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Other geographic names issues

Example laws on geographical names standardization and cultural heritage protection

Summary**

Two complementary legislative frameworks have been developed to address the complex challenges of geographical names standardization while protecting cultural heritage and Indigenous rights across governmental structures. Those comprehensive approaches establish robust mechanisms for both technical standardization and cultural preservation, providing evidence-based and culturally informed models for both centralized and federal jurisdictions.

The cornerstone of the frameworks is their governance structure, which can be implemented either through a single independent national names authority in centralized systems or through coordinated federal and state names authorities in federal systems. Both models operate with dedicated funding and technical infrastructure, implementing dual oversight systems that combine scientific committees of technical experts with cultural advisory boards. That ensures representation of Indigenous and minority communities, guaranteeing that standardization decisions reflect both scientific rigour and cultural sensitivity, regardless of governmental structure.

At the technical level, both frameworks mandate evidence-based standardization through rigorous research protocols that give equal weight to scientific evidence and traditional knowledge. The legislation requires comprehensive digital database systems that enable sophisticated analysis while maintaining strict documentation standards. In federal systems, that is achieved through coordinated federal-state technical infrastructure, while centralized systems maintain a unified national database. Those technical requirements ensure interoperability and data preservation, facilitating both national and international cooperation in toponymic research.

* [GEGN.2/2025/1](#).

** The full report was prepared by Peder Gammeltoft (Norway), Norwegian Language Collections, University of Bergen. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/9/CRP.9.



Both frameworks place particular emphasis on cultural heritage protection, establishing equal legal status for Indigenous and minority language toponyms. That is reinforced by mandatory cultural impact assessments for naming decisions and explicit protection for traditional geographical names as living heritage. Those provisions are supported by clear consent requirements for Indigenous naming decisions and protected status for traditional knowledge systems, with implementation mechanisms adapted to local contexts and governmental structures.

Implementation in both models follows a structured five-year plan, with dedicated funding streams supporting core operations and special cultural projects. The frameworks include comprehensive professional development programmes, ensuring that technical staff maintain expertise in both scientific and cultural aspects of toponymic work. That is supplemented by knowledge transfer protocols and regular review procedures that guarantee long-term sustainability. Quality assurance is maintained through regular monitoring and evaluation requirements, clear enforcement mechanisms and transparent appeal processes. The international dimension is addressed through mandatory research-sharing protocols and technical cooperation frameworks that are aligned with global best practices, whether managed centrally or at the federal level.

Those legislative models address current societal requirements for geographical names standardization, offering blueprints for jurisdictions seeking to modernize their toponymic practices while protecting cultural heritage. Their innovative integration of traditional knowledge with modern technical standards provides frameworks for balanced and sustainable toponymic governance in the twenty-first century.

Relevant resolutions

- I/4, on national standardization
- VII/5, on national standardization based on local usage
- VIII/1, on promotion of minority group and Indigenous geographical names
- IX/4, on geographical names as intangible cultural heritage
- IX/5, on promotion of the recording and use of Indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names
- X/3, on criteria for establishing and evaluating the nature of geographical names as cultural heritage