Interactivity for Handicapped Access

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Image Recording Is a cooperative project Involving the local museum, the County Authority for Work, and the Swedish Folk High School, among other Interest groups. (The Swedish Folk High School Is a democratic school for adult education that dates from the late nineteenth century.) To make the project worthwhile, we needed to find the place where all these different interest groups, and others, Intersected. If we hadn't have been able to find this meeting point, It would have been pointless to try to finance our project. In order to create something truly useful, common ground must be discovered. More pragmatically, It Is also necessary to find the place where research and development Intersect, and to arrange the product according to the national-international systems.

For our first project we documented the history and tradition of linen production in the area of Halsingland, In northern Sweden. We showed the piece, "Linen In Forsa," at the "VAV91" (Weaving '91) conference in August/September 1991.

We are working with text and Image recording as a potential Job opportunity for handicapped people. Our aim is to help disabled students to study and practice with Hyper/Interactive systems and find applications for use In schools, museums, and in research not only for disabled people, but for the general public as well. Today, many resources are spent on teaching children how to use computers, which of course Is worthwhile because these children will grow up and become part of the work force. But we emphasize the need to train adult disabled people. Many disabled people today have never had any computer training at any time In their lives, though they are perfectly capable of learning to use computers. We hope that our students will inspire an Interest In Interactive media, and we think that many people will have a richer life because of It. Courses are being offered at the Folk High School for the general adult population In how to produce and use Interactive media.

A project from 1990, "Growing with Computers," Is still being supported and sponsered by the Swedish Board of Education; the aim of the ongoing project Is to find out if Interactive media really can make daily life easier, particularly for handicapped people. In 1992, we plan to study how interactive media can be used, in a number of different areas - in the Halsinglands Museum, as a tool for disabled people, and as compared to tinteractive processes In the Adult education program. And finally, In 1993, we aim to combine with other text and image recording systems, and to experiment.

Some of the goals of the Image Recording project are to develop the humanities through Interactive media, and to find out if Interactive media can be useful for Swedish adult education In general.The main goal of the three-year project, however, Is to find out how people with a variety of disabilities can take advantage of Interactive media. We are studying the potentials for use In daily life, particularly In areas of education.

We also want to dicover whether or not Image recording Is a good job opportunity for the disabled. Disabled people want to work, but there need to be workplaces that can accomodate them. Museums are good potential employers, needing to have Image recording done - a job that could be easily handled by the disabled using computers.

There are some concerns, though. One is that image recording may be too isolated to be a really valuable work experience. Another problem is that most small museums don't have the money to fund this work anyway. So creating an accessible workplace is a problem from the beginning.

The County Authority for Work and a national project are going to fund a workplace for eight young handicapped people. The municipality and the Halsinglands Museum will be the employers. The Folk High School and the county authorities have the locations. Besides these groups, though, other parties are involved: the local history organization, the adult education organizations, and private collectors. Different institutions and organizations will support with money, materials, and systems. For instance, the FRN, the Swedish Coucil of Research, will provide foundations.

A number of questions arise. Will the cooperation work? How well will the different interest groups support each other? How can the Halsingland Museum gain support from the bigger National Museums for classification and computer matters? In what ways will the National Institution for Handicapped Research support a project of this kind? The National Board of Education has already shown interest; in March 1990, a number of teachers took a course in interactive media and gave their opinions about how it could aid handicapped people. What part will this play in the project? Can we fulfill our plans in three years? And what are we going to learn during the journey?

My main concerns are with the disabled people themselves. We are trying to create places for them to enter into the work force. Are these jobs good ones, that fulfill their needs and provide rewarding experiences? Will they be doing something meaningful not only for themselves, but for all people? The good news is that more and more, the answer to these questions is "yes."