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Toponymic education

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Submitted by PAIGH **

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10th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

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Roger L. Payne, Chairman
PAIGH Working Group on Geographical Names

Introduction

Since the last conference, the working group has presented the José Joaquín Hungría Morell Geographic Names Course three times in Quito, Ecuador; Madrid, Spain; and Tegucigalpa, Honduras respectively. The course in Ecuador was from 31 March through 11 April 2008. The Instituto Geográfico Militar served as host and provided excellent training facilities and administrative support. The course was also scheduled to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Instituto Geográfico Militar, and was part of the numerous celebration events. The course in Madrid was held from 19 October through 30 October 2009 at The Instituto Geográfico Nacional, which served as host and provided excellent training facilities and administrative support. The course is, by design, held in a member State of PAIGH, but in 2009 by special request to and dispensation from the Office of the Secretary General, the course was held in the PAIGH observer State of Spain. The course was last presented 20 February – 2 March 2012 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras where the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras served as host and provided excellent training facilities and administrative support at Facultad de Ciencias Espaciales (FACES). The details of each course presentation follow later in this paper.

Online Version of the Course

The Cartographic Commission's Working Group on Geographical Names at the Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH) has only one major project at this time, which is the development of an online version of the geographic names course in applied toponymy. The goal is to implement the full online version by late 2012. No doubt, the conventional version of the course will become periodic, have a changed focus, and with special application once the full online version is available.

The importance of applied toponymy is evident worldwide, and has been noted to be essential in local, regional, and national planning as well as emergency response and preparedness, national security, environmental analysis, and a variety of similar applications. In short, standardization of geographic names is a major factor in support of a nation's spatial data infrastructure. In the existing digital environment for rapid, relevant, robust, and current information, it is essential to reach as many students as possible in the most active and efficient means possible. It is without question that the basic tenets of the course as well as the accepted standards and procedures for applied toponymy developed for the presentation of the course should be afforded to as many students and practitioners as possible in a most timely manner. So, the teaching team and the working group have accepted the challenge and the responsibility of making the course available online.

We have teamed with software developers and toponymists at the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (IGN) in Spain for assistance and exchange regarding this large and important project. The experts at IGN

Spain have a vast expertise and experience in previous development and implementation of numerous, successful, and related training courses.

The teaching team for the course has prepared in written form detailed lectures to support each of the seven modules of the course, which will be implemented by the IGN Spain team. The instructors will be the initial points of contact (tutors) for the online version, and will train other tutors gradually expanding that professional team who will serve as advisors and mentors for students enrolled in the online version.

Courses Offered Since the Last Conference

The twentieth course was comprised of 19 students from Ecuador. As requested, and as desired, the students represented a mixture from the various agencies of the National government. This version of the course was altered somewhat in some modules and significantly in some modules because it was clear that the level of progress in Ecuador toward establishing a program of national names standardization was beyond the introductory stage. Further, the level of expertise and understanding regarding automation in general, and specifically database design and data manipulation was in almost every case at the intermediary level or higher.

The module where development of principles, policies, and procedures of standardization is introduced was altered to analyze, discuss, and refine the material already developed in Ecuador, and to proceed to the next level of implementation. The course and its presence served to coordinate the efforts of those seeking to implement such policies and procedures and seeking to establish a national committee, as well as to stimulate those in policy making positions into action. It seems apparent that as a result of the course, there will likely be a formalization of geographic names activities and cooperation throughout the National government. The Instituto Geográfico Militar (the national mapping agency) is in a leadership role in implementing the establishment of a national program of geographic names standardization as well as poised to formalize that program throughout the National government. Also, the Instituto has completed the design, development, and implementation of a national geographic names database that can and will likely serve as the one vehicle for official geographic names in Ecuador with full partnership participation from throughout the National government by those agencies and individuals responsible for geographic names activities.

Also, the automation workshop was accelerated to be commensurate with the overall more advanced level of the students regarding database design and associated functions. Some functionality not normally presented was discussed.

The twenty-first course was comprised of 18 students from Spain as well as three students respectively from Brazil, Panama, and Ecuador. As requested, and as desired, the students represented a mixture from the various agencies of the National government, the autonomous States, and also included students from the academic community. This version of the course was altered somewhat in some modules and significantly in some modules because it was clear that a high level of progress in Spain has been achieved. Specifically, a national committee for names standardization had been established in 2002 and is functioning. Further, at least four of the autonomous States are in various stages of developing or have developed policies regarding the standardization of geographic names in their respective States. The level of expertise and understanding regarding automation in general, and specifically database design and data manipulation was in every case at a high level of development and comprehension.

