

Sixth Session

New York, 5-26 March, 1975

Progress report on the standardization of geographical names
in the Netherlands

The preparation of a national gazetteer

The work of the Dutch-Belgian Wordlist Committee (Belgian observers officiate exclusively as advisers) is nearing completion.

All circa 40.000 Dutch geographical names of provinces, municipalities, populated places, areas, hydrographical features and dikes were recorded on cards alphabetically. Each card comprises per catchword the different present customary spellings of the name, for which use is made of the Dutch Topographic Maps (1:25.000), the Water Management Map, Nautical Charts and other, partly onomastic sources. Likewise each card contains the spelling advised by the committee, along with a short designation regarding nature and location of the geographical object. For populated places the geographical co-ordinates are entered as a means of identification. Current and any proposed new spelling are cross referenced. For a small amount of names a definite spelling-proposal still has to be made. Geographical entities no longer existent are omitted.

The committee expects the names to be ready for publication within a couple of months. The introduction, account and directives belonging to this publication now also have their definite form. The committee has no say in the date of issue, nor in the lay-out and printing.

This is reserved to the responsible bodies.

Earlier spelling-changes have taught that these evoke rather emotional counter-reactions from the population and the local authorities, so that a certain circumspection should be exercised. As an illustration: a frequently used school-atlas broadly following the committee's spelling-proposals had to be withdrawn from circulation because of the reactions to these innovations.

International standardization

The Committee for the Spelling of Foreign Geographical Names (C.B.A.N.) has occupied itself primarily with the names of countries. A complete list of country-names along with an introduction, directions for use, notes and alphabetical index was presented for approval to the Minister of Education and Science in november 1973. For each country are listed successively: in Dutch the colloquial name of the country and the official designation and subsequently the colloquial name and the official designation in the foreign official language or languages. Regarding romanization of non-alphabetic writing systems the policy has been to abide by the transcription methods used in the country itself. Further are listed the Dutch adjective derived from the country-name and the inhabitant name. It is intended that official usage should follow this list. It is supplemented and corrected regularly.

Next the C.B.A.N. has made a start with the compilation of a list of exonyms, of which many naturally are already included in the list of country-names. At present the committee is practically finished with Europe.

An attempt has been made to subdivide exonyms into different categories. From this has resulted the decision to omit those exonyms by which the difference with the foreign domestic form(s) only existed in the translation of the generic term (e.g. Bielermeer-Bieler See; meer = See). The list does include though a glossary of generic terms. Furthermore names translated entirely (e.g. Zwartewoud-Schwarzwald) will be placed in a separate register. At the same time it seemed useful to follow the same policy with names that function solely within a geographic teaching-situation (e.g. Bovenrijnse Laagvlakte, Bekken van Parijs). When in Dutch the diacritical marks belonging to the foreign domestic form are omitted, usually combined with a difference in pronunciation, the Dutch form will be accepted as exonym (e.g. Munster-Münster). If the contrary is the case, the committee follows suits (e.g. Normandië-Normandie). The committee still has to consider the treatment of so-called traditional names (e.g. Pruisen, Saksen). These will in no case be included in the list of exonyms, for this is based on the present situation. Transcription problems do arise with Greek exonyms, since it is not clear where the modern Greek and where the classical transcription should be followed.

The secretary of the C.B.A.N., D.P. Blok Ph.D , participated as adviser in a Seminar on national standardization of geographical names, which was held at Zanderij and Drietabiki in Surinam. In the future representatives of the committee will be closely involved in the organisation of a pilot training course in toponymy to be held at the I.T.C. in Enschede (planned for spring 1976).