

# Evaluation report

Tactile Reading 2021  
June 2021



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# 1. Introduction

This report evaluates the Tactile Reading Conference (TR2021), which was held 29th and 30th April 2021, with 420 participants. The conference was held digitally due to the corona pandemic. The report describes the planning and organizing of the conference and will reflect our experiences. All participants at the conference were asked to complete an evaluation form. The results are part of this report.

This report is conducted by Statped and is written by Lars Bjørndal and Astrid K. Vik. Marie Hartløfsen has contributed to the chapter about Questback. Marie Sverdrup has contributed to the paragraph about promotion, and with language revision and editing.

TR2021 was an international conference arranged by [Statped](#) in collaboration with [the Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille](#) (NLB) and [the Norwegian Association of Blind and Partially Sighted](#) (NBF).

An overall aim for TR2021 was to bring new knowledge and competence into the field of tactile reading, i.e., a broad approach to education and use of braille, graphics, and technology.

By arranging TR2021 it was also a goal to contribute and secure a continuum of the Tactile Reading conferences. With this report we want to ensure that the experiences from TR2021 can contribute to the next Tactile Reading Conference. We want to initiate development of new knowledge and competence that might be fruitful for professionals as well as users of braille and graphics for the future.

## 2. Background

The idea of arranging a conference that specifically concentrated on disciplines within the field of tactile reading was established by a co-operation between [The Swedish Braille Authority](#), [Swedish Agency for Accessible Media](#) (MTM) and [The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools](#) (SPSM) in Sweden. Their ideas formed the base for the very first Tactile Reading Conference held in Stockholm, Sweden 5th to 7th April 2017. One of the aims for [TR2017](#) was to bring colleagues together and to share knowledge and competence, and by this initiate further development of the field of tactile reading. See [Statement for the International Tactile Reading Conference©](#), written by Catarina Hägg (SPSM) and Björn Westling (MTM) (2018).

### 3. Target group and aims for TR2021

Even from an international perspective, the field of tactile reading is a small area of knowledge. TR2021 intended to have participants from various parts of the field of tactile reading from all over the world. The target group was defined to be

- practitioners, developers, and innovators
- academics in various research areas
- commercial companies
- users of braille and graphics

The overall aim for the conference was to follow up ideas and topics from TR2017, based on the statement for Tactile Reading. Thus, the aims for TR2021 were to:

1. be available for participants all over the world
2. facilitate sharing of knowledge, ideas and experiences from practical work, innovation, and research
3. bring new knowledge and inspiration to the participants in their professional work
4. promote further development of new knowledge within the field of tactile reading

### 4. Focused topics at TR2021

The society in which tactile reading is used is continuously changing. Therefore, the program for TR2021 had unique topics reflecting the development within the field of tactile reading.

We decided that this conference should concentrate on new options and technical solutions, research projects and best practice. This meant that we wanted to present ideas, knowledge and competence within various topics related to education, braille, graphics, and technology. We also wanted to initiate an inclusive approach. The program should have several options and attendees should choose topics according to their interests.

This was the background for the five categories of topics that professionals, innovators, and practitioners could submit their presentations:

- The Neuroscience of Tactile Reading and Understanding
  - Mental imagery and spatial cognition
  - The impact of blindness on imagery
  - Tactile and haptic test battery or material
- An Inclusive Approach to Early Intervention in Kindergarten and School
  - Use of tactile symbols and schedules
  - Use of tactile graphics
  - Pre-braille activities

- The earliest reading and writing, analog and digital
- An Inclusive Approach to braille and literacy
  - Introduction to braille
  - Going from print to braille
  - Multimodal reading: using braille, print and speech
  - Learning braille in a second language
  - Achieving higher levels of literacy
- Tactile graphics and 3D material
  - Interventions for using tactile graphics and 3D materials
  - Maps and illustrations
  - Utilizing 3D print
- Tactile reading and universal design
  - Tactile material in public space
  - Publicly available devices with braille
  - Learning material in a digital community
  - Access to written language in public space
  - Image descriptions
  - Access to tactile graphics and 3D

## 5. Organizing the conference

This chapter describes the process from the idea of a Norwegian follow-up from the first Tactile Reading Conference in 2017, and to the implementation of the conference.

