared for a future eruption of nature. You can order the book at www.gim-international.com/higherground.php or via Amazon.