
**United Nations Group of Experts On
Geographical Names
2019 session**

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Item 5 (a) of the agenda *

Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names

Report of Latvia

Submitted by Latvia**

Summary:

The national report of Latvia covers the two-year period 2017–2018 since the convening of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

The full report covers the main developments in Latvia with respect to the standardization of geographical names in the following areas: national standardization (geographical names authorities, changes in legislation and the results of the nationwide crowdsourcing action, the Place Names Bee); domestic geographical names databases/registers (the Latvian Place Names database, the National Address Register, the Latvian Place Names Card Index); electronic and printed dictionaries; names relating to consulting and educational websites; international and national events held in Latvia (the international scientific conference on onomastic investigations, the 21st meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Working Group on Exonyms, the first regional Place Names Day); the treatment of names on maps and in geospatial data; and exonyms.

The report also provides links to Latvian web sources related to geographical names and includes the contact information of the institutions involved.

*GEGN.2/2019/1

* Compiled by Vita Strautniece (Latvian Geospatial Information Agency) using data provided by Latvian Geospatial Information Agency; Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia; State Land Service (Address Register Section); State Language Centre; Jāņa sēta Map Publishers

The report covers the period between the 11th United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the 1st session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN).

I. International activities

(UNCSGN Resolutions VI/1, IV/24, II/20)

Latvia is a member state of the Baltic division of UNGEGN. By the principle of rotation Latvia acts as coordinator of the Baltic division for 4 years since the 11th UNCSGN (2017).

Experts of Latvia participated in:

- 1) The 11th United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, and 30th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) (New York, 7-18 August 2017);
- 2) The 19th meeting of the Baltic Division (Vilnius, Lithuania, May 21–24, 2018);
- 3) The UNGEGN Scientific Symposium on the role and importance of expert knowledge in the standardization of geographical names in conjunction with its Joint Divisions and Working Group Meetings of UNGEGN (Brussels, Belgium, October 2018).

The 21th Meeting of the UNGEGN working group on Exonyms was hosted by LGIA in collaboration with the Latvian Language Institute (Riga, Latvia, September 24-26, 2018). 36 participants from 16 countries took part in it. The main theme was categorization of exonyms.

II. National activities

1. Names authorities (UNCSGN Resolution I/4 A.)

There are no changes regarding the structure and responsibilities of Latvian geographical names authorities during the reporting period.

The decision makers (having rights to adopt the official names) are: Parliament and Government; several ministries, the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA) and all municipalities. Controlling and advisory body is the State Language Centre. Consulting and scientific bodies are: the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, LGIA, and the Latvian Language Agency. LGIA is responsible for approving official names of the natural features. Names of 209 features are approved during the reporting period.

A consultative expert body with recommendatory rights, the Place Names Sub-commission of the Latvian Language Experts Board, the State Language Centre appraises the official name proposals, takes care of straightening out Latvian toponymy and protection of geographical names as a cultural heritage. It consists of 9 experts in linguistics, geography and cartography. The Sub-commission should be in session at least once per 2 months, the consulting and conclusion-making via e-mail is being practiced, too.

In 2014-2019 the State Language Centre has been working on a voluminous conclusion regarding the official name proposals (for more than 4.000 natural features) submitted by LGIA. Accordingly the Regulations on the Toponymic Information, the conclusion is a basis for approving official names for nature features. A conclusion regarding the official names proposals for 271 nature features is prepared and submitted to LGIA.

131 conclusions regarding the official names proposals for 11 street names, 1 public road name, 115 estate names, 2 lake names, 1 forest name and 1 railway station name were prepared and submitted to local authorities during the reporting period.

Guidelines on forming certain names for addressed objects at populated places ("Vadlīnijas atsevišķu adresācijas objektu nosaukumu veidošanai apdzīvotās vietās") are issued in 2018, available at: http://vvc.gov.lv/advantagecms/export/docs/komisijas/vadlinijas_nomenklaturvardi.pdf

2. Legislative acts (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4 B, C, E, VII/5, VIII/9)

The main legislative acts regarding the geographical names standardization in Latvia are the same as during the previous reporting period: the State Language Law, the Geospatial Information Law and the Regulations on the Toponymic Information. The Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas (stating the administrative and territorial division of Latvia) and the Regulations on the Address System also have an impact on the geographical names standardization.

Amendments to the Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas are prepared and submitted to the Parliament in 2018. Consideration of them began in 2019. The main goal of the amendments – to keep more than 4000 populated places registered in the National Address Register by expanding the criteria for recognizing official villages to fit also small settlements with disperse built-up areas, not having specific urban elements.

Regulations on the Toponymic Information was amended in April, 2018, to establish the control of the State Language Centre over the naming and renaming of villages and smaller address features as well as all small man-made geographical features and real estates: local governments have to ask an opinion of the State Language Centre in all these cases now.

3. Field collection of place names (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4 B, VII/5)

The field collection of place names has continued mainly in a framework of student tutoring and a scientific research work at the University of Latvia, Latvian Academy of Culture and at some other institutions of higher education.

