MAGIS Brugge: a 16th-century bird's-eye view on Bruges as a digital stage for public urban history

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In 1562, the painter Marcus Gerards drew a splendid bird's-eye view on Bruges. The town council requested him to present Bruges more accessible than it actually was. The result was an extremely detailed map that gives a unique view of sixteenth-century Bruges. Historians, art historians and archaeologists know the document for a long time and use it to illustrate their books and articles. It is still very popular amongst the wider public as well. A lot of reproductions adorn living rooms inside and outside Bruges.

The digital *MAGIS Brugge* project aims to go beyond this 'traditional' use of the sixteenth-century map. City maps are always made for a specific purpose: as a means to find the way, as a piece of art that could decorate a place, or, in this case, as a tool for propaganda in order to attract foreign merchants to a decaying port. Yet, hiding the map in a dark corner of an archive has never been the original purpose a cartographer had in mind. The *MAGIS Brugge* project has the ambition to unlock and valorise the enormous mass of information of this sixteenth-century masterpiece to a very diverse audience. In this respect, the project aims to create a new 'stage' for our historical knowledge on Bruges and to stimulate visitors to discover the history of the city.

During the first phase the project offered the opportunity to digitize the bird's-eye view with GIS-technology and to build a scientific knowledge platform accessible for scholars. During the second phase, the project partners aimed to open up the information to the wider audience by creating a user-friendly website. It was necessary to work out clear instructions about data input in order to create a coherent database. In addition we had to find out what the diverse target groups actually hope to discover on a website with a digitized historical map. This might appear rather simple, but in fact we faced several complications and had to make compromises. In this paper we want to discuss some of the difficulties that we have encountered and the solutions that were chosen for the *MAGIS Brugge* project. Hence we hope to share experiences and inspire scholars, museums, city councils, associations and everyone interested to see the potential of digitizing and unlocking historical maps online.

FIGURE 1: PRINTSCREEN OF THE USER-FRIENDLY WEBSITE AT WWW.KAARTENHUISBRUGGE.BE/MAGIS