



Philippe De Maeyer, Professor, University of Ghent

Belgian contribution to the geographical and cartographical information system for the World Heritage parks in the DRC

The SYGIAP project (SYstème de Gestion d'Information pour les Aires Protégées – Information Management System for Protected Areas) is a project of ICCN (Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature – Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation) supported by UNESCO's World Heritage programme, various NGOs and the universities of Ghent and Louvain-la-Neuve, in collaboration with the federal research institutes (Royal Museum for Central Africa, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, National Botanic Garden of Belgium). The Belgian contribution, co-financed by the Belgian science policy, allows assistance in the development of and the installation of a management system for the spatial data needed for the management of the six Congolese parks forming part of the World Heritage (Okapis Fauna Reserve, Garamba National Park, Virunga National Park, Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Salonga National Park).

The Geographical Information System (SIG) also serves as a development support for a thematic database regularly updated by local agents. The availability of a thematic database is helping to relaunch monitoring measures at local and national level, and, in doing so, also revives the chances of better prevention and fight against illegal activities. These efforts now need to be extended beyond the World Heritage parks to all nature reserves. Paper maps have been produced for all the parks listed in the World Heritage on the scale of 1:200,000 and the data can be used in the SIG up to scales of 1:100,000 or even 1:50,000. These maps are published both as basic (topographical) maps and satellite image maps. The cartographic product includes the essential layers of the database.

The use of imaging and new media for hard-to-access historical data extends possibilities for monitoring and research into changes in the environment of these enormous reserves which form part of the World Heritage and which are endangered.