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TOPONYMIC EDUCATION

ICA Toponymy Webcourse

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Summary

From 2004 onwards, the Commission on Education and Training of the International Cartographic Association has been working on a toponymy webcourse in English. In 2011 it was extended from 11 to 20 modules; in 2012 they were updated updated and brought to the same layout and functionality. The rationale for the realization of this webcourse were that 1) only a limited number of potential participants can be reached by toponymy courses organised in the field, and that 2) advanced courses in the field can be more effective when participants have taken the webcourse already.

Both the module and the course structure are described, and the 20 individual modules are characterized.

THE COMPLETION OF THE ICA COURSE ON TOPONYMY

From 2004 onwards, the Commission on Education and Training of the International Cartographic Association on its website hosted by Elte University in Budapest, Hungary (<http://lazarus.elte.hu/cet/>), has included a webcourse in toponymy in English. In 2011 this existing ICA toponymy course was extended from 11 to 20 modules; in 2012 the previously existing 11 modules were updated and brought to the same layout and standard as the new modules. This has been possible thanks to financial support from the United Nations Statistical Division. The rationale for the realization of this webcourse were that 1) only a limited number of potential participants can be reached by the toponymy courses organised in the field, and that 2) advanced courses in the field can be more effective when participants have taken the webcourse already.

The objective of this course were and are to provide the basic knowledge necessary to deal with geographical names at BSc level.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND TARGET GROUP

The course sequence first follows the national names 'production' process: collection, processing, standardizing, visualization and communication of correctly spelled geographical names. Then, the international framework is shown: how to deal with different languages, scripts and conversion systems. Institutional aspects are not forgotten: the experience of both the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) as well as national names bureaux has been applied here. Changes in focus are reflected in the course: from the original focus on national gazetteers towards the current focus on names data bases and cultural aspects of one's toponymical heritage.

This course is intended for topographers that collect geographical names, staff of geographical names branches, cartographers that have to select names for their maps and for map and atlas editors

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE MODULES

-Module 1 Introduction

Introduction to the field of toponymy. In this lesson we try to look at geographical names in general. In this overview you can read about the objectives of the course, and we touch on the main problems and topics which will be covered later in more detail. Current problems because of confusion about geographical names (exonyms, homonyms, allonyms' are discussed. The way we have tried to deal with these issues through national and international names standardization since the end of the 19th century is shown. Counter-arguments against international

standardization are discussed as well. Available educational literature is mentioned.

-Module 2 The naming process

Here the rationale is explained why geographical names are used in order for humankind to relate to its environment. The question what geographical features or objects are named for is answered, differences between specific and generic name parts are explained, and the evolution of the original and present connotation of names is sketched. Examples are given of etymological names studies and of synchronous and diachronous names research.

-Module 3 Functions of geographical names

Once given, the names of geographical features can be used for cartographic purposes such as orientation or as links in the spatial data infrastructure, but also for non-cartographic purposes: for historical purposes as in etymological studies, as brand names for cheese or wine, as educational concepts, as proof of sovereignty or as symbols or images for countries, empires, battlefields, traumatically peace/treaties, tropical paradises, inaccessible places or cities built on islands.

-Module 4 National Agencies, models and procedures

The possible organizational structures of a national geographical names bureau are indicated, as well as its legal position. The possible composition of geographical names boards and the way they should represent society at large is discussed. The mandate of the names board and the way its decisions are enforced are dealt with, as well as the expertise expected in those sitting on a names board. The kind of names they have to relate to is indicated, as well as the kind of general decisions on principles and specific decisions on actual names expected from them. The tasks of the secretarial support staff in preparing the sessions of the board as well as its follow-up are covered in module 7.

-Module 5 Field collection systems

Fieldwork objectives and requirements are shown, the activities necessary during the fieldwork planning stage in the office are enumerated as well as the targets drawn up for the names collection campaign. As the toponymists/topographers have to prepare for all contingencies in the field, this planning phase can be quite time-intensive. Preparations include administrative, logistical, linguistic, geographical and cartographical aspects. The kind of problems one is liable to encounter in the field is shown. Name forms and their design to speed up names collection and its later processing are discussed.

