

Geographical names and education; school world atlases

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Introduction

This issue is completely different from national standardization. It is much more complex as it involves different languages and scripts. No one can be an expert in geographical names from all the languages that are spoken over the world, or in all national names practices. Only a limited number of editorial teams exist all over the world that has the expertise to deal with names from all languages. And even if such teams exist, they are just too expensive to deal with just single school atlases. So except in cases where big publishing houses have the possibility to use their toponymical expertise for series of school and reference atlases for different countries, editors of single school atlases just won't have the means to deal with all foreign names individually. They are wont to copy them from other sources, like reference atlases. But in copying lies a danger, that the names for these reference atlases have been processed in such a way that they are not suited for incorporation into some national school atlas. Reasons can be that the local educational authorities have different political views, or different ideas of converting names from one script to another. So some basic problems will remain. But at least we can give some general advice that will help the producers of local school atlases up to a given point.

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The first issue an atlas editor is confronted with are his constraints: Constraints regarding both content and economy. For reasons of economy, he can only have a limited number of map pages in his atlas. From freely available global databases like the Digital Chart of the World, or Global Map, he would be able to derive his maps, in the projection selected. But when it is up to names it gets more difficult, as it is impossible to take 100,000 or even 5,000 individual decisions about how to write a name. Reliable sources and workable standards are therefore indispensable.

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Constraints involving the names content itself are a consequence of the publisher's necessity to meet the (real or perceived) requirements of his market. Whether they are right or wrong, the names in a school atlas with a reasonable share of the market will develop into a *de facto* standard, just because they are taught to the people. When producing a new edition of an existing school atlas an atlas, moreover, that in the classroom may have to be used together with former editions, we have to be careful not to change too much at a time. Geography teachers have developed their teaching material and practice around specific name forms, and would tend to be conservative, because otherwise this would mean they would have to change their teaching material. To the customer, systematic changes of the orthography of names are especially hard to accept if the publisher has no other story than 'these new name versions are better'.

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That means that name changes on a large scale in new editions of school atlases would only be acceptable when linked to major political upheavals: when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1992, the market was extremely receptive to names changes: after all, it was obvious that in the newly independent republics everything would have changed. In the new editions of atlases published after that date, many editors took the opportunity to reconsider all the names in the atlas at once.

Toponymic guidelines

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In principle, atlas editors would be helped out, when dealing with names, with the toponymic

guidelines that have been published. But to some degree, that possibility remains theoretical, as these guidelines are not available for all countries. They are still lacking for Latin America (though for editors of atlases in the roman script names from these Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking countries do not pose too much of a problem). It is notably the Central Asian countries that pose toponymical problems, South- and Southeast Asian countries, and most countries in Africa. There, again for Roman-script atlases south of the Sahara local names can just be copied.

But, even if toponymic guidelines would be available for all these countries missing now, the atlas editor probably would not have the time to consult all of these guidelines. They will help in individual cases, but not for studying all names on a systematical basis. And sometimes the use of toponymical guidelines implies some knowledge of the language discussed. Finally, even if we wish to conform our choices as much as possible to the toponymic guidelines recommended through the United Nations, many decisions still remain to be taken. Some of the more important are: the use of exonyms, the use of generics, script conversion systems, the use of the article and how to deal with variant names.

Exonyms

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Exonyms are names used in a specific language for geographical features situated outside the area where that language has official status and differing in form from the official name used in the country where that feature is situated. The latter we call an endonym. Examples of exonyms are Rome for the Italian capital Roma or Moscow for the Russian capital Москва. Concerning the reduction of exonyms, as recommended by the United Nations, atlas editors have to find a compromise with their market, consisting of rather conservative geography teachers. To them, a recommendation from the UN is not enough: special arguments are needed to 'sell' them a decrease of exonyms. Exonyms are often quite popular, because they are part of the language, of history and thus of the cultural heritage, of the people. They are emotion. The arguments we bring forward to get rid of them will only be acceptable if they appeal to emotion likewise. We could claim, for instance, that our children (the primary consumers of school atlases) need to be prepared for a globalizing, internationalising world. As international travel increases, so do the chances that one will actually be confronted with a place name one had to learn at school: if one actually visits Tuscany in Italy, and wishes to go there by car and wants to turn off the motorway at the correct exit, it becomes important that one knows Firenze (endonym) instead of (just) Florence (exonym). Nevertheless we have to be well aware of the enduring cultural value of an exonym before we discard it.

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For atlas editors the issue would be for which names to use exonyms. Some countries prepare official lists of exonyms, and such lists can be used as a source here.

Language choice

From which language should the geographical names within an area be taken? As some countries do possess more than one official language - either applying to the whole country (English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil in Singapore) or to parts thereof (Catalan, Galician and Basque in the corresponding Spanish autonomous communities) - this in many cases also involves an explicit decision.

Compound Names

In compound geographical names we have generic and specific elements. The generic

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elements show what kind of feature the name refers to. In the name Mount Everest, for instance, mount is a generic element, and Everest is the specific element. How to deal with generic elements in compound names? Do we have to translate generic elements of geographical names, or can we leave them as they are in their endonymic form? Should it be *Golfo de Valencia* or *Gulf of Valencia*. For a school atlas, one might opt for the latter. Why? It is a marine name, a hydronym, and in the seas (as they are international waters) one would want to read them in one's own language. Thus *golfo* wherever it occurs (except in place names!) would be translated into *golf*.

