

DRAFT REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
ON THE WORK OF ITS FOURTEENTH SESSION

WORKING GROUP ON TOPONYMIC DATA FILES

41. Mr. Lewis, Convenor of the working group, introduced his report (Working Paper No.33) by emphasizing the recent widespread expansion of Geographical Information Systems (GIS). A toponymic database was an indispensable part of a GIS. Yet such a system was unfortunately beyond the reach of many nations which had to devote resources to more fundamental concerns.

42. Mr. Lewis felt that toponymic guidelines and the UNGEGN Newsletters would provide much of the information called for in resolution 12 of the Fifth Conference.

43. Mr. Payne introduced Working Papers Nos.36 and 34. The first paper described the role that micro-computers could play in providing a relatively substantial toponymic database at a relatively low cost. It was often ideally suited to the provincial or regional scale. The second paper provided updated information on the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) at the United States Geological Survey. There were now over 2 million entries, divided into State files for ease of management. There were index cards for only 3% of domestic names, so usually the digital file was the only record. Currently, a link was being envisaged between the GNIS and the digital cartographic database. It was anticipated that the number of entries would increase to about 5 million by the end of the century.

44. Mr. Kadmon reported on the first results of computerized placement of curved names on maps. He also stressed that updating and output became a relatively straightforward task when the information was stored in an automated form. It was reported that the databases in Canada and Israel were independent of scale, and that methods of selection for the various scales were required. Mr. Payne pointed out the problem of positioning each name as the map scale changed. Mr. Lewis informed the Session that the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland was experimenting with ways of generating automatically information required at 1:10,000 scale from the larger database of information stored. Mr. Böhme and Ms. Mattison considered there was necessarily a qualitative element of judgement required in selection and

generalisation. Ms. Mattison reported that since 1980 Sweden had developed two databases, keyed to 1:250,000 scale and 1:50,000 scale. Every name in each database possessed a code enabling it to be selected for smaller scales as appropriate.

45. The Vice-Chairman felt that these topics were of direct interest to developing countries. Morocco was endeavouring to establish a database in collaboration with the Quebec Commission of Toponymy and the working group should look at ways of disseminating pertinent information.

46. Introducing Working Papers 37 and 38, Ms. Kerfoot reported on Canada's National Toponymic Database (NTDB). It contained almost 500,000 names, entered from card records. Sometimes these records were elderly, in which case the geographical co-ordinate information may not be accurate. The database, which was organized on a Provincial/Territorial basis, supported the National Atlas Information System, and efforts were being made to match it with the smaller database of cultivated toponyms recorded by Statistics Canada for census purposes. Alberta reported on its provincial database of 17,000 names (see Working Paper No.60). The session stressed the importance of incorporating standardized toponyms in databases meant for administrative, census and related uses, as well as cartography and gazetteers. Mr. Kadmon reported that in Israel the census was indeed totally integrated into the toponymic database.

47. Turning to the subject of gazetteers, Ms. Kerfoot introduced Working Paper No.32 concerning gazetteers of Canada. These were produced from the National Toponymic Database and were laser-printed. It was hoped to include administrative division information and a greater number of cross-references in the next volume (New Brunswick). Particular mention was made of the Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names and the Répertoire Toponymique du Québec.

48. Mr. Payne provided updated information on the USA State Gazetteers (Working Paper No.47). Compilation work had begun in 1976. Phase I had been completed by 1981; this had involved the inclusion of all names from the 55,000 sheets of the 1:24,000 and 1:25,000 scale topographic map series. Phase II, currently in progress, involved the integration of names from

other sources. So far, five State gazetteers had been published and eleven others were in preparation. Geographical co-ordinates were provided to degrees, minutes and seconds, the topographic map reference and the first-order civil division were provided, and the type of feature and (in most cases) its elevation noted.

49. Mr. Randall reported that the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) had devised a common specification for gazetteers, with minor national variations, based on the names found on the 1:250,000 map series being produced by that organization. The specification included an abbreviation of the feature type, geographical co-ordinates to degrees and minutes, an administrative division code and a reference to the relevant map sheet. So far, only Venezuela had produced a list; this was not yet a gazetteer, but comprised a list of names on the reverse of each map sheet.

50. Mr. Bacchus reported that France had a considerable amount of toponymic data stored in automated form. Demand for this information was great. Positionally, the data included kilometric co-ordinates, which could be converted to geographical or grid co-ordinates as required. Mr. Randall commented on the gazetteer of undersea features published by the International Hydrographic Organization (see para.39).

51. With reference to Working Paper No.6, Mr. Raper reported on progress in automation of toponymic data in South Africa. Orthographical rules for some African languages had been changed and this had put a temporary halt to the gazetteer programme, but when completed the gazetteer would include about 4,000 names, with the latest approved names indicated by an asterisk. Geographical co-ordinates would be provided for physical features only; it was possible that the US Board on Geographic Names might co-operate in the provision of co-ordinates for cultural features.

