Preserving cultural heritage through geographical names

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Geographical names pivotal role

Reference points

Cultural links

Geographical names

Key media points

Database queries
Geographical names for daily use
Toponymms describe our activities
Languages, scripts - georeferencing, communication
Connection between Man and Earth

• Toponyms
  – Carry cultural significance (sometimes well hidden)
  – May become modified
  – May be created for new places
  – May change their application
  – May not exist for ever

Urban dwellers (UN data) over 80% 2030
Names tie the landscape to traditional knowledge and are entry points for oral narratives of Inuit culture and natural history.

“Our children must learn … these stories must never die.”
Significance of names

• *Place Names of Hawaii* (Pukui, Elbert & Mookini)
• Of 4000 names in the book (3334 Hawaiian origin)
  – 83% Hawaiian names have discernible meanings
    • Most tied to type of feature, plants, animals, birds, sea life, material culture ...
    • Wai (water) - 240 ... *Wai-anu* (cold water); *Wai-nēnē* (goose water)
    • Pā (fence, enclosure) - 34 ... Pā-moa (chicken enclosure)
    • Streets: Palapala (learning) / Kapalama (the ‘lama’ wood enclosure)
  – Some important names – so ancient that no translation
    • e.g. names of islands (Hawai‘i, Kaua‘i, O‘ahu)
      ... although some meanings provided to tourists
• 2003 UNESCO - Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage
  – including oral traditions, languages, (toponyms), performing arts …

• Countries may proclaim “Masterpieces” to be preserved
  – 429 proclaimed up to end of 2016
    • reference to cultural space, music, language, oral heritage, dance
      – 55 in S & C America: Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina

None just for toponyms yet – France, Croatia, Norway looking into possibilities
Bedu in Petra and Wadi Rum, Jordan environmental knowledge, central to camel husbandry

Yaaral and Degal of Mali – festival of twice yearly crossing of Niger – transhumance routes and pastureland management
Mapoyo oral tradition and its symbol reference points within ancestral territory

Narratives of collective memory linked to places along the Orinoco River - connect the Mapoyo to their past and their territory
Single names or multiple names?

Norway

Finland

Spain

Falkland Islands / Islas Malvinas

Slovenia
New Zealand dual naming

Mount Taranaki or Mount Egmont

Aoraki / Mount Cook

Only some features have dual names in Maori and in English
Cultural heritage – name laws

- Some countries have place name acts to preserve heritage through toponyms
  - e.g. Estonia and Norway

- **Norwegian Parliament** – revised place names law 2005 – to take care of toponyms as cultural monuments – place names are historical “documents” containing information on the name-givers and how they viewed the “place” at the time.

  - References to protecting traditional names; following spelling rules of language; recognizing minority language names (Sámi, Kven) as official; possibility of more than one form of a name
Active programmes promoting heritage

- Finland
  - *Placenames dictionary of Finland* 2007
    - For general public; about 4700 names
    - Researched old spellings and dates, etymology, dialects, map use
  - 2010, European Heritage Days “Your own environment” celebrating built heritage
    - Exhibition: *Story of a Place Name*
      - Birth of placenames; name layers representing different languages and time periods; collection of names; checking map names; planning of names in town plans; unofficial names
Recognition of heritage names: China

• Books and television programmes to celebrate the heritage value of geographical names

• Developed standards for preservation of names
  – of ancient cities, counties, towns, villages ... where name has remained in use for over 1000 years and place has rich historical and cultural tradition; surrounding landscape has special character
  – names in national minority languages – oral tradition of many generations
  – famous mountains and rivers of historical/cultural significance
  – more recent names of places of modern significance
Falkland Islands / Islas Malvinas

Toponyms recall:

British officials, sea captains, settlers, French officials

Size, shape, direction ...

Naval, wrecks ...

Local stories

Local farm animals, wildlife, local birds, plants, bushes ...

British claim continuous “occupation” since 1833
Names on current Argentine maps ... from Navy sources many are different names (parallel toponymy)

1766 French sold out to Spain; 1806 Spanish withdrew; 1820 S. America claim
Support from the United Nations

• UN resolution I/4a 1967 underlines need to establish national agencies ... again V/15 1987
   Importance of toponyms in spatial data infrastructure ... UN Regional Cartographic Conferences, 2000, 2001 and UN res. VIII/6, 2002
   Preservation of toponyms as elements of identity and cultural heritage ... VIII/9 and IX/4 + link with UNESCO
Names may change

War and conquest
Boundary changes
Post-colonial period
Use of indigenous names
Changes in romanization systems

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Names appear, re-appear and disappear

Names needed!

New urban names in China

New man-made islands in Dubai, UAE
Marracuene

Record: in the field
Process: in the office

Training course: Mozambique
Municipal office at Marracuene
What is important?
Looking to the future … for improved communication and a world at peace

unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo