



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.91/CRP.43
17 January 1998

ENGLISH ONLY

SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 13-22 January 1998
Item 13 of the provisional agenda*

TOPONYMIC WEBSITES

• The Nordic Place Names Database

Paper submitted by Finland **

* E/CONF.91/1

** Prepared by Mr. Jorma Marttinen, Finland

Nordic Place Names Database

Jorma Marttinen (Finland)

The Nordic Place Names Database (NONDB) is a joint project of five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. At present the database is a prototype on the website of the National Land Survey of Finland (<http://www.kartta2.nls.fi>).

In early nineties a 1:2 million map database was prepared, that is also available on CD-ROM. At that time the Mapping Agencies of the five Nordic countries acknowledged the need of a comprehensive place names database of that map area. The original plan from 1995 proposed the use of ISO 8859-10 character set specially designed to fulfil the needs of the Nordic countries. The database tool was selected to be MS Access and distribution media would be mainly CD-ROM.

In 1996 the job was tackled seriously. It was found out that there are twelve different languages in use in the area, five of them being Sámi languages. These languages contain altogether 53 different letters of which seven are non-standard supplements of the ISO 8859-10.

In the beginning of 1997 the financing of the project was clarified and the search for tools to solve the problem of the missing letters was continued. That was the time when UNICODE standard first came up seriously. It was found out that it is the basic encoding of the much discussed Java language. At the same time there were indications that the days of CD-ROM products might come to an end.

The Nordic Names DataBase was going to the web with the UNICODE-encoding. The prototype now consists of somewhat heterogeneous data sets from the participating countries, Finland having a very large set just to test the performance of the system.

The most interesting part of the prototype is the possibility to choose a map output in addition to the traditional list of names as a result of a query. The greatest problem still to be solved is how to find a uniform classification of the types of places appearing in the database. The basic idea is that all the data can be directly transferred from the place names databases of each individual country. So far we have not found very much in common in each other's feature classes.

The locations of the named places are referenced with WGS84 coordinates in decimal degrees. A 5-6 decimal resolution is needed to achieve accuracy necessary for cartographic applications.

We sincerely welcome all the visitors to our website and we will be especially pleased of all the feedback we get. This goes in particular to the beta version that should be accessible in the second quarter of 1998 and should also include a map interface for all registered users. The effort to prepare a database and a user interface for five countries and 12 languages is the first step towards a real multiscriptual place names database for common use in all interested countries.