52. Mr. Wang reported that the new multi-volume gazetteer of China, of which the volumes for Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces had already been published, contained a wealth of textual information. Standardized names, local variants and former names were included, with location indicated by geographical

co-ordinates for administrative centres and by directional information from the county seat for other places. Also included was information on the origin and evolution of the names, plus the name-changes which had occurred through time.

53. Mr. _____ called for the standardization of feature designation codes; this would facilitate map compilation internationally.

54. Many views were expressed on the degree of accuracy to which positional information in gazetteers should be provided in gazetteers or stored in databases. China and some Latin American countries preferred a directional reference in relation to the nearest administrative centre. The session agreed that, whatever additional information might be provided, geographical co-ordinates should be included at the very least. Often, the accuracy of these co-ordinates depended on the scale and reliability of the sources used to determine them. It was important that users be given an indication of the accuracy of positional references. In gazetteers designed specifically for use with gridded maps, the inclusion of grid co-ordinates was clearly desirable, as in the Netherlands gazetteer based on the 1:50,000 map series M.733.

55. The session also recommended use of a feature designation in a gazetteer. Mr. Lewis felt that if these were to be coded there should not be too great a number of them, but several experts considered that a substantial number was necessary. Mr. Payne reported that over 1,700 different kinds of feature, grouped into 63 broad categories, had been identified in U.S. domestic names, though these were not coded. Ms. Kerfoot reported that there were approximately 1,500 initial designations, which had been reduced to about 30 broad categories for the National Toponymic Database. Mr. Böhme reported that the Gazetteer of the Federal Republic of Germany, keyed to the 1:500,000 map series, contained about 20 codes, which Mr. Randall reported was also roughly the quantity anticipated for the PAIGH gazetteers (see para.49). Mr. Kadmon mentioned that the Gazetteer of Israel had 15 designations. Administrative information and a remarks column were also felt to be desirable elements of a gazetteer.

56. Mr. Sievers reported that a first supplement to the first edition of the "Digital Name Database Antarctic" had been edited (see Working Paper No.52). This Federal Republic of Germany database contained 675 German language place names in the Antarctic. The names had all been approved by that country's Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

WORKING GROUP ON COURSE IN APPLIED TOPONYMY

57. Mr. Dorion, convenor of the working group, emphasized the importance of training course in the UNGEGN programme and outlined the aspects associated with the preparation for, and evaluation of, such courses. He identified a complementary inventory of resources and needs: after communication with various universities, resources were found to be limited, but it was proposed that the American Names Society contribute to the task of identifying further courses available worldwide. Mr. Dorion spoke too of the necessity of having a flexible syllabus in order to adapt to the needs of the region in which the course is held. The working group would deal with the drawing up of such a syllabus, and would provide practical help for future courses.

58. Mr. Randall mentioned the idea of a mobile training team, and reminded the group that the issue of names standardization was paramount, an opinion endorsed by Mr. Lewis. Mr. Lapierre advocated a balance between applied toponymy and cultural aspects, and drew attention to working paper 41. Mr. Wang spoke of a training course which would take place in China later in the year, and which would include such aspects as the romanization of names and the standardization of names in Chinese and minority areas. He also spoke of the establishment of a geography course in Nanjing University which would cover, among other topics, the contemporary history of China and the world, the study of the history of names and automated data processing.

59. Mr. Dorion confirmed that the United Nations would indeed send a letter to South East Asian students as a way of introducing the imminent course here, and that an UNGEGN-approved diploma would be offered to students on completion of the course. Mr. Njuki repeated his country's willingness to host a training course, depending on United Nations financial assistance, and asked if a date for such a course could be decided on.

60. Mr. Kadmon, supported by Mr. Lewis, reminded the Group of the expertise available in smaller countries for training courses, while Mr. Tazi suggested contacting ALECSO, as an organization which may offer relevant advice and experience. Mr. Randall spoke of the syllabus used at the PAIGH training course and reiterated the need to retain flexibility and practicality. Mr. de Henseler confirmed that the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development had, and does, fund training courses.

61. Two aspects of toponymic training were identified by Mr. Raper: the training course held in various countries, and the encouragement of tertiary level training in such countries. Mr. Raper stated that a tertiary academy had been established in South Africa.

62. The question of the cultural role of geographical names was discussed, with Mr. Vallières speaking of the training course in Quebec and of his belief that the cultural aspect encourages interest in names. Mr. Randall, supported by Mr. Lewis, believed that resolution 6 of the Fifth United Nations Conference emphasized standardization and practical aspects of geographical names, and that this line of emphasis should be adhered to.

