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English

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**Technical Expertise: names collection, office treatment, features
beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation**

Collection of geographical names aimed at preserving cultural heritage

Submitted by Brazil**

Summary:

Geographical names play a crucial role in our daily lives by helping us to navigate and organize the spaces we inhabit. Beyond their practical function, those names hold a deeper significance, reflecting the history, culture and evolution of the places and people associated with them. They offer insights into environment, migration, economic activities, language and religious beliefs, often preserving traditions and the memory of long-forgotten languages or minorities.

In Brazil, the Geographical Names Department of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics contributes to the institutional mission - “to portray Brazil by providing the information required to understand its reality and exercise citizenship” - by collecting the stories behind geographical names. Those narratives help preserve the origins and cultural value of names.

To ensure consistent and culturally sensitive naming, the Institute developed the technical manual for the collection of geographical names, which is available in Portuguese and English, that contains procedures for accurate data collection, based on the resolutions of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names on the subject and on the procedures presented in the *Manual for the National Standardization of Geographical Names* that was developed by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The report provides information on the technical manual and the three phases of collecting geographical names: office preparation, fieldwork and post-field data consolidation. It also contains a discussion of the expected effects of the use of that manual for the advancement of geographical names standardization work in Brazil, in accordance with Strategy 4 (iv) of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical

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Names strategic plan and programme of work 2021-2029.

Collection of geographical names aimed at preserving cultural heritage

Introduction

Geographical names are much more than simple combinations of words that indicate a place or a feature on the map. They carry a deep historical and identity-related significance, connecting a community to its past, traditions, and homeland. These names are silent witnesses to past events, the peoples who inhabited a region, and the customs and cultural influences that shape the space over time, thus strengthening the ties of the inhabitants with the place where they live. By recognizing the importance of these names, we are valuing not only cultural diversity but also the collective memory of a region.

Therefore, it is essential to preserve, promote and disseminate these names, ensuring that future generations can benefit from their historical and identity-related richness and continue writing the history of the places we inhabit.

The collection of geographical names in the field is one of the most valuable sources, if not the most important source, for obtaining the necessary information for the reliable standardization of these names. It is in the field that some of the most significant stories for understanding the cultures to which geographical names belong are revealed. In general, these little-known stories are precisely those belonging to minority cultures and languages, often preserved by people who do not know how to use a computer or a smartphone and, therefore, are unaware of or unable to participate in crowdsourcing projects enabled by digital platforms and the internet. However, these people and cultures need to be heard, respected, and represented. Correct and accurate geographical names are the voice that researchers and mapping agents bring from the field and that is published for society in basemaps and databases that disseminate the use of these geographical names at national and international levels.

Purpose and Importance

Acknowledging the budgetary, administrative, and logistical challenges faced by official mapping agencies in Brazil and other countries in conducting field data collection operations—and responding to the growing demand from various sectors of society that deal with geographical names, particularly academic institutions, for a robust and well-founded methodology—the Geographical Names Department of the IBGE's Coordination of Cartography released the *Manual for the Collection of Geographical Names* in July 2023. This manual, available in Portuguese and English at <https://www.ibge.gov.br/geociencias/metodos-e-outros-documentos-de-referencia/revista-e-manuais-tecnicos/15826-manual-tecnico-em-geociencias.html?edicao=37182&t=publicacoes> is grounded in the established and widely recognized practices of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), ensuring a reliable framework for geographical name collection (and is also provided to the Group of Experts as a background document to this present report in English and Portuguese).

This manual was rigorously developed by the Geographical Names Department, in collaboration with the experienced technical surveyor team of the institution. Its creation was a careful process, in which the document and the methodology itself were tested and refined over years, in geographical name standardization courses and collection operations for mapping at various scales. The IBGE presents a methodology for collecting geographical names that considers the concepts related to this theme and the specificities for their standardization, from the perspective of the institutional cartographic practice. It is worth noting, however, that the publication is aimed at a broad audience, and the proposed guidelines can be applied to any type of project, in various organizations and areas of knowledge, and are independent of digital resources. Its dissemination is intended to establish a minimum set of procedures that enable

effective collection and can be used by other mapping-producing entities in the country, as well as by academic institutions and other segments interested in toponymy.

