

1 Introduction

There are several factors, which complicate the global use of geographical names, such as differences in language, writing systems, use of exonyms, and more. Unique and functional place-names are of great importance for well-functioning international communications.

The United Nations has been engaged in international standardisation of geographical names since the 1960s, mainly through its expert group, *The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names*, *UNGEGN*, which is one of seven expert bodies under *The Economic and Social Council*, (*ECOSOC*). International standardisation is based on national standardisation of geographical names and on other national measures based on international agreements under the auspices of the United Nations. A competent authority, with the formal responsibility for matters relating to geographical names, shall be responsible for the national standardisation and establishment of the spelling and denotation of the names.

In the Nordic countries, the standardisation of geographical names is normally considered to be a part of what, in general terms, is known as place-name preservation. Sweden has participated in the UN programme since the first conference on geographical names, which was held in Geneva in 1967. This publication describes the most significant components of this work.

2 The United Nations organisation of geographical names

The need for international standardisation of geographical names was first discussed during the 1800s and received recognition by the UN in the mid-1900s when the Secretary General invited the views of member countries concerning standardisation. The replies confirmed that such a need existed.

In 1960, a group of experts was called to a meeting at the UN headquarters in New York to discuss, amongst other subjects, holding an international conference on the standardisation of geographical names. The first UN conference of this type was held in Geneva in 1967. Amongst the main items in the programme were *National Standardisation*, *Geographical Terms*, *Writing Systems* and *International Co-operation*. Since 1967 the conferences have, in principle, been held at five-yearly intervals. The last conference was held in Berlin in 2002.

At the Geneva conference in 1967 an *Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Geographical Names* was formed. Following amongst other things, a decision taken at the London conference in 1972 the ad hoc group was given the status of a permanent body, *The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)*. The group's mandate is to act as an advisory body with the task of promoting work with geographical names, both nationally and internationally. The group comprises experts from the current twenty-two linguistic/geographic divisions to which the countries belong. Every division elects an expert who is responsible for leading the work in his/her division during and between the meetings of the group of experts. The chairmanship of the Norden Division has up to now alternated, in five-yearly periods, between Finland, Norway and Sweden. In addition to the work in the divisions and at the meetings of the group of experts, working groups can be formed for special individual tasks.

An important result of this work is the resolutions that are adopted at the conferences. These resolutions are not legally binding but can be compared to high level internationally recommended standards.

3 Resolution no. 4 from the Geneva conference 1967

During the eight UN conferences on geographical names that have been held so far, fifteen resolutions have concerned national standardisation. The most fundamental of these fifteen is Resolution no. 4 from the first conference in Geneva in 1967. This resolution is in five parts, which have the headings: *national names authorities, collection of geographical names, principles of office treatment of geographical names, multilingual areas and national gazetteers.*

Prior to the 1967 conference and the adoption of this resolution, the Nordic countries had already begun to implement many of the recommendations contained in this resolution. This is, for instance, the case concerning procedures for collecting names, where the Nordic standardisation of names, in an even more decisive way than is prescribed in the recommendation, is based on field collection and checking. In accordance with the recommendation concerning national name authorities, the national place-names (geographical names) authority should comprise either a continuing body or a co-ordinated group of bodies. In Sweden, the National Land Survey (Sw. Lantmäteriverket), The National Heritage Board (Sw. Riksantikvarieämbetet) and The Institute for Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research (Sw. Språk- och folkminnesinstitutet) form the co-ordinated group, which is responsible for exercising the function as national place-names authority.

Detailed rules for writing place-names have been presented by the Place-Name Advisory Board (Sw. Ortnamnrådet) in number 6 called *God ortnamnsed* (Good Place-Name Practice) in the present series of publications.

Concerning names in the minority languages, legislation, which states that from April 1, 2002 Finnish, Meänkieli (the Finnish spoken in the Torne Valley in northern Sweden) and Saami are official minority languages in Sweden, has contributed to giving names in these minority languages the same status as the Swedish names.

4 Exonyms

An *exonym* is a geographical name in a language, which is not spoken in the area in which the named object lies. To be classed as an exonym the name must also differ from the local, native name. An exonym can be a fully or partially translated name, a name that is fully or partially adapted to another language or a name that has no resemblance to the original name. In this chapter three main reasons for the occurrence and use of exonyms are discussed: historical reasons, problems with pronunciation and situations where an object stretches across several countries. The latter can also be described as a situation where the object has different names, endonyms, in different language areas. Exonyms are sometimes also called *traditional names*, although, at times the term traditional name only refers to exonyms that occur in several languages.

