

# *GIM INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS DR DAVID FAIRBAIRN, VICE-PRESIDENT ICA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE*

## Cartography for Everyone - You Too!

Since June 2004 ICA has been publishing a monthly one-page column in GIM International. Dr David Fairbairn is responsible for ensuring content for the ICA page and is himself a regular contributor. As vice-president he is further responsible for ensuring that ICA keeps an active eye on issues and paradigms affecting the practice of modern cartography.

When was the International Cartographic Association (ICA) established and how is it organised in terms of structure?

The International Cartographic Association was formally established in June 1959. But in fact it grew out of a series of international conferences addressing issues of common cartographic interest held earlier in 1956 (the Esselte conference in Stockholm), in 1957 (the Rand McNally conference in Chicago) and in 1958 (the DGfK conference in Frankfurt). These conferences were sponsored by commercial companies and a learned society and showed that there was an interest in breaking down national, military and commercial barriers, exchanging theoretical and technical information, and promoting cartography as a tool for international understanding and co-operation. Today ICA maintains its mixture of input from government agencies, commercial companies, academic institutions and learned societies. ICA is a member of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), the UN-recognised umbrella organisation for scientific organisations. Like the majority of ICSU members, the members of ICA are nations (more than seventy in total) represented by recognised national bodies. These bodies represent the governance of ICA, meeting quadrennially for a decision-making General Assembly. Individuals, however, are the life-blood of the organisation, and it is individual cartographers who volunteer to participate in the ICA Commissions, the major forums within which cartographic research and development is undertaken. The list of commissions is given on the ICA page in each issue of GIM, and they reflect the broad scope of cartographic enquiry undertaken by ICA. Working groups supplement the work of some of the commissions. The most active commissions have a vigorous publication schedule, meet regularly and promote advanced cartographic progress. There are other membership categories, notably affiliate members, drawn from the ranks of commercial and government organisations. Such members contribute to the status and work of ICA by their valuable support, whilst there are advantages to them in terms of publicity.

What are the main scope and objectives of ICA?

The ICA is a dynamic organisation and its scope and objectives have developed as the discipline of cartography has changed. Our Strategic Plan adopted at the 12th General Assembly in Durban, South Africa in 2003 contains a number of aims and vision statements. The overall mission is to ensure that geospatial information is employed to maximum effect for the benefit of science and society through promotion and representation of the discipline and profession of Cartography and GIScience internationally. ICA feels that this is best achieved under its guidance, and thus would like to be recognised as the authoritative, inclusive and dynamic body for world cartography. Targets required to achieve this include:

- promoting cartography in decision-making
- encouraging national and international spatial data infrastructures
- increased knowledge transfer to developing countries
- supporting international research in cartography and spatial-data handling
- encouraging the use of cartography by under-represented groups such as children and the visually disabled
- developing and enhancing educational provision in cartography
- promoting the use of professional and technical standards.

The Strategic Plan defined a number of operating environments, describing issues and paradigms that affect the practice of modern cartography. Each of these has been allocated to a vice-president responsible for ensuring that ICA keeps an active eye on the wider picture. Science and Technology, Education, Professional Practice, Society and Art are these big themes, and each influences ICA: we need to ensure that in return we can exert some influence on them. These are challenges for the cartographic and GIScience community.

Please elaborate upon your own role and involvement in ICA.

Participating in ICA activities, primarily by getting involved with the working groups and attending the international cartographic

conferences, should be an expected duty of an academic active in teaching and research. In addition, my experience of working in a number of roles within my national cartographic society (the British Cartographic Society) led me to look to contributing at an international level. I am one of seven vice-presidents on the ICA Executive Committee, assisting the president, secretary-general and past president. We represent ICA regionally and also have specific roles to play, notably liaison with the Commissions and developing policy and giving advice on the specific topics of interest mentioned above. In addition, I am responsible for ensuring content for the regular ICA page in this magazine.

...Indeed, since June 2004 ICA has been publishing a monthly page in GIM International. Do you any observe positive effects of this initiative?

ICA is grateful for the opportunity to raise its profile within the well-read pages of GIM International magazine. The regular ICA page informs readers of the work of the ICA Commissions, along with occasional more immediate news of meetings and initiatives. It is clear that the work of ICA is becoming better known within the wider world of geomatics as a result of this communication. And I think that cartographers (who have always been willing to embrace, and occasionally initiate, change) are now more closely aware of the world of geomatics and how their own discipline fits into the wider context of spatial-data handling.

Both technology and society are in the process of rapid change. How do you see ICA's future role within the geomatics business over, say, the next five years?

It is clear that the increase in spatial-data handling in all areas of our daily life has resulted in renewed interest and expectation in the field of data modelling and representation. Cartography has been shown to be essential in adding value to spatial-data handling operations undertaken by groups from census demographers to emergency planners, from resource exploiters to navigators. Cartographers have always embraced new technologies and applied generic techniques to their own particular requirements. As a result, the cartographic community encompassed by ICA is a technologically literate and open-minded group. Collaboration with ISO, with OGC, with commercial vendors and government data providers at both national and international level is a characteristic of ICA activity. But technological advance is rooted in our respective societies. It is vital to ensure that the democratisation of cartography is extended.

...What do you mean by democratisation of cartography?

By democratisation of cartography I mean the increasing application of cartographic tools by sister disciplines and non-expert map users. We do not feel bound by professional recognition and restrictive practises: Cartography is for Everyone is the slogan for our next GA in Moscow in 2007. However, we must ensure that cartographic good practice and years of accumulated experience are also brought to the attention of society. Our missionary role is important to ICA: hence our new Memoranda of Understanding with a range of other organisations signed in 2004 and 2005, to be described in a future ICA page. Exchange of knowledge and experience are vital to our development and strengthening our role in society.

Many countries in the world are under development or in a process of transition. Geo-information plays an essential role in all associated activities. What are the activities of ICA in these fields?

ICA has from the beginning recognised its international reach and its international responsibilities. We have held our General Assembly outside traditional western locations many times in the past (Delhi 3rd GA; Moscow 5th GA; Morelia, Mexico 8th GA; Durban 12th GA). Our working group on Mapping Africa for Africa was described in a previous ICA page in this magazine: we are aware of a range of initiatives, including the NEPAD proposals, which are intended to kick-start appropriate and self-led development on that continent. Our collaboration with the Pan American Institute for Geography and History (PAIGH) has raised ICA awareness of Latin America. The implementation of national spatial data infrastructures is a primary requirement for assisting development plans: experienced in handling spatial data and reacting to end-user and client requirements, cartographers have much to contribute to these initiatives. In 2007 we meet in Moscow and turn a cartographic spotlight on Eastern Europe and former communist states in transition. The model for cartographic enterprise and developments in these societies is of considerable interest: we shall look and learn, as well as offer experience and advice.

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