



The Standardization of Geographical Names  
Across Languages and Geographic Regions





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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

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### Encore « tenir compte des progrès scientifiques » !

*Pierre Jaillard (France)*

*Président du GENUNG*

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Chers Collègues,

Notre expérience commune de la normalisation des noms géographique montre bien ce dont les linguistes ont fait une base de leur science : dans la réalité, l'usage des locuteurs prime toujours sur la normalisation administrative, ou même sur les règles académiques. Voilà qui suffit à justifier pleinement de « tenir compte des progrès scientifiques », et notamment linguistiques ! Non seulement cela doit permettre de surmonter les différences d'approche des différents pays pour établir un consensus entre eux, mais c'est aussi nécessaire pour influencer effectivement l'usage de chaque communauté linguistique, ce qui est le but ultime de toute normalisation.



Concrètement, cela conduit certes à établir des principes de traitement (résolution 1967/I/4, C), mais en se fondant sur l'observation la plus fine de « l'usage courant », premier élément à prendre en compte (résolution 1967/I/4, C, b, i), et non sur des idées théoriques, souvent d'autant moins justes qu'elles sont plus simples. Or, les langues sont des domaines quotidiens pour leurs locuteurs, à qui elles ont été enseignées au prix de plus ou moins fortes simplifications pédagogiques. Aussi, le simplisme y règne et les analogies erronées y abondent, parfois jusqu'à faire évoluer l'usage courant.

En pratique, les principes les plus pertinents et les plus didactiques s'appliquant aux noms géographiques sont donc souvent ceux qui s'appliquent aussi aux autres noms propres ou à la langue générale (résolution 1967/I/4, C, 2). Ils font souvent appel à des notions dont la combinaison est plus complexe que la seule « pratique orthographique » — surtout dans sa version scolaire, seule connue de la plupart des locuteurs —, comme la fréquence d'emploi d'un nom ou l'influence d'autres langues familières, régionales ou étrangères. Cette cohérence est un atout essentiel pour valoriser et diffuser ces règles auprès du public et pour assurer la meilleure réception possible, par l'usage effectif, de la normalisation de chaque nom géographique.

Au-delà de ces idées générales, la pertinence de ces notions est bien sûr variable selon les langues et leur prise en compte selon les pays. Le présent *Bulletin* nous permet donc de découvrir comment chacun de nous s'en empare dans le cadre qui lui est fixé, et il peut amener chacun de nous à réfléchir à ces pratiques pour envisager des évolutions, toujours en « tenant compte des progrès scientifiques ».



## “To be based on the achievements of science” again!

*Pierre Jaillard (France)*

Chair, UNEG

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Dear Colleagues,

Our shared experience with the standardization of geographical names clearly illustrates what linguists have made a basis of their science: in reality, speakers usage always takes precedence over administrative standardization, or even academic rules. This alone is enough to fully justifying “to be based on the achievements of science”, particularly linguistics! Not only should this enable us to overcome differences in approach between various countries in order to establish consensus among them, but it is also necessary to effectively influence usage within each linguistic community, which is the ultimate goal of any standardization.

In concrete terms, this certainly leads to establishing principles of treatment (resolution 1967/I/4, C), but based on the most detailed observation of “current usage”, the first element to be considered (resolution 1967/I/4, C, b, i), and not on theoretical ideas, which are often all the less accurate for being simpler. However, languages are



everyday domains for their speakers, who have been taught them at the cost of more or less significant pedagogical simplifications. As a result, oversimplification prevails and erroneous analogies abound, sometimes even changing common usage.

In practice, the most relevant and didactic principles applicable to geographical names are therefore often those that also apply to other proper names and/or to the general language (resolution 1967/I/4, C, 2). They often use concepts whose combination is more complex than mere “orthographic practice” — especially in its scholar version, the only one known to most speakers — such as the frequency of use of a name or the influence of other familiar, either regional or foreign, languages. This consistency is essential for promoting and disseminating these rules to the public and for ensuring the best possible reception, into actual use, of the standardization of each geographical name.

Beyond these general ideas, the relevance of these concepts naturally varies depending on the language and their application in different countries. This *Bulletin* therefore allows us to discover how each of us approaches them within our own specific context, and it can lead each of us to reflect on these practices in order to consider improvements, always “based on the achievements of science”.



# MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARIAT

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**Mark Iliffe**

UNEGN Secretariat

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Dear UNGEGN Experts,

The 70<sup>th</sup> issue of the UNGEGN Bulletin features articles on the theme “The Standardization of Geographical Names across languages and geographic regions”. The articles received really reflect the diversity and vibrancy of our global community, as well as covering the usual featured sections – from the countries, divisions, working groups and special projects, and other news items.

## National Strategies and Multilingual Realities

Geographical names, or toponyms, are far more than mere labels for locations; they are fundamental national assets that embody history, language, and cultural identity. In multilingual contexts, standardization is essential not only for technical clarity in navigation, emergency response, and governance but also for fostering inclusivity and preserving intangible cultural heritage. The articles in issue of the Bulletin showcase diverse approaches to managing complex linguistic landscapes:

- **Balancing Official and Indigenous Languages:** New Zealand and Canada highlight the ongoing work to integrate indigenous names (Māori and various First Nations languages) alongside official English and French forms. Similarly, Kenya is working to document toponyms from over 60 indigenous languages to create an authoritative national gazetteer.
- **Linguistic Policy and Governance:** Belgium operates under a rigorous framework where names are strictly tied to four linguistic regions. In contrast, Indonesia utilizes the "*Trigatra Bangun Bahasa*" framework to prioritize Indonesian as a unifying language while preserving local dialects.
- **Subsidiarity vs. Centralization:** Austria emphasizes a subsidiary system where naming decisions are made at the local level to respect endonyms, whereas Saudi Arabia and Cyprus utilize National Committees to ensure country-wide alignment and unified Romanization.

## Toponymy as Cultural Heritage

Many contributors emphasize the role of names in preserving history:

- **Migration and Settlement:** Articles from Argentina and Bulgaria explore how migratory flows—such as Welsh settlers in Patagonia or various historical layers in Sofia—leave a permanent imprint on the land.
- **Oral Traditions and Myths:** Chile’s study of its "*Bestiario*" (mythological creatures) illustrates how folklore and legends shape the "mitotoponyms" of a region.
- **Historical Evolution:** Egypt’s multilayered history, from the ancient "Kemet" to the modern "Misr," demonstrates how names serve as a linguistic map of history.

## Technological Innovation and Global Cooperation

The digital era has transformed toponymic management. Saudi Arabia’s Geographical Names Portal and Iran’s integrated multilingual database represent a move toward greater accessibility and data integrity. Furthermore, the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) highlights how crowdsourced data and AI can fill critical gaps in underrepresented regions to support international aid efforts.

## Ongoing UNGEGN Activities

*The 2027 Session of UNGEGN*

Preparations for the 2027 Session of UNGEGN have begun! The 2027 Session will now take place on **26 - 30 April 2027**. Kindly note that this is the week before the dates previously announced.

*Revitalization of Working Groups*

Since the 2025 Session, the Secretariat has been working with each Working Group to redevelop their administrative instruments. Many of these, and other improvements, are now reflected on the website of the respective Working Groups.

*Strengthening of Divisions*

Following the [meeting](#) of the Divisions on 9 December 2025, the position paper on the revitalization of Divisions, the draft work plan, the fact sheet, and several additional resources are now available for consultation. The next meeting of the Divisions is scheduled for 29 May 2026. In recent weeks, the Africa East and Africa Central Divisions



have convened, and the former United Kingdom Division has adopted a new name—the Anglophone Caribbean and United Kingdom Division—to better reflect its current membership.

Divisions are encouraged to contact the Secretariat to ensure their representatives' contact details are up to date. Likewise, representatives of Member States are invited to reach out to the Secretariat if they wish to participate in Divisional activities

## Other events

At the recent 57th session of the Statistical Commission, the Unique Identifier for Cities was formally endorsed. Following this endorsement, and with the support of UN-GGIM, the Secretariat—assisted by the Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management—will proceed to implement the UUIDs within the World Geographical Names Database.

The sixteenth session of UN-GGIM will be convened in New York from 3 – 7 August 2026. Further information is here: <https://ggim.un.org/>

The [workshop on the use of interoperability standards for the management of geographical names](#) “Linking Geographical Names, the Disaggregation and Localization of Sustainable Development Goals and the Semantic Web”

will be convened at ECLAC, Santiago, Chile on **2 to 4 June 2026**. The workshop examines the importance of unique identifiers for geographic entities, such as countries, cities, and physical features, as a means of removing the ambiguity of multiple toponyms and enable the integration of data for the SDGs.

The Third United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress (3rd UNWGIC) will be convened in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from 16 to 19 November 2026. The 3rd UNWGIC seeks to advance a future-ready, responsibly governed global geospatial ecosystem and support the acceleration of the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework. More information here: <https://ggim.un.org/3UNWGIC>

The upcoming International Scientific Symposium in Rome (2026) and the ICOS Congress in Vienna (2027) will continue their deliberations on toponymy with a focus on how toponymy contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and identity.

We thank all our contributors to this issue, and to Andreas Hadjiraftis of Cyprus for designing the front page. Your comments on this issue and contribution to the next Bulletin, number 71, to be circulated in September 2026 under the theme “*How toponymy can contribute to reach the Sustainable Development Goals*”, are welcomed.

The *Information Bulletin of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names* (formerly UNGEGN Newsletter) aims to showcase and promote good practices from across the global geographical names community.

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Contributions for the Bulletin can only be considered when they are made available digitally in Microsoft Word or a compatible format. They should be sent to the following Email address: [geoinfo\\_unsd@un.org](mailto:geoinfo_unsd@un.org)

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Previous issues of the Bulletin (formerly Newsletter) can be found at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/pubs>

**Secretariat of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGGN)**  
**Statistics Division**  
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**New York, NY 10017, USA**

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## THEME: The Standardization of Geographical Names across languages and geographic regions

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### Welsh toponymy in Argentine Patagonia: a living memory of immigration

#### *Origin, current situation, stakeholders, projects, standardisation and identity*

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#### Introduction

Despite widespread belief, Argentina does not present a homogeneous landscape of geographical names in the Spanish language, but rather a complex palette of place names that reflect the variety of origins of the occupation of its territory and the richness of its multiple migratory flows.

Indigenous communities began naming places in numerous languages and dialects without writing systems, many of them disappeared. Indigenous geographical names covered the entire country. Later reinterpreted and distorted, they are mentioned in different forms in historical texts, maps, tourist information, legal documents, and other official sources. Often located in difficult-to-access areas, they continue to pose a challenge to the arduous task of standardisation.

The subsequent occupation of the territory -initiated by the Spanish conquest and followed by the campaigns of the national government at that time- gradually added place names. Mostly, these are place names in Spanish. However, geographical names in French, Dutch, English, Irish, or Italian, among others, are not uncommon, due to explorers, military personnel, navigators, religious figures, politicians, or members of scientific missions who arrived in these lands between the 16th and 19th centuries and whose standardisation seems to offer less complexity.

Later, the need to populate and develop a territory as vast as Argentina led to a policy aimed at attracting settlers from the most varied corners of Europe, a wave that began in the 19th century and continued into the 20th century. Whether caused by local problems or coinciding with the world wars and

their aftermath, their contribution was so significant in terms of the total population that it is often said that ‘Argentines descend from ships’.

In this context, non-Spanish European immigration also left its mark on place names, reflecting its close ties to the new land where it established its life and dreams. As part of a more localized or a particular toponymy, it is less known, and its standardisation requires more specific historical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge associated with its origin.

#### Welsh place names: origin and territorial imprint, recording and standardisation

The Welsh community represents a very particular chapter in this history of immigration. The first contingent of Welsh settlers arrived in Argentine Patagonia from Liverpool and initially settled in the lower valley of the Chubut River (río Chubut), where the first geographical names in this language are recorded.



Figure 1: Love Jones Parry Madryn assisted the migrants by chartering the sailing ship *Mimosa*, which would bring them to the Patagonian coast in 1865. His noble title, Baron of Madryn, will give rise to the name **Puerto Madryn**. (Photo: in Gavirati, Op.cit.)

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<sup>1</sup> Coordinator of the Technical Commission on Geographical Names of the Centro Argentino de Cartografía (CAC), a scientific and technical institution that is a member of the International Cartographic Association (ICA).

• Corresponding member (Argentina) of the Joint ICA/UGI Commission on Toponymy.

• Participant in the Incubator Group to revitalise the UNGEGN Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage (UNEGGN WG GNCH) and in the Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names



Figure 2: Lewis Jones, promoter of the colonisation project in Patagonia, led negotiations with the Argentine government. His name will give rise to Trelew (Tre, in Welsh, meaning town, and Lew, short for Lewis or Luis in Spanish, meaning Town of Luis). (Photo: in Gavirati, Op.cit.)

Later, with the arrival of new settlers, the Welsh moved westward through the Andes on a long and difficult journey, earning the name "Rocky Trip" (Hazardous Journey). The naming of places accompanied the route of immigration and its settlements. Sketches, maps, and other official documents began to record these names.



Figures 3 and 4: In 1888, engineer Llywd Ap Iwan drew up a map of the Chubut territory that records the routes of Welsh explorations and Indigenous trails and their geographical names. (Details of one of the originals, courtesy of Maria Esther Evans)



Figure 5: Located in Cwm Hyfryd (beautiful valley), wheat production and the development of more than twenty flour mills generated a prosperous regional economy and gave rise to the name Trevelin (Tre in Welsh means village; Velin means mill). (Photo is a courtesy of Museo Regional de Trevelin)

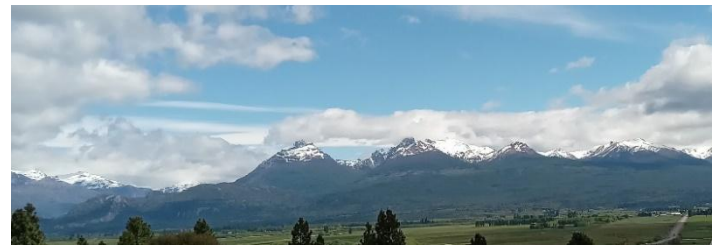
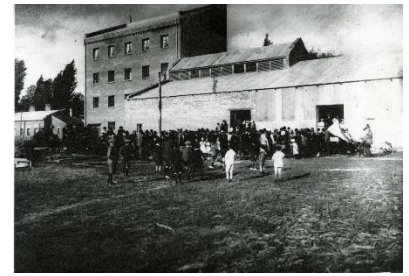


Figure 6: Dominating the landscape to the west of Trevelin stands Gorsedd y Cwmwl (Throne of the Clouds), so named because there are always clouds "resting" on the peaks of this mountain. (Photo: Adriana Vescovo)

The possibility of speaking their own language was one of the reasons for Welsh emigration to Patagonia. Places were named in the Welsh community of 'the Colony',<sup>2</sup> used 'Patagonian Welsh' that differs in style and spelling from the Welsh spoken today in Wales.

In this regard, the contribution of local experts can be relevant in the standardisation process, which would help to overcome differences in spelling that are still observed in documents, websites, and signage.



Figures 7 and 8: Discrepancies and inaccuracies in Percy Wharton's writing (correct form in Ordinance No. 997/11) applied to the river and the bridge that crosses it. (Photos: Hernán Gómez)



<sup>2</sup> "The Colony" (Y Wladfa or Y Wladva, in Welsh) was the term used by settlers to refer to the Welsh colony. Currently, in Wales, the expression 'the Colony' refers only to the Welsh colony in Patagonia.



**Welsh geographical names, beyond cartography**

*Integrated into everyday life, Welsh geographical names, or those associated with Welsh immigration, go beyond their use in identifying places. Over time, they have become mixed into other areas such as local production, tourism, and people's names. In this regard, there is a surprising anecdote about Richard Jones Berwyn, "considered one of the great men of the Welsh Colony", which recounts that "although his surname was Jones, at this time he added the name Berwyn, a mountain range near his hometown, and Berwyn is now the surname of many of his descendants"*<sup>3</sup>

In another area, from "the Colony" times to the present day, several local food products are identified by Welsh geographical names or by names associated with their history. In this sense, geographical names add value to regional production and preserve cultural and gastronomic heritage by certifying their geographical origin. Similarly, in the tourism sector, place names can take on brand value.



Figure 9: In 2024, Trevelin was recognised as part of the Best Tourism Villages Network, an initiative of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), United Nations specialised Agency.

**Interest in Welsh place names: local actions and initiatives**

The process of Welsh immigration has aroused great interest among both the local community, which now has fifth-generation representatives, and other social actors. Regarding place names, numerous studies and actions have been conducted. Descendants of the settlers and their associations, government agencies, and those interested in understanding and preserving them have participated in these efforts. Among the initiatives developed locally, the following are worth highlighting: a survey of rural place names; the naming of streets in Trevelin (177 streets); the revaluation of historical maps and historical records; municipal ordinances; the use of bilingual place names and trilingual urban signage (Spanish/Welsh/Indigenous), and proposals of new names.

Ordenanza N° 997/11

**PROYECTO DE INSTAURACION DE NOMBRES DE NUESTRA TOPONIMIA (Estudio y significación de las denominaciones originarias)**

1° etapa

ZONA CORINTOS

PENTREF SYDYN : Villa repentina. Nombre utilizado por los primeros pobladores del área, ya que en la zona estaba la Escuela n° 18, el Juzgado, la Comisaría, un comercio, y varios pobladores ubicados en chacras que surgieron de las subdivisiones de las leguas 16, 15 y 8.

BORDEANDO EL VALLE 16 DE OCTUBRE EN LA DIRECCIÓN SURESTE

SIERRA COLORADA – CRAIG GOCH  
Denominada así por sus características geológicas.



Figures 10 and 11: Partial reproduction of the original rural toponymy survey (Stage 1). It covers natural and anthropic objects. It was carried out through personal interviews and includes the localization, origin and meaning of the name. In some cases, the pronunciation is cited. It gave rise to Ordinance 997/11, whose objective was the local officialization of place names with the aim of preserving the value of their cultural heritage (Courtesy of María Esther Evans, and official document)



Figures 12 and 13: Examples of bilingual signage (Spanish/Welsh)



in the province of Chubut: Loma María is a hill near Puerto Madryn remembers the name of María Elizabeth Humphreys, the first Welsh girl born in the territory, weeks after the first settler's landing. (Photo: unknown author). On the right, traffic signs in Trevelin (Photo: Hernán Gómez).

<sup>3</sup> In Williams, David, Op. cit., 20.



Figures 14 and 15: On local initiative, María Humphreys is the name given to the high-complexity public hospital in Trelew, to honour her pioneering work in the history of healthcare in the region as the first Welsh woman (and non-native woman in Patagonia) (Photo: courtesy of Fernando Coronato, Director of the Museo Punta Cuevas). (Photo on the right, official logo of the Hospital)

### Contribution to the dissemination of the topic of the geographical names and their standardisation

Within this context, on 28 October 2025, the Workshop “Place Names: Management Tools and Heritage of Local Communities” was offered within the framework of the 84th Geography Week organised by the Sociedad Argentina de Estudios Geográficos (GAEA), with the support of the Municipality of Trevelin.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of the Workshop was to share key concepts related to geographical names, encourage the awareness of the importance of place names and their link to the local community, the benefits and necessity of their standardisation, and the role of UNGEEN.

The format of the workshop encouraged participation by attendees, analysing place names as geospatial information data, and as intangible cultural heritage in the current digital context and within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.



Figure 16: The Workshop was open to all local actors from the governmental, academic, productive and civil society spheres. (Photos: Lautaro Valenzuela)

<sup>4</sup> Idea for the proposal and development of the Workshop: Adriana Vescovo, at the suggestion of Hernán Gómez.



Figure 17: The activity concluded with a presentation by Lowri Williams, Strategic Director of the Welsh Language Commissioner. (Photos: (Fotografía gentileza de Lowri Williams))

### Conclusions

As those who analyse the phenomenon of place naming agree, geographical names reflect the community's appropriation of space. This appropriation is not only material, but also involves feelings, meanings and identity.



Figure 18: The Trevelin coat reveals this link and a dual sense of belonging: to the country that welcomed them and to their Welsh origins. In the upper field, the Welsh red dragon rests on the blue and white of the Argentine flag. (Urban mosaic, Photo: Adriana Vescovo)

The exchange between Welsh descendants in Argentine Patagonia and Wales is very intense and includes twinning agreements and visits by Welsh language teachers, choirs and participation in traditional activities, which keep their cultural heritage alive.

The Welsh language was used to name the places of their new home, where the language could be spoken. Thus, the place names perhaps serve as a bridge between their two identities.

In this sense, the experience in Trevelin, *the town of the mill*, allowed us to appreciate the awareness of the value of geographical names and the need for their preservation as part of their cultural heritage, demonstrated by all social actors.

The local actions already carried out, and the interest shown since the Workshop opened new opportunities for future projects that expand the actors and spaces involved with geographical names and their local and national standardisation.



**Acknowledgements:**

To Hernán Gómez, teacher, historian and member of GAEA, for his joint efforts with the Municipality of Trevelin to organise the Workshop, and for his contributions on Welsh colonisation, references, comments and photos for this article.

To María Esther Evans, President of the Welsh Association ‘16 de Octubre’ for the meeting and the extensive information and collaboration provided during and after my stay in Trevelin, and for reading the final version of this article.

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To Lowri Williams, Strategic Director of the Welsh Language Commissioner, for her willingness, her presentation in Spanish from Wales at the end of the Workshop, and her careful reading of the final version of the article.

To the Sociedad Argentina de Estudios Geográficos (GAEA), for its invitation to the 84<sup>th</sup> Geography Week, and for the space provided for the dissemination of this topic.

To Marina Banús, for reviewing the final English version.

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# Standardization of Geographical Names Across Languages and Geographic Regions

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Geographical names, or toponyms, constitute a fundamental component of geography. They establish a unique connection between human populations and geographic features, not only indicating locations but also conveying significant scientific information of considerable interest and importance.

Geographical names vividly reflect the mindset, worldview, culture, lifestyle, customs, and psychological characteristics of populations. They represent an integral element of contemporary civilization and form a unique toponymic environment essential to human existence. The preservation of geographical names as elements of intangible cultural heritage has become a matter of significant importance—particularly toponyms in the languages of indigenous peoples, national minority groups, and regional linguistic communities.

National topographic and cartographic organizations are responsible for addressing toponymic matters. These institutions are tasked with collecting and organizing information while ensuring the utilization of accurate and up-to-date geographical names. However, a significant challenge emerges from the fact that multiple agencies within a country frequently work on these issues concurrently. Consequently, coordinating their activities becomes extremely difficult.

It is essential to recognize that in every country, beyond the management of domestic geographical names, there exists a requirement to define and register foreign geographical names through a specialized approach—particularly ensuring their correct translation. The emergence of multiple variants and inconsistencies in the usage of such names frequently results in errors, rendering contradictory interpretations of certain geographical names unsurprising.

There is an increasing demand for the application of practical and standardized transliteration methodologies in the translation of geographical names.

It may appear anomalous to encounter names such as New York and New Orleans presented differently on the same cartographic representation. The standardization of geographical names varies considerably from one country to

another, contingent upon governmental resources and organizational structures, the linguistic diversity within the country, and the cultural and political relationships both within and between its regions.

Various guidelines and manuals for the translation of geographical names have existed since the Soviet period, providing at least partial assistance in this domain. However, with the passage of time, many of these regulations have become obsolete or diminished in relevance. It is therefore reasonable to anticipate that the process of revising and updating the protocols for translating geographical names will continue on an ongoing basis.

In almost all state languages worldwide, with few exceptions, it is possible to distinguish between literary and colloquial forms—a linguistic phenomenon known as diglossia. The literary form is characteristically regarded as official and authoritative, whereas the colloquial variety is used in everyday communication. Examples include Greek, with *Καθαρεύουσα* *katharevousa* (high register) and *Δημοτική* *dimotiki* (low register); Arabic, with *الْفُصْحَى* *al-fuṣḥā* (literary) and *العامية* *al-‘āmmiyya* (colloquial); and Switzerland’s use of *Hochdeutsch* (standard German) alongside *Schweizerhochdeutsch* (Swiss German). In a broader context, this type of linguistic division is also observable in countries where two unrelated languages coexist, such as Spanish (*español*) and Guarani (*avañe’ẽ*) in Paraguay.

The Armenian language has not been exempt from these linguistic developments. When examining the emergence, formation, and evolution of the Armenian dialectal system, it is necessary to trace the historical roots of the phenomenon. Each dialect shares certain features with the literary language and with other regional varieties, while simultaneously possessing distinct phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and stylistic characteristics that define its individuality and linguistic independence.

The emergence and independent development of dialects constitutes a characteristic feature of the tribal and ethnic linguistic period, becoming most pronounced during eras of political and geographical fragmentation. The earliest documented references to Armenian dialects date to the 5th



century, however, they are most distinctly recognizable in Middle Armenian.

The contemporary Armenian language comprises a considerable number of dialects—approximately 60\* have been documented. This diversity primarily results from the geographical fragmentation of the Armenian homeland, with the vast majority of these dialects found within the Republic of Armenia. The foundation of this linguistic diversity lies in the distinctive historical development of the Armenian people and their language; indeed, within as few as five neighboring settlements, three to four distinct dialects may be identified.

Even within a monolingual country, numerous dialects may exist, wherein the pronunciation and spelling of geographical names may differ significantly from the official forms. Nevertheless, these dialectal toponyms may still be incorporated into the RA Geographical Names Catalog.

Although the Law on Geographical Names of the Republic of Armenia does not grant dialect-speaking communities the formal right to use geographical names specific to their dialects, this does not prevent them from using these names legally in everyday life or in various literary materials, including on signboards. Where an official toponym exists, it is permissible to include the local dialectal form in parentheses—with the exception of official names of countries, regions, communities, cities, and villages.