We present an overview of organizational work in the table below. All actions will be further described.

| Time                      | Action   |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>April 2018</b>         | Decision to arrange the conference in Oslo with Statped as main organizer              |
| <b>June 2018</b>          | Clarify frames and organizing  |
| <b>February 2019</b>      | First meeting in the programme committee   |
| <b>January 2020</b>       | Call for abstracts<br>Contracts with keynotes  |
| <b>May 2020</b>           | Establish contact with the organizer of the next conference, Dedicon (the Netherlands) |
| <b>15th May 2020</b>      | Deadline abstracts   |
| <b>May – October 2020</b> | Review abstracts   |
| <b>August 2020</b>        | Decision on a digital conference   |
| <b>October 2020</b>       | Accept/reject abstracts  |
| <b>December 2020</b>      | Accept exhibition<br>Present program   |

|                               |                             |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>January 2021</b>           | Open registration form      |
| <b>15th April 2021</b>        | Registration deadline       |
| <b>28th April 2021</b>        | Preconference               |
| <b>29th – 30th April 2021</b> | Tactile Reading Conference  |
| <b>May 2021</b>               | Distribute evaluation forms |
| <b>June 2021</b>              | Evaluation report           |

## 5.1 The initialization

In the autumn 2017 [the Norwegian Braille Authority](#) began the process of searching for collaborators who would be willing to organize the second Tactile Reading Conference in Norway. Throughout this process, there was close contact with the Swedish initiators, Björn Westling and Catarina Hägg. The Norwegian Braille Authority sent a request to Statped, NLB and NBF. They were all interested in cooperation.

In late April 2018, the Norwegian Braille Authority had a meeting with the collaborators. Before the meeting, MTM and SPSM had prepared a statement document to give reflections and opinions on how to provide support during the preparation for the next conference. The cooperators in Norway also got the end report after TR2017, to get an idea of possibilities and challenges.

One experience that the initiators had made, was that it was demanding to share the main responsibility between several parties. Statped therefore decided to take the organizational and economical responsibility for the event. Statped organizes several annual conferences, so the organization had a registration system as well as many other necessary resources. Statped defined prerequisites:

- the conference had to last for only two days, not three as in Stockholm
- the conference had to be held in spring 2021, not 2020
- Statped's web site and other resources had to be used
- the cooperators had to cover their own expenses during preparation.

At the end of 2018, the members of the programme committee were ready:

- Astrid K. Vik, the Norwegian Braille Authority
- Arnt Holte, NBF
- Kari Rudjord, NLB
- Catarina Hägg, SPSM
- Björn Westling, MTM
- Lars Bjørndal, Statped (leader)

The first meeting in the programme committee was held in February 2019. At that time, the conference date was set, and a hotel was booked for the event.

## 5.2 Economy and resources

In principle Statped has low participation fee in accordance with nonprofit events. The fee at the physical event was set to 1800 NOK. For digital events Statped decided that fees are reduced with 60%. Therefore, the fee for TR2021 was 720 NOK. There are less expenses in regards of a digital event, yet we had some costs such as keynote speakers, video texting and entertainment.

Regarding resources, it is difficult to estimate a total time use in advance. In addition to the programme committee meetings, we had an internal workgroup which had meetings once a week since late October 2020. Between the weekly meetings a lot of work was done in smaller groups or individually, such as write text for promotion, setting up the program, and organizing videos. In addition to three members from the programme committee, this group consisted of four extra people covering communication, ICT, and secretary functions.

## 5.3 Work in the programme committee

During the complete period, the programme committee has had an overall responsibility for the facility and the content at the conference, while Statped has had the operational responsibility.

The programme committee had four meetings in 2019, eleven in 2020 and two in 2021. Only one meeting, the first meeting in January 2020, was a physical meeting. The rest was held digitally.

One of our first tasks, was to identify a red thread for TR2021, and how to best follow up from TR2017. We landed on only making minor changes and adjustments from the Swedish event. The most important were:

- more focus on technology
- adding 3D technology as a new focus area.

All subjects related to arranging the conference has been discussed in depth with the committee. This includes choosing keynote speakers, working out topics for call for abstract, working with the exhibition and many more details in setting up the program. Switching to a digital conference naturally led to many necessary discussions on how to facilitate for a good result.

The most laborious for the committee, was working with the received abstracts. All members in the programme committee were deeply involved.

