

Interview 8

Interviewee	08-Esri-E
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Date	1 May 2023

Interviewer

So let me start, but with the first question, I just would like to clarify or could you please describe what [Esri distributor in country E] does <redacted>?

Interviewee

First of all, I can describe my role, I'm <redacted> in the [Esri distributor in country E]. But we are an Esri distributor, so we are not owned by Esri; we are privately held company owned by <redacted>. <redacted>, privately held, but we have a distributor contract with Esri, of course. So we are in fact the local Esri distributors.

And regarding my role as <redacted>, I've been working in this role for the last <redacted> years. And we are of course very much focused in <redacted> on what makes sense with the ArcGIS platform -- I don't know how much you know about the ArcGIS platform that Esri's offering -- but I mean it doesn't make sense to use that platform if you don't have data; it's both private data, and of course a public data. In [country E] we have lots of free public data. And that's why we focus on integrating it into the platform and all the capabilities that you have with the ArcGIS platform.

We are <redacted> persons in [Esri distributor in country E]. And I would say a handful of them work with data, open data, one way or another. It can also be a data integration projects, data interface projects, all kind of. It's a crucial part of any project is to handle data.

But we also offer a service called the <redacted> and that's FTP service that we offer to the market in general. But it requires that you have an ArcGIS platform to get the full benefits. But we have several customers on that. Most of it is actually focused on free open data, public data. But we also have some public data that you have to pay for or work specifically with the data, then we help the customers, but we offer it through this <redacted> that we offer and the customers pay for.

Interviewer

What is <redacted>?

Interviewee

It's a <redacted>. So you can also read it in on our homepage, you can see about the <redacted>.

On a commercial basis, I'm in charge of selling these things <redacted>. But of course <redacted> that sell this kind of services to the customers. On continuous basis, we develop and expand the data services depending on what the customers want and specific cases for their day-to-day businesses.

Interviewer

So that includes a consulting services tailored for the customers?

Interviewee

Yes, yes, also that. The thing is that we have gathered it and consolidated in our service. In theory many customers could pick up the data themselves from the different public data sources and they bypass us, but it's a little bit challenging sometimes to handle these different kind of data. So that's

why they're buying the service from us because we handle the data management and push of data to the customers.

Interviewer

OK, so apart from the <redacted>, do you also provide data in ArcGIS Living Atlas as well?

Interviewee

Not that much. I mean customers can pick up data themselves from Living Atlas. Every Esri customers has access to Living Atlas. So some customers yesterday use Living Atlas data and we also have provided some data, [country E] data to Living Atlas, but it's not the primary source of data for our customers.

Interviewer

OK. Why is it then you have a separate platform called <redacted> instead of using Living Atlas?

Interviewee

It's because it's easier to handle instead of going through the Living Atlas. So it's some administrative technical issues. So in theory we don't mind putting it in Living Atlas. It's just easier this way.

Interviewer

OK. And you also mentioned that there are about <redacted> persons in [Esri distributor in country E]. Is there any specific department that looks into data?

Interviewee

It's our consulting department. We have a consulting department of almost <redacted> consultants, and several of them are working intensively with the data, data services, data sources, data management and data science.

Interviewer

Are there personnel that look into open data specifically?

Interviewee

Yes, also that. And we also participate in in the different kind of forums in [country E] regarding open data. So many of the public data suppliers have different kind of forums, seminars and events and we participate there and promote the Esri ArcGIS data story and support.

Interviewer

OK. And how do open data services provided by [Esri distributor in country E] benefit or attract customers?

Interviewee

Well, I mean for instance, we have almost 50% of [country E] municipalities use ArcGIS. And then when you're municipality, you have many administrative processes and responsibilities, and there you need easy, seamless access to open data -- and it probably open data -- so that's what we help them do it. So it's on a day-to-day business, so they easily can pull in public data into the ArcGIS platform and then so they cannot perform their day-to-day duties and tasks in public administration. But it could also be a different kind of public organizations within the environment, public infrastructure, public transportation, tax whatever. We have 30 different kind of public administration customers as well. The defense are customer. We have a 300 different kind of customers in [country E] and many of them are large public administration companies.

Interviewer

OK. And how does offering open data services benefit [Esri distributor in country E] itself?

