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INTRODUCTION

To begin with, I would like to make some comments of a practical nature. During the week to come, 46 papers will be read within this section by scholars from 17 nations: Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United States.¹ ‘Settlement Names’ may seem to be a fairly well-defined and homogenous topic, but this is far from the case. A wide range of aspects, material, methods and problems are represented in these 46 papers, some of which are quite general while others are very specific to certain regions, countries, languages or historic contexts.

This being so, we found it best in the end to allow the papers to be organized and presented on the basis of language. 20 of the papers are in Italian, 11 are in English, 9 are in German and 6 are in French. As the congress programme shows, all the papers today – that is August 30th – will be in English including this brief introduction offered by myself as president of the section.² There will only be a single 5a-session on this first day. On Thursday, September 1st, section 5a will be split up into two parallel sessions, one of them starting with a remaining paper in English, followed by all the papers in German and ending with two papers in Italian. The other session on Thursday consists solely of 6 Italian papers. On Friday, September 2nd, the section is also divided into two parallel sessions, one consisting of the 6 papers in French and the other of the remaining 11 papers in Italian.

To provide a short introduction to these 46 papers, and thus to point to the most important topics and issues of this sub-section as a whole, is not an easy task, but a few general comments can be offered.

To begin with, I think the very title of this section emphasizes the necessity to continue the important work on onomastic terminology already being carried out within ICOS and elsewhere. The English term

¹ Unfortunately, a number of the expected participants were unable to attend to read their papers, including scholars from the Ukraine, the United States, and Italy.

² Advisers in this section were professors Wolfgang Haubrichs (Germany) and Kay Muhr (Northern Ireland).

settlement names used in the title refers, as I see it, to names borne by settlements, habitations, houses, farms, villages, etc. The Italian term *microtoponomastica* and the French term *microtoponymie*, on the other hand, in the translated title, sounds to me (and probably to many of our colleagues) more like the English term *microtoponymy* or the Scandinavian *mikrotoponymi*, which do not primarily refer to settlement names, but the names of minor features (*micro/mikro* meaning ‘small’) or even names used by a small group of people, e.g. local names attached to settlements: names of minor fields, trees, groves, ditches, marshes, stones, pastures, etc. I do not argue that any one of these terms is necessarily better or more appropriate than the other, I wish merely to illustrate how this terminology may lead to misunderstandings and other problems.

A number of papers focus on the presentation and classification of a given name-stock and the underlying naming-motifs. Classifications of names and name-stocks, from all over the world, have been presented over the years numerous times before, and this topic will no doubt be the subject of many future ICOS papers. After all, to group a stock of place-names after having interpreted them, is a very natural way to fit each individual name into a system or structure. And of course, presentations of this kind, are always valuable for understanding the history and identity of the local or regional community concerned. But the question – if we face it from an international or global point-of-view, as befits an ICOS session – is, what can we learn from this kind of presentation. What possibilities of classification exist? What similarities and differences exist between countries and continents in this respect and how can we compare them to one another? Which naming motifs are universal or common generally, and which are specific and unique? It is difficult enough for each one of us to grasp and keep up with the research carried out within our own countries or linguistic areas, so how do we find the time and resources to engage ourselves in what is being done in other parts of the world? The answer is very often ‘we don’t’, no matter how interested we might be. I do not have any answer or solution to this problem. Perhaps additional international meetings or symposia should be organized with small groups of specialists discussing specified topics and problems more intensely. This has been done before with success, and can be done again.

Many papers in this section attempt to trace and describe the settlement history of an area, or for other reasons employ place-names as historical source material. Place-names are, as we all know, short and compressed texts from the past and one of our goals as onomasticians is to interpret them and elicit their messages. Perhaps that is also what

the public expects most of all from us? Settlement names are often very ancient, which of course makes them immediately interesting but at the same time creates various difficulties. Studies on how to interpret specific place-names and how best these function as a key to times past, will probably keep turning up at future ICOS events.

Names and name-shifts resulting from modern historical and political development are presented by scholars from several countries, e.g. Latvia, Lithuania and Hungary, with examples taken from village and street names. In these studies it is not the etymology of the names that is the focus of the speakers' interest and attention but rather the political, sociological and psychological aspects of names and naming.

The interpretation of place-name evidence becomes even more complicated in situations where several folk groups and several languages were responsible for the place-names within one and the same area (e.g. Germanic-Slavonic in Germany, Latin-Etruscan-Germanic (Goths) in Italy, Celtic influence in Spain, Italy and France, etc.). Are there time-strata to be unraveled in such areas? How to determine which name belongs to which strata? Are there mixed name-forms to be identified wherein one element comes from one language and a second element from another? Can traces of dead languages be extracted from ancient names and if so, how can we use these extracted words? These are questions and problems that will be the focus of some papers. In most parts of Scandinavia such questions have no relevance at all, since a continuous Germanic population has lived there from as far back as we can trace. But in the north of Scandinavia, the Germanic-speaking people meet with the Finns and the Saami-population which gives rise to questions similar to those just mentioned. Again, this is an aspect of onomastic research of global importance, where methods and results should perhaps be shared more widely and on a more regular basis.

Languages (and names) in contact and the modern standardization of names is still a delicate topic, and perhaps we can solve the problems of our own time in a better way if we learn to listen to what history has to tell us.

The standardization of *toponyms*, to use the United Nations' term for the process of deciding the form and spelling of a name, is the main subject of several papers. Here, influence from oral and colloquial name-forms come into play when scrutinizing map names.

UNGEGN (the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names) and ICOS are both world-wide organizations dealing with place-names. Some experts, including myself, are involved in both or

ganizations. I believe that interaction and cooperation between the two bodies could be developed further.

Single names and name-elements are discussed in a few papers. This is a topic that will of course always be of interest for a variety of reasons. I won't comment further on this except to mention one name that will be studied later this week: *Rome/Roma*. Finally, as expected, several papers have a theoretical and methodological approach. One paper discusses what the referent of a settlement name really is, by introducing the intriguing concepts 'space' and 'spaceness'. Theory and method in name-research will always be a topic for discussion, re-evaluation and improvement.

I have chosen to introduce and open this section concerning *settlement names/microtoponomastica* by briefly introducing to you some of the topics that will be raised during the next few days and also by sharing with you some of my personal thoughts and reflections on this theme.