
RESEARCH TRIP 2014

Germany and the Netherlands

Thanks to sponsorship received from the FIG Foundation I was able to conduct a research trip to the Netherlands and Germany during September and October 2014. The purpose of the trip was to learn as much as possible about the cadastral systems of the two countries. These two cases are the first to be studied as part of a multiple-case study towards my PhD. I plan to follow up with several cases from southern Africa in 2015.

The topic of my PhD is cadastral development, specifically with the aim of assessing the impact of development on the general citizens of a nation / state. Hence the interviews I conducted were with the aim of understanding the state of development of the German and Dutch cadastres, and how they got to their current respective states. This will form the basis for comparison with developing cadastres in the southern African context.

I went first to Stuttgart where I met with Marcus Wandinger, secretary-general of the AdV¹, and Günther Steudle, the principle officer of surveying and geoinformation at the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection, Baden-Württemberg. I later met with Jens Riecken in his office in Bonn, North-Rhine Westphalia. He is the vice-president of the DVW, Cologne District Government, and head of the department of cadastral surveying and geodetic reference. These key informants gave me most of the information I needed regarding the origins and development of the German cadastre, with specific attention to the current ALKIS[®] project which should see completion across all states by the end of 2015. This is an important project in Germany and is an interesting case of cadastral development. The project hinges around the amalgamation of the cadastral map (ALK) and cadastral register (ALB) into a joint system, ALKIS[®]. The AdV is also involved in the integration of ALKIS[®] (the real estate cadastral information system), AFIS[®] (the authoritative control point system), and ATKIS[®] (the topographic information system) into a common application scheme called the AAA[®] model. What makes the ALKIS[®] project unique is that, in Germany, cadastral surveying is the responsibility of each state. Hence cadastral development has needed to take into account the different needs and procedures of all the different states, resulting in a weighty document (the GeoInfoDoc) of standardised procedures for all states to follow. Of particular interest for my research was learning how the opinions and needs of relevant stakeholders were included in the new development, and how the success of the project is measured.

After Bonn I moved to Apeldoorn, Netherlands, where I spent a week at the office of Kadaster. They arranged a full program for me to get a feel for the various improvements that are being made to the Dutch cadastre on an on-going basis. I got a chance to spend a day with a surveyor in Zwolle, observing first-hand how cadastral surveying is done in the Netherlands. I was quite surprised at how different their approach is to the South African approach. During the rest of the week I met with several people: Co Meijer, Marije Louwsma, Dan Liu, Gerard Leenders, Jacques Vos, Bob Bakker, Alex de Jonge, and Magdalena Grus. Each of these people took time out of their busy schedules to explain a specific project within Kadaster with which they were / are involved. I discovered, for the first time, the concept of a negative cadastre (i.e. subdivision and sale of new portions *prior to* cadastral surveying). With each of the projects described to me, I was again interested to learn how the opinions and needs of stakeholders had been accommodated and how the project's success was / is being measured. I was also particularly interested in Co Meijer's account of the work done by the international office of Kadaster, especially into Africa.

¹ Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Vermessungsverwaltungen der Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, a.k.a. Amtliches Deutsches Vermessungswesen

But probably of utmost importance at this early stage in my research is the contacts that have been made, and the opportunities that are now open to me for follow-up questioning should it be required. Though I have hours and hours of recorded interviews and pages and pages of transcripts, which is all valuable information, the benefit of meeting people face-to-face cannot be overlooked. At Kadaster I was also given the opportunity to give a short presentation on the purpose of my visit and my research objectives.

While trying to set up interviews in Germany, Jens Riecken confessed to me that my trip was awkwardly timed due to the Intergeo conference that would be taking place in Berlin during the second week of October. But he suggested that I try to go to the conference as I would be able to meet more people there who could give me further information, and a significant part of the conference itself was dedicated to ALKIS® and land administration in general. So I took his advice and acquired additional funding to cover the cost of conference fees and the extension of my stay overseas. But my time at Apeldoorn ended a week before the conference, leaving me with a week to fill. So I contacted Jaap Zevenbergen at ITC, Enschede, and asked if I could visit his faculty during that week, and he graciously accepted.

The week spent at ITC was wonderful because it gave me a chance to consolidate what I had learnt over the previous two weeks of interviews and observations, in a quiet environment free of the usual distractions. I also had an opportunity to meet and chat with several important researchers in the land administration field: Paul van der Molen, Rohan Bennet, Walter de Vries, and of course Jaap Zevenbergen. This was time well spent as I talked through some of my ideas for my research and got feedback from them. I reciprocated by giving a short presentation on some of the work that my undergrad students have been doing at the University of Cape Town, involving the application and critique of a model developed by a student of Rohan and Jaap.

Other than the trauma of losing my passport in Berlin, offset by the relief of finding it again (there's a whole story there that I can't go into here!), I loved the city and the Intergeo conference. I was, admittedly, very tired by this point and initially struggled to find the energy for more networking. I was also very disappointed to learn (just before leaving South Africa) that the vast majority of the conference was in the German language, including the part on land administration that I had been looking forward to (I don't speak or understand German!). But I did manage to chat to some of the software developers involved in the ALKIS® project and gained valuable insights into the intricacies and difficulties associated with the project. I also attended a very interesting plenary talk (in English) in which future trends in geomatics were discussed. And of course I got to see all the latest and greatest that technology has to offer the geomatics industry.

All in all it was a great experience from which I learnt a lot and made valuable contacts and some new friendships. I feel that a solid foundation has been laid from which I can continue building towards the completion of my doctorate. I am immensely grateful to FIG and the South African Geomatics Institute for providing the funding for this trip, and I look forward to future collaboration in this regard. Unfortunately there hasn't been sufficient time for analysis between the completion of the research trip and the submission date for abstracts for the FIG Working Week in Sofia, else I would have liked to present something there. But I should be ready (with even more data) for the next one ...

Mr Simon Hull

Lecturer and PhD student

University of Cape Town

South Africa