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Geographical Names
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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**

Submitted by 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.

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.

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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.

Blank areas: naming and renaming landscapes in Germany

Names of landscapes are an important aid to orientation in space. In contrast to names of towns or streets, however, they often cannot be proven and delimited without contradiction.

Nevertheless, some basic characteristics can be noted:

- In terms of size, they stand between settlement and field names on the one hand and country names on the other.
- For the most part, they mark larger geographical units that are clearly distinguished from neighbouring units, e.g. by natural, cultural and historical features.
- The boundary to smaller and clearly nameable geographical objects, such as mountains or valleys, is often fluid.
- In contrast to their number and significance, in Germany they are generally not names that are legally binding.

Despite this restriction, the Standing Committee on Geographical Names (StAGN) has been dealing with landscape names for many years, not least because many enquiries refer to them.

Although there is not yet a comprehensive database of landscape names for all German-speaking areas, a map is available at least for the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, showing landscape names and the respective areas they designate in their boundaries:

This is the map "Germany. Landscapes. Namen und Abgrenzungen", scale 1:1,000,000, published by the Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy (BKG) in close cooperation with the StAGN. This map was drafted firstly in 1983 by Herbert Liedtke and has been updated several times since then. The publication of the current 7th edition in 2017 was used by the author to test new procedures for the verification of landscape names by using digital sources and thus to present material for a further development of the map.

First of all, it should be noted what the special features of the map are and what makes it valuable for work with landscape names:

- The map was drawn up on the basis of the pragmatics of the names. This means that only those names were taken into account that are also widely used. These include names that designate natural, historical and economic spaces, which are also colloquially referred to as landscapes in German. What a landscape is, however, can never be precisely defined, especially in a cultural and historical context.
- The delineation of landscapes, represented by lines, is a new piece of information, since topographic maps can normally only indicate the approximate location of a landscape by writing.
- The result was a list of 754 names with the areas they designate, as they are commonly used. It was never intended to be a complete collection. Only those names could be selected that could still be depicted with sufficient accuracy on a small-scale map at a scale of 1:1,000,000.

In the meantime, the names and their geometries have also been included in the Web Map Service of the BKG "Geographical Names" 1:250,000 (GN 250).

The evaluation of the following overview maps originally served as an essential basis for the selection of the landscape names:

- "Amtliche Übersichtskarte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1:500,000" (World Series 1404), Frankfurt am Main 1978 ff.

- "Relief and Landscape Names 1:1,000,000", Bad Godesberg 1965.
- "Regionale geographische Namen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik ca. 1:800,000", Berlin 1982, compiled by Erfried Haack.

The selection of names was thus based on a decidedly cartographic logic. It is true that the names in maps are based on extensive preliminary research of existing text-based material, but often other criteria, such as available space or legibility, decide on inclusion in a map. Therefore, at the beginning of the editing of the new edition, the question was also posed as to what extent these names, which were taken from maps at that time, are still congruent with general usage today.

For the new edition of the map, all 754 names were analysed and checked again for their common usage. In contrast to the past, where only overview maps at a scale of 1:250,000 and smaller could be evaluated, it is now possible to explore the use of the respective landscape name in much broader contexts with a reasonable expenditure of time. This includes digital offers such as the following:

- Online encyclopaedias, especially Wikipedia. Here it can be assumed that users who are particularly familiar with the use of names write or edit these articles.
- Virtual German Bibliography. A nearly complete detailed digital bibliography of literature of German regions and federal states. Here it can be assumed that the use of landscape names is mainly reflected in regional literature.
- Gemeinsame Normdatei (GND) or Integrated Authority File. This is a controlled set of names that also includes geographical names and is used to assign keywords in library catalogues and for research in data holdings.
- Digital language corpora, such as the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (DWDS).

A very good result was that most of the names could actually be confirmed by this check, i.e. they are recorded as common in other non-cartographic sources.

For many names, however, a need for further research regarding spelling variants and the delimitation of the named areas could be identified.

How can the map now be further developed in the next steps?

In Germany, the surveying administrations of the federal states are responsible for the topographic map series up to a scale of 1:100,000. The surveying administration of the Free State of Bavaria, for example, has inquired because it has found differences in its name inventory with that of the map. So a more detailed analysis and correction of the names in the indicated doubtful cases is a necessary next step. Ideally, this should be done with the names of landscapes of all 16 federal states. One difficulty here is that despite close coordination of the work of the administrations, there are differences in the way landscape names are handled.

For further considerations it is important to know what the needs of the users of the map are. This can be better answered by analysing the previous requests:

Some of the users miss landscape names on the map that they themselves consider introduced. This can have two reasons. Either the landscape named by the landscape name is too small for the scale of the overview map and cannot be represented, or the name has been invented only recently, either for advertising reasons or to give landscapes a new image. Thus it was asked why the name Itzgrund, as the name of the wide river valley of the Itz, a tributary of the Main near Bamberg in Northern Bavaria, did not appear on the 1:1,000,000 scale map. It soon turned out that it does appear in the topographic maps in the larger scale and has also appeared for some time, e.g. on old maps. Its absence therefore has only to do with the scale.

