

Interview 19

Interviewee	21-User-E
Interviewer	Ashraf Shaharudin (TU Delft)
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Interviewer

OK, so my first question to you, could you please describe your role at <redacted>?

Interviewee

Yes, I work as <redacted>, where I do local planning and municipal planning and I do environmental assessments, impact assessments and I use GIS a lot in my work to do analysis of where say, a good location for a specific plan or something like that. I work a lot with the larger technical plans, so we have to look into all these buildings and things that are in a certain area, if it's fit for the kind of plan that we are planning for.

Interviewer

Before I continue with the next question, could you briefly describe what is <redacted> and what does it do?

Interviewee

Yeah, <redacted> is <redacted> company where we work as consultants for, it can be municipalities, it can be private companies that want to build something, in the energy, it can be the government as well. So we work for everyone.

Interviewer

And how is your role related to open data?

Interviewee

Well, I use open data a lot in my work, when I use GIS, for instance to do GIS analysis to see where how the area is fit for the purpose. And I use it to make maps. Actually mostly to make maps because when we do environmental impact assessments and planning, we have always have to do a lot of maps, so you can have a good overview of the area. So we used open data to put in the maps.

Interviewer

What do you think is the value of open data to society in general?

Interviewee

I think it has a great value for the society. I'm not sure how much it's used for by private people. Actually I think it is more than people know it is. But in my job we couldn't do it without the open data. Of course, if it would be there that you could buy it, we could still do it, but it's a great help that it's for free and you could just use it as you want to and you don't have to ask for it. For instance, we have these -- it's called <redacted>, it's pipes and so on, you cannot just get them for free, it's not open data, you have to ask for them and pay for them. And it's always a bit more difficult when we need these because obviously because it's more expensive, but also because it takes more time and we get bad [quality], it's not always shapefile or mapinfo files or something, it can be a PDF where it's drawn in by hand and scanned in or something. So it's a great help that it's there and we could

use it. And sometimes we also use open data just to look at it. It'd just for five minutes and then take it out of the workspace again. So yeah, it has a great value in my work.

Interviewer

And do you have any grievances or unmet needs with regards to using open data?

Interviewee

Umm, I wouldn't call it a grievance, but sometimes they can be wrong information in these open data. I have to notice that when I use plugin in QGIS, as I mentioned, I work with QGIS now. For instance, we used data from something called <redacted> that has a lot of these information from the municipalities and so on, and sometimes what is shown in QGIS, we had a plugin or the VFS, is not the same as is shown if you go to the web page, the map web page solution. And that is something we have found out ourselves by accident. And so that is the only thing that can be a bit -- we're not always sure how good the data and how correct the data actually is. It can be one day it's correct and the next day it might not be correct.

Interviewer

And do you have any challenges with regard to the timeliness or standard of the data or accuracy of the data?

Interviewee

No, I think it's accurate enough or that it is as accurate as it made by the supplier because -- how can you say -- for instance, some of the shapes, the polygons, they doesn't follow cadastral boundaries, for instance. But that's not an error because it's open data, it's an error because it's a plugin or something. That's just because that's how it's made. So yeah, I think the accuracy is good.

Interviewer

And the data is up to date?

Interviewee

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer

What is your perception --

Interviewee

Mostly. Sorry, mostly it's up to date, yeah.

Interviewer

Mostly, yeah. And the standards are also fine with you?

Interviewee

Yeah.

Interviewer

And what is your perception of the health or sustainability of the current open data ecosystem? In other words, how do you perceive the future of open data in terms of its potential, in terms of its access, use, financial sustainability? Do you think that open data ecosystem will continue to not only survive, but also to flourish over the coming years in the future?

Interviewee

I hope so that it will, but I also afraid that someday will not be for free anymore or something like that would be more difficult to access these data. But so far it hasn't. So, I'm just crossing my fingers that it'll stay this way. But I do think that it has a sustainable future, so that's my thought.

Interviewer

OK. But do you think there's anything that can be improved in the current open data ecosystem?

