

Interview 15

Interviewee	17-Prov-B
Interviewer	Ashraf Shaharudin
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Interviewer

Now I would like to start with my first question. Just to get some background about you and also <redacted>, could you please describe your role in <redacted>?

Interviewee

Yes. I am <redacted> in charge of the dissemination of product produced by the <redacted> and <redacted>. And this concern both products in paper format which are sold in physical shops and in a virtual store as well, and also digital data which are distributed through a geospatial information download platform. Also in my area, there is the photo library of the institution which has orthophotos from the <redacted> and from other institutions that give them to us for conservation and dissemination. And we have also a virtual platform that allows the consultation of -- personal consultation -- to the public for the consultation of the photographs.

Interviewer

OK. When you mentioned digital data, do you provide it for free or this one is also charged?

Interviewee

No. All the digital data are for free. Only if there is a special demand of a huge amount of data, which have to be stored in disk or other format or we have little tasks for the service. But if user goes to the platform on the Internet it is everything for free.

Interviewer

OK, alright. And how long have you been working in this or similar role?

Interviewee

In this role, I only have been working for nine months, but my experience in <redacted> is <redacted> years, in positions related with the geospatial information system, with INSPIRE implementation, cartographic viewers, geographical educational resources -- it was very interesting - - and that kind of works.

Interviewer

OK. And I think you mentioned a bit, but could you please elaborate more how you role is related to open data?

Interviewee

I think the main connection between my role and open data is the <redacted>, which is the name of the download platform. And as I mentioned before, that platform allows to download data from the <redacted> and other <redacted> government agencies. Having in my unit <redacted>, and thanks to my previous positions, I have been in contact with other ways to disseminate geospatial information, not only downloading, but also through viewers, APIs or standard web services, and metadata.

Interviewer

OK, alright. And this <redacted>, do you spell it as <redacted>?

Interviewee

Yes.

Interviewer

Yes. OK. I'm just gonna check it later.

Interviewer

OK, now we're gonna move to the topic of open data....

Interviewee

I can send you the link if you want.

Interviewer

Yeah. Yes, that would be great.

Interviewee

I think I have sent, yes.

Interviewer

OK. Thank you.

Interviewee

Some parts are produced <redacted>, but I think not everything <redacted>, <redacted>.

Interviewer

Yeah, it's fine. Thank you.

Interviewer

So we're gonna move to the topic of open data. How long has <redacted> been implementing open data?

Interviewee

Well, long before. Since <redacted>, we began building our spatial data infrastructure, publishing standard web services and metadata to locator information that could be freely consumed from any GIS client, geographic information systems client. And this, regarding to a web online information. But regarding downloading, since <redacted>, practically all the digital geographic information is available for free of charge in our <redacted>.

And although previously there have been different degrees of openness of our information, <redacted> was the absolute open data. And in <redacted>, we changed the platform, the usability of the download center, and we realized that it increased highly the amount of downloading files.

Interviewer

OK. And what happened in <redacted> that you started to make it open? Was it through national legislation? Was it something through national policy?

Interviewee

Yes, yes, it was a law published. Well, no, not exactly a law, because it was order of our ministry, the <redacted>, which <redacted> belongs. And the ministry decided to do the step, and I think it was a significant step because in some other regional cartography agencies -- sorry, because I have a cold and my voice is not perfect. I was saying that there are all other regional cartography agencies and some of them gave data for free and some other not. It meant a starting point for some of them because, one after another, I think all of them are having open data policies nowadays.

Interviewer

OK, so <redacted> is the umbrella of all these regional cartography agencies or it's a separate entity altogether?

Interviewee

It's a separate entity. It's a <redacted> agency. The <redacted> is an organisation close to the <redacted>, and both of them belong to the <redacted> and the competencies are at a <redacted> level.

But also there are other institutions of the <redacted> level who produce geospatial data, for example the cadaster which belongs to other ministry, the Ministry of <redacted> who produce a lot of geographical data as well. And also, we have different agencies or other kind of institutions at regional and local level, which are different, but we collaborate under the umbrella of the national system. <redacted>, it's the national cartographic system. It's the umbrella under all the national plans for cartography are decided and in this system, all the institutions are represented and we decide together the production of cartography, I think, every two years. Each one of the agencies produce data of their level of, the scale of resolution.

