Preferences of potential users of multimedia atlases

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We know very little about preferences of common man concerning search and navigation in national atlas information systems (NAIS). A NAIS is related to general geographic information systems, but has a structure which resembles a regular atlas book. A multimedia atlas incorporates pictures, sound, video, text and animations.

An inquiry has been done with emphasis on the user preferences in the design of the user interface, which has an impact on the structure and functionality of a hypothetical multimedia atlas product. Search of information was supposed to be done using a graphical user interface with a pointing device.

Three categories of potential users were selected: students, representatives of the general public and professional map-users. These three groups were further subdivided with respect to age, sex, education, profession, "computer maturity" and interest in geographical issues. "Computer maturity" concerns experience and practice of computers and peripherals such as a CD-ROM.

This investigation shows mainly that there are differences within the two subgroups age and sex. Thus, people over 35 show a greater preference to work in a static multimedia atlas environment than younger people. Gender revealed differences in selection of presentations and the way of using data. Women prefer text, videos and pictures, while men mainly prefer landscape in 3-D, aerial photographs and simulations. The investigation also indicates that search strategies and analytic functionality, as well as the user interface, have to be better adapted to the user profile.