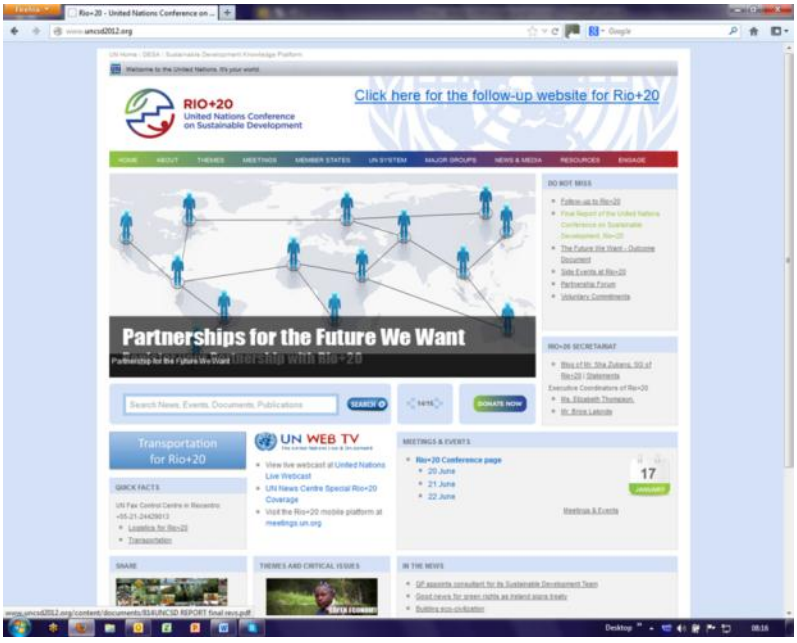
Geospatial Information and Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

A Belgian perspective

In the resolution adopted by the General Assembly , '*The future we want' World leaders acknowledged 'the need to further mainstream sustainable development at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognizing their inter-linkages, so as to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions.'*

Belgium was represented at this meeting by our Minister for Development Cooperation, his Excellency Paul Magnette.



For the Nationaal Geografisch Instituut of Belgium the word 'inter-linkages' has an important relevance to the work it does on behalf of the nation and the work carried out on behalf of Europe and the wider world.

The word 'inter-linkages' is important because it can be seen on a daily basis that it is geo-information that provides the inter-linkage between economic, social and environmental issues. This becomes increasingly realised by politicians, scientists, business leaders and citizens across the world; and so the demand for reliable and authoritative geospatial information is increasing too.

Belgium has responded to this by re-defining the role of the National Geographic Institute, from data producer/data gatherer …. to data integrator …… from data integrator …. to data broker.

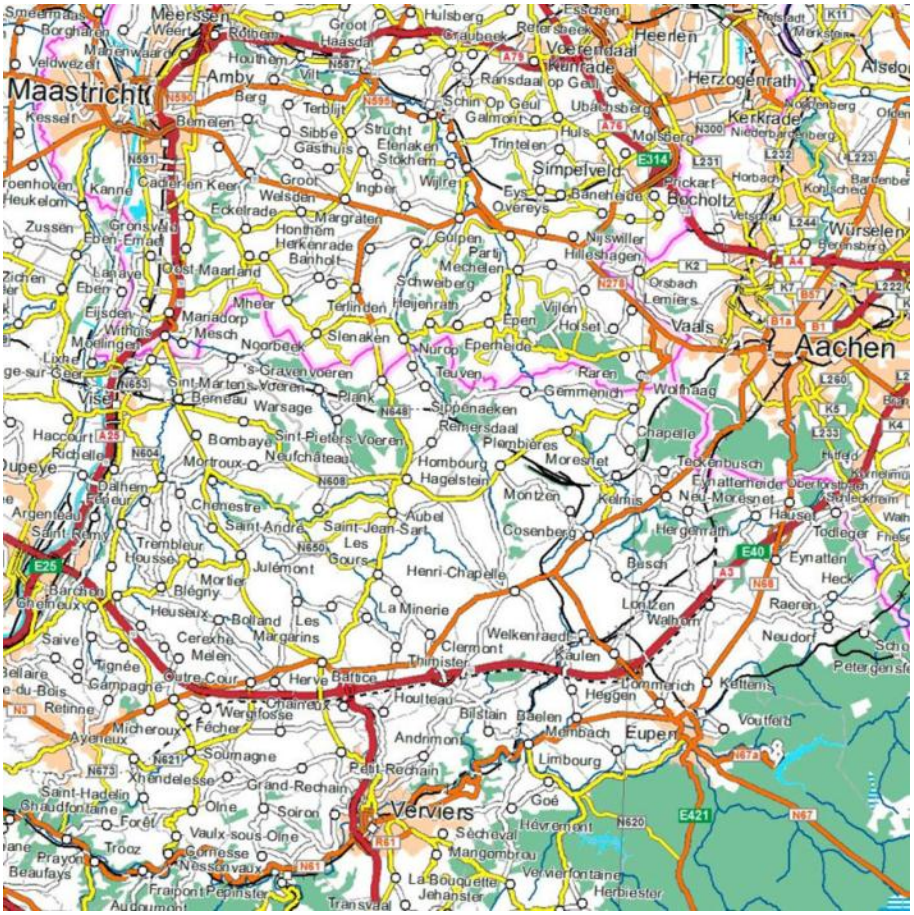
This was done because the challenge for the national mapping and cadastral community is to make their geo-information more reliable, more up-to-date and more relevant to more users who have increasingly diverse requirements. Those with a long memory or a good understanding of cartographic history will know that this is not a new challenge; in fact this is a challenge which has existed since the birth of the mapmakers' profession.

