

30 June 2017

Original: English

**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8-17 August 2017

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

**National and international meetings, conferences,
symposiums, publicity and publications**

Place Names Day and Place Names Bee in Latvia

Submitted by Latvia **

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by Vita Strautniece (Latvian Geospatial Information Agency) and Sanda Rapa (Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia)

Place Names Day and Place Names Bee in Latvia

The Place Names Day was held in Riga, capital of Latvia, in afternoon of October 20, 2017. It was organized in honour of the 22 years of the Laboratory of Toponymy – small specialized unit of the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency, whose duties are obtaining, processing and maintaining geographical names and names related data, necessary for the performance of geodetic and cartographic activities. The Place Names Day was devoted also to the geographical names of Latvia, collection, investigation and usage of them. Besides all retired and former staff members and managers, a wide circle of specialists from different institutions whose work is related to place names use and standardization, linguists-toponymists, enthusiasts in local studies, etc., were invited. UNGEGN expert from Estonia, a faithful friend of the Laboratory, Mr. Peeter Päll, was also among the guests. Total number of participants was ~90 people. The event took place in a spacious hall of one of the museums in historical centre of Riga.

The first part of the event gave insight in the goals, origins, past, present and future of the Laboratory of Toponymy. Peeter Päll gave a speech (in Latvian) regarding the standardization of geographical names. Veterans and former managers were honoured. An ingenuity game on Latvian place names was carried out, too.

Then was a coffee break with a large sweet traditional jubilee pretzel...

Theme of the second part of the Place Names Day was “Place names around us”. Seven presentations on different aspects of place names were given by scientists-linguists, representative of the national place names authority, archaeologist, cartographer and local-studies enthusiast.

Exhibition on work of the Laboratory of Toponymy through its 22 years was arranged in the hall, too.

Total length of the Place Names Day was ~6 hours (see Agenda in the Annex). More detailed information (in Latvian) with some photos is published at:

http://www.lgia.gov.lv/lv/Aktualitates/2016/11_novembris/04-1.aspx;

Presentations – at:

http://map.lgia.gov.lv/index.php?lang=0&cPath=3&txt_id=116&0&ap=119).

The Laboratory of Toponymy received a lot of thanks for the emotionally and informatively rich event afterwards. The contacts between persons involved in investigation, collection, standardization and usage of place names was strengthened.

Moreover, the spirit and ideas of the Place Names Day got a further development in 2017. The Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, in collaboration with the Latvian Language Institute (University of Latvia) and some other partners, feeling themselves inspired by the Place Names Day, launched an interactive nationwide Place Names Bee. It is a crowdsourcing of place names. Everybody is invited to input his or her information on Latvian place names into the special public electronic “Database of National Place Names” (Tautas Vietvārdu datubāze, <https://vietvardi.lv/talka/>, maintained by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia).

Place Names Bee in Latvia has a century long history. Approximately 70 thousand handwritten cards of place names have been collected in the previous Place Names Bees with the help of people. The first call to collect place names was made in 1911. However, the idea became more popular in the 1920's, when linguists themselves became more active in the collecting of place names. They collaborated with each other and inspired others to show interest in this field. Approximately 10 thousand place names were collected – they were recorded in the notebooks and subsequently they were

excerpted on the cards of place name card files. The second call was made by the Latvian folklorists in 1940's and mainly pupils and students were involved. Approximately 60 thousand place names were collected in the special questionnaires. The third attempt was made in 1990's when several thousands of place names were collected to be processed into the electronic database, but technological weaknesses of the time had caused certain limitations of the process.

About 3000 place names have been collected in the electronic "Database of National Place Names" so far. Users of the Database provide not only place name, its localization, description of the object's category, but also cultural, historical, and linguistic information of place, as well as pronunciation and description of flora, fauna, and geological features of the geographical feature. The most active users have collected approximately 250 place names of one civil parish in a month. After the resolution of technological problems, the Database will be additionally populated with the data from Latvian Geographical Names Database maintained by Latvian Geospatial Information Agency – it will ensure that the users will be able to correct or complement existing data. We hope this should bring a good harvest for geographical names investigation as well as for geographical names standardization.

The terms of the Bee are February 23 – September 30, 2017. Then, in October 20, 2017 will be held the second Place Names Day, devoted to the results of the Place Names Bee. The best place names collectors of every month will be congratulated.