

The International Cartographic Association 2015-2019

Menno-Jan Kraak

in conversation with Alexander Wolodtschenko and Florian Hruby

Volume 8 of <meta-carto-semiotics> continues the rubric “interviews” with Menno-Jan Kraak, very well-known cartographer and geoscientist from the Netherlands and current president of the International Cartographic Association (ICA).

About the interview

The following interview was undertaken via email during November 2015. The final version has been authorized by Menno-Jan Kraak in January 2015.

About Menno-Jan Kraak

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International Cartographic Association

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Prof. Dr. Menno-Jan Kraak (born 1958) is a very well-known cartographer. Since August 2015, he is president of the International Cartographic Association (ICA) for the 2015–2019 term.

Selected positions held:

- President of the International Cartographic Association (ICA), (2015-2019).
- ICA Vice-President (2007-2015).
- Co-chair of the ICA Commission on Visualization and Virtual Environments (1995-2007).
- Principle Investigator of the ITC research program Spatio-Temporal Analytics, Maps and Processing (STAMP) and member of the Twente Graduate School

He is member of the editorial board of several international journals in the field of cartography and GIScience (International Journal of Cartography, The Cartographic Journal, Journal of Maps, Cartographica, Cartography and Geographical Information Sciences International Journal of Applied Earth Observation and Geoinformation); author of more than 200 publications on cartography and GIS.

1. The ICA has many goals. What are the ICA objectives for the 2015–2019 term?

The International Cartographic Association (ICA) is the world authoritative body for cartography. Its objective is to promote the discipline and profession of cartography internationally. For the 2015-2019 period this does not change. Reaching the objective is done via the activities of our Commissions and Working Groups. But also via our new International Journal of Cartography, the website, other publications (book series, columns, interviews), conferences, research scholarships, and capacity development.

2. One of the keywords of the 2009 research agenda is “Cartographic theory”. From 1989 – 2015, a working group or commission worked explicitly on this topic. However, there is no Commission on Theoretical Cartography within the current ICA line-up. Is this a temporary gap, or have theoretical issues been transferred to other commissions?

Every four years the national members make proposals to the General Assembly to establish or renew Commissions. During the Rio de Janeiro Assembly no proposal for a Theoretical Commission was brought forward. This does not imply that there is no need for it, but also not that no one is working on theoretical aspects of cartography. There are many Commissions who publish in scientific journals and extend the theory of our discipline.

3. Geomatics vs. Cartography – a popular controversy. In your opinion, are there alternatives to cartography?

Terminology is always an interesting element in any domain, and especially if multiple domains start to overlap. In my opinion it is not geomatics (or do you mean geoinformatics, or geoinformation) versus cartography. Depending on ones background, ‘versus’ might be ‘with’, or ‘and’, or even ‘or’. Your question is if there are alternatives to cartography. Not if the aim of cartography is to design and create maps to offer insight in spatio-temporal pattern.

4. In 2011 we talked to Ferjan Ormeling (http://meta-carto-semiotics.org/uploads/mcs_vol4_2011/MCS_2011_4_ormeling.pdf), who argued that the ICA doesn’t need a structural reform. Do you (still) share this opinion?

My answer depends on what you mean with structural reform. If you look at the broad picture, ICA as an organization with members, and commissions as the working forces, I do not think so. However, it is always good for each Executive to look at the functioning of the organization in its timeframe. For the current Executive it is the 2015-2019 period. Some fine tuning might be required, and we will indeed look again at the membership of individuals, as was discussed by Ormeling.

5. You co-authored the current ICA Research Agenda in 2009 - do you consider this document still up-to-date, or can we expect a new edition?

The research agenda was written with a living document in mind. It was probably already old when published. Since 2009 not much has happened with the document, but the discipline has made lots of progress and the context of cartography has also changed considerably. It is indeed to be expected that a new edition will appear in the next few years. Initiatives have already been taken, and by the end of 2016 or at the beginning of 2017 a special issue of our International Journal of Cartography will be devoted to the agenda.

6. Where do you see the focus of the last ICA presidency, and where will you place the emphasis on?

The ICA under Georg Gartner's presidency has reached important milestones. Here the establishment of our International Journal of Cartography, published by Taylor & Francis, and the International Map Year (IMY), recognized by the United Nations initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UNGGIM) have to be mentioned. But also our International Council for Science (ICSU) membership is an important recognition of our association. And the activities under the umbrella of GeoForAll to promote Open Source software in education should not be forgotten.

During my presidency I can build on these achievements and in the framework of the IMY I intend to strengthen the relations with the UNGGIM by demonstrating how our discipline can be helpful in mapping the new UN sustainability goals. ICA will organize a cartographic exhibition at the next UNGGIM meeting in New York, August 2016. The plan is to create a set of 17 posters, one for each goal that demonstrates how maps can help to get insight in these goals. The plan is not just to create a single map for each goal. The idea is to offer different cartographic perspectives on these goals via story maps. These perspectives are offered by our Commissions. Each of the 17 goals has been adopted by two Commissions and together these will map a goal based on their skills set.

Thank you, Menno-Jan, for this opportunity to talk about some issues and plans regarding the ICA's 2015-2019 term, and thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences. Best wishes to you and to your ICA-presidency!