TOPONYMIC GUIDELINES

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In 1979, the head of the Geographical Department of the Austrian Institute for Eastern and Southeastern Europe, professor Josef Breu, prepared a document called 'Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors', in which he collected and summarized all possible information that anyone might need to deal correctly with Austrian geographical names. The paper was submitted to the UNGEGN, and so well received internationally that at their 5th Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Montreal 1987), the United Nations recommended by resolution all member states to follow the Austrian example. Many of them did not linger to do so: by 1989 more than 25 countries had published their own Guidelines[i], making this initiative one of the most successful achievements of the first 30 years of the existence of the UNGEGN.

The scope of Toponymic Guidelines

A checklist of subjects to be treated in the Toponymic guidelines, based on the Austrian example, would include the following items:

1. Languages

The Guidelines should in all cases contain a clear statement about the *official language(s)* of the country. Is there one nation-wide official language (in Austria: German), or are there more (in Singapore: English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil)? Are there languages that are official on a sub-national level? (Catalan, Basque, and Galician in Spain)? Are there minority-languages in official use on a local level? (Aranes in Val d'Aran in the Catalan-speaking Spanish *Autonomous Community* of Catalonia)? What is the *national* language?

In the Austrian document, for instance, it is explained that in Austria:

– German is the only nation-wide official language.

– Minority languages play a subordinate role, and are of regional and local importance only.

– Standard German is the national language.

– The main Germanic dialects spoken in Austria belong to the Alemannic (Vorarlberg and some parts of Tyrol) and the Bavarian dialect groups (the rest of the country). The main characteristics of these dialects, and their historic background, are summarized.

– Austria officially recognizes four minority languages: Slovenian (in Carinthia), Burgenland Croatian (in Burgenland), Hungarian (also in Burgenland), and Czech (in Vienna); a map is enclosed. The alphabets of these languages, and in the case of Burgenland Croatian (native to Austria only) a pronunciation key, are presented, and their official and *de facto* status for toponymic use is explained.

2. Writing system(s) and pronunciation

Which writing-system is used (officially or otherwise) for the country's language(s)?

Is there more than one writing-system in use? In case of a non-Roman writing-system, which transliteration key is recommended for rendering geographical names in Roman script (if any)? If the writing-system is an alphabet, which letters does it contain? Are there special signs (diacritical marks, non-standard Roman letters) included? What is the alphabetisation, i.e. the sequence of the letters in the alphabet? As far as the alphabet use is phonetic, which (combinations of) letters represent which sounds?

The *Guidelines* for Austria mention that:

– Standard German is written in the Roman script, augmented with a non-standard Roman letter ß ('scharfes s') and one diacritical mark for vowel discrimination (a diaeresis or 'Umlaut' to be combined with a, o or u).

– Of ß only a lower-case variant exists; where capitalization is needed, it is transliterated by ss.

– Previously another variant of the Roman script was in use, called German script. Nowadays it does not occur anymore, and it is therefore not further explained.

– As German spelling is not always clearly indicative of pronunciation, especially in the case of geographical names (which often show an archaic spelling, or originate from another language or dialects), the pronunciation of the names of Austrian settlements is listed name by name in a *Gazetteer of Austria*. The Gazetteer uses the IPA-alphabet. A general pronunciation key is nevertheless presented in the *Guidelines*.

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i   F.J. Ormeling Sr. – UN achievements in name standardization. In: T.R. Tichelaar (ed.), Proceedings of the Workshop on Toponymy held in Cipanas, Indonesia 16–18 October 1989. Cibinong, Bakosurtanal 1990.

3. Spelling rules

To what extent do the orthographic rules of the language in general also apply to geographical names? Does the spelling of geographical names follow spelling reforms? If the language concerned is also the language of another country (German in Austria and Switzerland, but also in Germany; Dutch in Belgium, but also in the Netherlands; French in Switzerland and the Italian Aosta Valley, but also in France), does the language policy in the country where the language is most dominantly used also affect the spelling rules? Which rules are applied to the spelling of geographical names?

