

New Arab Cities Geographical Names Electronic Database Using Beirut Modified Guideline for Romanization

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential feasibility for developing an Arab Cities Electronic Database (ACED) as a pilot project for future collaboration among Arab countries in building an Arab National Gazetteer.

Introduction:

Spread over land and sea from Africa's Atlantic Coast in the West to the East Coast of the Arabian Peninsula, 22 Arab countries share an area of approx. 14.3 million square kilometer (10.2% of the world total landmass), with a population of over 325 million. This area contains innumerable geographical place names, some of which have been collected and recorded, while many more have not. While this pilot project will initially focus on the main Arab cities, it also intends to develop a future model for a much broader collection of Arab geographical names.

The main problem resulting from the recent Arab cities database approach and method is that each individual country used different approaches to collect, document, write and pronounce its main cities names. A further problem is left over from the colonial era, as some Arab countries use European standards to document their geographical names, while others document their geographical names using their local standards.

The resulting diversity creates obstacles for both the international community and individual researchers. It is thus important to unify a standard that all Arab countries can use to document their geographical names. But it must also correspond to international standardization by using the Beirut guideline, accepted by both the Arab League and the United Nations (UGEGN).

Objectives:

The project aims to collect information on Arab cities with populations exceeding 100,000 using the latest modified Beirut Guideline in Romanization for classifying and naming. It will test the viability of different information technologies to interface with more than 22 geographical and cartographical authorities, which deal with the geographical names in the Arab countries.

Methodology:

The pilot stage will use a specifically designed MS-ACCESS database form to compile the necessary information to avoid future complexities of data gathering. Following initial correlation, a unified form will be distributed to the representative members of Arab counties in the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names (ADEGN) as an attached e-mail file to speed up the process. Returned forms will be examined and edited to meet Beirut Guideline for Romanization.

The pilot project manager chose a Microsoft ACCESS database package to process collected data as all the Arab Countries most likely have access to this software. Future project expansion may switch to a more powerful Oracle database package with uplinks for ACCESS data.

Results:

This would be the first attempt to create a unified standardization for an Arab geospatial database of major Arab cities. The resulting product will be available to all Arab countries, while a webpage will make the collected data (ACED) publically available for all internet users.

Conclusion:

Collecting and developing a systematic standardized geospatial database for large number of countries that currently use different systems presents a challenging task. By using advanced information technology and corresponding expertise, this project will enable potential users to access a currently accurate and continually updated Arab cities database (ACED). The project has relevance and importance to a wide range of educational, public and private sector users who need to retrieve Arab city names using the Beirut Guideline for Romanization.