Interviewer

OK, so the governance structure is more of like a collaborative decision making instead of like top down where <redacted> ask people to do stuff? It's more of like we discuss together on how we do stuff?

Interviewee

Yes, it is discussed and it is co- financed because -- before, in <redacted> with I think it was when -- well the national cartographic system was established in <redacted> -- but from <redacted>, some national plans started. And before that date, before <redacted>, maybe the <redacted> local agency was doing cartography at the same scale as we were doing and we spent a lot of money in the same things, we duplicated information. And thanks to the establishment of the national cartographic system, everything is regulated in the terms of collaboration model. It is not an imposition because it is clear that each of the agencies have their own competencies, as I said before, because of the scale of the data and the resolution.

Interviewer

What do you think is the value of open data to society from the point of view of <redacted>?

Interviewee

Well, first of all, it's an obligation. I think that on one hand, the citizens are offered free access to the [country B] geographic information and not only because it is for free, but also because we try to facilitate the access to different channels, not only online, but also downloading.

And on the other hand, this accessible and free information is of great value for other administrations and for companies of the sector. It allows them to create value added data and services from the basic information which they obtain for free with the cost savings that it entails. And I think in the report I sent you yesterday of <redacted>, you can see the geospatial information companies leading number turnover, number of employees, over other fields of work.

Interviewer

But the implementation of open data also costs the government because you -- in providing this data you have to incur cost. What do you think are the benefits of open data to your organization itself? Is there -- do you see any value return back to you as a data provider?

Interviewee

We think that, on one hand, it increases the prestige of the institution and public administration in general, and that's important for politics. But it allows the geographic data to reach a border audience, and that also means that we receive more feedback from our users. That brings us a quality control of data because every day, people contact us to say, I see this error or that other. It also allows us to direct our strategy towards what citizens and other public administrations and even companies are demanding. So it's like a contact between the public and us.

I would like to tell you a curious detail. Sometimes it is more expensive to charge for the service than to give it for free because you have to implement payment and to be checking out that no one is doing with the data what you are not allowing. So giving it for free and with very less restrictions, it is less work for us in that sense.

Interviewer

Yeah, that makes sense.

Interviewer

What are the costs of providing open data to <redacted> in terms of financial, in terms of human resource?

Interviewee

Yes, we don't receive so much money for the data, that's clear. But as a public institution, financially, we have funds from the government, from the state. The higher cost of not having a return means, I think we have a decrease because of the national system I have told you before, it is co-financed between several parties, [thus] the costs are lower and in some way we are balancing in that way.

Another thing to take into account is that as users get used to have more and more information, they demand the information to have great quality, great updating. The technology goes so fast and they ask to have it more quickly and it is the cost for us to be up to date in the newest technology and progressing day by day.

Interviewer

Yeah, but in general is the cost constant over the years or it's increasing?

Interviewee

It's quite constant. Yes. Because the plans are programmed for long, a lot of years. So I think it's quite constant.

Interviewer

OK, now I'm going to move to the topic of open data ecosystem. What is your perception of the health or sustainability of the current open data ecosystem? And it's up to you how you want to conceptualize open data ecosystem. It could be spatial data ecosystem. So how do you see the sustainability, the health of the ecosystem?

Interviewee

Yes, I will focus most on geospatial ecosystem, which is what I know better. And I think it getting better every day. In [country B], we have a general open data portal at the state level and others are the lower level of administration. This is for the general data, not only for geospatial data. In the geographic information sector, the fact that the state level institution, which is ours, offers its data as open data, serve as an example for other administrations, as I told you before. Sharing information within that, enables to grow, to save money, and to create added value products. By using information from other organizations, the quality of this information increases as the

organization responsible for the data is informed of errors and improvements -- the feedback of the information.

Interviewer

Yeah. What do you think can be improved in the current open data ecosystem?

Interviewee

I think there are some points to improve. Some users or organization, don't know how to use interoperable formats such for example GML. I don't know. Maybe you don't know it because it's very specific. Or GeoPackage which are open formats. And other downloads services. This lack of knowledge forces us to publish geographic information sometimes in non-interoperable formats because we are very committed to offer in open format, but user, non-specialized user sometimes doesn't know what to do with that kind of information.

