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Geographical Names

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Item 18
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TOWARDS THE SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

ITEMS FROM THE EVALUATION OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

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ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD FROM THE EVALUATION OF THE SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

At the close of the Sixth Conference in New York evaluation forms were circulated to delegates. Twenty five individuals (from 23 states) chose to complete these forms and so provide valuable feedback for future conferences and for UNGEGN's planning role.

The most useful aspects of the Sixth Conference were summarized as:

The opportunity to come together to make personal contacts; to exchange ideas, experience and documentation; and to increase awareness of innovations, progress and problems of various member states.

What could be improved?

The commonly expressed thoughts on what could be improved were presented for general information purposes at the Seventeenth Session of UNGEGN in 1994 (Working Paper No 34). Some of the points applicable for planning the Seventh Conference for 1997 are noted below.

1. Documentation

The improved participation and general benefit of having documentation for review before the conference (or at least before the session) was emphasized.

- (a) If possible, documents should be circulated several weeks ahead of time (possibly through national names authorities).
- (b) Documents that become available at the Conference itself should be distributed as early as possible.

2. Agenda, presentations, and discussions

Several respondents commented about the excessive length of oral presentations of various national reports. As a result, insufficient time was available for discussion of important items of common interest.

- (a) Oral presentations (particularly of national reports should be shortened. Summaries should be circulated and used for presentation purposes.
- (b) More time should be available for discussion, with concentration on core issues.
- (c) Less time should be spent on organizational and administrative matters, and on items of political involvement.
- (d) Participants from all member states should have the opportunity to discuss issues, without the domination of any particular group or individuals, and with democratic decision-making processes.

(e) Resolutions should be developed before or during the Conference, rather than at the last minute; less time should be spent by the whole Conference on exact wording of resolutions.

3. Working group and divisional meetings

Participants would like scheduled time for working groups, divisions and particular interest groups to convene.

(a) More time should be scheduled for various committees and interest groups to meet within scheduled sessions.

(b) A committee addressing legal aspects of legislation for geographical names would be welcomed.

4. Organizational issues

The smooth running of the Conference should be encouraged.

(a) Continuity of participation should be emphasized, and states that were formerly active should be encouraged.

(b) More contacts should be made with other organizations, and their participation encouraged on equal terms.

(c) The working procedures of the Conference should be reviewed; rules of procedures should be better known.

(d) Mini-training sessions would be useful for those chairing sessions.

(e) Hours of work should be lengthened, breaks should be more frequent. Less repetition of ideas could lead to a shorter Conference.

(f) More organized extra-curricula activities, including the possibility of local field work, would be appreciated.

5. Funding

(a) More commitment should be made by the United Nations to provide funds to states needing assistance to participate.

(b) Guidelines should be made available to participants on procedures for seeking training funds through the United Nations.

Are we meeting the goals seen as most important by those who responded?

- To encourage national and international standardization of geographical names (practical rather than academic)

- To encourage the sharing and exchange of ideas, documents and techniques; and to promote sensitive approaches to the resolution of geographical names questions
- To encourage international cooperation
- To reduce exonyms
- To encourage the development of standardized Romanization systems

Are we responding to the most important tasks identified by respondents?

- Particularly at the divisional level
 - identify needs and provide support/training, and assistance in the development of infrastructures for national standardization
 - promote implementation of Conference resolutions
- Particularly at the UNGEGN level
 - assure the availability of a handbook, a glossary of terminology, and a collection of toponymic guidelines
 - promote cooperation between linguistic/geographical divisions
 - encourage a complete suite of single Romanization systems for writing systems of the world
 - disseminate documents to all member states
- Particularly at the member state level
 - increase government awareness of the importance of geographical names standardization and promote its benefits