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**National and international standardization of
geographical names: names collection, office
treatment, national authorities, features beyond a
single sovereignty and international cooperation**

A guide to deciding on a place name

Summary**

Between 2015 and 2019, a series of territorial reforms were carried out in France, resulting in the merger of several regions and many communes, and in the creation of new place names.

However, the National Committee on Toponymy (CNT) was not involved in the design of the reforms or in their implementation by local authorities. It could only take note retrospectively of the poor quality of some of the new names adopted. From that point on, the Committee rallied to provide assistance to decision-makers and, most importantly, to elected officials in order to improve the handling of place names.

Beginning in 2015, the Committee wrote to the precursor directors (*préfigureurs*) of the new regions to draw their attention to the issue, outline the points to take into account and offer assistance. While these letters arrived too late to be of use for the naming of the regions, they did serve to share the Committee's concerns regarding the need for high-quality place names.

During the wave of mergers of communes that followed, the Committee, with the backing of the Ministry of the Interior and the Association of French Mayors and Presidents of Municipal Districts, offered assistance and provided specific advice when requested to do so by a city council or prefecture.

The Committee made use of this experience and took advantage of a pause in the reform process linked to the holding of municipal elections in order to develop a practical guide for elected officials entitled “Deciding on a place name”, which it published online in January 2021. The guide is intended to raise awareness of the

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

** The full report was prepared by Pierre Jaillard, President of the National Committee on Toponymy and Chair of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (France). It will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2021/55/CRP.55, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/2nd_session_2021/.



cultural, historic and political importance of place names, provide advice on choosing a place name, set out the applicable spelling rules for place names, outline the necessary legal expertise and procedures, and provide additional reference information. The graphic design of the guide was done by the Ministry of Culture, and the Association of French Mayors and Presidents of Municipal Districts is assisting with its dissemination.

The Committee believes that the guide may be of broader use to all those interested in place names and in place name decision-making. The Committee hopes that the guide will encourage decision makers to be more cautious and citizens to be more vigilant with regard to the issue of place names.