Given that certain Armenian dialects diverge substantially from the literary language, linguists and cartographers have adopted a more flexible approach to dialectal forms. Concerning the standardization of geographical names across languages and regions, Armenia, as a classically monolingual country, encounters relatively few

complications. This remains the case even when accounting for toponyms in the languages of national minorities or in the various Armenian dialects.

The State Catalog of Geographical Names of the Republic of Armenia, excluding intra-settlement objects, contains approximately 36,000 toponyms. The vast majority of these—approximately 72%—are significantly influenced by the languages of national minorities or by Armenian dialectal variations. The professional services responsible for managing these toponyms in Armenia approach them as a form of intangible (spiritual) cultural heritage: a body of achievements with inherent value, tradition, norms, and rules that reflect the historical experience and collective memory of the populace. These place names are considered an inviolable component of the intangible cultural legacy created by preceding generations.

Regrettably, the development of national languages frequently precipitates the gradual decline of dialects, resulting in a substantial reduction of the geographic areas where numerous dialects are spoken and, in certain instances, their complete disappearance.

Acknowledging that geographical names are not immutable and may undergo change for various reasons, the disappearance of dialects could ultimately result in a significant impoverishment of the toponymic landscape. In such circumstances, newly designated geographic entities might be assigned foreign toponyms or, in the absence of suitable alternatives, reduced to mere numerical designations.

\*Armenian Dialects, Hrachya Acharyan, Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, Moscow-New Nakhichevan, 1911; H.Petrosyan, Dictionary of Homeland studies, Yerevan, 1987, page 128-130.



## Place-name standardization in Austria

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The Austrian system of place-name standardization is characterized by subsidiarity, i.e. decisions are made at the lowest possible level and as close as possible to the feature concerned. This contrasts with the approach in some other countries, which have central name authorities that determine all names from the top-down. Both systems have advantages and disadvantages. The key advantage of the subsidiary system is that the locally used names (endonyms) are usually respected. Its main disadvantage is that standardizing according to scientific principles and applying a consistent approach poses some challenges.

However, this does not apply in the same way to the names of natural features. They indeed fall under the responsibility of a central authority, the Federal Office of Metrology and Surveying [Bundesamt für Eich- und Vermessungswesen, BEV]. Even so, BEV is obliged to respect the local usage of the names and, therefore, also follows the bottom-up principle.

### Microtoponyms

When considering the names for the smallest geographical features, namely for houses, buildings, farms, fields, pastures, fences, stones, springs, ditches, etc. in a mainly rural environment, collectively termed microtoponyms, the owner's right to name the feature generally applies. Although this is not explicitly stipulated anywhere, it is implicit in the Austrian General Civil Code [Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, ABG]. The Code states that the owner can freely dispose of their property: "The limits of property lie where the rights of another would be encroached upon, or restrictions imposed in the general interest would be violated." (§ 364 para. 1 ABG). Naming a property rarely falls into those restricted categories.

There are, however, some restrictions, e.g., under the Hereditary Farm Law [Erbhofgesetz]. Farms that have been owned by a single family for at least 200 years (and have a traditional *vulgo* name) may only be renamed with the consent of the federal province [Land]. Another restriction is ruled by the Reactivation Act [Wiederbetätigungsgesetz], which prevents the use of names alluding to the National-Socialist period. There are also other similar restrictions. However, commercial names (e.g. *Red Bull Stadium*) or names in non-local languages (*Vienna International Centre*, *Mari e monti*, *Mon repos*) are permitted.

The fact that the owner is allowed to determine the name of their house, farm or property has led, for example, to the fact that some names of individual farmsteads in southern Carinthia [Kärnten], with its Slovenian minority, have for many years been represented in Slovenian orthography on the official Austrian map: *Breznik*, *Bukovnik*, *Kališnik*, *Meležnik*, *Pristovnik*, *Ravnjak*.

An owner's land can also be very large. The Federal Forests [Bundesforste] or the Alpine Club [Alpenverein] own entire mountain ranges; lakes often have private owners as well (e.g. Lake Neusiedl [Neusiedler See] is owned by the Esterházy family). The Alpine Club employs a toponymist—ensuring in-house expertise. When it comes to the naming or renaming of geographical features on their territory, such owners usually consult the relevant provincial place-name commission, the Austrian Board on Geographical Names [Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kartographische Ortsnamenkunde, AKO] or the BEV. It is only occasionally that they insist on a name not in local popular use.

### Names of traffic areas and populated places

The names of traffic areas (such as streets and squares in cities and towns) are decided exclusively by the respective municipality. There are UN recommendations on this topic (UN resolution VIII/2, Commemorative naming practices for geographical features; see UNGEGN 2025), and AKO has adopted similar recommendations based on the UN model (see Jordan 2017). The City of Vienna [Wien] has set out more detailed guidelines for this purpose, which have been adopted or used there as a reference by other Austrian cities (see Krapf 2015). In principle, however, the municipalities are free to make their own decisions, including regarding commemorative names (intercalary period, etc.).

The municipality also determines the names of populated places, which will then appear on the town sign, and the names of their components. However, this only applies in four of the nine Austrian federal provinces: Burgenland, Upper Austria [Oberösterreich], Salzburg, and Vorarlberg. In Carinthia, Lower Austria [Niederösterreich], Styria [Steiermark], and Tyrol [Tirol], the approval of the respective federal province is required. Vienna is both a municipality and a federal province (see Fig. 1). However, the consent of the federal province can only be refused if

"the historical and local conditions are not taken into account", and the "changed name is identical or confusingly similar to the name of another populated place in Austria".

In principle, this also applies to the names of well-established linguistic minorities such as the Carinthian Slovenes, the Burgenland Croats, and the Burgenland Hungarians. However, after the Second World War, the federal legislature had to intervene in a kind of reverse subsidiarity, because according to the usual regulations, Article 7 of the Treaty of Vienna of 1955- an international agreement by which Austria regained its sovereignty- would not have been fulfilled. Between 1955 and 1972, neither the municipalities nor the federal provinces succeeded in achieving official bilingualism through the usual procedures. As a result, bilingual official locality names were decreed by federal law in 1972, 1976/77, and finally in 2011. Since then, the interethnic climate has improved to such an extent that further bilingual locality names have indeed been implemented by the municipalities (in keeping with the spirit of Austria's subsidiarity-oriented constitution).

statutory city, together with the federal province and the federal government.

### Names of natural features

So far, we have dealt with names determined by law or official authorities and are therefore official in the fullest sense. As already mentioned, the BEV is responsible for the names of natural features. These names are official only to the extent that they appear on the official topographical map. Their collection and determination are the exclusive competence of BEV. But the principle of local use applies: the name must be used by the local population (i.e. it must be an endonym). What is said in the next village is no longer considered valid. For this purpose, BEV consults informants, preferably foresters, farmers, parish officials, community secretaries, and teachers with a profound knowledge of the local namescape. The names of water bodies are commonly determined jointly by the BEV and a subunit of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

### Names of the technical infrastructure

The names of motorways and expressways are determined

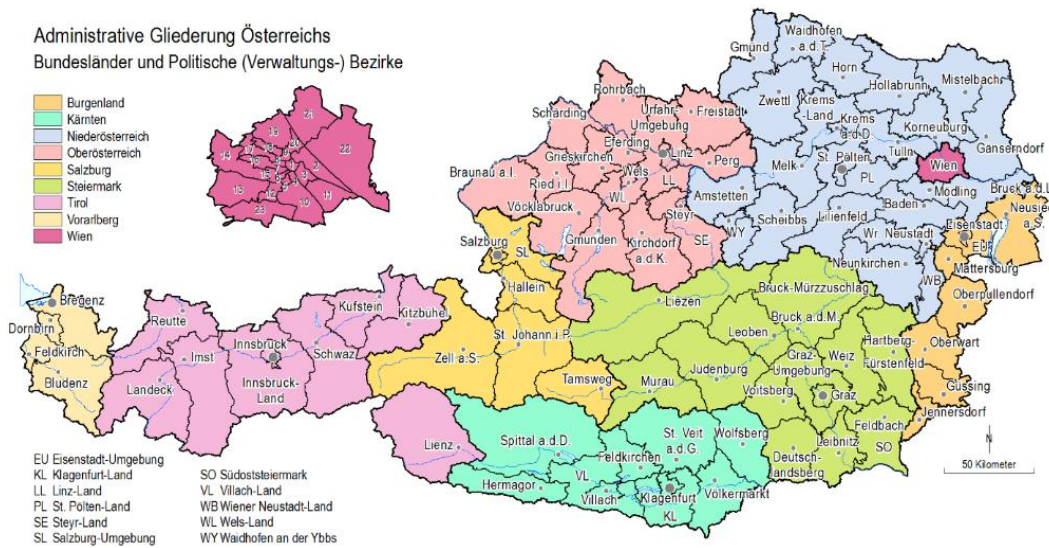


Figure 1: Austria's subnational administrative structure composed of federal provinces (indicated by colors) and Political districts and statutory cities (indicated by black lines). Municipalities are not represented on this map. (Source: Seger 2019)

### Names of municipalities and other administrative units

The situation is similar for the names of municipalities. In all federal provinces, the respective province is involved in the decision. The names of federal provinces, as well as of political and judicial districts, are decided jointly by the federal province and the federal government. The names of statutory cities (cities that function as municipalities and political districts at the same time) are decided by the

by the Federal Roads Act [Bundesstraßengesetz] and its amendments, not by ASFINAG, the agency charged with their construction and maintenance. The names of stations of all modes of transport are determined by the respective transport company. They are encouraged to apply names with spatial reference (i.e. locality- or region-related and not commercial names).



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# Some principal thoughts on place-name standardization

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## What is place-name standardization?

Standardization of geographical names, place names, or toponyms entails identifying, from a variety of names for a certain feature, the most relevant ('correct') one and promoting its use, in the first line in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup> The guiding principle is "one name for one feature", although this principle is not valid in the case of minority and indigenous names and (with a certain caveat) also not with exonyms. This is done to achieve the following goals: to achieve unambiguity, which can be essential for the identification of a location, most important in emergency situations; to achieve – more generally speaking – clarity and reliability, as it is useful also in other fields, when procedures are based on rules and scientific findings; to preserve and protect traditional names against unfounded changes and commercialization; and not the least conflict prevention, thus sustainability in the political sense. Place names, due to their symbolic power, frequently cause conflict (see Eller et al. 2008; Horn 2004). If their use is regulated and if an international authority like the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGGN) and, based on them, national authorities offer recommendations, this can contribute to avoiding conflict (see UNGEGN 2025, Fig. 1).

At the global level, standardization is conducted by UNGEGN, one of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); at the national and subnational level, it is conducted by place-name authorities (see Kerfoot 2003). From the goals of standardization and the considerable efforts to achieve them at all administrative levels, it can be concluded that standardization indeed creates many benefits.

Standardization does not mean that all other names should be forgotten. They, too, should be preserved and documented. With our modern electronic means, this is anyway easier than ever. In any case, place names are a cultural asset – whether standardized or not. Each name, including non-standardized names, can be valuable for research. However, standardization does mean a restriction in the practical use of names.

<sup>5</sup> The UNGEGN Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names defines standardization as "The prescription by a names authority of one or more particular names, together with their

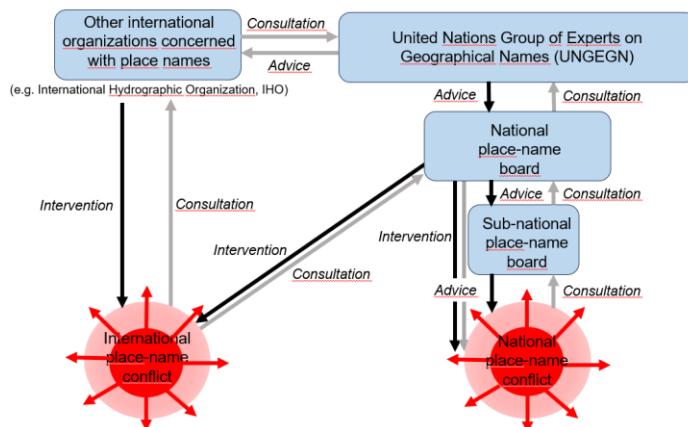


Fig. 1: Mechanisms of preventing, mitigating or solving place-name conflicts by standardization (author's draft)

## Who benefits from it?

It is also justified to ask who benefits most from standardization or who should benefit from it. Is it the local and regional community with their frequent use of dialect names (= names in the vernacular language)? Is it the nation, the community mostly linked by a well-codified standard language and its names? Or is it the international community, whose communication is to be facilitated through standardization, then perhaps in an optimal way by the use of "international names", in practice, the exonyms of a global trade language? The basic principle of standardization, the agreement on a single 'correct' name for a geographical feature, requires a decision between these options, because it cannot meet all these requirements at the same time.

This question, however, is not just about the geographic coordinates or spatial reference but also about scale. There are also people with different interests within these spatial categories, e.g., those who primarily value clear communication, and those who are more concerned about the preservation of place names as part of the cultural heritage (see Cantile & Kerfoot 2016; Choo 2015; Jordan, Bergmann, Cheetham & Hausner 2009). So, the problem is more complex than it appears at first glance. These are also questions typical for critical toponomastics, a rather recent research current that examines the social and political

precise written form, for application to a specific geographical feature, as well as the conditions for their use." (UNEGGN 2002, p. 24)



background of place names, regarding also standardization as an expression of a specific naming policy and not without alternatives.

In the context of the United Nations, Ingvil Nordland explicitly referred to this problem for the first time in 2019 (see Nordland 2019). In practice, as always with place names, it is the dominant social force and the dominant political level in a hierarchical political system that determines the direction. In our day and age, these are usually nations and nation-states, with international bodies like the United Nations often facilitating between these entities. Where the local political level is unusually stronger than other 'higher' layers of government, such as in Switzerland, the national interest has far less influence over decisions concerning place names.

This political constellation means that, as a rule, place names are standardized in their respective standard-language forms, thereby optimizing them for nationwide communication. Occasionally, however, dialect names are also standardized if they are well-established in literature and public use and well-known in other parts of the same country. Usually, however, this is not the case, and sometimes dialect speakers consider a written dialect name unsuitable for the public sphere and would probably even feel uncomfortable seeing their (intimate) dialect names, e.g., on town signs. It is also a fact that the ability to read a dialect in its written form (in its specific orthography) is not widespread.

Declaring the names of a global trade language the norm instead of names in a national standard language is not a realistic option either, as long as nations are the most powerful global players and languages, alphabets, and scripts with their place names are so symbolic for national identity. Even if English proceeds in its status as the dominant trade language, that does not have to mean that English names, if they exist for a feature, will become the standard in more than some special fields. Just as English is a trade language with the specific functions of this language category, which will continue to supplement local standard languages in their own functions, and each of these two categories will maintain their functional domains, so will it be with place names in these languages. In their additional function as international names, English exonyms will be standardized only for certain international purposes (navigation, aviation).

### Dangers

What cannot be denied is that standardization means elevating one name version for a feature over the (usually

many) others and promoting its use, while other versions are regarded as less useful and consequently in danger of falling into oblivion. It is like elevating a single language in a multilingual society to the rank of an official language. This means that standardization works against the wealth of culture expressed also in the wealth of place names, a fact that has only been fully recognized by UNGEGN more recently and results in a tension that remains at least to be mitigated.

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# Unir en normalisant les noms géographiques : la toponymie belge en néerlandais, en français et en allemand

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## Contexte institutionnel

La Belgique, située à la croisée des mondes roman et germanique, est un pays de dimension modeste mais doté d'une organisation politico-institutionnelle particulièrement élaborée. Celle-ci s'articule en cinq niveaux de pouvoir : l'État fédéral, les Communautés, les Régions, les Provinces et les Communes. Cette structure complexe est le résultat d'une série de réformes successives, motivées principalement par la diversité sociale, culturelle et linguistique du pays.

Les lois linguistiques y occupent une place centrale. Elles encadrent l'usage et la reconnaissance des trois langues officielles du Royaume : le néerlandais, le français et l'allemand. Ces langues délimitent quatre régions linguistiques :

- la région de langue néerlandaise
- la région de langue française
- la région bilingue de Bruxelles-Capitale
- la région de langue allemande



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national

Chaque commune appartient à l'une de ces régions. Certaines bénéficient toutefois d'un statut particulier : les « communes à facilités », qui accorde des facilités linguistiques à leurs habitants.

## Rôle de l'Institut géographique national

L'Institut géographique national (IGN), organisme fédéral d'intérêt public, a notamment pour mission de collecter et de structurer l'information topographique couvrant l'ensemble du territoire belge, y compris la toponymie. À travers ses activités, ses services et ses productions cartographiques, l'IGN contribue à la normalisation des

noms géographiques. Ce processus repose sur trois principes fondamentaux.

**Le premier principe** est le respect de l'usage local. Les noms de lieux sont collectés ou contrôlés par des enquêtes de terrain menées auprès d'acteurs locaux.

**Le deuxième principe** concerne la graphie des toponymes. Pour les dénominations officielles — à savoir celles des entités administratives — l'orthographe publiée au *Moniteur belge*, journal officiel du Royaume, fait référence. Pour tous les autres toponymes, l'IGN applique les recommandations orthographiques de la Commission royale de toponymie et de dialectologie (CRTD). Placée sous le haut patronage de l'Académie royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique et de la Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, cette commission scientifique est chargée de l'étude de l'onomastique et de la dialectologie dans les domaines roman et germanique. Elle se compose d'une section flamande et d'une section wallonne. Pour les toponymes bruxellois, l'avis des deux sections est sollicité.

**Le troisième principe** consiste à assurer le respect strict de la législation linguistique ainsi que des recommandations de la Commission permanente de contrôle linguistique.

## Le toponyme sur la carte

En pratique, les toponymes figurant sur les cartes sont indiqués exclusivement dans la langue officielle de la région concernée : en néerlandais dans la région néerlandophone, en français dans la région francophone et en allemand dans la région germanophone. Certaines entités administratives disposent d'une traduction officielle dans une autre langue nationale. Ainsi, la commune néerlandophone d'*Antwerpen* possède pour exonyme officiel français *Anvers*. Ce type de traduction est reconnu, mais il n'est utilisé que dans des contextes spécifiques : dans les annonces ferroviaires ou sur les panneaux routiers. Ces exonymes ne figurent jamais sur les cartes de l'IGN.

Dans la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, où s'applique le bilinguisme institutionnel, les toponymes sont systématiquement mentionnés en français et en néerlandais. Lorsque les deux formes sont strictement identiques, la carte n'en reproduit qu'une seule pour des raisons de lisibilité,

bien que les deux soient dûment enregistrées dans la base de données toponymique de l'IGN.



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Dans les communes à facilités, les toponymes apparaissent uniquement dans la langue officielle de la région linguistique à laquelle la commune appartient. Toutefois, deux exceptions importantes existent. Premièrement, la traduction du nom de la commune et de ses sections dans la langue de la facilité est indiquée entre parenthèses. Deuxièmement, les abréviations étant considérées comme des dénominations génériques destinées à identifier un objet géographique sur une carte, celles-ci doivent également être accompagnées, entre parenthèses, de leur traduction dans la langue de la facilité.

### Appartenance linguistique du toponyme

La langue de la région linguistique détermine également l'appartenance linguistique des toponymes : tout nom de lieu situé dans une région donnée est considéré comme appartenant à la langue de cette région, même lorsque son origine étymologique renvoie à une autre langue.

Ainsi, des toponymes tels que *Quatre Bras*, *Coupure* ou *Coin Perdu*, bien que d'origine française, sont assimilés aux toponymes néerlandais en raison de leur localisation en territoire néerlandophone. L'usage de l'article en témoigne : on dit *de Quatre Bras*, *de Coupure* ou *de Coin Perdu*, et non *les Quatre Bras* ou *la Coupure*.

De même, en région de la langue française, des toponymes tels que *Puttenberg* ou *Beek*, situés le long de la frontière linguistique avec la Flandre ou des toponymes tels que *Gemengebësch*, *Goldbach*, *Klaus*, situés le long de la limite des communes germanophones ou le long de la frontière avec le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg sont assimilés à des toponymes francophones en raison de leur localisation en territoire francophone. Là aussi l'usage de l'article confirme leur assimilation : on dit *le Puttenberg*, *le Beek* et *le Goldbach*, *la Klaus*.

En Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, si les toponymes disposent le plus souvent d'une forme dans chacune des deux langues nationales, il arrive toutefois que certains lieux ne soient connus des deux communautés linguistiques que sous une seule dénomination, en français ou en néerlandais. Il peut s'agir de toponymes très anciens, souvent hérités de l'Ancien Régime, dont seule la forme néerlandaise est attestée. Il peut également s'agir de toponymes à caractère historique ou folklorique, dont la traduction entraînerait une perte de sens ou de spécificité. Le monument le plus emblématique de Bruxelles, *Manneken Pis*, constitue à cet égard un exemple particulièrement éclairant. À l'inverse, certains toponymes ne possèdent qu'une forme française. Par ailleurs, l'enseignement relevant des compétences des communautés, les établissements scolaires dont les universités ne disposent pas de traduction dans la langue de l'autre communauté. Ainsi, l'Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) porte la même dénomination en français et en néerlandais, et il en va naturellement de même pour la *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* (VUB).



*Manneken-Pis (Photo : Wikimedia Commons [Belgium-6450 – Manneken Pis \(13934735107\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Belgium-6450-Manneken_Pis_(13934735107)))*

### Conclusion

Les toponymes de Belgique constituent le reflet d'une histoire particulièrement riche et complexe. La collaboration entre l'IGN et la CRTD contribue à la mise en valeur de ce patrimoine culturel en prenant en compte, de manière intégrée, ses dimensions historiques, linguistiques et géographiques. L'IGN collecte, gère et normalise les noms de lieux en Belgique afin d'assurer une toponymie cohérente, précise et conforme aux législations linguistiques, tandis que la CRTD formule des recommandations scientifiques. Ensemble, ces institutions contribuent à la préservation d'un héritage commun et à la valorisation durable de l'identité des territoires. Dans un pays marqué par une grande diversité linguistique et institutionnelle, cette gestion rigoureuse garantit la cohérence et la fiabilité de la toponymie belge.

## Les langues officielles et la normalisation des noms de lieux sur les cartes fédérales canadiennes

Nicole Halseth, Steve Westley<sup>6</sup>

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Depuis l'arrivée des premiers explorateurs et colons européens dans ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui le Canada, le français et l'anglais ont façonné le paysage des noms géographiques. Ils ont dominé la toponymie officielle, et ont remplacé ou écrasé, dans de nombreux cas, des noms existants en diverses langues autochtones et en usage depuis longtemps.

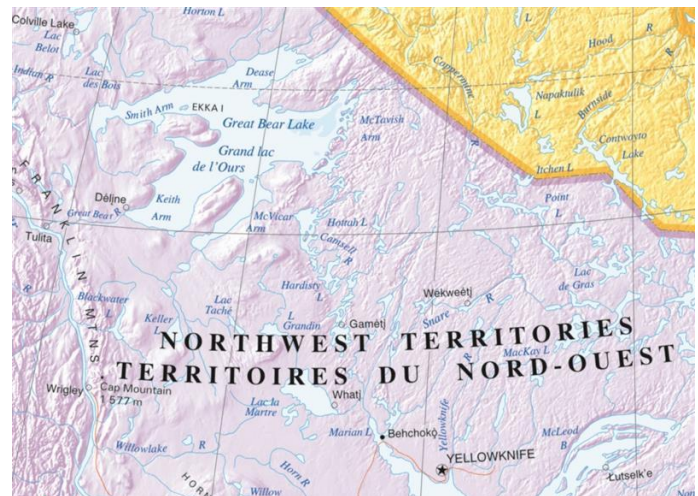
Le français et l'anglais ont été reconnus comme les deux langues officielles du Parlement et du gouvernement du Canada en 1969.<sup>7</sup> La désignation reconnaît le droit des Canadiens, dans certaines circonstances, de communiquer avec les institutions fédérales et de recevoir des services dans l'une ou l'autre des langues officielles.<sup>8</sup> En 1983, le gouvernement du Canada a publié une politique (circulaire du Conseil du Trésor 1983-58) concernant l'utilisation des langues officielles et les toponymes, de même que leur application à la cartographie fédérale. Elle a été élaborée en collaboration avec la Commission de toponymie du Canada (CTC)<sup>9</sup>, connue à l'époque sous le nom de Comité permanent canadien des noms géographiques. De plus, elle a été motivée par les dispositions de la *Loi sur les langues officielles* et de la *Charte canadienne des droits et libertés* de 1982.

La politique énonce quelques points importants concernant la normalisation toponymique et les langues officielles. Ces derniers ont d'ailleurs été réaffirmés dans les *Principes et procédures pour la dénomination des noms géographiques* (2011) de la CTC et qui fournissent plus de détails à ce sujet. En général, la normalisation des noms de lieux s'effectue en une seule forme officielle – le nom approuvé par l'autorité provinciale ou territoriale compétente en la matière – à quelques exceptions près.<sup>10</sup>

Dans certains cas, une entité importante, ou d'importance nationale ou historique, porte un nom bien connu à la fois en anglais et en français. C'est par exemple le cas pour les toponymes *baie d'Hudson/Hudson Bay* ou *Grand lac de*

*l'Ours/Great Bear Lake*, dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Afin d'instaurer une approche normalisée concernant les noms d'[intérêt pancanadien](#) dans les deux langues officielles, la circulaire du Conseil du Trésor contenait une première liste des entités canadiennes. Le caractère officiel des versions française et anglaise de la liste a été reconnu et on a établi qu'elles devaient être représentées dans les deux langues sur les cartes fédérales bilingues. Le CTC assure désormais la gestion de la liste.

Vous trouverez un exemple de l'approche de normalisation ci-dessous. Il illustre les noms uniques et officiels qu'a approuvés la province ou le territoire concerné, de même que les noms d'intérêt pancanadien, en français et en anglais pour certaines entités.



