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TOPONYMIC EDUCATION AND PRACTICE: TRAINING
COURSES IN TOPONYMY

Report of the Working Group on Toponymy Courses
1992 - 1997

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names (UNGEGN)**

Report of the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymy Courses 1992-1997

1. Introduction

In order to overcome the lack of qualified personnel in member countries, UNGEGN stimulates the organisation of training courses. The general model of such courses is a one- or two week programme of lectures, alternated by execises and fieldwork, on names collecting, office editing, names representation on maps, and the production of gazetteers. New digital techniques are introduced into these courses. An important aspect of these courses is also to refer participants to the emerging literature on the subject. Generally, the following course objectives are discerned:

1. Help to create an awareness of geographical names problems
2. Help to set up national names authorities
3. Teach data collection techniques (fieldwork included)
4. Teach data processing techniques
5. Show applications of geographical names files

As not everyone will be able to participate in such courses, because these are held far and wide apart, increasing attention is paid to the provision of educational material on the internet.

2. Composition of the Working Group

During the period 1992-1997 the Working Goup on Toponymy Courses was composed of the following persons:

Mr H.Dorion
Mr N.Kadmon
Ms H.Kerfoot
Mr F.J.Ormeling (convenor)
Mr R.Payne
Mr P.Raper

3. Toponymy courses held

In between the 6th and 7th UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names the following international toponymy courses were held (this listing is based on an inventory made in November 1997:

La Paz, Bolivia (1997) Ninth PAIGH Course in Applied Toponymy, sponsored by the Pan American Institute for Geography and History (PAIGH) and organised by experts from the United States, held at the Instituto Geografico Nacional in La Paz, Bolivia.

Pretoria (1997) Fifth United Nations Training Course on Geographical Names, held in Pretoria, South Africa, organised by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, the Names Research Institute of South Africa, and the Department of Geography, University of Pretoria.

Riga (1997): International Training Course in Toponymy of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, sponsored by the State Land Service of Latvia and organized by the State Land Service, the Scientific Laboratory of Regional Geography and Toponymy at the University of Latvia, the State Language Centre, the Institute of Latvian Language and the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, in Riga, Latvia, April 22-24 1997.

Pretoria (1996) Fourth UN Training Course in Geographical Names, held in Pretoria, South Africa, organized by Department of Geography, University of Pretoria, Topocadastral Information Service, City Council of Pretoria and UNGEGN.

Asuncion (1996) Eighth Course in Applied Toponymy, sponsored by the Pan American Institute for Geography and History (PAIGH) and organised by experts from the United States, held in Asuncion, Paraguay.

Pretoria (1995): Third United Nations Advanced Training Course in Geographical Names, sponsored by UNGEGN, organized by Dr P.E.Raper and Dr L.Möller in Pretoria, South Africa

Lima (1995) Seventh PAIGH Course in Applied Toponymy, sponsored by the Pan American Institute for Geography and History (PAIGH) and organised by experts from the United States and Honduras, held at the Instituto Geografico Nacional in Lima, Peru.

Wellington (1994): New Zealand Geographic Names Workshop, sponsored by Department of Survey and Land Information and organised by George Benwell of Otago University

Pretoria (1993): Second United Nations Training Course in Toponymy, sponsored by UNGEGN and organised by Human Sciences Research Council

