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FIFTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
Montreal, 18-31 August 1987
Agenda item 15

Draft report of the Conference

Chapter II: Summary of the work of the Conference

Report of Committee I

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National standardization (item 5)

In submitting their reports on activities to the Conference, during consideration of item 4, most countries had described the progress made during the past five (5) years in the field of national standardization.

More specifically, Canada had drawn attention to the publication Principes et Directives pour la Dénomination des Lieux/Principles and Procedures for Geographic Naming, which had been prepared on the occasion of the Conference.

The United States Board on Geographic Names had also submitted Principles, Policies and Procedures (E/CONF.79/L.20).

National standardization in Cuba had also involved the establishment of lists of standardized names of coastal features, populated places and major geographical entities.

Field collection of names (item 5 (a))

Canada's paper E/CONF.79/L.43 mentioned a number of guides relating to various aspects of standardization, more specifically under item 1.4 concerning the Méthodologie des inventaires toponymiques, a work translated into English also and intended in particular for training courses in toponymy. The text of the Spanish version would be submitted to the Spanish-speaking countries.

In its paper E/CONF.79/L.3, Australia mentioned the beginning of research on aboriginal names in the 1960s.

Office treatment of names (item 5 (b))

China had adopted a set of rules for the treatment of its geographical names (E/CONF.79/L.79) on 23 January 1986.

The review CANOMA published by Canada gave an annual list of current toponymic research projects, and Canada suggested that all countries should make their projects known through an identical channel. On the subject of the treatment of names of communication routes, the Canadian Province of Quebec submitted its Guide Odonymique.

Treatment of names in multilingual areas (item 5 (c))

Malaysia pointed out on its maps the geographical names in Malay. In the frontier area, the names were written in Thai. The legends on the maps were in Malay and English.

In Finland (E/CONF.79/L.68), the forty-one (41) bilingual municipalities used the two languages Finnish and Swedish. On large-scale topographical maps, toponyms

were written in both languages; those of the ethnic majority were given first. On smaller-scale maps, toponyms were also written in both languages but in different characters. The same principle was applied in the writing of names on road markers and street signs.

Although Lappish did not have official language status, an effort was made to use a large number of Lappish names on maps for national use.

The United Kingdom had published a world atlas in Welsh for use in schools. It was also preparing a similar work in Scottish Gaelic.

The twenty-seven (27) resolutions adopted by Canada on the occasion of a symposium on native geographical names related mainly to the compilation of a handbook for the collection and treatment of names. Canada was prepared to work together with the United States and Mexico on that subject.

Administrative structure of national names authorities (item 5 (d))

The official structures that had been entrusted by their Governments with the task of standardizing geographical names were clearly the source of the success of that work and the key to the progress of international standardization.

Considerable development might be noted in that area.

For two years, Portugal had been carrying out preliminary studies. One of the difficulties remaining to be resolved was that of the competent administrative department.

In that connection, Israel stated that its Committee came under the Prime Minister.

In France, the establishment in July 1985 of a National Council for Geographical Information (CNIG) had made it possible to establish as one of the standing committees of the Council, a national committee on toponymy comprising all concerned parties. One of its first objectives was a study of the files of toponyms established by the cadastral survey and the National Geographical Institute.

In Japan, there was no governmental authority entrusted with toponymic decisions, but several authorities were concerned. There was no monitoring of pronunciation or orthography. Standardization was based on tradition.

Sweden had established a Foreign Names Committee in 1985.

Canada intended to recommend that a list of its national authorities should be established.

Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors (item 5 (e))

The document was entitled Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors. Thirty-two (32) member States had published Toponymic guidelines. The Co-ordinator

asked countries that had not already compiled them to begin as soon as possible. Such guidelines were useful both domestically and internationally. Guidelines ought to distinguish between descriptive elements and the different categories of geographical names. In order to avoid delays in publication, the Secretariat would circulate the guidelines it received under the same conditions as World Cartography.

Exonyms (item 9)

Turkey's interest in traditional names (exonyms) was explained by history. These names were scattered over the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. The short list of exonyms in document E/CONF.79/L.29 should be viewed as a modest contribution to the problem of names that had been altered. The delegate of Turkey would be grateful for any corrections suggested by other delegates.

The United Kingdom felt that the definition of the word "exonym" given in Glossary No. 330 (Rev.1) was unsatisfactory. A distinction must be drawn between exonyms that were foreign names and those that were traditional names, i.e., those that had been adopted into another language with different pronunciations and spellings.

Cuba shared that opinion and explained that "Madrid" was not an exonym because the toponym was spelled identically in Spain and in Cuba. The Cuban delegate added that local forms were given with their exonyms in parentheses if they were not well known.

Morocco had prepared a list of exonyms and endonyms. The delegate said that a flexible approach should be taken to reducing the number of exonyms; it was not necessary to change everything. Morocco encountered no difficulty in retaining the toponym Volubilis, for example; however, he announced that the name Casablanca had been changed and translated into Arabic as Dâr el Beida.

Document E/CONF.79/L.27 submitted by France dealt with the question of place names "adapted" as a result of factors other than the nature of the French language itself: historical factors, geographical factors or simply random factors stemming from alterations, corruptions or approximate translations fostered by transmission that was essentially oral in nature.

China pointed out that Peking was not an exonym for Beijing. That inexact transcription had now been corrected.

In Finland the following types of exonyms were not used:

1. Those that were not well known;
2. Those not sanctioned by usage;
3. Those lacking a cultural or historical aspect;
4. Those whose names, as officially standardized by the country in question, was not the source of undue difficulty for Finns. The creation of new exonyms for national use would be regarded unfavourably in Finland.

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Canada recalled that the goal was to reduce the use of exonyms. Moreover, it might be asked whether the publication of lists of exonyms truly served the desired purpose. Perhaps, on the contrary, they made those names known and spread their use. Agreement had to be reached on what action was to be taken, and the Austrian paper (E/CONF.79/L.6) contained good suggestions. The use or omission of exonyms in cartography depended greatly on the categories and degree of use of exonyms. There were three possibilities for the names of cities in national cartography: (a) the exonym alone; (b) the exonym with the local name in parentheses; (c) the local name with the exonym in parentheses. Type (b) was generally gaining ground. In international cartography, as the Austrian delegate noted, the goal was to exclude all exonyms.

In order to reduce the use of exonyms, very concrete operational resolutions were required with respect to (1) international atlases and (2) airline schedules.

Research and experiments in assisting in name pronunciation (item 11 (d))

Canada tape-recorded the local pronunciation of native geographical names. Three to five different speakers were questioned about each name, since the pronunciation of geographical names could differ from one speaker to another. The tapes were given to a group of native interpreters who transcribed the names into the Roman alphabet.

The United States of America, France, Canada, the United Kingdom and Morocco took into account certain characteristics of native informants, such as age, origin, etc., when transcribing the pronunciation of names.

Morocco explained that it recorded names on the spot when surveying but that speakers' pronunciation varied from one social class to another. The names were transcribed into Arabic, but it was more difficult to respect their pronunciation when they were transcribed into the Roman alphabet.

Austria noted that the pronunciation of names was not, strictly speaking, of concern when mapping. Maps gave only the written form of geographical names. The international phonetic alphabet (IPA) should be used for writing down their pronunciation.

The delegate from the Netherlands mentioned that agenda item 11 (d) should be studied in the light of resolution 7 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Athina, 1977): aids to pronunciation prior to the transfer of names from one writing system to another.

The Chairman observed that pronunciation was the key to transcription systems.
