

Speech Delivered by Mrs. Ingrid Vanden Berghe - Administrator-General of National Geographic Institute, at the occasion of the FLEXPUB General Assembly (18 November 2020)

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

As explicitly formulated in the FLEXPUB Strategy, "location" is fundamental for a well-functioning government and society. In short one could say: everything happens somewhere.

Importance of location

The importance of 'location' and a common understanding of it has been highlighted this year by the CoViD19 pandemic: the impact of the disease was much better understood when people saw the map of Belgium with municipalities becoming more and more red to even black. Maps of at-risk areas abroad showed us where it is better to go or not to go. Location plays of course a pivotal role in contact tracing: where did you go and who was at that location at the same time. And the NGI map will help you make an appointment for a test at the nearest test centre.

Why did people start making maps? In the first place, because a map allows to quickly and efficiently share information that would otherwise require inedible amounts of text. At the start, every mapmaker or country made its own maps, which resulted in a colourful cacophony, but made it impossible to get out of the tangle. Fortunately, this led to cooperation with jointly defined maps and information, which brought back a bit of ease.

Maps were made for several reasons: trade (think about the navigational charts) and ownership (the book of goods owned by an Abbey) were certainly important but the most widespread factor for massive cartography was certainly a military purpose, as a map is indispensable to win a battle...

As a national mapping agency we continue the legacy of mapmaking in a modern technological setting. Most people know that we continue to make maps, topographic maps and maps for leisure such as hiking or biking maps, or a map where to find the Trappist abbeys.

For the benefit of society

We continue to work for the Belgian Defence but there are, of course, many more 'battles' to be fought and thus 'maps' to be used, and this is our aim today: to provide quality reliable geographical data and services that can be used for the benefit of society.

This is for example, every day the case in our emergency services who have to prepare for and react quickly on incidents and crises. We work hard at NGI to deliver them solutions that provide uniform geodata and maps especially developed for emergency services



People need to get to work, home or a date on time in the most comfortable and fastest way, using the optimal transportation means. Many companies are developing solutions to make your choice easier, and we provide them access to all transport data through a common platform.

It is also in our mission to keep our airspace safe by maintaining a very precise database of obstacles in the airspace, such as high chimneys or wind turbines.

We help you discover all available federal geo-data on the Belgian geoportal [geo.be](https://geoportal.be)

We even guide you through the hundreds of thousands of old maps and aerial photos that have been made of our country and beyond in the past 700 years. If you are interested, take a look at [Cartesius.be](https://cartesius.be) (Cartesius).

Improving public service by location

At the same time, we still see that the same geo-data is collected more than once, that data are being converted in fragmented ways into non-interoperable map or data products, and that final users of these maps no longer see the wood for the trees. They waste time and effort getting to grips with these problems, while their tasks and skillsets lay absolutely elsewhere. We still see examples where even crucial services, such as the emergency services, lack professional map resources and find it difficult to cooperate, not only between disciplines, but also across the borders of cities, provinces, regions and our country, and even within their own organization.

The NGI will of course continue to monitor and further develop the basis and quality of our national datasets. Witness, for example, the new reference network that we are rolling out.

Rapid technological developments and digitisation offer both challenges and opportunities for the NGI. Opportunities, because these technological developments offer new functionalities and therefore allow more efficient exchange of data, easier integration of external sources or more automated creation of our maps. Technology makes it possible to update a map almost immediately. But technology also comes as a challenge: capacity building, knowledge management, investments in hard and software, new business needs, agile reaction to new demands are not only buzz words but are stretching our resources and our people to the limit. Not all that is possible is possible.

One thing is clear: as NGI we want to go the extra mile to allow our partners, our clients and society to use geoinformation in the most optimal way, so they can do their work better.

Our DNA

The flexpub project which we formally close today, shows how important openness, collaboration and participation are for the development of flexible governmental services. This is in line with the DNA of the NGI today and integrates seamlessly to the way we want to operate as a governmental service.

Collaboration

We want to work with you, integrating information from authentic sources at federal, regional, provincial and local level, connect these sources seamlessly across borders, thus providing uniform geodata and map products and services for the whole of Belgium.

We continue the transformation from stand-alone collection to predominant integration of external datasets from federal players such as Infrabel, and also increasingly from the regions, translating those into national datasets that reach across borders.

We make life easier for federal geo-information users, organising the supply of data from private parties, when this information is not available within the administrations.

We create easy access to data through one-stop-shop platforms and provide tools to make geo-data and geo-functionalities available to the community

Our ambition is also to make people, administrations work together, by offering platforms, forums, and other cooperation modalities that allow end-users, as well as administrations, civil servants, and private parties, to participate in the production and use of geodata.

We adhere to once-only, and where appropriate propose to accept our own products as authentic source.

Participation

In the field of Participation we also make good progress. We have deployed crowd-sourcing for data collection, integrating a feedback option on our topomapviewer and using this information in a short cycle update of cartoweb. We are shifting our work to more demand-driven developments of our services: in terms of maps, update frequency, expertise. We provide uniform maps for end-users in general, but also collaborate on adapted versions of these for specific user groups, such as the Ministry of Defence, the emergency services, companies, who want to have cross-border, uniform mapping...

Openness

Through cooperation and participation we want to realise a geodata ecosystem in which data are FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). We do our best to be able to offer High Value Datasets according to the European directives and therefore will continue our efforts to adapt our business model to the changing approach of free access. We gladly share our expertise and our data with others, in a continuous effort to improve the added value for society of using geodata. We will continue our missionary work and at the same time go on hunting and collecting interesting data that can be opened through a geographic approach, so that they are available to the benefit of society.

Improving quality of our government at all levels

Over the last years, the NGI has invested a lot in the development of the so-called broker role. We met many organizations and developed partnerships and collaborations. Our experience is that in those organizations where collaboration, participation and openness are well anchored, we have been able to achieve good results better and more easy, thus confirming the conclusions of the flexpub project in practice. I am sure that the result of this work, when put into practice, will help us to improve the quality of our government at all levels.

Thank you

I would like to thank you for your interest in the Flexpub project, for your support and the work you did, and for joining us today. I am sure you are all convinced today of the value of geodata and the importance of collaboration, participation and openness to achieve better government.

I wish you all a pleasant afternoon.

Keep safe and I hope to meet many of you in person somewhere in 2021.

Ingrid Vanden Berghe

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