

THE FIG YOUNG SURVEYORS NETWORK

Inspiring and Empowering the Agents of Change



Eva-Maria Unger is chair of the FIG Young Surveyors Network. This network wants to increase the number of young professionals participating within FIG. To help young professionals make valuable contacts in the early phase of their careers, the network increases cooperation between the FIG commissions and the younger generation. *'GIM International'*

recognises the need to secure the future of the surveying profession and took the opportunity to interview Eva-Maria about the network's vision.

(By Christiaan Lemmen, contributing editor, *GIM International*)

Who are the 'young surveyors'?

To be a 'young surveyors' you must be under 35 years old and either a student of surveying or surveying-related subjects or a young professional who completed an undergraduate or graduate programme a maximum of ten years ago. But that's the formal definition. In terms of who the young surveyors actually are, beyond obviously being young they are also enthusiastic and either in the midst of completing their studies or embarking on a professional career. So, as young surveyors, we are eager to learn, to embrace the latest concepts and paradigms and, with the appropriate guidance, we can definitely make a valid contribution within our profession and society. All the young surveyors out there have strong skills and great potential that can make a real difference. They can be sources of inspiration, and their open outlook and affinity with technology can be key in today's rapidly changing world.

What is the Young Surveyors Network?

The FIG Young Surveyors Network (FIG YSN), which I currently chair, was established in 2009. The previous chairs were Cecilia Linden from Sweden and Kate Fairlie from Australia. FIG YSN only exists today thanks to the dedication and energy of those two women. We bridge the gap so that young surveyors can engage and get involved in the many activities within FIG – which is the association that brings together and facilitates collaboration between surveyors from all around the world. For us cooperation between generations is the key to success. We work with the FIG commissions, task forces, other networks as well as the council to advance the aim and goals of FIG. I would invite anyone who is interested in finding out more about FIG YSN to take a look at the FIG homepage and at our current work plan. In our working groups and mission statements, we explain how we inspire and empower young surveyors to be the agents of change in the surveying world. Together we explore, prepare, encourage, collaborate, support and facilitate to benefit the future of our profession.

What have been the network's key achievements so far?

There are many achievements but I think the most obvious is that more young surveyors than ever are informed about and involved in regional and global activities within FIG and its national member associations. The number of young surveyors participating in FIG activities, meetings and workshops has increased significantly, and this has helped us to gain recognition worldwide. Thanks to the establishment of regional young surveyors' networks we are working more efficiently and also effectively, thus reaching an ever-increasing number of young surveyors. We also took a lead role in FIG's ongoing work with GLTN on STDM (*GLTN stands for the 'Global Land Tool Network' and STDM for the 'Social Tenure Domain Model', a tool for recording and recognising people-to-land relationships, Ed.*) and we became acknowledged as key players in the STDM advancement and training programmes. Furthermore, we co-organise workshops within conferences, 'training-of-trainers' sessions and summer schools. Thanks to our flexibility, the Young Surveyors Network has been able to react to situations immediately after a disaster, for example with our Mapping for Nepal session during the FIG Working Week 2015 in Sofia, Bulgaria. But the network's greatest achievements are the personal ones: seeing your colleagues and friends benefiting from the network, particularly through peer-to-peer learning, is a sign that the concept of the Young Surveyors Network is working.

What are the benefits for young surveyors?

Networking! The most important benefits, I would say, are the friendships, the contacts and the activities. These help members to develop skills that cannot be taught at university, the 'soft skills'. The network creates possibilities, whether as the chance to give a presentation to

a surveying audience, play a key role in organising a workshop, provide some training or just be involved and active within a worldwide surveying community. It's important to note that the network is a platform for opportunities, but that the young surveyors themselves are responsible for making the most of them. But let's just say that anything is possible. The benefits of involvement for young surveyors are endless.

How are young surveyors from developing countries involved in your activities?

We have a lot of active young surveyors from developing countries within the network. However, it is important to recognise that FIG is working through national associations that are members of FIG and thus we encourage young surveyors to engage with and become involved in national activities, to seek support including nomination to be involved in FIG and with the Young Surveyors Network. But we are creative in the ways that young surveyors, especially from developing countries, can be involved within our network. They can join or follow our Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter accounts and become involved through these social media channels. Especially during events, these channels are constantly updated and young surveyors worldwide can follow, comment, interact and contribute remotely. We also support young surveyors who have an outstanding idea or paper but cannot afford to attend a FIG event by enabling them to give a presentation via Skype, for example. We do seek financial support so that outstanding young surveyors can attend FIG events, and we are grateful to the FIG Foundation for its contribution towards the professional development of young surveyors and thus the Young Surveyors Network.