Extrait, carte du Canada

Source : Carte murale du Canada, MCR 102, Atlas du Canada, Ressources naturelles Canada, 2014

<sup>6</sup> L'Œuvre a été créée dans le cadre de l'emploi des auteurs susmentionnés au sein de Ressources naturelles Canada et, à ce titre, Sa Majesté le Roi du chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre des Ressources naturelles (Sa Majesté), est le seul titulaire du droit d'auteur sur l'Œuvre..

<sup>7</sup> Source : « [Historique de la Loi sur les langues officielles](#) », Patrimoine canadien, consulté le 3 décembre 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Source : « [La Loi sur les langues officielles modernisée](#) », Patrimoine canadien, consulté le 3 décembre 2025.

<sup>9</sup> La responsabilité de la gestion des noms géographiques au Canada est répartie entre les autorités fédérales, provinciales et territoriales, sous la coordination de la CTC.

<sup>10</sup> Une liste des exceptions est disponible en ligne : [Traduction des toponymes – Ressources naturelles Canada](#)



Depuis la publication de la circulaire du Conseil du Trésor, 40 années se sont écoulées et le paysage toponymique canadien a changé. Les autorités toponymiques de la CTC ont apporté des mises à jour aux versions française et anglaise des toponymes de la liste de noms géographiques d'intérêt pancanadien, au besoin et à la demande de l'autorité compétente. Par exemple, lorsque le territoire du Nunavut a vu le jour, en 1999, les anciens *district de Franklin/District of Franklin*, *district de Keewatin/District of Keewatin* et *district de Mackenzie/District of Mackenzie* ont été dissous. De plus, les noms pancanadiens ont été supprimés.

Les noms de lieux évoluent au fil du temps.<sup>11</sup> Le travail de normalisation de ces noms que réalise le Canada est également toujours d'actualité et en constante évolution.

L'article ne fournit qu'un aperçu de quelques points dont il faut tenir compte concernant les langues officielles du

Canada et leur incidence sur la toponymie. Les autorités toponymiques provinciales et territoriales peuvent également être assujetties au respect de leurs propres lois et politiques à cet effet.

Ce sujet a été abordé dans le cadre de publications antérieures du Groupe d'experts des Nations Unies pour les noms géographiques (GENUNG). L'article suivant, présenté en 2019, fournit un exemple et des renseignements supplémentaires : « [Le Canada, un pays bilingue, dont le bilinguisme se reflète dans sa toponymie](#) ».

Pour plus de renseignements sur le travail de la CTC en faveur des langues et des noms de lieux autochtones, consulter « Les activités du Canada à l'appui de la reconnaissance des noms géographiques en tant qu'éléments du patrimoine culturel », Bulletin d'information du GENUNG [n° 68](#) | Décembre 2024 | Page 16.

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<sup>11</sup> [L'évolution des noms de lieux au Canada](https://canada.ca/evolution-toponymique) (<https://canada.ca/evolution-toponymique>) est une carte interactive qui donne un aperçu de l'historique de l'évolution de la toponymie au Canada.



## Official languages and standardizing place names on Canadian federal maps

Nicole Halseth, Steve Westley<sup>12</sup>

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Since the earliest arrival of European explorers and settlers to what we now know as Canada, French and English have shaped the geographical names landscape. They have dominated official toponymy, in many cases replacing or overwriting long-preexisting names in a diversity of Indigenous languages.

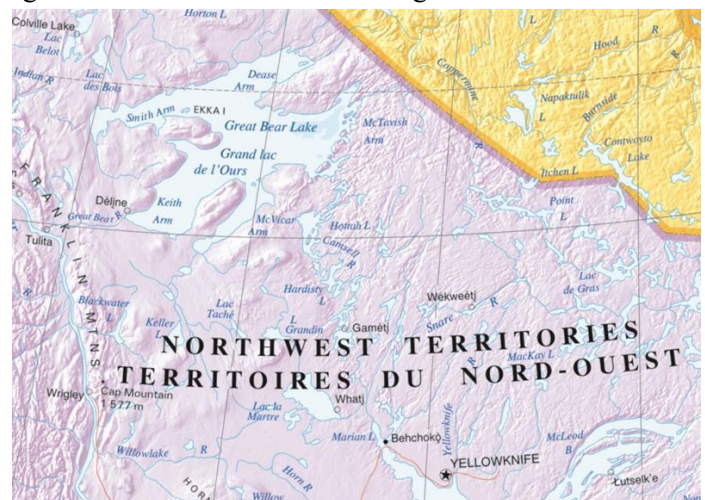
French and English were recognized as the two official languages of the Parliament and Government of Canada in 1969.<sup>13</sup> This designation recognizes the right of Canadians in certain circumstances to communicate with and receive services from federal institutions in either language.<sup>14</sup> In 1983, the Government of Canada issued a policy (Treasury Board Circular 1983-58) regarding the use of official languages in Canadian geographical names on federal government maps and charts. It was developed in consultation with the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC)<sup>15</sup>, known at the time as the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, and was driven by provisions in the *Official Languages Act* and the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The policy sets out a few key considerations relating to toponymic standardization and official languages, reaffirmed in the [Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming](#) (2011) of the GNBC, which provides further detail. Generally, place names are standardized with one official form - the name approved by the relevant provincial or territorial naming authority with jurisdiction over that feature - with some exceptions.<sup>16</sup>

There are some cases where a large, or nationally and/or historically significant feature has a well-known name in both English and French; for example, *Hudson Bay / Baie d'Hudson*, or *Great Bear Lake / Grand lac de l'Ours* in the Northwest Territories. To ensure a standardized approach to these names with [pan-Canadian significance](#) in both official languages, an initial list of Canadian features was provided in the Treasury Board Circular. Both the English and French

forms on this list were recognized as having official status and must be represented in both languages on bilingual federal maps. This list is now managed under the GNBC.

An example of this standardization approach is below, depicting single, official names as approved by the relevant province or territory, as well as names of pan-Canadian significance in both French and English for some features.



Extract, map of Canada

Source: *Wall map of Canada, MCR 102, Atlas of Canada, Natural Resources Canada, 2014*

In the 40 years that have passed since the Treasury Board Circular was introduced, the Canadian toponymic landscape has changed. Naming authorities of the GNBC have been making updates to the French and English names included on this list of geographical names of pan-Canadian significance, as needed and as requested by the appropriate authority. For example, when the territory of Nunavut was established in 1999, the former *District of Franklin / District de Franklin*, *District of Keewatin / District de Keewatin* and

<sup>12</sup> The Work was created during the course of the above-mentioned authors' employment with Natural Resources Canada, and as such, His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Natural Resources (His Majesty), is the sole copyright owner of the Work.

<sup>13</sup> Source: "[History of the Official Languages Act](#)," Canadian Heritage, accessed December 3, 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Source: "[The Modernized Official Languages Act](#)," Canadian Heritage, accessed December 3, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Responsibility for geographical names management in Canada is distributed across federal, provincial and territorial authorities, coordinated by the GNBC.

<sup>16</sup> A list of exceptions is available online: [Translating Geographical Names - Natural Resources Canada](#)



*District of Mackenzie / District de Mackenzie* were dissolved, and the pan-Canadian names were removed.

Place names evolve over time.<sup>17</sup> Canada's work to standardize these names is also evergreen, and constantly evolving.

This article is just a snapshot of some considerations regarding Canada's official languages and how they are reflected in toponymy. Provincial and territorial naming authorities may also be subject to their own laws and policies in this area.

This topic has been discussed in past publications under UNGEGN. The following article submitted in 2019 is one example and provides more information: "[Canada, a bilingual country, as reflected in its toponymy.](#)"

For more information on the work of the GNBC in support of Indigenous languages and place names, see "Canada's Activities Supporting Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage," UNGEGN Information Bulletin [No. 68](#) | December 2024 | Page 14.

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<sup>17</sup> [Canada's Evolving Geographical Names](https://canada.ca/evolving-geonames) (<https://canada.ca/evolving-geonames>) is an interactive map providing insight into historical name changes in Canada.



# El Bestiario En La Toponimia Oficial De Chile

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## Introducción

Los pueblos moldean el espacio geográfico según su cosmovisión, folclore e historia, las que en ocasiones narran hechos extraordinarios (Vicuña Cifuentes, 1915). Los nombres geográficos preservan estas visiones, estudiadas por la toponimia, una rama de la onomástica, que contribuye a dar continuidad al patrimonio cultural inmaterial histórico y cultural (IGM, 2024). Por esto, la gestión de los nombres geográficos es un tema fundamental en los patrimonios culturales, las lenguas y las identidades étnicas (UNGEGN, 2021; UNGEGN, 2025).

El Instituto Geográfico Militar de Chile (IGM), es el servicio oficial técnico y permanente del Estado, parte de su misión es todo lo referente a la geografía y confección de cartografía regular. El año 2023 un dictamen de la Contraloría General de la República formalizó sus atribuciones para asignar, modificar y sustituir nombres geográficos de accidentes geográficos. Esta validación permitió desarrollar el procedimiento de “Determinación de Nombres Geográficos”, centrado en la normalización y preservación patrimonial.

Leyendas, entidades mitológicas y nombres de lugares asociados a estos, dan origen a los mitotopónimos (Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2024), reflejando los miedos y creencias representados por el Bestiario Chileno (Montero Labbé & Donoso Suazola, 2023; Ortega & Vega, Monstruos y Dioses del fin del mundo, 2024; Vicuña Cifuentes, 1915). Este estudio aborda el desafío de *El Bestiario en la Toponimia Oficial de Chile*, reuniendo las visiones del IGM y UNGEGN sobre la compleja misión de estandarizar la oralidad (Naciones Unidas, s.f.).

## El Bestiario Chileno y los Mitotopónimos

La multidisciplinariedad toponímica exige investigación profunda que asegure el arraigo histórico del nombre geográfico (IGM, 2024). La información se documenta para una cronología, preservándolo según el uso y la costumbre, e incluyendo la adaptación fonética de lenguas sin escritura a las normas de la RAE (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, 1927), aportando a la revitalización y preservación de las lenguas (UNGEGN, 2021).

La búsqueda de nombres asociados a mitos se basó en una recopilación de fuentes sobre el Bestiario Chileno: historia, folclore, investigación de mitotopónimos y registros audiovisuales de oralidad.

El propósito principal fue establecer su ubicación espacial y distribución. Esto fue complejo, pues una misma criatura puede tener nombres diferentes según su ubicación, siendo el caso más representativo el del *Tuetué* —o *Chonchón* en el Norte Chico— (Aqua Ideas TV, 2025; Montero Labbé & Donoso Suazola, 2023; Montecino Aguirre, 2017). Otra dificultad fue la diferencia de escritura para un mismo nombre, como ilustra en la tabla N°1. *El Piuchén* (“secar gente” en mapudungun), presentó más diferencias de escritura, para verificar si estas correspondían a influencias de pueblos originarios, se agruparon según su escritura para corroborar su continuidad geográfica, lo que subraya la complejidad de la oralidad. El procedimiento IGM, además, respeta los orígenes y la significación otorgada por los pueblos originarios (IGM, 2024).

Tabla N°1. Diferentes escrituras de *El Piuchén* asociada al espacio geográfico.

Continuidad geográfica	Variante fonética	Forma gramatical	Nombre geográfico	Accidente geográfico	Región de Chile
No	IU	Plural	P <u>i</u> uchenes	quebrada	Atacama
	IU	Singular	del P <u>i</u> uchén	quebrada	O’Higgins
	IU	Femenino	la P <u>i</u> uchena	cerro	Maule
	IU	Femenino	la P <u>i</u> uchena	lugar	Maule
	IU	Singular	P <u>i</u> uchén	estero	Los Lagos
	IU	Singular	P <u>i</u> uchén	lugar	Los Lagos
	IU	Singular	de P <u>i</u> uchén	cordillera	Los Lagos
Sí	IHU	Singular	P <u>i</u> huchén	lugar	O’Higgins
	IHU	Singular	de P <u>i</u> huchén	portezuelo	O’Higgins

Continuidad geográfica	Variante fonética	Forma gramatical	Nombre geográfico	Accidente geográfico	Región de Chile
Único registro	IHUE	Singular	Grande de Pihuechén	estero	O'Higgins
Sí	IHUI	Singular	balsa Pihuichén	lugar	La Araucanía
	IHUI	Singular	Pihuichén	Comunidad indígena	La Araucanía
	IHUI	Singular	Pihuichén alto	Comunidad indígena	La Araucanía
No	IGU	Singular	Risco Piguchén	lugar	Valparaíso
	IGU	Singular	Grande de Piguchén	quebrada	Valparaíso
	IGU	Singular	Piguchén	cerro	Maule
	IGU	Singular	Piguchén	caserío	Maule
	IGU	Singular	Piguchén	estero	Maule
No	EU	Singular	Peuchén	quebrada	O'Higgins
	EU	Singular	Peuchén	lugar	Los Lagos

Fuente: Elaboración propia a partir del *Listado de Nombres Geográficos de Chile* del IGM, 2002.

### Cuantificación del Bestiario

El análisis de los nombres geográficos proporciona evidencia cuantitativa de las principales criaturas del bestiario chileno en la cartografía oficial.

Tabla N°2. Criaturas del Bestiario con más registros.

Ranking	Criatura del Bestiario Chileno	Número de Registros
1	El Diablo chileno	78
2	El Chivato	49
3	Sirena	28
4	El Piuchén	26

Fuente: Elaboración propia a partir del *Listado de Nombres Geográficos de Chile* del IGM, 2002.



Imagen N°1. El Diablo Chileno. Su representación como patrón de fundo, con traje y espuelas de la cultura huasa, subraya el arraigo folclórico del personaje en la tradición local.

Fuente: Ilustración de Rodrigo Pardo para la serie *Miedo a la Chilena de Agua Ideas*, dirigida por Christian Pino.

Los registros se asocian a accidentes geográficos, no corresponden a lugares de avistamientos, sino a las características del lugar, marcando rutas agrestes o zonas de peligro.

Tabla N°3. Clasificación de registros toponímicos por criatura y accidente geográfico.

Criatura del Bestiario Chileno	Total de Registros	Accidente Geográfico	Número de Registros
El Diablo chileno	78	Orografía (cerro, morro, risco, sierra, cordón, loma, etc.)	24
El Chivato	49		21
Sirena	28	Asentamiento / lugar (ciudad, caserío, estación)	10
El Piuchén	26	Hidrografía (estero, arroyo, quebrada)	9

Fuente: Elaboración propia a partir del *Listado de Nombres Geográficos de Chile* del IGM, 2002.



**Rigor Científico y Gobernanza de Datos**

La complejidad del Bestiario exige que la estandarización toponímica integre la multidisciplinariedad como eje estratégico del IGM, asegurando que la normalización sea un acto de preservación cultural. Esto se estructura en ejes clave:

**Integración de *Expertise*:** Formalizar el análisis lingüístico e histórico con expertos externos para contrastar etimologías y asegurar el rigor científico-humanista.

**Brecha de Formación:** Impulsar un programa de formación especializado a nivel nacional para profesionales de las Ciencias de la Tierra, Historia y Lingüística.

**Base de Datos Toponímica Multiescala (BDTM):** La solución final es la transformación digital. El IGM avanza en la migración de los nombres geográficos a una BDTM, una herramienta unificada, pública y dinámica para la Gobernanza de Datos y la investigación masiva. La BDTM es el futuro de la gestión toponímica, garantizando el cumplimiento de los estándares internacionales.

**Conclusión**

El IGM y UNGEGN coinciden: el nombre geográfico, como patrimonio cultural inmaterial, debe respetarse de forma similar a la exactitud de un texto histórico. Los mitotopónimos son testimonios vivos del pensamiento mágico que moldea la geografía. Figuras como El Diablo chileno y el vampírico Piuchén demuestran la profunda conexión de la cultura con el territorio. Al normalizar estos nombres, a pesar de su dificultad, el IGM asegura que la memoria histórica y la identidad cultural del país sean preservadas.

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# The Bestiary In Chile's Official Toponymy

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## Introduction

Peoples shape geographical space according to their worldview, folklore, and history, which sometimes recount extraordinary events (Vicuña Cifuentes, 1915). Geographical names preserve these visions, studied by toponymy, a branch of onomastics, that contributes to the continuity of historical and cultural intangible heritage (IGM, 2024). Therefore, the management of geographical names is a fundamental issue for cultural heritage, languages, and ethnic identities (UNGE GN, 2021; UNGE GN, 2025).

The Military Geographic Institute of Chile (IGM) is the official, technical, and permanent state service; part of its mission involves all matters related to geography and the production of standard cartography. In 2023, a ruling by the Comptroller General of the Republic formalized the IGM with the authority to assign, modify, and substitute geographical names for geographical features. This validation allowed the development of the "Geographical Name Determination" procedure, focused on standardization and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Legends, mythological entities, and the place names associated with them give rise to **mythotoponyms** (Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2024), reflecting the fears and beliefs represented by the Chilean Bestiary (Montero Labbé & Donoso Suazola, 2023; Ortega & Vega, *Monsters and Gods of the End of the World*, 2024; Vicuña Cifuentes, 1915). This study addresses the challenge of the Bestiary in Chile's official toponymy, bringing together the views of the IGM and UNGE GN on the complex mission of standardizing orality (United Nations, n.d.).

## The Chilean Bestiary and Mythotoponyms

Toponymic multidisciplinary demands in-depth research that ensures the historical grounding of the geographical name (IGM, 2024). The information is documented for a chronology, preserving it according to usage and custom, and including the phonetic adaptation of unwritten languages according to the RAE (Royal Spanish Academy) rules (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, 1927), contributing to the revitalization and preservation of languages (UNGE GN, 2021).

The search for names associated with myths was based on a compilation of sources about the Chilean Bestiary: history, folklore, research on mythotoponyms, and audiovisual records of orality.

The main purpose was to establish their spatial location and distribution. This was complex, as the same creature can have different names depending on its location, the most representative case being that of the *Tuetué*, known as *Chonchón* in the *Norte Chico* (Small North) (Aqua Ideas TV, 2025; Montero Labbé & Donoso Suazola, 2023; Montecino Aguirre, 2017). Another difficulty was the difference in spelling for the same name, as illustrated in Table N°1. The *Piuchén* ("to dry people" in Mapudungun) presented the most spelling variants. To verify whether these corresponded to influences from Indigenous peoples, they were grouped according to their spelling to corroborate their geographical continuity, highlighting the complexity of orality. Furthermore, the IGM procedure respects the origins and meanings attributed by Indigenous peoples (IGM, 2024).

Table N°1. Different spellings of El Piuchén associated with geographical space.

Geographical Continuity	Phonetic Variant	Grammatical Form	Geographical Name	Geographical Feature	Region of Chile
No	IU	Plural	Piuchenes	Ravine	Atacama
		Singular	del Piuchén	Ravine	O'Higgins
		Feminine	la Piuchena	Hill	Maule
		Feminine	la Piuchena	Locality	Maule
		Singular	Piuchén	Stream, creek	Los Lagos
		Singular	Piuchén	Place	Los Lagos
		Singular	de Piuchén	mountain range	Los Lagos
Yes	IHU	Singular	Pihuchén	Locality	O'Higgins
		Singular	de Pihuchén	mountain gap	O'Higgins
Unique record	IHUE	Singular	Grande de Pihuechén	Stream	O'Higgins
Yes	IHUI	Singular	balsa Pihuichén	Locality	La Araucanía

Geographical Continuity	Phonetic Variant	Grammatical Form	Geographical Name	Geographical Feature	Region of Chile
		Singular	Pihuichén	Indigenous Community	La Araucanía
		Singular	Pihuichén alto	Indigenous Community	La Araucanía
No	IGU	Singular	Risco Piguchén	Locality	Valparaíso
		Singular	Grande de Piguchén	Ravine	Valparaíso
		Singular	Piguchén	Hill	Maule
No	IGU	Singular	Piguchén	Hamlet	Maule
		Singular	Piguchén	Stream	Maule
No	EU	Singular	Peuchén	Ravine,	O'Higgins
		Singular	Peuchén	Locality	Los Lagos

Source: Own elaboration based on the IGM List of Geographical Names of Chile, 2002.

### Quantification of the Bestiary

The analysis of geographical names provides quantitative evidence of the main creatures of the Chilean bestiary in official cartography.

Table N°2. Bestiary creatures with the highest number of records.

Ranking	Chilean Bestiary Creature	Number of Records
1	El Diablo chileno (The Chilean Devil)	78
2	El Chivato (The Goat-Man)	49
3	Sirena (Mermaid)	28
4	El Piuchén (The Piuchén)	26

Source: Own elaboration based on the IGM List of Geographical Names of Chile, 2002.

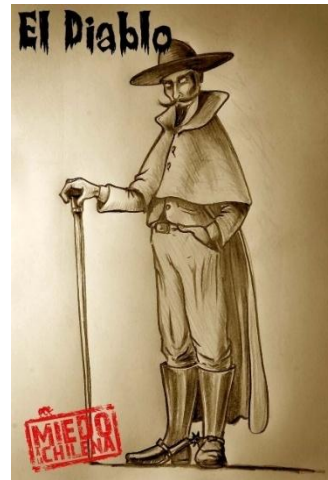


Image N°1. The Chilean Devil. His representation as a landowner, with a suit and spurs from the huaso culture, underscores the folkloric rooting of the character in local tradition.

Source: Illustration by Rodrigo Pardo for the series “Miedo a la Chilena” by Aqua Ideas, directed by Christian Pino.

The records are associated with geographical features rather than corresponding to sighting locations, and often denote the characteristics of the place, such as rough routes or danger zones.

Table N°3. Classification of toponymic records by creature and geographical feature.

Chilean Bestiary Creature	Total Records	Geographical Feature	Number of Records
El Diablo chileno (The Chilean Devil)	78	Orography (hill, headland, crag, mountain range, ridge, knoll, etc.)	24
El Chivato (The Goat-Man)	49		21
Sirena (Mermaid)	28	Settlement / Locality (city, hamlet, station)	10
El Piuchén (The Piuchén)	26	Hydrography (stream, creek, ravine)	9

Source: Own elaboration based on the IGM List of Geographical Names of Chile, 2002.

### Scientific Rigor And Data Governance

The complexity of the Bestiary demands that toponymic standardization integrates multidisciplinary as a strategic axis of the IGM, ensuring that normalization is an act of cultural preservation. This is structured around the following key pillars:

1. Integration of Expertise: Formalizing linguistic and historical analysis with external experts to contrast etymologies and ensure scientific-humanistic rigor.
2. Training Gap: Promoting a specialized national training program for professionals in Earth Sciences, History, and Linguistics.
3. Multiscale Toponymic Database (MTD): Digital transformation is a key solution. The IGM is advancing the migration of geographical names into



an MTD, a unified, public, and dynamic tool for data governance and large-scale research. The MTD supports the future of toponymic management, ensuring compliance with international standards.

### Conclusion

The IGM and UNGEGN agree: the geographical name, as intangible cultural heritage, must be respected in a manner comparable to the accuracy of a historical text. Mythotoponyms are living testimonies of the symbolic thought that shapes geography. Figures like the Chilean Devil and the vampiric *Piuchén* demonstrate the deep connection between culture and territory. By standardizing these names, despite the challenges involved, the IGM ensures that the historical memory and cultural identity of the country are preserved.

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que «cubrió con varios metros de agua, hizo desaparecer los enormes “cañones de 15 pulgadas”...», existe otra mención respecto a este uso por un comandante que se refiere a las condiciones de insalubridad y de aislamiento que vivían los torpedistas de Isla Alacrán en 1880, de hasta 25 días. (Figura 3) (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983; Ramírez Rivera, 1984).



Figura 2. Imagen de la Iglesia de San Pedro de Atacama.  
Fuente: Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales de Chile.

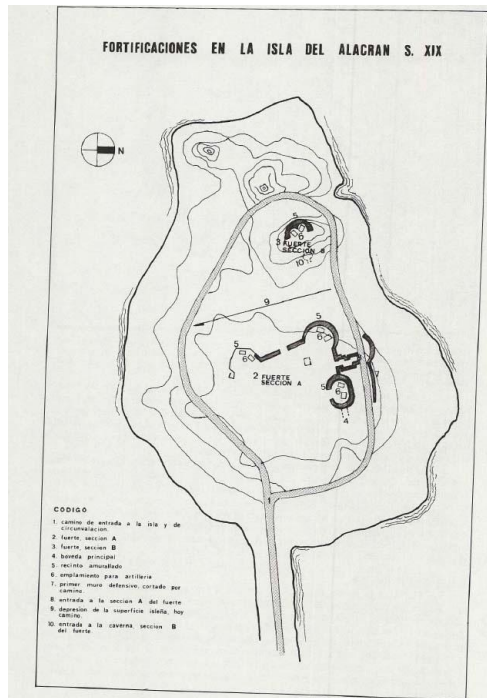


Figura 3. Ilustración de las ruinas de las fortificaciones en la Isla del Alacrán en el S. XIX  
Fuente: Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983.

La isla en diferentes documentos o cartas se nombra de diversas formas, en el diccionario de Riso Patrón se refieren como “Alacrán (Isla del). Pequeña, baja, manchada de guano en su cima, roqueña, se le puede abordar por la

medianía del canalizo que forma con el continente, en el puerto de Arica...”, en un documento el francés Frezier la menciona como Isla del Guano, en mapas coloniales se le menciona como “Ysla del puerto” o “isla frente al Morro” (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983). En la carta de Arica del año 2015 del Instituto Geográfico Militar de Chile, se puede observar tanto Isla Alacrán como la señalización de un “Faro Península Alacrán”.

El origen de la diferencia para referirse al accidente geográfico (isla o península) se debe a los cambios que presenta al comparar registros visuales. En fotografías aéreas de los vuelos Hycon de 1956, se observa una isla, pero en las imágenes satelitales actuales de la zona, se puede observar como un istmo une dos masas de tierras, dando origen a una península. El “istmo” tiene una génesis antrópica, las obras de éste finalizaron en 1965, en conjunto con la construcción del nuevo puerto de Arica, con la finalidad de unir la isla al continente (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983).

