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Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including indigenous, minority and regional languages and multilingual issues

Minority place-name standardization: a comparison of regulations and approaches in Europe

Submitted by the Liaison Officer for the International Cartographic Association **

Summary:

A research project under the auspices of the Joint International Cartographic Association (ICA)/International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on Toponymy and the IGU Commission on the Geography of Governance is to produce a handbook comprising three volumes. The handbook contains a comparison of the regulations on minority place names in European countries with autochthonous linguistic minorities, against the background of ethnic and linguistic structures, historical and political developments, the political landscape, governance structures and external relations. The project also attempts to establish whether minority place-name standardization is part of the general standardization process or if there are specific regulations; whether it is a bottom-up or a top-down process; and which administrative levels are involved. The aim of the project is also to explain the extent to which such regulations satisfy linguistic minorities and help to facilitate the relations between majority and minority groups. Experts of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names contributed to the project.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** The report was prepared by Peter JORDAN (Austria), Austrian Academy of Sciences, ICA Liaison Officer, ICA Chair, Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy.

Minority place-name standardization. A comparison of regulations and approaches in Europe

Related to the representation of minority place names in public space (on town signs, road signs etc.) and on maps exist various regulations in Europe. They differ by

- definition of the minority,
- feature categories included (populated places, natural features etc.),
- the administrative level where the decision is taken (national, province, district, commune level),
- the share of minority population necessary for taking advantage of the regulation,
- additional procedures necessary to effectuate the right on the name,
- the choice between standard language and dialect name versions,
- the kind of visual representation of the minority name,
- comprehensiveness of the fields where the minority name has (in addition to the majority name) to be used (only on town signs, also on maps, in all kinds of communication),
- the level of officiality of the minority name (as official as the majority name, supplementary official, just for information etc.)
- and by several others.

The project attempts to compare such regulations in the countries of Europe with autochthonous linguistic minorities on the background of ethnic and linguistic structures, historical and political developments, the political landscape, governance structures, and external relations. Is minority place-name standardization part of the general standardization process or are there specific regulations? Is it a bottom-up or a top-down process and which administrative levels are involved? The book is also going to explain, to which extent these regulations satisfy linguistic minorities and help to facilitate the relations between majority and minority.

Contents

1 Introduction (Peter Jordan)

2 The concept fields of minorities/non-dominant groups, toponymy and place-name standardization (Peter Jordan)

The concept field relevant for the main subject of this book comprises first of all the **identity group** in the sociological sense as a group of people connected by a common identity in contrast to a coherence group characterized by frequent interaction. This leads to the various kinds and scales of identity groups starting from a supra-national European identity across national, regional and local space-related identities to cultural identities that may share the same place with others – also as cultural minorities in the sense of non-dominant groups bound together by specific cultural characteristics like speaking their own language or language variant. For the topic of this book only linguistic (and not religious or social) minorities are relevant, since only linguistic minorities have their own place

names. They have also to be present for several generations to be regarded as autochthonous (although the time span is flexible), since only long-term presence lets a group-specific toponymy develop, while new migrant communities are inclined to use the names they find.

Toponymy in the sense of all kinds of place names, studied by toponomastics, comprises proper names for all kinds of geographical features, i.e., features for which the relation to space is relevant for their identity. While, e.g., sea currents, winds or meteorological highs or lows with their proper names (Gulf Stream, hurricane Catherina, high Laura, low Frederic) are still geographical features, because their identity depends on where they occur, a car or a ship are not anymore geographical features, since they remain the same, wherever they cruise. It will be pointed at the symbolic power of place names and their role as identity markers. It will be explained how they are generated and gain ground, that they are always promoted by the dominant political force and how much they depend on political and societal backgrounds – as highlighted by ‘critical toponomastics’, a major, rather recent research current in (geographical) toponomastics. Regarding toponyms or place names (or geographical names) as social constructs is most important in the context of minorities, who are (usually) non-dominant groups and depend on the benevolence of the dominant group to accept the shared identity of a place.

Place-name **standardization** will be explained as the process of selecting the ‘correct’ name out of several name variants for the same geographical feature, the name variant to be recommended for further use, especially in public and official communication. The chapter will also highlight the purposes and benefits of standardization, the various authorities active in this field from the global (United Nations, IHO, ICAO, SCAR etc.) to the national and subnational levels. It will hint at the divergent standardization procedures (bottom-up versus top-down) and not conceal the problems resulting from standardization, e.g., the fact that it devaluates non-standardized place-name variants, although all place names represent cultural heritage, or the inevitable choice between the potential targets of standardization – the local community, the national, or the international community. The principal question in this context is: Who is entitled to standardize minority place names of which feature categories?

3 International standards in minority place-name standardization (Peter Jordan)

This chapter refers mainly to the resolutions of the United Nations elaborated by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). They have the function of recommendations of the UN to their member states, are not strictly binding, but constitute benchmarks for national standardization. While up to the 1980s UNGEGN observed the ‘one name per feature’ principle with place-name standardization avoiding parallel names also in minority situations, its policy changed at that time by passing several resolutions on naming in multilingual areas elevating minority names to equally ranking standardized names and accepting two or even more standardized names for the same feature. In the 2000s a ‘cultural turn’ in UNGEGN added to this by emphasizing the value of all names – standardized or not – as parts of the cultural heritage that should be documented and kept in use. The chapter will discuss these resolutions as a basis for classifying and comparing national regulations of minority place-name standardization.

