Geographical Names – Executive Summary

Geographical names are included in Annex I of the Directive, which means that they are considered as reference data, i.e. data that constitute the spatial frame for recognising geographical location in general, as well as linking to and/or pointing at other information that belong to specific thematic fields such as environment, addresses, area management, human health and many others.

Geographical names are widely used in every-day communication for referring to various natural and man-made objects in the real world. Consequently they are interconnected with other themes in INSPIRE. Administrative units, addresses, elements of hydrography (lakes, rivers etc.), elements of transport networks (airports, bridges etc.) and protected sites are usually referred to by their names.

Geographical names are used extensively when searching for information in web-services (including geoportals), navigating, referencing thematic information to a location (geocoding), visualising geographic information on maps and screens, as well as when processing spatial data sets comprising historical data. Correct usage of geographical names is a principal aspect of everyday communication; consequently the status (official, historical…) linguistic properties (language, spelling, eventual transliteration, etc.) are a prime interest of many users, including press agencies, map publishers, spatial analysts, authorities, etc.

The INSPIRE data specification on geographical names has been prepared following the participative principle of a consensus building process. The stakeholders, based on their registration as a Spatial Data Interest Community (SDIC) or a Legally Mandated Organisation (LMO), had the opportunity to bring forward user requirements and reference materials, propose experts for the specification development, and to participate in reviewing and testing the data specifications. The Thematic Working Group responsible for the specification development of *Geographical names* was composed of experts coming from Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, and Spain. The specification process took place according to the methodology elaborated for INSPIRE respecting the requirements and the recommendation of the INSPIRE Generic Conceptual Model.

In everyday life, the same place can be referred to by several names. In order to reflect this approach the central element of the INSPIRE geographical names data model is the spatial object "named place" that can carry one or more names. The specifications of geographical names can be used for modelling names in any other INSPIRE theme.

Each named place has a unique INSPIRE identifier. It is further characterised by the eventual name(s), geometrical representation and if available, type[1], local type[2], indicative scale of usage, and the possibly related spatial objects. The latter helps to preserve consistency between data at different levels of detail. In addition, life-cycle information[3] should be given if available.

Geographical names are proper nouns applied to real world entities. All names related to the same real world entity have to be provided with correct spelling. If available, further properties on the names are given, such as the language, the source and the status[4] of the name, the script[5] used, and (when relevant) the transliteration[6] scheme. A specific attribute describes if the name is an endonym[7] or

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[1] Characterisation of the kind of entity designated by the geographical names according to the code list of INSPIRE. Whenever possible, types are taken from the INSPIRE Feature Concept Dictionary (administrative units, buildings, hydrography, land cover, transport network, protected sites) that are complemented by other frequently used types like elements of landforms and populated places. The not categorised types belong to the Other category.

[2] Characterisation of the kind of entity as defined by the data provider.

[3] When the named place has been inserted / changed, or eventually superseded / retired in the spatial data set

[4] official, standardised, historical, other

[5] Set of graphic symbols employed in writing a particular name, like Latin, Cyrillic, Greek, etc.

[6] Method of conversion between different scripts

[7] "Name of a spatial object in an official or well established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated." (from [UNGEGN Glossary 2007])

exonym[8]. As part of linguistic information, the pronunciation of the name can be given either using the International Phonetic Alphabet, or linking the URI[9] of a sound file.

Interoperability is also supported by a common reference system[10] and provisions for visualisation. For the latter simple rules for default portrayal are given. The typefaces and fonts used for the portrayal of geographical names shall fully and correctly reproduce all the letters and diacritics/accents present in the spellings of the geographical names to be visualised.

The main value of the INSPIRE geographical names model is a simple yet flexible structure that allows geographical names to be used as an attribute of a spatial object, either modelled within the geographical names theme or in any other theme of INSPIRE. The possibility of linking more names with the same named places gives the opportunity to integrate minority languages and exonyms, which are an important contribution to European multilingualism.

As the specification on INSPIRE geographical names is the result of a detailed analysis of user requirements and involves strong consideration of existing initiatives[11] that go beyond the strictly environmental scope, it is expected that it will also be a solid element of a multi-purpose European spatial data infrastructure.

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[8] "Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken, and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated." (from [UNGEGN Glossary 2007])

[9] Unique Resource Identifier

[10] ETRS89 or (when applicable) ITRS

[11] For example UNGEGN and EuroGeoNames project