

November 23, 2017



Dear **Member**

of the International Society for the History of the Map (**ISHMap**),

The circumstances force me to turn to the membership of the Society because of an emergency situation in the short life of ISHMap. I would like to inform you about the current situation, as well as I ask for your support in the renewal and transformation of our Society.

As you are all aware, the planned AGM had to be cancelled this summer for substantial problems regarding the confirmation of **membership status**. The lack of information on membership status made it impossible for the Secretary to confirm who had voting rights. Because of the constitutional problem the Chair had to **postpone** the meeting until the problem is solved. Members of the Society were all notified of the cancellation of the official meeting, at the same time, ISHMap members were asked to help Council in finding solutions. Unfortunately, for my sudden illness, I could not attend the **informal** meeting I proposed to be held in Belo Horizonte, and a small group of members took the chance to take control over the entire organization. Despite they were Trustees, who were all informed about the inner administrative and structural problems of the society, instead of cooperation they elected each other, but it took almost half a year (!) to communicate the outcomes of their meeting which **they call** AGM.

You, as a member, must be rather confused to see the recent announcements from this group and this message was written to explain you the real situation, and make you able to make a decision how to proceed. That confusion is very well understood: our reputed former colleagues speak about imperatives and legal matters, and this latter filed is a rather slippery ground in your own country, not to mention the UK. I do not see it useful to argue with references to our constitution or by-laws – we are not lawyers but historians of the map!

And this ideal what really counts, although I feel it was not as strongly represented by the society as it should have been. Over the years we were all too busy with administrative matters regarding membership, subscription, nomination, election and reports, instead of focusing the initial goal of the society. What we all wanted was an **independent, international scholarly organization representing** the community of all people interesting in our multidisciplinary field. This is what should be kept while other things must be changed when we would like to propose a way out of the trap.

So, without going into legal details, I would like to state that meeting in Brazil was not our AGM. People who elected each other there are not legitimate representatives of ISHMap. Those who played their disgusting comedy ignored not only me, the Chair, as well other Trustees but, more importantly, they simply cancelled the membership of all who were not involved in their plot. It did not matter if you paid the membership fee or not you deserved the same treatment. This is simply **not acceptable**.

I. SOCIETY MATTERS

Although it may be disappointing to learn, the recent administrative and legal problems of ISHMap were caused by one Trustee, Leif Isaksen. As the new Treasurer of the society, elected by the 2016 AGM in Lisbon, first he could or would not do his job, later refused the assistance offered by other society officers, in the end he did not communicate with other Trustees and acted arbitrarily. Right after the Lisbon AGM he was commissioned to take over the society's bank account and the PayPal account. As it seems, Isaksen started to act early January of 2017.

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As a result of his actions and the missed communication with other officers soon the whole system of administration collapsed. The immediate reason was that Isaksen did never send the Webmaster the information necessary for updating the online payment function (the PayPal widget) on our website. As he was the **only person** with access to the society's accounts no one else could do this. He was asked more than once to cooperate. Technical assistance was also offered. But he not only refused but misinterpreted my offer as an attempt to control him. From this January members of the society have been unable to use the **PayPal** widget - consequently, they **could not pay** the 2017 membership fee or subscribe to the journal.

I must clarify that anyone who ever joined the society remained a member, unless someone expressed the wish that he/she would not like to be a member. According to the constitution only those members can vote at the AGM who paid the membership fee by the deadline. Now they say that I was not a voting member in June because I had not paid the fee, but they would not tell you why I did it so.

As the Chair, although I could easily find a solution, I did not pay because of these unacceptable circumstances. I really wanted to convince Isaksen to make **all of us** able to pay by PayPal, and, because it was his duty, I asked him to repair the PayPal widget and give the chance to all members to pay the membership fee in the way we, as a Society decided and arranged. He never made an attempt to fix the widget so I did not pay in the end. I am proud of it, because this was the only way to demonstrate that, although I am your elected chair, I am not a special member. By this spring this remained the only possibility **to protest** against the Treasurer's hostility and unacceptable actions – and now Isaksen raised the legal issues suggesting that I was no longer chair. At this point I realized that the renewal of the Society is an urgent matter.

As a consequence of Isaksen's, in retrospect rather systematic, deconstruction activity the society's administration, depending on the cooperation between officers, was paralyzed. The Secretary, the Membership Secretary and the Webmaster were in need of information from Treasurer to be able to administer membership, subscriptions and the website. They **could not** do this and were frustrated like me, while Isaksen, who was responsible for all, kept sending aggressive messages. Due to disinformation, originating from the same source, Council became divided. Leaders of the society could not react properly, although the Chair sent them a detailed report, asked for their assistance in finding a proper solution. Unfortunately, some of them did not even reply. Perhaps it is not by chance that names of those Trustees who did not cooperate now appear in the document reporting their **putsch**.

Their motivations are rather dubious, at least you must consider that those persons were already given the chance to develop the society. As **Trustees** they were in the position to improve matters, suggesting new projects and supporting ISHMap in general. It was not only a chance, as Trustees of the society **it was their responsibility**. But they have not done anything. Now, as you see, the same persons tell you they want a renewal - after they elected/ appointed each other either fits better to their plan...

