

Hierarchies, Markets and Networks: A Public Administration View on SDI

Glenn Vancauwenberghe¹

¹K.U.Leuven, Public Management Institute

Abstract

The lack of coordination between different spatial data producers and users is often considered as an important barrier to the development of an SDI. In this presentation, we argue that the public management literature on intergovernmental coordination offers a valuable perspective to describe and analyse this coordination problem.

For the public sector, coordination has always been a major problem. Main cause of this problem is the fragmentation of this public sector into several organisations. These organisations all have their own tasks and competences, which makes it difficult for them to align their policies. As a consequence, government programs could sometimes overlap or duplicate each other. In others instances the absence of coordination could lead to major gaps in policy.

In literature, three dominant approaches to coordination are discerned: hierarchy, market and network. These three approaches do not only help us to understand the causes of coordination problems, they also offer insight into the mechanisms through which coordination can be achieved. Hierarchy as coordination mechanism refers to authority as the central pattern of interaction. Coordination within markets is based on exchange and competition between several actors, while the network form of coordination relies on cooperation and solidarity.

In reality these different coordination mechanisms will coexist next to each other. Although each model offers its own conceptions and explanations of coordination, a complete picture on coordination can only be achieved through the combination of the different models. Together the three perspectives on coordination provide us an interesting framework to analyse coordination policies in the public sector. It is our ambition to apply this framework on the development of spatial data infrastructures.

In public administration literature the hierarchy-market-network typology is mainly used in the context of inter-organizational coordination. However, this typology has proven to be valuable in many other domains. For example, in an intra-organizational context the concepts of hierarchy, market and network can be used to analyse make-or-buy decisions. In order to conclude this presentation we will try to verify whether other applications of the hierarchy-market-network typology are also relevant in the context of spatial data.