In Austria:

– The Survey of Austria since 1969 officially uses a set of General rules for the German spelling of geographical names, which are generally in concordance with those in current use in the other German-speaking countries.

– Geographical names are normally not subject to the general spelling rules. Especially for the spelling of names of inhabited places, name-specific conventions as laid down in official documents serve as *de facto* standards, that take preponderance over general spelling rules.

– Geographical names do, with some explicitly mentioned exceptions, follow the general spelling rules in matters of capitalization and word composition (writing compound names as one word or two words, setting them apart or joining them together with hyphens).

– A set of specifically toponymic rules applies to capitalization and word composition of geographical names; this is presented in detail.

– Names of geographical-topographical objects other than inhabited places, that belong to one of the officially recognized minority languages, are officially written as they are spoken by the local population, but the sounds are represented in accordance with German writing and reading conventions.

4. Names authorities and names standardization

Which authorities are responsible for which categories of names? What is the division of responsibilities between the national (or federal) government and regional/local authorities? What is the state of progress of the official standardization of names? What are the mail addresses of the (national and regional) names authorities, and, if these exist, of the advisory board(s) on geographical names assisting them?

In Austria, as is explained (in 1979),

– The names of inhabited places of all categories are standardized, and published by the federal names authority.

– The geographical names other than those of inhabited places are in the process of being officially collected and presented as standards through publication by the federal authority. In the meantime, the names on the most recent sheets of the official *Austria Map*, 1/50,000, are to be regarded as being official names.

The Guidelines include a map showing the areas covered by provincial toponymic commissions.

5. Source materials

Which documents – in the form of maps and gazetteers – are available to check the correct, standardized, official form of any geographical name?

In the Austrian guidelines, the *Austria Map* 1:50,000 and the *Gazetteer of Austria* already referred to are reiterated. At the time of publication of the guidelines, the toponyms of 191 out of 213 map sheets have effectively been standardized. An additional official gazetteer, the regularly updated *Ortsverzeichnis* 1971, is mentioned as being exhaustive for the names of inhabited places.

6. Glossary

In the Guidelines, a glossary of generic as well as frequently occurring specific (determinative) elements – like adjectives of colour and dimension, the points of the compass, etc. – should be included, ideally in each of the occurring languages, so that their correct spelling is safeguarded. To foreign users, a toponymic glossary also adds transparency to the otherwise opaque geographical names.

The Austrian glossaries contains the following categories of terms:
a. all possible geographic-topographic generics;
b. adjectives of age (old, new)
c. adjectives of colour (black, white)
d. adjectives of dimension (large, small)
e. adjectives of situation or relative position (rear, fore, middle, upper, lower)
f. adjectives of nationality (Austrian, Croatian, Slovenian)
g. prepositions (at, on, upon, in, above, between)

7. Abbreviations

Toponymic guidelines may also cover a recommendation concerning the *abbreviations* used in a country's geographical names. A listing of the abbreviations used in the Austria 1/50,000 official topographic map series was included in the Austrian paper. If existent, it would also be very useful to explain the rules governing the formation of these abbreviations.

8. Administrative division

The standardized names of the higher order administrative units may well be included, in a listing and/or a map, in the *Toponymic guidelines*. The Austrian guidelines include them (the 2nd and 3rd order areas) in an annex, that also contains the official designations of units of administration and settlement occurring in the gazetteers of Austria.

