Geographical names – maps, identity and the United Nations

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ICA, Santiago
Easter Island or ...........?

- Paasch-Eyland ...1722 Dutch Admiral Jakob Roggeveen
  - Paaseiland
- Île de Paques ...1756 French La Pérouse
- Isla de Pascua ...1770 Spanish ........... (annexed by Chile 1888)

- Te pito te henua .... (Navel of the World)
- Te pito o te kainga a Hau Maka ... (Little piece of land of Hau Maka)
- Mata-ki-te-rangi .... (Eyes that talk to the sky)
- Rapa Nui (Rapanui)
Maps/charts ... no names

- Stick chart of Marshall Islands
- Chart given to R.L. Stevenson by King Kabua, ruler of the Marshall Islands
- Cowrie shells indicate islands
- Documented by Winkler in 1901
- Each island named in David Lewis’ *We the Navigators*
• Driftwood ‘map’ gives tactile reminder of detailed coastline
Towards inclusion of toponyms

- St. Helena, likely Dutch origin
  - In John Ogilby, 1670

- St. Helena, Moll, 1732
• Even fictional maps are incomplete without names!
Communication problems – thematic maps, air photos ...
... satellite images

Toponyms needed to identify, describe, analyse
Names are more than just labels on a map ...
Names are a connecting point between Man and the Land...
Names may change

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

.........
Names appear, disappear and re-appear

Names needed!

New urban names in China

New man-made islands in Dubai, UAE
Names carry the hopes and challenges of culture and identity ...

Inuttitut Nunait Atingitta Katirsutauningit Nunavimi (Kupalimmi, Kanatami)
Gazetteer of Inuit Place Names in Nunavik (Quebec, Canada)
Répertoire toponymique inuit du Nunavik (Québec, Canada)
Misuse of names can cause friction

• Inaccurate references
  ▪ Macedonia ... The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

• Inappropriate use of exonyms

• Inaccurate spelling ... omitting diacritics
  ▪ Montréal; La Coruña

• Not recognizing name changes
  ▪ Pietersburg to Polokwane

• Not recognizing multiple names
  ▪ Helsinki/Helsingfors
Benefits of standardized names?

- information management
- humanitarian aid
- respond to climate change,
world health issues and food provision
- urban planning
- infrastructure development
- tourism promotion
- preservation of cultural heritage ...
Benefits of standardized names?

- Technical benefits
- Economic benefits
- Social benefits
- Cultural benefits
Lack of standardized data ...

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
  - Earthquake in Pakistan, 2005
    - problem of delays in providing assistance to remote villages
    - difficult to obtain - standardized names, coordinates of villages, gazetteers, population statistics, maps
Standardization benefits – UNOCHA

- Java, Indonesia, earthquake, 2006
  - aid progressed rapidly … maps, standardized names integrated into GIS, easily available

- Need for cooperation towards regional/global toponymic databases …

- SE Asia and SW Pacific
  - regional gazetteer and map
Aim - clarity and avoiding ambiguity

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

- **National mapping/hydrographic authorities**
- **Names boards established**
  - 1890  United States Board on Geographic Names
  - 1897  Geographic Board of Canada
  - 1910  Denmark
  - 1946  New Zealand, Ireland
  - ..................
  - 2009  Brazil, Afghanistan
  - Now some 40 countries with names authorities
Names authorities ...

Names discussions:
A. Mongolia
B. Canada – advisory committee
C. Australia – NSW board
Accessing standardized geographical names data

- Individual countries
  - web-based queries; paper copy gazetteers

- Groups of countries
  - SE Asia/SW Pacific regional gazetteer and map
  - Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso ... CD?
  - Africa Gazetteer – free development software (ECA)
  - Arabic-speaking countries gazetteer (Beirut system)

- Multinational – decentralized
  - EuroGeoNames

- World – UN – selected data
  - UNGEGN multilingual, multiscriptual
Project EuroGeoNames (EGN)

European geographical names infrastructure and services based upon the decentralized individually maintained national data bases

EGN Consortium

Public sector

Academic sector

Private sector

EGN Central (WFS) Service (public WFS URL):
http://www.eurogeonames.com:8080/gateway/gateto/anonymous-public

Connected EGN Local Services
October 2009
UNGEVN Geonames Database

- Access through UNGEVN 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

Interactive map

Tabular format

Query
Early days at the UN

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

28 scripts have UN recognition
17 scripts under discussion
see UNGEGN Technical Manual

Convenor: Peeter Päll, Estonia
WG website: http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/

Cooperating with ICANN
-web addresses in non-Roman scripts
WG - Training courses in Toponymy

- International courses since 1982
  - in various languages and locations
- Course outlines
  - web site: http://toponymycourses.geog.uu.nl
- For a larger audience ... towards web-based courses
  - Division francophone
    www.toponymiefrancophone.org/DivFranco/Formation/accueil.htm
  - ICA lazarus.elte.hu/cet (Convenor: Ferjan Ormeling)
## Building names standardization in Africa

### Low participation

- “Benefits of a country’s toponymy not really recognized”
  - Felicia Akenyami, Nigeria
- “Relevance of toponymy not really appreciated”
  - Vibon Ngo, Cameroon

### Since 2004

#### Task Team for Africa
- Convenor, Brahim Atoui, Algeria
- Agenda item during UNGEGN Sessions
- UNGEGN Nairobi 2009
- Liaison with African organizations ...
  - ECA, AOCRS, etc.

### Results?

- Increased interest in some countries; re-establishing UNGEGN divisions
Toponymic guidelines for map editors

Template

• Languages (official, national, minority)
  ▪ legal status, spelling and grammar rules; pronunciation; dialects

• Names authorities
  ▪ national and provincial; legal aspects

• Source material
  ▪ maps, atlases, gazetteers, databases

• Glossary of words needed to understand maps

• Abbreviations used on maps

• Distinguishing toponyms from other type on maps

• Administrative maps

Josef Breu, 1979 – Austria model

Guidelines for 40 countries
Overview … Mandate
Conferences
UNGEGN
• Working groups; divisions
News and events
Documents and publications
Links
• National authorities
• National toponymic databases
Contacts …

UNGEGN website . . .
unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/
In concluding …

- **50 years of the UN & names**
  - Work affected by politics, communications, and Internet
  - Higher expectations from users and methods changed

- **Need for accessible standardized names continues**
  - Names are vital GIS elements in accessing knowledge and preserving our cultures
  - Providing benefits for users government, science, education, public …
Looking to the future …

Mira el mundo con otros ojos
See the world through the eyes of others