

# Towards the Atlas of Living Flanders, a Challenging Path

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## Abstract

In Belgium, a federal country in the heart of Europe, the competencies for nature conservation and nature policy lie within the regions. The Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO) is an independent research institute, funded by the Flemish regional government, which underpins and evaluates biodiversity policy and management by means of applied scientific research, and sharing of data and knowledge.

One of the 12 strategic goals in the 2009-2015 INBO [strategic planning](#) was that: 'INBO manages data and makes them accessible. It looks into appropriate data gathering methods and means by which to disseminate data and make them readily available'. Since 2009, the INBO has steadily evolved into a research institute with a strong emphasis on open data and open science. In 2010 INBO became a data publisher for the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), adopted an [open data](#) and [open access policy](#) and is known for being an open science institute in Flanders, Belgium. In 2021, a question arose from the council of ministers on the possibility and availability of a public portal for biodiversity data. The goal of this portal should be to ensure findability, availability, and optimal usability of biodiversity data, initially for policy makers, but also for the wider public. With the Living Atlas project already high on our radar, an analysis project, funded by the Flemish government, started in December 2021. All the entities in the department of 'Environment' contributed to a requirements and feasibility study, a proof of concept (POC) Living Atlas for Flanders was set up and the required budget was calculated.

During the requirements and feasibility study we questioned the agency for nature and forest (ANB), the Flanders Environment Agency (VMM), Flemish land agency (VLM) and the [Department of Environment](#) with the help of a professional inquiry agency [IPSOS](#) on the possible relevance for policy of a Flemish biodiversity portal, the need of high resolution data (geographical and temporal scale) and the availability of biodiversity data in Flanders, focussed on key species, protected species and other Flemish priority species.

During the technical proof of concept, we tested the Living Atlases (LA) software suite as the most mature candidate for a Flemish Living Atlas. We checked how we could set up a

LA installation in our own Amazon Web Services (AWS) environment, evaluated all the used technologies, estimated the maintenance and infrastructure cost, the needed profiles and the number of full-time equivalent personnel we would need to run a performant Atlas of Living Flanders.

The goal of this talk is to inform the audience on the steps we took, the hurdles we encountered and how we are trying to convince our policy makers of the benefits of an Atlas of Living Flanders.

## **Keywords**

Living Atlas, portal, policy

## **Presenting author**

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## **Conflicts of interest**

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.