Then there are some mess with too much regulation and different formats. And some organizations, even the organization doesn't know the proper regulation to apply in every case. And that happened, for example, in the case of metadata, which there is a European regulation directive. Sometimes they are difficult to implement for some local level organization who don't have some means to implement that regulation. We think it is necessary to capture more data. As I told you before, with higher quality and precision, with a greater frequency to give answer to the questions of the users.

Once we provide the information, we have to give a step more, allowing to taking advantage of the big data based technologies and allow to create automatic processes through artificial intelligence and using clouds as technological support.

And it's also important that data and services from the private sector should be integrated with the public resources to span the number of problems that can be solved -- for telecommunication companies, energy companies, banks, etc.

Interviewer

There are a lot of good points there.

Interviewee

I was thinking yesterday a lot about them.

Interviewer

Yeah, this is very good.

Interviewer

Yeah, I have follow up questions to several of them actually. So you mentioned that you also have to provide data that is not in an interoperable format because some users do not know how to use this format. So for example you provide data in shapefile for users of ArcGIS?

Interviewee

Yes.

Interviewer

Yeah, OK. And then this complex data standards. Do you think that's because of INSPIRE overspecify the standard?

Interviewee

Yes.

Interviewer

Yeah. And also regarding the private sector data, so at the moment, is there any platform for them to share data?

Interviewee

For private companies?

Interviewer

Private sector, yeah.

Interviewee

I don't think so.

Interviewer

And do you think that they have incentive to share data? Do they want to share data do you think, in general?

Interviewee

I don't think so, because sometimes I know that -- I think the telecommunications and energy companies have very good geographical systems, geographical information systems, and they don't share this data. Maybe in interchange of information or some way they could give it to the public, but I don't think they [do it]. Maybe they would sell it to other companies. I don't know. Maybe it's there, I don't know the case, but I don't think they give their information as open data. I don't know.

Interviewer

So my follow up question with the development of SDI in Europe, through your experience, especially since INSPIRE, what would you say are key lessons learned for other non-geo open data ecosystems?

Interviewee

I think that there are a lot of lessons learned because we, in <redacted>, think that INSPIRE was a great directive that make interoperable geospatial data. It was very important for organization to bring to light a lot of geographical data that was on the desk.

But on the other hand, it has been very hard to implement, so I took note of some of lessons learned and that is one of them -- the importance of having standards and models to allow data interoperability. If no standards are defined, it's impossible to share data. But in the definition of the standard, we think it's important to agree on common minimum and without too many requirements that at the end they are difficult to meet. That I think was one of the problems of INSPIRE, a lot of little requirements and not so many organizations have the money and the time enough to implement it.

Another thing is to correctly choose the data format and related to what we were talking before and so that they are easy to implement and easy to use for users. And also to communicate to the sector in the simplest way possible the requirements to be met and highlighting the benefits for society, the adoption of all the open data, and not only for society, but also the benefits for the organization itself.

The last, the need of focusing attention on users and the use cases, the problems to be solved rather than focusing on the data provider. Sometimes we forget the use cases and the user and their needs -- and I think that's an error.

Interviewer

Great. Thank you. Now I'm going to move to the next topic, which is on open data intermediaries. Do you think that open data intermediaries are playing an important and positive role in the open data ecosystem right now?

Interviewee

Yes, I think they are. They are playing an important role since they have been adapting their tools to open data format. Although it is true that sometimes it has been difficult for them to get out of proprietary formats such as shapefile, as we talked before. But the role I think, is essential to adapt, to transform, integrate geospatial resources, both data and services, so they can be used by society in an easy and intuitive way that maybe is lacking in public organizations. Maybe public organizations are not so close to the final user as intermediaries are.

Interviewer

Yeah. And how do you think they can play a better role in the ecosystem?

Interviewee

I think they could be more open to adopt, for example, INSPIRE standards, which has been very difficult and also providing greater knowledge about the needs of society to public administrations to direct our strategies to solve the real problems of citizens; that could be a good point.

Interviewer

So, meaning, you think that they can be the bridge that provide the feedback from users to data providers?

Interviewee

I think they are, in fact.

Interviewer

OK, now I'm gonna focus to [Esri distributor in country B] as an open data intermediary. Do you think Esri plays a role in enhancing access supply of flow of open data?

