

SPEECH TEXT:

«Gender equality in names, sustainable cities and communities»

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Thank you Mr/Ms Convenor!

Recent efforts made in Italy in the field of geographical academic research have focused on toponymy for Sustainable Development Goals in general, and this will also be the theme of the 5th International Scientific Symposium of the Romano-Hellenic Division of UNGEGN, in June 2025.

The aim of that initiative was to illustrate the advantages that the study of historical toponymy can offer in achieving fundamental results such as equality of opportunities (particularly gender equality) and sustainability, in general, in communities. In this view, appropriate strategies could be summarized in two slogans, so to speak. First, with regard to gender equality: “bring excellence into open light, and make sure it shines, from now on”. Second, in reference to sustainability: “carefully learn from the past so as to inspire the future”.

What are we trying to say in practice?

Let us first consider gender equality. In this context, particular attention was paid to odonyms.

We know there are limits imposed by current legislation which, for purely practical reasons, restricts the change of names of existing streets and squares to very exceptional cases. We believe that it is appropriate to propose the city toponymic commissions, in particular, to pay due attention to gender equality both in the naming of new urban circulation areas, and also in the naming of parks, gardens, pedestrian trails and any other public space that can function as a place of memory.

A particular instance to be reported is the case of the proposed new street names of the Fisciano Campus of the University of Salerno. A special internal

commission studied a new toponymy of the university's public spaces, with names dedicated to illustrious female scholars and not only to male scientists.

In this case - with no resident population and no businesses to suffer bureaucratic complications - we find ideal conditions for changing existing names: an advantage which is not typically enjoyed in standard urban contexts.

Let us now consider sustainability.

All of the many powers, cultures and migrations that have moved across the Italian peninsula added toponyms based on their needs, worldview, priorities. Yet, all of them had to take into account, and identify through placenames, some fundamental categories in their interactions with the environments: farming areas, water supplies, forest resources and so on.

The life of humans depended on a correct management of available resources: this may be an inspiring lesson that toponymy studies can teach for the benefit of future generations, increasing their awareness of such a different relation between humans and the environment.

As researchers, experts and counsellors to policy makers, we have a duty to try and disseminate good suggestions and practices. From presenting future generations with inspiration towards sustainability, to educating them to a deeper sense of equality, let us work together to make the objectives of the SDG happen: let us promote them from the very fundamental act of placenaming.

SLIDE TEXTS:

«GENDER EQUALITY IN NAMES, SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES»

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Two strategic lines for fostering the achievement of two crucial SDG goals through placename studies and possible actions:

1) Promote **GENDER EQUALITY**: “bring excellence into open light, and make sure it shines, *from now on*” .

- a) Since legislation restricts major ex-post changes in toponymy and odonymy, increase cultural actions to foster equality in future assignments.
- b) Consider possible major re-assignments of placenames, for better gender equality balance, **starting** in contexts where such actions would cause no administratives, economic or social inconveniences.

2) Encourage the development of **SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES**: “carefully learn from the past so as to inspire the future”

- a) Historic placenames in century-long inhabited regions may often hint to traditional human-environment interactions, from old times in which sustainability was the only strategy to ensure survival of cities and communities.
- b) Careful and detailed study, identification and mapping of such placenames may help understand the deep nature of sustainable interactions. This type of knowledge may serve the purposes of education and might also assist in the cultural recovery of good practices, towards a more sustainable use of spaces and resources.