In the programme committee we had many useful discussions. Especially the experiences from the Swedish initiators were of great value.



## 5.4 Promotion

The main channel for information and promotion was [Tactilereading.org](https://tactilereading.org). From the beginning the programme committee was concerned about the homepage. Since the conference is international, it was of importance that all content was written in English, without Norwegian menus, footers etc. Even though we ended up with a page without Norwegian menus, we were not able to remove all Norwegian text, unfortunately. This was due to Statped's website setup.

We sent emails about the upcoming conference to those who had been participants and exhibitors at TR2017. The Swedish organizers had provided a list of both. Other persons who might be interested were also added to this list.

Late December 2020 the [Tactile Reading 2021 Facebook page](#) was created. Keynote speakers, plenary speakers, and a selection of presenters of parallel sessions were asked to record a 1-minute video about their presentation. These videos and other posts about the program were published. The page was also used during and after the conference. As of June 2021, the page has close to 200 followers. The page can be transferred to the Dutch organizers of TR2024, and after that to the next organizers. This will keep the page alive while not losing the followers.

## 5.5 Keynote speakers

During the two-day conference we planned to have three keynote speakers, and we wanted to cover broad aspects of the field.

Diane Wormsley is a well-known figure after more than 40 years of teaching braille and doing research within the field. Wormsley was booked to talk about a broad approach to learning braille.

Silvija Seres comes from outside our field but has many years of experience in technological innovation. Seres was booked to talk about the future of technology in school and education.

Ajai Mittal was a pioneer within promoting braille and training special educators in India. Mittal was booked to talk about braille and technology in developing countries. However, in September 2020 we got the sad message that Mittal had died. We decided not to engage a new keynote speaker. Instead, we asked some of the contributors to present their abstract as plenary sessions.

## 5.6 Abstracts

### 5.6.1. Call for abstracts

At [Tactilereading.org](https://tactilereading.org) we had published the topics presented in chapter 4. We provided a link to a form in Microsoft Forms where the contributors could submit abstracts. The timeframe options for parallel sessions were 20 or 40 minutes. In addition, it was possible to submit as a poster or stand presentation.

The submission window was open from 22nd January until 15th May. In late April we had received very few abstracts, and we decided to extend the window until 14th June. At the end we got approximately 100 abstracts.

### 5.6.2 Selection

After the deadline in June 2020, the members of the programme committee read through the abstracts and ranked them. The committee had several meetings to discuss moments to concern in the selection process. Based on the Swedish experiences, we ranked abstracts from 0 to 3:

- 0 meaning excluded or outside of conference topics/aims
- 1 meaning not included unless room in program
- 2 meaning a good abstract
- 3 meaning an excellent abstract

### 5.6.3 Response to presenters

Due to the conversion to a digital conference, we decided that the timeframe for all parallel presentations would be max. 25 minutes. We thought it could be more challenging to follow longer presentations on screen.

In October we informed the contributors whether their abstract was rejected or accepted. The email gave information about the changed timeframe and that requirements for video presentations would follow in a later email. In early November we sent the document about requirements to presenters and asked for their presentations within the deadline 1st February 2021.

Due to the high number of good presentations, we rejected some abstracts marked as 20- and 40-minute parallels. Some of those who were rejected, were offered the possibility to present their work in 3-minute videos for the exhibition.

In addition, presenters were informed that we planned on making videos and/or PowerPoint presentations as available on [Tactilereading.org](http://Tactilereading.org) after the conference. If they did not want their video and/or PowerPoint presentation made available, they were asked to notify us.

## 5.7 Parallel topics

In the program we had to organize the parallel sessions under different topics. We strived to keep the topics presented in call for abstracts, but due to low frequencies in some topics, we did some adjustments. We ended up with these eight topics:

- Universal design
- Early intervention in kindergarten and school
- An inclusive approach to braille and literacy
- Mathematics
- Adult braille readers

- Tactile graphics
- Music
- 3D material

## 5.8 Exhibition

The hotel we had booked had a big area for an exhibition. Already in June 2019 we had a meeting with all the Norwegian providers of technical aids in the field of braille and tactile reading. That contact served as a springboard to getting in touch with the various producers around the world of technical aids.