4 Minority place-name standardization by countries

This is the focal chapter of the book. It proceeds country by country in alphabetical sequence within European cultural macro-regions. The grouping of countries by cultural macro-regions seems appropriate due to their relative cultural homogeneity as a result of similar historical development with an impact on settlement, language and political culture. This can help avoiding repetition when the historical, cultural and political backgrounds of minority situations are described. The sequence of cultural macro-regions can still be modified in accordance with the final length of country sections and the potential division of the book into several volumes.

With every country section this same structure of subthemes is to be observed:

By country

- Ethnic and linguistic structure: Historical development and current state
- State formation
- Political system, administrative structures, governance
- Cultural characteristics (language, religion etc.)
- National and other space-related identities
- External relations
- Minority legislation with special regard to place names

By individual minority situations

- Who is the minority? (identity markers)
- Geographical and historical setting of the minority
- Settlement and cultural history of the minority region
- Minority life (education, organizations, cultural life, language, religion, media)
- Minority toponymy
- History and current state of minority place-name standardization
- Political and inter-cultural climate, satisfaction with existing regulations and standards

As the number of minority situations varies per country between one and at least ten, some country sections will be substantially longer than others. Also the fact that not in all countries the same regulations apply to all minorities of a country, but need to be explained situation by situation may cause additional differences in the length of country sections.

4.1 Central Europe

4.1.1 Austria (Peter Jordan)

4.1.2 Croatia (Ivana Crljenko)

4.1.3 Czechia (Tadeusz Siwek)

4.1.4 Estonia (Peeter Päll)

4.1.5 Germany (Helge Paulig)

4.1.6 Hungary (Gábor Mikešy & Attila Sasi)

4.1.7 Latvia (Zane Cekula)

4.1.8 Luxemburg (Sam Mersch)

4.1.9 Lithuania (Rita Baranauskienė & Ilona Mickienė)

- 4.1.10 Poland (Maciej Zych)
- 4.1.11 Slovakia (Vladimir Ira & Juraj Majo)
- 4.1.12 Slovenia (Matjaž Geršič & Drago Perko)
- 4.1.13 Switzerland (Alfred Gut et al.)

4.2 North Europe

- 4.2.1 Denmark (Peder Gammeltoft)
- 4.2.2 Finland (Sami Suviranta)
- 4.2.3 Norway (Kaisa Rautio Helander)
- 4.2.4 Sweden (Staffan Nyström)

4.3 West Europe

- 4.3.1 Belgium (Christian Vandermotten)
- 4.3.2 France (Pierre Jaillard)
- 4.3.3 Ireland (Aindí Mac Giolla Chomhghaill)
- 4.3.4 Netherlands (Jasper Hogerwerf)
- 4.3.5 United Kingdom (Guy Puzey)

4.4 South Europe

- 4.4.1 Italy (Igor Jelen et al.)
- 4.4.2 Portugal (António Bárbolo Alves & Anabela Leal de Barros)
- 4.4.3 Spain (Joan Tort i Donada & Maria del Mar Batlle)

4.5 Southeast Europe

- 4.5.1 Albania (Dhimiter Doka)
- 4.5.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina (Rahman Nurković)
- 4.5.3 Bulgaria (Boian Koulov)
- 4.5.4 Greece (Konstantinos Tsitselikis)
- 4.5.5 Moldova (Dorin Lozovanu)
- 4.5.6 Romania (Zsombor Bartos-Elekes)
- 4.5.7 Serbia (Rade Goljović)

4.6 East Europe

- 4.6.1 Belarus (Ihar L. Kapylou)
- 4.6.2 Russian Federation, European part (Andrej Herzen, Yuliana Gordova & Olga Herzen)
- 4.6.3 Ukraine (Yaroslav Redkva)

5 Comparative discussion of current situations (Peter Jordan)

This chapter will briefly outline the full range of regulations in Europe by comparing their major characteristics (also in a table and on a map) and try to find out, which kind of regulations are typical for certain minority situations, how they differ by

- the relative size of minority and majority,
- the relative serenity of minority and majority,
- the relative cultural prestige of minority and majority and their language,
- the relative economic status of minority and majority,
- earlier power relations (e.g., power inversion in history),

- historical events,
- the possibility of minorities to be suspected of irredentism, autonomism or regionalism,
- current governance structures (e.g., centralist versus federal),
- current levels of democracy,
- a.o.

It will then conclude with highlighting regulations that have contributed to calming down or preventing inter-cultural (minority/majority) conflict and others that have rather promoted such conflict. It will thus provide policy consultation and show ways for more adequate solutions.

6 Conclusion (Peter Jordan)

Audience

The book addresses (political) and other human geographers as well as colleagues from related disciplines, but even more so administrators at all levels, most specifically in minority regions, as well as minority associations and organizations and their representatives. It can serve as a sound basis for discussions also in the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) representing the interests of European minorities including minority rights, among which the rights of being visible in the linguistic landscape and to have official place names are very important and symbolic.

Work plan

December 2021: Contract with Springer Publishers settled

by 31 December 2022: Delivery of all country sections (Chapter 4)

2023: Elaboration of chapters 1-3, 5-6; editorial work; peer-reviewing; technical book production

by 31 December 2023: Book manuscript submitted to the publisher

2024: Publication of the book