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National and international standardization of geographical names: Names collection, office treatment, national authorities, features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation

Harmonizing names of features intersected by the national boundary of Austria

Submitted by Austria**

Summary

Austria has 2,706 km of international borders, of which 1,689 km are the land borders with Italy (430 km), Slovenia (330 km), Hungary (356 km), Slovakia (107 km), and Czechia (466 km). Along parts of those borders, languages other than German have official status. German is the official language for the whole country. Geographical features such as mountains, mountain passes, alpine pastures and rivers that are intersected by those borders have different names, depending on the language spoken on either side of the border. In 2020, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior issued a decree in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis in which it imposed travel restrictions and listed all border crossings down to the smallest mountain passes. The decree revealed a large number of inconsistencies in naming, especially in the spelling of names other than German and in the different names applied to one and the same feature on both sides of the border. This motivated the Austrian Board on Geographical Names to offer the Austrian Federal Office of Metrology and Surveying as the publisher of the country's official topographical maps to assist with a project on harmonizing the names applied on both sides of the border to features intersected by the border. Under the project, national names authorities and official mapping agencies in all neighbouring countries that have an official language other than German will be consulted about names applied at their side of the border. The project started with a pilot study on the Austrian-Slovenian border in cooperation with the Commission for the Standardization of Geographical Names of Slovenia and the Urban Jarnik Institute in Klagenfurt, Austria, the latter with regard to Slovenian minority names along the Carinthian section of the border.

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Harmonizing names of features crossed by Austria's border

1. Introduction

Austria's external borders have a length of 2,706 kilometers, of which 1,689 are borders to countries (Italy 430 km, Slovenia 330 km, Hungary 356 km, Slovakia 107 km, and Czechia 466 km) with at least partly official languages that are different from German, which is Austria's nation-wide official language. Geographical features such as mountains, mountain passes, alpine pastures or rivers which cross these borders have names in different languages from both sides. A decree issued in 2020 by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior [Bundesministerium für Inneres] prompted by the COVID-19 crisis ruling travel restrictions and listing all border crossings down to the smallest mountain pass revealed a lot of inconsistencies in naming, especially in spelling names in the languages of neighbouring countries and relating names from both sides of the border to the same feature.

This motivated the Austrian Board on Geographical Names [Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kartographische Ortsnamenkunde, AKO] to offer the Austrian Federal Office of Metrology and Surveying [Bundesamt für Eich- und Vermessungswesen, BEV] as the publisher of Austria's official topographical maps to assist with a project on harmonizing the names applied from both sides of the border to features crossed by the border. The project is to involve national names authorities and official mapping agencies in all neighbouring countries with an official language different from German as regards consultations referring to names from their side. The project started with a pilot study on the Austrian-Slovenian border in cooperation with the Slovene Governmental Commission for the Standardisation of Geographical Names [Komisija za standardizacijo zemljepisnih imen Vlade Republike Slovenije] and the Urban Jarnik Slovenian Ethnographic Institute [Slowenisches Volkskundeeinstitut Urban Jarnik/Slovenski narodopisni inštitut Urban Jarnik] in Klagenfurt, the latter related to Slovenian minority names in the Carinthian border section.

2. The task

The Austrian Map [Österreichische Karte] published in the scales 1:50,000, 1:250,000 and 1:500,000 is the official Austrian topographical map in the tradition of the Austrian land surveys starting in the 18th century. It portrays the topography (geographical features and their names) of the Austrian territory as well as of adjacent parts of neighbouring countries should they complete a certain map field. The map series in the 1:50,000 scale represents all place names contained in the Austrian Geographical Names Data Base GEONAM. The map series in the scales 1:250,000 and 1:500,000 (and 1:25,000 enlarged from 1:50,000) are derived from the basic scale 1:50,000 and generalized as regards features as well as place names.

Feature types divided by country borders and thus concerned in our context are mainly mountains, mountain ranges, mountain peaks, mountain passes crossed by all kinds of land traffic routes – from railways, motorways and roads down to just hiking paths –, road and railway tunnels, bridges, mountain pastures, fields, forests, swamps, and all kinds of water bodies. Not concerned are populated places, buildings, and administrative units, since they are always clearly affiliated to one side of the border.

Prompted by the decree of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior mentioned before, a closer investigation of the rendering of place names for features crossed by the Austrian-Italian and Austrian-Slovenian borders, the latter selected for a pilot study, revealed several items to be discussed further.

- Do all features marked only by one name bear a name only from one side of the border?
- Do all corresponding names (translated or derived from each other) refer to the same feature?
- Is the variation of type fonts and type sizes between corresponding names justified?
- Would it be appropriate to represent the Slovenian name standardized in Slovenia, when the feature designed by it is also part of the Carinthian-Slovenian minority area and in addition to its German name named by the local Slovenian endonym?

3. First recommendations

Findings along the border sections so far investigated suggest the following general recommendations (partly applicable also to other sections of the Austrian border, perhaps also to topographical maps in general):

- (1) All transboundary features bearing differing standardized names from both (or three) sides are recommended to be named by all their names.
- (2) All these names are recommended to be shown by the same font type and size without using brackets to express that they are equal in rank and refer to the same feature category. The name standardized in the neighbouring country may be placed below the name standardized in Austria or after it, in the latter case separated by a comma.
- (3) Slovenian minority names being (besides German names) endonyms in the Austrian minority area are recommended to be placed after the German name divided from it by a slash (e.g., *Steinberg/Kamnik*, *Woschza/Vošca*). This would express equal rank of two standardized endonyms. The Slovenian name standardized in Slovenia is recommended to be added according to principle (1) whether it differs from the Slovenian endonym in Austria or not.

The Group of Experts is requested to:

- (1) Take note of the effort made to encourage national standardization of geographical names.
- (2) Discuss the principles of standardization applied in this specific case.
- (3) Encourage Austria's neighbouring countries to cooperate in this project.
- (4) Consider similar projects in other parts of the world.