

Section 13 Media training

Chapter 32 Exercise in Producing Media maps

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32.1 Introduction

Media maps are produced in order to illustrate news items that have a spatial connotation. Figure 32-1 shows that for a news item something of a particular nature happens at a specific place and time to a subject, because of some internal or external development, and that this is supposed to have led to specific consequences.

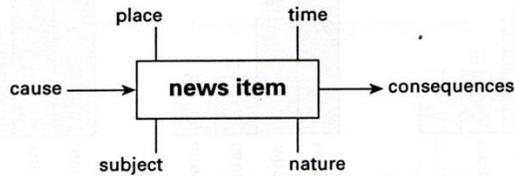


Figure 32-1 Model of the structure of a news item or news event

The map would be relevant in trying to show why the event happened there, as well as the consequences of the event happening there (a strike, traffic jam, earthquake, missile theft, famine, epidemic, etc). The map would portray the relevant spatial relationships, and in order to realize that, it has to show connections between the location of the event and places known to the audience.

It is no use, when visualizing an event that happened in Zevendijke in the central Netherlands, to show that village against its municipal background – it has to be shown against the background of well-known places like Amsterdam, Rotterdam or The Hague (the seat of the government of the Netherlands, 's-Gravenhage or Den Haag, is known internationally as The Hague).



Figure 32-2 Relevant locator map

But location alone is not enough. It is a well-known aspect of media graphics (Findahl and Hoyer, 1971-1985) that in newspapers or television news broadcasts, news items are better remembered when supported by visual evidence such as maps. And a map which does not only indicate the place of the event, but also highlights the (nature of the) event itself again in a caption on the map, leads to even better results (figure 32-3 C)

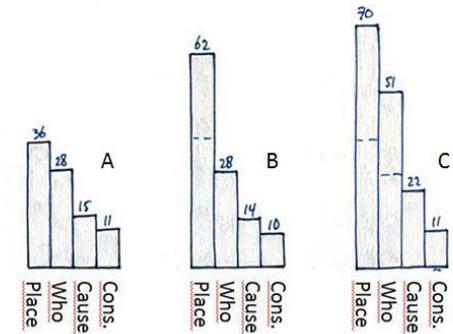


Figure 32-3 The role of the map in remembering news items from a newspaper: The graph shows the percentage of people able to recollect the place, persons involved, cause and consequences of news items: A) (left) without a map; B) with a map added; C) with a map added which also refers to the event in a text block or caption mentioning it.



Figure 32-4 Locator map with event caption added, and inset to show the location of the main map

Of course, the map has to be attuned to the article describing the news item: the spelling of geographical names in the text and in the map must be similar, and all places mentioned in the text must be shown on the map.

32.2 Map function

What functions do maps have in the media and how do they answer the relevant requirements for these functions?

Most maps in the media have an orientation function. So, they act as Locator maps. Locator maps inform about the location of a specific event or process.

Geographers know that maps will also inform about site and situation, and therefore provide spatial explanations. The site of Rotterdam is on the North Sea at a location where the tidal difference in water level is the least; the situation of its port is its proximity to one of the largest industrial areas of the world, connected to it by way of a river as an inexpensive carrier of mass goods. So, site and situation provide the explanatory function of media maps. But it needs to be sustained through symbols or texts in order to be effective.

Explanatory function and orientation function are not always easy to discern between. Take the case of the Falklands. In a media map of South America, the Falklands are so close to the mainland, that it seems callous of the United Kingdom not to render them to Argentina. But when one would add Britain at the same scale, it would enable one to become aware of the distances involved: Port Stanley is as far from the Argentine coast as Iceland is from Britain - and one would not think of claiming Iceland for Britain or vice versa on the basis of the distance between them! (from Ormeling 1997). See figure 32-5.

