The area told as a story

An inquiry into the relationship between verbal and map-based expressions of geographical information

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Why did they not use maps?

"But never, in tens of thousands of pages of documentation, in countless acts providing addresses and boundaries, in immense rent registers that collectively list the locations of thousands of pieces of property, will you ever find an image even remotely like a map." (Smail, 1999, p. 1)

Problem

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Hypothesis and method

- Hypothesis: 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.

Method

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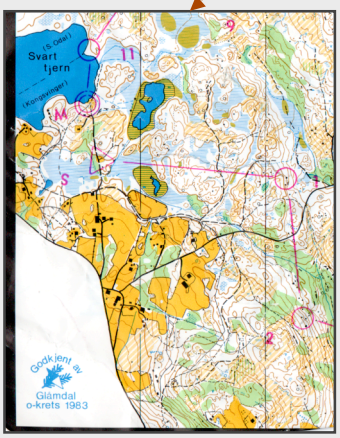
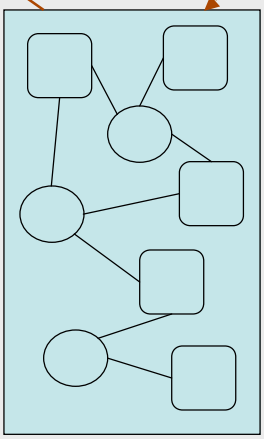
Modelling and experiment





You can run through the forests; they will be wild and blooming, you will turn right, or left, or straight up and fly. You will never go through before you want to.

Method

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Modelling

- The model include all the geographical information I am able to read from the text
- Event based modelling
- The model will contain contradictory facts
- Level of calculation on top

Method

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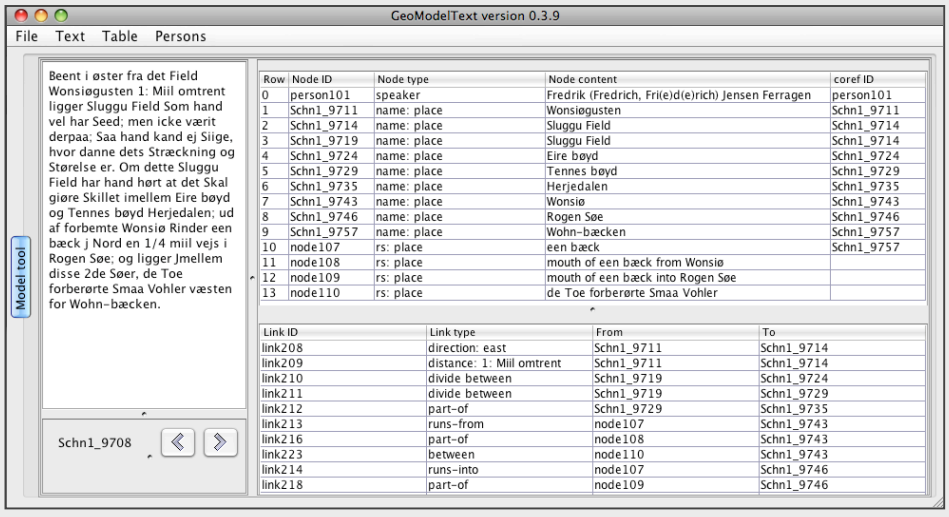
Modelling tool



Horace

"ut pictura, poesis: erit, quae, si propius stes, te capiat magis, et quaedam, si longius abstes [...]" (Horatius Flaccus and Brink, 1971, p. 68)

This means: In order to understand how poetry works, we use painting as an example.

It does not mean that poetry should be like painting.

Lessing

- Poetry should not mime painting
- Painting should not mime poetry
- Their ways of expressing themselves are different
- Rejects contemporary understanding of "ut pictura poesis"

Lessing applied to maps

- Texts should not mime maps
- Maps should not mime texts
- Their ways of expressing themselves are different

Is this an argument against map based visualisations of textual information?

Text to map

- There are differences in expressiveness
- The syntax of spatiality
- Example: Nothingness

"Nothing here"
vs.
"We don't know"

Example

Historical background for the example text

- Scandinavia, 1740's
- From overlapping tax areas to borders between states
- Information gathering
- Common people seen as a source to information based on their knowledge, not on their status

interview
↓
aggregation
↓
map

Example

The actual process I

Example

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The actual process II

Example

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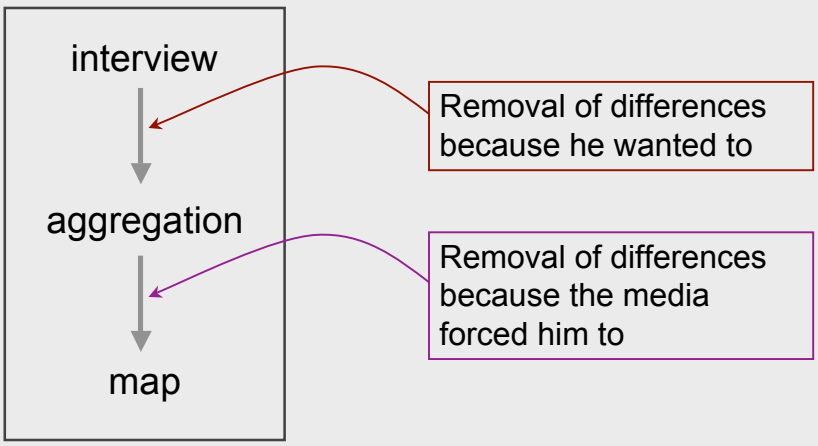
Freedom of expression?



The actual process III

But of course, often it just works!

(the Truth is extracted and the resulting text is based on the sources)

Preliminary results

- The expression “or” is a troublemaker. Under-specification?
- Truth is easier than doubt on maps

Why are we always told that maps are full of lies, but seldom told that texts are full of them?

In two years you will get...

- An answer to the question: are there types of geographical information that can be stored in and read from texts, but which are impossible to express on geographical maps without significant loss of meaning?
- If yes: a catalogue of types of geographical information posing problems.

Thank you!

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