El origen del nombre de la Isla “Alacrán” tiene su origen probablemente en la abundancia del alacrán en la zona, o en la forma de la isla, pero el historiador peruano Rómulo Cúneo-Vidal se aventura a imaginar que esto tiene su origen en un ritual con una *monstruomaquia* llamado *Llallaguas* o *Uturuncus* que realizaban los grupos étnicos que habitaban la costa, y que, por la persecución de sus creencias protegieron esta estructura en la isla, llamándola como tal la “isla de la Llallagua”, que traducida al castellano sería “Isla del Alacrán” (Figura 4) (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983).

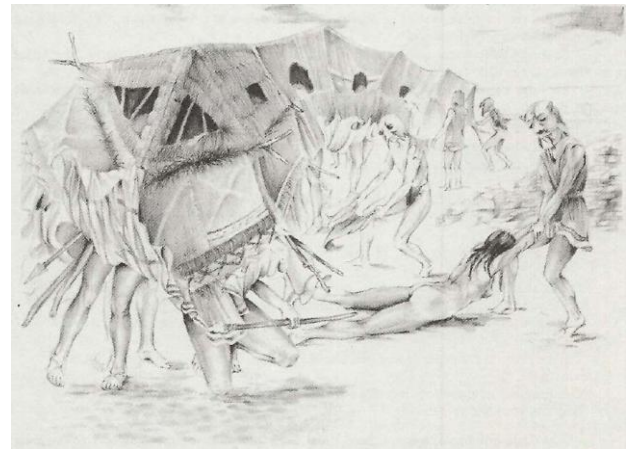


Figura 4. Representación de la “festividad de la Llallagua” ilustrada por Gustavo Espinoza.  
Fuente: Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983.

Los topónimos como hemos visto juegan un importante papel en el rescate patrimonial del territorio nacional, y es por eso que en concordancia con el decreto que “Declara Monumento Histórico la Ex Isla del Alacrán de la Provincia



de Arica, I Región de Tarapacá”, es apropiado usar el topónimo “Ex isla del Alacrán”, ya que, de manera discreta acoge la historia del accidente geográfico, y llama a preguntarse ¿por qué ya no es una isla?, invitando a la ciudadanía a investigar la historia que tiene este monumento nacional.

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# The Importance Of Toponyms When Describing History, Changes In Names, And Culture In Chilean Territory

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The concept of toponymy (from Greek *tópos*=place, *ónoma*=name) means the names given to a place. In other words, they are the names given to geographical features and objects by the inhabitants of the territory with the purpose of serving as references, and locate them within their surroundings. In doing so, place names leave an imprint of history, culture, and worldview, or they emphasize a specific feature of the geographical object concerned (Mamani M., 2010). For this reason, the study of toponymy is an area that needs a substantial multi-disciplinary approach. An example of this is the importance of its linguistic content, which, on occasions, can be affected by phonetic adaptations, particularly where Indigenous languages were historically unwritten (Greve, 1967; Mamani M., 2010).

To understand the context in which these toponyms have been taking shape, it should be comprehended, firstly, that Chile is characterized by being a country of very varied geographic landscapes, moreover, by the cultural influences arising over the length of its history. This has led to a real challenge when it is time to place and put into effect the toponyms in Chilean maps, because many of them have their origins in our native peoples, in the work of hydrographic surveyors of various nationalities, from various explorers, and in the various cultural contributions arising from migration processes (Greve, 1967).

Choosing the right, accurate toponyms from among the approximately 90,000 records located around our country is difficult, as each has a history to tell. This is the case of a city located in the region of Antofagasta, called “**San Pedro de Atacama**”.

The toponym “San Pedro de Atacama” has its origin in the way in which the Spaniards referred to the area and to its inhabitants, the “licanantay” people, calling them “*Atacama*” and the “*Atacameños*”. According to what was written by Juan del Pino Manrique in 1787, the area was divided into two major zones, which were centered upon what is currently known as San Pedro de Atacama, then called “upper Atacama”, and on ChiuChiu, then called “lower Atacama”. An interesting fact is that, on a map made by Juan de la Cruz Cano y Olmedilla in the year 1775, San Pedro de Atacama appears as San Francisco de Atacama (Figure 1) (ZAPATER E., 1976-1977; Bittmann, Gustavo Le Peige S.J, & Núñez A., 1978). The part of the toponym

corresponding to “**San Pedro**” (Saint Peter) is associated with the missionary campaigns of the Christian religion among the licanantay, at the time that they came into contact with the Christian faith in 1536, bringing with it an organization as a “*Spanish city*”, having a priest and a church with a patron saint “San Pedro” (Figure 2) (Bittmann, Gustavo Le Peige S.J, & Núñez A., 1978).



Figure 1. Extract from the “Draft Map of South America” of Juan de la Cruzcano y Olmedilla, 1775

Source: ZAPATER E., 1976-1977

Demonstrating that working with toponyms requires a multi-disciplinary effort, there is the case described here as follows, because, unlike the previous case, its origin is not in the historic background, rather in qualitative and geomorphological features.

The “*Ex Isla del Alacrán*” (“former island of the scorpion”) is located in the north of Chile, specifically in the Borough of Arica, Arica and Parinacota Region. It is a geographic feature behind which there is a rich history, having been used since pre-hispanic times as a source for hunting, collection of food and of raw materials. During the year 1781, it was used to hold rebel peasants who had joined the call of Túpac Amaru, which would indicate that there was, possibly, a structure on the island to hold them, due to the lack of a prison. As early as the year 1868, there is a record of statements of the U.S. Navy officer L.C. Billingsla, who mentions the presence of a fort which was swept away by a tsunami that «covered it under several meters of water and made the enormous 15-inch cannons disappear». There is

another mention about the use made of that site by an official who referred to the unhealthy and isolated conditions in which the torpedo crews of “Alacrán” (scorpion) Island lived in 1880 for periods of up to 25 days. (Figure 3) (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983; Ramírez Rivera, 1984).



Figure 2. Image of the church of San Pedro de Atacama.  
Source: National Monuments Council of Chile.

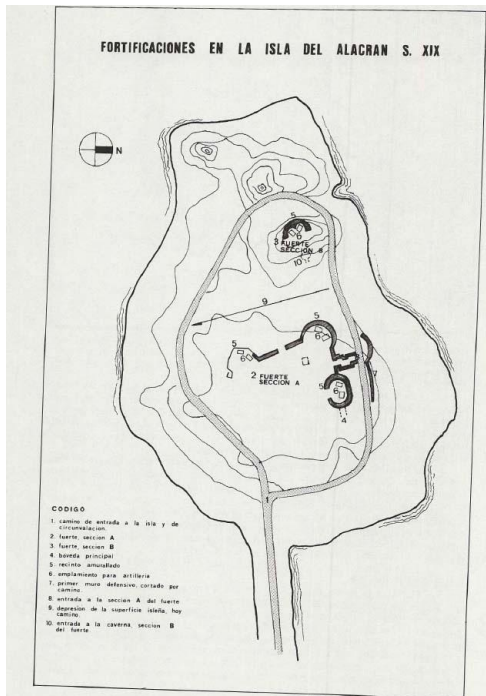


Figure 3. Illustration of the ruins of the fortifications on “Alacrán” Island in the 19th Century  
Source: Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983.

The island, in various documents or charts, is named in several different ways. In the catalogue of Riso Patrón it is referred to as “Alacran” (Island of...). Small low, stained with guano at its summit, rocky, may be reached across the mid-point of the small channel between it and the continent, at the port of Arica...”. In a document of Frezier (of France),

it is mentioned as Guano Island and in colonial-era maps it is mentioned as “Ysla del puerto” (port island) or “isla frente al Morro” (island by the headland) (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983). In the map of Arica of the year 2015 from the Military Geographic Institute of Chile, both Alacrán Island and the text label for “Alacrán Peninsula Lighthouse” can be seen.

The origin of the difference for referring to the geographic object (island or peninsula) is due to the changes that can be seen when comparing the visual records. In aerial photographs of the “Hycon” flights of 1956, an island is seen there, but in the current satellite images of the zone, it can be seen that an isthmus links the two areas of ground, giving rise to a peninsula. The “isthmus” has an artificial origin; the work creating it was completed in 1965, in conjunction with the construction of the new port of Arica, with the purpose of joining the island to the continent (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983).

The origin of the name “Alacrán” Island probably has its origin in the abundance of scorpions in the area, or in the shape of the island; however the Peruvian historian Rómulo Cúneo-Vidal has hazarded the speculation that it has its origin in a ritual performed with a giant puppet called the “Llallaguas” or “Uturuncus” by ethnic groups inhabiting the coast. Due to the persecution of their beliefs, they stored and protected this structure on the island, which they called the “island of the “Llallagua””; translated to spanish, this would have been “Island of the “Alacrán” ” (Figure 4) (Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983).

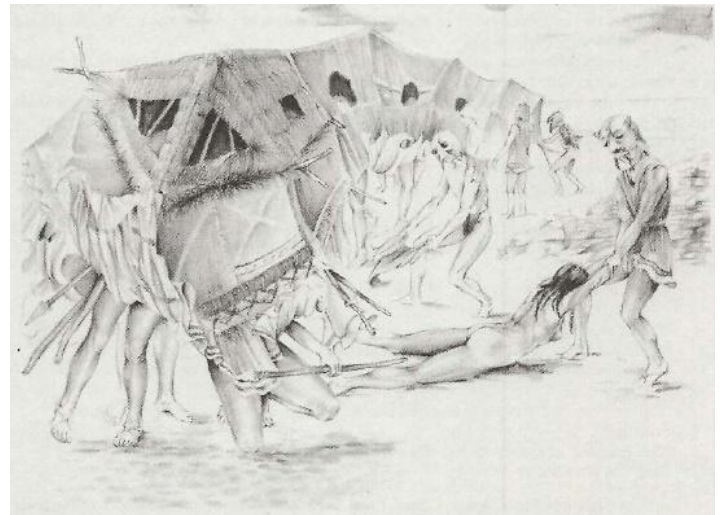


Figure 4. Illustration of the “celebration of the “Llallagua” ”, by Gustavo Espinoza.  
Source: Chacon C. & Hidalgo L., 1983.



As we have seen, toponyms play an important role in the conservation of the heritage of Chilean territory, and it is for this reason that, in accordance with the decree that “Declares former “Alacrán” island of Arica Province, I Region of Tarapacá to be a Historic Monument”, it is appropriate to use the toponym “Ex isla del Alacrán” (former island of “Alacrán”), as this discreetly takes into account the history of this geographic object, and leads to the question why is it no longer an island?, thus encouraging citizens to find out more about the history that this national monument has.

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# The Standardization of Geographical Names Across Languages and Geographic Regions in Cyprus

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## Introduction

The standardization of geographical names in Cyprus is a process that promotes consistency and accuracy in place names through international cooperation and national efforts, primarily guided by the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). This is crucial for a variety of functions, including efficient government operations, accurate emergency services, reliability in education and public awareness, and global communication. Standardization involves the creation of an official national authority and establishing a system for romanization (transliterating names into the latin/roman script). The Republic of Cyprus is actively involved in geographical names standardization and UNGEGN's activities. The national authority is the Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names of Cyprus (MKETFO). It was established in 1967 and has continued its activities uninterrupted from 1967 to the present day.

## Scope and Importance

Toponymic standardization, and the establishment of a single authoritative form for each place name are essential for mapping, land administration, emergency services, cultural heritage, education, and international datasets. In Cyprus the task is complicated by a long multilingual history (Greek dominating over many centuries, alongside minority languages such as Turkish, English as well as other influences from the Venetian, Lusignan and Ottoman periods, and minority names including Maronite and Armenian). Additional complexity arises from orthographic/script differences, and from the island's political division since 1974. Clear, consistent geographical names, and transparent policies about alternate names help reduce confusion in navigation, legal records, cross-border data exchange and global communication.



Figure 1: Linguistic Complexity of Cypriot Geographical Names

## Institutional and Legal Framework

The Republic of Cyprus, based on legislation, collects and maintains official toponyms through national authorities (notably the Department of Lands and Surveys, local authorities, and the Cyprus Permanent Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names - MKETFO). Names are recorded in an official gazetteer and made available via the national geoportal ([www.geoportal.gov.cy](http://www.geoportal.gov.cy)). Cyprus actively participates in the UNGEGN processes and efforts. For Greek geographical names, the Hellenic standard ELOT743 (based on ISO843) is used. Romanization and orthographic rules are applied systematically when publishing national and international datasets, books, reports, and cartographic products.

## Key practical processes

Authoritative toponyms are drawn from the official cadastral maps, the land registry, historical sources, local authorities and field collection. Linguistic, historical and cartographic evidence are used to determine standard forms. All data are stored in integrated national geospatial databases, and hardcopy publications.



This integration allows names to be used in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), navigation systems, maps, planning, emergency services, infrastructure, and more. Stable, accurate, authoritative place names are vital for decision-making, coordination of emergency services, national development, and communication systems.

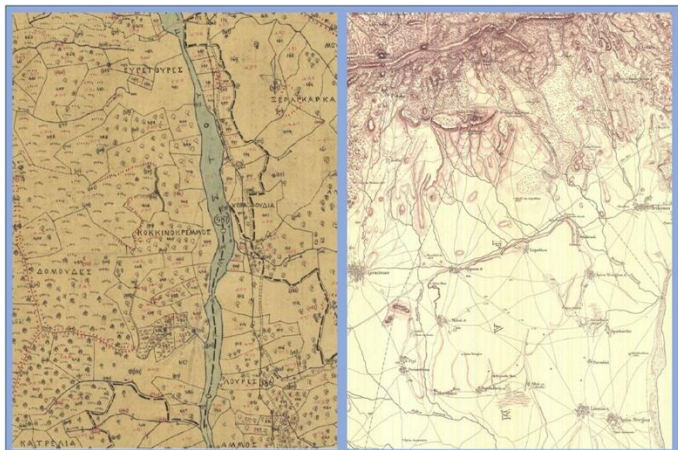


Figure 2: Historical Cadastral and Topo Maps

Cyprus has submitted several national reports, articles, books, leaflets, and relevant materials to UNGEGN conferences and sessions. Several activities support interoperability with international datasets, including the Second Administrative Level Boundaries (SALB), UN geospatial repositories, EuroGeographics databases, European Union databases, European Commission INSPIRE datasets and e-services. Geographical names are integrated into the national geospatial systems. All Cyprus toponyms are available via the Geoportal of Cyprus (INSPIRE / Department of Lands & Surveys) and MKETTO's website.

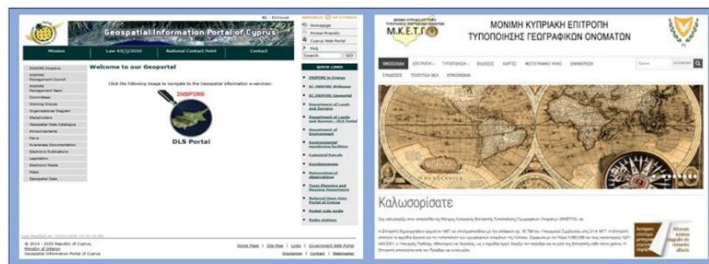


Figure 4: Cyprus Geoportal and MKETTO Website

### Standardization and romanization

Geographical names are standardized in demotic/panhellenic forms and romanized according to national UN-approved standards. Turkish and other names are handled according to their own orthographic conventions and historic pre-1974 forms that are explicitly tracked in official records. The national standardization committee (MKETTO) applies linguistic, historical and cartographic criteria when deciding standard forms.

### Major challenges specific to Cyprus

Political division and renaming: Since 1974, parallel naming practices have been applied under the northern (de-facto) administration of the island, including the replacement of pre-1974 authoritative geographical names. The Republic of Cyprus does not recognize those changes, and documents all authoritative pre-1974 original Greek and Turkish names and their variants. The existence of parallel, non-recognised naming systems creates unnecessary conflicts, which are against national legislation and UN resolutions, complicates island-wide geographical names, and creates confusion.

ΠΙΝΑΚΑΣ ΜΕΤΑΓΡΑΦΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΥ ΑΛΦΑΒΗΤΟΥ ΣΤΟ ΡΟΜΑΝΙΚΟ ΑΛΦΑΒΗΤΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΕΛ.Ο.Τ

Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω
a v g d e z i t h i k l m n x o p r s t y f c h p s o
αι ει οι ου ευ αυ ηυ γυ γκ γξ γχ vt μπ
ai ei oi ou ev(1) av(1) iv(1) ng gk nx nch nt b(3)
ef(2) af(2) if(2) mp(4)(5)

(1) Μερικά από τα σύμφωνα: β, γ, δ, ζ, λ, μ, ν, ρ και όλα τα φωνήεντα (2) Μερικά από τα σύμφωνα: θ, κ, ξ, π, σ, τ, φ, χ και στο τέλος των λέξεων  
(3) Στην αρχή της λέξης (4) Στο μέσο της λέξης (5) Στο τέλος της λέξης

ΤΥΠΟΠΟΙΗΣΗ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΩΝ ΠΟΛΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΧΩΡΙΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΚΥΠΡΟΥ

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΟΝΟΜΑ	ΡΟΜΑΝΙΚΗ ΓΡΑΦΗ	ΤΟΥΡΚΙΚΟ ΟΝΟΜΑ
Α		
ΑΔΕΛΛΕΡΟ	AVDELLERO	AVDELLERO
ΑΓΓΑΣΤΙΝΑ	ANGASTINA	ANGASTINA
ΑΓΓΑΣΙΔΕΣ, 08	ANGLISIDES	ANGLISIVA
ΑΓΓΟΛΕΜΗ	ANGOLEMI	ANGOLEM
ΑΓΙΑ	AGIA	AYA KEBIR
ΑΓΙΑ ΑΝΝΑ	AGIA ANNA	AYANNA
ΑΓΙΑ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΑ (ΛΕΥΚΟΣΙΑΣ)	AGIA VAVVARA (LEFKOSIAS)	AVVAVVARA (LEFKOSIA)
ΑΓΙΑ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΑ (ΠΑΦΟΥ)	AGIA VAVVARA (PAFOU)	AVVAVVARA (BAF)
ΑΓΙΑ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ (ΚΕΡΥΝΕΙΑΣ)	AGIA EIRINI (KERYNIAS)	AYIRINI (KERINE)
ΑΓΙΑ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ (ΛΕΥΚΟΣΙΑΣ)	AGIA EIRINI (LEFKOSIAS)	AYIRINI (LEFKOSIA)

Figure 3: Romanization Rules based on EAOT 743 and ISO 843

### Publication and access

Standardized geographical names and their variant forms are published in national gazetteers and made available online via Cyprus National Geoportal ([www.geoportal.gov.cy](http://www.geoportal.gov.cy)) and via MKETTO's website ([www.geonoma.gov.cy](http://www.geonoma.gov.cy)).

Bilingual/multiscript environment: The coexistence of Greek script and Turkish/Latin script forms, plus historical endonyms and exonyms, requires careful recording of primary names, local variants, historical names, and standardized romanizations in order to serve different user groups.

Heritage vs. usage: Toponymic decisions must balance historical authenticity, official usage, administrative practice, and political sensitivities.

Data interoperability: The use of UN-approved standards for romanization and transliteration, guarantee smooth operations, and general international acceptance of the authoritative geographical names.

## Practical Actions and Implementations

Cyprus maintains a multilingual national gazetteer with explicit metadata for every toponym including the official form, language, script, geographical area, historical variants, local pronunciations, and geographical coordinates at: ([www.geonoma.gov.cy/myfiles/ekdoseis/cygazetteer/index.html](http://www.geonoma.gov.cy/myfiles/ekdoseis/cygazetteer/index.html))



Figure 5: Complete Gazetteer of Cyprus

This is already fully implemented, and both the website and geoportals are continuously updated electronically and openly documented.

Romanization/transliteration rules are documented and widely applied, so that international users and GIS systems can predictably map geographical names. These are aligned with UNGEGN's recommendations.

The Committee promotes interoperability standards, and publishes gazetteer data in a variety of digital formats, and coordinates with European and international repositories.

Fieldwork supplements archival sources through community consultation and linguistic fieldwork to capture

living local authoritative usage and intangible cultural heritage.

The Committee reviews geographical names whenever needed, in accordance with legislation, and actively cooperates with UNGEGN and regional fora to share best practices and maintain up-to-date standards.

The Committee has already published two editions of the standardization guidelines, in both Greek and English.

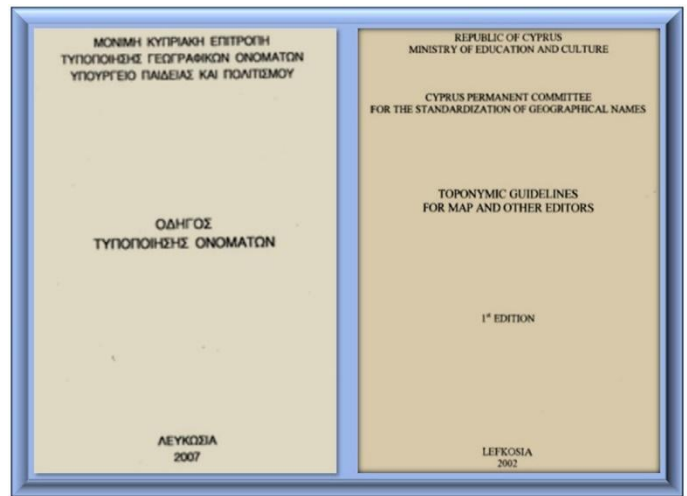


Figure 6: Toponymic Guidelines in Greek and English

## Conclusion

Cyprus has established the required institutional capacity and digital infrastructure to support robust toponymic standardization and transliteration, including national gazetteers, a geoportals, websites, and an active national committee with participation in UNGEGN. The principal obstacles are political fragmentation, multilingual/multiscript complexity and the need to balance legal, historical and social considerations. Transparent legislation, regulations, and processes are already in place, along with published romanization rules, toponymic guidelines, and continued international cooperation, which guarantee the delivery of practical benefits of standardization, while respecting the island's authoritative linguistic, historical, and cultural complexity.

# Use of Indonesian in the Standardization of Names in Public Spaces and Geographical Names

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As a multilingual country, Indonesia needs to identify the position and role of languages in naming public spaces before standardizing its geographical names. Indonesia distinguishes between three language categories: Indonesian, local languages, and foreign languages. This classification is stated in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 42 of 2018 concerning the National Language and Literature Policy. Indonesia's national language serves as a unifying force and is employed as a medium of instruction in education, employment, the mass media, and government. Local languages are regional languages used within a specific region and are primarily spoken, such as Javanese, Bugis, and others. Foreign languages are international languages used for various functions on a larger scale, such as English and Arabic.

According to the National Agency for Language Development and Cultivation, the status and role of language are outlined in the *Trigatra Bangun Bahasa*, which emphasises three priorities: *first*, prioritizing Indonesian; *second*, preserving local languages; and *third*, mastering foreign languages. This framework signifies that Indonesian, as the unifying language, is paramount. Furthermore, local languages must be preserved as markers of group identity and character. After local languages and Indonesian, foreign languages must also be mastered to increase international reach. However, the application of these language categories differs depending on their use in naming geographical features and public spaces.

In this case, Indonesian is used for naming public spaces, such as commercial establishments, places in heterogeneous communities, and places in border areas, as a marker of national identity. The names of housing complexes in Indonesia are often synonymous with the English word "residence" rather than the Indonesian word "perumahan." For example, the *Sakura Residence* in Bekasi City, West Java Province, also has the Indonesian name, *Perumahan Bumi Asih Indah*.

Public spaces are given names in local languages in three different situations: (a) within communities that share the same regional language and have a homogeneous or indigenous population, (b) at sites of historical, cultural, customary, and/or religious significance, and (c) in areas designated to acknowledge the presence of local tribes, ethnic groups, or racial communities. For example, *Ranu Kumbolo* on Mount Semeru in East Java Province. *Ranu Kumbolo* is a Javanese name meaning "wanderer's lake" because its position on a mountain is usually a stopover for mountain climbers.



Figure 1. Ranu Kumbolo Lake

Foreign languages are frequently employed in public areas of historical, cultural, traditional, and/or religious significance, or where corresponding vocabulary or connotations are absent in Indonesian or regional dialects. For example, Fort Rotterdam in Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province. The fort does not have an equivalent name in Indonesian or local languages, so the name remains in a foreign language so as not to diminish its historical value, reflecting usage originating from European languages such as English or Dutch.



Figure 2. Fort Rotterdam in Makassar, Indonesia

Standardization is required not only for naming in public areas, but also for geographical names more broadly. This objective is to manage the usage of language that remains diverse in practice within society. The standardization of geographical names is crucial for clear communication about geography, ensuring that everyone uses identical names that conform to the established national standards. However, in Indonesia, the standardization of geographical names must be accompanied by consideration of the *Ejaan Bahasa Indonesia yang Disempurnakan* (EYD V). With Indonesian spelling guidelines, variations in the spelling of geographical names can be avoided. For example, many people still write *Palangka Raya*. In fact, according to Indonesian spelling and geographical guidelines, the city name consists of a generic and a specific element that should be written as one word: *Palangkaraya*.

Furthermore, there are still variations in the spelling of the numerical elements within geographical names. For example, *V Koto Timur District* in Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra Province. The use of a Roman numeral in the name of this area does not comply with geographical naming

guidelines or Indonesian spelling. The correct spelling is *Lima Koto Timur District*, which conforms to the guidelines for special names, with numbered elements displayed in letter form.

The use of numerals also persists in regional names, such as *Kelurahan 35 Ilir* in Palembang City, South Sumatra Province. This use of numerals violates the Indonesian spelling rules and standardization of geographical names. Indonesian spelling rules allow numbers longer than three words to be written as numerals, but this is not appropriate in regional names because they are proper names. The standardized spelling is *Kelurahan Tigapuluhlima Ilir*, which also complies with the geographical name guidelines, which stipulate that specific names must consist of at most three words.

Another example of variation is *Sungai Batu Village* in Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan Province. The proper spelling is *Sungaibatu Village* because the name of a natural topographic element, consisting of a generic and a specific, should be written as a single word. However, some names, such as *West Java* and *Kebayoran Baru*, already comply with the rules for specific names followed by adjectives or directional terms, which are written separately.

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that spelling practices for names in public spaces and geographical names remain highly diverse. This necessitates the standardization of geographical names in line with Indonesian spelling conventions. Indonesian, as the national language, has its own spelling standards, therefore standardizing geographical names in Indonesia is necessary to ensure consistent spelling of names in public spaces and geographical names. Reducing spelling diversity is essential to simplify the creation of new names in public areas and geographic locations.



# Standardization of Geographical Names: Challenges and Solutions in the Context of Different Languages and Geographical Regions (Case Study: Iran)

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## Abstract:

Standardization of geographical names (toponymy) is the process of systematically recording and standardizing place names at national and international levels. This process plays a fundamental role in areas such as cartography, geographic information systems (GIS), crisis management, urban planning, and even international relations. However, the standardization of geographical names has always faced numerous challenges. Linguistic diversity, diverse cultural identities, historical developments, and political issues have made this process a complex issue. This article, using a descriptive-analytical research method and a case study, examines the main goals, benefits, and obstacles to the standardization of geographical names. The research findings show that standardization, although necessary to facilitate global communication and integrated data management, must be carried out with due regard to the cultural and historical sensitivities of different societies. Finally, this article analyzes the importance, challenges, and mechanisms of standardization of geographical names in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

## Introduction:

Geographical names are not just labels for places but also reflections of the history, culture, language, and identity of a nation or ethnic group. The correct registration of these names in maps, atlases, and geographical documents, in addition to being a national necessity, preserves cultural and historical identity. Every name, whether of a mountain, river, or city, can contain a narrative of myths, beliefs, and historical developments of a region.

With the expansion of technology and the increasing need for global information exchange, the need to create a standardized and unified system for geographical names has become increasingly felt. Standardization does not mean eliminating cultural or linguistic diversity, rather, it aims to create a reliable reference for use in official documents, international maps, and navigation systems. This is especially important in times of crisis such as earthquakes or floods, when international coordination is

vital. However, standardization of geographical names in multilingual regions faces challenges, including linguistic diversity and pronunciation differences, political and historical issues, name changes over time, as well as the lack of a uniform writing system.

## Importance and Benefits of Standardizing Geographical Names:

Standardization of geographical names is an essential and fundamental process in today's world that deals with the unification and precise definition of place names at the local, national, and international levels. This work does not only mean the uniformity of names, but also provides a basis for accurate information management, development planning, and efficient interaction between governments, organizations, and people. The importance of this standardization can be sought in preventing confusion, increasing the accuracy of navigation and mapping systems, facilitating international communications, and preserving cultural and historical heritage. Without single standards, the name of a place may be pronounced or written in several ways, which could lead to widespread errors in areas such as transportation, crisis management, scientific research, and even everyday affairs.

Standardization of geographical names has several advantages, some of the most important of which are:

- Facilitation of international communications: By standardizing names, the possibility of confusion in correspondence, travel, and scientific exchanges is reduced.
- Support for information technology systems: GIS, satellite navigation, and databases depend on standardized names.
- Preservation of cultural heritage: Many geographical names are rooted in history and indigenous languages, and standardization helps to record and preserve them.
- Security and emergency applications: In rescue operations, military systems, and crisis



management, the use of uniform and accurate names is essential.

- **Data integrity:** Standardization enables the accurate and error-free exchange of geographical information between different countries, organizations, and systems.
- **Improving operational efficiency:** This leads to increased accuracy and speed in areas such as transportation, postal services, natural resource management, and disaster response.
- **Preserving historical identity:** Official registration of indigenous and historical names prevents them from being forgotten over time.

## Results:

Standardization of geographical names in Iran, given its extensive linguistic and cultural diversity, is not only a technical necessity but also a historical opportunity to strengthen national identity, territorial integrity, and preserve cultural heritage. The best solution for standardization is to create an integrated database of geographical names with search capabilities in multiple languages, along with providing phonetic pronunciation, phonetics, and registration of place names in both the official Persian language and the native and local language where appropriate. It would also provide the basis for the correct, principled, and uniform writing of place names in Persian script, and to prepare it in alignment with the model recommended by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and, from a local perspective, to provide phonetic, Latin script, and calligraphy criteria, as well as an introduction to the common languages of the country. Place-name phonetics provide a uniform and accurate pronunciation for all users, and the inclusion of phonetic information in various documents such as maps, atlases, and geographical dictionaries is a fundamental step in standardizing the names of places and geographical features. Using a single phonetic method in executive agencies, educational and research centers, and map production institutions not only prevents distortion and changes in the pronunciation and writing of names, but also contributes significantly to preserving geographical names as part of the country's cultural and geographical identity. This can help tourists, researchers, and even government institutions avoid confusion.

## The standardization process should proceed on the basis of several key principles:

- *Preserving linguistic and cultural diversity:*  
Standardization should not eliminate or ignore local names. Rather, it should preserve Iran's cultural richness by registering and recognizing names in

different languages, including Persian, Kurdish, Azeri Turkish, Balochi, Arabic, and other indigenous languages.

- *Creating a balance between local and national identity:*  
A successful standardization system should create harmony between local names and their official pronunciation and writing in national documents. Phonetic transcription with a phonetic alphabet provides both accurate and correct pronunciation and is understandable to non-Persian speakers who are not familiar with the Persian script.
- *Cooperation with government institutions and local communities:*

The success of this process requires the participation of relevant organizations such as the National Mapping Organization, the Cultural Heritage Organization, as well as representatives of local communities. The formation of specialized committees consisting of linguists, historians, and residents of each region can increase the accuracy and public acceptance of standardization.

## Conclusion

Standardization of geographical names in Iran is, in fact, an infrastructural and strategic project that, beyond an administrative measure, plays an unparalleled role in protecting cultural heritage, strengthening national identity, and territorial integrity. Given Iran's unique linguistic and cultural diversity, this process not only means unification but also constitutes a bridge between the past and the future, local and national, and tradition and modernity. Creating a comprehensive, multilingual database capable of providing correct pronunciation, accurate phonetics, and simultaneous registration of names in both official and local forms is the only way to achieve this lofty goal. Such a system, while preventing distortion and change in pronunciation and spelling of names, acts as a valid reference for tourists, researchers, government, and international institutions, and prevents confusion caused by multiple and incorrect names.

The success of this project depends on observing three fundamental principles: first, preserving linguistic and cultural diversity by recognizing and registering names in all the common languages of the country; second, creating a smart balance between local and national identity by using the Persian script as a common script; and third, attracting the full participation and cooperation of relevant government institutions and local communities by forming specialized committees consisting of linguists, historians, and regional representatives.



For Iran, this project is a historic opportunity to increase accuracy and efficiency in territorial management, showcase its cultural richness, and strengthen national unity in respect of its ethnic and linguistic diversity. Ultimately, the successful standardization of names will provide a lasting reference for future generations, in which scientific accuracy, national cohesion, and cultural wealth are seen in perfect harmony.

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# The Standardization of Geographical Names across Languages and Geographic Regions in Kenya

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## Abstract

Kenya is advancing efforts to standardize geographical names across its linguistically diverse landscape, recognizing toponyms as key carriers of cultural identity, heritage, and spatial reference. With more than 60 indigenous languages in addition to Kiswahili and English, the country faces the dual challenge of preserving authenticity while achieving national consistency. The absence of an updated national gazetteer since 1978 and the prolonged inactivity of the Standing Committee on Geographical Names (SCGN) have contributed to inconsistencies in spelling, limited representation of indigenous languages, and uneven harmonization of cross-regional and shared physical features. Current initiatives focus on reactivating the SCGN, documenting multilingual toponyms, strengthening linguistic validation, and aligning naming practices with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Strategic Plan for 2021–2029. Kenya is working toward an authoritative multilingual national gazetteer that upholds linguistic integrity while enhancing geospatial coherence.

## Introduction

Geographical names are fundamental national assets. They provide cultural meaning, linguistic expression, community memory, and spatial reference for governance, planning, emergency response, education, and navigation. In a multilingual State such as Kenya, toponyms also embody indigenous knowledge systems and reflect historical relationships between people and their landscapes.

The UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021–2029 emphasizes the protection of culture, heritage, and language through standardized geographical naming practices. Kenya aligns with this vision and recognizes that effective standardization requires balancing linguistic authenticity, national uniformity, and community participation. This article outlines ongoing national initiatives, existing gaps, and priority actions to support a sustainable framework for geographical names.

## Background

Kenya produced its first official national gazetteers in 1964. Since then, no updated national gazetteer has been issued. The SCGN, mandated under the Survey Act (Cap. 299) to coordinate national naming practices, has been largely inactive, resulting in a gap in naming governance. In the absence of a functioning national authority, geographical names have evolved organically at the community, county, administrative, and institutional levels. This has produced multiple spellings for the same feature, inconsistent orthographic representation, limited documentation of indigenous names, and fragmentation in cross-county and cross-regional naming. While Kenya actively participates in regional and global geospatial forums, national-level training on geographical names standardization remains limited, constraining alignment with international best practices.

## Methodology and ongoing work

Kenya's approach to standardizing geographical names is based on governance, documentation, stakeholder engagement, spatial validation, and preparatory framework development.

### *Institutional reactivation and governance*

*Kenya has initiated the process of re-establishing the SCGN under the Department of Survey and Mapping. A proposed structure includes three technical subcommittees:*

1. Gazetteer and standardization
2. Data systems and records management
3. Heritage, language, and public participation

Draft workflows have been developed for reviewing, validating, standardizing, and publishing geographical names, including version control and update cycles.

### *Documentation of Multilingual Toponyms*

A national compilation exercise has been initiated to collect existing names from:

- County governments and county spatial plans;
- Historical maps and national cadastral records;
- Community elders and language custodians;



- Existing geospatial datasets and biodiversity inventories.

Collected names include attributes such as language of origin, etymology, pronunciation, variant spellings, and contextual usage. They are currently being geocoded and will eventually be developed into a database.

**Linguistic validation and cultural safeguarding**

Kenya’s linguistic diversity, comprising over 60 mother tongues alongside Kiswahili and English, presents both richness and complexity in geographical naming. Standardization recognizes that multiple linguistic forms may co-exist where culturally significant, provided each is accurately documented and orthographically standardized. Community consultation is central to this process. Indigenous language speakers and local authorities serve as primary sources of toponymic knowledge, offering guidance on meanings, pronunciation, and spelling. These participatory engagements ensure that names are culturally authentic and properly validated, reflecting the principle that communities are custodians of their own landscapes and linguistic heritage. This is in line with UNGEGN’s emphasis on community engagement and recognition of linguistic diversity in geographical naming.

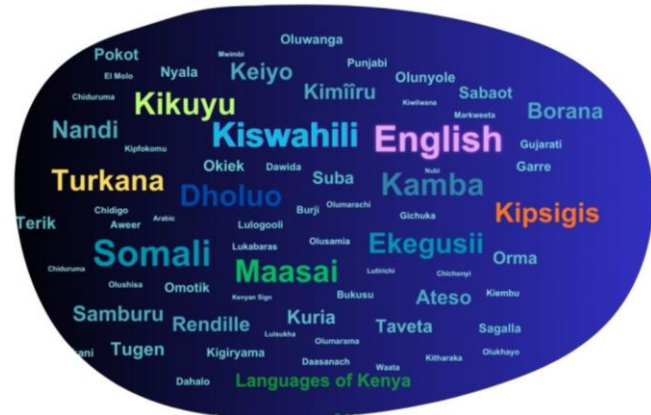


Figure 1: Languages of Kenya

**Cross-regional name harmonization**

Shared geographical features such as rivers, escarpments, wildlife conservancies, grazing routes, hills, and cultural landmarks may have different names in different languages, yet refer to a single feature. In standardizing geographical names, it is imperative to recognize the shared linguistic diversity and the historical contexts. For instance, when people from the Agikuyu community see Kenya's highest peak, they do not only see ‘Mount Kenya’ but also ‘Kirinyaga’ a name meaning ‘bright place’, likened to the white ostrich feathers representing a holy dwelling place for Ngai (God). By contrast, the name ‘Mount Kenya’ reflects the period of British colonial administration, during which

the mountain was formally standardized as ‘Mount Kenya’. As some languages worldwide face extinction, geographical names can serve as linguistic backbones by preserving indigenous knowledge, environmental understanding, and cultural heritage. Kenya’s experience demonstrates that effective toponymic standardization does not require the erasure of linguistic diversity, but rather, it can protect it while adapting naming practices to the evolving systems of the world. Kenya has therefore developed reference tables that assign standardized primary names while recognizing linguistic variants.



Figure 2: Harmonization of geographic names by different groups

**Spatial referencing and administrative alignment**

Progress has been made in linking geographical names to:

- Official administrative units (counties, sub-counties and wards).
- Accurate geographic coordinates.
- National spatial reference frameworks.



Figure 3: Geographic Names linkages by different Communities



This work supports harmonization across government maps, national datasets and digital platforms.

### Identified capacity and system gaps

S/No.	Gap Identified	Impact
1.	Limited training on UNGEGN naming conventions	Weak alignment with global standards
2.	Insufficient expertise in linguistic validation	Inconsistent or inaccurate name records
3.	Lack of national naming guidelines	Absence of a unified orthographic approach
4.	Limited capacity in digital gazetteer development and metadata management	Slow transition to authoritative databases
5.	Minimal cross-border harmonization capacity	Reduced consistency in shared features
6.	Weak collaboration between linguists and geospatial experts	Gaps in accurate language representation
7.	Absence of continuous structured training	Limited capacity for long-term UNGEGN compliance

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Kenya’s progress demonstrates a strong commitment to revitalizing its national geographical naming systems. Initiatives to constitute the SCGN, document multilingual geographical names, strengthen linguistic validation, and harmonize cross-regional features establish a solid foundation for modernizing the country’s naming framework.

To fully align with UNGEGN standards and achieve a sustainable naming system, Kenya will prioritize:

- Formal operationalization of the SCGN and its subcommittees.
- Development and adoption of national geographical naming guidelines consistent with UNGEGN standards.
- Expansion of multilingual toponym collection through structured community participation.
- Continuous training for linguists, cartographers, and geospatial practitioners.
- Consistent participation in UNGEGN forums, workshops and technical training activities.
- Development of a nationally endorsed, multilingual, geospatial digital gazetteer.

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# The Standardization of Geographical Names across Languages and Geographical Regions in New Zealand

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## Introduction

The UNGEGN<sup>18</sup> community is well aware that geographical names are more than labels and locations for practical identification purposes; they also embody history, language, and cultural identity. In multilingual contexts, such as in New Zealand, where Māori geographical names coexist alongside English and other language geographical names, standardization is essential for clarity in governance, mapping, navigation, emergency response, environmental management and international communication. The New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa<sup>19</sup> (the Board) has developed standards, policies and guidelines to achieve standardization in geographical naming, taking care to balance the needs of technical consistency and practical location identification with cultural considerations.



Dannevirke (<https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/19302>) (Scandinavian) welcome sign, taken 6 March 2019 by Christopher Stephens

## Languages of New Zealand

New Zealand has two official languages: Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).<sup>20</sup> However, English is the main language and is considered a de facto official language, established through long-term and widespread

usage. New Zealand also has over 150 other languages resulting from immigration, reflecting cultural diversity and adding a further level of complexity to naming systems. Historically, these other languages have influenced pockets of nomenclature throughout the country where people have explored or settled, and some examples are covered in this article. In making their mark, the name givers have preserved their own historical, linguistic, and cultural identity from their homelands.

## Māori geographical names

Māori geographical names are steeped in oral tradition. They typically describe physical features, historical events or ancestors. Correct orthography, including macrons<sup>21</sup>, is vital for pronunciation and meaning. Increasingly, people are becoming aware that geographical names are all about the story; but if the orthography is incorrect, then the story and history can change, affecting a name's authenticity and authority, and its ability to endure for many years to come. With its own knowledge and through widespread consultation with recognised tribal authorities, the Board aims to confirm the authenticity of the names and their stories.

In Māori lore, layers of naming have a legitimate place, with migrations, rediscoveries, and inter-iwi<sup>22</sup> conflict creating new names and stories that are equal in importance to preserve as part of New Zealand's history. However, where possible, we prefer to standardize one official name for one place (to eliminate ambiguity and confusion). We capture these multiple layers of past naming by 'collecting' unofficial original Māori names (i.e. those that existed pre-European settlement), where known, in the *NZ Gazetteer*<sup>23</sup> along with their stories. And where appropriate, official dual or alternative naming is applied.

*Dialect and orthography:* Māori dialects differ across iwi, influencing spelling, pronunciation and meaning. For example, in the South Island - Te Waipounamu, the predominant iwi, Ngāi Tahu, applies a discrete dialectical difference, i.e. *ng* = *k* as in *manga* vs *maka* (stream). These

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Groups of Experts on Geographical Names

<sup>19</sup> New Zealand's national naming authority

<sup>20</sup> Details of the standardized use of 'New Zealand Sign Language' are covered in the Board's 2018 archived Frameworks document, section 8, pages 14-15:

[https://www.linz.govt.nz/sites/default/files/nzgb\\_frameworks-v10\\_20180615.pdf](https://www.linz.govt.nz/sites/default/files/nzgb_frameworks-v10_20180615.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> the horizontal line above vowels that denotes long vowel sounds

<sup>22</sup> <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/word/1822>

<sup>23</sup> <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/>



are acceptable standardized forms in the Māori language. Other iwi may have slightly different pronunciation, but the standard spelling remains the same (as with any language). The Board follows the orthographic conventions<sup>24</sup> set by the Māori Language Commission, Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, to ensure the standardized written form of the Māori language in geographical names is upheld.

**Generic terms:** Across the country, Māori geographical generic terms are commonly used with both Māori and English/other language specific terms. Some Māori generic terms are so common that they have become part of the everyday spoken 'English' language, used interchangeably with English geographical generic terms. Some Māori specific terms also include a Māori generic term, leading to tautologies in geographical names, e.g. *Lake Rotoiti* (where *roto* means lake) and *Mount Maunganui* (where *maunga* means mountain). The Board encourages standardized Māori generics, offering guidance for proposers with a generic terms policy<sup>25</sup> and webpages providing Māori names for geographical features.<sup>26</sup>

**Translocation:** Europeans often relocated Māori geographical names, especially where destinations were similar in sound. The practice was used to avoid duplication and confusion.

In a modern context, we may still translocate an existing Māori name, usually when it is under threat of being removed or lost due to disuse or changes in geography. For example, the name for the suburb of Hataitai (correctly *Whāitaitai*<sup>27</sup>) in Wellington (the capital city) was translocated from the isthmus suburb known as Kilbirnie, presumably to preserve the name of the *taniwha* (sea creature) whose body created the isthmus.

### Moriori geographical names

Unique to the Chatham Islands (offshore and east of New Zealand), known to Moriori<sup>28</sup> as *Rēkohu*, Moriori geographical names reflect distinct phonetic patterns and cultural narratives. Moriori names similarly reflect oral traditions, however, approved standardized orthography for

the language is still to be established. A number of Moriori geographical names were recognised as official under the Moriori Claims Settlement Act 2021, which settled their Treaty of Waitangi claim with the Crown.<sup>29</sup>

### Settler- and explorer-language influenced geographical names

As noted above, settler and explorer languages have also contributed to geographical naming in New Zealand, as demonstrated by the following examples.

#### Dalmatian<sup>30</sup> geographical names

Many eastern and southern Europeans arrived around the 1860s, attracted by gold mining, kauri gum extraction and wine growing. Examples of their language-influenced geographical names include *Vella Stream*<sup>31</sup> and *Zora Glacier*.<sup>32</sup>

#### Scottish geographical names

The early wave of Scottish settlers had considerable influence on geographical names in Otago and Southland, especially through the introduction of their geographical generic terms such as *burn* (creek or stream), *crag* (rocky outcrop) and *inch* (island). Examples of Scottish language-influenced geographical names include *Bannockburn*<sup>33</sup> and *Ben Nevis*.<sup>34</sup>

#### French geographical names

French explorer and naval officer Jules Dumont d'Urville (1790–1842) also had an impact on geographical naming in New Zealand. He visited New Zealand in 1824 and returned in 1826 during his circumnavigation of the globe as captain of the ship *Astrolabe*. Many of his names were supplanted by English ones, and some have since had their original Māori names restored. Examples of his French language geographical names include *Ballon Rock*<sup>35</sup> and *Gauttier*, later changed to *Whangaparāoa Bay*.<sup>36</sup>

Geographic name examples west of Pitt Island (Rangiauria), Chatham Island showing language influences in Māori, Moriori, French and English.

<sup>24</sup> [Orthographic Conventions](#)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.lin.govt.nz/resources/guide/nzgb-generic-terms-policy>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.lin.govt.nz/products-services/place-names/geographic-features>

<sup>27</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/57206>. [Several attempts have been made to officially correct the spelling but have not been successful due to public objection](#)

<sup>28</sup> Indigenous people of the Chatham Islands

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2021/0049/latest/whole.html>  
. Refer to the Moriori Deed of Settlement Summary for further details

of the Moriori geographical names:

[https://whakataurua.govt.nz/assets/Treaty-Settlements/FIND\\_Treaty\\_Settlements/Moriori/DOS\\_documents/Moriori\\_Deed\\_of\\_Settlement\\_Summary\\_14\\_Feb\\_2020-1.pdf](https://whakataurua.govt.nz/assets/Treaty-Settlements/FIND_Treaty_Settlements/Moriori/DOS_documents/Moriori_Deed_of_Settlement_Summary_14_Feb_2020-1.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Yugoslav, Croatian

<sup>31</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/6576>

<sup>32</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/48971>

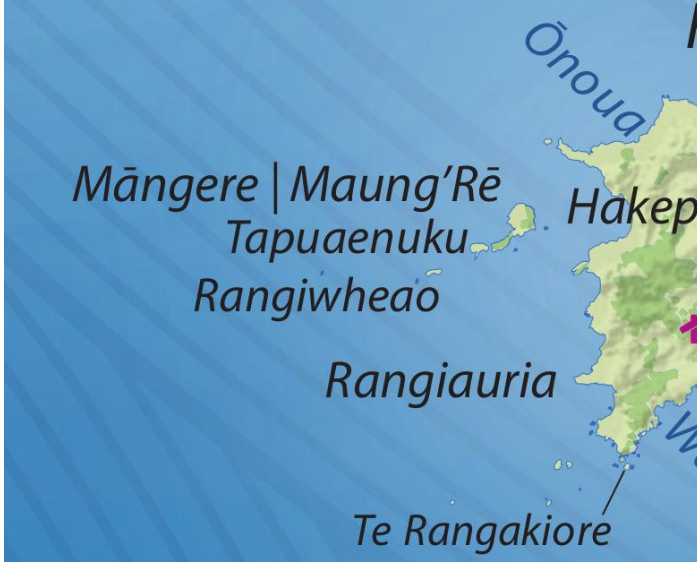
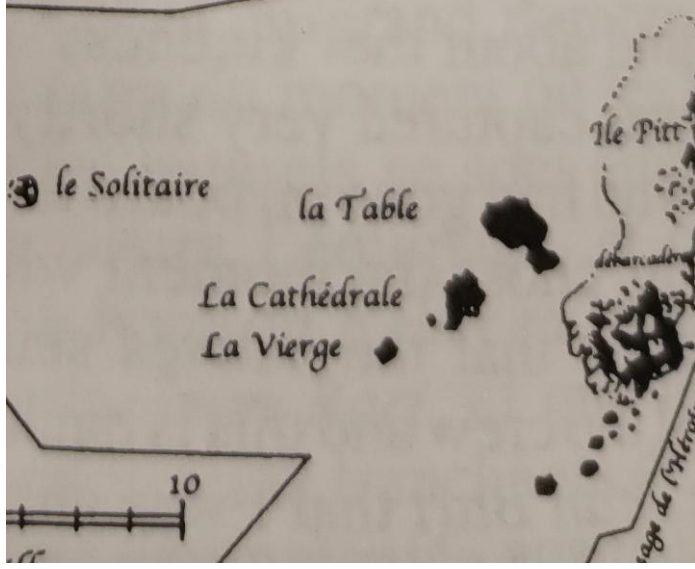


<sup>33</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/16157>

<sup>34</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/16417>

<sup>35</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/16131>

<sup>36</sup> <https://gazetteer.lin.govt.nz/place/48116>



<p><b>Original Moriori and Māori names<sup>37</sup></b></p> 	<p><b>French names (1838)<sup>38</sup></b></p> 
<p><b>English names (1840)<sup>39</sup></b></p> 	<p><b>Current official topographic map (2024)<sup>40</sup></b></p> 

**Transliteration**

Names transmitted orally have risked misinterpretation during early transcription, or have been adapted phonetically, thus altering their meaning, For example Otakau to Otago, Port Nicholson to Pōneke. While transliteration has historically been acceptable for Māori geographical names, in modern-day practice we typically uphold standardized, consistent and accurate naming, whether applying to English, Māori or other languages. Increasingly, transliterated Māori names are the focus of formal proposals to the Board to restore the original and correct spellings.

One of the Board’s legislative functions<sup>41</sup> is to ‘determine the spelling to be adopted’ and the Board’s *Standard for New Zealand place names*<sup>42</sup> requires that ‘Foreign names must be Romanised and should be in the form of the country of origin.’ So, the endonym romanised form of any foreign name is now preferred in current naming practice. For example, in 2021 the Board changed Te Korowhakaunu / Cunaris Sound to Te Korowhakaunu / Kanáris Sound.<sup>43</sup> Kanáris is the modern standardized romanised form of the Greek name and has been the commonly used spelling since 2000.



### International

New Zealand's geographic naming jurisdiction extends to Antarctica and undersea features on New Zealand's continental shelf. Other countries also give names in these areas but usually consult with the Board. Standardized naming practices are followed as set by international bodies. Examples of different language geographic names include: Dolgae Hill (Korean), Axel Heiberg Glacier (Norwegian), Yamato Yukihiro (Japanese).

