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Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Date Files and Gazetteers

Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

2009-2011[*]

Scope of Work

In order to address UN resolutions and UN data needs, this Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers addresses various issues of toponymic data processing, including the creation, maintenance and outputs of toponymic data files (including gazetteer production) and aspects of toponymic data exchange formats and standards. Issues of providing geographical names information within national and international spatial data infrastructures (SDIs) through web (gazetteer) services and multipurpose toponymic database solutions in the context of SDIs are becoming more and more important.

Work plan

In 2009 the Working Group (WG) on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers discussed in February various subjects for an out-of-session workshop in conjunction with UNGEGN sessions or Conferences, including simple database applications, data modelling, and lessons learned through regional and international projects. Members concluded that Working Group involvement should complement and support the UNECA "Africa GeoNyms database/gazetteer" and also that further meetings should focus on the description of relevant work being carried out by member states. However, particularly for the latter item the WG will always focus on what is beneficial to UNGEGN to address resolutions and data needs. This item can be addressed properly at the WG meetings and comments/resolutions can be posted in the UNGEGN Information Bulletin and on the WG website.

At the 25th session of UNGEGN in Nairobi, May 2009, the objectives of the WG were discussed. Amongst others it was noted that many countries are no longer looking for data exchange formats but for complete multipurpose database solutions to set up multipurpose databases. This fact should be reflected in the objectives of the Working Group somehow.

After the 25th session of UNGEGN, the Working Group established the following outline of objectives:

1. maintain liaison with international standardization bodies like the Unicode Consortium regarding digital text encoding in the context of geographical names, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) with reference to the development of exchange standards for toponymic information and to web (gazetteer) services for the provision of toponymic information through the Internet;

2. maintain liaison with the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) in relation to UN developments and requirements;

3. promote and support the geographical names database of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN database);

4. promote, complement and support the UNECA "Africa GeoNyms database/gazetteer" initiative;

5. promote and provide consultancy and technical advice to national standardization programs and to toponymic training courses including the development of multipurpose toponymic database solutions in the context of spatial data infrastructures;

6. organize workshops in conjunction with UNGEGN Sessions or UN Conferences, focusing on topics like data modelling, database applications or lessons learned through national and international geographical names programs or projects, and, as required, provide presentations on such topics at the UNGEGN Sessions and UN Conferences;

7. recommend content and structure of nationally produced authoritative gazetteers and toponymic data files in particular making use of the Internet.

Progress against the Work Plan since the 25th Session of UNGEGN:

The following points summarize activities occurring during 2009-2011:

Objective 1 - liaison with international standardization bodies (ISO, OGC, Unicode)

The Convenor is a liaison member of the International Organization for Standardization's Technical Committee 211 Geographic information/Geomatics (ISO/TC 211). A standard of particular relevance to the Working Group is ISO/DIS 19142 Geographic information - Web feature Service (WFS).

The Convenor is also registered as an observer for the Open Geospatial Consortium Standards Working Group (SWG) for developing a Gazetteer Profile of a WFS. The SWG appears currently to be inactive.

The Working Group's contacts with the Unicode Consortium have been re-established. Information on its Common Locale Data Repository (CDLR) project as well as on developments in the Unicode Standard would be sought from a Unicode representative who had been invited to attend the 26th UNGEGN session.

Objective 2 - liaison with the UN Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG)

The Convenor participated at the UNGIWG-10 Plenary Meeting (19 - 21 October 2009) in Bonn, Germany. The notes of the Convenor about the 10th UNGIWG are available through the WG website: http://www.zrc-sazu.si/ungegn/WG_TDFG/gazetteers.htm. The UNGIWG-11 Plenary Meeting is to be hosted by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in Geneva from 14-16 March 2011. No WG member is planning to attend.

In a broader UN context the WG recognized the importance of co-operating with the planned UN initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM) being promoted by the UN Statistics Division and Cartography Section. The so-called Working Group GGIM committee of experts already requested input into its meetings by the UNGEGN chairperson. It has been agreed that UNGEGN has different responsibilities and its own mandate (including the work of the WG on TDFG) must be preserved.

