Standardization of geographical names - the United Nations outreach to individual countries

Helen Kerfoot
UNEGG Chair
(Natural Resources Canada)
Early days at the UN

- UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 1948
- First Regional Cartographic Conf. for Asia and Pacific 1955
- ECOSOC resolution 715 A (XXVII) 1959
- Meeting of first experts group 1960
- First Conference on the standardization of geographical names in 1967
  - national standardization
  - basis of international standardization (romanization)
  - resolution I/4 … foundation
UN Conferences 1967-2007

- Peak at 3rd Conference - resurgence to 9th
- 2007
  - 91 countries
  - 301 reps
- Countries
  - 2002 - 10 new
  - 2007 - 8 new

- Continue to encourage countries and agencies

Graph showing participation:
- Conference No. (1 to 9)
- Participation (0 to 350)
- Categories: Delegates, Countries, Special agencies
Africa: participation at Conferences

- 7: Morocco (1)
- 6: Cameroon, Egypt, Libya (3)
- 5: Algeria, Nigeria, South Africa (3)
- 4: Botswana, Kenya, Madagascar, Sudan (4)
- 3: Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda (7)
- 1: Benin, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Lesotho, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Sao Tome & Principe, Tanzania, Zimbabwe (10)
- 0: ??? (16)
UN Conference participation = 0

Burundi
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Eritrea
Gabon
Gambia
Guinea-Bissau
Malawi
Mauritius
Niger
Rwanda
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Swaziland
UNCSGN resolutions

- Conference resolutions reflect the technical work discussed
- From 9 Conferences - 195 resolutions assembled and grouped by subject area (26 groups)
  - Refer to: national standardization; systems of romanization; distribution of data through gazetteers (hard copy/web); data exchange in accepted formats; training and education; tools, toponymic guidelines; exonyms ....
  - + on-line database of resolutions
UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names

- one of seven expert groups of ECOSOC
- follows up on implementation of resolutions
- convenes between conferences (2) … 24 sessions
- supported by a Secretariat at UNHQ (NY)
- creates working groups to follow up on resolutions
- has 23 geographical/linguistic divisions for grass roots work
Among current issues

• Lack of advancement in some regions
  ▪ e.g. parts of Africa
  ▪ “Benefits of a country’s toponyms not really recognized” (Akinyemi)
  ▪ “Relevance of toponymy not generally appreciated” (Ngo)
  ▪ Questions of communication, commitment, leadership, continuity, recognition … and, of course, resources
Task Team for Africa

- Created a Task Team for Africa, 2004
  - Working through African organizations
    - (e.g. Economic Commission for Africa)
  - Organizing training where possible
    - South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Sudan, Tunis, Burkina Faso, Kenya
  - Participating in Conferences/regional meetings
    - CODI V in Ethiopia; Africa GIS 2007 in Burkina Faso; IGU in Tunis; CODIST-I
  - UNGEGN 25 in Africa - Nairobi, 2009
    - Essay/poem contest
UNGEGN Divisions

- Africa Central
- Africa East
- Africa South
- Africa West
- Arabic
- Asia East (other than China)
- Asia South-East and Pacific South-West
- Asia South-West (other than Arabic)
- Baltic
- Celtic
- China
- Dutch- and German-speaking
- East Central and South-East Europe
- Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia
- East Mediterranean (other than Arabic)
- French-speaking
- India
- Latin America
- Norden
- Portuguese-speaking
- Romano-Hellenic
- United Kingdom
- United States / Canada
... UNGEGN working groups

- Romanization
- Training
- Data files / gazetteers
- Evaluation / implementation
- Terminology
- Pronunciation
- Exonyms
- Country names
- Promotion – indigenous / minority names

Publicity / funding
WG - Training courses in Toponymy

- Courses offered to international audiences since 1982 - in various languages and locations
- Collection of course outlines, etc. available
- Web site: [http://toponymycourses.geog.uu.nl](http://toponymycourses.geog.uu.nl)
- To reach a larger audience ... moving towards web-based courses
  - ICA [http://lazarus.elte.hu/cet](http://lazarus.elte.hu/cet)
International toponymy training

