

3 July 2002

Original: English

---

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

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 17 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Toponymic education and practice and international  
cooperation: existing education and practice**

**The social and cultural value of place names**

**Submitted by Norway\*\***

---

\* E/CONF.94/1.

\*\* Prepared by Botolv Helleland, Senior Lecturer, University of Oslo, Name Research Section.

## Summary

Why is it important to take care of place names and treat them as part of our cultural heritage? Obviously there are several answers to this question. Whereas the question of standardizing place names has been on the agenda for many decades, and for more than a century in some countries, the non-material values have received less attention, especially in the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. A great deal has been said and written about the value of place names and about the importance of taking care of them and protecting them. First, place names provide historical documentation. Most place names have arisen as expressions describing certain properties of the localities that have been given the names, and they thus provide information about natural and cultural circumstances at the time the names were given. Secondly, there is an environmental aspect, as place names constitute a vital part of the local language. Place names are the links between individuals and their topographic surroundings, and they are thus part of the identity of the name users.

---