

**Twenty-eight session  
28 April – 2 May 2014**

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**Item 18 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Other toponymic issues**

**The Standardization of Geographical Names in Brazil:  
Some Challenges and Accomplishments \***

Submitted by Brazil

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28<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nation Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Item 18 of the Provisional agenda – Other toponymic issues

Recommendations B, C and E, of resolution 4, of the First United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names

PAPER SUBMITTED BY BRAZIL

### **The Standardization of Geographical Names in Brazil: Some Challenges and Accomplishments**

#### Summary

The paper provides a description of the main technical difficulties faced by the Reference Center on Geographic Names (CRNG) of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in the standardization of the set of the Brazilian geographical names and the efforts towards standardization made so far.

The paper describes problems caused by the frequent alterations in spelling rules, discrepancies between the local use of some geographical names and the legislation which creates the feature, and the impossibility of obtaining the original text of the legislation or a reliable copy of it.

Among the progresses made towards standardization, the creation of the Reference Center on Geographic Names of the Coordination of Cartography of the IBGE and the creation of a Geographical Names Committee, in an attempt to establish of the Brazilian geographical names authority are mentioned, as well as the development of the Geographic Names Database of Brazil and of specific methodology for collection and office treatment of geographical names.

Paper prepared by Ana Cristina da Rocha Bérenger Resende, Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

## **The Standardization of Geographical Names in Brazil: Some Challenges and Accomplishments**

The aim of this paper is to briefly present the main technical difficulties faced by the Reference Center on Geographic Names (CRNG) of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in the standardization of the set of the Brazilian geographical names and the efforts towards standardization made so far.

As recommended by the UNGEGN in recommendations B and C of resolution 4 of the First United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, the standardization of geographical names should be based on local usage of the name, avoid the use of more than one name for one feature, and consider that the spelling of geographical names be as much as possible in accordance with the current orthographic practice of the country.

However, in our efforts towards standardization, we face technical problems to combine these basic principles. The numerous and frequent alterations in the spelling rules, the existence of discrepancies between the local use of some geographical names and the legislation which creates the feature, and the impossibility of obtaining the original text of the legislation or a reliable copy of it are some of the most common difficulties encountered.

The alterations in spelling rules often cause the population and even governmental organizations to use different spellings for the same name.

An example of this is the name of a river, *Rio Uraricoera*. According to the current spelling rules, the correct form would be “*Rio Urariquera*”, a form which is actually sometimes used to refer to this river. However, only the first one was established as the official form by the CRNG due to its traditional use.

This problem affects not only names of natural features, which are not regulated by law in Brazil, but also the names of features created by legislation, especially concerning names of localities.

The laws which create features such as municipalities are not updated to the most recent spelling rule, so some people use the original spelling which is in the law and others write the name according to the new spelling rule.

The name “Granjeiro” is spelled “Grangeiro” in the text of the law which creates this city. This spelling was correct according to the spelling rules at the time the city was created. However, these rules changed and the correct spelling is now “Granjeiro”. The text in the law was not updated and the two forms are widely used by both the people and the government. The CRNG has not yet been able to establish an official form.



ESTADO DO CEARÁ

MUNICÍPIO DE GRANGEIRO					
RELATÓRIO RESUMIDO DA EXECUÇÃO ORÇAMENTÁRIA					
BALANÇO ORÇAMENTÁRIO					
ORÇAMENTO DA SEGURIDADE SOCIAL					
JANEIRO A JUNHO DE 2002/BIMESTRE MAIO-JUNHO					
Art 52º da Lei complementar N. 101/00 (LRF)					
					Valores em R\$
ÓRGÃO	CRÉDITO ORÇ E SUPLENTE	DESPESAS EMPENHADAS	DESPESAS PAGAS	DESPESAS EMP A PAGAR	SALDO DOTAÇÕES
CAMARA MUNICIPAL DE GRANGEIRO	210.000,00	129.334,47	91.720,94	37.813,23	80.665,83
GABINETE DO PREFEITO	134.000,00	111.797,72	83.245,23	28.552,49	22.202,28
PROCURADORIA GERAL DO MUNICÍPIO	14.000,00	6.880,00	5.160,00	1.720,00	7.120,00
SECRETARIA DE PLANEJ DE					



Besides, the changes in spelling rules hardly ever take into account the possible change in the meaning of names of indigenous origins, which do not originally have written form, and were written according to transcription systems created long ago by the linguists who studied them. Any change in spelling may interfere with these systems and affect the understanding of the meaning of the name. This often causes reactions of the population towards the reestablishment of the traditional and meaningful spelling, generating public consultations, lawsuits and general confusion.

Ex. A significant example is the city of Paraty, in the State of Rio de Janeiro. Originally spelled *with* “y”, after a change in spelling rules which banned this letter from the set of letters used in Brazilian Portuguese, the city’s name started to be written “*Parati*”. The people in the city reacted to this, since this change in form altered the meaning of the indigenous expression which originated the name of the city, “*parati’y*”, which meant “river full of *paratis* (kind of fish)”. In spite of not being in accordance with the spelling rules at that time, the original spelling was restored after a lawsuit. Before the original spelling was restored, the two forms coexisted.



Although most grammarians agree that the spelling of geographical names should follow tradition rather than the current spelling rule, these frequent changes are a continuous source of confusion and a great challenge to the task of standardization of geographical names.

