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FIFTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
Montreal, 18-31 August 1987
Item 15 of the agenda

Draft report of the Conference

Chapter II: Summary of the work of the Conference:

Work of Committee II

COMMITTEE II REPORT

The Chairman opened the session, complimenting Canada and the United States of America (USA) on the work done on Automated Data Processing (ADP) in toponymy, as exhibited at this Conference. He spoke of the progress in various countries: in China with computerization using Pinyin; in Denmark with the Jutland gazetteer; in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) with the gazetteer based on the 1:500,000 scale-maps, and the planned expansion to include names shown on the 1:200,000 scale-maps; in Israel with the automated transliteration/transcription/translation system; in Sweden with databases; and in Finland, Malaysia and Australia. The United Kingdom (UK) reported that the country's 1:50,000 microfiche gazetteer had been in use for two years and that a hard-back edition, with some 250,000 names and including latitude and longitude, had now been published.

6a - Data Collection Procedures

There was no discussion of this item.

6b - Data Elements Required

Canada mentioned that its National Toponymic Data Base (NTDB) and several provincial toponymic data systems were described in the 1986 editions of CANOMA. The Conference was informed that some provinces had individual toponymic data systems and that links with the national data base were being studied. It was confirmed that the TOPOS data management system of Quebec stores formerly used names. The delegate from Canada referred to a proposal from the 12th meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that ADP-assisted gazetteer samples and formats from different countries be collected and presented to the next Conference for comparison and comment. This proposal was felt to be still valid and a resolution to this effect would be submitted. The Conference was informed of the publication of a 300-page English/French glossary of generic terms used in Canadian toponyms.

The delegate from Israel told the Conference that the automated gazetteer of Israel was based on all names legally confirmed by the Government Names Commission, whether or not they appeared on maps. He reported on the precision of location of places using the original Israel Topographic Grid, as well as the UTM grid for which the co-ordinates were directly computed by the system. The Israeli delegate added that names remain in the system even if eliminated from maps, and that historical names from older maps were being added. With reference to optical scanning, the delegate from Israel stressed the need for the implementation of paragraph 55 of the twelfth UNGEGN report.

The United States of America reported on the "National Geographic Names Data Base: Phase II Instructions" (E/CONF.79/L.22) and the accompanying information regarding software to be used by researchers communicating with the central system. The data base was complete, except for road and highway names which would be dealt with in Phase III data collection. The United States reported on optical scanning difficulties arising from diversity of typefaces and colours.

Norway reported on three national names listings: a concise gazetteer of 500,000 entries, based on 1:50,000-scale mapping, to be completed towards 1990; a listing of 1.5 million names from large-scale mapping; and as a long-term project, a complete inventory of 4 to 5 million geographical names, including pronunciation.

The FRG delegate mentioned that his country's national data base recorded long names which need to be shortened for small-scale mapping. The delegate from the United Kingdom sympathized with this problem, and mentioned that historical names in the United Kingdom are kept in county archives, separate from the national gazetteer programme, except where the historical names appeared on the 1:50,000-scale maps. Discussion of river names, names of other linear features and area names revealed that their treatment varied from nation to nation. The Chairman indicated that much depended on whether or not the names data were directly derived from cartographic sources. Further consideration of the subject was referred to UNGEGN.

6c - Automatic Data Processing Systems

The USA commented on the "Data Users Guide for the Geographic Names Information System" (E/CONF.79/L.21) and the current state of the system (E/CONF.79/L.16). He reported that updated information was added on a quarterly basis, and could be changed to a continuous basis if necessary. Research is being centred on the possibility of data storage on compact disc (ROM) for distribution to reference organizations; the two million names will fit on two six-inch compact discs.

The Chairman introduced the "Bibliography for Automated Data Processing in the Preparation of Gazetteers and Names Lists" (E/CONF.79/INF/50), and thanked Canada for the assistance in its preparation. Sweden reported that a data base is being developed to include about 500,000 names shown on the National Topographic Map series, related to the Swedish National Grid.

