

Focus of my PhD research

My initiation into the Dutch GI world was on September 14, 2005. Before I was officially appointed, I went together with my PhD supervisor, to a *Geoloketten* (geo portal network) project meeting in Utrecht at TNO. The research project was called *success- and fail factors of geo portals*. The proposed approach was that I should participate in the project: monitoring the process and, if appropriate, do a limited amount of consulting work. The project was supposed to run from 2005 until 2008, so at that time the project had already started.

The technology-orientedness of the proposal struck me with surprise. I felt the project proposal was ambiguous in that sense. On the one hand it had a clear objective: the realization of an open, approachable, coherent network of *geoloketten* as part of the National Geographical Information Infrastructure (NGII). On the other hand the proposal addressed a clear existing problem: the data was there, findable and accessible, but 'the Geo information work field does not succeed to connect demand and supply from a user perspective'.

The Geoloketten-proposal was approved and funded by the Space for Geo information (SGI) program and was meant to bring 13 organizations together into one project, so they had to agree on the text, contents and the conversion of a mission into tasks. It seemed that there was a common understanding of how to translate a rather vague topic into deliverables.

This research addresses the question of how unifying concepts like NGII and Geoloketten emerge. This single example suggests that there is agreement on the concepts, but the question is how these concepts come into being. Are there differences among groups in interpreting these concepts? Stories or narratives mostly guide interpretations of concepts. Many narratives of different kinds in the geo information sector represent a common culture that holds individuals and organizations together. Furthermore, narratives emerge, sustain, are translated, fade away, and are aborted. By consequence, an investigation of narratives must have a time perspective.

The Geoloketten project is part of an initiative of the whole geo information sector to enhance the sharing of geo information. The NGII concept came into being to guide thoughts of sharing geo information. The focus will be on how that concept came into being and how it emerged out of former concepts about the sharing of geo information. As mentioned in the introduction, while realizing *Geoloketten*, the key questions of how to answer societal questions are answered in terms of building a system. That notion did not come out of the blue; it was shaped by interpretations of earlier experiences. Before NGII and Geoloketten, there were other conceptualizations of sharing geo information. The aim of this research is how conceptualizations on sharing data came into being, developed, changed over time and vanished. The research focus is:

The conceptualization of geo information sharing in the Dutch geoinformation sector over time.

The focus leads to the following research questions:

- **How can the construction of concepts of geoinformation sharing be investigated using narratives analysis?**
- **How did concepts of geoinformation sharing develop over time?**
- **How must changes in conceptualization of geoinformation be interpreted?**
- **What recommendations can be made based on this study to develop geoinformation sharing in the future?**

Methodology

People tell stories to make sense of the world. In order to make sense of these often incomplete, ambiguous and ill-connected stories, people try to put them in a narrative to bring them into a meaningful whole, having a clear start and ending and a discernable plot. Ethnographically oriented research methods are applied to elicit these narratives in order to answer research questions.