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WHY TOPONYMY ?

Toponomastics, the science of place names, geographical names or toponyms is in one sense a sub-discipline of onomastics, the science of proper names in general. However, toponomastics may equally well be regarded as a science in its own right, located at the intersection of several acknowledged disciplines: notably linguistics, geography and cartography, but also historical, cultural and juridical research.

The location of toponomastics at the intersection of better-known disciplines has resulted in the subject enjoying only a low level of academic institutionalisation. There are very few university chairs devoted exclusively to this field, and dedicated academy institutes and the like are rare. Toponomastics is at present usually pursued by academics as a sideline alongside their main role in one of the established sciences. Yet this lack of academic institutionalisation is not a valid indicator of the vital importance of place names. Toponyms are symbols, like flags and coats of arms, and as part of the intangible cultural heritage they possess – in addition to their more practical functions of identification and orientation – also a political significance. At the symbolic level they can often represent conflicts with deep roots in society.

The United Nations recognised the significance of geographical names standardization as early as 1960, when it established an expert group in this field (the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, UNGEGN) – one of just six active permanent expert United Nations groups. Many countries have also recognised the subject's significance by establishing national or regional boards on geographical names. Within the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS), too, toponomastics is attracting increasing interest, as indeed it is within the basic disciplines involved in onomastic research, especially linguistics, cartography and geography.

It is certainly an advantage of UNGEGN and ICOS to be organized in multidisciplinary way and to facilitate in this way interdisciplinary discussions and work. But it also makes sense to establish toponomastic fora within the International Geographical Union (IGU) as well as the International Cartographic Association (ICA) to encourage engagement of geographers and cartographers, resp., in this field.

Geographers are able to contribute a lot to research into questions like the role of place names for space-related identity building or as mediators between man and place.

For cartographers certainly the role and function of place names on maps is in the focus of research interests. But it is also important to raise the awareness of the meaning of place names and to further disseminate scientific methods of place-names representation on maps among cartographers. For UNGEGN, a.o., the question of identifying and naming features in different cultural contexts is important and can be answered by cartographers and geographers. Thus, a toponomastic forum within IGU and ICA certainly creates an added value compared to the already existing fora of UNGEGN and ICOS.

INTRODUCTION

The talks for the creation of an ICA/IGU working group or technical commission acting on toponymy, were initiated during the 26th UNGEGN, in Vienna. It was discussed the need of a specific group inside the two organizations, ICA and IGU, due to its importance, mainly for the geographical aspect, as well as for the cartographic one. In the lack of a specific commission, researches on the theme were presented in events, without a dedicated forum for the discussions. The discussions about the joint working group would continue during the 25th International Cartographic Conference in Paris, France, in 2011.

During the meeting in Paris, held on July 05th, 2011, Prof. Georg Gartner opened the discussions exposing about the importance of geographical names, that is toponymy, and the need of a cooperation among the sister organizations, just as IGU, informing that its President, Prof Ron Ablor supported entirely the idea of a joint commission ICA / IGU on the theme, in conversations that occurred in previous events.

It was explained the role and structure of existing toponymic fora such as the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS). Both are multidisciplinary in structure, with a dominance of cartographers/geographers with UNGEGN and a dominance of linguists with ICOS. It was emphasized that an ICA commission can only be initiated by the ICA General Assembly, and thus within ICA it would have to start as a working group and could be elevated to commission status at the next ICA General Assembly (Rio de Janeiro 2015). Otherwise, the IGU-part of the proposed joint commission could start immediately as a commission.

Prof. Gartner reported on a talk with Helen Kerfoot, UNGEGN chair, who gave him the impression that UNGEGN was specifically interested in approaching geographic/cartographic research capacities. Regarding to involve other organization participants such as IHO, prevailed the opinion that the new commission should first get established before reaching out for other institutional participants.

To represent ICA, Prof. Paulo Menezes from Brazil was appointed by Prof. Georg Gartner.

Immediately after Paris' Conference it was proposed to the ICA Executive Committee the creation of a Working Group on Toponymy, as a first step to be defined a Joint ICA/IGU commission on toponymy.