The delegate from Israel introduced his paper on biscriptual versus bilingual automated gazetteers (E/CONF.79/L.65), and reported that, in view of wide popular demand in Israel for the automated gazetteer, it was now being published in book form with an updating service available. Furthermore, a new file of name origins was being prepared, to be merged with the original data base. In answer to a question from the Chairman, Israel reported that its computerized translation of some 2,000 generic terms was done by character string recognition via a terminology table. Although reversibility was not required, it could be applied for transliteration-ingested languages such as Arabic. Vocalization was used only where it prevented ambiguity.

The issue of the listing of biscriptual names was discussed and it was reported that Canada too was considering development of a data base in two scripts, Roman and syllabic.

Malaysia reported that its personal-computer-based toponymic system was operational. The FRG reported on the German Antarctic toponymic base (E/CONF.79/INF/25) which included name origin data for about 600 names. It was reported that the Japanese gazetteer included location by latitude and longitude, as well as feature code, elevation and area data.

China commented on a paper presented at the twelfth session of the UNGEGN, and reported on an atlas of the People's Republic of China, which is in microfilm form and contains about 50,000 entries. The conference was told that the Chinese provincial gazetteers were still being developed, except for the volume for Liaoning Province which was complete. It contains Han characters and Pinyin romanization.

Latitude and longitude are only being included for state-level gazetteers and relate only to the name placement. Gazetteer listings can be organized according to the number of character strokes, order of drawing, shape, or pronunciation. The toponymic data base will be expanded from names shown on 1:1 million-scale maps to include names on those of 1:250,000 scale. After that, names shown on the 1:50,000-scale maps will be processed. China announced that no further simplification of Chinese characters is planned and that historical names are retained in the place-name records, but stored quite separately from contemporary names. Pinyin provides a simpler method than the radicals and strokes of the Chinese characters. China confirmed that the Standard Telegraphic Codes are still current but are due to be revised.

6d - Compatibility and structure of ADP Systems

It was agreed that there would be informal discussion on this subject during the Conference along the lines proposed by Canada in document E/CONF.79/L.47.

6e - National Gazetteers

France introduced the document Pays et Capitales du Monde (E/CONF.79/L.26), and Morocco and France were invited by the Chairman to resolve an issue over this document.

Canada provided details about the new gazetteer of Quebec, published in mid-1987, prepared in accordance with UNGEGN directives, and comprising about 100,000 names. Updates will be produced annually. Canada proposed that the UNGEGN discuss the standardization of geographical referencing for gazetteers. Sweden is planning a national gazetteer with cross references between old and new spellings, and with spatial information.

The USA noted that gazetteers have been published for four states and that volumes for the remaining states are in the process of compilation and publication. A one-volume concise national gazetteer of about 40,000 entries will be published soon. Products derived from the data base, such as microfiche, bound name lists, and magnetic tapes were reported. Gazetteers of foreign countries were being produced, in co-operation with the involved countries whenever possible.

Israel noted the increasing involvement of various countries in ADP-assisted treatment of geographical names, and proposed that the UNGEGN assume the development of standardized structures to ensure compatibility.

Australia reported on its new gazetteer being compiled by the Division of National Mapping. This will include names shown on the 1:100,000-scale maps in outback areas, on 1:50,000 or even 1:25,000 in settled areas. The total number of entires will be about 500,000 names. This work will take from 5 to 10 years. A gazetter of names shown on 1:250,000-scale maps already exists, but shows no data on the legal status of names.

Austria spoke of a detailed nine-volume automated gazetteer published between 1984 and 1986, and remarked that the typographic quality is inferior to that of manually produced gazetteers.

7 - Terminology in the Standardization of Geographical Names

Mr. Cassar from the United Nations Terminology Unit expressed interest in the proceedings and assured the Conference of continuing support with publications. He spoke of alphabetizing problems, especially with multi-script gazetteers, and noted the solutions offered by Israel as well as by the United Nations Technical Committee.
