

Geospatial Surveyors - What Are They Good For?

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SUMMARY

Current and expected future technological changes mean that former time-consuming tasks are done by devices. As a result it is increasingly important for surveyors to define their professional role, not by what they do or what they produce, but by what they are good for - the positive results they contribute to clients or society, and the confidence they provide for the economic, social and environmental benefits of decisions based on that confidence.

In a world where anyone can use a measurement device, where that device has very high levels of redundancy and self-checking algorithms - what distinguishes the surveyor's measurements from those of others? When sufficiently precise global or local geospatial datasets can be routinely accessed and used by anyone through common devices such as smartphones, what will distinguish the geospatial surveyor's data from anyone else's?

Previously, surveying and mapping were clearly within the domain of a profession called Surveying. More recently, a focus on activities rather than outcomes, has created an artificial division between those who gather spatial data (surveyors) and those who process spatial data (cartographers, geospatial scientists or GIS managers).

A focus on outcomes reveals both groups as experts who obtain spatial information, assess its suitability for their clients' needs, and process it to generate outcomes such as confidence in boundary location, good decisions based on spatial models, etc. The shared outcomes delivered for their clients, and for society, unify these experts more than their activities divide them. That is what geospatial surveyors are good for.