



Panel discussion 1

“Advancing geographical names standardization through inclusive, culturally-informed and evidence-based solutions to support sustainable development”

Date: Monday 28th April 2025

Timeslot: 3:00-6:00 pm

Time frame: 60 minutes

Chair: Sungjae Choo, Vice-Chair, UNGEGN, Republic of Korea

Rapporteur: Allison Dollimore, United Kingdom

Panelists:

1. Frédéric Giraut (Chair, UNESCO Toponymy Inclusive Team, Switzerland)
2. Dieter Laskowski (Technical Lead, Google Maps, U.S.A.)
3. Emily Diana Lethbridge (Co-convenor, UNGEGN Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, Iceland)
4. Ana Cristina da Rocha Berenger Resende (Geographic Names Manager, Geosciences Directorate, IBGE, Brazil)

Introduction

The theme of the 2025 UNGEGN session, as reflected in the title of this panel discussion, was adopted from the ECOSOC theme for 2025, “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind.” The theme is also aligned with the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, Strategy 1 (Technical expertise) and Strategy 4 (Culture, heritage and language recognition).

Building on this, the panel will explore three key principles that have been central to UNGEGN’s work for the last few decades:

- Inclusivity – ensuring that geographical names represent and respect all communities.
- Culturally-informed approaches – recognizing the historical, linguistic and societal significance of names.
- Evidence-based decision making – using research, data and best practices to guide standardization.

The session has invited documents and subsequent discussions focusing on these three key principles. In this panel discussion, it is suggested to explore them in a different way, attempting to derive and elaborate the essence of each of these three principles by sharing experiences of Member States, international bodies, experts and private companies. The approach thus will be rather inductive, targeting a better understanding of inclusive, culturally-informed and evidence-based solutions to advance geographical names standardization and then further apply them to practices of geographical names management.

Thematic issues/questions:

1. Inclusivity in geographical names standardization

- What are inclusive solutions in the standardization of geographical names?
- Do geographical names have the capacity to contribute to “pursuing an inclusive and equal society,” as noted at the 2021 UNGEGN session (Decision 2/2021/15)?
- In what ways do standardized names impact marginalized or minority communities?
- How does your organization ensure inclusive representation in geographical naming?

2. Culturally-informed approaches

- Should geographical naming and standardization always be culturally-informed? Why or why not?
- What are the indicators of distinguishing a culturally-informed geographical name from others?
- Are culturally significant names always inherited from the past, or can new names also become part of cultural heritage?
- How does your institute handle geographical names where there is overlap of different cultures at the same location, e.g. names of minority/majority languages, names of various indigenous languages, etc.

3. Evidence-based standardization

- Should geographical naming or names standardization always be evidence-based?
- What evidence should be considered, quantitative or qualitative?
- What evidence does your institute take into account in decision-making (fieldwork results, documentary research, crowd-sourcing, etc.)?
- How does your institution verify and validate names? Are there any reliability issues?
- How can UNGEGN as a whole strengthen evidence-based practices in geographical names standardization?

4. Supporting sustainable development

- How do inclusive, culturally-informed and evidence-based solutions, support sustainable development?
- Can you share any examples where geographical names have promoted social cohesion, economic growth or environmental sustainability?
- What policies or practices contribute to long-term sustainability in geographical names standardization for Member States and other stakeholders?

Panel guidelines

- Each panelist will be invited to speak for 3-5 minutes in the first part to share their perspective and views on the topic being discussed (PowerPoint not required), and then a free-flowing discussion will be conducted, including interventions and questions from the Chair and panelists and, if time allows, from other UNGEGN experts.
- 60 minutes will be allocated in the afternoon session on Monday 28 April, but it could be extended beyond an hour if time allows.
- A summary of the key discussion points will be prepared and published through the UNGEGN Bulletin.