

# What Does the Word Geomatics Mean?



Surveyors are identified with the acquisition and measurement of data. But what about its management and curation? We have the opportunities today to influence and engage with our futures. So more of us need to do it, argues Gordon Johnston, Chair of RICS's Geomatics Professional Group.

The UK's latest £200m Antarctic scientific research ship, soon to be commissioned, has received many suggestions for names in a public poll. The winning submission will likely not be used as according to the UK government "it fails to reflect the science and endeavour" that the research vessel is meant to be engaged on. Personally, the RRS "Aunt Arctica" and the RRS "Usain Boat" were my favourites though also not likely to be accepted.

## What about Data Storage?

So what's in a name? Geomatics is the word that encompasses the concept of the measurement and traditional surveying of our land and seas together with the representation of spatial data through new information systems and visualization technologies. The term from the late 1980s predicted that spatial information would become important and of great value to a great many users and consumers of the data. The information was to be made available via what was then the relatively new technology of GIS.

For many generations surveyors and other members of geomatics groups have been identified with the acquisition, measurement and collection of data; but far less so in respect of the data storage, access and management. On the tightrope of data gravity, the weight of data is shifting away from the data collection end towards data management. Those alert to this have already embraced the challenge and an initiative such as Survey4BIM can act as a vehicle for significant change. Thus it is encouraging to see the wider community recognising the importance of our data.

The Journal of Map and Geography Libraries has just completed a short series dedicated to the theme of geospatial data, its management, curation and preservation. Let's hope that our data remains relevant, accessible and contributes to the development of new techniques creating a better understanding of our geospatial future through applications, media and the internet. These concepts get an airing elsewhere in this magazine.

## The Opportunity to Influence

Recent trade and industry events I have attended have re-enforced my view that it's important to contribute in whatever way you can to develop and benefit from our profession. Ours is an ever-changing world and it requires many voices and ideas to develop change that is beneficial to the majority. Not all of us can take the time to write an article, present at a conference or post themed tweets to generate a vast number of impressions. However, there are various opportunities to influence and to be better engaged such as posting comments, questions and ideas on the RICS LinkedIn page.

The RICS, as an international organization, offers each of us an opportunity to engage and influence our futures on a personal level and on a wider more universal level through its standing at the international level. The FIG Working Week (2-6 May) is a prime example of our engagement, contribution and influence on surveying policy at the global level.

Policymakers nowadays usually consult with stakeholders on matters of importance and this can often include the public too. Concerns over the delays such a process represents may be valid when we compare the rate of infrastructure development in different countries. The UK's Land Registry, also the subject of an article elsewhere this month, is coming under scrutiny again as an assessment is made of its value as part of the government's strategic austerity and expenditure review. Let's hope the broader picture is maintained and it may be of interest to stakeholders that various nations are actively assessing how best to develop their land management, or cadastre, for coastal seas and marine areas as these areas become more important for our security of food, transport and represent limits of sovereignty. Managing our areas on land or sea requires data and as an asset, the data must also be managed, or did I mention that? Perhaps a public poll on the title (pun intended!) of the Land Registry will be required if it were to also manage our sea and ocean areas.

Finally, spare a thought for the London Marathon runner from Israel who was last to start. He followed his computer-based directions which mapped his route to the finish line instead of the start on Blackheath. He had to re-plan his route and dash across London to the start.

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