National agencies and functioning of a names board

Helen Kerfoot
(Canada)

UNEGGN
Aims today

- National programmes – premises and justifications
- Some different types of geographical names authorities
- Variations in mandate, composition, etc. of names boards
- Principles of naming – some thoughts
Basic premises

- Geographical names should be clear and unambiguous
- Each country has control over the geographical names in its own territory
- Each country needs a process for standardizing and approving names
- Nationally recognized names are the basis for international use
Justifying a national programme?

- Not always easy to justify the benefits in financial terms
- Considerable money and time are spent on different programmes; overlapping efforts
  - little coordination and conflicting results
- Consolidated, small nucleus of dedicated people
  - at less cost
  - more consistent information in government documents
  - names more readily available to general public
- Names are for the use of all, not only mapping!
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 authorities come in different shapes and sizes

- The choice depends on the nature of the country
- (1) Default if no names board?
- (2) Centralized national names board
  - all decisions under one roof
  - by sub-committees: feature types, language ..
- (3) Decentralized to regional names boards
  - with central umbrella coordinating authority
  - with regional committees

  *Is it a board, a commission, a council .....?
(1) Standardization – central agency / agencies

- Municipalities
- National Hydrographic Office
- Military Mapping
- National Mapping Agency
Is this good or bad?

- Expertise in mapping
- Collect names while doing field survey
- Continuing user of names
- Have available finances

- Perhaps responsibility of one individual
- Lack of range of expertise
- Have own agenda
- No shield from political pressure
(2) Standardization – names authority (centralized)

National Names Authority (centralized)

Office - Secretariat

branch offices

sub-committees

advisors
Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names

Responsibility - Under Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Legal basis - Decree 1989 and 1992

Decisions – physical and transport features

Advice – administrative names; treatment of names outside Hungary

Members – national mapping, departments of both domestic and foreign affairs; transport; geographical science, education and higher learning; experts in linguistics; local authorities, minorities; major map publishers; national press

Meetings – 3 to 5 times a year
(3) Standardization – names authority (decentralized)

National Names Authority (decentralized)

- Regional committee
- Office - Secretariat
- Regional committee
- Regional committee
- Regional committee
- Office
- Office
- Office
Geographical names - Canada

Administrative structure

10 provinces
3 territories
11 federal depart.
advocates
GNBC ...

- √ Forum for discussion
- √ Development of policies
- √ International, United Nations activities
- √ Receive advice on toponymic problems
- √ Work on common projects
- X .. Name decisions

(except undersea; Antarctica)
Provincial and territorial names authorities

- Some have administrative structures
- Some have names boards

Public appointees
- academia
- First Nations
- Northern Ontario
- francophone rep.

Ex officio

Advisory to Minister

Chair

OGNB

Ministry of Natural Resources
In general ...

Board meeting results ...
Decisions of a Board

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES BOARD OF CANADA

BRITISH COLUMBIA DECISIONS

The decision noted hereunder was approved:

DATE: 19 NOVEMBER 2012

BY: Provincial Toponymist Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

RESCINDED
CGNDB Status: B4 (Gazetteer Cross-Reference)

JANGI Mayne
Feature type: Community
92B/14 - Mayne Island, British Columbia
NW side of Mayne Island, facing Active Pass, Cowichan Land District
Geographical Coordinates: 485104 1231759

ADOPTED
CGNDB Status: A4 (Change in the Form of a Name)

JDLLC Mayne Island
Feature type: Community
92B/14 - Mayne Island, British Columbia
NW side of Mayne Island, facing Active Pass, Cowichan Land District
Geographical Coordinates: 485104 1231759

Mayne (Post Office) adopted 12 December 1939, as labelled on BC Lands' map 2A, 1913 et seq. Form of name changed to Mayne (community) 29 November 1984 on Ottawa file 203-2. Form of name changed to Mayne Island (community) 19 November 2012, as requested by Islands Trust and endorsed by residents groups and area representatives, including Ratepayers Association, regional government, and elected provincial & federal representatives.
# Decisions of a Board

## GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES BOARD OF CANADA - DECISIONS

The decisions noted hereunder were approved:

Date: Dec 6, 2010

As confirmed by: [Signature]

Nancy Saunders, Nova Scotia Member of the GNBC

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Process ........

- Gathering names
  - field collection from local use
  - other sources

- Processing in office
  - to database, etc.