Belgium's first contribution in the sphere of Geospatial Information for Sustainable Development came from the work of Gerardus Mercator, born in 1512 in Rupelmonde in the Habsburg County of Flanders, part of Belgium. His projection transformed navigation and continues today to underpin much of the geo-information, including the information which underpins sustainable development.

Of course a lot has changed since Mercator's day and a lot will continue to change. Change Management has become a necessary skill for all organisations involved in geographic information management.

In Belgium the role of the national geographic institute is changing from data gatherer, to data integrator, from data integrator, to data broker, in the face of the changing expectations of users. This is making the NGI become more responsive to user's needs and better attuned to user's needs. Working more effectively with national government bodies and partners in local and regional government and of course with commercial companies the mapping agency is now delivering better products and better services.

But it is not just to the benefit of Belgium that NGI is delivering this transformation. The transformation to a data broker is fundamental to the ongoing development of one of Europe's definitive and authoritative geo-spatial reference datasets, EuroRegionalMap, the production of which NGI coordinates.



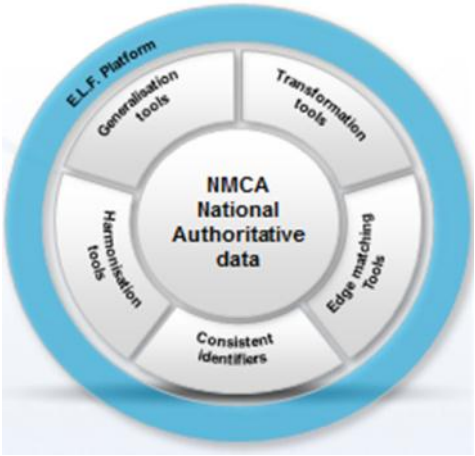
The Belgian State Secretary Minister Bogaert, who has

responsibility for leading the broader transformation of the Belgian federal public administration on a new track, reported in his speech in the UNGGIM High Level Forum Ministerial Segment, that the Belgian Mapping authority, as well as the cadastral and land registry administration, are actively engaged in cross border collaboration, most importantly through the European Association of National Mapping and Cadastral Authorities, EuroGeographics.

These efforts can be seen **Belgium's second contribution** in the sphere of Geospatial Information for Sustainable Development, especially NGI's role as the production manager for EuroGeographics' EuroRegionalMap. In this the production coordination team at NGI gathers and integrates data from Europe's national mapping, cadastre and land registry authorities to produce a harmonised pan-European reference data set already covering 35 European countries[1] and growing in coverage each year.