Tegucicalpa (1993) Sixth PAIGH Course in Applied Toponymy, in Honduras

4. Toponymy Course organisation model

In order to stimulate the organisation of succesful toponymy courses, a general model for the organisation of toponymy courses is offered hereby. It could consist of the following steps:
a) Interest UNGEGN Divisions, other UN affiliates, national governments or the World Bank in sponsoring regional toponymy courses, by helping to provide airfares and daily allowances for lecturers and participants
b) Select the proper accomodation, with lecture rooms and rooms for exercises and PC's and for a map exhibition.
c) Devise a suitable course programme (see section 5)
d) Invite a lecture team (either or not through the convenor of the working group of toponymy courses, who might be able to help). The practice to invite a small team of UNGEGN experts and to add local experts aware of local conditions has proved itself to be useful and relatively inexpensive.
e) Send out invitations to all countries near the location where the course is to be held, and well in advance, so that potential participants have ample time to put in claims for travel grants
f) Prepare the fieldwork long in advance, by collecting relevant cartographic material and by contacting potential local informants
g) Announce the course and the fieldwork also in the local press, so that local inhabitants will not consider the course participants to be tax collectors!
h) Make full use of the training documents made available to UNGEGN.
i) Prepare the proceedings of the course well in advance, so that participants can profit maximally from the lectures
j) Try to have an excursion to a mapping establishment, so that the course participants can witness the actual processing of names
k) Prepare an exhibition of relevant maps and gazetteers
l) Let representatives of all countries participating report on the specific problems they are confronted with in standardizing their names
m) Send out a report on the course to all participants afterwards.

5. Toponymy Course programme model

In order to prepare a programme for a toponymy course for the Southeast Asia-Pacific division, the models adhered to for the courses organised by PAIGH and by UNGEGN were combined by Messrs Payne and Ormeling. This combined model is considered to be best for confronting current educational needs, and it is therefore presented here.

Programme model:

Monday:
-Opening, welcome
-Functions of geographical names
-Social and economic benefit of standardization
-UN activities in geographical names standardization
-National standardization
-Implementation of UN recommendations
-Setting up a national names authority (membership, staff)

Tuesday:
-Establishing standardization principles
-International agreements
-Policies and rules for uniform decisions
-Specific national, regional and local requirements
-Standardization implementation
-Procedures, methodologies and guidelines

Wednesday:
-Techniques of toponymic fieldwork
-Coordinate systems and projections
-Linguistic problems in the fieldwork area
-Description of the fieldwork area
-Cultural aspects of fieldwork area inhabitants
-Preparation of interview questions

Thursday:
-Departure for fieldwork area
-Overview of fieldwork area
-Interviews

Friday:
Interviews (cont.)

Saturday:
-Office analysis and data processing (manual)

Sunday:
-Excursion with local maps

Monday-
-Computer-assisted processing
-Terminology
-Hardware and software
-Database management systems
-Office processing: data verification
-Office processing: data loading

Tuesday:
-Data retrieval requirements and techniques
-Maintenance problems

Wednesday:
-Automated processing workshop
-Formatting reports

Thursday:
-Minority names
-Name placement on maps
-Toponymical guidelines
-Name placement exercise
-Toponymical needs for private industry
-Toponymical evaluation of the school atlases in the area

Friday:
-Exonyms
-Writing systems
-Names availability on the internet
-Cooperation within the region
-Course evaluation
-Handing out of certificates, Closing ceremony

6. Teaching material developed

A list of training material is already available at the Geonames Canada Website (http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/english/publications.html), and also at the Toponymy courses site (http://nvkserver.frw.ruu.nl/nvk/toponymycourses.html)

At the Toponymy courses site the contents of all the toponymy training courses material available at the convenor's is listed. This material consists of proceedings from courses held in Cisarua (1982), Québec (1988), Cipanas (1989), Pretoria (1992, 1993, 1995 and, shortly, 1997), and Wellington (1994). For the PAIGH courses training material in both English and Spanish exists.

7. Toponymy Courses website

For the time being, the toponymy courses site constructed by the convenor of the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymy Courses is housed at the following address at Utrecht University: http://nvkserver.frw.ruu.nl/nvk/toponymycourses.html
It is hoped, however, that in future the site will be taken over by the UNGEGN secretariat, so that there will some official seal on the information provided. This should be discussed during the 7th conference.

The site has the following structure (and it is possible to select directly one of the following fields):
    Future toponymy courses
    Past toponymy courses
    Teaching material available, used for past toponymy courses
    Other relevant teaching material
    UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymy Courses
    United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)
    Other Interesting Sites