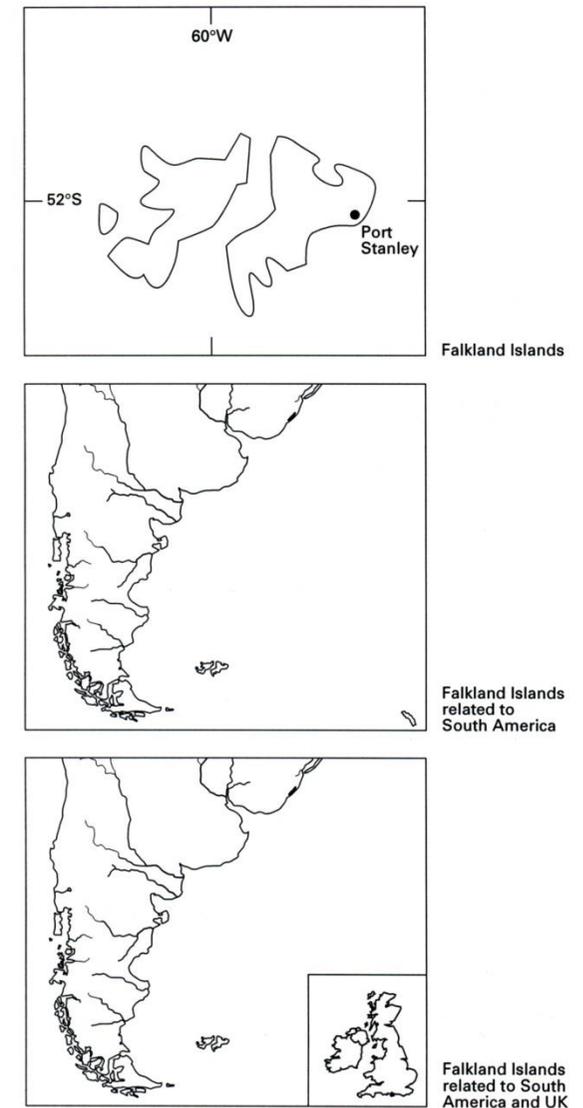


Figure 32-5: the influence of map scale (Ormeling 1997)

Explanatory aspects can both be based on things that occur at the same place (this is called vertical explanation), or on things at different places that influence each other (horizontal explanation). The examples of the Falklands is a case of horizontal explanation. Showing the proposed route of a new highway relative to subsoil characteristics, is an example of vertical explanation.

c) More mundane is the **decorative function** or stimulus-function of a map: something graphic that looks nice and therefore beckons the reader to get at a specific text.

d) Finally, there would be the **logo-function**: a simplified map that would show the readers by its outline what geographical region the news text highlighted by it, would refer to.

e) Answering a) the orientation function, would call for the provision of means that linked the area discussed to the readers' cognitive map (i.e. the ideas about space or about their environment the readers have in their minds): either by providing a shape that they would know or by providing the location of the area relatively to areas the readers would know. Showing the Falkland Islands on their own with identification of their longitude and latitude would not say anything to most readers; by showing them at a smaller scale that would also allow for (part of) South America to be rendered, would improve orientation possibilities considerably. In an Internet environment or, in future, in an electronic newspaper environment, it would be feasible right now to have the possibility to ask for extensive additional orientation possibilities (e.g. showing the map on which both the viewer's home country and the area discussed would be rendered).

To what degree are **comparison maps** that compare the size of a specific area to the size of an area known to the viewer also necessary? These comparison maps are devices that are used in school atlases. They would show, in some corner of a foreign land, (part of) their home country, in order to be able to assess the distances or surface areas involved, and get a proper idea of their magnitudes.

Part of the explanatory function dealt with on the previous page, is to prevent the audience from taking the wrong conclusions from the map.

In figure 32- 6 a map of the number of abortions in France is shown, per department. This is done by relating the numbers of abortions per department to the number of life births in the same department. As the availability of abortion clinics in every department would be an important issue here, a warning is included: the observed differences between departments will partly have been caused by insufficiency of abortion facilities.

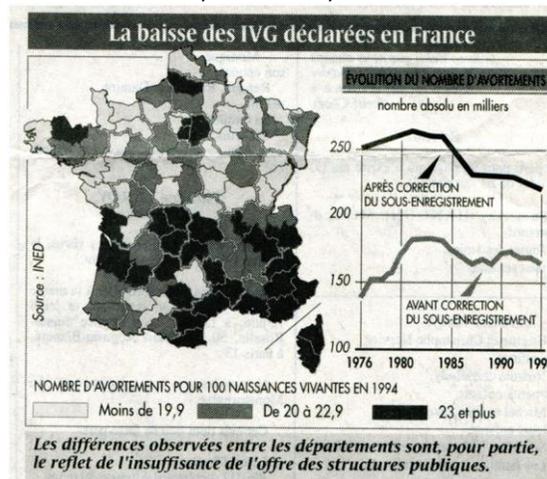


Figure 32-6 The decrease in declared abortions in France (Le Monde 11/6/97). The bottom line reads: The observed differences between the départements are partly due to insufficient supply or capacity of public infrastructure.

32.3 Exercise aspects

What is needed for an exercise is, of course, a suitable news item – in our case a news item with a location that can be mapped where something tangible happened: where pictures were stolen, statesmen met, treaties were signed, trains collided, battles were fought, etc.