Another source of undesirable variations in the use of geographical names are the alterations of names which were dear to the population by legal acts not endorsed by the people. The population resists using the new name, which causes a discrepancy between the legal use of the name and its use by the people.

There are even cases in which the name supported by the population is restored by a law issued by a non-competent governmental department, and therefore cannot be accepted as the official/legal name by the federal government.

The city in the State of Rio Grande do Norte whose official name is Januário Cicco is called “Boa Saúde” by its inhabitants and local government. Originally called “Boa Saúde” after *Nossa Senhora da Boa Saúde* (Our Lady of Health), the city is, by state law, “Januário Cicco”, a name imposed by local political authorities at the time of its recognition as a city. Now that these authorities are no longer in office, the present local government decided to restore the original name, supported by the people, and issued a local law changing the city’s name. However, only state governments have the power to officially make toponymic alterations. Thus, the IBGE cannot recognize the alteration.

Still concerning geographical names of features created by legal acts, it is sometimes impossible to obtain the law of creation of or a reliable copy of its text so as to proceed the standardization of the name according to it. In addition to this problem, there are also cases in which the geographical name in question is written with two or more different spellings in the text of the law itself, as seen below.

*Pitimbu - PB*

LEI Nº 2.671 DE 22 DE DEZEMBRO DE 1961

Cria o Município de Pitimbu  
e dá outras providências.

O GOVERNADOR DO ESTADO DA PARAÍBA:

Faço saber que o Poder Legislativo decreta e eu sanciono a seguinte Lei:

Art. 1º - É criado o Município de Pitimbu, com sede na atual vila do mesmo nome, que fica elevada à categoria de cidade.

Parágrafo único - O município de Pitimbu, constituído pelo território do antigo distrito, tem os seguintes limites:

Also, sometimes, different copies of the law present different spellings for the name of the feature it creates.

LEI Nº 3.920, DE 25 DE NOVEMBRO DE 1957

Eleva à categoria de Município o distrito de Moraujo.

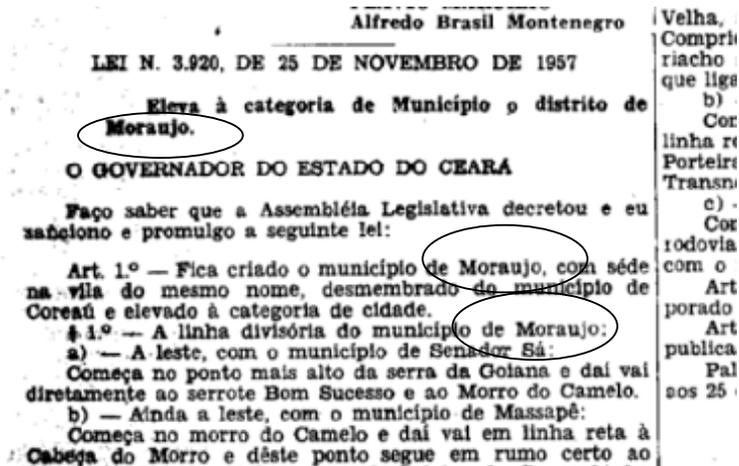
O GOVERNADOR DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ

Faço saber que a Assembléa Legislativa decretou e eu sanciono e promulgo a seguinte lei:

Art. 1º - Fica criado o município de Moraujo, com sede na vila do mesmo nome, desmembrado do município de Coreaú e elevado à categoria de cidade.

§ 1º - A linha divisória do município de Moraujo:

a) - A leste, com o município de Senador Sá:



In order to proceed the standardization of its geographical names, Brazil has implemented the project *Nomes Geográficos do Brasil*, which resulted in its participation in the 24<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> Sessions of the United Nation Group of Experts on Geographical Names and in the 9<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The above mentioned project also resulted in Brazil's participation in international training courses on toponym and, most importantly, in the creation of the Reference Center on Geographic Names of the Coordination of Cartography of the IBGE, in 2007 and, more recently, in 2008, in the creation of the *Comitê de Nomes Geográficos* - CNGEO, an attempt to establish a Brazilian geographical names authority, according to resolution 4, recommendation A, of the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Among the technical advances towards standardization are the development of the Geographic Names Database of Brazil - BNGB by the IBGE, available at [www.bngb.ibge.gov.br](http://www.bngb.ibge.gov.br) since September 2011, and the *Projeto Nomes Geográficos do Paraná* - PNGPR (Geographical Names of the State of Paraná), carried out by the

Reference Center on Geographic Names of the IBGE and the government of the Brazilian State of Paraná.

The database is intended to facilitate the standardization of names and the dissemination of their standardized forms, according to resolutions 32 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and recommendation E, of resolution 4 of the First Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Presently, the database contains 55,000 names, drawn mainly from the *Malha Municipal 2005* (Municipal Boundaries Dataset) and from the *Base Cartográfica Contínua do Brasil, ao Milionésimo* (BCIM) – version 2.1 (Continuous Cartographic Base of Brazil, millionth).

The *Projeto Nomes Geográficos do Paraná – PNGPR* has been developing specific methodology for the collection of geographical names during fieldwork for new mappings and for the update of names, in addition to methodology for office treatment of names. So far, the names in the 1:50,000 mapping of 29 municipalities, out of 399 in the State of Paraná, have been collected and standardized.

As the above mentioned advances demonstrate, Brazil is struggling to overcome the complex difficulties faced and carry out the task of standardization of its set of geographical names.