

Verbal expressions of geographical information

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Last year, my PhD project *The area told as a story. An inquiry into the relationship between verbal and map-based expressions of geographical information* was initiated. The primary objective of the project is to explore how people reflect and communicate about geography. Why do some groups of people, e.g. in the modern Western world, use maps extensively, whereas other group, e.g. medieval Notarius Publicus, did not use them?

The method to be used will be to examine the relationship between verbal and map based geographical communication. My hypothesis is that types of geographical information exist that can be stored in and read from texts, but which are impossible to express on geographical maps without significant loss of meaning. By modelling the geographical information I read from my source text into conceptual structures, and by trying to express these conceptual structures on maps, the hypothesis will be tested. A computer program is made specially to assist the modelling experiment.

Any text containing descriptions of an existing or fictional geography could in principle be examined in search for geographical information that is impossible to express on maps. But such information is more likely to be found in some texts than in others.

In the 1740s, Major Peter Schnitler was appointed by the Danish government to explore the border area between the middle and northern parts of Norway and Sweden. Large parts of the text in the manuscript that he handed over to the Danish government consist of transcripts of local court interviews carried out by Schnitler in order to gather information about the local population as well as their view of the border areas. The material includes information directly relevant to the border question, as well as general information about the areas in question.

There are two main arguments for the use of this text in my investigation. First, it is based on interviews about geography with many different persons, of whom many presumably did not use maps much. Thus, they would be assumed to have in their ways of expressing themselves many of the features we are looking for. And secondly, they came from different ethnical and professional backgrounds, e.g. Sami reindeer herders, Norwegian farmers, and military officers, while still discussing the same topics. In addition, the text is available as a computer readable TEI document, making the use of it simple on the technical level.

In the paper, some of the theory behind my work will be outlined, the context for Schnitler's text will be presented, and the method for the actual study of the expressiveness of the text will be shown. Lastly, some preliminary results will be presented.