The WG recognized a proposal for a UN Spatial Data Infrastructure gazetteer project for disaster management, which would link names information being held in different UN agencies' systems and would exploit crowd-sourced data and create a common vocabulary.

Objective 3 - promote and support the UNGEGN database

The Working Group reviewed UNGEGN's World Geographical Names Database and noted the new design of the UNGEGN website.

Objective 4 - promote/support the UNECA "Africa GeoNyms database/gazetteer" initiative

The Working Group promoted and supported the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) initiative at meetings, conferences and the Toponymic Training Course in Yaoundé, Cameroon (22nd -28th November 2010) and outlined the provision of a free tool to create names databases, particularly within the context of an African spatial data infrastructure.

Objective 5 - promote and provide consultancy and technical advice

The Working Group contributed to and the Convenor was involved in the undertaking of a Toponymic Training Course in Yaoundé, Cameroon (22nd -28th November 2010). Consultancy and technical advice had been given for the establishment of multipurpose toponymic database solutions in the context of spatial data infrastructures.

The United States had assisted the Afghan Government in setting up a geographical names board and was providing information on database models.

Objective 6 - organize workshops in conjunction with UNGEGN Sessions or UN Conferences

The WG considered the organization of a workshop during the UNGEGN session on the implementation of the INSPIRE geographical names specification, its schema being deemed a potential model for international use. It was identified not to be necessary for European participants, but perhaps could be of value in conjunction with the Africa GeoNyms database/gazetteer project.

Very likely, a workshop will be held at the 26th Session of UNGEGN to address the promotion of nationally standardized geographical names in a world increasingly dependent on web-based digital data which were often "crowd-sourced" and unauthorized. The availability of free and easily-accessible authorized geographical names data is seen as a key driver in encouraging the use of nationally-standardized names.

Objective 7 - recommend content and structure for gazetteers and data files

See activities for objective 4 and 5.

Meetings of the Working Group since 2009

A meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers (WG TDFG) was held in conjunction with the 20th session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division and a EuroGeoGraphics - EuroGeoNames workshop at the Hotel International, Zagreb, Croatia, 9th – 11th February 2011. The Working Group session was attended by more than 40 participants from 19 countries.

Particularly WG business according to the next 26th UNGEGN session, i.e. the general preparation and re-structuring of Working Paper presentation under item 9 was discussed, along with WG business according to its objectives, potential follow-up workshops, lessons-learned from national and regional projects involving gazetteer applications & services as well as outreach and contacts in less advanced countries. Furthermore the representation at international meetings, technical workshops and the WG business according to liaison activities – Unicode; OGC; ISO were outlined.

The notes of the WG meeting in Zagreb are available through the WG website: http://www.zrc-sazu.si/ungegn/WG_TDFG/gazetteers.htm.

Upcoming Actions for 2011 – 2012

- The Working Group will assist the UNGEGN chairperson in co-operating with the planned UN GGIM committee of experts in order to emphasise that UNGEGN had different responsibilities and its own mandate (including the work of the WG on TDFG) which must be preserved. Particularly WG contributions to the forthcoming GGIM forum in Seoul in October 2011 will be requested.

- The Working Group will monitor the availability of free and easily-accessible authorised digital geographical names data as it is seen as a key driver in encouraging the use of nationally-standardised names.

- The Working Group will monitor and support the proposal for a UN Spatial Data Infrastructure gazetteer project for disaster management.

- The Working Group will identify text encoding issues encountered in its geographical names work in order to compile a list of required encodings for submission to Unicode.

- The Working Group will further promote and support UNECA's provision of a free tool to create names databases within the context of an African spatial data infrastructure.

- The Working Group will contribute to and/or members will participate at the International Cartographic Conference in Paris, France, 3rd – 8th July 2011; a European State of the Map Conference in Vienna, Austria, 15th – 17th July 2011; and the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences in Barcelona, Spain, 5th – 9th September 2011.

- The Working Group's website will be updated regularly.