



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.79/INF/15
18 August 1987

ENGLISH ONLY

Fifth United Nations Conference
on the Standardization of
Geographical Names
Montreal, 18-31 August 1987
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON PROGRESS IN THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FOURTH CONFERENCE

Report on the progress of standardization
of geographical names

Paper submitted by the United Kingdom

* E/CONF.79/1.

Report on the progress of
Standardization of Geographical Names

Paper submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Geographical names in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland tend to change very little. The names of major administrative divisions, on extremely rare occasions, are changed in response to government decree. When such changes occur the former names of counties tend to continue in use for certain purposes eg postal services. There is also a public reluctance to discard the familiar for the unfamiliar. Other name changes result from the creation of new towns and minor administrative changes which occur only rarely. In the period since the Fourth Conference the most marked name changes are the increasing number of Welsh names in Wales. Adoption of those names, like all similar names throughout Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a response to local preference. All name changes are reflected in the official maps and all gazetteers, names listings and census organization are based on those maps.

Since the scale for urban areas is 1/1250 and for other settled areas 1/2500, the maps serve as an adequate standardizing medium. There is no standardizing authority. It is felt that the situation is so stable that no such authority is required.

Computer-assisted cartography has tended to ensure uniformity in the rendering of names at all scales of mapping and has also assisted in dissemination of such changes as are made. It should be noted, however, that name changes are not simply implemented by changing the maps. Postal, telecommunications, road transport and rail services are all affected and any of them may resist the implementation of a name change. There is finally public reaction. If a name is not used by the people its chance of survival is reduced.

In overseas aid and in joint mapping and charting programmes every effort has been made to apply at the earliest possible date the measures of standardization adopted by the four UN Conferences. Romanization systems approved by the Conferences have been applied for the most part rapidly and thoroughly. This can be observed in maps and charts produced by official mapping agencies and also by the maps and atlases published commercially.

Since the Fourth Conference the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names has acquired its own computer. This has removed its dependence on other bodies for its computer services. The installation consists of:

Hewlett-Packard HP9836S	640 Kbyte computer
Hewlett-Packard HP7911P	28 Mbyte "Winchester" disc drive
Hewlett-Packard HP2934A	dot matrix printer

It will be a long time before the vast amount of data held in card files can be transferred to computer but the process will continue as names listings and gazetteer work is undertaken.

At the Fourth Conference and at intervals since the United Kingdom has reported on its experience in the introduction of Pinyin and particularly the difficulties encountered in determining the best Pinyin rendering of names in China. The receipt in 1983 of the "Zhongguo Diminglu" proved to be a great acquisition by

improving the quality and the number of names. There are, however, many problems still to be resolved in the minority language areas and a constant watch is kept on new sources of information likely to improve the situation.

The greatest problem of all is the education of the public which on the whole is not interested in maps except as tools for travel and still less interested in the subject of geographical names. Name changes tend to be regarded as manifestations of attempts by a few eccentrics to make everyday life unnecessarily complicated.

As has been reported in other UK papers submitted at this Conference an official gazetteer in microfiche has been issued by the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain. Rather unexpectedly a single volume gazetteer in hard-back has now made its appearance. Macmillan are the publishers, but the names data has been provided by OSGB.

A Welsh Atlas for school use was published in 1986.

In Northern Ireland the creation of a toponymic database using the current names has been started. A test area near Belfast has been selected. When trials have been completed satisfactorily, work will begin on Belfast and will then be extended throughout the whole province.