

The Language of Cartography

Despite the homogenising effect of the adoption of English as a common language by international scientific and technical communities, there are probably more scientific practitioners now working solely within their own native language environment than those with fluency in the 'international' discourse. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that information is conveyed to such people in alternatives to English.

For example, many governments of Spanish-speaking countries downgraded the significance of offering English-language classes at primary and secondary-level education, resulting in their academic communities, including students and professors, facing great difficulty in communicating using English. This means that research, reliant on exchange of ideas and global knowledge sharing, suffers greatly from lack of access to technological and conceptual innovation. Spanish-speaking professionals, scholars and students might be falling behind and may thus play only a very limited role in shaping the future of our discipline.

In 1999, the Mercator Group of the Universidad Politécnica of Madrid (UPM), fully aware of the lack of available Spanish-language information about events, meetings, seminars and conferences relating to surveying and cartography, formed a student association called 'CartoTranslator'. Its main objective was to disseminate among the Castellano-speaking community information contained in geospatial journals. The association, based at the UPM School of Surveying Engineering, started off by translating the FIG Bulletin , ' Maplines ' (the bulletin of the British Cartographic Society), and the ICA Newsletter , and making them available on the internet.

An early lack of administrative support, and the intrinsically transient nature of student employees, quickly resulted in a fading effort, and eventually meant the initiative being put on hold after just two issues of each of the journals had been translated. In spite of these difficulties, the Mercator Group eighteen months later re-evaluated the situation and decided it would be worthwhile continuing. At first the Group itself funded the project, but later obtained support from the Laboratory of Geographic Information Technologies (LatinGEO), funded by the National Geographic Institute of Spain (IGN). Translation of the ICA Newsletter into Spanish was again a reality.

Since December 2004 a professional translator has been employed to expeditiously carry out the task. The Mercator Research Group is very proud to be taking part in this effort. The Spanish edition of ICA News is being disseminated by means of RedIRIS distribution lists (Mercator List, GIS List, Cartovisual List, etc.) and through other bulletins circulated in most Latin American countries. The group is not currently aware of any individual or organisation producing hard copies of the newsletter, but would not object to this.. The Spanish edition of the ICA News is also available online from <http://redgeomatca.rediris.es/ICA/> .

As ICA prepares for its next major conference in Santiago de Chile in November 2009, we feel that outreach to Spanish-speaking cartographers is essential for the future of cartography worldwide.