Crowdsourcing website with electronic place names database *Tautas vietvārdu datubāze* (<https://vietvardi.lv/talka/>) is maintained by the Latvian Language Institute and Institute of Mathematics and Computer Sciences of the University of Latvia since the February 2017. It is open for any interested and enables to register place name, its spelling and pronunciation, localization (in the parish and on the map), cultural, historical and linguistic data of the place names. More than 5000 names are collected so far.

The nationwide campaign "Place Names Bee" to fill the database was organized for the period February - September 2018. The most diligent participant and the richest in place names county were nominated monthly. The "Place Names Bee" concludes with the Place Names Day, celebrated as a solemn event in the National Library (Riga, October 20, 2017). All the winners, representatives of the counties richest in collected names, as well as interested parties met there to summarize the results, exchange experience, impressions and opinions.

4. Toponymic data files and gazetteers (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4 E)

The **Geographical Names Database of Latvia** maintained by the Laboratory of Toponymy, LGIA, contains 169.4 thousand names of 127.2 thousand features (data on 2nd January 2019). Each entry contains information on kind of feature, names of parts of the feature (if existing), a reference to the relevant map, the name of the administrative/ territorial area, in which feature lies, official

name (if approved), etc. The location of named features basically is characterized by the coordinates of the point and areal object's centers, and mouths of flowing water features. Besides that:

- flowing water features are characterized by rough geometries (lines);
- drawing of areal feature geometries (mainly villages, occasionally forests and bogs) was launched in 2013-2014.

The concise public version of the Geographical Names Database (8th edition, containing 137 thousand names of 105 thousand geographical features located in Latvia) is available at <http://vietvardi.lgia.gov.lv> (user interface in Latvian only, a brief description in English is available at <http://map.lgia.gov.lv>).

The **National Address Register** maintained by the State Land Service includes names of all administrative territories and territorial units of Latvia (110 counties, 497 civil parishes, 76 cities and towns), 6.313 officially recognized villages (number of official villages is decreasing slightly), 17.741 streets, 223.307 houses, other buildings and land units intended for buildings (data on January 15, 2019). Names search in the State Address Register is available on the data distribution portal of the State Land Service of Latvia at: <https://www.kadastrs.lv/> (in Latvian and English). Search of real estate names is also available there.

The **Latvian Place Names Card Index** (or card file) (approximately 1 000 000 domestic geographical names) is maintained by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia (since the very beginning of the 19th century, no public access). The cards comprise mainly linguistic information. Digitizing of the basic part of the Card Index ~842 000 names – is completed. The work continues by digitizing notebooks of field work expeditions with more detailed information.

The Card Index serves as the main source for compiling the comprehensive linguistic dictionary “Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca” (Latvian Place Names Dictionary, in Latvian). The latest volume of the linguistic dictionary «Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca» (Latvian Place Names Dictionary, in Latvian) comprising toponyms “Saba-Sēža”, was published by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, in 2017. A new volume of toponyms “Sgajevski-Slotukalns” is being prepared now (approximately 17,000 place names of the Card Index will be compiled and processed).

In 2017, the **Electronic Historical Latvian Dictionary** (<http://www.tezaurs.lv/lvvv>) based on the “Corpus of Early Written Latvian Texts” (<http://www.korpuss.lv/senie/>) was opened. More than 480 historical proper names from historical sources (the Lord's Prayer of the 16th century, dictionaries of the 17th century, texts of oaths and laws, religious texts, so-called dedication poetry) have been processed and included in the dictionary so far (search query for place names is *nloc.* ‘nomen loci’).

5. Toponymic education, consultations, exchange of knowledge on domestic and foreign names (UNCSGN Resolution VII/9)

The section “Vietvārdi” (Geographical names) devoted to the different aspects of toponymy (in Latvian) is maintained on the *Website of LGIA Products and Services*: <http://map.lgia.gov.lv>

The next volume of the “Onomastica Lettica” (No. 5) was published in 2018 by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia. Four articles discuss the origin, semantics, history and structure of place names.

The public webpage <http://www.valodaskonsultacijas.lv> offers answers to various questions about the spelling and pronunciation of the Latvian language, including information on the geographical names of Latvia.

Consultations on the spelling of foreign geographical names, etc. are available at the Department of Language Development of the Latvian Language Agency.

The first regional **Place Names Day** was organized in collaboration of the Latvian Language Institute with Latvian Geospatial Information Agency and Valka municipality (Turna, northeastern Latvia, October 20, 2018). Researchers and local pupils carried out the field work in the Ērgeme civil parish (approximately 80 place names were collected). Presentations about regional place names, their significance and georeferencing were given in the local center of culture. The event ended with a local place-names quiz with copies of cards from the Latvian Place Names Card Index.

International scientific conference “Onomastic Investigations” with more than 80 participants was organized in May 10-12, 2018 by the Latvian Language Institute. Many presentations were on place names, their semantics, origin, use and standardization. The compendium of abstracts is available on the website of the Institute:

http://www.lulavi.lv/media/upload/tiny/files/OP2018_Abstracts_25.04.pdf.

