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Technical expertise: Geographical names data management

Open Gazetteer for Europe: progress and further development

Submitted by Germany

Summary **

Open Gazetteer is a pan-European gazetteer created under the auspices of EuroGeographics (the association of European national mapping and cadastral agencies) and the Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy of Germany. The gazetteer is derived from data sets produced by EuroGeographics and its members. It contains the official toponyms of all participating European countries and currently encompasses more than 60 languages.

The project to further develop Open Gazetteer comprises two phases.

In the first phase (2021-2023), Open Gazetteer was expanded to include common exonyms in the languages of the gazetteer. In the second phase (2024-2026), the content has been and will continue to be further expanded to include minority toponyms. Since many minority place names are not recorded in official registers, both exonyms and endonyms in the relevant languages will be added. All data sets are in compliance with Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe specifications and the relevant decisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The Open Gazetteer is publicly available under an open data license, making it freely accessible.

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Open Gazetteer for Europe— progress and further development

1. Introduction

1.1. Open Maps for Europe

The Open Maps for Europe (OME) web and data portal by EuroGeographics offers maps for almost all European countries. The data is provided by National Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authorities (NMCAs) and therefore has authoritative character. The OME portal comprises the European products EuroGlobalMap (EGM), EuroRegionalMap (ERM), European Open Data Elevation Model (EuroDEM), Open Cadastral Map, Pan-European Imagery, High-value large-scale pan European prototype and the Open Gazetteer.

1.2. Open Gazetteer

The Open Gazetteer is a compilation of the geographical names content of EuroBoundaryMap (EBM) and ERM in one single database. EBM contains all names of administrative units, ERM is a topographic dataset and contains among other information names of settlements (only city districts missing). For the Open Gazetteer names from the themes hydrography, transportation and protected sites are also processed. The positional accuracy is absolutely sufficient for a gazetteer. ERM and EBM contain all endonyms.

The aim of this gazetteer is to provide a comprehensive European service for geographical names based on authoritative names data. By the end of 2024, the Open Gazetteer included the names of over 50 European countries and their "dependent territories" in more than 60 languages.

The Open Gazetteer is accessible on the OME website of the EuroGeographics (<https://www.mapsforeurope.org/datasets/open-gazetteer>) and is available in three formats:

- Web Feature Service
- Geopackage
- Search on map (this version is in-filled by open data not provided by NMCAs, to enable a full searchable database for the end user)

2. Implementation status, requirements and challenges

2.1. Toponyms beyond standardised endonyms

The Open Gazetteer of the EuroGeographics projects OME and Open Maps for Europe 2 (OME2) had two notable shortcomings:

- Toponyms beyond the competence of the NMCAs were not included (i.e. exonyms: e.g. Prag, Prága, Prague for Praha)
- Toponyms of some official and all unofficial regional languages – endonyms and exonyms – were not included (e.g. Kashubian, Friulian, Rusyn, Occitan, ...)

These two types of missing toponyms in EBM and ERM are not in the responsibility of the NMCAs. However, the objective of the gazetteer is to include these missing geographical names to support and promote multilingualism and facilitate better international communication.

The first shortcoming has already been addressed with exonyms in common use and additional name variants being supplemented during the period 2021 to 2023.

The project "Further Development of the Open Gazetteer" is addressing the second shortcoming. From 2024 to 2026, toponyms of European minority languages will be recorded and linked with their official endonyms.

2.2. Input Requirements for Exonyms

Populating the Open Gazetteer with toponyms is subject to strict rules based on specifications from two international toponymic authorities.

- The Open Gazetteer follows the UNGEGN resolutions regarding the use of exonyms.
- As a common European project co-financed by the European Union, the data must comply with the Directive on the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe (INSPIRE). INSPIRE is a directive which obliges European Union member countries to a common spatial data infrastructure.

2.3. The attribute *NameStatus*

In order to promote awareness of a conscious and standardised use of toponyms as postulated by UNGEGN, each name in the Open Gazetteer is classified by its status. The data specification on geographical names of INSPIRE comprises a normative code list of values for geographical names (https://knowledge-base.inspire.ec.europa.eu/publications/inspire-data-specification-geographical-names-technical-guidelines_en).

According to the specification four values can be assigned for an endonym or an exonym:

- Official (name in current use and officially approved or established by legislation)
- Standardised (name in current use and accepted or recommended by a body assigned advisory function and/or power of decision in matters of toponymy)
- Historical (historical name not in current use)
- Other (current, but not official, nor approved name)

2.4. Languages

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the period from 2022 to 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

The Open Gazetteer covers toponyms of four types of languages:

- All 24 official languages of the European Union
- Official national languages of all other non-EU countries participating
- Official minority languages of participating countries e.g. Basque, Scot-Gaelic, Romansh
- Non-official minority languages of participating countries e.g. Occitan, Breton

Given that numerous toponyms of minority languages are not included in official lists, this further development of the Open Gazetteer includes not only exonyms of the respective languages, but also their endonyms.

As of April 2025, the Open Gazetteer has incorporated toponyms from the following languages: Breton, Ladin, Lower Sorbian, Upper Sorbian, Occitan and Rusyn.

All datasets comply with INSPIRE specifications, meaning that each toponym is linked to the corresponding geographical feature, identified as either an endonym or exonym, and assigned with a name status.

The Open Gazetteer is publicly available without restrictions and is provided as open data.

3. Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the report and progress made with the EuroGeographics' Open Gazetteer.
- (b) Express its views on the way forward and the involvement of UNGEGN experts.