Since TR2021 was to last only two days, NLB came up with the idea of arranging a preconference. They had access to a free venue, and they thought it could be a low-threshold offer, with possibilities to have workshops, for instance with producers of technical aids.

Members of the programme committee intended to visit SightCity in the spring of 2020. Due to the pandemic, this was not possible. Instead, NLB and Statped arranged digital meetings with all the producers we got contact with.

From there, NLB started to plan a preconference, and the various producers were asked to provide a stand in the digital exhibition in the main conference as well. Even though we invited many producers, only a few of them chose to contribute.

## 5.9 Conversion to digital conference

When the pandemic set in, we became very uncertain about what to do with TR2021. Should we cancel, should we hope that it was possible to at least have people from Europe physically in Oslo and make a hybrid conference, or should we make a fully digital replacement? Late August 2020 we made the decision to arrange a digital conference. Even though it was a tough decision, time has shown it was the right one.

### 5.9.1 Principles for a digital conference

When the decision was made to host a digital event, there was a lot of circumstances we had to take in account. What would be the best way to arrange a digital event with participants from all over the world? Should we have a live event, perhaps with some prerecorded presentations, or should the complete program be prerecorded? A live event would assume that all people attended at the same time, e.g., that participants from outside Europe would have to follow our time zone. That could affect the number of signed ups. On the other hand, a live event would facilitate more interaction, such as better possibilities to reach out to presenters and have a more dynamic chat. We landed on a fully prerecorded conference with all its advantages and disadvantages.

We also discussed if we should run the program in two or more time zones, so that people could choose the nearest and participate with the fellows from that time zone. At last, we decided that the most equal solution was to completely remove the time zone barrier and let people attend at their local time. Our solution was to keep the conference page open for five days after the set program had ended. This was done to ensure that all participants would get equal access to the content.

Even though people could attend whenever they wanted, we were concerned about how to get a good conference feeling. We decided to set up a program much like how it would have been in an analog conference. That is why we set it up with allotted times. We saw it as beneficial in that we could promote the exhibition and lead the participants through the plenaries and parallels during the days.

When it comes to the exhibition, we were curious on how we best could convert a physical exhibition into a digital one. We decided to ask the producers to record short videos, max. 3 minutes, to demonstrate/show their product/solution. We got fewer videos to the producer section of the exhibition than we expected.

#### 5.9.2 Requirements for video presentations

After having set the main lines in how to run the program, we sent an email to all presenters to ask if they were still interested in presenting. Thankfully, we got an overwhelming positive response.

We made up a [requirement document](#) that we sent to all presenters. In the document we emphasized the importance of:

- good sound quality
- proper audio description of pictures / video clips, so that also blind and visually impaired participants could follow the presentations.

This clarified that the providers were responsible for their content and to follow the requirements. They also had to consider privacy policy where appropriate.

#### 5.9.3 Subtitles

Due to [guidelines for universal design](#) all videos had to be subtitled. Because of this we set the deadline for presentations as early as 1st February 2021. We used a commercial company to do the work. Producers in the exhibition had to ensure subtitles in their own videos.

In addition, to ensure accessibility for people who are deafblind we also published the subtitle texts as ordinary web pages. This was provided as a link below the corresponding video.

#### 5.9.4 Technical solution

When the decision to follow the participants' local time was made, we left the idea of using some sort of webinar or meeting solutions. We found that those solutions

would have complicated the interface unnecessarily. Instead, we used standard YouTube players, provided as inline frames on the web page.

We also decided to omit using some sort of login procedure. Instead, we built up ordinary web pages that served as the conference pages, which we opened a few hours before the first conference day.

To facilitate some interaction, we implemented a live chat where participants could post comments. We used [slide](#) for this purpose. We also decided to provide a [Zoom Meeting Room](#) serving as a coffee bar where they could mingle. Both the chat and Zoom room were open 24/7 during the conference days.

## 5.10 The conference days

Just after the registration deadline, we sent all participants an email with information about how to follow the conference. We also provided [tips for screen reader users](#).

The link to the conference page was sent the participants the day before at 5PM European time, to ensure that all of them had the information well before 9AM their local time.

To secure those participants from all parts of the world had access to support in case of technical problems, we had two people at work in the evening the day before the first conference day. A handful of people did need assistant to be able to start the show, but overall, we are impressed about how few inquiries we got.