-Module 6 Reference systems

One of the issues during fieldwork is the geographical positioning of the named objects. Different reference systems are discussed as well as their transformations into one another and their relation to gps-measurements. Absolute and relative gps positioning are covered and the geometrical accuracy of the various types of measurements is indicated.

-Module 7 Office processing of geographical names

The kind of operations expected of a national geographical names bureau are indicated, . The development of policies and procedures to support names approval or rejection is discussed, as well as the necessary maintenance of records, assuring minutes on decisions of names are generally available. Gathering of names information implies also an indication of the various sources that could be used. After authorisation of the toponyms by the names board, storage of the data (and of the details of the decision process) and maintaining records are necessary, as is dissemination of the data. Different modes of dissemination are discussed. For the set/up of names files and derived publication, see module 15.

-Module 8 Multilingual areas and Minority names

There are few countries that are completely homogeneous from a linguistic point of view. The ways linguistic minorities develop and the official national policies regarding geographical names used by linguistic minorities are investigated. Transformations or minority names are rubricated, attitudes regarding linguistic minorities are dealt with as well as current trends in these attitudes. Map use is also envisaged: in order to accommodate linguistic minorities, apart from toponyms, marginal information on the map might be rendered in the minority language as well.

-Module 9 Languages

As all other names, toponyms belong to languages, as they once used the vocabulary and followed the grammatical and orthographic rules of a certain language. Languages are the subject of the science called linguistics. Therefore, anyone handling geographical names needs to have some basic linguistic knowledge, both in general terms and specifically pertaining to the language situation of the area of survey. Different types of languages are described, which might have different legal status in a specific administrative area. The distribution of different language families is indicated so that participants can see what languages are spoken in the area studied.

-Module 10 Writing systems

First, the difference between meaning, sound and looks of geographical names is explained. Then scripts, the graphics of language, are dealt with. The division of scripts is discussed, into ideographic, syllabic and alphabetic scripts, based on the basic unit of writing.

Examples are given of ideographic and logographic scripts as well as syllabic scripts. Finally, alphabetic scripts are shown, with vocalised and non/vocalised forms.

-Module 11 Conversion systems

For international standardization of geographical names, the existence of various writing systems would mean that there have to be standardized ways of representing geographical names originating in languages with other writing systems. Thus, for each name written in a non-roman alphabet there should be only one internationally accepted way of writing in roman letters. The terminology involved is explained, the UN-approved systems and the various types of names conversions are shown, as well as the websites of the UNGEGN-Working group on Romanization where all the tables can be found that show how conversions should be done.

-Module 12 Role of the UN in the standardization of geographical names

The historical background of UN's involvement in geographical names standardization is shown, the reasons of this involvement as well as its long-term goal. The organizational set-up of UNGEGN (working groups, divisions, secretariat), its working procedures (sessions, conferences, resolutions) are explained and an overview is given of the publications produced and the website developed in order to reach the long-term goals. UNGEGN's role in archiving the corpus of toponymic publications presented at its meetings is highlighted, as is its role in the development of a global geographical names database. The contents of the UNGEGN website is explained.

-Module 13 Exonyms

Exonyms are defined, they are categorised, their origins are explained and examples are given. For different object categories exonyms are used to different degrees. Exonyms can form a problem for international communication, and that is why UNGEGN has set up a working group to deal with them. Arguments for and against the use of exonyms are given, and current trends in their reduction are signalled.

-Module 14 Toponymical guidelines for map and other editors

Toponymic guidelines aim at systematically presenting information for each country about its languages (distribution and status) the alphabets used, with the phonetic value of characters, the use of capitalization, word strings, hyphenation, addresses of names standardization authorities, references to published source material on geographical names and glossaries of generic elements within toponyms. They aim to be practical professional instruments for toponymists, geographers and cartographers.

They show how geographic names for a specific country should be rendered.

