

## **A shift in professional practice: the added value of a national association**

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**Key words:** capacity building, professional practice, Young Surveyor, National associations, membership, community, network

### **SUMMARY**

Societies change and so do professions due to the developments and innovations around us. These changes have a big impact on the role and position of national associations. The changing circumstances brings members with a different need for membership of a professional association. In this abstract the response to the changing circumstances of the national association for Dutch geo-information professionals 'Geo-Informatie Nederland' (GIN) is described.

#### *The struggle of national associations in the Netherlands*

In the Netherlands the current young professionals and students are more assertive and more and more actively involved in contributing to the development of products and services. They are skilled (digital) networkers, and they want to be able to choose. They feel increasingly cosmopolitan and their training is becoming more multidisciplinary.

Professionals are looking for customization and clear added value from their national association. The identity and ambition of the national association are important. Without proper positioning the added value is not clear for members.

At the same time the national associations are under financial pressure. After the financial crisis it is difficult to raise external funds. Also there is limited influx of new members and with an ageing society the number of members is decreasing. This puts the revenue of national associations under pressure.

These changes in conditions require actions from national associations. In order to adapt, priorities need to be (re)set and actions need to be taken.

#### *Response of GIN to the changing circumstances*

GIN understands that the definition of being a network and the added value need to be reviewed. The association has defined steps to adapt to the changing needs of their current members and to learn about the demands of the next generation. In this paper the recommendations and actions of the board and a working group are described.

## A shift in professional practice: the added value of a national association

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### 1. SOCIETAL CHANGE IN THE NETHERLANDS

Societies change and so do professions due to the developments and innovations around us. These changes have a big impact on the role and position of national associations. The changing circumstances brings members with a different need for membership of a professional association.

In the Netherlands the current young professionals and students are more assertive and more and more actively involved in contributing to the development of products and services. They are skilled (digital) networkers, and they want to be able to choose. They feel increasingly cosmopolitan and their training is becoming more multidisciplinary.



*Illustration 1: Societal changes*

Professionals are looking for customization and clear added value from their national association. The identity and ambition of the national association are important. Without proper positioning the added value is not clear for members.

## 1.1 Membership of associations

The rapidly changing technology shift and the demographic economic shift affect the associations in the Netherlands.

In recent years, the information technology developed revolutionary. Technology has changed the society, especially the cohesion and interaction in society. This gives people access to networks and information without the help of associations. An association needs to adapt to these changed circumstances to keep providing added value to its members

In the Netherlands and Europe, the total population is rapidly aging. In 2020, 45% of the EU population is aged over 50 years. The number of over-50s in the Netherlands is currently almost 6.5 million. Simultaneously the Dutch youth group, who's going to work, is getting smaller. This shift represents a serious threat to associations. Because of this demography the member numbers will decrease. And most of the associations are controlled and fully supported by the 'baby boomer generation'. The result is also financial pressure for the association. More and more small associations shall cease to exist due to a decrease of memberships.

Associations for broadcasting, charities, political parties and professionals are under pressure. Members doubt the meaning and benefits of a membership. They are more critical and more demanding. Members are making a cost-benefit analysis for joining the association. They prefer leisure instead of joining the traditional and professional association.

In general, in the Netherlands the people became more assertive. Moreover, they are involved in contributing to the development of products and services by themselves. They are mostly well educated professionals, digital networkers and above all they want to be able to choose. For the young professionals, or X-Y-Z-generation, they feel increasingly cosmopolitan and they are multidisciplinary trained. They feel less comfortable with the traditional associations. This is certainly the case when these associations fail to adapt to the circumstances.

## 1.2 Members and their generation

In this paragraph the different backgrounds of the generation is described. There is no good or bad generation. But each generation has its specific needs and expectations (Verheggen, 2011). National associations should be beware of the differences and meet the needs of all members, also the future ones.

Baby boomers are proud and concerned. Described as the biggest, richest and most powerful generation. They really stood up when necessary and do feel a need for recognition for all the achievements of their youth. Baby boomers still feel young and have an active life but are concerned about their health and about the world. They look back and want to do something to leave a better world behind.

