

# Mapping Society and Social Mapping

The theoretical basis of cartography is of fundamental importance. There are many conceptual issues involved in representing space, many of which are of interest to the ICA Commission on Theoretical Cartography. In particular, it is important to understand how cartographers represent their model of the world and how users interpret what maps mean. These issues reflect the social nature of the study and practice of cartography, showing that people are as important as technology in the mapping process. A further commission of the ICA, the Commission on Gender and Cartography, also has a bias towards these societal issues.

## Census Maps

An open meeting at the Laboratory of GIS, Department of Geodesy and Photo-grammetry of the University of Agriculture in Wroclaw, Poland, in February this year included, amongst others, members of both Commissions. Sessions were devoted to terminology, reliability, the role of visual perception, geographical education, and cartogram representations. By considering a range of data sources during initial compilation the reliability of maps can be enhanced. The impact of GIS and multi-attribute spatial databases means that a full picture of the environment can be built up. Cartographers preparing representations of the natural landscape can use socio-economic data to inform (and perhaps update) their maps; those preparing census maps can use satellite remote sensing data to assist in obtaining an overall picture of their subject. Examples were given of the impact of international agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO in supplying data and using it to create practical maps for their own purposes.

## Mapping the Totality

As there arises a new generation of map users raised in the digital era, there comes a renewed need to examine the perception of the map image. In particular, the role needs to be examined of distorted representations of space, such as cartograms based on some other variable: population, "time-distance"™ or other socio-economic ratio value. These maps, along with other more standard representations of socio-economic data, should be thoroughly examined at school level, where up to now the emphasis has been on maps of the environment, topography and physical landscape. The meeting further considered how one could map the totality of the social, economic and demographic characteristics of a complete country. The complicated combination of features and issues which together make up a national culture need to be carefully analysed and compiled if a true picture of the nation is to emerge. Issues such as race, gender, religion, politics and demography need to be conjoined with measurement of the physical extent and characteristics of a country to ensure an accurate map.