II. RENEWAL OF ISHMAP

After the explanation of the present situation, which is not as disappointing as you may think as we can identify problems which were hidden but could undermine any project, I think you may be more interested in the proposed way of renewal and transformation. Below you find the main points of the proposed actions plan.

1. Online Election

Anyone who would like to lead the renewed society, which would be the realization of the idea I proposed in my message postponing the AGM, must agree that it can not be

done without strong legitimacy. In my opinion only persons who have the support of the majority of the membership can be called elected officers. For these reasons I propose and urge a general election – but not in the way we did it in the past, when only members present at the AGM could vote. Online election is the way how we can give the chance to each member to vote. Anyone who feels he/she would like to lead the society can stand and we all must accept the decision by the majority.

2. Change of Constitution

As the Chair of the society I was involved in all kinds of society matters from the beginning and was aware that the legal form of the society could be a major obstacle against any renewal. As you may know, in 2011 we adopted the model constitution recommended for UK charity organizations. But you must know that we were never an UK charity, and we were never registered as such, but an international scholarly organization. If you read the model constitution on our website you will understand what I meant when I suggested a change. If you are not UK citizen you have no chance to effectively influence what is happening (e.g. although I was Chair of the Society I was not allowed to be a signatory of the bank account because I had no permanent address in the UK (at that time in the EU)). As the ridiculous procedure which was minutely described in the report on the meeting demonstrates this is not what an international scholarly society should do: to allow a few members take power with such a putsch - instead of an election. Even if we put aside the dubious circumstances it contradicts common sense if a small group could elect the representatives of the entire membership.

3. Improving Administrative and Financial Matters

To take the new road towards a renewal we should also change the legal form of the society for the reasons apparent to anyone who reads the documents mention above and considers the needs of our society. And perhaps at this point we should consider a major factor influencing the future: membership. After years of steady decline, currently we have theoretically less than 40 members, the majority of them are subscribers to the journal, many of them from the UK. The journal IM at the reduced rates remained practically the only membership benefit the society could offer to prospective members. The discount is actually given by the Publisher while IM Ltd. covered only the difference between the reduced and normal student rates. This amount, c. GBP 10 a year, was IM's contribution – all support we ever received.

The society not only promoted the journal but we also processed the subscriptions which were paid with the membership fee, usually before the end of the year - because subscribers usually wanted to make sure they receive the journal in the following year. So it is not by chance that now most of the voting members are the subscribers who are concerned about their subscription.

As it is clear for the financial reports all our income came from membership fees. It is simply **a lie** what Isaksen says about the website: it cost nothing for the society (the website is hosted by a university and the webteam never asked for any compensation as we were all volunteers). The expenses the society ever had were the honoraria we paid for appointed ISHMap officers, who administered the subscriptions and the website (they were also co-opted members of Council). The nominal amounts were always proposed by the Treasurer, agreed by the AGM and honoraria was paid posteriorly, well after the job has been done.

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However, you must note that the administration of subscriptions, a terribly complicated issue, was actually financed by all members, on the other hand not all of us enjoyed the benefit. Why should non-subscribing members finance this is a question, but perhaps it would be fair if the administration of subscription was covered in a new model. If volunteers can hardly take the job and responsibility, so it is proposed that the costs should be included in the rates, or subscriptions should be collected and administered by the publisher. The Society can issue a confirmation and this should entitle the member to subscribe at the reduced rates.

I emphasize that no other payments were made by ISHMap – the honorary officers never received or asked for any compensation for their work or expenses. Although I had full access to the PayPal account during a long period I never made any financial transaction. Although after I explained this and gave the reasons why the society needed that access Treasurer Isaksen refused my request. His action was not only inexplicable but also degrading. Our balance was always positive - I never took anything from the society but always gave something. We still have some money on the bank account. This is not private money, any member who ever paid membership fee has got a share, so we all must have the right to decide what should happen to that amount.

4. Future Projects

Although scholarly projects were suggested from the very beginning the society has never had the sources to realize more than the biannual symposium. This was not only proposed by me, but I organized it in 2012. Based on the experience ISHMap decided to continue the series of smaller and cheaper thematic meetings and we have had two successful international symposia: in Paris (one day) in 2014 organized by Gilles Palsky and (two days)s in Lisbon organized by Thomas Horst. Beyond these achievements it had been realized that the society needs a forum. While initially it was hoped that the Society could be involved in IM not only on the market side, now I can see no inclination to move towards this direction, although it would seem prospective for both parties. The form and the nature of this forum have to be decided by the society, but preparations and arrangements have been already made towards society publications. Perhaps this is what we should have done from the beginning - but it may be not too late to do this. Anyone who would like to join and contribute to this publication project please contact me.

I ask you not only to consider the suggested way but also to contribute to the process with your support. If you remain with us, I am sure, ISHMap will find a better future as an independent, international and academic society.

As the chair of the Founding Group and the first elected Chair of ISHMap I am still with the idea of an international community of the historians of the map. I may not be able to work for the society how I wished, but here and now I found it imperative to tell you all this. Hope you agree that it would be unfair not to listen to the other side as well. Anything will come next it was an honour to serve our Society, and I did my best to do the job.

Best regards,

Zsolt G. Török,

Hon. Chair, ISHMap