Generation x is sceptic and cynic with respect to politics, media and organizations. They need transparent and personal communication. Their lives are hectic with young kids and a career for

both males and females. The work-life balance is lopsided. The approach is practical, pragmatic and individualistic. This generation is not loyal to organizations. For making buying decisions they need a clear and personal offer.

Generation Y is also known as the millennials. They are smart, grew up during digital revolution, often work together and use knowledge and skills in online networks. Being good in something is adding value to their network. They are mostly me-centric, spoiled with stuff and attention. Negotiation has been part of their nurture and education; always want to join a conversation and give an opinion. They are bound in a big online network with everything and everybody. Very interactive and continuously busy being up to date and related.

Generation Z, also called as the digital natives. They are raised by parents 2.0 who consider children as successful projects. Their parents want to maintain their luxury lives besides their kids. They are digital networkers, very experienced with computers and they are used to be on-line all the time. They have a bad connection with current hierarchical systems. They have a rampant demand for new experiences and inspirations. Interesting holiday destinations and inspiring meetings give them satisfaction. Authority has to be deserved and is dependent of the inspiration and experience instead of position. Working is time and place independent.

In the Netherlands associations struggle to adapt to the different needs of the generations and their networks. It is difficult to restructure and prioritize the actions. It starts with a clear description of the purpose and determination of the added value.

In the next chapter the structure of the Dutch association for Geo Information (GIN) is described as well as the challenges for GIN.

## **2. GEO-INFORMATIE NEDERLAND**

Geo-Information Netherlands (GIN) is the member association in the Netherlands for geo-information professionals. As association GIN promotes sharing knowledge of geo-information and stimulates the use of the information and applications. GIN is both a meeting place as a knowledge network for any current or future geo-information professional. The broad focus on all aspects in our profession make our association a bit different, and maybe unique, than other National associations.

GIN is a member association of FIG since the early days. At international point of view GIN is working together with several other associations, CLGE, ISPRS and ICA. GIN is convinced that other members of these associations face the same struggles as GIN does.

## 2.1 Mission & Vision

In 2014 the new policy plan was adopted. The subtitle of the document is ‘Samenwerking in Geo – Knooppunt NL’, translated as ‘Working together in Geo-Node Netherlands’. In the plan the imbalance is described of the growth of the sector and its users and the decrease of members. Also the growth of the sector, besides the societal changes, requires a different approach as member associations. Sharing knowledge is important for GIN. This is described in the new mission and vision. The key goal of GIN is to be the spider in the geo-web.

### *Mission statement*

‘GIN is an interactive meeting place and provides a platform for knowledge exchange that is accessible for all working with geo-information. GIN organises frequent meetings and it encourages and facilitates members to share knowledge with members to strengthen the position of the geo-information sector (GIN). GIN does this with others.’

GIN determined the following strategic goals:

- To create an accessible network for geo-information professionals
- To provide an interactive knowledge exchange platform
- To enhance the relevance of geo-information to users outside the sector

GIN wants to achieve this by:

- Organising conferences, lectures, symposia, excursions and other meetings
- Publishing the journal ‘Geo-Info’, updating the website, and encouraging publications
- Establishing an interactive knowledge exchange platform for all geo-professionals
- Initiating and stimulating dialogues between government, private sector and educational institutes
- Organising, representing and supporting of members during their education and promotion with the use of geo-information
- Managing cooperation with other national associations and international branch organisations.

To achieve this GIN described 6 steps to change. This is described in more detail in the following part of the paper.

## 2.2 Membership

At GIN there are different types of Membership.

- Personal Membership (lid (persoonlijk))
- Student Membership (lid student)
- Membership through a company, e.g. Kadaster in table below (bedrijfsabonnement)

In the table below an overview is given of the number of members in the last ten years. In 2006 there were more options for membership.

Since 2011 the membership for retired professionals was no longer possible. All members of that category became a personal member.

