

IMPACT OF THE USE OF TOWNSHIP SCHOOL ATLASES IN THE COMMUNITY.

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The project called *Township School Atlases* is being developed in the state of Minas Gerais (Brazil), since 1994. The atlases which have already been published are those of the towns of Contagem (1996), Gouveia (three editions: 1997, 1998 and 1999), São Gonçalo do Rio Preto (1998), Santo Antônio do Itambé (1999) and Pedro Leopoldo (2000). The purpose of these atlases is to fulfill the need for didactic material for the study of the local (municipal) space, the main theme of the official program for the teaching of geography in elementary school in that state of Brazil. The atlases also aim at helping to form citizens who are aware of their obligations and rights. In other words, people who know the environment that surrounds them and the role they must play in their own community. The atlases were at first directed to school children, but what is being verified is that their impact goes far beyond the school limits. This study examines the impacts of the *Township School Atlases* in their respective communities. Some of the indirect users are the local population, the elected administrators, members of social organizations, local entrepreneurs, religious leaders, companies located in the township territory, state and federal administrators who act locally and even other researchers who study the same region. Many times the *Township School Atlas* constitutes the first organized document that encompasses the majority of the municipal geographic and economic aspects. The plan of the urban nuclei and the maps presented in such publications help the community to have a better perception of the extension of the municipal territory, and also to get more conscious of its problems and possibilities. One immediate consequence of this is the fact that the people start to value them and, indirectly, they also tend to value themselves more.