



Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

Monday August 15, 2017, 9:00 - 9:45 am at the UN Head Quarter in New York on the occasion of the 11th UNCISG, Room: CR-B

Minutes

Attending: 31 delegates representing Australia, Austria, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Latvia, Morocco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Romania, Sweden, Tunisia, United Kingdom and U.S.A.

1. Welcome

The Convenor opened the meeting at 9 am.

2. Adoption of agenda and administrative matters (chair, rapporteur etc.)

The agenda had been posted on the Conference website before the Conference and was shown on a screen during the meeting. The Convenor of the Working Group, Annette Torensjö, and the Rapporteur, Leila Mattfolk, both from Sweden, continue their tasks in the working group.

3. Report of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

The Convenor presented the work done within the working group over the last years, i.e., meetings in New York, Copenhagen, Bangkok, and Innsbruck, some of these being joint meetings with divisions and other working groups. Joint meetings work well for WGGNCH since the work of the WG relates to almost every other WG in UNGEGN.

4. Focus groups and joint efforts

The Convenor presented the idea behind focus groups and then opened the floor for comments, questions and suggestions.

Suggested focus groups:

Names in non-written languages

The question of names in non-written languages could be a joint matter for both WGGNHC and the Working Group on Romanization Systems, in partnership also with the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers.

The relation to UN-GGIM

The Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers is also looking for cooperation with WGGNHC on collections, gazetteers, databases (e.g. how to handle diacritics) etc., also regarding questions relating to UNGGIM.

UNESCO

Cooperation with UNESCO in their work on intangible heritage would be good, in order to, for example, produce joint brochures or leaflets about place names. It would be important to use their principles in the convention on intangible heritage concerning place names, stressing that place names are standing memorials of languages that do no longer exist, and showing best practice methodology in collecting names from indigenous groups, threatened languages etc., for example through collecting place names used in narratives.

5. Website

The WG website will probably be on the UNGEGN web site. The rapporteur has provided the webmaster with an update still to be uploaded.

The convenor asked participants to provide her with best practices.

6. Discussion on organization of work

Urban naming

The convenor presented an idea on a workshop jointly with the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation on urban naming, including commercial names, sponsor names etc. Another possible topic suggested:

- Builders sometimes name areas with their own names, when traditional names are lost. Legislation deals with this question in some countries but not in all.
- In some multilingual cities, translations of names are sometimes inconsistent.

The workshop organizers could ask for other suggestions for topics through the UNGEGN bulletin.

Cf. also Des guides pour une saine gestion de la toponymie urbaine E/CONF.105/99/CRP.99, Submitted by Canada (https://unstats.un.org/UNSD/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/11th-uncsgn-docs/E_Conf.105_99_CRP.99_9_20170712%20Guides%20for%20Sound%20Management%20of%20Urban%20Place%20Names_fr.pdf)

The convenor asked for best practices to be put on the web site; this would help spreading information on national work globally. The best form of best practices would be recommendations, since the legislations in different countries might be very diverse with respect to street naming and commercial naming.

7. Other business

The problem of inconsistency in Google maps

As a private company Google has to use data that are available. Google is very productive and has a large real-world impact. A best practice would be to make all public and official material free for use, then Google could use the official databases.

Collection of names in indigenous languages

Canada has intentions to produce more globally relevant instructions on collecting indigenous names. Australia and New Zealand have a lot of experience to share.

Special interests group naming

Fishermen, BMX bikers, surfers, etc. coin their own names and these inside names are used mainly or entirely within the subgroup. This might be problematic e.g. in relation to paramedics etc., if no one else knows what they call certain places. Could possibly be an issue for crowd sourcing to collect names, preferable in co-operation with the subgroups.

8. Next meeting

Was not decided on.

9. Closing

The convenor closed the meeting reminding everyone to send her both suggestions regarding the work of the WG, and best practices to be put up on the web site.