For companies there are three options for membership, basic, extended and plus.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Lid (persoonlijk) (inclusief ereleden)	2.396	2.120	2.050	1.965	1.870	1.730	1.490*	1.410	1.294	1174
Lid gepensioneerd	171	154	148	138	137	121	n.v.t.	n.v.t.	n.v.t.	n.v.t.
Lid student	101	95	92	54	46	74	12	42	16	15
Bedrijfsabonnement**	563	526	518	499	474	354	346	348	333	326
Lid BVK / Kadaster***	678	675	676	669	669	662	608	542	537	612
Lid BVK gepens.	154	151	146	142	142	112	n.v.t.	n.v.t.	n.v.t.	n.v.t.
<b>Totaal</b>	<b>4.063</b>	<b>3.721</b>	<b>3.630</b>	<b>3.467</b>	<b>3.338</b>	<b>3.053</b>	<b>2.456</b>	<b>2.342</b>	<b>2.180</b>	<b>2127</b>

*Table 1: Number of members of GIN*

At GIN for some years a decrease in the member amount is seen. This makes it difficult to meet members' needs and it's more difficult to find active members in the regions for example to start new programs or workshops. It seems there is less involvement among the members. However more often the government is asking associations for knowledge, information and input. They see the associations as a lever to achieve goals or a position.

And GIN has seen that those associations who are able to adapt to the changed circumstances, became healthy and successful!

A good strategy with a subsequent business model can help the association in the right direction. That's the challenge for GIN!

### **3. THE STRUGGLE OF GEO-INFORMATIE NEDERLAND**

In the Netherlands 2 out of 5 associations are confronted with a decrease or stagnation of members. The effects are huge. As was described in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter GIN also experiences pressure. The needs of members change and also the numbers are decreasing. The association is ageing and there is less potential for innovation, less revenues of membership fees, and thus less money for attending and organizing meetings for members. Besides it is more difficult to raise external funds. In addition to that it will be more difficult to maintain the international membership fees of the international networks. A complete era will be lost if associations are unable to adapt.



*Illustration 2: Struggle of GIN*

In this setting opportunities remain unused, because there is not enough support and input from the members. This requires action from GIN to adapt. It requires a redefinition of the added value, finding ways to stay connected, to identify the changes, and focus.

Also the growth of the sector and its users changes the settings. Before the association focused on members with a background in geo-information. The users of geo-information do not always have this background, but is important target audience to share knowledge about the development in the sector.

#### *Added Value*

GIN has to advocate the advantages of being a member in an active way to their (future) members and show them GIN's added value.

During the reconsideration of the added value it is important to focus on the added value of the next generation as well as the current members. GIN needs to think outside of the box.

#### *Staying Connected*

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FIG Working Week 2016  
 Recovery from Disaster  
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A big part of being a member of a professional association is being part of a network. Currently most of the members manage their own professional networks online. To stay connected as association, you will have to be part of these communities as well. There you can show members the added value of the association by sharing updates and knowledge. If Facebook or snapchat is the platform for that generation, why not be there as well?

#### *Identify changes*

An overview of the requirement of current and future members will help to identify the changes that are needed. Based on this inquiry one can identify the changes that are needed. This can be part of the mission and vision.

#### *Focus*

And last but not least, focus is needed to achieve the results. The advantages a member can have of its membership is crucial. If you are not able to sell the membership to the next generation, then it will be difficult to survive. Focus on the next generation to be successful in the future.

### **4. THE ACTIONS OF GEO-INFORMATIE NEDERLAND**

GIN faces challenges, but as association it is still existing and present, and ambitious. GIN has strong support of other organisations in its profession. To maintain this position and to improve the value of the membership GIN is aware that it needs to adapt to become future-proof. More and more small associations shall cease to exist due to a decrease of memberships. GIN does not want this to happen, so they are changing their course to adapt to the societal changes. And therefore GIN has questioned themselves and their members.

As a result of the surveys among the members GIN concluded that the definition of being a network has to be reviewed. There is lack of clear positioning and a missing clear added value to the members. In a bold statement: GIN simply does not offer what their members desire to receive. This is a serious threat for the future.