The opposite of exonym is *endonym*, which is the name form in the language that is spoken in the area where the object that has the name lies. Where an object has more than one endonym, the term *allonym* is used. A special type of allonym is a name pair, where the current name is used in both a long and short form, for example, Sweden and Kingdom of Sweden.

Like many other countries, several of the Nordic countries are multilingual. For this reason there are many places in Finland that have both a Finnish and a Swedish name. This occurs even in the monolingual, Finnish or Swedish speaking, areas. In the minority language areas in Norway and Sweden there are also many places that have standardised names in more than one language.

In the opinion of the UN, the use of exonyms impedes global communication. In addition, their use is contrary to the UN's basic principles concerning one name for one object and thereby obstructs efforts to create international uniformity in the handling of names. In its work with international standardisation the UN's goal is, therefore, to reduce the use of exonyms. Time has, however, shown that initial ambitious attempts to rapidly decrease the number of exonyms were over-optimistic and not possible to realise in the intended way. The reason would appear to be that many exonyms have become common words in a language and can be seen as part of the language's cultural heritage. To attempt to replace them with other words is practically very difficult and a restrictive use of exonyms can, therefore, initially be applied to those exonyms that are weakly supported by traditional use.

5 *Transliteration to the Roman alphabet*

The UN's work with geographical names includes, amongst other things, to establish standardised transliteration keys for transliterating names from non-Roman script to Roman. Within UNGEGN there is a working group with responsibility for this work. A fully acceptable romanisation system should admit a reverse procedure i.e. Roman back to non-Roman. The system must also be as simple as possible, easy to follow and user-friendly so that the romanised form is as simple as possible to write, read, remember and store electronically.

This work is based on two main principles: firstly, that there is only one single romanisation system for each language and, secondly, that the donor principle is applied – the donor country shall have the right to develop the romanisation system that will be used. Decisions regarding a romanisation system are taken at a conference and when the resolution has been adopted the system becomes a UN standard. Since 1967 systems have been adopted for twenty-eight languages. Some of these systems have not, however, been put into practical use.

In this chapter there is a listing based on document E/CONF.94/CRP.81, *Report on the current status of the United Nations romanization systems for geographical names*, from the 2002 Berlin conference, which shows the applicable romanisation systems for a number of languages.

6 *Names of countries*

In 1992 the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names took a decision to create a working group for the establishment of the official forms for country names. The work of the group was presented at the Berlin conference in 2002 in a document titled E/CONF.94/CRP.11, *List of country names* and this list has been official since June 1, 2002. It contains the names of the 192 independent countries recognised by the international community. In this chapter there are examples of three country names in the document.

The UN also publishes an additional booklet on the subject of country names, the latest number of which is titled *Terminology Bulletin No. 347/Rev.1*. The bulletin does not,

however, contain any standardised endonyms for country names that are not written in one of the six UN languages.

Approved Swedish exonyms for the names of other countries are given in the Foreign Office and Sweden-Finnish Language Council publication, *Utrikes namnbok* (Official names for foreign countries). For use in the Nordic countries there is the Nordic Language Secretariat's publication no. 17, *Statsnavne og nationalitetsord* (Names of States and Nationalities).

7 Terminology

Issues concerning terminology have been on the UN's agenda since the beginning of the organisation's engagement in work with geographical names. In 2002 a new glossary was published as a single volume in all six UN languages. This was the result of the work of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology. The English title is *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*. The glossary contains 375 headwords, which in the English version run from *acronym* to *writing system*.

Documents produced during the course of the UN's work with the standardisation of names can now, terminologically, be based on this glossary which, in itself, is an example of standardisation. In the appendix at the end of this publication the glossary, in a somewhat shortened form, is presented in a Swedish translation.

8 How should foreign geographical names be written?

The UN's basic reasoning is: the lesser the unambiguity in the spelling of geographical names and the wider the use of standardised versions of them, the better communication systems will function. Giving priority to domestic name forms, endonyms, means that both the need for unambiguity and respect for the cultural-historical values embodied in names are respected.

The donor principle implies that the standardised spelling of a name should always be looked for in maps produced by the national mapping authority in the donor country. In cases where maps are not available, an alternative can be to look for the name in a place-name database on the Internet. It has become increasingly common for countries to make their names databases accessible in this way.

On UNGEGN's homepage on the Internet, in addition to general information, there are also links to different documents, information about the breakdown into divisions, working groups, national geographical names authorities and more. The ambition is that *toponymic guidelines* in different countries will also be available on the Internet. Many countries have created this type of instructive and informative material with the aim of making it easier for users to read and understand geographical names on maps from other countries.

Special difficulties can arise when one is confronted by geographical names written in languages that have an uncommon alphabet or writing system. In countries that use a non-Roman script small-scale maps are often also published in versions on which the names have been romanised.