### Conclusion

Language connects people to place. Standardization that respects linguistic diversity strengthens identity, fosters inclusivity, and preserves heritage. For over 100 years, the Board has developed practices, policies and procedures to

meet these standardization objectives, and to ensure that geographical naming in New Zealand aligns with global best practice and demonstrates active recognition of multiple languages within our country.

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<sup>37</sup> 346-02 Te Waipounamu –(2023) *Tangata Whenua Place Names - Prior to European Settlement*, Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa New Zealand Geographic Board:

<https://www.linz.govt.nz/resources/guide/te-waipounamu-tangata-whenua-place-names-map>

<sup>38</sup> Plan des Iles Chatam [Document cartographique] / Levé en 1838, Par MM. Fournier (Martial), Lieut.t de Vaisseau et d'Ubaye, Enseigne de V. au sous les ordres de M. Cécille, Capitaine de Vaisseau, Commandant la Corvette l'Héroïne:

<https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb455015250.public>

<sup>39</sup> Chatham Islands, compiled from a plan by M. Fournier, 1840 and from a sketch by Charles Heaphy, 1840:

<https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/maps/id/1280>

<sup>40</sup> NZTopo250-31 Chatham Islands v1-04 (2024), Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand

<sup>41</sup>

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2008/0030/30.0/DLM1065479.html>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.linz.govt.nz/resources/regulatory/standard-new-zealand-place-names-nzgs60002>

<sup>43</sup> <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/59501>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.linz.govt.nz/our-work/new-zealand-geographic-board/about-new-zealand-geographic-board/board-documents-policies-and-standards>

# The Standardisation of Geographical Names in the Sultanate of Oman: A National Framework

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## Introduction

Geographical names, or toponyms, are far more than simple identifiers for locations on a map. They are deeply embedded in a nation's cultural fabric, serving as vital repositories of historical memory, linguistic diversity, and societal identity (Al-Rahbi & Zarytovskaya, 2023; Kharusi & Salman, 2011). In the Sultanate of Oman, a country with a rich tapestry of heritage and varied dialects, the significance of toponyms is particularly profound. However, this very richness presents a significant challenge for systematic management. The absence of a centralised authority and a unified national framework has led to inconsistencies in official documents, maps, and databases, complicating governance, navigation, and international communication (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008). These challenges are exacerbated by the complex process of transliterating Arabic names into the Latin script, resulting in multiple spelling variants and widespread confusion (Kharusi & Salman, 2011; Al-Rawashdeh, 2025). This essay argues that the standardisation of geographical names in Oman is an imperative undertaking, balancing the technical necessity of consistency with the cultural responsibility to preserve a unique heritage. It will explore the existing institutional landscape, analyse the policies and international engagements that guide this effort, address the significant challenges involved, and propose a forward-looking framework to safeguard Oman's toponymic legacy for future generations.

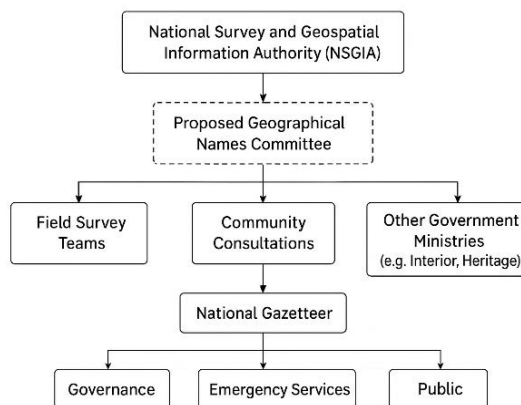


## Importance of Geographical Names

Omani geographical names are vital repositories of cultural identity, linguistic heritage, and historical memory (Al-Rahbi & Zarytovskaya, 2023; Kharusi & Salman, 2011). However, inconsistent management and the lack of a centralised authority have led to significant discrepancies in official documents and maps (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008). These issues are compounded by challenges in transliteration, where phonological differences and the absence of universal procedures result in multiple spelling variants, causing communication difficulties (Kharusi & Salman, 2011; Al-Rawashdeh, 2025). Therefore, standardisation is essential not only for administrative consistency but also for preserving cultural and historical integrity (Eichler, 1980).

## National Institutions and Responsibilities

The National Survey and Geospatial Information Authority (NSGIA) is responsible for the standardisation and management of geographical names in Oman (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008). Its tasks include systematic data collection, toponym approval, and maintenance through field surveys and community consultations. A key output is the national gazetteer, which helps resolve naming discrepancies and supports Geographic Information Systems (GIS) (Wijegunaratna et al., 2025; Keßler et al., 2009). This authoritative dataset is fundamental for governance, land administration, and environmental management (Amna & Al-Wardy, 2023; Home, 2024). To enhance its effectiveness, future efforts should focus on integrating vernacular data, advancing technological capabilities, and strengthening community collaboration (Keßler et al., 2009; Nabhani & Nasir, 2008).





### Policies, Standards, and Transliteration

The Oman Geospatial Manual provides the foundational policy for managing geographical names, emphasising the need for a centralised names committee to address institutional inconsistencies (see Table 1) (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008; Wijegunaratna et al., 2025). The manual explicitly recognises toponyms as vital carriers of cultural heritage and collective memory, necessitating careful preservation (Kharusi & Salman, 2011). A significant challenge is the transliteration of Arabic toponyms into the Latin script, as current practices often deviate from international standards such as those of BGN/PCGN (Al-Rawashdeh, 2025). This misalignment results in multiple spelling variations, undermining the reliability of geospatial data for international and domestic use (Dhieb, 2018; Holland et al., 2020). A harmonised transliteration framework that aligns with global standards while respecting local linguistic nuances is urgently needed (Al-Rawashdeh, 2025).

*Table 1 Visualising Transliteration Inconsistencies*

Arabic Name	Official Proposed Transliteration	Common Variant 1	Common Variant 2	Source
الخوض	Al-Khoud	Al Khawd	Al Khoud	Old Map Tourist Sign Online Map

### National Addressing System

A National Addressing System (NAS) relies on a multi-tiered governance model that integrates local input, linguistic standardisation, and central oversight (Lewandowski, 2024; Bijak, 2022). This structure includes local naming committees, translation rules for accurate representation across languages (Mikesy, 2016; Kang, 2022), and ministerial oversight to align local decisions with national standards (Bijak, 2022). Technological implementation, such as geocoding and comprehensive databases, is essential for maintaining consistency and addressing non-standard formats (Paull, 2003; Yildirim et al., 2014).

### International Engagement

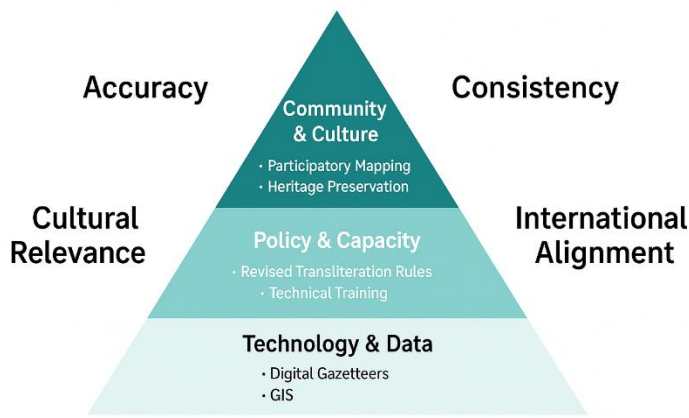
Oman's participation in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and its Arab Division supports the alignment of local practices with international standards (Ormeling et al., 2023). Engagement through conferences and capacity-building initiatives helps address challenges such as Arabic-English transliteration and database development (Wolnicz-Pawłowska, 2017; Ormeling et al., 2023). The benefits include technical advantages and cultural gains through the formal recognition of toponyms as vessels of heritage (Ormeling et al., 2023; Jordan, 2022). However, this collaboration requires balancing global standards with local cultural practices and managing underlying political sensitivities (Ormeling, 2022; Kladnik, 2007; Jordan, 2022; O'Reilly, 2023).

### Challenges and Cultural Considerations

Standardisation faces challenges due to linguistic diversity (Al-Kathiri, 2024; Al-Rahbi & Zarytovskaya, 2023), transliteration difficulties (Kharusi & Salman, 2011; Al-Rawashdeh, 2025), and logistical issues in data collection (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008; Ormeling et al., 2023). The cultural significance of Omani toponyms necessitates that standardisation efforts be both technically sound and culturally respectful (Kharusi & Salman, 2011; Al-Rahbi & Zarytovskaya, 2023). Successful implementation must address these complexities to preserve Oman's toponymic heritage within a national framework.

### Significance and National Impact

A standardised national framework for geographical names supports effective governance, providing a consistent spatial reference for clear communication and informed decision-making (Payne, 2000). It is vital for public safety, as emergency services depend on unambiguous place names for efficient crisis response (Coetzee et al., 2008; Mauck et al., 2009). Furthermore, the digital economy relies on standardised toponyms to ensure the reliability of mapping and location-based services (Murray & Shiell, 2003; Sievers & Zaccheddu, 2006). Beyond technical utility, standardisation plays a crucial role in cultural heritage preservation by officially recognising and safeguarding traditional toponyms (Santos & De Carvalho Augusto, 2019; Ormeling et al., 2023).



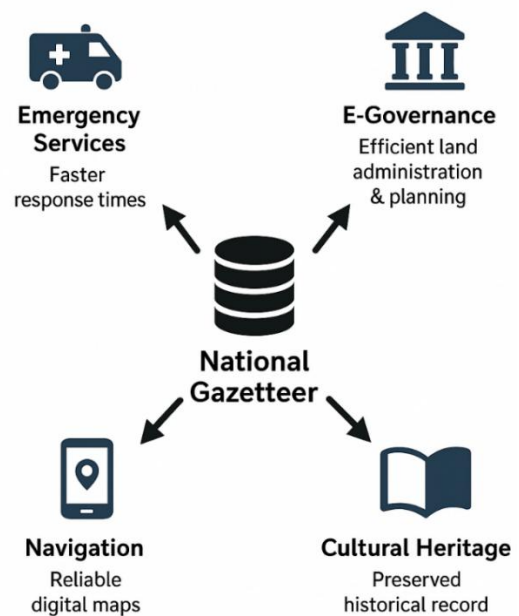
### Future Development and Recommendations

To strengthen the national naming framework, Oman should:

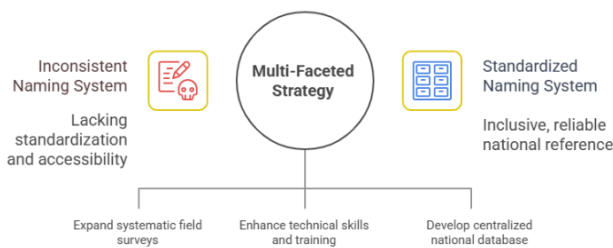
- Expand systematic field surveys guided by UNGEGN methodologies and community involvement (Ormeling et al., 2023; Ingram & Horn-Miller, 2024).
- Enhance technical capacity through specialised training and modern data management systems (Ormeling et al., 2023).
- Revise transliteration rules to improve accessibility while preserving linguistic authenticity (Kharusi & Salman, 2011; Kamel, 2024).
- Develop a centralised national database or digital gazetteer to integrate multiple data sources and facilitate data sharing (Al-Aghbari et al., 2022; Wijegunaratna et al., 2025).

A key challenge will be balancing cultural preservation with technological modernisation, as seen in efforts to integrate cultural expression into technical standards (Hussain et al., 2016).

cultural responsibility to preserve toponyms that embody the nation's history, linguistic diversity, and societal values (Al-Rahbi & Zarytovskaya, 2023; Kharusi & Salman, 2011). This process is also a prerequisite for practical international cooperation in toponymy (Ormeling et al., 2023; Wolnicz-Pawłowska, 2017). Establishing a national framework, including a dedicated Geographical Names Committee, is proposed to oversee the process and ensure consistency (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008). This should be supported by technical training and the integration of standardised names into digital platforms (Kerfoot, 2004; Ormeling et al., 2023). However, careful management is required to balance modern technical needs with the preservation of Oman’s diverse cultural identities (Dorion, 2000; Jordan, 2022).



### Building a Robust National Naming Framework



### Overall Assessment

The standardisation of geographical names in Oman is both a technical necessity for ensuring consistency in cartography, navigation, and geographic information systems (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008; Payne, 1995), and a

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the endeavour to standardise geographical names in the Sultanate of Oman is a multifaceted undertaking of critical national importance. It transcends mere administrative convenience, representing a crucial intersection of technological progress and cultural preservation. As this essay has outlined, the path forward requires a concerted effort on several fronts: strengthening the institutional role of the National Survey and Geospatial Information Authority (NSGIA), establishing a centralised Geographical Names Committee, and implementing a harmonised transliteration system that bridges Arabic phonology and international standards (Nabhani & Nasir, 2008; Al-Rawashdeh, 2025). The success of this national framework hinges on its ability to integrate robust technological solutions, such as a centralised digital gazetteer, with deep community engagement and respect for linguistic diversity (Ormeling et al., 2023; Kharusi &



Salman, 2011). By doing so, Oman can overcome the challenges of data collection, transliteration, and balancing local identity with national and global needs. Ultimately, a standardised toponymic system will not only enhance governance, public safety, and economic development but will also formally enshrine the names that carry the soul of Omani history and culture. Through this balanced and proactive approach, Oman can ensure that its geographical names continue to tell their stories, serving as an enduring link between its past, present, and future.

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# National Efforts in the Standardization of Geographical Names in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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## National Efforts Toward Standardization

Geographical names carry far more than location references—they preserve identity, reflect cultural history, and serve as an essential foundation for national development. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the standardization of geographical names has become a national priority, driven by the General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information (GEOSA) and the National Committee on Geographical Names. Over the past years, the Kingdom has taken significant steps to standardize naming practices, improve data quality, and enhance accessibility across government sectors, digital platforms, and public applications. These national efforts align closely with UNGEGN’s vision of promoting standardized geographical names across languages and regions, ensuring cultural recognition while enabling global interoperability.

## Unified Romanization Approach

A major achievement has been the development of a Romanization System for Geographical Names for Arabic–English romanization. This System provides a consistent approach for rendering Arabic names in the Latin alphabet, greatly reducing variation and ensuring that government and private agencies, map producers, and digital platforms use standardized spellings. The methodology follows UNGEGN’s principles and supports clearer communication at the regional and global levels. For example, the system ensures that a place name like “Makkah” is consistently romanized, avoiding variations such as “Mecca” or “Makka,” which improves clarity in mapping, navigation, and international communication.

## Role of the National Committee

The decisions of the National Committee on Geographical Names have played an important role in ensuring country-wide alignment. The Committee has adopted resolutions to harmonize spelling conventions, approve name corrections, address historical and linguistic nuances, preserve historically and culturally significant names, and ensure that government entities apply standardized names in their systems. These resolutions have contributed to a more unified national approach and greater alignment with UNGEGN guidelines. The Committee includes representatives from key government agencies and

academic institutions, ensuring multi-sectoral expertise and national consensus.

The main objectives of the National Committee on Geographical Names in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are:

1. To coordinate among relevant government agencies regarding the naming of new geographical features or the renaming of existing ones.
2. To collect geographical names, publish them, and prepare a database for their storage and management.
3. To prepare a national, indexed gazetteer to serve as a binding reference for all government agencies.
4. To represent the Kingdom both domestically and internationally.
5. To cooperate and participate internationally in the preparation of the International Gazetteer.



Figure 1. Meeting of the National Committee on Geographical Names, GEOSA Headquarters, Riyadh, 2025.

## Visible National Outcomes

One of the most visible outcomes of Saudi Arabia’s standardization efforts can be seen on the ground—literally. The Kingdom has implemented standardized bilingual (Arabic–English) geographical names on road signage, improving navigation, supporting tourism, and ensuring consistency across regions.

Standardized names are also increasingly reflected in national mapping systems, navigation applications, tourism brochures, and heritage trail signage, ensuring uniformity across both physical and digital platforms nationwide.

These signs reflect GEOSA-approved romanization and are an example of how standardization translates into tangible, everyday applications that benefit residents and visitors alike.

Beyond national standardization, Saudi Arabia has invested in digital transformation to support long-term sustainability in names management. The ongoing development of the Geographical Names Portal is supported by an enterprise geodatabase that forms an authoritative national gazetteer. The portal integrates geospatial technologies, interactive maps, cultural and historical information, photographs and pronunciation of names as audio files, alongside name classifications, within a modern, interactive platform. It will serve as the central reference for researchers, planners, developers, and government agencies, strengthening interoperability with national and international geospatial systems. The portal is also aligned with Saudi Vision 2030 and contributes to digital governance and data accessibility.

The Geographical Names Portal represents a major advancement in Saudi Arabia's modernization of geographical names management. By applying international best practices and offering advanced tools for visualization and data exploration, the portal significantly improves accessibility, accuracy, and usability for all stakeholders, including government agencies, geographers, researchers, and the public. It ensures seamless integration with national geospatial systems and reinforces Saudi Arabia's commitment to digital transformation.

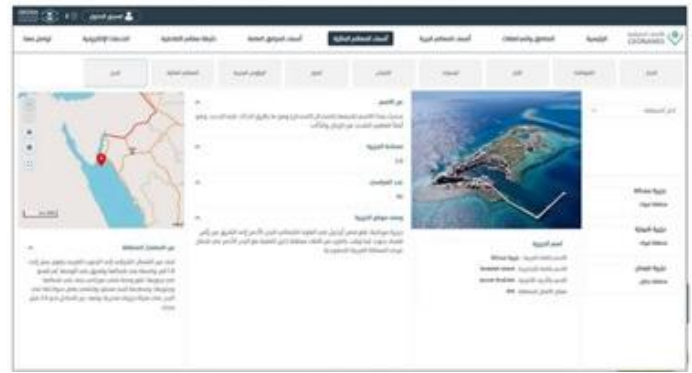


Figure 2. Geographical Names Portal of Saudi Arabia developed by (GEOSA).

### Future Directions

Looking ahead, the Kingdom continues to expand its efforts through projects such as AI-based romanization tools, enhanced data validation mechanisms, and updated national gazetteers. These initiatives focus on ensuring that geographical names remain accurate, relevant, and reflective of Saudi Arabia's cultural and geographic diversity.

Future developments also include integrating AI capabilities into the Geographical Names Portal to automate quality checks, improve name-recognition accuracy, and support predictive search—enhancing efficiency for both government users and the public.

Through these sustained efforts, Saudi Arabia reaffirms its dedication to the standardization and promotion of geographical names, which are a cornerstone of national identity, geospatial development, and international collaboration. The Kingdom's work demonstrates how modern approaches—anchored in cultural preservation and powered by digital innovation—can shape a more consistent and connected geospatial future.

## FROM THE COUNTRIES

### Bulgaria - a land of unique toponyms

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*“Hello! It’s very nice meeting you! Where are you from?”*

The question “Where are you from?” is among the first questions one gets when meeting new people in another country. But how do you answer that? For many, the answers come easily if one is born, raised, or living in the USA, the UK, Australia, or Japan, for example. And if you are not?

*“Do you know of the country that is home to the **Balkan** mountain range, which gave the name of the whole peninsula – the **Balkan Peninsula**? This country’s eastern border is the **Black Sea**, and it lies south of the **Danube**, just a bit before the river’s delta.”* (Figure 1)



**Figure 1** Bulgarian territory shown on a 18<sup>th</sup> century map (Punt et al, 1738)

You probably have guessed (or looked it up on a map) that I am referring to a beautiful country called **Bulgaria**.

Throughout history, the Balkan mountain range has had many different names, reflecting its key location on the peninsula. In his work (2025), Dobrev extensively discusses the name “Balkan” in the context of its vital role in historic events, its meaning and linguistic features, and gives a referenced list of 100 names (with their variations), which were once used to refer to the mountain range. The most commonly used alternative names are Haemus (by Thracians and Greeks during Antiquity), Matorni Gori (a Slavic name from the Middle Ages), and Koca Balkan

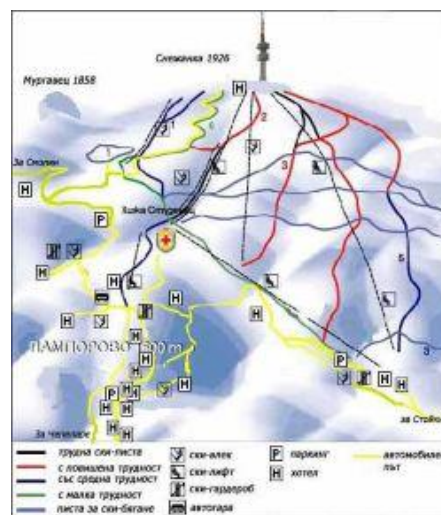
(during the reign of the Ottoman Empire). Since the early 16th century, the name Stara planina (Old Mountain) has been predominantly used; it has largely replaced “Balkan” in the local languages after the end of the Russian-Turkish War (1877-1878). Nowadays, the names “Stara planina” and “Balkan” are both considered standard geographical names for the same mountain range. However, only one name was adopted as a worldwide standard, “Balkan”.

The conclusion: Unique toponyms that describe unique locations.

*“And the city you live in? What could you enjoy doing? What would be worth seeing?”*

*“For how long would you be visiting? What are your interests?”*, I would ask in reply.

If you are planning a longer vacation in Bulgaria and you are a keen skier, you could stay at one of our mountain resorts in **Rila**, **Pirin**, or **Rhodope** mountains (Figure 2). In case you prefer the seaside, you could book a room in a hotel or hostel or come with your own home on wheels at campsites like **Kavatsite** or **Arapyia**. And if you are interested in the past and you have time to spare, the **Baba Vida** castle (Figure 3) or the Thracian megalith **Perperikon**, or the ancient city of **Heraclea Sintica**, is always a good start.



**Figure 2** Web map of the ski runs in the Rodopi mountains, Bulgaria

“Oh, it is highly unlikely that I could stay more than a couple of days there...”



**Figure 3** Baba Vida castle, Vidin Municipality, Bulgaria (photo by National Geographic Bulgaria)

Well, in case of “I want it all”, as my daughter would say, and limited time to spare, one could:

- go hitching or skiing in the **Vitosha** mountain,
- go fishing or canoeing at the **Pancharevo** lake,
- or just wander around the **Sofia** city, discovering by themselves the ancient ruins of the old cities of **Serdica** and **Sredets**, embedded in the urban environment.

Unlike the name “Balkan”, the name of Rhodope Mountains has not been changed significantly since its first mention by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus in the 5th century BC (Vasileva et al, 2021). It reflects both the myths about the Thracian queen Rhodope (Rosy-cheeked) and the physical characteristics (i.e., the reddish colour) of the local soil and rivers (Dechev, 1925), and thus serves as a useful reference for orienting oneself on maps. The name “Rodope” appears on many medieval maps of the region (Figure 4).



**Figure 4** The Rhodope mountains depicted on a 16<sup>th</sup> century map (Castaldi, 1584)

Sofia, the present capital of Bulgaria, has more than 7000 years of history as a settlement. Remnants of the Thracian town Serdica (i.e. “the town of the Serdi”, as the Romans had called it; 8th century BC – 9th century AD) are visible in the city centre. Archaeological artefacts containing Latin inscriptions of the town's full name, “Ulpia Serdica”, as well as the date of the construction of the first fortress wall, could be seen on site.

In the 9th century, the Bulgarian Khan Krum conquered Serdica and renamed it Sredets. The new name rests on an Old Bulgarian word for “middle”, as it reflects the centre (middle) of the lands of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Unlike the name “Serdica” found in stone monuments, Sredets was mostly used in medieval written (official) documents, chronicles and maps.

In its Golden Bull, issued in favour of the Dragalivski Monastery in 1378, King Ivan Shishman provided the official confirmation of the renaming of Sredets to today's city of Sofia. Both names appear on 14th - to 17th-century maps, such as Sanson's map of the Danube River from Belgrade to the Black Sea and the neighbouring territories (Figure 5).



**Figure 5** A part of a 17<sup>th</sup> century map showing both names: Sredets and Sofia (Sanson, 1665)



Examples of place-name changes like these can be found worldwide. Some names had a brief life; others proved more sustainable. Eventually, these changes have led us to some of the basic principles being taken into account in geographical names standardisation, like linguistic correctness (place name etymology, name changes, most common name forms, etc.), name localisation (the name should contain information on the type of the object, as well as its geographical location) and name variations (phonetic, morphological-syntactic, word-forming, lexical, etc.) (Choleva, 2009).

The goal? Unique toponyms for describing unique locations!

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**Maps:**

1. Jan Punt, Johannes Condet, Gerardus Condet (1738) Tooneel des oorlogs aan den Dnieper, Tira en Donauw in den jare 1738 gevoerd = Théâtre de la guerre sur les rivieres de Dnieper, Tira et Danube, faite en l'année 1738 = Theatrum belli ad Borysthenem, Tyram et Danubium fluvios, gesti Ao MDCCXXXVIII, J. Covens en C. Mortier, te Amsterdam
2. Giacomo Castaldi (1584) Romaniae (quae olim Thracia dicta) vicinarvmq; regionum vti Bvlgariae Walachiae Syrfiae etc. descriptio
3. Nicolas Sanson (1665) - Cours du Danube, de puis Belgrade jusques au Pont Evxin, ou sont, d'vn costé la Transilvanie, la Valaquie, la Moldavie, la Bessarabie; et de l'autre la Bulgarie, la Romanie, et partie de la Servie, de la Macedoine / tirées de divers autheurs par le Sr. Sanson d'Abbev. geogr. ord.re du roy, Paris: Ches le Sr. Robert Geog. du Roy rue St. Jacques dans la maison de Mr. Delespine à l'image S. Paul avec Privilege

**Sources of the photos:**

1. [Бабини Видини кули - най-запазеният средновековен замък в България | National Geographic България](#) Accessed on 18.02.2026
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# Cultural Exchange of Exonyms and Endonyms in Egypt and the World

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## The Multiple Identities... Names of Egypt through History from Kemet To Um El Donia

Egypt's unique and multilayered history reflects the importance of its geography as a nexus connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe. The diversity of its appellations tells the story of its interaction with different civilizations and languages across millennia. Every endonym used by Egyptians to their land, carries a specific historical and cultural significance:

- **The Pharaonic Era (c. 3100 BCE - 332 BCE): "Kemet" (The Black Land) and "Ta-wy"**

The Pharaonic Era was the ancient Egyptian civilization's peak, spanning roughly from the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt (c. 3100 BCE) by King Menes/Narmer to Alexander the Great's conquest (332 BCE). This period saw monumental achievements in architecture (pyramids, temples), art, writing (hieroglyphs), religion, and governance under a succession of God-kings (pharaohs), divided into the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, with periods of unity and disunity. The original endonym that the Ancient Egyptians used in this period for their country was "**Kemet**" (كِمْت). This name means "The Black Land," referring to the rich, dark silt deposited annually by the Nile flood, distinguishing it from the desert, "**Deshret**" (*Deshret*), or "The Red Land." They also used another name, "**Ta-wy**" (*Ta-wy*), which means "The Two Lands," referring to the unification of the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt under one central rule.