Place

Next, a base map would be needed on which the location can be pinpointed (the site), but which also allows for reconstructing the relevant spatial aspects of the site (the situation): what were the getaway routes, what nearby airport did the statesmen fly in to, where did the trains come from, or which was the tactical situation on the battle front? So apart from a (topographical) base map, a railway map or tactical terrain map might be needed as well for documentation, in order to be able to include all relevant data on the newspaper map. As was shown in the Falkland example, the scale of the map is relevant as well.

Time

One of the aspects of the news item to be supported by a map is time (see figure 32-1). Of course, a newspaper map is static, and for television news broadcasts, where it would be possible to produce dynamic maps, there usually wouldn't be time enough to produce (and show) the movements that led to or followed from the reported news event. Only in exceptional situations that occur and are reported on continuously, like the weather, is it worthwhile to set up a system that allows for dynamic maps, for instance for showing the movement of weather fronts.

But there are other aspects of time, we also have to reckon with, using static maps: when for instance a war situation is being reported on, and on consecutive days the location of the front is to be shown, and thus the map becomes part of a series, we have to take care that we use the same scale, the same shades for each of the protagonists, and the same symbology.

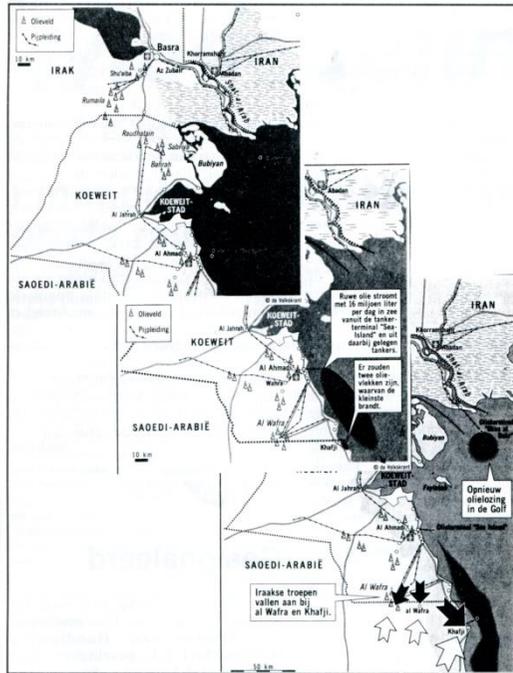


Figure 32-7 series of oil spill maps from newspapers on consecutive days, on the same scale and with the same legend.

Subject.

There frequently is an antithesis in the news item: the

cops and the robbers, the two parties in a treaty, the belligerents, etc. In comic strips the hero is always dressed in white and the knave in black; the hero comes into the drawing from the right, unlike his sinister adversary. Although these kinds of clues might not be used in newspaper maps, at least one should think about the way in which the opposite parties, adversaries, etc are being portrayed.

Nature

Monmonier (1989) proposes to discern amongst the following themes for media maps:

1. crime
2. physical planning
3. tourism
4. politics/elections
5. military conflicts/terrorism
6. defense issues/geopolitics
7. (development of) resources and their transport
8. accidents, natural disasters
9. science, research, ecological disasters
- 10 education, history, demography.

This seems to be a useful categorization (though it seems not to account for weather maps?) which can be used in a number of ways. The development of mass media maps over time would be an example. There seems to be a trend the last 50 years towards more diversification amongst mass media maps. First, only weather maps and maps of disasters and military conflicts were incorporated in newspapers. In conjunction with the rise of thematic maps, socio-economic maps and elections maps were being added gradually as well as maps on crime and physical planning, while the incorporation of science and tourist maps seems a rather recent addition.

This differentiation into, first map functions, and now map themes, is included here, because those that do the following exercise might want to adapt their design to the function or theme of the map. The nature of the event/theme can be expressed by the style of the media maps

32.4 Exercise

News item

The exercise is about the following fictitious news item: a crash on Tuesday May 2015 between an early morning passenger train going north from Meppel (departure Meppel 7.30) to Leeuwarden and a freight train loaded with crude oil, coming southwest from the Eastern Drenthe oilfields, via Meppel to the refineries in Rotterdam, which apparently ran through a red light. The two trains collided at the junction about 1 km north from the passenger station in Meppel, in the countryside next to a canal. Part of the passenger train derailed and was left hanging above the canal. Injured casualties were brought to Meppel hospital, but as that had limited capacity, ambulances also went for Hoozeveen and Zwolle hospitals. Because of the fire that had spread, there were many victims covered in burns, and for them a helicopter airlift to specialised hospitals in Amsterdam and Beverwijk was organised.

