# The Role of Cartography in the GSDI World

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**Key words:**

## SUMMARY

We would like to start with the important historian of cartography the Egyptian Prince Youssouf Kamal (1882-1952), editor of the *Monumenta cartographica Africae et Aegypti* (Cairo, 1926-51), which, in its 10 volumes showed the high level of Muslim cartography in the Middle Ages. It is not only based on Ptolemy, but also had original contributions, with works like the World map by al-Idrisi (see figure 1) and the Atlas of Islam (an atlas consisting of a series of maps that together represented all Muslim countries) by cartographers like al-Istakhri, al-Masudi, Ibn Hawkal and al-Biruni. The maps in these atlases are, to an important degree, characterized by their topological structure. They very much catered for the linear mode of travel that was customary in those days, and so they were very much adapted to their function. The offer of geospatial information must always be governed by the specific demand - but also by the nature of the terrain, or of the distribution of the population that inhabits the country.

A country like Egypt is a very good example of a state where it would be a waste of resources to map the whole country at the scale 1:25 000, as most of the country has a very low population density. The portrayal of the densely populated Nile valley and delta, however, would call for topological maps, as otherwise the various patterns in the population could not be shown adequately. It is the old Arab geographers that show us the way here.

The offer and demand for geospatial information is the central theme of our presentation. Nowadays we are able to provide enormous volumes of geospatial information, on the basis of which we can take better-informed decisions for use of natural resources, for environmental protection or for fighting disasters and their after-effects. But the ground truth is that we are only able to use them if they fit in our concepts, if we understand them properly, if they have been tailored to our needs. It is not enough to build a nice technical infrastructure without teaching the population how to use the maps, be they in analog or digital form. We have to provide the concepts with which the population is able to deal with geospatial information, and we have to provide maps from which the population is able to derive the information they need: information that is up-to date and tailor made for solving the problems.