- **Ancient Semitic Eras (From the 3rd Millennium BCE): "Mişru/Mişir"**

The Egyptians interacted with their Semitic neighbors in the Middle East (Acadians, Canaanites, Arameans), who used a completely different name for the country: "**Mişru**" (مِشْرُ) or "**Mişir**" (مِشِير). This Semitic name, likely meaning "The Border" or "The Fortified City," appeared in Acadian cuneiform texts (the language of Mesopotamia) as early as the third millennium BCE.

- **The Greek and Roman Eras (332 BCE - 395 CE): "Aígyptos"**

When the Greeks arrived in Egypt, they heard a different name around the ancient capital Memphis: *Hwt-ka-Ptah* (حوت كا بتاح), meaning "Mansion of the Spirit of Ptah." They Hellenized this name into "**Aígyptos**" (أَيْغُوبِتْتُوس). From this Greek name, the Romans derived *Aegyptus*, and from there the name spread throughout Europe to become the modern English word "Egypt" and its counterparts in Western languages (e.g., French *Égypte*, German *Ägypten*).

- **The Coptic and Islamic Eras (From the 4th Century CE to Today): "Kēmi" and "Mişr"**

The Copts continued to use a form derived from the Pharaonic name Kemet, which was "Kēmi" (كَيْمِي). However, with the Islamic conquest in the 7th century CE, the Arabs adopted the ancient Semitic name "Mişr" (مِصْر), and it became the official name of the country in the Arabic language, the name used to this day.

The usage of "Mişr" extends significantly into modern Africa and Asia via Arabic influence. Across North Africa, the name is standard in all Arabic-speaking nations. Sub-Saharan African languages with strong historical trade or cultural links also use a variation, such as Swahili (Misri), Hausa (Masar), and Amharic (Misir). In Asia, the name is prevalent in languages like Turkish, Persian, Urdu, Indonesian, Malay, and Kurdish (Misir).

- **Famous Nicknames of Egypt.**

Egypt was called by early Arab travelers "مصر المحروسة" (Mişr El Mahrousa) (the Protected Mişr), referring to her protective boundaries as well as lands protected by God.

The most loveable name for Egypt is "أم الدنيا" **Um El Donia (Mother of the World)** which reflects its earliest and oldest recorded civilizations and heritage and also the protective nature of mother. The main factors contributing to this nickname include:

- **Cradle of Civilization:** Egypt is recognized as one of the world's most ancient civilizations, founded along the Nile River, which laid early foundations for knowledge, sciences, and arts.



- **Center of Bounty and Food (The "Breadbasket"):** Due to the abundant agricultural harvests facilitated by the Nile's flooding (especially wheat), Egypt historically served as a critical source of food for various empires and a refuge during famines (such as during the time of the Prophet Joseph).
- **Religious Significance:** Egypt holds a special place in religious texts (Torah, Bible, Quran), as several prophets visited or lived there, reinforcing its image as a blessed land.

- **A Haven for Refugees and Scholars:** Historically, Egypt, served as a global cultural and economic center and a safe haven for scholars, merchants, and artists, including those fleeing events .

**Conclusion:**

The diverse names of Egypt serve as a linguistic map of history. "Kemet" reflects the link to the Nile, "Misr" reflects regional ties to the Middle East, Africa and "Egypt" reflects the interaction with the Western world

**Table 1: Historical Names of Egypt**

Time Period	Name	Notes	Meaning	Writing System	Language
Pre-Dynastic to New Kingdom (c. 3100 BCE onwards)	<b>Kemet</b>	The original endonym referring to the fertile Nile Valley soil.	The Black Land	<b>Hieroglyphs / Hieratic</b>	Ancient Egyptian
Beginning of Dynasties (c. 3100 BCE onwards)	<b>Ta-wy</b>	Refers to the unified Upper and Lower Egypt kingdoms.	The Two Lands	<b>Hieroglyphs</b>	Ancient Egyptian
New Kingdom onwards (c. 1550 BCE - 332 BCE)	<b>Ta-Mery</b>	A common affectionate name used by the Egyptians themselves.	The Beloved Land	<b>Hieroglyphs / Demotic</b>	Ancient Egyptian
3rd Millennium BCE onwards (Bronze Age/Iron Age)	<b>Miṣru / Miṣir</b>	The original Semitic name, adopted by Arabs later.	Border / Fortified City	<b>Cuneiform &amp; Early Semitic scripts</b>	Akkadian, Canaanite, Aramaic
Greek and Roman Eras (332 BCE - 395 CE)	<b>Aígyptos</b>	The exonym root for the modern English name "Egypt".	Derived from <i>Hwt-ka-Ptah</i>	<b>Greek Alphabet</b>	Ancient Greek
Roman Era (30 BCE - 395 CE)	<b>Aegyptus</b>	Official name under Roman rule, derived from Greek.	Roman Province Name	<b>Latin Alphabet</b>	Latin
Coptic Era (4th Century CE onwards)	<b>Kēmi</b>	The Coptic linguistic continuation of the ancient <i>Kemet</i> .	The Black Land	<b>Coptic Alphabet</b>	Coptic
Islamic & Arab Era (7th Century CE to Today)	<b>Miṣr</b>	Modern Arabic name, continuation of the ancient Semitic root.	The official name currently	<b>Arabic Alphabet</b>	Arabic

**Table 2: Languages Using the Endonym "Misr" (Derived from Semitic Roots)**

Language	Original Script	Writing System Used	Phonetic Pronunciation (Latin)
Arabic	مصر	Arabic script	Miṣr / Maṣr
Hebrew	מִצְרַיִם	Hebrew script	Mitzráyim
Turkish	Mısır	Latin script	Muh-suhr
Persian (Farsi)	مصر	Perso-Arabic script	Misr
Urdu	مصر	Perso-Arabic script, Nastaliq style	Misr
Indonesian	Mesir	Latin script	Meh-seer
Malay	Mesir	Latin script (Rumi)	Meh-seer
Swahili	Misri	Latin script	Mi-sree
Uzbek	Misr	Latin script	Mis-r
Azerbaijani	Misir	Latin script	Mi-sir
Hausa	Masar	Latin script (Boko)	Ma-sar

**Table 3: Languages Using the Exonym "Egypt" (Derived from Greek Aigyptos)**

Language	Original Script	Writing System Used	Phonetic Pronunciation (Latin)
Greek	Αἴγυπτος	Greek script	Aígyptos (ai-gyp-tos)
English	Egypt	Latin script	Ee-jipt
French	Égypte	Latin script	Ay-jipt
German	Ägypten	Latin script	Eh-gyp-ten
Spanish	Egipto	Latin script	Eh-heep-toh
Russian	Египет	Cyrillic script	Yegipet (yeh-gee-pet)
Italian	Egitto	Latin script	Eh-jeet-toh
Portuguese	Egito	Latin script	Eh-zhee-toh
Swedish	Egypten	Latin script	Ee-jyp-ten
Polish	Egipt	Latin script	Eh-geept
Chinese	埃及	Chinese characters (Hanzi)	Āiji (ai-jee)
Japanese	エジプト	Katakana script	Ejiputo (eh-ji-pu-toh)
Korean	이집트	Hangul script	Ijipeu (ee-jip-teu)

**Exonyms for foreign Countries names in Egypt**

In Arabic (including the Egyptian dialect), while most countries use names that are standard across the Arab world, some have names that function as exonyms compared to the original native name, or have historically distinct Arabic names.

It is important to note that Egyptian Arabic generally uses the same country names as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), but there are a few notable instances where the Arabic name differs significantly from the English or the native endonym of the country itself. Table 4.



Table 4: Examples of Exonyms variations of foreign countries names in Egypt

English name	Arabic name	Arabic Pronunciation	Native Endonym	Writing Language(s)	Native Phonetic Pronunciation (IPA)
<a href="#">Austria</a>	<a href="#">النمسا</a>	An-Namsā	<a href="#">Österreich</a>	German	'ø:stəʁaɪç
<a href="#">Belgium</a>	<a href="#">بلجيكا</a>	Baljīkā	België / Belgique	Dutch/French	'belʝijə / bel'ʒik
<a href="#">China</a>	<a href="#">الصين</a>	Aṣ-Ṣīn	<a href="#">中国</a>	Mandarin Chinese	[ʃón.kwǒ
<a href="#">Croatia</a>	<a href="#">كرواتيا</a>	Krūwātyā	Hrvatska	Croatian	xřvātska:
<a href="#">Czechia</a>	<a href="#">التشيك</a>	At-Tishīk	Česko	Czech	'tʃesko
<a href="#">Denmark</a>	<a href="#">الدنمارك</a>	Ad-Dānimārk	Danmark	Danish	'dænma:k
<a href="#">Estonia</a>	<a href="#">إستونيا</a>	Istūnyā	Eesti	Estonian	'e:sti
<a href="#">Germany</a>	<a href="#">ألمانيا</a>	Almānyā	Deutschland	German	'dɔʏtʃlant
<a href="#">Greece</a>	<a href="#">اليونان</a>	Al-Yūnān	<a href="#">Ελλάδα</a>	Greek	e'laða
<a href="#">Hungary</a>	<a href="#">المجر</a>	Al-Magar	Magyarország	Hungarian	'mɔʝɔrorsa:g
<a href="#">Ireland</a>	<a href="#">أيرلندا</a>	Āyrlandā	Éire	Irish (Gaeilge)	'e:riə
<a href="#">Italy</a>	<a href="#">إيطاليا</a>	Īṭālyā	Italia	Italian	i'ta:lja
<a href="#">Japan</a>	<a href="#">اليابان</a>	Al-Yābān	<a href="#">日本</a>	Japanese	nihōɴ
<a href="#">Netherlands</a>	<a href="#">هولندا</a>	Hūlandā	Nederland	Dutch	'ne:dərlant
<a href="#">Poland</a>	<a href="#">بولندا</a>	Būlandā	Polska	Polish	'pɔlska
<a href="#">Russia</a>	<a href="#">روسيا</a>	Rūsyā	<a href="#">Россия</a>	Russian	rɐ'sʝjə

# Toponymy as a Linguistic Monument of the Peoples of the Russian Federation

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The historical toponymy of the Russian Federation is quite diverse and reflects its multinational and multi-confessional population. Any toponym is a unique linguistic monument of its era. The variety of geographical names is noted in different parts of the country. Very recent and historical names coexist side by side everywhere. Thus, alongside Russian (Slavic) names, one encounters Turkic, Mongolian, Finno-Ugric, Baltic, and many others.

The toponyms of Russia are as if dissimilar beads strung on the single strand of a necklace, dazzling with the multifaceted and natural beauty of our multinational state.

This article will focus on only a select few of them.

## **The settlement of *Belaya Vezha* (поселок *Белая Вежа*) in the Belgorod Region**

This toponym is a memorial to the first territorial expansion of Rus', and the acquisition of independence from the Khazar Khaganate. Previously, a trade route of strategic importance passed through the area of the settlement, running from Crimea to the Volga River. In 965, Prince Svyatoslav, traveling along this route, led one of his successful campaigns against the powerful stronghold of *Sarkel* (крепость *Саркел*), a fortress built by the Khazars in the 830s at the mouth of the *Tsimly River* (река *Цыпля*). After conquering the fortress of *Sarkel*, Prince Svyatoslav renamed it *Belaya Vezha* (Белая Вежа). According to the "Dictionary of Folk Geographical Terms" by Eduard Murzayev (1999 edition), the Khazar city of *Sarkel* meant "white house" (белый дом) which translates into Russian as "*belaya vezha*" (белая вежа), where "*vezha*" (вежа) means a fortification or structure.

## **The village of (село *Терлой*) in the Chechen Republic**

The name "*Terloy*" (Терлой) refers to one of the nine Chechen tukkhums (historically established unions of teips, or clans). A Chechen teip is a unit of social organization, a community whose members self-identify through a shared perceived ancestry; it is a territorial and/or tribal association.

*Terloy* (in the Chechen language: *Терлой*) is a Chechen community, a sub-ethnic group; the *Terloy* people are descendants from the historical-geographical area of *Terloy-Mokhk* (Терлой-Мохк) within the borders of the modern Itum-Kalinsky District of the Chechen Republic.

The residents of the *Motskaroy* rural settlement are representatives of the "*Terloy*" tukkhum, and the territory of the formed settlement historically belongs to the teips associated with this tukkhum.



Figure 1 Satellite image of the village of *Terloy*

## **The village of *Manarkala* (село *Манаркала*) in the Republic of Dagestan**

The name "*Manarkala*" (Манаркала) consists of two words: "*manar*" (манар) which is a person's name, and "*kala*" (кала) meaning fortress or tower. Translated from Avar to Russian, it means "*the fortress (or tower) of Manar*" (баиња (крепость) *Манана*).

The written form of the name in the Avar language is "*Манархъала*".



### ***The village of Kumsaguba (деревня Кумсагуба) in the Republic of Karelia***

The name "*Kumsaguba*" (*Кумсагуба*) is characteristic of Russian vernacular language and falls within the ethnic traditions of the northern regions of Russia. "*Kumsa*" (*кумса*) originates from the Karelian words *kumsa* or *kumssa* (*кумжа*), meaning "*brown trout*" – a commercial fish of the salmon family. The toponym "*Kumsaguba*" originally appeared in the local Karelian language as "*Kumššalakši*" and was integrated into Russian usage as *Kumsaguba*.

According to the Geographical Encyclopedic Dictionary (1988 edition), "*guba*" (*губа*) is a term commonly used in the north, a folk (Pomor) name for deep bays that extend far inland, into which rivers flow.

### ***The village of Ozhogino (деревня Ожогоино) in the Kaluga Region***

The first mention of *the village of Ozhogino (деревня Ожогоино)* is found in historical chronicles from the beginning of the 17th century, where it is listed as the patrimonial estate of Prince Boris Lykov-Obolensky (a Russian state and military figure). *Ozhog* (*ожог*) means "burn" in English. The village was surrounded by forest and trees were burned in special charcoal pits here to produce wood charcoal for heating the royal chambers in Moscow, as well as for the numerous forges that existed in nearby settlements.

### ***The village of Nikandrova Pustyn (деревня Никандрова Пустынь) in the Pskov Region***

The history of the toponym "*Nikandrova Pustyn*" (*Никандрова Пустынь*) is connected to the history of the monastery located in this area.

The monastery was founded in 1584 on the site of the ascetic deeds of the wilderness-dweller and miracle-worker Nikander of Pskov (1507–1581). In 1928, the monastery was closed, and its buildings were used to house military personnel. The monastery began its revival in the year 2000. In October 2010, the stone Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Holy Theotokos on its grounds was solemnly consecrated.

Currently, 45 people reside permanently in the monastery, with an additional 25 people temporarily staying there who manage a subsidiary farm on the monastery's territory. Besides the monastery itself, the territory of the newly formed village includes churches, brotherhood quarters for housing monks, novices, and parishioners, a bakery, a refectory, residential houses, and utility buildings.

### ***The village of Savkino (село Савкино) in the Pskov Region***

The name *Savkino* (*Савкино*) is based by the settlement's location within the Pushkin Museum-Reserve, in close proximity to the ancient settlement of *Savkina Gorka* (*Савкина Горка*) – a site of federal cultural heritage significance.

The *Savkina Gorka* (*Савкина горка*) settlement is located one kilometer from the village of *Mikhailovskoye* (*Михайловское*). This site is a monument of Russian antiquity. Archaeological excavations conducted here in recent years have shown that the "*Savkina Gorka*" settlement dates back to the 9th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, an old wooden chapel stood on the *Savkina Gorka* settlement, and next to it was the "*Savka's Stone*" (*Савкин камень*), which is over 400 years old. A partially eroded inscription in Old Church Slavonic indicates this: "*In the year 7021, Priest Sava erected a cross*" ("*Лета 7021 постави крест Сава non*"), that explains the origin of the name *Savkino*. The year 7021 corresponds to 1513 in the modern calendar. The cross was placed on a mass grave of Russian warriors.

*Savkina Gorka* was one of the favorite places of poet Alexander Pushkin. In 1831, he intended to purchase *Savkino*, but this dream was not destined to come true. In 1965, *the village of Savkino* became part of the Alexander Pushkin Museum-Reserve "*Mikhailovskoye*" (*Михайловское*).

### ***The Talakan Airport (аэропорт Талакан) in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)***

The name *Talakan* (*Талакан*) is very ancient and is associated with the presence of an Evenki tribe of reindeer herders here at the end of the 9th to the first half of the 10th century, who migrated from the Amur Region and founded their settlement and reindeer pasture, which they called *Talakan*. The written form of the name in the Yakut language is *Талакаан*.

The name *Talakan* is translated from Old Turkic, where *tala* means "*steppe, field*". To this term, the diminutive-affectionate suffix *kan* from the Evenki language is added, resulting in the name *Talakan* being translated as "*little field*" or "*glade*".

According to the Evenki-Russian dictionary by Anna Myreeva, the word *talakan* in the Urmian sub-dialect of the Burein-Urmian-Amgun dialect is a name for rivers and localities in the Amur Region.



Geographical names are an inexhaustible source of information about our multinational country.

The work of establishing the names of geographical objects contributes to the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

The State Catalogue of Geographical Names (hereinafter – the State Catalogue) is created and maintained in order to ensure uniform and sustainable use of names of geographical objects across the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as registration, accounting and preservation of names of geographical objects as an integral part of the historical and cultural heritage of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

The State Catalogue is based on an information search system that forms a database about objects and their names and facilitates its storage, processing and issuance of information registered in it at the request of interested parties free of charge. The recommended request form is available on the website of the Public Law Company “Roskadastr” which is responsible for the State Catalogue maintenance as its Operator.

Currently, over 850,000 names of geographical objects are registered in the State Catalogue.

The names of geographical objects as an integral part of the historical and cultural heritage of the peoples of the Russian Federation are protected by the state. Unauthorized renaming and the use of distorted names of geographical objects is not allowed.

The State Catalogue consists of the register of names of geographical objects which is a systematized set of information on the names of geographical objects and contains two sections:

- names of geographical objects on the territory of the Russian Federation;
- names of geographical objects of the continental shelf of the Russian Federation, the exclusive economic zone of the Russian Federation, as well as geographical objects discovered or identified by Russian researchers in the high seas and Antarctica.

Each geographical object in the database of the State Catalogue is characterized by indicators, most of which are the information necessary for registration and unambiguous identification of a geographical object (name of the geographical object, type of object, administrative status of the settlement, administrative-territorial position of the geographical object, geographical coordinates, nomenclature of the sheet of a topographic map of scale 1:100 000 on which geographical object is displayed, position of the object relative to another larger geographical object, etc.).

The other part of the information indicators includes additional reference data on the geographical object and its name (variants of the name, variants of the type of object, data on the origin of the name, etc.).

Registers of names of geographical objects formed according to the State Catalogue are published on the official website of the State Catalogue Operator Public Law Company “Roskadastr”: <https://kadastr.ru/> to promptly bring information to interested users.

## FROM THE DIVISIONS

### Plans of the Dutch- and German-Speaking Division (DGSD) for the period 2025-2029

*Peter Jordan*

*Chair, Dutch- and German-speaking Division*

*Vice-President and UNGEGN Liaison Officer, International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS)*

*Honorary Chair, Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO)*

*Email: [peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at)*

#### DGSD membership and presidency

In a hybrid meeting in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 30 September 2025, the DGSD experts present agreed on proceeding with division-chair succession in alphabetical order of English **country** names for a four-years term (from one UNGEGN session to the next-but-one). Country representatives will be asked in this sequence with the option to deny. Thus, Austria will chair the Division until the UNGEGN Session 2029. Besides Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland are actively cooperating Division members. Suriname and South Africa have not replied to recent requests to confirm their cooperation.

#### GeoNames Symposium 2026

Resuming the DGSD tradition of organizing GeoNames symposia (the first took place in Frankfurt am Main in 2000), the Austrian presidency invites all UNGEGN experts to a symposium on “The cultural heritage value of microtoponyms” in Hermagor, Carinthia, Austria, 12-13 October 2026. Co-organizers of the symposium are the Austrian Board on Geographical Names, the ICOS Working Group on Toponymy, the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy and the Municipality of Hermagor-Presssegger See. It is the same venue that hosted the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms meeting in 2014 (see Fig. 1). A first circular with the call for papers has already been disseminated, with a deadline of 31 January 2026. A preliminary symposium program is already available. The symposium will be held in conjunction with meetings of the UNGEGN Working Group on Place Names as Cultural Heritage and the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms. Thus, a full week of toponymic events will take place in Hermagor including an excursion to the adjacent Val Canale in Italy with its multilingual linguistic landscape (see Fig. 2). Proceedings of the symposium will be published as Volume 10 of the toponymic book series “Name & Place” edited by Peter Jordan and Paul Woodman with volume editors still to be found.



Figure 1: The participants of the Working Group on Exonyms meeting 2014 in front of the venue



Figure 2: Quadrilingual (Italian/German/Slovenian/Friulian) welcome sign of a village in Val Canale/Val Cjanâl/Kanalska dolina/Kanaltal



**Other common DGSD activities and goals for the next UNGEGN Session**

As one of the main intentions of establishing the UNGEGN divisions was to create a first supra-national level of standardization, where neighbouring or linguistically related countries could articulate their specific common interests and arrive at recommendations effectuating these interests ideally based on prior preparatory work, the DGSD plans to

develop a documentation of “Practices and instruments of renaming and avoiding renaming” in the DGSD member countries. This will serve as the DGSD’s first common standardization project for the forthcoming period. Based on this documentation, and by comparing the results as well as the advantages and disadvantages of existing practices, recommendations for future procedures in this field could then be developed.

## 1st Circular, Call for papers

*GeoNames Symposium 2026 “The heritage value of microtoponyms” Hermagor, Austria, 12-13 October 2026*

Peter Jordan<sup>45</sup>

Chair, UNGEGN Dutch and German Speaking Division (DGSD)

Email: [peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at)

### Theme

**M**icrotoponyms, not in the sense of smaller toponyms, but of toponyms referring to small-scale features like scattered farmsteads and scattered houses, fields, pastures, fences, stones, springs, ditches etc. (names for typically urban features like streets, squares, stadiums excluded), and generally used locally by only a limited number of people, exist in high density in predominantly rural, agriculture-oriented areas and societies. They represent the most intimate namescape: the toponymy of geographical features named by farmers and village populations in their immediate surroundings according to their perception and indicating what they consider essential or striking. More than other place-name categories, microtoponyms are ‘condensed narratives’ in two respects: in describing the feature itself and in indicating the cultural and economic background of the name-givers. They therefore form a particularly significant part of the intangible cultural heritage as highlighted by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and as increasingly recognized also by UNGEGN.

This place-name category, however, is very much in danger of falling into oblivion – at least in the Global North – due to the conversion from agricultural to industrial and service-oriented societies, for which rural land use is not as important and by which the former patchwork of rural land use has been merged into larger entities. In many cases, the current older generation represents the last opportunity to answer questions on this place-name category, and to have them documented and preserved as a source for research into former land use and perception of the environment. It is for this reason that many surveys on microtoponyms have been initiated in recent years, and that the exchange of results and opinions would be very useful.

The Symposium aims to respond to this demand and to offer not only on-site information and the exchange of opinions, but also the publication of results in the form of proceedings.

Subthemes (with no claim to be exhaustive):

- The theoretical background of place names in general and more specifically microtoponyms as cultural heritage

- Microtoponym surveys in different parts of the world – results and experiences
- Naming motives as documented by microtoponyms
- Specific challenges of microtoponym standardization
- Ways of preserving traditional microtoponyms in an urbanized environment

### Venue and time

The Symposium will take place in Hermagor, Carinthia, Austria, the venue of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting 2014 (*see Fig. 1*), on 12 and 13 October 2026. The venue is accessible by train and is about one hour from Klagenfurt airport, from where connecting flights to the international hub Vienna [Wien] are available. It is also around two hours by train from Graz airport, from where connecting flights depart not only to Vienna, but also to major international hubs such as Frankfurt, Munich [München] and Zurich [Zürich].



*Figure 1: The participants of the Working Group on Exonyms meeting 2014 in front of the venue*

### Organization and complementary events

The Symposium, held under the auspices of the UNGEGN Dutch- and German-speaking Division (DGSD) will be organized by its Chair, Peter Jordan, supported by the Austrian Board on Geographical Names, chaired by Roman Stani-Fertl. It will be co-organized by the ICOS Working Group on Toponymy, chaired by Peter Jordan, the Joint

<sup>45</sup> on behalf of the organizers:

UNEGGN Dutch and German Speaking Division (DGSD), Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO)

ICOS Working Group on Toponymy, Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy, Municipality Hermagor-Presssegger See

ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy chaired by Matjaž Geršič and Elena Dai Prà, as well as the Municipality of Hermagor-Preseggger See with its Mayor, Leopold Astner. Like earlier GeoNames symposia it will be open not only for DGSD members, but also for all UNGEGN members and other interested parties. English will be the conference language.

