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The Benefits of Geographical Names Standardization in Cyprus

Cyprus Permanent Committee
for the Standardization of Geographical Names (CPCSGN)

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1. Introduction

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, after Sicily and Sardinia, with an area of 9.251 sq. km (3.572 sq. miles). It is situated at the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean, at a distance of 350 km north of Egypt, 102 km west of Syria, and 68 km south of Turkey. Cyprus lies at a latitude of 34,5° - 35,7° North and longitude 32,3° - 34,6° East. The Republic of Cyprus is a member of the United Nations since 1960 and member of the European Union since 2004.

The United Nations, with the decision of the Economic and Social Council in April 1961, undertook international efforts for implementing the standardization of geographical names. The Republic of Cyprus, complying with this mandate, and also complying with the related UN resolutions, participates actively in all Conferences, Sessions and Divisions' meetings, trying always to fulfill its obligations on these very important matters.

The Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names (CPCSGN) was officially established by the decision of the Council of Ministers no.15.769 of 21.4.1979 and constitutes the only competent National Authority for the Standardization of Geographical Names in Cyprus. According to law N.66(I)/98 and the regulations ΚΔΠ 443/2001, the Committee operates under the Minister of Education and Culture.

2. Geographical Names in Cyprus

Cyprus is privileged to have most of its geographical names bequeathed in ancient texts from Homer to Herodotus, the tragic poets and Strabon, up to ancient cartographers, like Claudius Ptolemaeus, and from medieval cartographers, like Abraham Ortelius, up to lord Horatio H. Kitchener, who mapped Cyprus in the 19th Century, at the beginning of the British rule of the island. The name of the island "Kypros" was mentioned by Homer 3000 years ago.



Map of Cyprus (Abraham Ortelius), 1573



Map of Cyprus (G. Mercator, J. Hondius), 1607

The last two conquerors of Cyprus were the Ottoman Turks, from the 16th to the 19th century, and subsequently the British until 1960. All geographical names, which survived through the centuries, in writing or in oral tradition until 1960, which was the year of the independence of the Republic of Cyprus, are fully acknowledged and preserved by the Government. Many of them have been collected from texts, historical documents, left by the British and the Ottoman Turks and other previous conquerors. All the conquerors of Cyprus imposed their own systems, but never proceeded to massive changes of the traditional geographical names. Following the tragic events of 1974, a significant number of geographical names were completely changed in the northern part of Cyprus. This issue is pending and it is carefully attended by the Republic of Cyprus. It must be noted that all official geographical names of Cyprus include Greek, Turkish and other names that pre-existed 1974 for several hundreds of years. All official geographical names of Cyprus are included in the Toponymic Gazetteer (please see par. 5 below).

3. Standardization of Geographical Names

Up to 1967, the year of the 1st UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, no significant work was done in relation to standardization, except the verification of the material collected after field checking and minor orthographical corrections.

After 1967, the Department of Lands and Surveys, complying with all relevant UN resolutions, within the context of the systematic mapping project, which was initiated in 1969 (at scale 1:5000), and which was based on photogrammetric methods, decided to proceed systematically with the collection of supplementary names and the standardization of all geographical names.

The methodology adopted was the following:

- Step 1: On every completed photogrammetric plot at scale 1:5000, all the toponyms were transferred from the cadastral plans that were already approved.*
- Step 2: An experienced team of cartographers and land surveyors visited the area covered by each photogrammetric plot (1X1.5 Miles), and came into direct contact with the respective Community Authorities and the inhabitants.*
- Step 3: The Communities appointed their experienced representatives who accompanied the team in the field.*
- Step 4: A re-verification or correction of the toponyms that already were transferred on the plot was done, and where necessary, new toponyms were recorded.*

Step 5: After the completion of the field work for every photogrammetric plot, all geographical names were transferred in special lists with their co-ordinates, along with the description of each item.

Step 6: The lists were examined by linguists, who submitted them to the Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names (CPCSGN) for checking and approval.

Step 7: The CPCSGN, proceeded next with the standardization into Greek and then with the transliteration of the Greek characters into the roman system ELOT 743. This system has the advantage of reversibility and can be computerized.

All of the above described toponyms which were gathered in the field by authorized bodies and checked repeatedly, constitute all the official toponyms, Greek, Turkish and others, of the Republic of Cyprus, which are used by its people. Many of the geographical names belong to ancient texts from the depths of history.

4. Standardization of Odonyms

Odonyms (street names) in Cyprus are given and maintained by Municipal and Community Councils. These odonyms, are under the approval of the respective District Officers, which operate under the Ministry of Interior. All official street names are communicated to the Cyprus Permanent Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names, for checking and correction, in order to achieve uniformity all over the island.

The Greek odonyms, as these are expressed with the terms “Ὀδός/Odos” (Street), Λεωφόρος/Leoforos (Avenue), Πλατεία/Plateia (Square), are all in genitive case. For the Greek odonyms of Cyprus, the following principles are applied:

a) All given names are complete (they are not abbreviated), to identify the persons, in honour of whom these are given.

b) Names in ancient language are recorded in the genitive case of each ancient name, as it happens with surnames of citizens. The names in modern language are recorded in the genitive case of each modern name.

c) The transcription to the approved Roman system, where it is applicable, is obligatory.

d) In the road signs, the Greek characters of the names are written on top and the Roman characters of the names at the bottom. The Roman transcription is done following each letter of the Greek characters. The same principle is followed for foreign names as well. The foreign writing of foreign names is not used on road signs.

5. Gazetteers of Cyprus

The existing national gazetteers prepared by the CPCSGN in 1982 and 1987 respectively are:

(i) The “*Concise Gazetteer of Cyprus*” (about 2000 entries)

(ii) The “*A Complete Gazetteer of Cyprus*” (about 67000 entries)



Complete (hardcopy) Gazetteer of Cyprus, 1987



Complete On-line Gazetteer of Cyprus

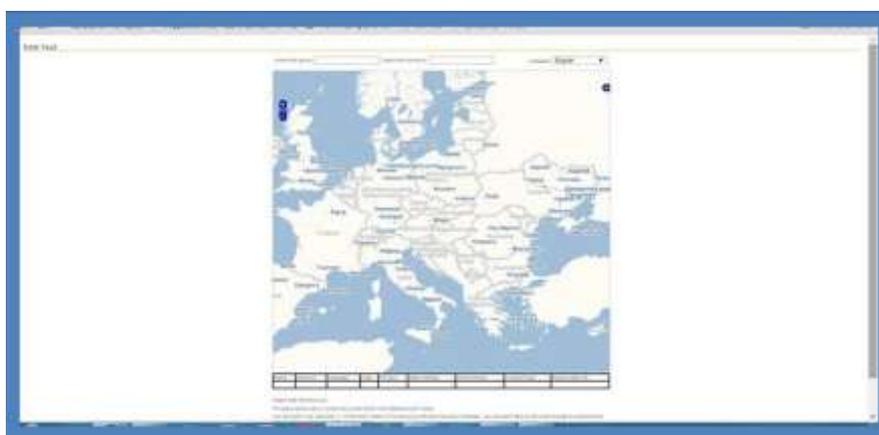
All geographical names and toponyms included in these gazetteers were derived from the official large scale cadastral map series of the Department of Lands and Surveys. The Complete Gazetteer of Cyprus was digitized, and is currently available on CPCSGN's website (www.geonoma.gov.cy).



CPCSGN's website (www.geonoma.gov.cy)

All cadastral maps of Cyprus have already been digitized and their information was categorized and stored in digital relational databases and Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Based on these databases, it is possible today to produce a new, more precise gazetteer. Furthermore, complex queries using geographical names can be performed with GIS, producing thematic maps of variable content, according to specific requirements.

All geographical names and toponyms were included in a distributed European database named "EuroGeonames" through EuroGeographics, and they are available on line at: <http://ec2-50-19-212-160.compute-1.amazonaws.com/EGNol/>



EuroGeonames Database

6. Benefits

Geographical names of Cyprus are more than just labels on a map. They are a connecting point between man and the land. They are needed to identify, describe, and analyse geographical entities. They carry the hopes and challenges of culture and identity of all Cypriots. Misuse of geographical names can cause friction. The official geographical names of Cyprus depict the island's history and culture through the years. They constitute significant evidence for citizens, researchers, historians, archaeologists and others, for analyzing, understanding, and preserving the identity of the nation.

Benefits from standardization and use of geographical names can be categorized in four main groups, these being: (a) Technical, (b) Social, (c) Economic, and (d) Cultural. Following strict rules, based on international standards, a complete standardization of all official geographical names of Cyprus was completed in the 80's followed by transliteration into roman characters. This fact made possible the homogeneous representation of geographical names in digital databases, geographical information systems, maps, books and internet applications. It is very easy today for all foreigners, tourists, external researchers, academic institutions, organizations and others, to read correctly all official Greek, Turkish and other geographical names of Cyprus.

Geographical names are an important part of our geographical and cultural environment. They identify geographical entities of different kinds and represent irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of well-being and belonging. Ancient monuments, ancient settlements, churches, monasteries, mosques, cemeteries and other significant topographical features, along with their respective geographical names, are solid examples and inseparable part of the cultural history of Cyprus.

Many concrete examples could be mentioned regarding the benefits gained by using standardized geographical names in Cyprus. Uniformity is achieved in all central government and local government organizations in their computerized and manual systems, web-applications, official reports, hardcopy and digital interactive maps, communication with citizens, street names, street signs etc. Geographical names are very important datasets within the spatial data infrastructure of Cyprus, included in the integrated Land Information System and the INSPIRE spatial datasets required by the European Commission.

Geographical names in Cyprus are therefore of major importance. Society must bear the responsibility for respecting geographical names heritage and assuring that place name planning is carried out in such a way as to ensure that the place names are preserved and the cultural heritage protected in a rapidly changing environment.

A new Law (N.71(I)/2013), was recently voted for by the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus, and an amendment was added to the basic law, by creating a new article, which criminalizes the alteration of geographical names and toponyms and the illegal issue, import, circulation, supply, distribution and trade of maps, books or other documents, in conventional or digital form, which contain geographical names and toponyms of the Republic, imprinted differently than those specified in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Law, or those contained in the official Toponymic Gazetteer. This was an additional measure taken by the Republic of Cyprus for safeguarding its invaluable cultural heritage.

7. Conclusion

Technical, social, economic, and cultural benefits have been observed from standardization and use of geographical names in Cyprus. Information technology makes it possible today to store, maintain, access, use, and analyze geographical names, along with other geographical information, in a very effective manner. They are an inseparable, very important

component of the spatial data infrastructure of the country. Uniformity is achieved through standardization and transliteration into the roman alphabet, based on strict rules and international standards.

The CPCSGN, realizing the benefits, strongly supports the efforts undertaken by the U.N. for the standardization of geographical names, and aims to comply and implement the U.N. and UNGEGN Conferences resolutions for the standardization of geographical names. The Republic of Cyprus gives a great importance on the implementation of the U.N. Conference resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, as a part of its duties for safeguarding the cultural heritage.