

Foreword

By way of background for the whole of the Re-Bel initiative, its inaugural public event started off by asking two questions: What does history teach us about the future of Belgium's institutions? What does geography teach us about the future of Belgium's institutions? Answers to the former questions were collected in Re-Bel e-book n°6, edited by Bruno De Wever. Answers to the latter are collected in the present one.

One lesson that quickly emerged was that thinking about the shaping of Belgium's institutions from a geographical standpoint forced us — not very surprisingly — to focus straight away on the "Brussels problem". When looking at the very instructive maps our colleagues made us discover, it does not take long to be struck by the strength of economic and demographic interdependencies between the Brussels Region and the other two nor to understand, under our colleagues' expert guidance, the nature of the specific issues that arise unavoidably when administrative and political borders divide a metropolitan area into three distinct pieces.

The first two components of this e-book consist of written versions of presentations made at Re-Bel's inaugural event: one by economist **Jacques-François Thisse** and geographer **Isabelle Thomas** from the Université catholique de Louvain, the other one by demographer **Patrick Deboosere** from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. After the event, economic geographer **Paul C. Cheshire** from the London School of Economics was invited to provide an outsider's perspective on the "Brussels problem".

One unexpected and particularly fruitful effect of this part of the inaugural event was that it persuaded many of us of how illuminating the cartographic representation of statistical data can be. This led our colleague **Bea Cantillon**, director of Antwerp University's Centre for Social Policy, to work, with her team, on a "cartography of Belgium's social security", which offers some unprecedented insights into the spatial structure of both social needs and the implementation of social policies. We are pleased to include a first product of this path-breaking approach.

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