WORKING GROUP ON A SINGLE ROMANIZATION SYSTEM

63. The convenor of the working group, Mr. Quinting, introduced his report (Working Paper No.35). Two new romanization systems had been adopted at the Fifth Conference in 1987 (for Russian, resolution 18 and Greek, resolution 19) and a further resolution (20) concerned Korea. It was important to know the extent of implementation of the Greek and Russian systems within the donor countries themselves, and also whether receiver countries had encountered any difficulties in their implementation.

64. There was general discussion on the relevance of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). It was agreed that IPA was a useful guide to pronunciation, but that as an alphabet specifically designed to reflect the spoken form of words it fell outside the scope of the working group, whose concern was with romanization systems for the written forms of names. Written forms of names could be standardized, whereas their pronunciation could not. Mr. Quinting pointed out that there would be a convention later in 1989 which would consider a possible revision of IPA.

Greek

65. Mr. Kofos reported that application of the ELOT system in Greece was proceeding satisfactorily. Hydrographic charts used the system, and the government had recently instructed that it be used on all new road signs. The publication of new 1:50,000 scale map sheets using ELOT was currently pending, awaiting the establishment of a committee of experts to turn Katharerousa forms of names into dimotiki. This work was currently the responsibility of local authorities and a parliamentary act was required to transfer this responsibility to the committee. It was hoped that the required act would be passed later in 1989. Whereupon the determination of dimotiki forms would be expedited.

66. For Cyprus, Mr. Kotsonis reported that the Fifth Conference resolution concerning ELOT had been implemented on all official maps and charts, as well as in the "Concise Gazetteer of Cyprus" and the "Complete Gazetteer of Cyprus". Several projects were under way in Cyprus, including the compilation of a glossary of 820 generic terms in dinotiki form, and a collection of street names in ELOT romanization for use by the postal service.

Korean

67. Mr. Quinting pointed out that three systems for the romanization of Korean currently existed. These were the McCune-Reischauer system, devised in 1939 and widely used, the revised Ministry of Education (MOE) system favoured by the Republic of Korea, and a newsystem proposed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at this session in Working Papers 2 and 40.

68. Mr. _____ informed the session that this new system proposed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was based on transliteration rather than transcription, and reflected the structure and characteristics of the Korean language. It was an appropriate and logical system for geographical names.

69. Mr. Lewis noted that this system and the new MOE system were based on different concepts. He appreciated the advantages of reversibility and letter-for-letter reading in the system proposed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but felt that it was difficult to ignore the question of pronunciation. He hoped it might prove possible for the two countries to collaborate in devising one agreed system for Korean, and suggested that the Group of Experts might be involved in any such discussions. Mr. _____ felt this to be a useful and constructive proposal, and expressed his country's willingness to discuss the matter with experts from the Republic of Korea. Mr. Park expressed his pleasure at the proposal, and reported that the Government of the Republic of Korea would arrange a meeting between the two countries on this subject as soon as possible. It was generally agreed that a uniform romanization system would be of benefit to all concerned.

Russian

70. Mr. Dmitrocenkov reported that the GOST 1983 romanization system had been used for geographical names in all USSR publications since the Fifth Conference in 1987. It was also being used in the compilation of a new edition of the world atlas "Atlas Mira", where both the atlas plates and the index would show GOST 1983 romanizations. The system was used for all Russian geographical names, including those outside the USSR, for example in Antarctica where 60 maps at the scale of 1:200,000 had been produced. Mr. Dmitrocenkov reported the possibility that the GOST 1983 system might eventually have an application wider than the field of geographical names, but that at the moment other systems were in use in other contexts. Mr. Haack reported that the first five sheets of the second edition of the world map "Karta Mira" at the scale of 1:2,500,000, published by the German Democratic Republic and covering parts of the USSR, also used the GOST 1983 system.

Languages of the India Division

71. It was reported that a revised version of the Hunterian system to render Urdu names in Pakistan would be presented to the next session. Mr. Lewis expressed the hope that any modifications would not result in different romanizations of Urdu names from those arrived at in India. For India, Mr.°Lakshman reported on the complexity of a country with fifteen official languages (see para. 29).

Arabic

72 The Vice-Chairman informed the session of the progress made in recent years in the countries of the Arabic Division towards agreement on a single romanization system. It had been decided to adopt, throughout the division, the amended Beirut system which was approved by resolution 8 of the Second Conference. The romanization of one letter in that system, however, remained a problem and an alternative romanization for it was being sought. The session warmly welcomed this decision of the Arabic division.

Thai

73. Mr. Chingchai reported that application of resolution 14 of the First Conference, calling for the adoption of the modified general system of the Royal Institute of Thailand, had caused certain increasing problems. Although widely used on maps, this romanization system was not well suited to computer technology and needed improvement and revision. In 1985, a committee was established to undertake this revision. A new version was submitted to the 1987 Conference of the International Standardization Organization (ISO), but was rejected by that body because it was not fully reversible. Since then, further modifications had been made and it was hoped that the Group of Experts would make comments on this revised system when it was submitted.