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NATIONAL GAZETTEERS

AUTOMATED DATA PROCESSING

Report on National Gazetteers

Paper presented by the Working Group on International
Gazetteers of the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names

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Very few national gazetteers have appeared since the First United Nations Conference recommended that each nation should produce its own national gazetteer and detailed the specifications. Within the United Nations Group of Experts, the Gazetteer of Austria was held up as an example for other nations to emulate. To date there has been no comparable national production.

In the period since the Gazetteer of Austria was produced, two important factors have become evident: the effort involved in producing such a gazetteer, and the difficulty in maintaining it. Had a gazetteer of that kind been produced in the United Kingdom, the greatest difficulty would have been experienced in updating it and producing a revised version. The effort involved would be so great that it would probably never be revised at all. Gazetteers become out of date, and economical maintenance is essential if the product is to fulfil its role as a reference to current names.

The second gazetteer to serve as a basis for study is the 1:500,000 scale Gazetteer of the Federal Republic of Germany, which is a product of automated data processing. Each gazetteer is complex in its own way: the Gazetteer of Austria by reason of its detail and comprehensiveness, the Gazetteer of the Federal Republic of Germany because of the detailed nature of the coding devised specifically for computer production.

The Conference will need to consider both types of product, and also take into account other papers submitted for discussion. Points for discussion would be the method of compilation: the adequacy of feature coding: the scope and methods of maintenance: the objective in producing national gazetteers: the type of output: the frequency of updated hard copy, whether directly output by computer or type-set independently (off-line) and conventionally printed: the type of binding: distribution: the type of user. If it is essential that future gazetteers will be computer compiled, what should be the form of input? Are punched-cards any longer necessary?

Two United Kingdom papers deal with gazetteers. The Ordnance Survey gazetteer based on the 1:50,000 scale maps has a very simple feature classification. Has such a simple classification any special value? Both papers link automated (or perhaps more aptly computer-assisted) cartography with geographical names and hence gazetteers. The Ordnance Survey gazetteer will in any event be a natural by-product of putting names into a computer for map production purposes. The paper on computer processing deals both with names data bases in relation to map production, and with the separate production of gazetteers by computer independent of map production.

The micro-computer has given a new impetus to the management of geographical names. What part will word-processors play in this context? How does the Conference view the future, bearing in mind the greatly increased capacity which is likely to be at our disposal from now on in the filing, sorting, arranging and output of names data? These are important questions. Over-riding all of them is the question: how important are gazetteers? Believing as we do in their importance, how do we convince others?