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At different levels of society spatial data infrastructures (SDI) are developed to facilitate and coordinate the exchange and sharing of spatial data (Cromptoets, et al, 2004). Describing the development of these infrastructures forms a substantial part of current research on spatial data infrastructures. Additional to traditional approaches for defining and operationalising SDIs, we propose a network approach on SDI. In this approach, an SDI is operationalised in terms of the organisations that are producing, using and sharing spatial data, and in terms of the flows of spatial data between these organisations. Together they form a network of spatial data sharing: the producers and users of spatial data are the so-called actors in this network, the flows of spatial data between these actors give shape to their relations.

The aim of our research is to demonstrate the value of this network approach for research in the field of SDI development. To analyze SDI from this network perspective specific models and methods are necessary. We examine how these models and methods can be provided by (social) network analysis. Therefore, this methodology is applied in the context of the Flemish SDI. The data for this analysis were collected from a online survey of 234 public organisations in Flanders. Information was gathered not only on the flows of geographic data between these public administrations, but also on the characteristics of these data flows and several characteristics of the public organisations.

I hope the workshop will provide some useful comments and suggestions on both the network theory and methodology.