Interviewer

Yes, of course. For example, they have a catalog, Living Atlas. I don't know if you know it. There are a lot of open data around the world and it allows its clients to use them and making it easier for them to access data that as I told you before, I think it is some more difficult to obtain the data from the original source than from the "bridge" that Esri means [to be].

But the problem is that catalog, for example, is not [open] standard itself, but it's very popular and used. Esri, I don't think it complies the principle of the technological neutrality and data portability of the European interoperability framework. Sometimes it feels that public organizations need to fulfill the laws and to be -- I don't know how to say -- to launch open data policies. But companies, well, they do what they can, they have the business and – not balanced between the both parties.

Interviewer

Yeah. OK. Yeah, we can talk a little bit more about it later. Do you think Esri plays a role in connecting other actors in the open data ecosystem?

Interviewee

Yes, we have been talking about that. I think it connects the private sector with the public, [and] different public organization with each other. Even in the educational sector, I told you at the beginning, I was working in geographical resources for education, and I realize that Esri has a lot of -- it is very extended in educational sector and it allows to connect official data with teachers and pupils. We are known because of them.

Interviewer

Do you think Esri in any ways helps or supports <redacted> in the implementation of open data?

Interviewee

Not so much, not in the implementation, but they make it [i.e., open data] known to the public. They are like the communicators of the open data.

Interviewer

And does <redacted> ever need to pay to obtain data or services from Esri that are developed based on <redacted>'s open data?

Interviewee

No, not currently, but it could be the case in a public private relationship. We do pay to use Esri platform but not for the data.

Interviewer

You've mentioned about, the issue of proprietary and also the non-interoperability. Do you see any other negative or less than ideal impacts of Esri in the ecosystem?

Interviewee

Mainly the things I told you before, the technology that they imposed -- the technological solutions to citizens. That's the main, I think is the main problem. Sometimes, in the case of non-specialized users, for example, in the education sector, I think that users may come to think that GIS is Esri or that Esri is the only possible GIS, and it makes it difficult for them to learn other free software tools because they learn early and they don't use other, for example, QGIS, I don't know if you know the open software.

Interviewer

Yes. So in that regard, how do you see the emergence of QGIS and also like open database like OpenStreetMap, do you think it's a good thing, do you think it would challenge the dominance of Esri? Do you think it's good for the whole ecosystem in general?

Interviewee

Yes, they are necessary. But I think it's like David and Goliath. It's difficult to compete with them. But each one of them has their own benefit. For non-specialized people, Esri is easier. But for engineers or cartographers, etcetera, they are more into QGIS or OpenStreetMap, etcetera.

Interviewer

Do you have any suggestions or wishes of how Esri business model or way of doing things could or should be?

Interviewee

To be more adaptable to the possibility that the end-users use open data, and since they integrate the data in their solutions -- they have a lot of open data, for example, as we saw in Living Atlas -- but when you try to, for example, to connect [some] standards services, [e.g.,] a web standard service, it is very difficult if it's not acknowledged technology of Esri.

And to support a interoperable formats such as Standard Services or the GML or GEOPACKAGE.

Interviewer

So mainly in terms of the formats they need to be more integrated with the rest of the ecosystem?

Interviewee

Yes, which allows to combine proprietary and open data format and the connection of data, the interoperability, which is so important for at least the geospatial sector.

Interviewer

Yeah. OK. So that's the end of my questions. But I would like to get back to one of the things that you have said with regard to open data ecosystem. You mentioned also that perhaps INSPIRE from the start, it should have highlighted the benefits the only to society, but also to organizations.

Interviewer

Who do you think has the role of this? Disseminating, highlighting the benefits, do you think that you should have done more. Or do you think, the Member States, should have done more?

Interviewee

Well, I'm not sure. I don't know if the EU, but the state organization should have done more to facilitate. Maybe we have been in a very computing level, an abstract level, and maybe we haven't known how to get to the users level and to put in the data accessible for them.

Interviewer

OK. Thank you. So that's it from me. But before we end the recording, do you have anything that you would like to share with me with regard to open data, open data ecosystem or intermediates or asking anything that you haven't mentioned that you would like to?

Interviewee

Nothing. I would like to see the results of your study. It would be great if you could share with me your investigation because I think it's very interesting.