

Report of the UNGEGN International Course on Toponymy



At the
Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE),
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,
15-19 May 2017

DESA/UNSD/UNGEGN Secretariat

Introduction

1. At the *Centro de Referência em Nomes Geográficos*, the toponymical department within the Brazilian Mapping and Statistical Institute (IBGE), wishes to establish a permanent international toponymical training facility for Member States of both the Portuguese-speaking Division and the Latin America Division. The UNGEGN working group on Training Courses in Toponymy was approached to design and deliver a course geared towards strengthening the expertise and skills for the proposed teaching staff. The Course was also targeted to members of staff of other Brazilian institutions with responsibility for creating and maintaining geographical names and participants from the Portuguese-speaking and the Latin America Divisions.

2. In accordance with the request and in alignment with its capacity building programme, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in collaboration with the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) coordinated and conducted an international training course in toponymy from 15-19 May 2017, at IBGE's offices in Maracanã, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The course was attended by 32 participants and seven trainers/coordinators from ten Member States. Course participants were from five Portuguese speaking countries, in addition to Argentina and Uruguay. Participants represented a cross section of fields that deals with geographical names, ranging from: academia, mapping, the military, the navy, statistics and geography, museum management to municipal/local government.

Course Objective

3. The objectives of the course were to increase participants knowledge, awareness and enhance skills in: - geographical names collection techniques, names bureau creation and operations, toponymy databases creation, gazetteer creation and management and conducting names collection field exercises.

The Course

4. This 40-hour course consisted of lectures, exercises, group discussions and field work; which covered topics such as the principles and concepts of geographical naming and the standardization of a country's toponyms; best practices in geographical names data collection; toponymic database building and the design and development of gazetteers. The course is in line with UNSD's training and capacity building programme, and is integral to its standard setting and methods mandate.

Opening Session

5. The course was opened by Mr. Paulo Rabello, the then President of IBGE; he welcomed the training course, pledged his full support and noted his interest to have of the information generated from the course recorded and shared with others. Also in attendance were Mr. Wadih João Scandar Neto, Director of Geosciences, IBGE and Mr, João Bosco de Azevedo, Deputy Director of Geosciences, IBGE, under whose portfolio the subject of geographical names resides.



6. Mr. Scandar Neto welcomed participants, introduced members of the head table, shared the importance of geographical names and challenged participants to gain additional skills in standardization of geographical names. Ms. Moema Augusto, Vice chair of the Portuguese speaking division expressed her pleasure to meet UNGEGN lectures again. She shared that it was important for Brazil to participate in the Portuguese speaking division and to be able to work with other countries. Further she reinforced Brazil's support to the work of the division and called for refocusing its work on IBGE's website.

Course Highlights

7. Highlights of the course as expressed by the participants were the field work exercises (pre, in the field and post), developing names databases and gazetteers, managing geographical names program and the geographical names bureau simulation exercise. The fieldwork exercise was conducted on Wednesday 17 May, in the outskirts and in the mountains of the seaside city of Mangaratiba. Extensive reconnaissance work was done by Ana Resende and her team, which paved the way for a well organised and successful geographical names data collection exercise. Of note were guest presentations from Prof. Paulo M. Leal de Menezes, from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, who spoke on "Place names history of Rio de Janeiro State" and the Brazilian territorial structure lecture by Ms. Miriam Barbuda from IBGE, on "Standardization of Statistical Area Names", both received special acknowledgement from participants. The names bureau meeting simulation was lauded for its applicability and relevance of the participants work, additionally it allowed for group interaction and generated interesting questions.

8. The course ended with the presentation of certificates to participants and closing remarks from Ms V Nagem and Ms Ana Resende of Brazil, Ms H Kerfoot on behalf of the trainers, Prof. F Ormeling and Mr P-G Zaccheddu, and Ms C Blake of the UNGEGN Secretariat.

9. After nine years of inactivity, the course provided the opportunity for the Portuguese speaking Division of UNGEGN to convene a meeting that addressed the reactivation of its activities.

Course Evaluation

10. Feedback from participants was overall positive, indicating their appreciation that the course was organised and delivered for the Portuguese speaking Division and Latin America. The results from the evaluation questionnaire completed by 23 participants indicated that 78% strongly agreed and 22% agreed that the course content met their expectations. The activities and topics participants found most useful were the field work, database creation and managing national names programmes. The participants thought that the three main strengths of the course were the knowledge and experience of the lecturers, the sharing of experiences provided by an international mix of participants from different nationalities and institutions and the high quality of the course structure, content and field work.

11. Participants thanked IBGE for being delightful hosts and applauded the course instructors and the UNGEGN Secretariat for designing, organising and delivering the course. The course outline, lectures, and course participants list are available on the UNGEGN working group on training courses in toponymy webpage https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/Toponymy_Training_Brazil.html.