# 6. Data collection

## 6.1 Questback and procedure

The conference was evaluated using the accessible platform [Questback](#).

The evaluation form was sent to all 420 participants immediately after the conference with a 14-day deadline to respond. A reminder was sent after one week to those who had not responded. 157 participants responded, and the response rate ended at 37%.

The evaluation form contained 11 questions and two fields for comments. A scale was used to grade the answers: 1 – disagree and 6 – agree.

It is worth noting that members of the programme committee and internal resources in Statped also received the evaluation. We assume that they did not answer the form.

## 6.2 Confidentiality

No personal information was required, and all responses from participants were anonymous.

## 6.3 Topics in the questionnaire

The participants were asked about demographics (aim 1), outcome (aim 2 and 3), and to which extent the conference may contribute to further development (aim 4). In addition, they were asked to evaluate the information received ahead of the conference. The questionnaire had two text fields in which the respondents could write comprehensive comments. The first text field was in relation to their satisfaction, the second was general comments, ideas, or suggestions for future conferences.

# 7. Results

## 7.1 Demographical information

To evaluate to what extent the target group was reached, we asked about demographic data, e.g., age, and their background for participating at the conference.

When asked “I participated at the conference as a ...” the respondents’ answers distribute as follows:

- Producer of tactile products: 23,6%
- Teacher for the visually impaired: 32,5%
- Other: 30,6% (many specified participating as advisors)
- Researcher: 8,9%
- Student: 3,2%
- Commercial company: 0,6%
- User of braille / parent: 0,6%

It is also important to know the age distribution. This can say if the conference reaches the “active workers” in the field. Most respondents were aged 30-65 (90,4%). 7% were younger than 30, while 2,5% were 66 years or older.

In addition, we wanted to if we have reached all parts of the world. Therefore, we also provide information about participants’ countries. We got this information from the registration form. This shows that most participants came from Europe and the US. The top 10 countries based on numbers of participants:

1. Norway: 131
2. Sweden: 77
3. The US: 40
4. The Netherlands: 35
5. Finland: 16
6. Belgium: 15
7. Denmark: 15

8. The UK: 14
9. Japan: 11
10. Canada: 10

There are significantly fewer participants from countries in Asia (other than Japan: 3 participants), Africa (1 participant), South America (1 participant) and countries in the eastern and southern part of Europe.

For future conferences it is interesting to know in what extend individuals with visual impairments participated. 9,7% of the respondents had visual impairments.

## 7.2 Promoting and preparation for participation

When asked about how the participants got information about the conference (multiple answers possible), we got the following numbers:

- Colleagues: 65%
- Email: 43,3%
- Your association of blind and partially sighted: 17,8%
- Facebook: 13,4%
- Other: 10,2%
- Google search: 4,5%
- LinkedIn: 1,9%

The results show that promotion via social media, mailing lists, as well as user organizations and colleagues has been impactful. One respondent comment: *“I shared information about the conference with many colleagues who were not aware of the conference at all.”* Another one writes: *“I am so glad I found it on social media and shared that information with my colleagues.”*

Since the conference was held in a digital format, it was especially interesting to know how information before the conference fits to the participants needs for preparation. When asked if participants got the information needed before the conference, 95% rate is as medium or better (4-6).

## 7.3 The set-up for the conference

Most respondents (87,9%) rate their satisfaction with the digital set-up to be medium or better (4-6). Comments reflect that the digital set-up provided flexibility and the opportunity to pick and choose from the program to your own schedule and interest. Many appreciated to be able to watch the presentations for five days after the conference ended, as many times as they wanted.

Some comments are:

*“I was greatly impressed with the organization of the conference. The huge effort which organizers put into preparing and running the event obviously paid off. A very*

*innovative approach to consider local time for everyone for start of all sessions. Also, a great idea to leave access to presentations for a few days. It was the first conference during which I could attend all parallel sessions without having to make difficult choices. I wish the idea could be 'copied' for on-site conferences!"*

*"I really liked that everything was filmed in advance, so that you could pause, and watch things when you wanted to. I could watch more than I would have been able to at a physical conference."*

*"I thought the conference was excellent. The ability to view all the parallel sessions outside the allotted conference hours was excellent; something that might not have been possible if it was a live conference. It generated a meaningful discussion among my colleagues also and it's great to get perspectives from around the world."*

*"Loved the coffee corner!"*

Several participants were not as pleased: 12,1% rate their satisfaction as lower or below medium (1-3). Comments reflect that the set-up did not allow enough interaction between presenters and participants, as well as between participants. The chat function lacked the possibility to write more than a fixed number of characters and to tag people. Another point was confusion regarding the program layout and the lack of accurate information in the program. Since all videos were prerecorded, it was challenging to achieve the right feeling of a conference.

Some comments are:

*"(...) And as a presenter, it's difficult to judge how people like your ideas and presentation. You miss the direct feedback. But for this moment with Covid it was the best solution and you organized it well."*

*"I prefer if the presentations could be live sessions with Q and A in the end."*

*"I liked the idea of meetings in the breaks, but the concept was rather simple and not very attractive as there could only be one conversation at a time. Maybe there could have been more interaction if there were also a few Zoom meetings with individual presenters so that you could really ask questions directly (not just on an open chat) and perhaps discuss a few topics."*

*"Since everything was remote, video presentations didn't need quite as rigorous of time parameters, a handful of them felt rushed. "*

When it comes to accessibility, the experience varied:

*"The digital organization was excellent, and I very much appreciated the opportunity to read the video transcriptions with my screen reader."*

*"I found the website to be very confusing. I had to extract everything into HTML to understand the buildup of it and quickly find the sessions I am interested in. As an accessibility researcher I tested the site with JAWS, it is not fully accessible with*



*Windows shortcut commands or VoiceOver on Apple as much information is omitted from the browsing. (...) The upside was that I was able to increase the speed of the recordings to 2x to the usual speed of JAWS when I listen to audio."*

*"The conference was about tactile reading for people with visual impairments and I'm sure many of the participants themselves have visual impairments just like me, but there were no descriptions of what were shown during many of the keynote speeches and parallels."*

## 7.4 Participants' outcome

One of the main aims for TR2021 was that the conference should contribute to participants work within the field of tactile reading. When asked to rank the claim "Tactile Reading 2021 was relevant to me", 96,2% ranked the conference as medium or better (4-6).

Some comments:

*"Interesting and highly relevant program."*

*"It has been very interesting to get information about several topics even if not all presentations were relevant for my work."*

### 7.4.1 Parallel and keynote sessions and exhibition

Respondents were asked to rank the eight parallel topics on a scale from 1 to 6 or "not relevant". The list below shows the average score for each topic:

- Tactile graphics: 5,31
- Universal design: 5,19
- An inclusive approach to braille and literacy: 5,16
- 3D material: 5,08
- Early intervention in Kindergarten and School: 5,01
- Mathematics: 4,89
- Adult braille readers: 4,70
- Music: 4,24

Overall, the content was ranked as relevant or highly relevant. However, some parallel topics, i.e., music, adult braille readers and mathematics were ranked as medium interesting. We see this as a pleasing result due to the topics narrow impact field.

Respondents were also asked to rank the keynote presentations on the same scale, which gave the average score of 5,08.

Some comments:

*"I have left the conference with many tools and resources that I will implement into my teaching!"*

*“This conference was very inspiring for myself and my colleagues who also attended. We have had quite a few conversations and reflections on our practice.”*

*“It was great to see that a lot of attention was given to Braille. Never too much!”*

*“Some of the lectures were really good with interesting content and an approach that made it easy to assimilate the research. It was really good when the lecturer had some pictures, things to demonstrate or extra film they also verbalised in English. Some also could create pictures in my head that made it more easy to assimilate the research.”*

Lastly, respondents were asked to rank the exhibition on the same scale, which gave the average score of 4,77. One respondent commented that *“The exhibition is really hard to get hold of when it is digital”*.

## 7.5 Does TR2021 contribute to development of the field of tactile reading?

The respondents were asked to rank the claim “In my opinion, Tactile Reading 2021 contributes to development within the field of tactile reading.” The majority (98,8%) agreed to this claim (4-6). Overall, the majority (97,55%) were satisfied with the conference.

One comment illustrating several aspects:

*“I think this was a fantastic conference and I extremely thankful to the Norwegians who did a fabulous job hosting and presenting. I am also very thankful to each presenter from a broad range of countries and continents for sharing their research, their teaching practices, their success and innovations.*

*I would love to come to this conference in person but if it were not virtual, I would not have come, pandemic or not. It is too far, too costly and time consuming from Canada with family commitments and costs. Plus, I would not have been able to attend as many wonderful sessions. As much as I love a conference in person, meeting people and be able to chat at greater length, but there are many advantages of virtual. We also need to consider the health of the environment. Flying to central Canada, then to Europe, then to another location in Europe, I don't think it is right. (...) I truly hope it is possible to do a combination including virtual. I'm not sure how we could do it, but it would be nice to have questions and answers following a session or a chance for feedback at a designated time. Or would it be possible to have chat sessions attached to each session to leave thanks, questions, or comments that the presenter could revisit and respond to that could then be viewed by others (who may have had the same question). I thought there was going to be this, but I couldn't find it. I did see the one place to write comments but due to my work schedule and time zone, it was well after others. I didn't see too much there.*

*Still, this was a fabulous conference. So many great ideas, so many inspiring developments. Very nice to see how different locations have developed different services.”*

## 7.6 Suggestions for further conferences

To the claim “Next time I will prefer a physical conference” most of the respondents (78,3%) answer that they will prefer a physical conference (this equals 4-6 on the scale). As one respondent comments: *“This was a fantastic opportunity to be part of a conference that I would not usually be allowed to attend, as the costs would be too high.”* Yet, many respondent (21,7%) also say that they would not prefer a physical conference.

Some comments:

*“I think you all did a fabulous job with this conference, but 14 months of soul-destroying lockdown has convinced me of the importance of being together in person.”*

*“For the next conference, it would be wonderful option of online participation, as well as live attendance. For some of us from smaller national organization, due to funding issues, this is the only way to attend international conferences in our field of work and research.”*

*“Although I think it is good to have a physical conference, I really appreciated being able to attend virtually. My employers would never fund an international conference. Using a hybrid approach would enable many more people in my situation to access such an important conference, as well as giving opportunities for some people who can get the funding to physically attend and have other opportunities to network as well.”*

This part of the evaluation form had a text field for comments. The respondents were asked if they had any suggestions for future Tactile Reading Conferences. We received several concrete suggestions:

*“More beginning reader sessions would be greatly appreciated as those beginning years of Birth to 5 getting a child ready to read are often the most crucial and we need to keep it interesting for the students!”*

*“Next time more good examples from the best practice of education.”*

*“Kindly have more manufactures on board. How to have tactile printing made cheaper.”*

*“Be able to interact with visual impaired people, and thus get a more fundamental grasp of the means, techniques and methods that are really helping them.”*

*“I want more focus on adults who needs education in Braille.”*

*“Is there a possibility to build a digital platform which can be connected to the conference and can serve as a social Community and a channel to spread knowledge and scientific articles etc.”*

*“There should be a session about “dual readers”, users who will become Braille readers eventually, but are using both written letters and tactile reading for a while.”*

*“Perhaps more subject specific topics (just as it was done for music and math), encouraging teachers of other subjects to actively participate (science, foreign language teachers).”*

*“It would be great if on-site conferences could adopt the idea of keeping the presentations (saved as videos) for a few days after the event so that participants could “attend” a greater number of sessions.”*

*“It would be useful to continue having updates around technological developments and how mainstream tech is improving to include the needs of people with VI. Also, some reflection on how children’s specialist skills can be developed within and alongside core curriculum when they attend mainstream education. More on early development of tactile and IT skills. Continue with some reflections of braille and technology users across the age range.”*

## 8. Discussion of results

In this report we have described the planning and organizing of the conference, as well as presenting results from the evaluation form. We will discuss the findings according to our experiences. It is important to bear in mind that the response rate was 37%. This means that there might be opinions and experiences that are not reflected in this report. However, we are satisfied with this response rate, which let us draw conclusions based on the results.

### 8.1 Do the conference appeal to the target group?

An overall aim was that TR2021 should have participants from all over the world. Results show that the majority were from Scandinavia, the US, and the western part of Europe. We tried to promote the conference to all continents. However, we have failed to reach especially African, Asian, and South American countries. This tendency is something we also see in submitted abstracts. To obtain a broader international participation, we recommend locating relevant institutions and organizations for promotion.