What is the younger generation's attitude towards crowdsourcing? Will we still need surveying professionals in the future?

The younger generation is embracing these new ways of data gathering. We are not threatened by it and we don't see it as a danger for us as professionals. Instead, we see potential: another data gathering channel can only be a good thing. It can strengthen our position as experts dealing with big data and specifically knowing what is needed in order to utilise the data accordingly. Of course, there is a lot of learning and work to do in order to be or become such experts, but crowdsourcing opens up a broader base of application for us. It is already present; it's now up to us to make more out of it.

New developments such as fit for purpose (FFP) and STDM may not always be in alignment with what has been learned. What is YSN's stance in terms of how this should be handled?

It's true that these developments are not totally in alignment with what many of us have studied at university. But during our studies we have been taught that we have a duty to serve the people. We've learned to determine boundaries, that land is a limited but vital resource for all. So in a sense there is a general alignment on what is needed out there. Today's approaches are more appropriate and a transition is underway, both within the surveying community and in university curricula, towards accepting and including alternative approaches and new concepts. In our activities and events, we provide scope for information, teaching and debate about these new developments. As an example, FIG YSN is working together with GLTN on training the so-called 'barefoot surveyors' who are working closely with the people on the ground. We train young surveyors all over the world in the use and application of STDM. But it is important to point out that STDM is not the only tool out there. The emphasis is on fit-for-purpose approaches, identified by experts who have an open mind and are receptive to new ideas.

How do the young surveyors contribute to the development of the profession?

Under FIG president Chryssy Potsious, the current council's theme is 'Rapid Response to Change will be done by the Surveyor of Tomorrow'. This requires us all to work together on the development and the future of the profession, to be ready to respond. YSN members see themselves as the surveyors of tomorrow! Our efforts to promote a vibrant and energetic network for young surveyors, providing the scope and opportunity to be involved and also contribute, are part and parcel of how we are helping to develop the profession.

And how are young surveyors contributing to societal development?

This is a difficult question for me to address and I think the readers themselves are a better judge of whether the young surveyors are contributing to society as a whole. I would like to think that our active involvement in initiatives such as STDM Training-of-Trainers events and Awareness Workshops – which involved young professionals from various parts of world and encouraged them to become agents of change after these events in their respective communities – is good for society.

How do you see the future of young surveyors and land professionals?

I see a shining and bright future ahead, but at the same time a challenging and unpredictable one. But it will definitely be exciting. It is shining and bright because our skills will be needed now more than ever in a world of constant change. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development showed the way forward and the challenges we are facing. We will need to be more open to new and innovative approaches and concepts and to new skills. The future will be challenging because we have a role to play in this agenda as well as in issues such as climate change, disaster preparedness, urbanisation and food security. And the future is always unpredictable! Whoever would have thought that Dolly the sheep would become acceptable or 20 years ago envisaged that we would be able to gather terabytes of data in seconds. BIM (building information modelling, Ed.), Bitcoins/Blockchain and standardisation processes are opening up new worlds for our profession, and surveyors are at the forefront of technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles and Lidar. Last but not least, it will be exciting because the profession is opening up, and it is becoming more and more important to cooperate with other professionals, such as legal experts, building experts and anthropologists. I am particularly excited to be able to witness and be a part of how our profession will adapt and progress to these developments.

What would be your message for our readers?

Young surveyors should be at the forefront of global change and innovation in the surveying profession. Employed and empowered, we are key agents of change – the surveyors of tomorrow, committed to the betterment of the world.

About Eva-Maria Unger Chair of the Young Surveyors Network

Eva-Maria Unger, chair of the FIG Young Surveyors Network (FIG YSN), obtained a master degree in geodesy and surveying from Vienna University of Technology, Austria, in 2011. She joined the Federal Office of Metrology and Surveying (the Austrian Cadastre, BEV) as a

surveying engineer in the Information Management Department in 2011. Since 2006 she has been on the board of the Austrian Society for Surveying and Geoinformation. Eva-Maria became involved within FIG in 2009 and was the general secretary of FIG YSN from 2010-2014, during which period she was also the first young surveyors' representative on the CLGE Executive Board. Eva-Maria has been chair of FIG YSN since 2015, and in the same year she became a member of the advisory board of the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) of the Global Land Tool Network. Eva-Maria is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) of the University of Twente in Enschede, The Netherlands.

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