Interviewee

Maybe if they would be better at updating some of the themes that is not always correct. If there could be some sort of, I don't know, check. They could check it somehow that it's correct. For instance, I worked on this project that we had to consolidate all the local plan boundaries and so I was looking into all boundaries in [country E] and we found out there's a lot of errors where for instance one local plan has been cancelled but it has not been deleted in the system or in the theme. So it's still shown as this is valid, but it's not. So there's no one checking it. It's only the municipality who has to make sure that their own boundaries are up to date, and if they don't do that, it's not done and no one is checking up on it. So you always have to be alert and check one more extra time if it's correct. If there could be some, I don't know, could be [some] security [measures] that it could be more correct, some rules that they have to check once a year or once a month or something like that.

Interviewer

And when you say local plan, is it a development plan?

Interviewee

Yeah, yeah. It's sort of like smaller area that's the regulation of what can be built here, for instance, so it's a little local law.

Interviewer

OK, alright. Now we're gonna talk about open data intermediaries. And as I mentioned, we define open data intermediaries as a third party actors that enhance the supply access and/or flow of open data and also relationships among open data stakeholders. So imagine them as, for example app developers that use open data and then this information then can be used by general public. Or for example Esri, which provides ArcGIS software and then they put open data in their software and those data can be used by their users. Or can also be civil society organizations that take open data, they transform it into more digestible information for the general public who may not have the skills to process the data themselves. So they are the third party actors more or less in between data providers and the end users.

So do you think that open data intermediaries in general, especially in [country E], are playing an important and positive role in the open data ecosystem right now?

Interviewee

Yeah, definitely because it's really easy to access the information via these ... what did you call them?

Interviewer

Intermediaries.

Interviewee

Thank you, yeah.

OK, it's really easy to access system through this for instance, as I mentioned <redacted>, I think they would be an intermediary of data from the municipalities and if you wouldn't have these, I would have to go to 98 different municipalities, web GIS solutions, to access this data. So it's a great help that I can just go in there and see everything gathered in together in.

Interviewer

What's the name of the it again? <redacted>? <redacted>?

Interviewee

Yes, exactly. It might actually the website might be plain info and the map is called plan data. But if you use Google, <redacted>, you'll get it, yeah.

Interviewer

OK, yeah. But do you think they can play a better role? Are they playing enough role? Do you think they can play better role in the open data ecosystem?

Interviewee

From my perspective, no. But if you see it from just normal citizens are -- what would you call the people not working with it? Then maybe yes, because I don't think people are aware that is there, that it's actually free and available and they can access it.

Interviewer

In terms of communication, you mean?

Interviewee

Yeah.

Interviewee

Yeah, but maybe people just don't need it that much.

Interviewer

OK. Now we're gonna talk about [Esri distributor in country E], as an open data intermediary. Do you think that Ge info or ArcGIS, the software, plays a role in enhancing access supply or flow of open data?

Interviewee

No, to be honest, no. I know that a lot of students are taught to use GIS at the university, at Aalborg University. I wasn't myself because I started reading architecture and urban design, and then I took a master in land management. So I didn't get the GIS education that they had on their the bachelor and but I know they are taught using that. So in that way, maybe it helps those students to be aware of everything. But in other terms, no. Also, because the actual GIS is the expensive to use, it's not a free program. While QGIS for instance, is free for everyone to use, so I see that there's a better solution.

Interviewer

And do you think they play a role in connecting other actors in the open data ecosystem?

Interviewee

No, they might do. But in my experience, from my experience, what I have been using it for, I didn't know.

Interviewer

And how does it, in your previous work, perhaps support you in using open data or did it not support you in using open data?

Interviewee

No, it didn't really, because I think the data we used was not open data. Some of it maybe, but I did the nautical charting for the government, so it was our own data, collected data and so on. So it was not open data that we used in the program. But of course, maybe we use some open data for the mapping. In the work I did, I didn't, but I think they did somehow somewhere in the organization.

Interviewee

So what was the question again?

Interviewer

Do you think Esri supports you in using open data. And the answer is no?

Interviewee

No, not in my work.

Interviewer

You mentioned that the software is expensive. But apart from that, do you have any grievances with Esri or [Esri distributor in country E], using their services and using their open data related services besides the cost?

Interviewee

I think compared to QGIS, it's a lot more complicated to use. But otherwise, no. It's a good program and stable program and so on.

Interviewer

So you don't need them to, for example, curate open data for you. So even with QGIS, you can look for open data yourself and maybe use the plugin and use it with QGIS instead of -- so you don't think that ArcGIS do anything more added value with regard to open data?