Also a shift in communication was detected. Due to the societal changes and the online network. Members want to be notified about news, but they want to be able to decide when to read the news. Besides that, there is a shift to more network driven communication and sharing knowledge within a group. This important when discussing membership needs.

To attract and to keep individual members the identity and ambition of national associations are important.

#### **4.1 Keeping and attracting members**

GIN is working to make the changes and to become more aligned with the requirements of the members. The definition of being a network and its added value will be reviewed.

Steps for understanding the demands of the next generation and fulfilling the needs of their current members are undertaken.



GIN's strategy, structure and culture are in state of change. A part of the recommendations is already introduced in their mission. The ambition and vision of the future GIN is adapted. The GIN strategy is modernised and reformulated. In the strategy the priorities for positioning of GIN in the coming years.

- Everybody working with Geo-Information, of all education levels, must want to become a member of GIN
- GIN is about your profession. It's where you meet the right people. GIN is approachable and accessible. GIN is active in your region. The cost of participation is as low as possible. The platform of GIN is helpful for your development.
- Members are involved and participate actively: in discussions, meetings, workshops. We use modern technological tools.
- Companies and governments are interested to invest in an independent association like GIN. GIN helps the employees of these organizations to move forward. We want to enforce this by providing companies with the opportunity to become a company member. Through this membership they provide added value to their employees, i.e. also our members.
- Starting point is that GIN dedicated to all those who deal with geographic information. Within this large group groups can be distinguished who have different needs and requirements on knowledge and networking in geo-information.

There are four types of members groups described to approach for becoming a member.

- **New Geo Professionals:**  
These are young geo-professionals working at executive level. They have a graduate degree in IT or engineering. GIN considers this the main target for the coming years to actively demonstrate its added value and to recruit new members.
- **Senior Geo Executives**  
These are managers in fields where geo-information plays an important role. They are not necessarily trained in geographic information. They have to make important decisions based on geo-information or geo-information resources. Issues like: outsourcing, acquisition of GIS software, organization of geo information etc. For GIN this group stands in 2nd place when it comes to recruiting new members.
- **Young Geo Managers**  
These people are project leaders or policy makers in fields related to geo-information (eg environment, planning and scheduling, security, and mobility). In their training they have (indirectly) had to deal with geographic information. They are aware of the importance of geo-information and want to stay informed about new techniques and developments in the market, decision making and legislation.
- **Geo-Outsiders**  
These are people who are interested in geo-information because of their work or hobby. It is not a substantial part in their work. Examples include geography teachers, consumers, gamers and hobbyists (geo-cacher). This involves both young and old people. These people are mainly concerned about the presentation and visualization of their information. Gathering and analysis of geographic information plays a less important role.

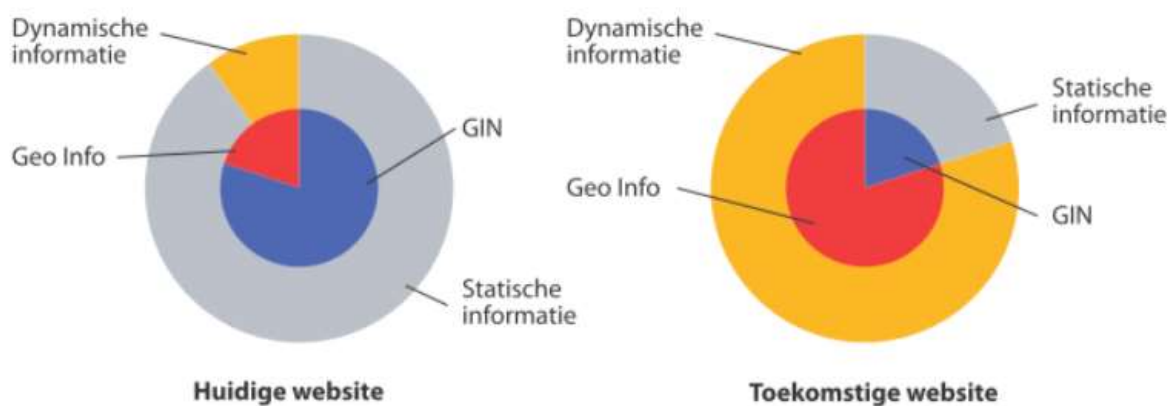
GIN suspects that many people from this segment are already members. These are the people that have a lot of knowledge and experience is. They have active in the field of geo-information / surveying and gathering for a long time.