An additional suggestion regarding international participation, is that of a hybrid conference. Many respondents comment that they would not been able to participate if TR2021 was a physical conference due to financial resources. A recurrent comment is the wish for a hybrid conference with several digital options, including participation without travel.

Another aim for TR2021 was to have participants from various parts of the field of tactile reading. Results show that we have reached professionals in the field.

## 8.2 How was the digital format perceived?

Many respondents were pleased with the possibilities provided by the digital format, e.g., flexibility. Another positive consequence was the low cost of attending. Some respondents were concerned with limitations regarding interaction and commented that they would prefer a live conference. With the decision to have a fully prerecorded solution, the possibility to interact was limited. The perks of this digital format were that everyone could participate in accordance with their local time. We believe this was one reason so many participated, especially from other time zones. With the limitations and insecurities caused by the pandemic, we thought a fully prerecorded conference was the safest choice.

Regarding interaction during the conference, we chose a simple solution for the chat, as well as a Zoom meeting room. This had to do with our resources and the complexity caused by many different time zones and a potential more challenging user interface.

Despite our document describing requirements for video presentations, several presentations had low sound quality. Numerous respondents commented on this. Even though all presenters were responsible for the quality of their presentations, we realize that we should have had more time to assure the quality. This is especially important for the plenary sessions. Our suggestion for future conferences is that there is enough time to quality check potential prerecorded material.

The same goes for accessibility. Our requirement for universal design was as follows:

“Bear in mind accessibility for attendees with blindness and vision impairment. Present your work as if you “were on radio”. However, pictures are a good support for sighted to highlight and engage. We recommend the use of pictures and precise explanations of visual content like pictures, videos, and graphs.”

We were disappointed that several presentations did not live up to this standard. We should have found the time to quality check the accessibility, and if possible, asked for a more accessible version. This is something to bear in mind for future conferences, regardless of physical or digital presence or format.

Some respondents had wished for audio descriptions during the conference. We chose not to implement a special solution for this. We trusted that prerecorded presentations followed our requirements. In hindsight we see that this is something we should have considered more seriously.

## 8.3 How was the participants' outcome?

Results show that overall respondents had high levels of benefits, and they thought that TR2021 contributed to positive development within the field. We conclude that we have obtained our aims for the conference. The submitted abstracts provided possibilities to present topics which we assumed would be of interest to a broad group. We believe that the opportunity to tailor your own program, is part of why the

participants report high positive outcome. Based on comments, we see that respondents appreciated the strong focus on braille and tactile reading.

Parallel and keynote sessions are generally ranked high, while there are more variations in the ranking of the exhibition. It is obvious that a physical conference will facilitate better for a more hands on exhibition experience.

## 8.4 Conclusion

The pandemic situation forced us to convert to a digital event. The alternative was to cancel or postpone the conference. When we began planning this complex and international digital event, we searched for similar conferences to gain experience on organization. Statped is used to arranging both digital and physical conferences, but these are all for Norwegian audiences. TR2021 was more complex due to the international audience, and we had to find our own solutions to many aspects.

Based on this innovative work, we are pleased with the organizing and outcome of TR2021. At that time, we did not know how much work lay before us, but luckily, we had enough internal resources in Statped to finish in time.

Some of our suggestions and recommendations to future organizers of Tactile Reading Conferences:

- Be true to the focus on tactile reading, braille, and graphics, including relevant technology
- Have focus on accessibility and universal design
- The program should reflect the heterogeneity of the field
- The program should contain plenary and parallel sessions / workshops, as well as an exhibition
- At a physical conference, it should be an option to participate digitally
- Solutions for interaction should be considered regardless of physical or digital format

We wish Dedicon the best of luck organizing Tactile Reading 2024!

## 9. Resources

[The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools \(SPSM\)](#)

[The Norwegian Association of Blind and Partially Sighted \(NBF\)](#)

[The Norwegian Braille Authority](#)

[The Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille \(NLB\)](#)

[Requirements for digital presentations at Tactile Reading 2021](#)

[Slido](#)

[Statement for the International Tactile Reading Conference©](#)

[Statped](#)

[Swedish Agency for Accessible Media \(MTM\)](#)

[Tactile Reading 2017](#)

[Tactile Reading 2024](#)

[Tactile Reading Facebook page](#)

[Tips for screen reader users](#)

[The Swedish Braille Authority](#)

[Questback](#)

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