Interviewee

Well, they had one -- I think they had a function where you could access some open data directly instead of in QGIS you have to have a plugin or you need to have a VFS that you do have to know yourself to put in, so we have to find it somewhere else. Whereas as I remember in ArcGIS you could go to this, you could go inside the program somehow, you could access some open data directly, but it was not open data that was useful for me because it was not [country E] open data and then it would be some American open data that was not useful in my work. So depends on the need, I think.

Interviewer

And so how is your experience in using QGIS differ from ArcGIS?

Interviewee

I think your QGIS is much more easier to use and it's free. You don't need too much knowledge about

the program to actually be able to use it. So everyone can use it. But of course there can also be some errors because it is a free and open program, so it's not as well developed as ArcGIS is. So it can have some minor errors, but for my use and purpose it's much better.

Interviewer

And you do QGIS mostly for doing analysis? So you don't have to use it for publication and so on?

Interviewee

Analysis and then maps that we do publish.

Interviewer

Could you perhaps describe a little bit what is the process of using open data with QGIS?

Interviewee

Well, we can either have one plug in, as I mentioned, it's called <redacted>, it is a one of these intermediaries where you can get all the open data and then you can just access them directly via the plug in and you could just add whatever you need, cadastral boundaries or municipal boundaries or whatever we need, aerial maps. That's quite easy. Otherwise you need to have a link or a -- what is that called -- URL or VMS server and then you can just edit, and then add it up there, and then you will have it incorporated in my QGIS, my personal QGIS and then next time I need to access it, it's really easy. I just click the link, whatever theme I want to add and then it's visible.

Interviewer

And then this plugin is universal for any data provider or it has to be for specific data provider?

Interviewee

I think it will be from specific data providers, yeah.

Interviewer

OK, so meaning that this plugin requires you to know where you want to get the data from, but and once you know that, it's quite easy to use this plugin to access those data.

Interviewee

Yeah, exactly. So you need to know beforehand where you get different data, but in [country E] there are only a few providers of these things, or mostly the most common is -- I think there might be three or four or something that you use, and so that's quite easy because they have gathered it all together. But if you don't know that, or if you're not aware of that, then of course it would be difficult because you would have to, I don't know, Google where to find this and this and this beforehand, but you learn it. And then you just know. But if you're new and no one have taught you, then of course maybe can be difficult because you would not just access it directly without knowing.

Interviewer

I wanna know apart from ArcGIS, the software, so [Esri distributor in country E] itself, as a geospatial company, do you think that in [country E] they actually have an active role in spurring the data ecosystem or do you think they're just really an ArcGIS distributor and they're not really doing much in the geodata scene?

Interviewee

I'm actually not aware of that because I don't use them or have anything to do with them. I wasn't

even aware that they were actually they [distributor] of ArcGIS before. I just looked into it recently, so yeah, I don't think they have a huge role in all this.

Interviewer

So that could be an indicator that they're not really playing an active role, right?

Interviewee

Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer

OK, so I have a last question but since you're not very familiar with [Esri distributor in country E] so it's fine if you if you don't have answer to this, but do you think like in an ideal world, how would [Esri distributor in country E] or Esri in general or ArcGIS software in general can be a bit better open data intermediary? In ideal world without any limitation.

Interviewee

Maybe they should better be better at communicating it somehow. I don't know if they have a web page with links to all portals where you can find open data, but in case they don't have that, and I don't think they have because I would probably have known then they maybe could have some sort of overview of this is where you find the all kind of open data and maybe information about is it for free, or how does it work, on sort of guidelines how to use it. Maybe that could be a help. Or some courses. I don't know if they have courses, to be honest.

Interviewer

And as it is now, even whatever in the ArcGIS software, is not particularly useful for you who was looking for open data in [country E], right? That's what you said as well?

Interviewee

Sorry?

Interviewer

So I mean data that they put in the ArcGIS software is not particularly useful to you because as you said, they are not mostly about [country E]. They're probably in about other countries, so it's not really useful to you?

Interviewee

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Interviewer

I think that's all. Those are my questions. Do you have anything that you would like to share with me that it perhaps you haven't said it?

Interviewee

No, I think that's all. I just hope you can use my answers for something.

Interviewer

For sure. I'm gonna stop the recording now.