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**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names****2021 session**

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Item 12 of the provisional agenda*

**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity,
including indigenous, minority and regional languages and
multilingual issues****Blank areas: naming and renaming landscapes in Germany****Summary****

Together with other geographical names, the names of landscapes are important components of cultural heritage and regional identity. In Germany, unlike placenames and street names, landscape names are not officially defined or legally protected. In addition to a number of old and well-established landscape names, such as the *Schwarzwald* (Black Forest), which can be found on old maps, a vast number of often lesser-used and lesser-known names exist that cover smaller parts of landscapes. In the past, the use of landscape names was limited by the space restrictions of printed map sheets. The question of evaluating and selecting landscape names is now raised once again in the age of sheet-cut and scale-free “geoviewers”.

In 1983, the geographer Herbert Liedtke took an important methodological step with his map entitled “*Deutschland: Landschaften, Namen und Abgrenzungen*” (“Germany: landscapes, names and demarcations”), which was at a scale of 1:1,000,000. In his map, landscape names were included according to strict criteria, such as their continuous use on topographic maps and in public life over a long time. The map was last revised in 2017; the experiences gathered in that process are to be discussed and will serve as a basis for the further development of the map and the work of the German permanent committee on geographical names.

Two aspects are striking about the map:

- There are overlapping areas covered by various names of landscapes
- On the other hand, there are many blank areas representing mostly larger, less structured landscapes.

* [GEGN.2/2021/1](#).

** The full report was prepared by Andreas Dix, University of Bamberg, Institute for Geography, Germany. It will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2021/45/CRP.45, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/2nd_session_2021.



Especially the blank areas never fail to bother map users. There seems to be a great need to live in a clearly defined and named landscape. People often turn to maps in which the national territory is neatly divided, from a scientific perspective, into areas without overlap, and names are based on criteria such as natural features, soil type, land cover or climate.

On the other hand, cultural or historical aspects are never considered. In Germany, as in other countries, this includes the “*Naturräumliche Gliederung*” (“Natural landscape classification”), which was developed from the 1950s onwards in both East and West Germany as a basis for spatial planning. The landscape names used are partly traditional, but more often are newly formulated and compound. The nomenclature is mostly derived from geomorphology and is not common in everyday life. However, Wikipedia has popularized this type of classification and the names associated with it in recent years because it is easier to process, even by laypeople. However, the different delimitations and the mixing of names lead, once again, to uncertainty. At the same time, new landscape names are mostly reinvented for commercial reasons.