As the accident happened during rush hour, a total chaos and monumental traffic jam ensued which provided additional difficulties for the ambulances. At this moment (13.00 hours) 44 casualties and 240 wounded have been reported. There was a sizeable contingent of British horsemen aboard the train, that had spent the night in Zwolle and Meppel hotels, on their way to Heerenveen in Frisia province in order to

participate in the Military there. Because of the limited hotel capacity in Heerenveen, Military participants had had to find accommodation some 30k away from the racecourse.

Assignment

The exercise is about designing a media map to support the newspaper article about this event for a British newspaper. Below you will find a site map, an overview map of the situation, a map showing the geographical relation of the Netherlands to Britain, and, finally, a possible solution to the assignment

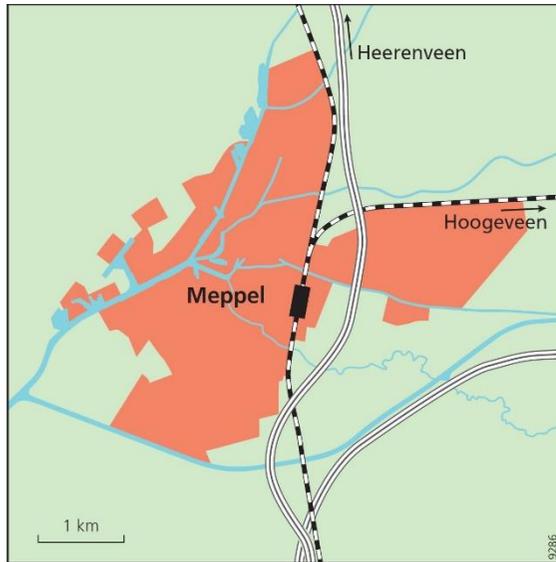


Figure 32-8 site map, showing the fatal bifurcation in the rail network, the built-up area of Meppel (30 000 inhabitants), the motorways and canals

What the maps in figures 32-8 and 9 do not show is the soggy character of the area where the trains collided. The canal drains the Drenthe plateau to the northeast of Meppel, and during the spring rains the canal is

frequently overflowing, flooding the adjacent area, except for the rail tracks that run on an embankment

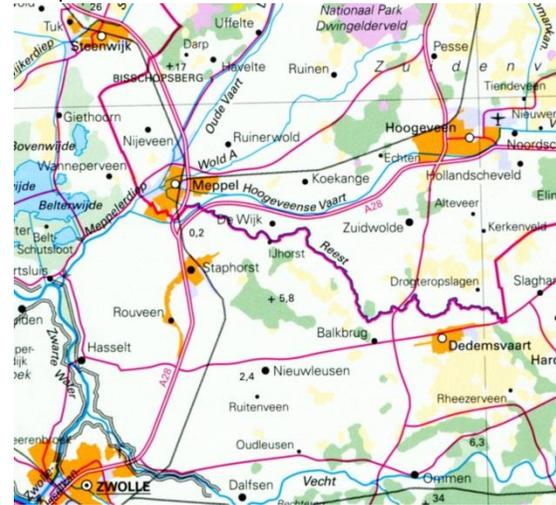


Figure 32-9 Situation map



Figure 32-10 Map showing the relation to Britain



Figure 32-11 Detail of the rail network map of the Netherlands

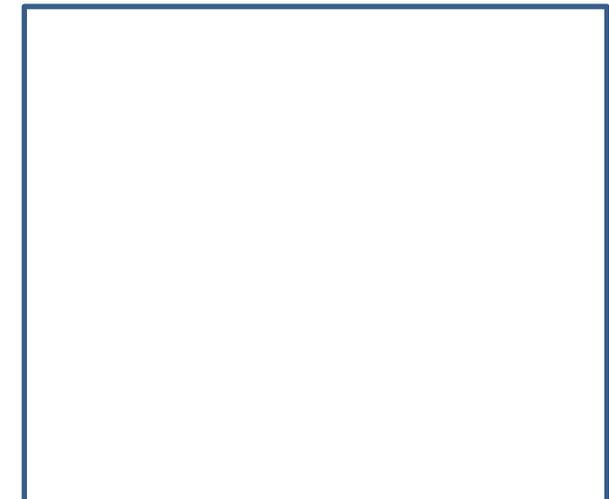


Figure 32-12 Your map assignment

32.5 References

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