- Official recognition

- Dissemination
Aim - clarity and avoiding ambiguity

- Correctly recorded names data
  - based on local usage
  - “standardized” - through an authority
- Available and easily accessible
Responsibilities of a names authority

- Responsibilities and scope of decisions?
- Developing policies and guidelines to support names approval or rejection
- Making decisions/recommendations on names
- Assuring minutes, names decisions … are made generally available

- Other tasks?
  - displays, talks, workshops
  - promotion in media, conferences
... impact of decisions

- Board looked to for independent unbiased judgement
- Decisions may affect highway signs, laws, maps, etc.
- Decisions are important to future generations
- Integrity and effectiveness of board at stake
  - Slow and sure!
- ..... avoid political interference
Variations – composition, mandate

- Number of members:
  - usually 6-18 ..... 44 in Madagascar (1973)

- Types of members:
  - national / regional / municipal governments
  - cultural and language groups
  - non-government experts (e.g. universities, scientific academies, publishers, historical societies)

- Mandate:
  - natural features; populated places; municipal units – towns, etc.; streets; buildings; ephemeral features
  - features in parks, on indigenous lands; marine features
  - exonyms

- Meetings:
Legislation: names, language

- Many national authorities established through legislation
  - Board Act: New Zealand (NZGB, 1946, 2008)
  - Decree: Israel (1951); Madagascar (KPMA, 1973)
  - Cabinet document: Malaysia (NCGN, 2002)

- Some countries have legislation regarding names
  - Ireland: Official Languages Act, 2003
  - New Zealand: since 1998 Māori place names for maps
  - Norway: since 1990 Norwegian, Saami & Finnish names
  - Estonia: since 1996 .. include language & spelling rules
More about a board …

- Secretariat support / tasks
  - really essential
- Policies and principles
- Who makes the final decision
  - Board or Minister of Department?
- Public consultations?
- … other questions …
Policies and principles

- Develop according to country’s needs
  - current and long-standing local usage
  - univocity / multilingual areas
  - duplication in small area?
  - spelling rules; variations for dialects?
  - derogatory and pejorative names
  - generic terminology
Policies and principles - 2

- generic terms for part of the whole
- statutory names
- commercial names
- personal names and commemoration
- preferred types of names where no local use
- use of council resolutions
- areas of restricted naming
- changing names
... one name, or more?
Early names authorities

- Historically many lists of place names accompanying maps (e.g. explorers)
- Mainly lack of names authorities until late 1800s
  - USA .. USBGN 1890 ... Executive Order of Benjamin Harrison ... decisions binding for Federal Government
    - Now domestic and foreign names under the USBGN
  - Canada .. Board 1897 ... Order of Privy Council ...
    - Originally federal, by 1960s all provinces had responsibility
- Denmark 1910; NZ and Ireland 1946
Why are some boards ineffective?

- No one reason! Some suggestions:
  - Do not have
    - commitment of management, particularly in the lead department (resources)
    - Secretariat as focal point
    - interest/commitment of board members
    - good advisors on subjects of concern
    - clear direction/mandate
    - consultation with local community and provision of feedback
    - decisions available and used by government
In concluding ...

- To have a suite of standardized names a country needs a geographical names authority
  - Why is there no one type of geographical names authority suitable for every country?
  - Why is a Secretariat important to an authority?

- Management must be aware of the advantages of an appropriate authority
  - How can a names authority be effective?

- References: UNGEGN website
  - National Names Authorities – documents
  - UNGEGN Bulletin # 51
Political pressure to change a name

- Mount Logan, Yukon (Canada)
  - The highest mountain in Canada
- Prime Minister wished to change the name
  - Commemorate a former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau (deceased)
  - Yukon/National Parks
  - Population strongly opposed

the proposition was withdrawn resistance of population, forthcoming election
Political pressures to change a name

- **Castle Mountain, Alberta (Canada)**
  - 1858, appears like a rocky castle
  - 1946, the Prime Minister gave instructions to rename it after General Eisenhower
  - 1979, after constant pressure from the public: Castle Mountain with Eisenhower Peak

![Castle Mountain and Eisenhower Peak](image)
Geographical Names

Core Activities

Outreach to international community

Dissemination

National Toponymic Services Board ... Database

Field recording & investigation delineation

Tools, Training

Policies, procedures, guidelines, standards