

## **Report to the International Cartographic Association for Belgium prepared on behalf of the Sub-Committee Cartography and GIS (2019 – 2023)**

The **Sub-Committee Cartography and GIS** is a sub-committee of the **National Committee for Geography**. The functioning of the committees is governed by regulations that can be found on <http://www.rasab.be/index.php/fr/comites-nationaux/reglement>.

The assignment of the Belgian national scientific committees is the promotion and coordination for Belgium of the studies of different scientific disciplines. From an international point of view, they coordinate the various disciplines in Belgium, and their representation in an international context, including nominating scientists for delegation to the general assembly of the international scientific union of the discipline (affiliated to ICSU).

### **1. National and regional mapping activities**

Belgium is a federally organised country, which implies that the creation, managing and distribution of geodata and maps is done at the national level as well as at the regional level, seeking complementarity of data collection and available data. The main institution at the national level is the *National Geographical Institute* (NGI) (*Institut Géographique National*).

The NGI is the standard-setting body for the provision of geographical reference data, establishing among other things the geographical projection for Belgium, embedded in the international framework. To build the inventory of topographic reference data, NGI makes limited use of its own production capacity. Important parts of the production are outsourced to the private sector. In addition, more and more authentic sources are being integrated into the database. For example, there is structural cooperation with *Infrabel* for rail infrastructure, with *Elia* for the high-voltage network, with *AAPD* (cadastre) and *Statbel* (statistical data). More information can be found on <https://www.ngi.be/website/>.

On the regional level, the three regions have their own agencies or administrations responsible for geodata.

The geodata-activities of Flanders are imbedded in *Digitaal Vlaanderen* (*Digital Flanders*), an agency of the Flemish government. Public available data can be consulted on the site <https://www.geopunt.be>.

The geodata of the Walloon region can be consulted at the site <https://geoportail.wallonie.be/home.html>. In the Walloon part of Belgium the geodata are organised by the *Service Public de Wallonie (Public Service of Wallonia)*, which role is to implement the policy established by the Walloon government, within the scope and fields under its remit. It is also the primary interface between regional and citizen institutions.

In Brussels-Capital Region the geodata are available via the *Geoportal of the Brussels Capital Region* (<https://geobru.irisnet.be>).

The national and regional geodata administrations are fully implementing the INSPIRE directive.

## **2. Research**

The research activities in the domain of cartography and GIS are mainly executed at the different universities and at some regional research institutions, such as VITO.

We refer here to the web pages of the universities and these of the science funding agencies (esp. FWO (*Research Foundation – Flanders*, <https://www.fwo.be/en/>) and FNRS (*Fund for Scientific Research*, <https://www.frs-fnrs.be/en/>).

## **3. Initiatives of the Sub-Committee for Cartography and GIS**

### **Mapathon**

After three successful editions in 2016, 2017 and 2018, a national *Missing Maps Mapathon* was organised for the fourth time in the last week of March 2019, coinciding with the *Printemps des Sciences* event taking place at French-speaking universities at that time. In 2019, the choice was made to map three provinces in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Tshopo, Ituri and High-Uele. These regions face recurrent epidemics and migrations due to major spikes in violence.

After four successful editions (2016-2019), all preparations were again made to organise a national *Missing Maps Mapathon* event in 2020, in cooperation with *Médecins Sans Frontières*, the *Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team* and *OpenStreetMap Belgium*. Like previous years, the event was planned to take place in March 2020, coinciding with the *Printemps des Sciences* event at French-speaking universities. However, due to the Covid-19 situation, it was

decided to stop all preparations and cancel the event two weeks before it was due to take place.

Due to the ongoing uncertainty regarding the evolution of the pandemic, it was decided not to hold a physical Mapathon event in March 2021 either. In 2022 – still due to the pandemic risk – no Mapathon was organised.

In 2023, from March 22 till March 26, the *Belgian Sub-Committee for Cartography and GIS* organized the fifth edition of its *National Mapathon* event, in collaboration with *Doctors Without Borders (MSF/AZG)* and the *Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT)*. Several universities in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia and the University of Luxembourg open their doors for a large collective mapping event.

### **Barbara Petchenik Drawing Competition 2019 and 2021**

Every two years, the International Association for Cartography (ICA) organises the Barbara Petchenik drawing competition for children under 16. Organisation of the Belgian part of the competition (pre-selection) is in the hands of the *Sub-Committee for Cartography and GIS*, and is done in close cooperation with the *National Geographic Institute*, which is jointly responsible for the logistical organisation of the pre-selection.

Invitations to participate within three age categories (0-8 years, 9-12 years and 13-15 years) were sent to primary and secondary schools in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia in autumn 2018. The response rate that year was very high. In 2019 a total, more than 300 drawings were received, 23 in the 0-8 years category, 234 (!) in the 9-12 years category and 51 in the 13-15 years category.

In spring 2021, a total of 119 drawings were received, divided into three age categories (<9, 9-12, 13-15 years). From these, the subcommittee selected six drawings to be submitted for participation in the international competition that took place during this year's ICA conference that took place in Florence (IT) in December 2021.

### **International Cartographic Map exhibition 2019 and 2021**

The Sub-Committee for Cartography and GIS, in close cooperation with the National Geographic Institute, were jointly responsible for the logistical organisation of the selection.

### **IGARSS 2021 educational project "Green in the city"**

In July 2021, Brussels hosted the International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (IGARSS 2021), one of the most important annual conferences around remote sensing technology and its applications. It was organised by a

Belgian-Dutch organising committee and coordinated from the Belgian side by *Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO)*. Frank Canters (VUB) together with Frieke Van Coillie (UGent) took on the task of educational chair of the conference. Several educational activities were organised as part of the conference, aimed at different target groups.

Specifically, an educational outreach activity was also organised aimed at secondary schools, to introduce students to applications of remote sensing and GIS. Through the Cartography & GIS subcommittee, the Geography departments of the various Belgian universities were approached to participate in this event. In the end, the geography departments on the Flemish side (VUB, UGent, KULeuven) proved enthusiastic to cooperate.

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This report is mainly based on the yearly reports of the *Sub-Committee for Cartography and GIS* to the *National Committee for Geography*.