-Module 15 Toponymical data files

Examples are given how toponymical data files can be developed, what attribute information should be added to the names, apart from coordinates and category of the named object. Data base structures are discussed on the basis of the expected applications. Relevant data exchange standards are listed.

Products derived from these toponymical data files are e.g. national gazetteers or name sheets for particular maps.

-Module 16 Names placement

This module shows how an optimal association should be achieved on the map between the geographical name and the named object, taking account of the spatial characteristics of the named object and of external factors (other symbols on the map) while making use of the available graphic variables.

-Module 17 Legal status of names

Full stability of the standardized names is only achieved when the names are granted official status. By this act geographical names would be protected by law and cannot be changed or tampered with anymore. Different notions of 'officiality' are discussed, as are naming competence and the procedures to make names official. Several place name acts are cited, noting their consequences.

-Module 18 Editorial issues (school atlases)

School atlases include only the most important geographical objects as well as their names on their maps. Consequently atlas editors are confronted with the need to make decisions about the spelling of geographical names from all over the world, and issues whether to use endonyms or exonyms, the translation of generic parts of names, transliteration or transcription, use of obsolete or historical names (if only for concordance in the names index). The special problems in generating a geographical names index for the atlas are dealt with as well.

School atlases are the first means to have school children relate to their world, and care should be taken that this happens with properly spelled geographical names.

-Module 19 Toponymical planning

Toponymic planning is the deliberate effort to influence the spelling of place names, primarily in order to improve communication. There can be other reasons, however, for instance shedding of supposed foreign toponymic influences. Various types of name changes are discussed. The

process of changing names can be improved by introducing transitory phases during which both the old and new name for the same object are displayed together, not only on the map but also on street signs or in directories.

-Module 20 Names as cultural heritage

Through their functions as spatial identifiers, bearers of personal and social experiences, and as prints of the past, geographical names represent huge cultural values. And that is why it is essential to treat and preserve them accordingly. In a sense, names form a living museum of humankind's occupation of the soil.

Present threats to this cultural heritage are the continued extension of towns and cities over the rural countryside, with the related loss of geographical names for fields and hamlets, villages and farms; new mapping methods, not depending on terrain surveys, tend to lose toponyms.

MODULE STRUCTURE

Each module is composed of a combination of slides, in which the issues are introduced and defined, and in which sources and literature are provided. In order to realize the necessary interaction, exercises are provided, the answers to which can be found elsewhere, so that participants can gauge their knowledge. Where relevant, different viewpoints are given in controversial issues.

Much use is made of the wealth of material contained on the UNGEGN website, and in this sense the webcourse is a good way to learn to access and use all this material. It refers to the papers handed in for the various sessions and conferences, to the websites of the working groups, to the resolutions and the search machines developed for them and to the World Geographical Names database.

EXPECTATION

A webcourse can never replace a course with live contact with the teacher. But even so, it is expected that those that have studied the modules of the webcourse, in their own time and at their own pace, did the exercises and read the literature provided, have become aware of the basic issues in geographical names standardization, both on a national and an international level. They have come to know best practices in the field of name collecting and processing, know the pros and cons of different organisational structures and even have some hands-on experience with geographical names data bases. The webcourse thus should provide a good starting point for those starting to work for organizations engaged in toponymical activities.

CREDITS AND INTELLECTUAL INSPIRATION

The course has been developed from papers and lectures by Bernd Beinstein (BKG), Botolv Helleland, Helen Kerfoot (UNGEGN), Richard Knippers (ITC), Nicoline McCarthy, Peeter Päll, Tjeerd Tichelaar (Noordhoff), Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu (BKG) and Ferjan Ormeling (Utrecht University).

Technical support was provided by Antal Guszlev and Krisztina Iras (both ELTE University) and Nicoline McCarthy. Laszlo Zentai had the course incorporated on ELTE University's Cartography Department website. The graphic and conceptual design of most modules was realised by Nicoline McCarthy (Cartografisch ontwerp bureau Blauwzand, Elst, the Netherlands).

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