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**United Nations Group of Experts on**

**Geographical Names**

**2021 session**

New York, 3 – 7 May 2021

Item 12 of the provisional agenda \*

**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including indigenous,  
minority and regional languages and multilingual issues**

**Report from the convenor of the Working Group on  
Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage**

Submitted by the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural  
Heritage\*\*

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\* GEGN.2/2021/1

\*\* Prepared by Annette Torensjö and Leila Mattfolk, Sweden

## Summary:

The full report provides information on the activities undertaken by the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage since May 2019.

The report also contains information on current work and forthcoming events.

## The Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

The Working Group was established to address Resolution 1 of the Eight Conference (Berlin, 2002) as *Working Group on the Promotion of Indigenous and Minority Group Place Names*, with the aim to oversee the activities related to the promotion of indigenous and minority geographical names as means of cultural retention/revitalization. The name of the WG was changed to the *Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage* at a side meeting at the 27th Session in New York 2012.

The aim of the WG is to oversee the activities related to the promotion of indigenous and minority geographical names, as well as to stress the importance of names as cultural heritage. Among the most important topics for the WG are geographical names used by minorities, the legislation and policies that are applicable to geographical names as cultural heritage, and the promotion of fieldwork and of the registration of names.

## Organization

Convenor: Ms Annette Torensjö

Rapporteur: Ms Leila Mattfolk

## Organization of work

The formal work within the WG is organized through meetings in connection with the sessions and on other occasions, preferably as joint meetings with other working groups, divisions, or other groups of interest. Because of the wide range of aspects, the more practical tasks within the working group are to be organized through different focus groups. The focus groups are decided on in the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of work 2021–2029, and are the following:

1. Geographical names in relation to minorities and indigenous peoples
2. Legislation, policies & best practices relating to geographical names
3. Commercial and commemorative naming, including urban naming
4. Crowd-sourcing for collecting stories behind the names
5. The names of unwritten languages
6. Naming within tourism and branding

The convenor has contacted persons suitable for leading the respective focus groups, and the intention is that each leader form their group and suggest its scope and methods at the WG's side-event meeting on May 6, 2021. The outcome of the work of the focus groups will be published on the Working group's pages on UNGEGN's website. For future UNGEGN meetings we would welcome a brief report from each focus group on their work in the report of the Working group on geographical names as cultural heritage.

### **Working Group activities since 2019**

WG meeting at the 1st Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in New York on May 3, 2019. (The Minutes of the meeting are published on the website [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/working\\_groups/wg9.cshtml](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/working_groups/wg9.cshtml).)

The WG, jointly with the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation, had planned a symposium and Working Group and Division meetings to be held at Halmstad University, in Halmstad, Sweden, 20–24 October 2020. Due to the pandemic, the symposium and the meetings had to be postponed until further notice. The title of the planned symposium is Cultural Heritage and Commercialization of Geographical Names, and questions in focus are how to deal with commercialization or commodification of geographical names in relation to their value as cultural heritage, and what role UNGEGN and individual toponymic authorities have in relation to this question. The WG convenors prefer in-person meetings, and intend to arrange the symposium when the pandemic situation makes this possible.

### **Further activities of relevance for the Working Group since 2019**

The Swedish handbook *Good Place-Name Practice. The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board's Guide to the Standardisation and Preservation of Place-Names* is made available online on the website of the Swedish Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority, Lantmäteriet, [GOOD PLACE-NAME PRACTICE \(lantmateriet.se\)](https://www.lantmateriet.se/good-place-name-practice). The handbook is aimed at local authorities in Sweden working with naming and the standardization of geographical names, and consists of onomastic information and advices for persons dealing with names and naming. The handbook is based on Swedish legislation, but can serve as an example of good naming practice also for others.

The Conference Names in the Economy 6 was held in Uppsala, Sweden, June 3-5, 2019. (Information: [www.isof.se/nite6](http://www.isof.se/nite6).) The proceedings from the Conference will be published later this year, and made available on the website [www.isof.se](http://www.isof.se).

### **Work plan**

- The Working Group will get the focus groups running in order to be able to allocate tasks to the different experts within the WG.
- The WG's website (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/wg10.html>) contains documents prepared by the WG, as well as examples of good naming practices. The convenor of the WG invites experts to contribute further examples of good practices for the purpose of updating the website with more guidelines available.
- The Working Group will promote and support the national work to consolidate good practices for Geographical Names.
- The Working Group will organize meetings, workshops, digital seminars, or the like, in order to focus on topics of special interest for the members of the Working Group, and will arrange joint meetings with other Working Groups within the UNGEGN in order to strengthen the work with Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.