

INTRODUCTION

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Geographical names represent a vital part of a nation's cultural heritage as they express the relationships between society and its environment. They function as a social consensus or as a sort of agreement regarding this environment reached over many generations. Through their functions as spatial identifiers, bearers of personal and social experiences, and as prints of the past, place-names represent huge cultural values. And that is why it is essential to treat and preserve them accordingly.

Place names, may be said to represent the oldest living part of human cultural heritage, in the sense that they have been handed down orally from generation to generation for hundreds or even thousands of years. People started naming their environmen very long ago, and many of the names for rivers, conspicuous hills, extensive forests or swamps kept these names, if somewhat altered trough adaptions to consecutive languages spoken in their areas. Through their form and the **orthographic** (#251) changes they were subjected to, these names also tell us something about the time period in which they were bestowed.

Apart from their original meaning, names also acquired **additional meaning**, for instance through the fact that locations with a specific name were the theatre of a battle for independence. Thus geographical names communicate cognitive, emotional, ideological, and social qualities.

Why is preservation necessary? Names are threatened because of various factors:

- there is the continued extension of towns and cities over the rural countryside, with the related loss of geographical names fro fields, hamlets and farms;
- there is the immigration of population groups speaking other languages without previous links to the environment
- new mapping methods, not dependent any more on surveys in the terrain also tend to loose out on toponyms.

In the following we will deal with names as part of human's cultural heritage under the following aspects and issues:

1. [names as carriers of meaning](#)
2. [names as carriers of linguistic change](#)
3. [names as carriers of images](#)
4. [naming habits and changing attitudes to names](#)
5. [names in colonisation-names as claims or mementos](#)
6. [names as a living museum. Names are proof of all the different language communities that once lived in a region.](#)
7. [threats to cultural heritage aspects \(obliteration, cleansing, UN resolutions\)](#)

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