### *Added value*

In the strategy plan the way to offer added value is described:

- An accessible and connected network creation within geo-users.
- Providing an interactive knowledge platform.
- Increasing the relevance of geo-information in the "outside world"

To achieve this GIN needs to shift from more static information on their platforms to a more dynamic setting (diagram 1). GIN will invest in a digital platform that supports this.



*Diagram 1: Shift from static (statische) to more dynamic (dynamische) information from the current (huidige) to the future (toekomstige) website.*

## **4.2 6 steps to change**

1. To transform the website to an interactive knowledge exchange platform
2. To provide more dynamic information
3. To organise structure and responsibility for the different types of information
4. To get more information about the members needs through 'My GIN'
5. To design, build and manager the new platform
6. To execute the steps to change in a structured way

### *Redefinition operational structure*

GIN redefined its operational structure based on their strategic marketing plan. In this plan GIN redefined their products and services based on added value to their members. For example, GIN decided to install a community manager and change the business model. This is inline with the mission to create an interactive knowledge platform.



*Illustration 3: Adapting to change*

Regarding the requirements, GIN's members want to have advantages that contribute to their daily job or professional career.

#### *Online Community*

Although members are organized in their own networks online, it also provides the association with ample possibilities to change the setting of the community. This can be done by creating an online community. It offers more options for interaction with and between members. Also online tools to exchange knowledge or to cooperate are available for low costs. This also offers a solution for members who prefer leisure instead of joining traditional meetings of an association. By providing opportunities online, an association can contribute to the community vibe members are looking for. GIN hired a community manager. This person is responsible to identify the different communities and to make a roadmap for the association to engage in the community.

#### *Business Model*

GIN is also looking into the types of membership. People paid dues once a year for access to a full year's worth of membership. Innovation is a must. Today, membership associations are introducing a variety of operational models and revenue streams. From only one membership option to tiered membership, Freemium membership, online membership, and group membership.

Installing an advisory board for the voting activities is part of investigation. Also ideas to offer students the possibility to work for GIN as a study project or obtaining credits for following a workshop are some ideas to meet our new ambitions and vision. These options should be explored further.

### *Conferences*

Since 2014 a new model for the yearly conferences is introduced. The GeoBuzz attracts over a 1000 professionals each year and nearly 75 companies had a stand in the exhibition area. During the events there was more time for interaction and all members had the opportunity to contribute to the program by giving an oral presentation about their work, hosting a workshop or to organise a debate.

### *Other Recommendations*

As mentioned before a clear description of the added value of GIN is desired. On an international level this is the case as well. Currently too little insight is given in the purpose, goals and added value of the international activities of GIN. While this can give international opportunities for GIN members. On top of that the connection with other associations is preferred. This will encourage cooperation and strengthens GIN's position.

## **5. Our struggle in international perspective**

The International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) is a confederation of Member associations, affiliates, academic members and companies, as well as two levels of honorary members. Through different membership categories 121 countries are represented in FIG. FIG is linking all the members together and combine the advantages of each.

- But.... Only the member associations have voting rights. The national associations representing one or more of the disciplines of surveying. There are about 103 member associations from 90 countries.
- The academic members are Organisations, institutions or agencies which promote education or research in one or more of the disciplines of surveying (92 academic members from 55 countries in July 2015).
- The affiliates are Groups of surveyors or surveying organizations undertaking professional activities but not fulfilling the criteria for member associations (45 affiliates in July 2015 from 43 countries).
- The corporate members are organisations, institutions or agencies which provide commercial services related to the profession of surveyor (23 Corporate members in July 2015).
- At last there is 1 correspondent a so called appointed individual appointed to correspondent in a country where no association or group of surveyors exists that is eligible to join FIG as a member association or affiliate.