6. Geographical names in cartography (UNCSGN Resolution VII/5)

LGIA has continued the topographic mapping projects. The most significant cartographic projects regarding the geographical names are:

1) The **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:50 000** (131 sheet) is being prepared in digital and printed versions; the 3rd edition started in 2012 (35% of sheets were completed until March, 2018). All the toponymy for this map is being compiled and updated by the Laboratory of Toponymy;

2) The **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000** (2792 sheets) is being prepared in digital format only; the 3rd edition started in 2009 and was completed in April, 2017; the 4th edition started in September, 2016 (25% of sheets were completed until March, 2019). The toponymy for this map is being compiled and updated by cartographers using the Geographical Names Database of Latvia, National Register of addresses and advice/assistance of the Laboratory of Toponymy, if needed.

Toponymic work at LGIA as far as possible follows the principle stated in the UN resolution VII/5 in 1998 - geographical names standardization, based on a local usage of the local place names forms (collected through the extensive field work during 1990-s).

The Latvian Geospatial Information Agency Map Browser “**LĢIA Karšu Pārlūks**” (<https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv>) maintained by LGIA offers search of geographical names on the latest versions of different maps of Latvia in scales 1: 1 000 000 - 1:10 000 (central part of Riga at scale 1: 2 000) prepared by LGIA. The toponymic layer from the Topographic map scale 1:10 000 along with the National Address Register data can be used for the search. Rough linear geometries – traces for watercourse names from the Geographical Names Database are also accessible there. The Map Browser is available at <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv> (user interface in Latvian and in English).

The private mapping company “Jāņa sēta Map Publishers” is the only enterprise in the Latvia preparing world and national atlases and cartographic editions for schools. The **map viewer of Baltic countries “Baltic Maps”** offers geographical names search on the maps prepared by “Jāņa sēta Map Publishers” (<http://www.balticmaps.eu>) (user interface in English and Russian).

7. Exonyms and country names (UNCSGN Resolutions VI/10, V/11)

As Latvian is a flexive language, it is impossible to use most of the foreign geographical names without endings in Latvian. Moreover, the cultural-historical value of traditional Latvian exonyms is recognized, Regulations on the Toponymic Information has stated the preservation of them. The responsible authority for **standardization of the Latvian forms of foreign geographical names**

is the Latvian Language Experts Board at the State Language Centre. The State Language Centre's website (section „Valstu un valodu nosaukumi” (Names of countries and languages)) maintains lists of standardized Latvian names of the countries, languages and regions of the European Union Member States („Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu reģioni”) is available at: <http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=240>.

The most extensive Latvian database comprising Latvian exonyms and renderings is maintained by the private Map Publishing Company “Jāņa sēta Map Publishers”. It contains 218.000 geographical names in their original languages, as well as exonyms and renderings: 91.000 – into Latvian, 34.000 – into Estonian, 14.000 into Lithuanian, 10.000 into Russian (no public access).

Further information may be obtained from:

Latvijas Geotelpiskās informācijas aģentūra,

(Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA))

Ojāra Vācieša iela 43

Rīga, LV-1004, Latvia

www.lgia.gov.lv

e-mail: info@lgia.gov.lv

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Valsts valodas centrs

(State Language Centre)

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Valsts zemes dienests

(State Land Service)

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Some useful links**A. Legislative Acts**

- 1) Geospatial Information Law (“Ģeotelpiskās informācijas likums”) [in Latvian](#); [unofficial English translation](#);
- 2) Regulations on Addressing („Adresācijas noteikumi”), [in Latvian only](#);
- 3) Official Language Law (“Valsts valodas likums”) [in Latvian](#); [unofficial English translation](#);
- 4) Data on administrative and territorial division of Latvia: Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas (“Administratīvo teritoriju un apdzīvoto vietu likums,”) the actual version in Latvian with Annex 1 (list of cities), Annex 2 (list of municipalities and the territorial divisional units thereof): [in Latvian](#); [unofficial English translation](#) of the [previous version of the law](#));
- 5) Database of Translated legislative acts - [search for unofficial English translations](#).

B. Geographical names and maps of Latvia

- 1) Place Names (Geographical Names) Database of Latvia (Latvijas vietvārdu datubāze), [public version \(in Latvian only\)](#), description in [English](#);
- 2) [Country Names List in Latvian](#) (2006);
- 3) Lists of standardized Latvian names of the countries and languages and regions of the European Union Member States („Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu reģioni”) [in Latvian](#);
- 4) Latvian Geospatial Information Agency Map Browser (“LĢIA Karšu Pārlūks”) (in Latvian and [English](#)), description in [English](#);
- 5) Historical maps portal of the Latvian National Library (LNB [Vēsturisko karšu portāls](#)): <http://kartes.lndb.lv/> (users interface in Latvian only);
- 6) GISNET Map Browser - [Soviet topographic maps of Latvia and a historical national map \(scale 1:75 000, compiled in 1930-s\)](#);
- 7) Jāņa Sēta Map Browser [Balticmaps](#) (in Latvian, English and Russian).