The module where development of principles, policies, and procedures of standardization is introduced was altered to analyze, discuss, and refine the policies already developed at the national level in Spain. There were more than 25 presentations and papers delivered by experts from national and State governments as well as representatives from the academic community engaged in formal agreements for database design and development with both the national government and the various State governments. The course offered a convenient means for all to review and contrast the work of these individuals and groups as it applies to the overall goal of national standardization and development and population of a national geographic names database, and provide a convenient forum for meaningful analysis and suggestions from other points of view.

The course and its presence served to facilitate further the coordination of these efforts, and provided a forum and platform for meaningful dialog where the instructors served as advisors and facilitators. The Instituto Geográfico Nacional leads a consortium of national and State agencies in implementing the national geographic names standardization program and a national geographic names database with all relevant national and State organizations represented on the national committee whose role presently (2009) is one of non-binding arbitration although this could change as policies and procedures become more developed and tested. Much time in the course was devoted to analyses regarding existing policies as to how they function, and whether the present policies are effective, and whether additional policies are required for situations not yet addressed. The same was accomplished for the autonomous States, and the facilitated discussions and exchanges were highly beneficial to all.

Also, the automation workshop was accelerated to be commensurate with the overall more advanced level of the students regarding database design and associated functions. Some functionality not normally presented was discussed. In fact, little traditional training was required as the students were already at a satisfactory level so that the exercises could be launched almost immediately allowing additional time for more thorough analysis of the nature of the questions in the exercises as well as a discussion regarding the reasons behind many of the more advanced questions.

Aspects of the internet as it applies to geographic names research were explored thoroughly and much time was devoted to the web-based maintenance program for geographic names in the United States (at the U.S. Geological Survey for the official national names database in the United States). As indicated, the mechanism and policies are in place nationally and throughout regional Spain, but maintenance has not been implemented or even developed in many cases (2009). In fact, the students (representing their respective organizations) are just beginning this all important process (2009), and the process of development and implementation in the United States was examined and dissected thoroughly providing insight as well as a sound basis for discussion and exchange. This was accomplished in detail, and the timing was just so.

The conventional course was last presented successfully 20 February – 2 March 2012 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The twenty-second course was comprised of 20 students from Honduras. As requested, and as desired, the students represented a mixture from the various agencies of the National government (including mapping, cadaster, census, emergency management, army, navy, air force, and even anthropology & culture) as well as professors from the academic (university) community. The standardization module was altered somewhat to accommodate the situation in Honduras whereby discussions have begun regarding the formation of a national committee for standardization, and so the standardization module focused on various methods of accomplishing the goal of standardization (not regulation) based upon the conditions in Honduras. The level of expertise and understanding regarding

automation in general was at a high level of comprehension. Based upon comments and discussion, it is expected that a national committee will be formed shortly.

Additional Activity

As we continue to report, the Working Group is most interested in pursuing and even directing or assisting in the establishment and development of an integrated geographic names data system for the Latin American Community to serve as the single authoritative source for users requiring standardized names for use in any project or task and also for toponymic support of national and regional spatial data infrastructures.

In addition to preparing for the course and most especially working on the online version, the Working Group's other activities and collaborations during the year are directed toward fielding questions regarding the course from the international toponymic community.

Summary

Undoubtedly, the importance and relevance of geographic names is growing continuously worldwide as Geographic Information Systems become increasingly linked and require more information than ever before especially correct and standardized names. In this context, the PAIGH Geographic Names Course online version, in addition to its tangible contribution to the PAIGH member community will be highly useful and perhaps one of several models for improving geographic names projects thus bringing about better communication and cooperation as well as standardization with the goal of geographic names information systems providing complete and current names and ancillary information interactively in real time to a wide variety of users and systems.

The related and parallel work of each of the three instructors reflects the basic tenets expressed in the course (conventional and online), and this work assists in keeping the course viable and completely up to date with advances in applied toponymy and related ancillary disciplines. This applies most especially to assuring that the module on automation is current and offers the most useful and technically relevant instructions for applied toponymy.

There was much correspondence by email among the three instructors on various aspects and upgrades for the presentation of the course in Tegucigalpa in February and March 2012. The voluminous course materials are continuously evaluated, upgraded, and made current, and this continues up to the date of presentation for any course. Even so, these materials are presently outlines only that prompt full lectures from the instructors. The full lectures are at this time either completed or in development and will be available from the online version of the course.

The Working Group is pleased to offer consultation to any member State on any matter of toponymy.

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