

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)
Meeting of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
Zagreb, 10th February 2011.

A meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers (WGTDFG) was held in conjunction with the 20th session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division and a EuroGeoGraphics - EuroGeoNames workshop at the Hotel International, Zagreb, Croatia, 9th – 11th February 2011. The Working Group session was attended by more than 40 participants from 19 countries.

The Convenor opened the meeting by thanking the hosts and organisers and by summarising the Working Group's activities since the last meeting in Nairobi, May 2009, noting the amended objectives and updated website contents (www.zrc-sazu.si/ungegn/WG_TDFG/gazetteers.htm)

The UNGEGN Chair reported on an initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM) being promoted by the UN Statistics Division and Cartography Section and described its relationship to other UN programmes dealing with geospatial data. The Working Group recognised the importance of co-operating with the planned GGIM committee of experts and providing input into its meetings, whilst emphasising that UNGEGN had different responsibilities and its own mandate, including the work of the WGTDFG, must be preserved. The WG suggested that the role of UNGEGN could be promoted within the GGIM arena, by contributing a presentation and poster board to the forthcoming GGIM forum in Seoul in October 2011 and through the eventual provision of UNGEGN material to the group. Standardised geographical names could also usefully be promoted as an example of an important component of any spatial data infrastructure.

The Working Group discussed its preparation for the forthcoming 26th UNGEGN session, Vienna, 2nd – 6th May 2011, noting the reduced duration of the meeting. The presentation of reports on national database activities would be discouraged, with the WG's focus to be on the provision of information to support national digital data processing and international interoperability. It was possible that a summary of the content of papers could be compiled or specific topics chosen as principal items for discussion. The WG's approach would be finalised once papers submitted under the relevant agenda item had been received. Members should also put forward suggestions to the Convenor by email. The WG considered the organisation of a workshop during the UNGEGN session on the implementation of the INSPIRE¹ geographical names specification, its schema being deemed a potential model for international use. It was identified not to be necessary for European participants, but perhaps could be of value in conjunction with the Africa GeoNyms database/gazetteer project. It was agreed that a workshop would be held to address the promotion of nationally standardised geographical names in a world increasingly dependent on web-based digital data which were often "crowd-sourced" and unauthorised. The UNGEGN Chair and WG Convenor would consult the WG and draw up a potential framework for such a workshop. The availability of free and easily-accessible authorised geographical names data was seen as a key driver in encouraging the use of nationally-standardised names.

The Convenor reported on national and regional projects involving gazetteer applications and services, describing the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) provision of a free tool to create names databases within the context of an African spatial data infrastructure. The UNGEGN Chair outlined the UN's Second Administrative Level Boundaries (SALB) project, accessible at www.unsalb.org, where registered users could download administrative division data provided in collaboration with National Mapping Agencies of UN member states. The unit names were currently limited to Roman script forms. The Working Group recognised that this database was an extremely valuable resource, but expressed concern at its frequent omission of diacritical marks and special letters which formed an integral part of the names.

The UNGEGN Chair reported on a proposal for a UN Spatial Data Infrastructure gazetteer project for disaster management, which would link names information being held in different UN agencies' systems

¹ The legal framework for a European Spatial Data Infrastructure

and would exploit crowd-sourced data and create a common vocabulary. The Working Group recognised the value of such data coordination, but expressed concern that the information would be difficult to maintain and that the appearance of such a resource could give the incorrect impression that the data comprised UN-approved names. The project coordinators would be invited to give a presentation on the project at the forthcoming UNGEGN session.

The Convenor provided an overview of the EuroGeoNames (EGN) project, the leadership of which had passed to EuroGeoGraphics. The national datasets of 14 countries had hitherto been connected, with a further 6 envisaged for 2011; an EGN reference application is available at www.eurogeonames.com/refappl.

The UNGEGN Chair gave an update on UNGEGN's relationship with Google. Recent mapping projects had focused on Sudan: <https://sites.google.com/site/mapyourworldcommunity/> and <https://sites.google.com/site/mapyourworldcommunity/events/sudan>, and a Sudan Mapping Conference was soon to be held in Washington DC. A presentation on Google's activities was anticipated at the next UNGEGN session.

Mrs Burgess summarised the Location Lingo project (www.locationlingo.net) which had been initiated by the English Project in conjunction with Great Britain's Ordnance Survey (OS) to collect locally-used toponyms via an online form. The data collected during this short project would be carefully scrutinised in an attempt to isolate the many spurious names provided, and the remaining information would be published by the English Project. Ordnance Survey had been keen to monitor the success of collating data submitted by the public in this way and was assessing the process and results in order to undertake a more formal data collection procedure in the future. OS planned eventually to compile a gazetteer of alternative unofficial names used in Britain which could assist, for example, the emergency services.

