



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC  
AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.  
LIMITED

E/CONF.53/L.35  
15 August 1967  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

---

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON  
THE STANDARDIZATION OF  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
Geneva, 4-22 September 1967  
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

REPORTS BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Submitted by the Government of Spain

SUPERIOR GEOGRAPHICAL COUNCIL  
COMMISSION ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN SPAIN

The Commission on Geographical Names carries out its work each year on the basis of the cartographic work plans which are co-ordinated and prepared by the Superior Geographical Council (see appendix I). Independently of these plans, it deals on a current basis with the problems relating to the standardization of geographical names which arise in all regions, and for this purpose it seeks information from the various local and provincial technical agencies as a basis for its studies and eventual decisions. The standardization of Spanish geographical names is affected by certain peculiarities resulting from the survival of Iberian roots and the later incorporation of the classical designations of the West and the East. It is therefore not surprising that, in addition to a learned and even conventional form of a place name, there will exist two or more other names which are well known locally and have a considerable cultural tradition, even though in official usage they survive only as the designation of the inhabitants of the locality. The following are some examples in this regard taken from the Diccionario Ideológico de la Lengua Española (second edition, 1966):

<u>Place name</u>	<u>Name of inhabitants</u>
Alcalá de Henares (Madrid)	alcalahino, complutense
Mérida (Badajoz)	emeritense, merideño
Sevilla	sevillano, hispalense, itálico
Toledo	toledano, carpetano
León	leonés, legionense
Lérida	leridano, ilerdense
Zaragoza	zaragozano, cesaraugustano, saldubense <sup>1/</sup>

<sup>1/</sup> Although this form is not recorded in the Diccionario, it does exist.

The same situation exists with regard to some of the more important orographic systems, although in this case the historical designations have more easily been supplanted through the introduction of a more rational terminology and as a result of the less developed state of general research on the geographical aspects of Spanish regionalism in so far as mountains are concerned. We thus have, for example: Sistema Central (Carpeto-vetónico); Cordillera Cantábrica (Galibéricos, Cantábricos and Astúricos); Sierra Morena (Mariánica); and Montes de Toledo (Oretana). Among the important rivers, the archaic designation has been retained in popular usage only in the case of the Guadalquivir (Betis < Baetis), although among the specialists and in official usage this name is used to refer to the river basin as a whole because of the geological and orogenic importance of the ancient depression which linked the Mediterranean Sea with the Ocean. A more rational geographical terminology also applies to the regional divisions, since today the two main subdivisions of the Spanish meseta are designated as North and South instead of the former Castilla la Vieja and Castilla la Nueva. There is, however, within the government administration a regional revisionist trend towards a better accommodation between natural resources and social and economic development.

In so far as the less important geographical names are concerned, the adoption of a single standard has given way to practical considerations. Thus, the existence of dialects has made it necessary, especially for postal purposes, to accept duplicate spellings or duplicate versions for some of the smaller localities. This has been due to a reluctance to accept the rules of spelling and grammar and adapt them to the prevailing regional dialects. To take an example, the entries under the letter "A" in the Spanish postal directory (Diccionario Geográfico Postal de España) include variant spellings for forty-eight localities (see appendix II). It is likely, however, that increasing contacts with the rest of the country and the influence of publicity media will lead to a decline, in the villages, of the forms rooted in oral tradition and their replacement by the forms based on standard usage. This will not, on the other hand, be true of forms corresponding to the dominant dialect, for these will most logically survive and come to be accepted as authentically reflecting the prevailing vernacular situation.

Although there would be little point in reporting on everything that is being done in Spain with regard to geographical terminology, both national and international, a tribute must be paid to the many philologists and specialists who have aided our research and whose efforts will make possible the publication of such important works as the Enciclopedia Lingüística Hispánica of the CSIC (volume I published in 1960), in which seven specialists take up the most important aspects of toponymy in the pre-Roman, Phoenician, Punic, Latin, Germanic, Arab and reconquest periods. Such studies will encourage a resurgence of geographical research in fields of toponymy, especially in conjunction with such works as the great history of Spain which is being co-ordinated and directed by that outstanding personality Menéndez Pidal, the linguistic atlases and the etymological and dialect dictionaries (see appendix III), the quality of which is being constantly improved.

The increased attention and interest being accorded to geographical names are further reflected in the 1960 gazetteer<sup>1/</sup> of the National Institute of Statistics and in recently issued maps and cartographic publications. The tasks still before the Commission on Geographical Names are none the less enormous. They include the dissemination of the prescribed standards, the introduction of modern study, research and data compilation techniques, and the exchange of experience both within the continental area and with adjacent zones.

Our efforts within the Superior Geographical Council will in the meantime continue to be directed towards improving and bringing up to date the standardization of geographical names, especially in cartographic documents. This work will be carried out both in the office and in the field, and its ultimate aim will be to achieve the accuracy and precision compatible with the historical background of the names.

-----

---

<sup>1/</sup> Published at Madrid in 1963.