Interviewee

I mean we sell the services, so we get some money there. And we help them with projects, so we get some consulting hours. But most of all we enable customers to have easy seamless access to open data and that's the main target. So it's not a big business area for us commercially wise but we focus on enabling our customers to have easy access to open data and other kind of data as well.

Interviewer

OK. And how long have you been offering this sort of open data services? Can you recall?

Interviewee

We have been offering it in different formats for the last five years. So we have some other services as well, some free services, where you can download -- where we put -- where we aggregate and consolidate data and then you can just pick up the data yourselves. So you also had a [Esri distributor in country E] Open Data. So we have many sources but the <redacted>, the first mentioned one, is the biggest one and that's the one that we are expanding now.

Interviewer

OK. And this one has been offered for the past five years, you said? The <redacted>?

Interviewee

Yeah, at least for the last three years in this format and design.

Interviewer

OK. Did you see any pickup in the subscription rate of ArcGIS software in [country E] since you offered this open data services?

Interviewee

No, I don't think it has directly enabled more software sales, but it has probably resulted in a more named users on existing contracts since they expand the usage of our software and the data within the organizations. There are some contracts called enterprise agreements where customers have access to lots of Esri software and there, as a customer, you can activate several named users when the need for a usage is there. And then the contracts already renegotiated every three to five years. So at the renegotiation point, we might have some more commercial benefit of it if they have activated several more users. But in the short run, we don't sell more licenses as such. Maybe a few but nothing special.

Interviewer

OK, what are the main technical and nontechnical activities that [Esri distributor in country E] has to carry out to offer open data services?

Interviewee

This is something that we work with daily, analyzing the data sources, what kind of formats, then we load them into our services and make it possible to push the data out to the customer. So it's not that complicated. And once we have said this service up, I mean adding a new standard data service would probably take us couple of hours and it's ready to be pushed to customers. It's not that complicated because we have made this set up.

Interviewer

OK. And therefore, are there any challenges at all in offering these services?

Interviewee

No, no. Sometimes with some formats, WFS, WMS, sometimes there can be some data format challenges, but so far we are handle it.

Interviewer

OK. In terms of data quality from the municipalities or from the other government agencies, do you think they are good enough?

Interviewee

No, not a big issue. Usually the data quality is pretty OK.

Interviewer

OK. And what are the cost of offering these services financially or non-financially?

Interviewee

I don't have the figures and even if I had, I couldn't tell you. I actually don't have the numbers.

Interviewer

Yeah. I mean, not the figures, but what sort of thing that you have to bear the cost for in order to offer these services?

Interviewee

Well, we don't pay for the data. Most of it is free open data. So we don't have to pay for it. So we just pick up the data and then massage it, and make it ready for transmission to end customers.

Interviewer

Yeah. So in terms of human resources as well, you don't have to allocate certain personnel just to look for, just to do open data processing?

Interviewee

No, it's on an ad hoc basis. Maybe if you look at the organization, it would be half a head count.

Interviewer

In terms of hosting the data in the server, it's a trivial cost?

Interviewee

Yeah, it's a trivial cost. We actually don't host the data. We make it possible for a point to point. So we pick up the data and handle the data and pass it on to the customers on a fixed schedule. So it's always up to date data because if we start storing the data ourselves, it's a huge cost. So just pick up the data on an interval and send it to the customers.

Interviewer

OK, so the <redacted> for example, so you don't host that?

Interviewee

Well, we have that service, but I was talking about the data itself. It's a huge data amounts, so it doesn't make sense usually to store the data. If you can pick up the data and make the service available to the end customers. Or at least it's just momentarily when we push the data.

Interviewer

OK, now I would like to talk about [Esri distributor in country E] in the open data ecosystem. Do you think [Esri distributor in country E] plays a role in enhancing access, supply, or flow of open data?

Interviewee

Uh, yes, I mean, as I mentioned, we participate in different kind of forums and we have the biggest data suppliers as customers. So there is one customer called <redacted> and another one called <redacted>. So those data suppliers are our customers. So we have well, not on a day-to-day basis, but we have very close cooperation and dialogue with these customers about data, data issues, open data formats and so forth.

Interviewer

OK. And do you think [Esri distributor in country E] also plays a role in connecting other actors in the open data ecosystem? For example, data suppliers and data users?