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Should it be *Montes de Toledo* or *Mountains of Toledo*? An atlas editor would opt for the former... as these *montes* are clearly within Spain, one could leave them in the Spanish language.

With 4810 meters, Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Western Europe. In a school atlas it would be left Mont Blanc... simply because everyone knows it under that name *Mont Blanc*, no one would translate it and call it "*White Mountain*". Likewise, the Spanish tourist area *Costa del Sol* is never translated into "*Coast of the Sun*", not even by the least educated of the mass tourists that go there would ever call it differently.

Incorporation of generic terms

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Do we have to include generic terms at all in the name of objects that in the map clearly belong to the category described by the generic?

For instance, the American custom to always add the generic 'Island' is not valid in the Netherlands: we thus render *Vancouver Island* simply as *Vancouver* (the situation of the name in the map would already clearly indicate it being an island). On the other hand, another American custom is to leave out the generic 'river' even if the specific element is an adjective, and this also conflicts with our Dutch habits: so the river name *Red* in our Dutch atlases becomes the *Red River*. We would not add that to the river name *Mississippi* as actually, in the Algonquin language it springs from, this name already means *Great River*, and thus already includes a generic element. After adjectives we always need a generic, so we could not call an island just 'long' but would have to call it *Long Island*.

The case of (the) Mississippi may be used to illustrate the major complication inherent to this policy: what we recognize and distinguish as generic and specific (especially adjective) elements does in any case depend on our knowledge of the respective languages.

Conversion between scripts

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Transliteration refers to conversion systems in which each character in the source script is rendered by one character or group of character in the target script. In theory, transliteration

is reversible: بغداد > Baġdād > بغداد . Transcription refers to a conversion system in which sounds from a source language are recorded in terms of a target language. In theory, transcription would be non-reversible: Bordeaux > Бордо > Bordo .

The UNGEGN officially promotes specific transliteration systems for converting names from one writing system to another. Even though it would be more comfortable to stick exactly to the transliteration systems recommended by the UN, sometimes these seem to be too complicated for school children (or geography teachers?) to comprehend. Therefore atlas editors sometimes do use officially standardized transliterations, where available, as a starting point, but often have to simplify these further for use in their school atlases (though not for the

general atlases).

Mostly, atlas editors apply the rule, that for names in languages using the Roman script, to represent the official writing including the diacritical marks - with the single exception of Vietnamese, where the diacritics representing tonal accents are omitted.

Variant Names

When names are changed, one needs getting used to the new names, and that is why it is common policy to include the no longer official names for a certain time in the atlas, at least for the next edition, as a secondary name. In 1991 the Russian place name Leningrad was changed back to Saint Petersburg, so the next 1994 edition of a senior school atlas still said *Saint Petersburg (Leningrad)*, the next 1999 edition just had *Saint Petersburg*; the 1999 edition still says *Mumbai (Bombay)*, while the 2003 edition only has *Mumbai*. In the geographical names index in the atlas, the old forms will for at least another 10 years still be included with a cross-reference to the contemporary name.

A special problem occurs when we know that names have been changed, for instance because the official language of a country changed, but we don't know the new name form yet. It happened for instance with the Central Asian republics that replaced Russian with Turkmen, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz etc. In such a case one would be forced to stick to the previous Russian names until the new name forms have been publicized.

Parentthesized secondary names would not only refer to replaced names but can also refer to exonyms. If a variant name is an official alternative - like Swedish names alongside Finnish for some Finnish towns - both are represented as being 'of equal importance', by separating them with a slash: Helsinki/Helsingfors. In these cases, we always maintain a constant sequence, even if this conflicts with local standards - for instance in Finland the Finnish name always precedes the Swedish one (according to Finnish official practice, the language form belonging to the most numerous local language community should be mentioned first). The reason is that in this way we can explain the situation to the consumer: with double names in Finland, the first is always Finnish, and should follow Finnish pronunciation rules.

Use of articles

Should we say *Gambia* or *The Gambia*? We do the first. Likewise, we use *Medina* instead of *Al-Madinah*, and *Riad* instead of *Ar-Riyad*. But this would depend on the editorial policies that have been drawn up in advance. Such editorial policies are meant to speed up the decision process when processing the names. The reason for doing away with these articles is that they would clutter the maps unnecessarily.

In some languages, definite articles are post-positionally affixed to the word; Swedish *älven* means **the** river, whereas *älv* means river. Although less obvious to the layman, here the atlas editor also have to make a choice. Mostly they choose to represent the indefinite form, so *Klarälv* instead of *Klarälven*. On the other hand, in Roman written place names editors would include the article if it makes part of the official form: *Le Havre*, *A Coruña/La Coruña*.

For each country/language combination, such rules and the exceptions to them would be listed in the internal toponymic guidelines used by the editorial team.

Global toponymic guidelines

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To systematize this kind of decisions, atlas editors should compose their own internal toponymic guidelines, which should be organized per country.

The needs of an atlas or world map editor exceed the scope of separate national names authorities: for the sake of homogeneity, the compiler of an atlas would rather apply similar rules to all names, regardless of the language they belong to. Although each country/language combination presents its own problems - therefore our internal guidelines are organized per country - it is not impossible to define a set of global toponymic rules. These global rules would serve as a starting point, a general guiding principle, for the rules defined for each country and language. They are normally extended with rules for producing indexes of the geographical names incorporated in the atlas (each language has a different alphabetic ordering system!), for a pronunciation guide and for rules for producing a geographical names database.