INTRODUCTION

<previous - next>

School atlases are characterized by the fact that they only present the most important objects: so only the most important places, mountains, rivers and lakes, islands, railways and roads, countries and (physical) regions will be incorporated, asl well as the names of these objects.

How to decide which are the most important topographical objects whose names have to be included? There could be objective yardsticks, such as:

Towns and cities:	*over a specific number of inhabitants*
	important administative functions (national/regional)
	important cultural functions
Rivers and lakes:	*size, volume or catchment discharge*
Mountains:	*height*
Islands:	*size*
Roads and railways:	*connecting important towns and cities*
(Physical) regions:	*size and importance*

The fact, that in school atlases there is a reduction of the information load to the names of the most important topographic elements, leads to a low information density. As a result the number of names in a basic school atlas will not supersede 2 000, in a junior school atlas 8000, in an intermediate school atlas 10 000, in a senior school atlas 25 000 and in a general world atlas 100 000.

Irrespective of the number of topographical objects and their names, the editor is confronted with contraints regarding content and economy.

Content: the content of an atlas is determined by Consumer needs. The educational market, for example, has its specific demands and requirements regarding the spelling (transliteration/transcription) of foreign names.

Economy: as it would be too expensive to take 100,000 or even 25,000 individual decisions (regarding the spelling of all named objects in the atlas), internal toponymic guidelines are indispensable for each atlas publishing house.

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has set up toponymic guidelines in order to help overcome the great variation in approaches that countries have regarding the spelling of toponyms.

Although map and atlas editors conform their choices as much as possible to these toponymic guidelines, many decisions still remain to be taken. In the following pages the most important ones will be elaborated upon.