More Guidelines

Volume II (the technical papers) of the 4th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in Geneva in 1982, contains next to the Austrian product also toponymic guidelines submitted by China, Denmark, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Iceland, Norway, Spain (in Spanish), Sweden, Turkey, the USA and Great Britain, as well as a review of the already existing *General directions for the spelling of geographical names* of the German Democratic Republic, and thorough preliminary products (called *Toponymic guides*) prepared by France and Switzerland. Canada, and especially the francophone province of Québec, submitted a number of separate papers on subjects that should be included in *Guidelines*, as did Cuba. Singular contributions on related subjects came from Japan and Peru. At the 5th Conference in Montreal in 1987, very elaborate Guidelines were submitted by Italy and South Africa. By the year 2000, toponymic guidelines were also available for Canada, Suriname, Ireland, Greece, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Netherlands, Estonia, France, Japan, the Democratic Republic of Korea, Iran, Algeria, Antarctica and Australia.

The Chinese guidelines of 1982 concentrated on the introduction of the Pinyin system for romanization of Chinese characters, adopted by the First National People's Congress in 1958, and used for the representa-

tion of geographical names since 1974. Further they treated:

1. the ethno-linguistic composition of the Chinese people;
2. the rules governing the spelling of Han Chinese (the majority language) geographical names using the Pinyin script;
3. the spelling of place-names in the most important minority languages: Uygur, Mongolian and Tibetan;
4. the national authority dealing with geographical names and standardization.

The annexes contained a Pinyin pronunciation reference, a Pinyin toponymic glossary, and keys for transliteration of the Uygur, Mongolian and Tibetan script into Pinyin and the IPA alphabet.

Most of the other Guidelines published in 1982 follow exactly the contents of the Austrian example recommended by the UN Conference, in holding on to the original division in chapters as well as the sequence of paragraphs (although not all of the latter are included in all submissions):

1. Languages
   1.1. General remarks
   1.2. National language
       1.2.1. General remarks
       1.2.2. The alphabet
       1.2.3. Spelling rules / orthography
       1.2.4. Pronunciation
       1.2.5. Linguistic substrata
       1.2.6. Dialects
   1.3. Minority languages
2. Names authorities and names standardization
3. Source material
   3.1. Maps
   3.2. Gazetteers
4. Glossary
5. Abbreviations

The Guidelines of 1987 added a 6th chapter covering the standardized names of administrative units.

The Finnish Guidelines contained a very useful annex showing which municipalities were (officially) bilingual in Finnish and Swedish, the country's two official languages, and which were monolingual in either Finnish or Swedish; and, for the bilingual municipalities, it showed which of the languages took preponderance. This is important information, as it is a rule to print the name version belonging to the latter first: Helsinki/Helsingfors (Finnish/Swedish) against Jakobstad/Pietarsaari (Swe-

dish/Finnish). As the preponderance is numerical, it may change due to demographic developments, and therefore this listing requires regular updating.

The (West-)German *Guidelines* included an extensive bibliography of publications of standardized geographical names.

The Norwegian and Swedish *Guidelines* contained, just like the Austrian, an annex listing the standardized names of 2nd (resp. *fylke* and *län*) and 3rd (municipalities) order administrative units.

The Spanish *Guidelines* skipped the subject of linguistic substrata, the Turkish did not mention any minority languages.

The United States, whose *Guidelines* were updated in 1987, did not go into any detail when discussing minority languages, dialects and other non-standard language issues, and did not exactly follow the standard composition of the *Guidelines*. Instead, they fully concentrated on the toponymic rules set by their national geographical names authority. They did include an interesting chapter about specific characteristics of US geographical names: binominal names (consisting of two separate elements), complex names (Cliffs of the Seven Double Pillars), names with unique generics (Butlers Toothpick), definite-article names, single-word names, legal vs. common usage, and group names.

The 1982 submission of Great Britain only contained four short chapters, summarily covering the subjects of policy for place and feature names, policy for administrative area names, languages and pronunciation.

The French *Guide de toponymie*, although (because of its non-standard composition?) not yet presented as *Toponymic guidelines*, treated the country's linguistic and toponymic situation in a very detailed and comprehensive way, suiting the needs of toponymic knowledge of 'map and other editors' very well.