

GEOGRAPHIC NAMES IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Prepared by Dr. Saif S. Al-Qaydi
Unit of Government, Policies and Urban Studies
College of Humanities and Social Science
UAE University

Introduction:

The history of geographical names in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) dated back to the pre-Islamic era. At the end of the 1800s J.J. Lorimar visited the area and listed several geographic names in the country and gathered some data about people, farms and animals of this land.

The UAE is a federation of seven emirates; Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. Abu Dhabi is the name of the Emirate as well as the city which is the federal capital. The UAE covers approx 83,000 square kilometer with a total population of 3,7 million.

Background:

The majority of people in the UAE reside in three major cities: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. As a result of expanding of these cities, and the increase demand on data and geographical names, geographical information systems become one of the major tools used in most planning department in the UAE. In recent years, most of local municipalities in the UAE Federation utilize laboratory equipment with the latest technology for the purpose of mapping production. Most of these laboratories used for adding and removing as well as creating new geographical names without consulting or obtaining permission from the Federal agencies.

It's worth noting that each Emirate has its own local municipality which deals with its geographical names. In some Emirates, there are town planning departments in charge of developing maps as well as geographical names. Those two entities are working to develop names pertaining to roads, industrial zones, farmlands, residential, and

commercial areas. Each municipality has the right to add and remove any geographical names without referring to any party. In some cases, the local municipality announces some of these changes, and adds them to the road signs. Some town planning departments establish special committees to deal with some changed names. Most of the members of these committees are old people from the same area.

Geographical Names Activities

There were some attempts to gather data about the geographical names in the country. These efforts came from the UAE University and other agencies. At the beginning of the 1990s the UAE University project was one of pioneer attempt to establish a unit to structure the geographic names in the whole UAE lands. The committee has had the chance to count more than 7000 geographic names, out of more than approx 35,000 names, after dividing the country into several geographical regions. The process of gathering materials about the geographical names required designing special forms to help in collecting the data. By the end of 1999s the unit completed a small data project on Al-Ain Region as a sample. Then, special teams were assigned to collect data from other regions in the UAE. However, this process has been postponed as a result of the limited resources.

On year 2002, the UAE Army Force (Survey) called for a national meeting for all parties in charge of geographical structuring to discuss the future projects on this mater. More than 60 representatives including UAE University committee attended this meeting in Abu Dhabi. This meeting resulted on appointing a new committee, where its member represented UAE University, UAE Army (Survey), Ministry of Information as well as other agencies. This committee met in year 2003 and set its goals and objectives as well as proposed a budget for this national project. The meeting concluded with some suggestions to be submitted to the UAE Cabinet for approval.

Main Agencies Working On Geographical Names in the UAE

There are several agencies working on the definition of geographical names in the UAE. The main agencies are the UAE Army Force (Survey), local municipalities and town planning in major UAE cities (table below). Most geographical names are retrieved from old maps and most of these names are referring to places or people of the UAE. As a result, more cooperation between these agencies is needed to

organize adding and removing the geographical names in the country. Also, there must be certain rules in constructing these names and some restrictions should be applied in terms of spelling or publication of these names. Most of these agencies lack clear standards in documenting these names (e.g., using transliteration and the right spelling for each name).

Main Agencies Working On Constructing Of Geographical Names In The UAE In 2004

Emirate	Municipality	Town Planning
Abu Dhabi	v	v
Dubai	v	
Sharjah	v	v
Ajman	v	
Umm al-Qaiwain	v	
Ras al-Khaimah	v	v
Fujairah	v	
Al-Ain	v	v

Conclusion

As a result of the world recent developments in general and the UAE in particular on all aspects of life e.g. economic, politic and social life. Geographical names became a demanding issue in the UAE. It is strongly recommended that the UAE government establish a national authority on geographical names in order to coordinate between the different agencies and to deal with standardization of geographical names in the whole country.