The Symposium will be held in conjunction with the UNGEGN Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage (WG-GNCH) and the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms (WG-E), resulting in a full week of toponymic events with opportunities for synergy. These other meetings are also accessible for participants of the Symposium. Further information is available on the website of the UNGEGN Secretariat here:

In addition, a common excursion for participants of all meetings will be offered to a multicultural valley across the Italian border (Val Canale/Val Cjanâl/Kanalska dolina/Kanaltal) with a quadrilingual linguistic landscape (see Fig. 2). Depending on registration for the toponymic events, the excursion will be scheduled for either Tuesday, 13 October, in the afternoon, or Saturday, 17 October, for the whole day. A fee will be requested for bus transport and (eventually) lunch. Registration for the excursion will open on 1 April 2026.



Figure 2: *Quadrilingual (Italian/German/Slovenian/Friulian) welcome sign of a village in Val Canale/Val Cjanâl/Kanalska dolina/Kanaltal*

### Abstract submission

Should you wish to present a paper, please fill in the registration form and send it to [peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at) by 31 January 2026 at the latest, indicating author and paper title and including an abstract ca. 200 words. Participants who do not intend to present a paper, are kindly requested to

announce their participation by 31 January 2026. Participation in the Symposium is free of charge.

A Scientific Committee composed of DGSD representatives will review the abstracts received after this call. By the end of February 2026 abstract submitters will be informed about acceptance. A preliminary Symposium program will be disseminated by the end of March 2026.

### Sponsoring of young scientists

A local science fund (Herfried-Berger-Fonds) offers young scientists - in the sense of university graduates in their first years of professional experience - support with their travel expenses, when they present a paper at the Symposium.

### Proceedings

After a double-blind review process, the proceedings of the papers presented at the Symposium are to be published as Volume 10 of the toponymic book series "Name & Place" edited by Peter Jordan and Paul Woodman. Volume editors have yet to be appointed.

### Accommodation and catering

Our venue is a hotel pleasantly located near to a lake in an alpine valley. A train station with a train every hour (except at night) is right behind the hotel. From 11 to 17 October 2026, it offers up to 60 rooms with shower/WC, satellite TV, telephone, radio, hairdryer, safe, bath towels, bathrobe, minibar, and in some cases a balcony. The rate includes full board (breakfast, coffee breaks, lunch, dinner) and the use of a spa with indoor pool and sauna at a preferential (group) price of € 149 per person/night based on double occupancy and € 169 per person/night in a room for single use. Rooms are also reserved for the weekends before and after our meeting week, but not at this preferential rate. Please reserve your room directly with Alpen Adria Hotel & Spa via <https://www.hotelkaernten.com/gruppenreisen-kaernten>, [info@alpenadriahotel.at](mailto:info@alpenadriahotel.at) or telephone +434282 2666. The offer is valid up to the end of April 2026.

You are, of course, free to find your own accommodation in the wider surroundings. Please consult: [https://www.nassfeld.at/en/Service/Nassfeld-A-Z/Tourismusburo-Information\\_az\\_30419](https://www.nassfeld.at/en/Service/Nassfeld-A-Z/Tourismusburo-Information_az_30419)

The organizers are, however, not able to cover any travel and accommodation expenses except the dinner on the second day of the Symposium (13 October), to which we will be invited by the Municipality Hermagor-Preseggger See.

**Important date: End of April 2026:** Room reservation in the Alpen Adria Hotel at preferential rates ends



# International Scientific Symposium

“How toponymy can contribute to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”

Roma [Rome] – Italia, 3 - 5 June 2026

Gianluca Casagrande, Italy

Chair, Romano-Hellenic Division

Email: [Gianluca.Casagrande@unier.it](mailto:Gianluca.Casagrande@unier.it)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The Romano-Hellenic Division (RHD) of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) announces its fifth International Scientific Symposium focused on



### “How toponymy can contribute to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”

The event will be held in Roma [Rome], Italia, at “Palazzetto Mattei in Villa Celimontana”, headquarters of Italian Geographical Society, from 3 to 5 June 2026, in partnership with the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy, and in close cooperation with the Italian Geographic Military Institute and the Italian Geographical Society.

Members of UNGEGN, scholars (geographers, cartographers, historians, linguists etc.), administrators and planners are cordially invited to attend the symposium. Participation is free of charge. Languages: English.

The symposium will focus on the contribution of toponyms – particularly historical placenames and the implementation of policies for the assignment of new toponyms – to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Building on discussions launched in 2024 and 2025, the event will explore how geographical names can serve as instruments for fostering bio-cultural heritage preservation, gender equality and sustainable communities. Particular attention will be given to two strategic perspectives: enhancing gender balance in the naming of public spaces and urban features, and drawing lessons from historical toponymy to inspire more sustainable human-environment relationships. The symposium will provide an interdisciplinary platform for scholars (geographers, historians, linguists, cartographers...) policymakers, and practitioners to share research findings, methodologies and case studies.

**Presentation proposals:** proposals should be submitted through the specific form accessible through the following [LINK](#) and QR code

### Deadlines

- 31 January 2026: abstracts submission (max. 400 words)
- 28 February 2026: authors of accepted abstracts are notified by the Scientific Committee
- 2 December 2026: submission of final papers, complete with images and captions

### Scientific committee

- Andrea Cantile, Honorary Chair of the Romano-Hellenic Division, IGMI, and University of Florence (Italia)
- Gianluca Casagrande, Chair of the Romano-Hellenic Division, European University of Rome (Italia)
- Catherine Cheetam, Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (United Kingdom)
- Annalisa D’Ascenzo, Roma Tre University (Italia)
- José Miguel Delgado Barrado, Universidad de Jaén (España)
- Elena Dai Prà, Co-Chair of Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy University of Trento (Italia)
- Peder Gammeltoft, University of Bergen (Norge)
- Helen Kerfoot, Former Emeritus Scientist Natural Resources Canada, Honorary Chair of UNGEGN (Canada)
- Joan Tort i Donada, University of Barcelona (España)

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be developed as part of ongoing work in the coming months. Other aspects of our work on analysing answers submitted to the survey include

- identifying the gaps in the data set (i.e. which countries/regions did not provide any answers) and taking steps to even out geographic spread where possible;
- integrating the data with already existing documentation compiled by UNGEKN concerning geographical names and cultural heritage;
- inviting case studies from Member States where sharing more details about existing legal frameworks and/or practices might be beneficial for our wider community;
- leveraging the information in the answers to work towards UNGEKN's next 10-year Strategic Plan and Programme of Work.

Overall, answers to individual questions provided us with many detailed insights into the progress and challenges worldwide regarding the standardization of geographical names, specifically from the perspective of cultural heritage considerations. Not unexpectedly, definitions of what cultural heritage is were varied, encompassing both tangible and intangible dimensions. There is much to celebrate and to commend – but also (as we know) much necessary work still to do, not least with technological capacity-building and communication.

The importance of UNGEKN's collaborative work aiming to protect, promote, and celebrate geographical names as expressions of cultural heritage and identity came through very strongly in the data-set. Thank you to all who submitted answers.

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## SPECIAL PROJECTS AND NEWS ITEM

### Twenty Years of UNGEGN: Fond reflections of the journey and looking to the future

*Stefan Schweinfest*

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#### **Beginnings.**

**M**y boss, the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) called me. It was early 2002. I had been in the division at that point for 13 years, and my work area was national accounts. “I need your help – we are planning a Conference on Geographical Names .... in Berlin! And I need someone to communicate with the organizers”. My only claim to fame was..... my German passport. I certainly had NO expertise whatsoever in “toponymy”. I remember running back to my office, looking up the word right after that first meeting, with the term “exonym” in flashing lights. And, thus, began for me an amazing journey with an incredible professional community!

I started working with – and learning from - my dear subject matter expert colleague Amor Laaribi, who was at that time the lonely cartographer and geographic information expert in an ocean of hard-core statisticians in the UN Statistics Division. The first thing I came to deeply respect, when I studied the background of UNGEGN, was its rich history, literally going back to the origins of the United Nations. In a way UNGEGN reflects the essence of the United Nations: it brings people and experts from very different countries and backgrounds together around one table – people with their own history, culture, language and names. And yet these very different people – bound by a joint sense of professionalism - work together towards a common language through standardization, so that we all better understand each other and literally connect effectively. I will be forever grateful to the “Grande Dame of UNGEGN”, the then Chair of the Conference Helen Kerfoot, who patiently (and with her typical Canadian warmth!!) explained to me the history and function of the many language divisions and the different working groups of UNGEGN.

#### **The journey**

Over the next two decades, I had the honour of working ever more closely with the UNGEGN community, especially when I became the Director of UNSD in 2013. The creation of the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) in 2011

was inspired by the many years of positive global cooperation in the area of geographical names. One thing I was very proud of was that we were able to take UNGEGN around the world, bringing it closer to the regions and the people, by organizing meetings in Vienna, Nairobi and Bangkok.

There were scary moments. When contentious political positions and even emotions sometimes infiltrated our technical debates. As the Director of the Secretariat you desperately try to steer the process back to calmer waters and to a consensus outcome. But even then, I kept reminding myself, that we are having “these difficulties” because what we are doing MATTERS. It is sensitive and important.

In 2017 – exactly 50 years after the first UNGEGN Conference - it was time for a reform to bring UNGEGN more in line with - and closer to - other subsidiary bodies of our parent body, the UN Economic and Social Council. We also hoped that a more regular and predictable meeting schedule could bring more sustainable funding. Sadly, the financial difficulties of the United Nations only kept increasing, but amazingly UNGEGN was always able to function on a shoestring budget. And that was simply because UNGEGN’s biggest resource is its people. I was always impressed by that fact: that the community achieved a lot even though there was very little funding. The geographical names database took a long time to mature, but it progressed steadily. The training materials were often a labour of love by all those closely involved. And when we were finally able to put some creative funding for a workshop together, it was cause for happy celebrations.

#### **The future:**

There are certainly numerous challenges ahead, but I choose to remain a hopeless optimist: Especially as UNGEGN is such a good example of the “quiet core business”, where the UN functions best. I have no doubt about its sustained significance. Perhaps I see, in particular, three areas of focus:



- 1) When the going gets tough, it is sometimes good to go back to the basics: The very first ECOSOC resolution on geographical names asks us “to provide encouragement and guidance to those nations which have no national organization for the standardization and co-ordination of geographical names to establish such an organization and to produce national gazetteers”. Supporting each country to establish a national names authority is still as relevant as it was in the early days – and the number of countries who have such an authority is also a good Key Performance Indicator for the group.
- 2) Continuing to strengthen the relationship with the UN-GGIM community is not only a substantive necessity, it is also strategically important. Even though the institutional arrangements in different countries are diverse, this should not be an impediment, but rather enriching the spectrum of possible cooperation.
- 3) For a technical area, it is critically important to maintain a clear link to the ongoing policy debates,

to project the continued relevance of our work: Geographical names as cultural heritage is a good example. The first UNGEGN medium-term plan 2022-29 was a very good framing tool, and the debate on its renewal will coincide with the discussion of a new development agenda post-2030, offering additional opportunities to link UNGEGN to ECOSOC’s policy agenda.

When I left the podium in the United Nations Conference Room 2 on 2 May 2025, it was not only the end of the 2025 UNGEGN session, it was a deeply personal moment for me. It was the last big intergovernmental meeting I served in my career. And I was fulfilled with a deep sense of gratitude to this very special community. And I certainly want to take this opportunity to thank each and every person I had the privilege to work with in this amazing UNGEGN community over the years. As I said, YES, there are numerous challenges ahead, but I am confident that as a community you are – and will remain strong.



# OpenStreetMap and the Landscape of Populated Places Names

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[OpenStreetMap](#) (OSM) is an open, editable map of the world. Anyone can contribute location data, and anyone can access the data. Built on open-source technology, the platform enables the crowdsourcing of spatial data from anywhere in the world. Information in OSM is based on direct knowledge and interpretation of aerial imagery. Once data is added to OSM, the map is collaboratively maintained.

While OpenStreetMap began in Europe, it quickly became a global tool. The article [De/colonizing OpenStreetMap? Local mappers, humanitarian and commercial actors and the changing modes of collaborative mapping](#) examines OSM's expansion into the Global South and demonstrates its development into a truly global project. Organizations such as the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) and the Missing Maps consortium have helped fuel this growth. OpenStreetMap data has now become a key spatial data source in humanitarian contexts. HOT's OpenStreetMap datasets are among the most popular on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange](#), and are listed as recommended sources in [Data Grids](#).

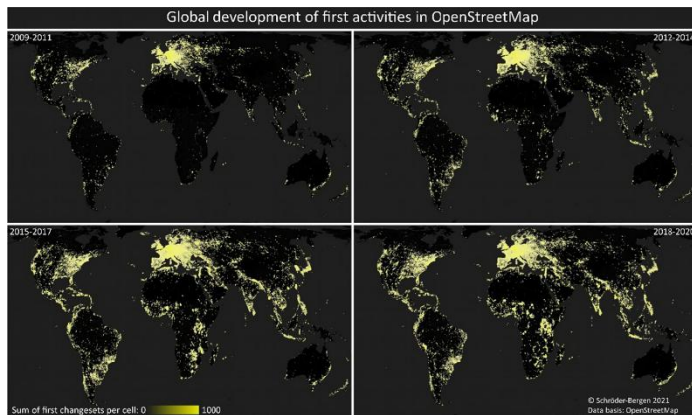


IMAGE 1: Global development of first activities of mappers in OpenStreetMap. Shading ranges from transparent to yellow to indicate the amount of first changesets per cell. Citation: Schröder-Bergen, S., Glasze, G., Michel, B. et al. De/colonizing OpenStreetMap? Local mappers, humanitarian and commercial actors and the changing modes of collaborative mapping. GeoJournal 87, 5051–5066 (2022).

## OpenStreetMap Populated Place Names in Humanitarian Contexts

Thanks to the power of the crowd, OpenStreetMap (OSM) can map places across wider areas and at varying levels of detail, often surpassing traditional sources, particularly in underrepresented regions. A 2024 analysis by HOT found that compared to more official sources, OSM generally offered broader geographic coverage, although with fewer completed attributes.

Taking Somalia and Sudan as examples, OSM populated places in Somalia had 80% more populated place locations than OCHA's dataset (57,822 vs. 11,283). In Sudan, OSM had 56% more populated place locations than OCHA (27,418 vs. 11,980). Additionally, the categories of populated places in OSM were more contextually adapted than those in OCHA. Each dataset used different classifications for populated places:

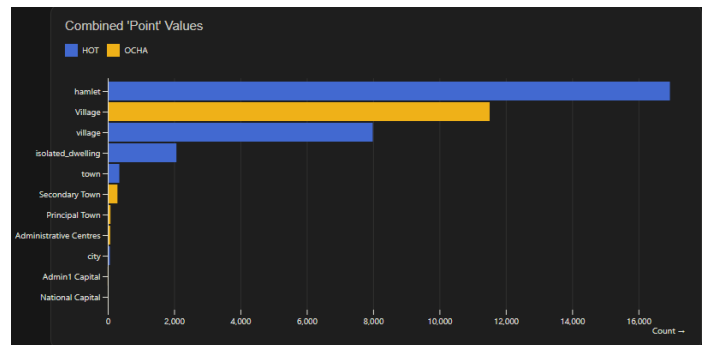


IMAGE 2: Sudan Populated Place Classification by Source

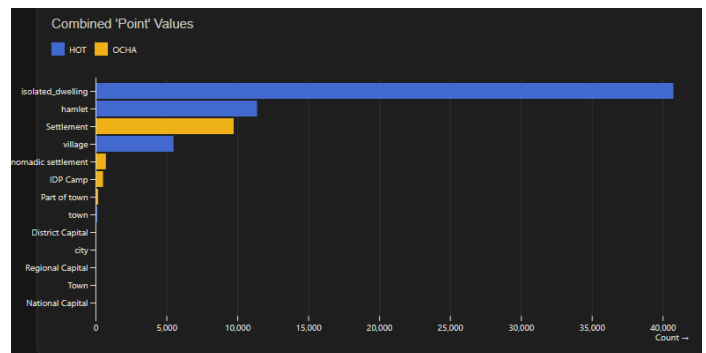


IMAGE 3: Somalia Populated Place Classification by Source

**Opportunity:** While OSM excels in coverage and classification, it often lacks place names and other details. In Sudan, only 38% of populated places in OSM have a name, and in Somalia, this drops to just 13%. By contrast,



100% of OCHA’s data points include populated place names. The complementary strengths of these datasets present an opportunity to improve populated place data in Sudan, Somalia, and other humanitarian contexts. By leveraging the known locations of populated places in OSM, names and other relevant information can be identified and added to the dataset.

### How Naming Works in OSM

OpenStreetMap (OSM) attribute information is based on tags, rather than a traditional tabular format. The tagging system provides flexibility for documenting information about the name of a place. Three of the most common name-related tags are:

**Core name**=\* tag for the primary/default name.

**Language-specific tags** such as name:en=\* for English, name:ar=\* for Arabic.

**Alternate and historical tags** ( alt\_name, old\_name).

A feature in OSM can have any combination of these name tags, making it possible to document a name in multiple languages and include alternate names. Names follow the “on-the-ground” principle, meaning the default name tag reflects what is observed locally, such as on signage, and sometimes is different from the official name, which also has a tag (official\_name).

For example, the city of Erbil in northern Iraq is home to both Kurdish and Arabic speakers. The alternative name tags capture this bilingual context.

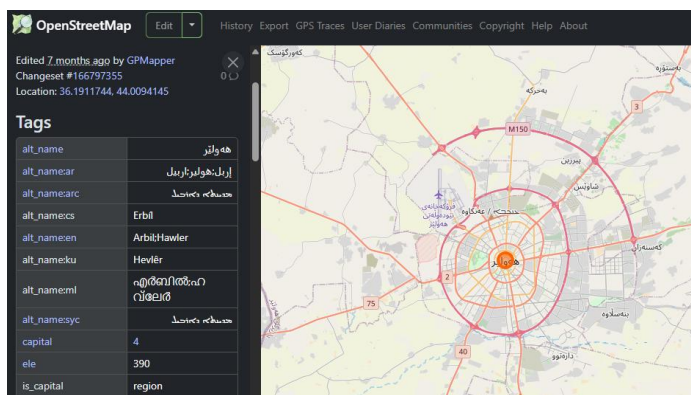


IMAGE 4: OpenStreetMap screenshot of OSM Erbil Tags

This approach applies to datasets beyond populated places. Any geographic feature with a name, such as roads, schools, hospitals, historical sites, or other points of interest, can be documented using OSM tagging conventions.

In humanitarian contexts, the flexibility of OSM structure is starting to be utilized. In the OSM data for Sudan, for example, while a relatively low number of populated places have a recorded name, two-thirds of those include an English translation in addition to Arabic. Bilingual datasets facilitate the creation of bilingual maps to support international humanitarian response efforts.

### A Proposal for Humanitarian-Derived OSM Datasets

Humanitarian workflows often require data to be standardized in naming formats, to include unique identifiers (p-codes), administrative hierarchy information, and near-complete names and other attributes. In most contexts, datasets need to be available in both local and humanitarian coordination languages. While OSM coverage has made significant progress in filling data gaps for humanitarian purposes, it does not always meet these specific requirements. However, sufficient foundational data exists - primarily the location, as indicated by the geographic spread of populated places.

HOT is proposing the creation of OSM-derived humanitarian datasets built on OSM's foundational location data. In the age of AI, information beyond the location such as language translations, unique identifiers, and feature category can be derived from other sources or limited information that has been recorded in OSM. Furthermore, with the strength of the OSM platform and its wider community, such information can be fed back into OSM after human review, enabling faster and more efficient verification of humanitarian data.

### Conclusion

OpenStreetMap complements official place name sources by capturing areas where people live or that are recognized locally as populated places, providing a richer, more context-sensitive map. Humanitarians can access OSM data through platforms such as HDX and HOT’s Export Tool. There is also an ongoing opportunity for volunteers to contribute by adding missing information.

As we move further into an era of automation, people-centric platforms like OSM are more important than ever for ensuring context and representation in geographical names within humanitarian contexts. To achieve this, we need to view OSM not just as a raw dataset but as part of a multi-tiered approach: serving as the geographic foundation from which AI, guided by human oversight, can derive the additional information needed for effective humanitarian use. Please reach out to data@hotosm.org if you would like to partner or learn more.

## ICOS Congress Vienna [Wien], Austria, 16-20 August 2027

**Peter Jordan**

*Chair, UNGEGN Dutch- and German-speaking Division*

*Vice-President and UNGEGN Liaison Officer, International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS)*

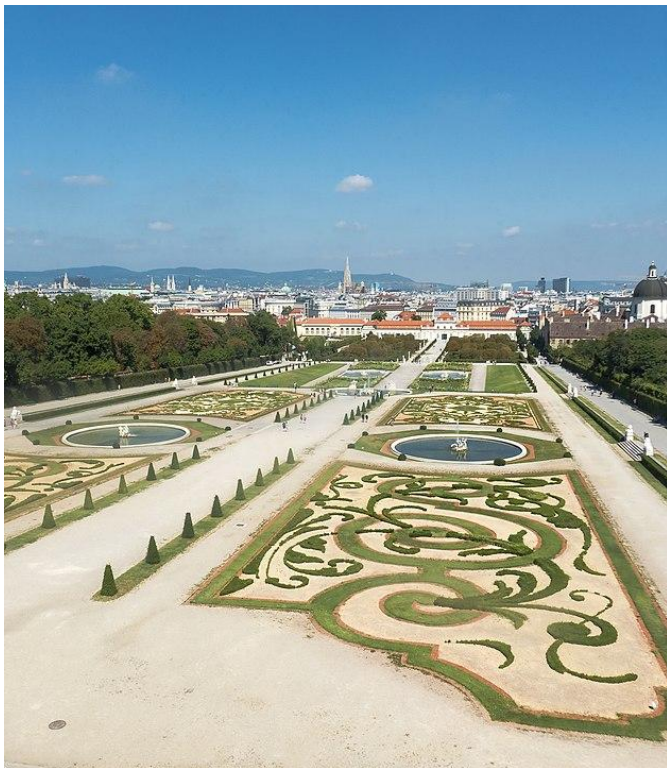
*Honorary Chair, Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO)*

*Email: [peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at)*

The Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Austrian Geographical Society cordially invite UNGEGN experts] to the XXIX International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, 16-20 August 2027, organized under the auspices of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS).

### Location

The Congress will take place in the premises of the Austrian Academy in Vienna's historical center, with a festive hall for 300 persons and five additional conference rooms, offering space for six parallel sessions and, in total, accommodating 500 participants.



*Vienna seen from the Belvedere (Photo: Jordan)*

### The Congress theme “Names as condensed narratives”

aims to highlight the importance and relevance of names and naming while leaving enough space for the whole variety of onomastic topics and scientific approaches. It may, nevertheless, be understood as setting a certain emphasis for the Vienna Congress and triggering paper submissions in this direction.

Names can be regarded as ‘condensed narratives’ about the person or feature they denote, as well as about the name-giver(s). This can very well be exemplified by place names. With them, the attribute ‘condensed narratives’ applies most typically to descriptive names based on the assumption that every name has been given intentionally, i.e. with the intention of highlighting an essential or striking aspect of the feature. However, the meaning of a name and this intention are not always transparent to us today, since some place names are very old, originated in former languages or variants of the language spoken in a place, and have been adapted morphologically and phonetically to the current language in use.

What has been said on place names as ‘condensed narratives’ can *mutatis mutandis* also be applied to other name categories, such as names of persons, animals, and features other than places in the geographical sense.

Thus, submissions for the Vienna Congress are invited to pay tribute to the Congress theme but are not obliged to do so. The papers and posters presented might cover (but are not limited to) the following topics:

- Names between heritage preservation and cultural change
- Names in the focus of various sciences
- The universal phenomena of names and naming
- Names and naming in different parts of the world
- Names as identity markers
- Name changes
- The endonym/exonym divide, not only with place names
- Nicknames
- Commercial naming
- Minority and indigenous names
- Naming in the Global South
- Names in literature
- Urban toponymy
- The juridical framework of naming
- Place-name standardization
- Toponomastics as a field of science
- Toponymy in education
- Names in social media



### Congress language

The Vienna Congress will not make use of all of ICOS' official languages, i.e. English, French, and German, but will admit only presentations in English, the most inclusive, by far dominant global trade language and the prevailing language of sciences of our days. Allowing German, for instance, would mean that – due to the fact that Austria is a German-speaking country, and many participants can also be expected from nearby Germany and the German-speaking part of Switzerland – very likely a larger share of sessions would be conducted in German, with the effect of excluding non-German speakers, expected to be the majority of Congress participants. This would be detrimental both to the general aim of international congresses to provide for international communication and the aim of researchers in the German-speaking sphere to present themselves and their work to a wider global audience at this occasion in Vienna.

### Program outline

The week from August 16 to 20, 2027, will be dedicated to keynotes, paper and poster sessions. On Wednesday

afternoon, a selection of excursions will be offered. Active participants are invited to select one of the following: (1) Vienna city tour by bus, (2) guided walking tour through the central part of the city, (3) visits to art galleries, (4) visits to the national library and museums. Additional excursions, throughout the week, will be offered to accompanying persons. A social dinner and a reception will complement the program.

### Important dates

- **End of May 2026:** Call for workshop and session proposals (via <https://icos27-vienna.at/>) ends.
- **End of June 2026:** Information about workshop and session acceptance.
- **July 2026:** Call for session papers (that may also be attributed to workshops) opens.
- **End of October 2026:** Call for papers ends.
- **End of January 2027:** Information about paper acceptance
- **End of February 2027:** Detailed Congress program available
- **1 March 2027:** Registration for the Congress starts