
United Nations
Group of Experts on
Geographical Names

Working Paper
No. 51

Seventeenth Session
New York, 13-24 June 1994

Item 8
of the Provisional Agenda

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
COURSES, SEMINARS AND PRACTICAL TRAINING IN TOPONYMY

Report of the Convenor of the Working Group on Courses,
Seminars and Practical Training in Toponymy
for the period 1992 - 1994

Report of the Convenor of the Working Group on Toponymy Courses 1992-1994

1. 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 two-week programme of lectures, alternated by exercises and fieldwork, on names collecting, office editing, names representation on maps and the production of gazetteers. New digital techniques are introduced in these courses, at least nine of which have been held since 1982, sponsored by either UNGEGN or PAIGH (Pan American Institute of Geography and History).

2. An important aspect of the courses has been to refer participants to the emerging literature on the subject; it is with regret that the convenor has experienced the limited availability and accessibility of toponymy course proceedings until recently. This trend seems to be offset by the recent availability of commercial editions of course proceedings and, in the near future, toponymy manuals.

In this respect the convenor can also refer to the Basic Cartography Manual series, published by the International Cartographic Association, in which a toponymy chapter will be incorporated as well.

3. Since the 6th UN conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, at least one UNGEGN-sponsored toponymy course has been effectuated, organized by UNGEGN chairman Dr P.E.Raper, for the Africa South Division. This was held from September 20 - October 1, 1993, in Pretoria, South Africa, at the Department of National Education.

4. As it is the convenor's task to stimulate the organisation of successful toponymy courses, a general model for the organisation of toponymy courses is offered hereby. It should consist of the following steps:

a) Interest UNGEGN, 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 accommodation, with lecture rooms and rooms for exercises and PC's and for a map exhibition. Preferably, the course participants should be housed in the same hotel or guesthouse, in order to stimulate contacts. This will lead to an awareness of each other's professional problems.

c) Devise a lecture programme in which at least these items should be incorporated:

- use and importance of geographical names
- explanation of toponymic terminology
- special aspect of the languages used in the area
- use of maps and coordinates
- fieldwork procedures for name collecting
- fieldwork exercise
- names processing
- aims and procedures of names standardization
- production of names lists and gazetteers
- treatment of minority names
- organisational aspects - national names authorities
- financial aspects
- names placement in maps
- toponymic guidelines

-toponymic databases and their use.

- d) Invite, either or not through the UNGEGN convenor for toponymy courses, a lecture team. The practice to invite a small team of UNGEGN experts, and to add local experts, aware of local conditions (languages, cartographic procedures and organisations) and requirements proved to be the most useful and least expensive solution, which could be arranged at relatively short notice. See to it that the lecturers are aware of each other's topics, so that overlap is avoided as much as possible.
- e) Send official invitations to all other countries in the UNGEGN region well in advance, so that potential participants can put claims to their department's travel budget in time.
- f) Prepare the fieldwork long in advance. Collect relevant cartographic material (such as blind maps), contact local chiefs/administrators well in advance, make appointments with local informers. This important aspect of the training should provide course participants with a good idea of the actual procedures.
- g) Announce the course and the fieldwork also in the local press, so that local inhabitants will be aware of the aim of the course and its participants.
- h) Make full use of the document kit (manual, literature, brochures) made available by Canada.
- i) Organise an exhibition consisting of relevant maps, gazetteers etc.
- j) Prepare the Proceedings of the toponymy seminar/course/workshop well in advance, so that participants can profit maximally from the lectures, and those that do not take all modules still can get an idea of the whole subject.
- k) Try to organize the appropriate technical infrastructure for the course with a number of PC's for hands-on experience with toponymic databases, xeroxing equipment, etc.
- l) Try to organize an excursion to a mapping establishment where names are actually processed and incorporated on maps or into geographical information systems.
- m) Let representatives of each country report on the specific problems they are confronted with in standardizing their geographical names.
- n) Sent a report on the course to all participants afterwards.