Toponymy Training Courses

- UNGEGN courses
- PAIGH courses
Marracuene fieldwork

Fieldwork and processing

Training in Mozambique

At Marracuene administrative office
UNEGGN website . . .

unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/

- Overview … Mandate
- Conferences
- UNGEGN
  - Divisions
  - Working Groups  e.g. Romanization … www.eki.ee/wgrs
  - Sessions
- News and events
- Documents and publications
- Links
  - National names authorities; toponymic guidelines
  - Interactive national toponymic databases; international agencies
- Contacts …
Some available materials

• Reports; resolutions; technical papers (over 2000)
• Glossaries of terminology (1984 and 2002) – 6 languages; 375 terms + 2007 addendum
• Brochure – general information – 6 languages
• New mini brochure – names in georeferencing
• Two new manuals – basic “plus”; technical reference
• UNGEGN Information Bulletin - 2 /year
Some current issues

• Availability of good standardized names data
  … cooperative ventures for socio-economic benefits

  ▪ EuroGeoNames network
  ▪ Asia SE and Pacific SW divisional project
  ▪ collaboration with GoogleEarth
  ▪ UNGEGN Geographical Names Database
  ▪ Division francophone website; Portuguese language cooperation
UNEGGN Geonames Database

- Access through UNEEGN web site
- To include names of:
  - Countries
  - Capital and cities > 100,000
  - original writing system
  - romanized
  - variants (exonyms, name changes)
  - audio for endonyms
  - geo-referenced
Map interface

Countries
- display six UN languages
  - Arabic
  - French
  - Chinese
  - Russian
  - English
  - Spanish

Capital and other cities
Local name(s) - romanized
English, if available
### Table format – country names

#### Endonyms: short and formal names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Short name</th>
<th>Formal name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Sverige</td>
<td>Konungariket Sverige</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### United Nations languages: short and formal names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Short name</th>
<th>Formal name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>السويد</td>
<td>مملكة السويد</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>瑞典</td>
<td>瑞典王国</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>the Kingdom of Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Suède (la)</td>
<td>le Royaume de Suède</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Швеция</td>
<td>Королевство Швеция</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Suecia</td>
<td>el Reino de Suecia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Endonyms … short and formal names
- UN languages … short and formal names
- Other languages … short and formal names
- Data source
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>City name</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Endonym</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>UNEGGNY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>UNEGGN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>ستوكهولم</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>斯德哥尔摩</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Стокгольм</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Estocolmo</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- endonyms
- UN languages
- other languages
- lat. long.
- language
- source
- sound (endonyms)
UNEGGN : World Names

- Currently:
  - Working on the user interface
  - Developing the database
    - Country names - endonyms and in 6 UN languages
    - Resolving the names of capital cities (endonyms)
    - Gathering data – cities >100 000 ... countries update list of cities currently shown on the UN Statistics Division website unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/densurb/urban.aspx
  - And to provide the pronunciation

- [Map showing locations around the world with names in various languages, including Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.]
25th UNGEGN session

- Nairobi ...
  - May 5-12, 2009
- Forum for discussion
- Networking
- Encouraging Africa
  - special presentations; posters; workshops; training

- Exchange of experience; information on new initiatives
- Make progress on Working Group activities
A map, a name, a cultural identity ...
Suggestions?

- Finances from the UN (UN Statistics Division) are limited ... some money for trainees; some could be for trainers ... for workshops or equivalent.

- What would you like to see UNGEGN do to help countries/divisions, etc.?
In concluding …

- Names are vital elements in accessing our digital world and preserving our cultures
  - standardized spelling and application are key to easy, quick and accurate referencing
  - providing benefits for all users - in government, science, education, public …
  - a process needs establishing in each country to ensure standardized name information is available nationally and internationally
... in concluding

- The UNCSGN started in 1967, are we attempting the impossible? ... work far from finished, and more relevant than ever with technology / communication changes

- National authority is fundamental base

- Opportunity for every country to participate - to learn and to share experiences. Individual participation ... different interests

- UN is us ... we must make it work!
Looking to the future …
for improved communication
and a world at peace

unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo