

CARTOGRAPHIC BODY OF KNOWLEDGE – JOINING FORCES?

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Abstract:

20 years ago the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS) published their Body of Knowledge for Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIS&T BoK) (Plewe, 2006). Many experts within different fields were engaged in the collection of this BoK. One of the knowledge areas in the BoK is “Cartography and visualization”. This area is in the core interests of the International Cartographic Association (ICA).

The GIS&T BoK is giving a comprehensive description of many Cartographic concepts. However, since it is based on voluntary contributions it not a complete BoK for Cartography. Since ICA is the international community for Cartography, a BoK for Cartography is of high interest for the organization. There have been several initiatives in ICA to develop a BoK for Cartography. A ICA Working Group was established in 2015 and some authors approached the problem (Fairbairn, 2018 and Moellering, 2019). In 2019 the Working Group on Cartographic Body of Knowledge was re-established (Midtbø et al. 2021, Midtbø et al. 2023, Midtbø et al. 2025). This time the idea was to challenge the ICA commissions in the collection of Cartographic concepts for the Cartographic Body of Knowledge (CartoBoK).

Since the work still were based on voluntary contributions, the results have been varying. Some terms/concepts are outlined in detail, while others are less comprehensive. On the other hand, the commissions have supported the CartoBoK with many keywords related to Cartographic concepts. To expand the CartoBoK, AI has been used to give descriptions and explanations for Cartographic concepts (Web:CartoBoK, 2026).

The GIS&T BoK was several years ago included in the Eo4Geo project (Earth observation for Geographic information)(Web:BoK-eo4geo, 2026). In this project the concepts from the GIS&T BoK are linked together by the Living Textbook environment (Web:LivingTextbook_Eo4geo, 2026). It is also visualized by the “BoK Visualization and Search” tool (Web:BoK_visualization, 2026).

When collecting concept for the CartoBoK it was decided to store the concepts in a dynamic way, and not as a static document. The LivingTextbook was selected as the environment. The various Cartographic concepts are linked up, with “the map” in a central position (Web:LivingTextbook_CartoBoK, 2026).

Since the CartoBoK and the Cartography and Visualization area of the GIS&T BoK are maintained in the same environment it is a potential to join these to get a more complete BoK for the field of Cartography. Both ICA and the maintainers of the systems are positive to a joint version of the BoKs. The open questions are the legal issues as copyright etc. for the GIST&T BoK?

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