Multi-site Ethnography With Geospatial Data - Google Earth And ATLAS.ti

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ATLAS.ti's Powerful Solutions For Integrating Google Earth Into Research

The exponential increase of accessible geospatial knowledge is changing our way of exploring and living in our spaces. As qualitative researchers, we're always looking for ways to merge new and imaginative research designs, but we also seek to create new computational tools and ways of querying our data and techniques. In this section, I will present four very basic but practical tips to help your work with geospatial information. If a multi-site ethnography approach is something you are interested in, ATLAS.ti offers powerful solutions for integrating Google Earth into your research.

Google Earth (GE) Preferences

First, be sure that your GE preferences have been set up according to your liking. Because the geo documents will be displayed as the other PD are, the "Embed GE within HU Editor" option must be activated if you want the codes and quotations to work in the proper way.

Image 1: GE Preferences

Assigning Geo Documents

If you have created a Google Earth Tour because, for example, your research is based on a multi-sited ethnographic approach, keep in mind that, when you click on the quotations, the names and descriptions that you had written in the placemark properties GE window will be displayed along with the quotation name, code and attached memos in the ATLAS.ti pop-up. Even if you are working with a free and available file provided by the Google Earth Community and you have found it useful for your research, it is important to remember the significance of your descriptions. If you are not familiar with this kind of GE window, here it is:

Image 2: GE New Placemark

And this is how the placemark will appear as a quotation in ATLAS.ti:

Image 3: ATLAS.ti quotation

Each placemark you have created in your KML or KMZ file will be automatically represented as a quotation. Your KML or KMZ file can contain any number of placemarks. It is possible to use other currently available GE tools to create your KML or KMZ file before it is assigned as a PD in your HU. In the free GE version, you can add polygons, paths and time to your file. If you have GE license, even more tools are available. All the work you have done in GE will remain after your files have been assigned to the HU.

Image 4: GE tools

Organizing Your HUs With Large Numbers Of Geo Documents

With the way that Google Earth is currently embedded within ATLAS.ti, your HU containing Geo Documents will load your quotations as elements belonging to a folder. These folders can be recognized by their HU name in the Temporary Places window. You can see what it looks like in the next image, which shows the window for my New Vision HU:

Image 5: GE Temporary Places within HU Editor

Because Temporary Places in GE can be a mess if you are working on a variety of projects at the same time, (and if you don't have the GE option that allows you save your Temporary Places files into My Places), I recommend that you save your HU as a Place (KML or KMZ files) to be loaded later from Google Earth, where the option to save into My Places will be available.

Image 6: Save Place As… option

Things will be easier when you can access your HU in My Temporary Places and have the option to compare the same HU you have saved in My Places. Remember that you can assign each element to be displayed into the HU Editor.

Working With Codes

Thinking qualitatively about geospatial data is a challenging and exciting way to explore connections between the HU objects. One good approach is to create codes based on similarities or homogeneous characteristics of your choosing. Besides using the Networks View to model such connections (memos, codes, memos and code families, supercodes and so on), the Query Tool is the best way to organize your queries when you are interested in finding patterns to analyze later on in your favorite sophisticated GIS software.
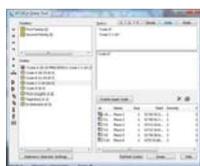
Image 7: Query Tool