

Distribution of standardized names: accessibility on the internet

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Introduction

When names have been collected and standardised the work is only half done. As long as the standardised names have not found their way to the public, all of the work has been for nothing. The public need to be informed of the standardised name forms, so that they are used. On the UNGEGN website (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/about_us.htm) there are links to all national websites from which the national geographical names databases can be accessed. We will discuss a number of them in order to get an overview of the way they operate and of their functionality.

Australia

Geoscience Australia, part of the Australian Government, has a place name search option (<http://www.ga.gov.au/map/names/>) where one can type in geographical names which then are retrieved from the central database. A number of matching entries will then come up, with indication of their feature code, coordinates, status (are they official or not) and the state they are located in. On that basis one can go to the entry looked for, and when clicking this, a detailed map with the looked-for entry comes up, with a locator map, feature ID and an indication of the topographical map sheets it can be found on.

Canada

Canada has 3 options, as the geographical names database can be accessed through three different sites, national atlas, mapping services and national geographical names bureau. When we go to the Geographical Names Search Service (<http://gnss.nrcan.gc.ca/gnss-srt/searchName.jsp?language=en>), we can type in names, but this facility also provides the possibility to type in aboriginal characters. The results can be displayed according to different options, ordered according to feature type or region, and when the looked-for entry has been selected additional information is given, such as a feature identifier; also the dates when the name changed status, for instance when it became official.

The Canadian mapping services also have access to the names database (http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/index_e.php) with a little more options for seeking the feature (wildcard, feature type, currently or formerly valid names, province), by coordinate or unique ID; the list of matching entries would order on province, feature type and location. It would also have an option explaining the name, as well as showing the location of the named object on the map.

The National atlas site of Canada also provides access to the names database (<http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/index.html>) where when a name has been typed in, a list of entries will come up, providing access not only to search-matching place name results but also to maps that show the entered name and articles (so name parsing is another functionality here).

Germany

As for Germany, a new (Gazetteer-) web service was developed by the Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy (BKG) in co-operation with the German Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (StAGN) in autumn 2006. This (Gazetteer-) web service is based on a Web Feature Service (WFS) and thus compliant to the respective Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) specification (www.geodatenzentrum.de). Since 2007 the gazetteer service provides the content of the single database called Geographical Names of Germany (GN-DE) comprising also geographical names in the Sorbian and Frisian languages.

Estonia

The Estonian place name database (KNAB), developed by the Institute of Estonian Languages EKI can be accessed through <http://www.eki.ee/knab/knab.htm> . As Estonian names in the past had their German and Russian variants, much attention is paid to languages of the place names. There are detailed photo and map options for showing the named feature in situ. The website also provides information for named features outside Estonia; according to the description they will specially collect names for linguistic minorities.

France

In France the Géoportail (<http://www.geoportail.fr/>) provides geographic and cartographic information delivered by the Institut Géographique National (IGN). The names part of this website is displayed against a map or satellite imagery background which can be customised, rendering at will the transport network, land use, heights, hydrography, public services and administrative boundaries. The various homonyms are differentiated between by adding the departments they are situated in and highlighting an entry will lead to a large scale photographic or cartographic representation of the named object.

Finland

The Finnish national names website , found at (<http://kansalaisen.karttapaikka.fi/kartanhaku/osoitehaku.html?lang=en-GB>), part of the Citizen's website, operates under the same principle, showing all matching answers from the query, from which the user must select the proper one, which will then be displayed on a large-scale map. This map is very clear and has reproduction-like quality.

Mexico

In Mexico the national statistical and mapping organisation INEGI also has a names server (<http://mapserver.inegi.org.mx/mng/index.cfm?c=1312>), perhaps a bit less user-friendly ergonomics, but delivering the same kind of information. One also sees in the matches different provinces and feature classes, and the looked-for match will show up on a large scale topographic map, with locator map added. The number of the sheet of the topographic maps the feature is rendered on will also be shown.

The Netherlands

The national atlas in the Netherlands strives at becoming a Geoportal as well, and for this purpose it also contains a geographical names web server (<http://www.geografiek.nl/anderen/nationaleAtlas/interactief/>). It allows for querying the geographical names database of the national mapping agency, but also has the functionality to query for parts of names or name elements.

South Africa

South Africa has a very active names programme with a geographical names search service (to be found at <http://sagns.dac.gov.za/>), where also information is given about formerly official names, regional place name boards, literature, where applications for place name changes can be made, etc.. The website informs about the name status, and will also show maps of the named features.

United Kingdom

<http://explore.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/> (search for a place or find a route) or <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/freerun/didyouknow/> (did you know you have instant access to a quarter of a million British place names?), <http://leisure.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/> would be the url's of the Ordnance Survey's place name server; they each provide different numbers of matches to the queries, most being given by the explore site. As with the other sites shown, the place name search functionality is part of a service allowing the customers to find the proper map they want to buy. The added functionality here is that also map-related services are provided, as walking tours. Find a route, create a route, blogs about the routes, are all related services here.

Overview

Most name servers are related to the national mapping agency. A number of them have as a prime function to find the necessary maps, but some have more extended functionality for scientific purposes (giving more information about the name (etymology, history) or their variants. Nearly all of them are linked to a map option where the named object can be seen on the map or on a satellite image. These maps or images can be customised, adding information layers at will. The information provided for the names sometimes extends to providing their ID numbers, and dates when they were standardised or entered into the names database.