In principle, the guideline is to be cautious with the adaptation and new inclusion of names. Of course, it may be that names become naturalised and are used everywhere, but often it remains with individual records. However, this only becomes apparent over a longer period of use of the name. For example, it was asked whether the naming of a Deutsche Bahn train with the landscape name "Neuseenland" is common. There are corresponding efforts by local actors to name the lake landscape, which was created south of Leipzig in a post mining landscape (former open pit lignite mines) situation. In fact, there is little evidence of this so far and it remains to be seen which landscape name will prevail for this young and very distinctive landscape.

Finally, there are requests that refer to areas that apparently or actually do not have a landscape name. This often confuses users because they cannot explain to themselves that they live in a region that is, so to speak, nameless. This is due to the fact that in the map landscape names are not contiguous without gaps and sometimes overlap. In everyday use, landscapes can often never be delimited exactly as it is possible on the map.

Now, competing naming methods offer exactly this and make the directories and maps created for this purpose very attractive for use in digital format. This includes a natural landscape classification developed in both German states. In the Federal Republic of Germany, a comprehensive map series at a scale of 1:200,000 was produced between 1953 and 1962, together with explanatory notes, in which the entire country was divided into a hierarchical system of areas without overlap according to strict scientific criteria, such as relief, soils, vegetation, climate, etc. The problem here is that these maps do not contain any information about the area in question. The problem here is that these areas were renamed in very different ways. On the one hand, the established names were used, on the other hand, many new terms were introduced that are not traditionally used as landscape names. Most of these names were derived from the technical vocabulary of geomorphology. In this way, a mixture of traditional, introduced names with new terms was created. Sometimes it is also not possible to decide which name was newly invented and which has a longer history.

The advent of digital methods and the replacement of traditional printed reference works by Wikipedia has made the adoption of such very clearly structured maps and name inventories more attractive, because in this way one can cover large areas relatively quickly. It can be seen, for example, that in Wikipedia's German-language articles on landscapes, these names are readily used in the corresponding descriptive sections, even though they were not actually introduced according to the previous criteria of the StAGN and are not landscape names in a narrower sense.

The influence is further strengthened by the fact that these names from the natural landscape classification are often used by nature conservation authorities to name and delimit nature conservation areas of all categories. In addition, these names have a new quality because, in contrast to traditional landscape names, they have to be officially defined by laws and ordinances. In this way, names become naturalised or traditional names are changed in their previous delimitation. This occasionally leads to the different use of names, which cannot be solved by a simple definition.

Two current enquiries from the federal state of Brandenburg can be cited as evidence of this:

The historical landscape of the Havelland is usually delimited by the arc-shaped course of the Havel River. However, the Westhavelland Nature Park, established in 1998, now covers a much larger area that extends far beyond the Havel. This led to a corresponding enquiry because of the lack of clarity as to how the Havelland should actually be delineated.

In the north of Brandenburg there is a former large military training area created after the Second World War, which is part of a larger landscape called either Wittstock-Ruppiner Heide or Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide. The military training area was closed in 2009. The name Wittstock-Ruppiner Heide is documented in the GDR's natural area classification, which was developed parallel to that in West Germany. It was then adopted in nature conservation and in 2000 part of the former military training area was registered with the EU as the FFH area Wittstock-Ruppiner Heide. This name thus has a legally binding, and therefore official, character. At the same time, however, since reunification

in 1990, there has been a long-lasting protest against the continued use of the military training area by the German Armed Forces, which has received nationwide and international attention. In this context, the area was now always called Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide. In the meantime, this resistance, which is strongly rooted in the collective memory of the region, and with it this variant of the landscape name, is increasingly communicated as part of the regional history. The use of this name has intensified again since 2011, because now the name Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide is used by the tourist side. In this sense, it is more present in the public, but at the same time, of course, the official name of the FFH area, which differs from it, remains. In this situation, the surveying administration of the Land of Brandenburg has asked which name is preferable. This decision must ultimately be made in the state, but it shows the difficulties that arise from the different ways of dealing with landscape names. The StAGN was at least able to provide material for further discussions through a detailed reconstruction of the recent naming history of this landscape.

Finally, it should be discussed whether in the future landscape names should not only be collected on a map at a scale of 1:1,000,000, but whether names of smaller landscape units that can only be represented on maps at larger scales (e.g. 1:100,000 and larger) should also be included and digitally represented. When using printed maps, the scales are separate and the use of landscape names results from the intended use, for which an appropriate map scale must be selected. In digital web map services, where sheet-section-free and scale-free research is possible, the blank areas, are even more obvious due to the transfer of landscape names from the analogue map series and one often cannot estimate when a name appears and why.

The map's further path to landscape names cannot therefore consist of filling seemingly blank areas with names which follow only a scientific logic or even with newly invented names. Rather, the work of the StAGN consists in pointing out the different origins of the landscape names. The names that have already been introduced, which often have a long historical tradition, should be highlighted and explained in their variations and meanings, as has already been done. Of course, the naming of landscapes is not finished and nothing is static. Therefore, current processes of naming should be observed and then evaluated. This is also why the enquiries are so valuable for the work of the StAGN. If, in the course of time, new names become naturalised in the public, they should then also be adopted.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the the report and the progress made for naming blank areas in Germany.
- (b) Comment and provide input on similar work being carried out in other countries.