With the ICA Executive Committee agreement for the proposal and relating the terms of reference, it was submitted to the IGU Executive Board, to organize within the framework of the Regional IGU conference in Santiago, Chile in 2011(November), a first meeting of the proposed joint commission, and to take steps that this commission is initiated by IGU as well.

Consequently, an invitation to this meeting was sent to all potential members.

The meeting at IGU 2011 occurred on November, 17th with presence of Prof. Ron Ablor, President of IGU, Prof. Cosimo Palagiano, Italy, Prof. Peter Jordan, Austria and Prof. Paulo Menezes, Brazil, ICA Chair.

Prof. Ron ABLER, president of IGU, communicated that the IGU Executive Board had approved this joint institution in the rank of a commission from the IGU side and had nominated Prof. Cosimo Palagiano (Italy) IGU chair of this commission.

Figure 1 shows Prof Palagiano, Prof Ron Ablor, Prof Menezes and Prof Jordan, at the Santiago meeting.



REFERENCE TERMS

It was presented a number of terms of reference for a joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy, which during the ensuing discussion was extended by several other suggestions brought forward from the audience, resulting in the following possible terms of reference for the proposed commission:

- to foster geographic/cartographic research in the field of place names, especially as regards:
 - functions of place names on maps
 - rendering of place names on maps
 - names placement on maps
 - elaborating principles for creating new place names
 - place names as expression of time – or space-related identity
 - place name/feature relations
 - motives for place naming
 - place names and administration
 - place names and transportation

- place names in the cyber world
 - social dimensions of place names
 - elaborating principles for solving place-name conflicts
 - to disseminate the scientific knowledge on processing and use of place names within geography and cartography;
 - To verify the use of others sciences' toponymy concepts, such as anthropology, linguistic and others, in favor of cartography and geography;
 - to support the establishment of national and regional boards on geographical names.
 - to support the efforts of international standardization of geographical names, such as undertaken by UNGEGN);
 - to maintain contacts and scientific exchange with UNGEGN and ICOS, such as by organizing joint events;
 - to support and encourage the elaboration and publication of gazetteers, toponymic data files and place-names reference systems (such as EuroGeoNames);
- It was questioned if this comprehensive list should not be streamlined and whether it was valid enough for cartographers and also for geographers.

RESEARCH AGENDA

A possible research agenda for cartographers and geographers regarding place names may be outlined in the following way:

- (1) Functions of place names on maps: e.g. Do they identify places or just explain them?
- (2) Rendering of place names on maps: e.g. When to use endonyms, when exonyms? Script conversion. Which features are to be named?
- (3) Names placement on maps: e.g. Selection principles, when space is rare? Needs every map feature to be named? Does lettering distort content density perception? (4) Principles for creating new place names: e.g. with commercial naming, street names, commemorative naming in general.
- (5) Place names as expression of time- or space-related identity: e.g. Why do they have this function? What do they indicate? What do they mean for non-dominant groups? What does this mean for legal regulations? What is the meaning of the endonym/exonym divide in this context?(6) Place name/feature relation: e.g. Up to where has a name endonym status? Can sea names be endonyms?
- (7) Motives for place naming: e.g. Cultural background of the name-giving community? Synchronic and diachronic diversity of motives? What do place names tell us about name-giving communities? Transparent and opaque names. Motives of our times: commercialisation versus preservation of the cultural heritage. Place-names changes and their driving forces?
- (8) Place names and administration: e.g. Administrative competences for place names? Street names as a case in point. Street naming in multilingual urban quarters. Naming when administrative units (municipalities, districts) are merged. Treatment of place names of non-dominant and indigenous groups. Place-names boards and committees of all administrative levels and their responsibilities.
- (9) Place names and transportation: e.g. Naming on road signposts, naming in the railway system, naming in air transportation.
- (10) Place-name conflicts: e.g. What do place-name conflicts indicate? Backgrounds and reasons of current conflicts. Best-practice in solving place-name conflicts.