GIN receives more and more requests for recommendations, requests for voting and request for influence and support certain topics or people from members of FIG.

From the Netherlands only GIN can vote in the General Assembly. Through the amount of members GIN is able to contribute two votes for each decision by the general assembly. To keep that GIN cannot afford a decline of the amount of members. This also goes for FIG. If members keep running instead of joining and are not combining strengths with ALL the national associations, then this will have major implications for FIG.

if national and international associations don't change for the next generations, FIG will soon be an empty shell with less international reputation and less influence!

## **6. Conclusions & Recommendations**

In this paper the response to the changing circumstances of the national association for Dutch geo-information professionals 'Geo-Informatie Nederland' (GIN) was described.

As association GIN is still existing and present, and ambitious. GIN has a strong support of other organisations in the profession.

The changes in society, the different requirements of the members and the decrease of members have changed the setting. To maintain the current position GIN needs to adapt.

GIN conducted a survey among the board members and the members. As a result actions were determined to help GIN adapt to the future needs of the association. The vision and mission statements have been adapted. One of the most tangible results is the instalment of an online community manager.

For the future GIN would like to encourage other member associations to share their challenges and to learn from each other. The societal challenges are different in each country and region, but the lessons learned on how the organisations adapted are valuable to all.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

### **Peter HOOGWERF**

Peter is the president of Geo-Information Netherlands (GIN). Since 2002 he is director at the Netherlands' Land Registry, Cadastre and Mapping Agency (Kadaster). He is responsible for the department of geo-information.

Before his career at Kadaster he worked for the Police. He was manager for the police-corps in Rotterdam.

### **Paula DIJKSTRA**

Paula works as regional manager for the international department of the Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency. She is a graduated geographer at the University of Amsterdam. She is responsible for the international projects in the Central and Eastern European region and the joint projects of Kadaster and the Global Land Tool Network. Also she is involved in the development of the international policies of Kadaster. Before joining Kadaster, she worked three years for an international digital mapping company. At Kadaster she worked as a team leader and as management secretary for the 'Land Use and Area Development'. Paula is also a leading player in building a global FIG Young Surveyors Community. She organised the first 3 European Young Surveyors Meeting (Lisbon, Berlin and Sofia) and the second Young Surveyors Conference (Kuala Lumpur, 2014).

### **Jacqueline MEERKERK**

Jacqueline studied geodesy in Delft and has extensive experience and a big network in the geo-information field. Since 2009 she works as independent consultant. She has varied and often important assignments. She has extensive experience in process and program management of complex projects, including five years as program director of the successful Innovation Space for Geo-Information. This program were more than 250 parties involved from the Netherlands and abroad. With innovative geo-developments different user worlds were connected ([www.rgi.nl](http://www.rgi.nl)). Before that she worked for five years as a management consultant for Twynstra Gudde Management Consultants in the field of ICT and government. Also she worked at Oranjewoud and the city of Leiden, where she gained a lot of practical experience. During her career she took numerous courses in the field of organizational management, change management, and financial management.

### **Carline AMSING**

Carline is a Master student in Geographical Information Management and Applications in the Netherlands. This is a joined programme of Wageningen University, University of Twente, Utrecht University and Technical University of Delft. As GIMA Secretary she is responsible for all practical matters related to the Master Programme. In November 2014 – March 2015 Carline did an internship at the international department of the Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency. In this internship the focus was on better international cooperation and alignment between the government, science and businesses. Which is one of the priorities of GeoSamen, a joint vision for the Dutch Geo-sector in 2020. Carline is part of a regional committee of GIN which organises

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FIG Working Week 2016

Recovery from Disaster

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all kind of geo-related events for its members. Besides she is part of the programme committee of the 4<sup>th</sup> FIG European Young Surveyors Meeting.

**Anouk Povel**

Anouk works at Kadaster and has worked in various roles. Her expertise is broadly in management, information analysis, consulting, business analysis and decision support.

Through various communication lines she influence decision making procedures, she supports the decision-making and brings recommendations to management and / or MT members of the Geo Information department.

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