

52 - The Enclaves and Counter-enclaves of Baarle (B/NL)

by [Frank Jacobs](#)
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One of the unlikeliest complexes of enclaves and exclaves in the world is to be found on the Belgian-Dutch border, and is centred on Baarle. This town, while surrounded entirely by Dutch territory, consists of two separate administrative units, one of which is the Dutch commune of **Baarle-Nassau**, the other being the Belgian commune of **Baarle-Hertog**. For an exhaustive history, please visit [this page](#) of the [Buffalo Ontology Site](#).

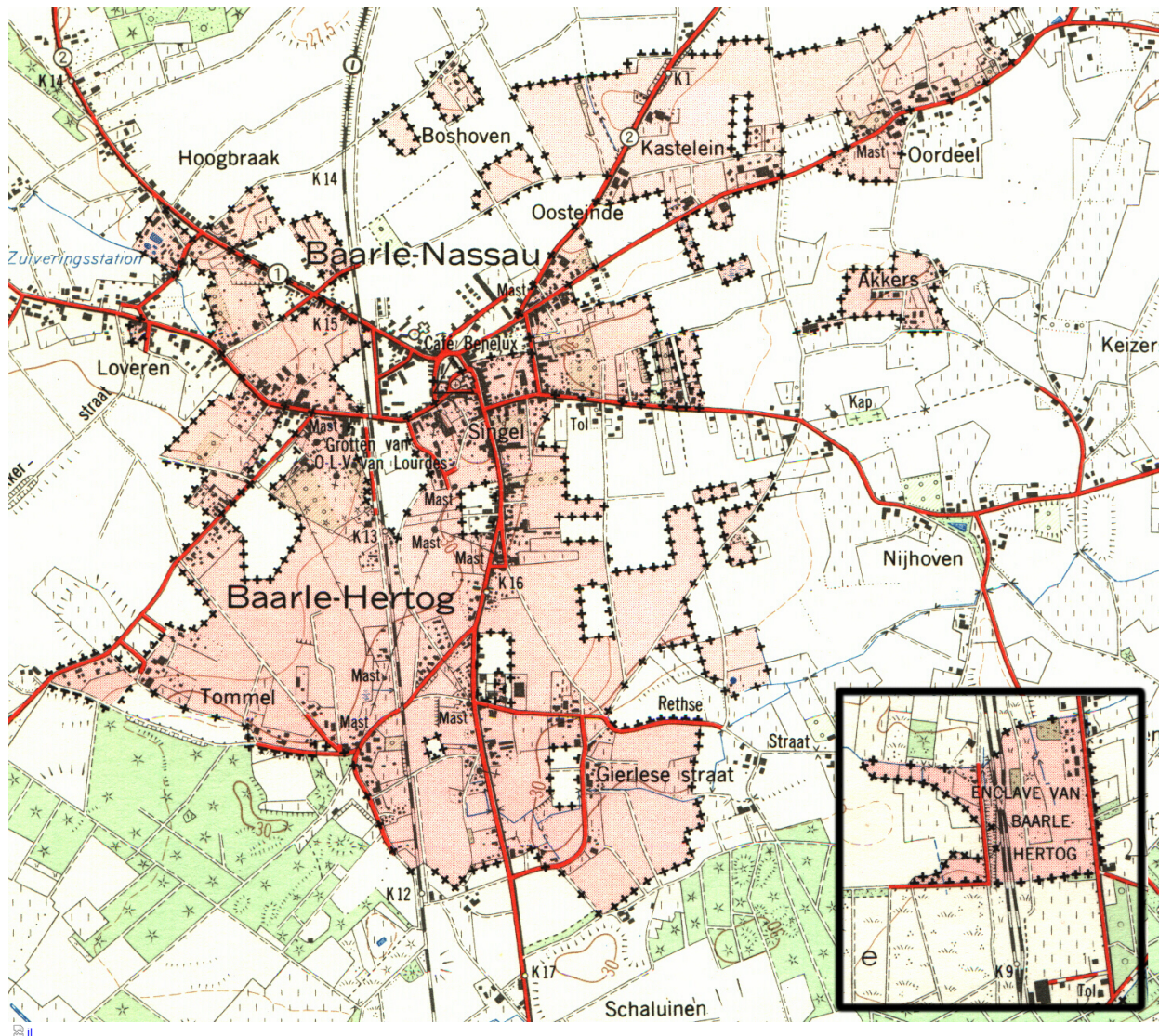
That same story, more succinctly: here...

The Belgian-Dutch border was established in the **Maastricht Treaty** of 1843, which mostly confirmed boundaries which were a few centuries old (as the separation of Belgium and the Netherlands has its origin in the religious wars of the 16th century). In the area around Baarle, it proved impossible to reach a definitive agreement. Instead, both governments opted to allocate nationality separately to each of the 5,732 parcels of land in the 50 km between border posts 214 and 215.

These parcels 'coagulated' into a veritable archipelago of 20-odd Belgian exclaves in and around Baarle. In turn, some of these Belgian exclaves completely surround pieces of Dutch territory. Deliciously complicating this picture is a small enclave of Baarle-Nassau situated entirely *within* Belgium proper – and there's even a *Belgian parcel within a Dutch parcel within a Belgian enclave, which in turn is surrounded entirely by Dutch territory*...

Numerous attempts have been made throughout the centuries to (literally) rectify the situation, but they have obviously all failed – leaving the double entity of Baarle-Nassau/Baarle-Hertog with some absurd folklore.

- As each house is deemed to pay **taxes** in the country where its front door is located, it is an old tradition in Baarle to move the front door some meters if that is profitable for the taxes, especially for shops.
- The valley of the river **Merkske** is divided between both villages/kingdoms. This made it impossible for the re-allotment and land-improvement people to do there a lot of harm, as happened elsewhere. So this is now one of the ecologically richest areas in the whole region.
- The village Baarle attracts a lot of tourists. To make the enclaves visible for the visitor, the little plates with the **house numbers** are made to look different: ovals with the Belgian colours and rectangles with Dutch colours.



This map taken from [this page](#) of previously mentioned website. Belgian territory marked red. Dutch territory is white.

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by [Frank Jacobs](#)
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Frank Jacobs loves maps, but finds most atlases too predictable. He collects and comments on all kinds of intriguing maps – real, fictional, and what-if ones – and has been writing the Strange Maps blog since 2006, first on WordPress and now for Big Think. His map ["US States Renamed For Countries With Similar GDPs"](#) has been viewed more than 587,000 times. An anthology of maps from this blog was published by [Penguin](#) in 2009 and can be purchased from [Amazon](#) and [Barnes & Noble](#).