Interviewee

Yes, yes. And we do that. We try to connect them and also connect them with Esri experts. And we also have our big user conference once a year, actually next week we have our user conference and there we also gather all the different kind of relevant customers for discussions, dialogue and then inspiration.

Interviewer

OK. Do you have any suggestions or wishes of how [Esri distributor in country E] way of doing things could or should be? Is there anything that should be changed or could be changed in terms of technical or non-technical aspects?

Interviewee

No, we are pretty much satisfied with how it is now. So yeah.

Interviewer

Do you have any suggestions or wishes of how other actors in the ecosystem can or should do to improve the open data ecosystem?

Interviewee

Yes, there is. I mean, Esri the largest player in GIS in [country E]. So it's important that they support all the main central formats like WFS and WMS services and that they follow the rules for formats and the data quality because sometimes they don't follow completely the rules for data formats. And so that can be a challenge for many Esri customers, ArcGIS users. But they are aware of it. And it's because there are many QGIS users and they are not that focused on always following the data formats and standards fully. But Esri follows the standards fully. And then some of the open data source suppliers, they don't always follow the standards 100% and that can make challenges for ArcGIS users. If they follow the standards, as they should, because they are public company and a public data supplier, then there wouldn't be challenges for Esri users. But we see some challenges and issues for Esri ArcGIS users since the public data suppliers don't follow common standards 100%. So that can be an issue or is an issue.

Interviewer

Alright, and apart from standards, anything that you want to see a change in the ecosystem?

Interviewee

Some public data should be free. We are one of the countries in the world that have most open free data from the public, but there are still areas that could be free, set free. For instance, <redacted>, they take money for all the public data. And that could be obvious place to actually set data free so everyone could access statistical data of the [country E] public and community.

Interviewer

What about from users? Any wishes or expectations from user you think?

Interviewee

They should support the open standards and then interfacing and integration of open data across all platform sectors. And it benefits the whole society, the whole economy, that the open data can flow freely. And at least all the public open data should be free and freely available in a seamless, easy manner within commonly accepted standards.

Interviewer

So my last question, what do you think about the emergence of open source software like QGIS and open database like OpenStreetMap? Do you think that it would change the way [Esri distributor in country E] does things?

Interviewee

No. Well, I think it's fine with the competition. And I mean, open source is here to stay and here to develop. In open source QGIS, they copy Esri all the time. So that's a good thing. I mean, what we do they copy it then it must be very good. So it's back to the standards. QGIS has some benefits, but they also have some disadvantages. It's the whole management of the QGIS platform and software. They have serious challenges and problems in interfacing with the large commercial software packages like SAP and everything else because they have to guarantee they follow the latest versions for instance SAP, Microsoft, Oracle, IBM and they have big problems with that. So they are a competitor and are used in many ways as competition to ArcGIS Esri. But we also support open data - not open data but also open source. We have open source ourselves in Esri and other ArcGIS platform. So it's a hybrid. They will be here and we will be here. And we have many customers that use both ArcGIS and QGIS. So that's come to stay. And making it more easy for those two platforms and other platforms to communicate with the right standards. That's some of the challenges with QGIS is. They don't follow standards, many end users have problems in relying 100% on the data. Because if you don't follow a standard 100%, you can't be 100% sure that you have all data.

Interviewer

What about the OpenStreetMap? Do you think they are doing similar things that you do in terms of processing open data?

Interviewee

Yeah, it's fine with OpenStreetMap. We also use Open Street map in ArcGIS.

Interviewer

That's all for now. I think that those are my questions, but do you have anything that you would like to share or that you think that is important for my research? Or we've covered pretty much everything?

Interviewee

I would say that the thing that I mentioned before that the goal for every western country with the regards to the data ecosystem is that they enable private and public companies to share and use open data, open free public data as seamlessly and easily as possible. And at the same time that they use commonly accepted data standards and formats because then every party can rely on that; it's a reliable data, a high quality data and you can just use it and consume it for the purpose you'll find relevant. So that's important not only for ArcGIS and Esri, but I mean all suppliers in the market. We are the world leader, so for us it's very important at least, but for other competitors, it must be the same I imagine. This kind of platform as IT system, it doesn't work if you don't have a reliable data.

Interviewer

Thank you so much. I'm gonna stop the recording now.