The Manual is written in simple and direct language, making it accessible to young school students and individuals with low levels of formal education. Its flexibility allows it to be used in school projects focused on early toponymic education and the appreciation of cultural heritage. Additionally, it can be utilized by minority group communities to collect and process their own geographical names, thereby recovering their stories, regardless of the educational level of their members.

This Manual facilitates the creation of a national network that enhances the Brazilian Geographical Names Database – BNGB (<https://bngb.ibge.gov.br/>). Launched in December 2024, the BNGB portal and API benefit from such projects by incorporating geographical names of features that fall outside the cartographic scales used by IBGE. Notably, many indigenous names and names from minority groups and languages are included in this category.

Considering the absence of a National Names Authority on Geographical Names in Brazil, uniformity in the collection and processing of geographical names by the different institutions that deal with this theme can present itself as an alternative path to minimize inconsistencies in the set of national geographical names.

Content

Based on the resolutions of past United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the procedures presented in the UNGEGN Manual for the National Standardization of Geographical Names, the Manual details the three phases of the geographical name collection process: preparation in the office, field collection, and consolidation in the office of the data obtained in the field.

Following a brief introduction that contextualizes the theme of geographical names and their relevance, the first part of the Manual explores fundamental concepts related to geographical names, including:

- **Reference and identity:** How geographical names serve as references and represent identities.
- **Toponymic form:** Structure and elements that make up the names.
- **Variant name:** Features identified by more than one name.
- **Motivation and history:** reasons and historical background behind the names.
- **Tradition:** Names spelled in disagreement with current orthographic norms; traditional spelling.
- **Standardization:** What it is, what benefits arise from it.

Next, the Manual details the process of collecting geographical names in the field, which aims to obtain accurate and updated information about geographical names directly from local sources. This includes confirming the existence and location of geographical features, verifying the name and correct spelling, and understanding the history and motivation behind the names.

Office Preparation

Preparation involves defining logistics, such as transportation, team, and schedule, as well as researching and preparing resources—maps, documents, and other relevant information about

the research area and the geographical names contained in it—to carry out the comparative analysis, a step that will define the items to be researched in the field.

An important step in the process is comparative analysis, which consists of comparing geographical names in all the documents obtained in the previous stage regarding the name itself, its spelling, and its location. Discrepancies are recorded in the Geographical Names Index, a document that lists the names to be investigated.

The Index is an important feature of the presented method. It is a unique document, formatted as a spreadsheet, to be used throughout all phases of the collection process. This document consolidates all information gathered both in the office and later in the field regarding the geographical names to be researched. It includes inconsistencies identified during the comparative analysis phase and issues to be investigated. However, issues that are raised and resolved solely through office research are not included in the spreadsheet.

Field Activity

During field collection, various activities are carried out. The Manual provides detailed instructions and clarifications on choosing the most suitable informants for conducting interviews, as well as on conducting interviews to obtain detailed information. Instructions are also provided for audiovisual recording of field activities and their subsequent storage, as well as for the use and completion of the field notebook.

The need for verifying traditional spelling—names spelled according to local tradition—is emphasized, highlighting respect for local culture.

Instructions are also provided for completing the cells in the Geographical Names Index, destined to be filled out or updated in the field, including the classification of the names researched as confirmed, unconfirmed, altered, excluded, or included, and the updates of position and type of the feature whose name was researched, if necessary.

Office Consolidation

After field collection, the information is consolidated in the office, and the Manual recommends a final review of the Geographical Names Index and the organization and storage of the material obtained in the field, to substantiate the justifications for decisions made and facilitate access to information in case of future inquiries about the names in the researched area.

The preparation of a **final report** is recommended, with suggestions regarding its content.

Final Considerations

This systematic approach ensures that geographical names are collected accurately and consistently, faithfully reflecting the local reality.

Photos and document samples from field collections conducted by IBGE teams illustrate the volume, facilitating understanding of the guidelines and enabling better visualization of expected results.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of this report and explore the *Manual for the Collection of Geographical Names*;
- (b) Contribute with suggestions to its improvement.