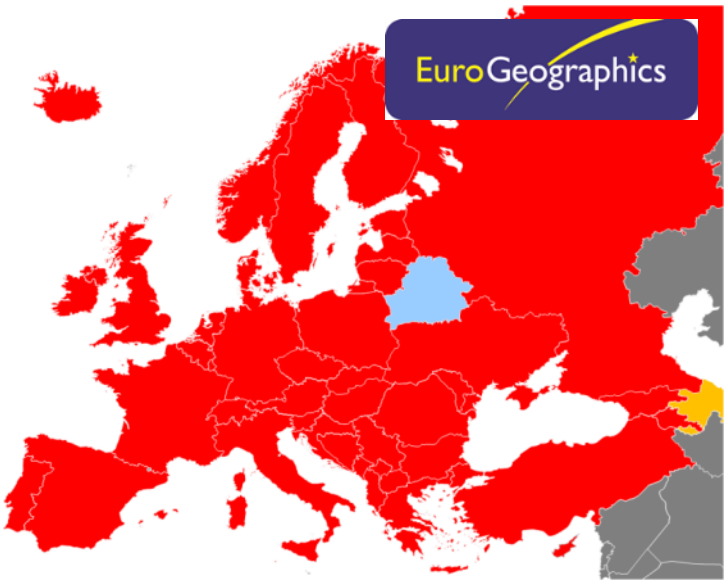
In the European Location Framework project which will start in March 2013, the European National Mapping and Cadastral Authorities, lead in this project by the Norwegian NMCA Statens Kartverk, will go even further. The European Location Framework will be a technical infrastructure which delivers authoritative, interoperable, cross-border geospatial reference data for analysing and understanding information connected to places and features. This will bring together the authoritative geographic information available at the national level for pan-European and international use.

The consortium is optimistic that the project will be part funded by the European Commission's Information and Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme, one of the three specific programmes of The Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme running for the years 2007-2013.



[1] 27 EC countries, 4 EFTA countries, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro + Andorra (included with Spain), Liechtenstein (included with Switzerland), Monaco (included with France), Citta del Vaticano and San Marino (included with Italy), Faeroe Islands (included with Denmark).

The ICT PSP aims at stimulating smart sustainable and inclusive growth by accelerating the wider uptake and best use of innovative digital technologies and content by citizens, governments and businesses. It provides EU funding to support the realisation of the Digital agenda for Europe.



In the European Location Framework the NGI intends to go further, not just as **Belgium's next contribution** in the sphere of Geospatial Information for Sustainable Development, but as Europe's contribution. EuroGeographics intends to contribute this exciting development project to the United Nation's 'Global Map for Sustainable Development ambition.

At the same time as the report on good developments in Europe, there are many examples in other regions of the world that Europe and the European countries can learn from and use to their benefit. One way in which this is done is through the strategic relationship EuroGeographics has with PSMA Australia Limited, the body responsible for aggregating the States of Australia's topographic, cadastral and other geospatial information into Australia's continental datasets.

Sustainable Development is a worldwide challenge. Geospatial Information Management is a world-wide challenge too one in which working together more can be achieved than working apart.

As the UN-GGIM initiative gathers momentum the President of EuroGeographics, along with colleagues from the European Commission's statistical body, Eurostat, and UNGGIM Co-chair Vanessa Lawrence, is working to establish UN-GGIM Europe, to ensure that all of EuroGeographics' members, be they from Western Europe or the CIS countries, are well represented, well connected and well engaged with the UN-GGIM.

The mapping and cadastral agencies of Europe will be able to actively participate in the work going on for UN-GGIM. Using the example set by UN-GGIM Asia Pacific ways to put this process 'on the fast track' are explored at the moment.

In her speech at the Conference on the European Union Space Policy, in Brussels, Mrs Mazlan Othman, Deputy Director-General, United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV), and

Director, Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA) draw attention to the UN General Assembly resolution 66/288, and particularly to paragraph 274 in which world leaders recognize(d) the importance of space-technology-based data, in situ monitoring and **reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policy making, programming and project operations.**

Many will be aware that the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015. For this reason, the United Nations has set up a UN System Task Team on Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (UNTT). In the report to the Secretary-General of June 2012, "Realizing the future we want for all", there is another important paragraph all should commit to memory:

> *Paragraph 79 'Improving access to geographical information and geospatial data, and building capacities to use scientific information in areas such as climate monitoring, land use planning, water management, disaster risk reduction, health and food security, will allow for more accurate environmental and social impact assessments and more informed decision-making at all levels.'*

Having committed it to memory we must commit to doing something about it.

In response to this and to the wider expectations of society and as a major Geospatial Information contribution to the Sustainable Development agenda EuroGeographics will make its 1:1,000,000 scale EuroGlobalMap available for download and free to all users for all uses. This important decision is announced in the Second High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management.

Acknowledgement: Belgium and EuroGeographics wish to express their thanks to the United Nations, particularly the office of the Director of Statistics in taking the brave, but necessary step, of launching the Global Geospatial Information Management initiative. Both have confirmed their engagement to advancing its objectives and delivering its commitments.

Doha, Qatar, 6th February 2013