Mr Leskinen described recent changes to the licensing arrangements for access to Finland's National Land Survey (NLS) datasets and services. As of 1st January 2011, the Geographic Names Register (GNR) could be accessed free of charge through the NLS web feature service interfaces and small-scale general map products could also be downloaded. Details were available at <http://www.nls.fi> > Data and services > Datasets free of charge.

Mr Palmer explained recent activities in the United States in establishing a Web Feature Service Gazetteer (WFS-G) as a future means of accessing the Board on Geographic Names' domestic and world names databases, both of which had separate interfaces. Mr Palmer also reported that the United States had assisted the Afghan Government in setting up a geographical names board and was providing information on database models.

The Convenor outlined Working Group participation in international meetings, detailing input into a Toponymic Training Course in Cameroon (22nd -28th November 2010). This WG involvement supported its objective to promote and provide consultancy and technical advice to national standardisation programs and to toponymic training courses in developing countries including the establishment of multipurpose toponymic database solutions in the context of spatial data infrastructures. Future meetings with relevant agenda items included the Association of American Geographers (AAG) meeting in Seattle, United States, 12th – 16th April 2011; the International Cartographic Conference in Paris, France, 3rd – 8th July 2011; a European State of the Map Conference in Vienna, Austria, 15th – 17th July 2011; and the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences in Barcelona, Spain, 5th – 9th September 2011.

The Convenor is a liaison member of the International Organization for Standardization's Technical Committee 211 Geographic information/Geomatics (ISO/TC 211); currently one standard of particular relevance to the Working Group is ISO/DIS 19142 Geographic information - Web feature Service (WFS). The Convenor is also registered as an observer for the Open Geospatial Consortium Standards Working Group for developing a Gazetteer Profile of a WFS, but this appeared currently to be inactive.

As the Working Group's point of contact for Unicode liaison, Mrs Burgess summarised the Working Group's involvement in text encoding issues and reported that contacts with the Unicode Consortium had been re-established. Information on its Common Locale Data Repository (CDLR) project as well as on

developments in the Unicode Standard would be sought from a Unicode representative who had been invited to attend the 26th UNGEGN session. The WG would inform Mrs Burgess of any text encoding issues encountered in their geographical names work in order to compile a list of required encodings for submission to Unicode.

The Working Group reviewed UNGEGN's World Geographical Names Database and noted the new design of the UNGEGN website. The Working Group's website would be updated and members were asked to send contributions to the Convenor. The next meeting of the Working Group would be held during the 26th UNGEGN session in Vienna. Members were encouraged to consider organising future joint meetings with other UNGEGN working groups or divisions.

15th February 2011.

Keys outcomes, actions and decisions

- The Working Group recognised the importance of co-operating with the planned UN GGIM committee of experts and providing input into its meetings, but was keen to emphasise that UNGEGN had different responsibilities and its own mandate, including the work of the WGTDFG, must be preserved.
- The WG suggested that the role of UNGEGN could be promoted within the GGIM arena:
 - by contributing a presentation and poster board to the forthcoming GGIM forum in Seoul in October 2011;
 - through the provision of UNGEGN material to the group;
 - through the promotion of standardised geographical names as an example of an important component of any spatial data infrastructure.
- For the forthcoming 26th UNGEGN session, the WG noted:
 - the presentation of reports on national database activities would be discouraged;
 - the WG's focus would be on the provision of information to support national digital data processing and international interoperability;
 - the WG's approach would be finalised once papers submitted under the relevant agenda item had been received; members would put forward suggestions to the Convenor by email;
 - a workshop would be held to address the promotion of nationally standardised geographical names in a world increasingly dependent on web-based digital data which were often "crowd-sourced" and unauthorised; the UNGEGN Chair and WG Convenor would consult the WG and draw up a potential framework for such a workshop.
- The availability of free and easily-accessible authorised digital geographical names data was seen as a key driver in encouraging the use of nationally-standardised names.
- The WG recognised that the UN's SALB database was an extremely valuable resource, but expressed concern at its frequent omission of diacritical marks and special letters which formed an integral part of the names.
- The WG supported the proposal for a UN Spatial Data Infrastructure gazetteer project for disaster management, but expressed concern that the information would be difficult to maintain and that the appearance of such a resource could give the incorrect impression that the data comprised UN-approved names; the project coordinators would be invited to give a presentation on the project at the forthcoming UNGEGN session.
- The WG would inform Mrs Burgess of any text encoding issues encountered in their geographical names work in order to compile a list of required encodings for submission to Unicode.
- The WG would consider how liaison activities relating to ISO, OGC and Unicode should be reported to the 26th UNGEGN Session.
- The Working Group's website would be updated and members were asked to send contributions to the Convenor.
- The Convenor would compile a report for 26th UNGEGN session on Working Group activities by 25th February 2011.
- The next meeting of the Working Group would be held during the 26th UNGEGN session in Vienna.