



Continental Political Tactile Maps (Spain)

Summary

This practice aimed to provide better education and social integration for blind and visually impaired people. The project created an educational tool – Continental Political Tactile Maps – to be used in the process of learning, both by students with visual impairments and by those without. This allowed the development of a common learning process, and thus promoted the integration of people with visual impairments into general education arrangements.

The project

The principal objective of this project was to develop maps accessible for people with more or less severe visual impairment. The project strived to facilitate the education, social integration, personal autonomy and access to leisure for this target group. Continental Political Tactile Maps were developed by the National Spanish Organisation for Blind and Visually Impaired People (ONCE). However, these special maps can also be used by people without sight problems.

Frequently, students with disabilities have difficulties in their education and social integration within schools. These students are often excluded from learning due to the lack of suitable teaching resources suited to their needs. Continental Political Tactile Maps gave the students with sight problems the opportunity to better integrate themselves into the learning process along with the rest of the students as this education tool can be used by everyone.

Consequently, the main activity of the practice was the design, production, dissemination and delivery of Continental Political Tactile Maps. These maps include text in Braille, textures and relief marks side by side with easy-to-perceive visual information (large print, colour, and contrast between different areas). Each map has a guide to its key elements in both Braille and large print.

Approach

The integration of people with disabilities in formal education processes requires the design of new learning materials – that can be more commonly used by various groups of students (with disabilities, from various backgrounds and with various skills). Blind or visually impaired students cannot integrate properly if the materials that they use for learning are completely different from those used by their peers and therefore cannot be shared in the learning process.

Continental Political Tactile Maps, with their comprehensive key elements guides, tried to prove how inclusive learning materials accessible for persons with visual impairment can, in many cases, be used

Sector(s) covered

Main sector

Education and Training: Social inclusion and equal opportunities for students with sight problems;

Other sectors

Society: Eliminating barriers to social participation for people with disabilities



and enjoyed by all. It is only necessary to be creative and have inclusive considerations in mind when conceiving and designing these tools.

Element of innovation – the process

Innovation and creativity were inherent to the project itself, given that, currently there are no other initiatives trying to addressing the need for better maps in schools and their role in making education more inclusive and egalitarian. From a technical point of view, Continental Political Tactile Maps promoted the idea that proved map design is possible, and that these maps can be used by all students, with or without disabilities. In other words, the project introduced the concepts of “design for all” and “inclusive design” to the development of education materials in Spain. Through Continental Political Tactile Maps, these innovative approaches were tested and introduced into practice.

Key successes

(outcomes, results, impacts)

The Continental Political Tactile Maps allowed people with visual impairments to learn more about World’s geography. These maps allow students to understand, perhaps for the first time, the location of specific countries as well as new states that have emerged recently in

Europe, Africa and other continents.

In this way, the Continental Political Tactile Maps have prompted the interest of students with seeing disabilities in geography. Further, they have also contributed to inclusion of the students with visual impairments in mainstreaming learning processes, because the maps can be used both by students with visual impairments and by those without. This has facilitated the development of a common learning experience.

Finally, the project also contributed to the understanding of geography among some 60,000 current members of the ONCE. The organisation represents and serves people of all ages with various visual disabilities. Many of these people will have touched a relief map for the first time, or for those who are older, it will have been enriching to discover how the World’s geography has changed since they learned about it in school.

Challenges

One of the main challenges of the project was to unite the use of relief and the use of contrasted colours in the labelling of maps for people with visual impairments. The project team also encountered technical difficulties regarding the representation and labelling of small countries and islands within the maps. However, in each case, the project team developed innovative solutions in order to overcome technical difficulties.

Transferability and sustainability

Following the success of Continental Political Tactile Maps, ONCE plans to design and produce tactile maps of all continents.

The experience and example of this project could inform the development and introduction of similar maps for education purposes in other countries. The nature of the Continental Political Tactile Maps – the use of relief, contrast colouring and the Braille alphabet – make this approach to cartography attractive in the study of other academic subjects.



The maps developed by the project were exhibited in congresses and events related to cartography, as well as at events organised for people with visual impairments. The maps were also made available for students and adults who are members of ONCE. Furthermore, the maps have been posted in associations working with blind persons, libraries, and distributed at both national and international levels (maps are also used in Latin America).

Special Highlights

Students with visual impairments often find it difficult to participate in the formal learning processes as schools lack suitable teaching tools suited to their needs. Continental Political Tactile Maps tackled this problem as these maps could be used by both students with visual impairment and those without. In this way, the project encouraged the integration of people with disabilities into mainstream education activities, contributing to social inclusion and equality within schools.

The use of Braille, contrast colouring and large print in the labelling of the Continental Political Tactile Maps helps not only students, but also migrants, older people, and others in “reading” the maps. This improved accessibility to information and this knowledge has benefited many groups in society, not only people with a visual impairment.

Key characteristics

General purpose of the practice	Promoting creative and innovative solutions to society problems
Target group	All people, all ages
Type of learning	Formal
Level of implementation	International and National
Funding	Private
Time frame	September 2007- ongoing
Leading organisations	National Spanish Organisation for Blind and Visually Impaired People (ONCE)

Further information

Website of the project

<http://www.once.es/new/home>

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Additional Information:

Interesting articles:

www.nctd.org.uk/conference/conf2008/Exhibitors/E18.asp

<http://tifloinnova2008.once.es/appdocumentos/tifloes/prod/revista.pdf>