

EDITORIAL ISSUES

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As an editor of school atlases published in the Netherlands, Belgium (French and Dutch), France, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland (French), Canada (French) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as general world atlases in the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy, I am certainly one of the ‘map and other editors’ the UN have in mind when recommending their member states to compile Toponymic guidelines.

The toponymic problem faced by the editor of an atlas with world coverage is quite unique, in that a tremendously large number of languages is involved. The number of geographical names occurring in a general world atlas is about 100,000, that in the senior and junior school atlases respectively 25,000 and 10,000.

The first issues the editor is confronted with, are his constraints. Constraints regarding both content and economy. For reasons of economy, it is impossible to take 100,000 or even 25,000 individual decisions about how to write a name. Reliable sources and workable standards are therefore indispensable.

Constraints involving the names content itself are a consequence of the publisher’s necessity to meet the (real or perceived) requirements of his market. Whether they are right or wrong, the names in a school atlas with a reasonable share of the market (which is 100% for our Dutch atlases) will develop into a *de facto* standard, just because they are taught to the people. When producing a new edition of an existing school atlas (our senior school atlas has been in the market since 1877!), an atlas, moreover, that in the classroom may have to be used together with former editions, we have to be careful not to change too much at a time. To the customer, systematic changes of the orthography of names are especially hard to accept if the publisher has no other story than ‘these are better’.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1992, the market was extremely receptive to names changes: after all, it was obvious that in the newly independent republics everything changed. In the 1995 edition of our senior school atlas, we took the opportunity to reconsider all our names at once.

Even if we wish to conform our choices as much as possible to the toponymic guidelines recommended through the United Nations, many decisions still remain to be taken. Some of the more important are:

1. For which names should we use *exonyms* (conventional Dutch names for objects outside the Dutch language area), and for which may we choose *endonyms* or local names?
2. Which languages should we take the names from?
3. When we apply endonyms, how should we treat compound names containing a generic element that holds relevant information?
4. Do we have to include generic terms at all?
5. How should we transliterate names from non-Roman writing languages?
6. Which obsolete (replaced) names should still be mentioned in the map?
7. How should we render secondary names?
8. What do we do with articles and definite/indefinite forms?

Exonyms

Concerning the reduction of exonyms, as recommended by the United Nations, we have to find a compromise with our market, consisting of at times conservative geography teachers. To us, a recommendation of the UN is not enough: we have to find arguments to ‘sell’ the policy to our market. Exonyms are often quite popular, because they are part of the language, and thus the cultural heritage, of the people. They are emotion. The arguments we bring forward to get rid of them will only be acceptable if they make an appeal to emotion too. We claim, for instance, that our children (the primary consumers of our atlases) need to be prepared for a globalizing, internationalising world. As international travel increases, so do the chances that one will actually be confronted with a place one had to learn: if one actually visits Tuscany in Italy, and wishes to go there by car, it becomes important that one knows Firenze (endonym) instead of (just) Florence (exonym).

Nevertheless we have to be well aware of the enduring cultural value of an exonym before we discard it.

Language choice

From which language should we take the names in which area? As some countries do possess more than one official language – either applying to the whole country (English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil in Singapore) or to parts thereof (Catalan, Galician and Basque in the corresponding Spanish autonomous communities) – this also in many cases involves an explicit decision. The consequences of this decision will be illustrated below.

Compound names

Do we have to translate generic elements of geographical names, or can we leave them as they are in their endonymic form? Should it be *Golfo de Valencia* or *Gulf of Valencia* (Dutch: *Golf van Valencia*)? We choose for the latter. Why? It is a marine hydronym... and in the seas (international waters) we want to read Dutch. We thus translate *golfo* wherever it occurs (except in place names!) into *golf*.

Should it be *Montes de Toledo* or *Mountains of Toledo* (Dutch: *Gebergte van Toledo*)? We choose the former... the *montes* are clearly within Spain, and we leave them Spanish.

Mont Blanc we leave *Mont Blanc*... simply because all Dutch know it as *Mont Blanc*, no one would call it *Witte Berg*, which is its Dutch translation. Likewise, *Costa del Sol* is never translated into *Kust van de Zon*, not even by the least educated of the Dutch mass tourists.

To systematize this kind of decisions, we composed our own internal toponymic guidelines, which are organized per country.

Generic terms

Do we have to include generic terms in the name of objects, that in the map clearly appertain to the category described by the generic?

