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Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

Toponymic Data as Part of the Content of a Country Code Standard

Submitted by USA*

*Prepared by Trent Palmer, U.S. Board on Geographic Names

Summary

With the withdrawal in 2008 of the United States (U.S.) Federal country code standard, the U.S. national names authority worked to ensure that the replacement standard would be compliant with its policies and standards. By remaining engaged with a multi-agency working group, a country code standard has been developed whose content is internet-accessible and includes a good source of toponymic information on countries and other political entities.

Background

In 2008 the Federal Information Processing Standards Publication (FIPS PUB) 10-4, the U.S. Federal standard for country codes, was withdrawn. FIPS PUB 10-4 was maintained by the same agency that provided the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) Foreign Names Staff. This arrangement ensured a close relationship (by design) in the content of the country code standard and those names approved by the national names authority. Although the BGN did not have authority over the codes, the geographical names used in the country code standard were those names approved by the BGN. As a replacement country code standard was being developed, the BGN was worked to ensure that the new standard would remain in compliance with BGN standards as well as U.S. foreign policy on sovereignty and recognition.

Standard Development

The Federal standards community logically sought to adopt the international country code standard, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 3166, *Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions*. However, despite the ubiquity and thoroughness of the standard, there were other factors to be considered. Certain geographical names and entities included in ISO 3166 are not in accordance with U.S. policy. Furthermore, there are some missing data elements which the US Government required. Therefore, the approach chosen was the development of a ‘profile’ of ISO 3166. In a profile, the elements of a base standard, in this case ISO 3166, are used to the greatest extent possible.

The Geopolitical Entities, Names, and Codes (GENC) Standard is the U.S. Government profile of ISO 3166 Parts 1 and 2. The first edition of GENC was published in November 2012. The first edition provided codes for the country level (equivalent to ISO 3166-1). Edition 2 of GENC added codes for administrative subdivisions. GENC is now in its third edition and is updated quarterly. For more details of the history of the development of GENC please see the link below.

The content of the GENC is set forth in the GENC Registry and hosted on the National System for Geospatial Intelligence (NSG) Standards Registry (see link below). The GENC Registry contains multiple registers of country code data. The registry is web-based application and includes RESTful (Representational State Transfer) API (Application Programming Interface) services.

The close relationship between and the BGN and the maintenance activity of the country code standard has been retained. Updates, robust content, historical information, web-access (not merely document download) are all available on the GENC Registry. The site not only meets the need of providing the content of the government country code standard but also as an easily

accessible record of BGN-approved names of countries, dependencies, administrative subdivisions, as well as other relevant areas. The BGN seeks to approve official names, romanized names, where relevant, as well as English-language exonyms for a subset of features.

Those interested in country code standards may also wish to explore the ISO's Online Browsing Platform (OBP), which includes most of the content of ISO 3166 (all three parts). Interested parties may select to 'Follow' the OBP and receive notifications of changes.

Links

U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN): <http://geonames.usgs.gov/>

National System for Geospatial Intelligence (NSG) Standards Registry
<https://nsgreg.nga.mil/index.jsp>

Geopolitical Entities, Names, and Codes (GENC): <https://nsgreg.nga.mil/gencc/discovery>

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Online Browsing Platform (OBP)
<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#search>