COMMISSION/WORKING GROUP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During its still short history, of not even four years, this young Commission/Working Group has already set a number of activities:

- (1) 32nd International Geographical Congress, Cologne [Köln], Germany, 26-30 August 2012: Four toponymic sessions titled "Place names as markers and ingredients of space-related identity 1-4" with a total of 15 papers had been organized by Peter JORDAN (Austria).
- (2) Peter JORDAN & Ferjan ORMELING (eds.) (2013), *Toponyms in Cartography. Proceedings of the Toponymic Sessions at the 25th International Cartographic Conference, Paris, 3-8 July 2011 (= Name & Place, 2)*. Hamburg, Verlag Dr. Kovac.
- (3) IGU Regional Conference Kyoto, Japan, 4-9 August 2013: Four sessions on geographical approaches to toponymy with a total of 15 papers had been organized by Kohei WATANABE (Japan). The proceedings have been published in the geographical journal *Semestrare di Studi e Ricerche di Geografia*, Rome, XXV, 2, edited by Riccardo MORRI.
- (4) Seminar "Historical maps, atlas maps, and toponymy", Leipzig, Germany, 21-23 August 2013: As a pre-conference event of ICC Dresden three ICA commissions/working groups, i.e. the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography (chair: Elri LIEBENBERG, South Africa), the ICA Commission on Atlases (chair: Peter JORDAN, Austria) and the IGU/ICA Commission/Working Group on Toponymy (chair: Paulo DE MENEZES, Brazil) in co-operation with the Leibniz Institute of Regional Research [Leibniz Institut für Länderkunde, IfL] Leipzig, met in the facilities of this Institute in Leipzig. The seminar saw 40 registered participants and 17 paper presentations with a lot of fruitful interdisciplinary discussion. The proceedings will be published open access by the host institute as a volume of its book series "forum IfL".
- (5) 26th International Cartographic Conference (ICC) Dresden, Germany, 26-30 August 2013: In two sessions organized by the Commission/WG in total six papers on toponymy were presented.
- (6) 4th EuGeo Congress Rome, 5-7 September 2013: In a panel on toponyms organized by Cosimo PALAGIANO (Italy) five papers were presented.
- (7) IGU Regional Conference Cracow, Poland, 18-22 August 2014: Five sessions on geographical approaches to toponymy with a total of 19 papers had been organized by Peter JORDAN (Austria).
- (8) Symposium on place-names changes, Rome, Italy, 17-18 November 2014: The symposium was jointly organized with the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (the Italian Academy of Sciences) and took place in its headquarter, the Villa Farnesina. It saw 53 registered participants and 40 paper presentations. It was organized by Peter JORDAN (Austria) and Cosimo PALAGIANO (Italy). The proceedings will in 2015 be published as Volume 5 of the toponymic book series *Name & Place*, edited by Peter JORDAN and Paul WOODMAN and financed by Peter JORDAN.

PLANNING FOR THE YEAR 2015

Besides toponymic sessions in the framework of ICC Rio de Janeiro, the planning for 2015 comprises the following events:

- (1) IGU Regional Conference Moscow, Russian Federation, 17-21 August: A session on place-name study and geographical research will be organized by Andrew HERZEN (Russia).
- (2) 5th EuGeo Congress Budapest, 30 August-2 September 2015: A session on "The Importance of Using Exonyms. On the use of exonyms in school atlases and other educational media" will be organized by Peter JORDAN (Austria).
- (3) Symposium on "Place names, diversity and heritage", to be organized together with the Unit for Language Facilitation and Empowerment, University of the Free State, Free State Province, South Africa, in Clarens, Free State Province, South Africa, 17-18 September 2015; organizers: Theodorus DU PLESSIS and Peter RAPER (both South Africa).

CONCLUSIONS

The joint Commission/Working Group conceives its function complementary to the tasks of UNGEGN whose focus is concentrated on standardization issues and international politics on geographical names. In the other hand, the focus of the Joint Commission/WG is on scientific researches about toponymy, trying to disseminate knowledge on place names to geographers and cartographers and to anyone who works with Toponymy.

The adopted model of a Joint IGU/ICA Commission worked very well during these four years, with a high demand on scientific papers, as can be seen along the eight events during these years.

In this way, The BRAZILIAN SOCIETY OF CARTOGRAPHY – SBC, National Representative of Brazil, proposes to the 16th General Assembly of the International Cartographic Association to create a new Commission on Toponymy, continuing the Working Group on Toponymy, operating since 2011, jointly with IGU Commission on Toponymy.