For instance, the American custom to always add the generic 'Island' has no equivalent in Dutch usage: we thus render *Vancouver Island* simply as *Vancouver* (the name in the map leaves no question over it being an island). On the other hand, another American custom, to leave away the generic 'river' even if the specific element is an adjective, also conflicts with our Dutch habits: so *Red* becomes in our Dutch atlases *Red River*. We think, the name of a river may be *Mississippi* – actually in the

Algonquin language it springs from this name seems to mean *Great River*, and thus already includes a generic element – or *Tennessee*, but it can never simply be *Red*... just as the name *Long Island* is not just *Long*. In such cases, we overrule local usage.

The case of (the) Mississippi may be used to illustrate the major complication inherent to this policy: what we recognize and distinguish as generic and specific (especially adjective) elements does in any case depend on our choice of language. In the US, where the origins of names are extremely multilingual, we choose the (official) English language to render our names. This means that *Colorado* may suffice as the name of a river in the formerly Spanish Southwest of this country, while an originally homonymous river in Argentina – where the language we use is Spanish – should be *Río Colorado* (*Colored River* in Spanish). Note that as a rule it is the *official* language of any country (or part thereof) that we apply to the names, whether or not this it is of native or foreign origin: the Algonquin language the name Mississippi was coined with is obviously much more native to the area than the official English language.

Transliteration

Even though it would be a lot more comfortable to stick exactly to the donor transliteration keys recommended by the UN, sometimes these seem to be considered too complicated for our children (or geography teachers?) to comprehend. Therefore we do use officially standardized transliterations, where available, as a starting point, but often have to simplify these further for use in our school atlases (not for the general atlases).

Nowadays we do apply the rule, that for names in languages using the Roman script, we represent the official writing complete with diacritical marks – with the single exception of Vietnamese, where the diacritics representing tonal accents are omitted.

Obsolete names

As far as replaced names are concerned, it is our policy to maintain the most commonly known of these for one more edition as a secondary name. So the 1995 edition of our senior school atlas still said *Sint Petersburg* (*Lenin-grad*), the 2001 edition just *Sint Petersburg*; the 2001 edition still says *Mumbai* (*Bombay*).

In the index of names, the old forms will for at least another 10 years still be included with a cross-reference to the contemporary name.

A special problem occurs when we know that names have been changed, for instance because the language of a country was replaced, but we don't know the new form yet. It happened for instance with the Central Asian republics that replaced Russian with Turkmen, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz etc. We were forced to stick to the Russian names for a transition period, that we tried to keep as short as possible.

Secondary names

Parenthesized secondary names may either be exonyms or replaced names. If a secondary name is an official alternative – like Swedish names alongside Finnish for some Finnish towns – both are represented as being ‘of equal importance’, by separating them with a slash: Helsinki/Helsingfors. In these cases, we always maintain a constant sequence, even if this conflicts with local standards – for instance in Finland the Finnish name always precedes Swedish one (according to Finnish official practice, the language form belonging to the most numerous local language community should be mentioned first). The reason is, that in this way we can explain the situation to the consumer: with double names in Finland, the first is always Finnish, and should follow Finnish pronunciation rules.

Articles

Should we say *Gambia* or *The Gambia*? We do the first. Likewise, we use *Madina* (or the Dutch exonym *Medina*) instead of *Al-Madinah*, and *Riad* instead of *Ar-Riyad*.

In some languages, definite articles are post-positionally affixed to the word; Swedish *älven* means the river. Although less obvious to the layman, here we also have to make a choice. We choose to represent the indefinite form, so *Klarälv* instead of *Klarälven*. For the Norwegian islands we made, in the last edition, an exception: where they contain a postpositional generic, we include it as *-øya* (following Norwegian custom) instead of *-øy*. Likewise we choose to use the name *Lofoten* instead of *Lofot* for the group of Norwegian islands known under the former name in the Netherlands (where the *-en* affix is generally misinterpreted as being a Dutch plural form). On the other hand, in Roman written place names we include the article if it makes part of the official form: *Le Havre*, *A Coruña/La Coruña*.

For each country/language combination, we list both the rules and the exceptions in our internal toponymic guidelines.

Global toponymic guidelines

The needs of an atlas or world map editor exceed the scope of separate national names authorities: for the sake of homogeneity, the compiler of an atlas would rather apply similar rules to all names, regardless of the language they belong to. Although each country/language combination presents its own problems – therefore our internal guidelines are organized per country – it is not impossible to define a set of global toponymic rules, and this is indeed what we do. These global rules serve as a starting point, a general guiding principle, for the rules we define for each country and language.