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

Report of Latvia

Submitted by Latvia**

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Summary:

The national report of Latvia covers the two-year period 2019–2020 between the 1st and the 2nd Session of UNGEGN.

The full report covers the main developments in Latvia with respect to the standardization of geographical names in the following areas: international activities, national geographical names authorities, legislative basis, geographical names collection, databases/registers (the Place Names Database of Latvia, the National Address Register, the Latvian Place Names Card Index etc.), promotion of indigenous Livonian place names etc., consulting on toponymy, publications, educational events, treatment of names on maps and map browsers, exonyms.

The report also provides links to Latvian web sources related to geographical names (incl. legislative acts) and the contact information of the institutions involved.

The report covers the period 2019-2020 (between the 1st and the 2nd Session of 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 a coordinator of the Baltic division for 4 years since the 11th UNCSGN (2017).

Experts of Latvia participated in the 1st Session of the (new) United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) (New York, 29 April - 3 May 2019).

The 20th Meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN was hosted by the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency in collaboration with the Latvian Language Institute (Riga, Latvia, September 24-26, 2019). 45 participants from all 5 member states took part in it (for more detailed information on the Meeting see the Report of the Baltic Division).

II. National activities**I. 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:

<i>No.</i>	<i>Names authorities</i>	<i>Features which names they shall assign or approve</i>
1.	Parliament and Government	Units of administrative and territorial division
2.	Distinct ministries	Names of features they are responsible for (state protected areas and cultural monuments, public transport features, maritime navigation features, quarries, forestries etc.)
3.	Latvian Geospatial Information Agency	Natural features
4.	All municipalities	Addressing system features (villages and smaller), parts of towns, parts of villages, artificial water bodies, small hydroelectric power stations, parks, cemeteries, immovable property (real estates), and other man-made features including natural, historical and cultural monuments of local significance

Controlling and advisory body is the State Language Centre. A consultative expert body with recommendatory rights, the Place Names Sub-commission of the Latvian Language Expert Commission, 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.

Consulting and scientific bodies are: the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, Latvian Language Agency and the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency.

In 2014-2020 the State Language Centre continued working on a voluminous conclusion regarding the official name proposals (for more than 4.000 natural features) submitted by the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency. Accordingly the *Regulations Regarding Geographical Names Information*, the conclusion is a basis for approving official names for nature features.

275 conclusions regarding the official names proposals for: 1 county name, 90 village names, 63 street names, 11 public road names, 1 square name, 3 names for public parks, 25 cemetery names, 388 real estate names, 393 lake names, 24 river names, 3 channel names and 3 reservoir names were prepared and submitted to responsible place names authorities during the reporting period.

Names for 322 natural features (mainly lakes) were approved by the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency accordingly with the conclusions during the reporting period (2019-2020).

2. Legislative basis (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4, 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 Regarding Geographical Names Information* (Regulations on Toponymic Information).

The *Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas* (prescribing the basic procedures on naming of relevant features) and the *Regulations on the Address System* (regulating also the naming of addressing system features) have a positive impact on the geographical names standardization, too.

A new **administrative-territorial reform** is under way. On June 10, 2020, the Parliament (Saeima) passed the new *Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas*. The law determines a **significant reduction in the number of local governments**, providing 42 local governments instead of the current 119. Borders of lower level – territorial units – remain unchanged. Also it **expands the criteria for recognizing official villages to fit also small settlements** with disperse built-up areas, not having specific urban elements. This allows to keep more than 4000 disperse villages registered in the National Address Register and to register other small historical villages in it. The administrative territorial reform and new administrative-territorial division of Latvia is going to be implemented by July 1, 2021. A new version of the *Regulations on Addressing* is in preparation due this.

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 and 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 the 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 name. More than 5500 names are collected so far.

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

The Place Names Database of Latvia maintained by the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (Laboratory of Toponymy), contains 178.6 thousand names of 131.1 thousand features (data on December 30, 2020). 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), recommended name, other names etc. The location of named features basically is characterized by the coordinates of the point, centre of areal feature, mouth of flowing water feature. Besides that, all flowing water features are characterized by rough geometries (lines). Drawing of areal feature (villages, forests, bogs, meadows and named areas) rough geometries launched in 2013-2014 was continued extensively in 2020. The concise public version of the Geographical Names Database (8th edition, containing more than 140 thousand names of 11.6 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 <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/place-names-database-0>).

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), 6,293 officially recognized villages (number of official villages is decreasing slightly), 18,052 streets, 222,596 houses, other buildings and land units intended for buildings (data on February 19, 2021). 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/> (interface in Latvian and English). Search of real estate names is also available there. Textual and spatial data covers all the territory of Latvia.

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. Digitized basic part of the Card Index - 842 000 scanned place names cards – is available for scientific research and place names standardization purposes now (by the request). The work continues by digitizing notebooks of field work expeditions with more detailed information. In 2020, more than 13 000 pages of the place names collected by students of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Latvia were scanned.

The Card Index serves as the main source for compiling the comprehensive linguistic dictionary “Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca” (Dictionary of Latvian Place Names, in Latvian, with preface in English). A new volume of the dictionary with toponyms “Sgajevski-Sļozovka” is being prepared now (approximately 21,000 place names are arranged in etymological nests and edited, supplemented with grammatical, historical, cultural data).

The Electronic Historical Latvian Dictionary (<https://tezaurs.lv/lvvv/>) based on the “Corpus of Early Written Latvian Texts” (<http://www.korpuss.lv/senie/>) comprises now more than 500 historical proper names from historical sources (search query for place names is *nloc*. ‘nomen loci’).

5. Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names (UNCSGN Resolutions VIII/1, IX/5)

Latvia is a home for the one of the world’s most endangered indigenous languages – **Livonian**. The State Language Law determines, that state shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the Livonian language as the language of the indigenous (autochthon) population. Names of places in the Livonian coastal territory shall also be created and used in Livonian.

The Livonian Institute of the University of Latvia (founded in 2018) maintains **database of Livonian place names** (current public version with 250 Livonian place names is available at: <http://www.livones.net/lili/en/vietvardi/>). Institute also deals with the standardization of Livonian place names, collection of place names from various sources and mapping them (active work on collection and mapping was begun in 2020). During 2021 it is planned that map-based public Livonian place name register featuring more than 1000 Livonian place names will become available for public use in cooperation with the mapping company “Jāņa sēta Map Publishers”. The Livonian Institute also works with promoting the use of Livonian place names in areas of Latvia historically inhabited by Livonians and the introduction of public road signs featuring Livonian place names.

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

On October in 2019 and 2020 Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia in collaboration with Latvian Geospatial Information Agency, Faculty of Humanities of the University of Latvia as well as Viesīte and Brocēni Municipalities organized **Place Names Days** in Southern and Western Latvia – in Viesīte and Gaiķi parishes. Regional Place Names Days are organized every year to promote awareness of regional place names, their importance and role, to summarize the results, exchange experience, impressions and opinions. Presentations about regional place names, their significance and georeferencing were given in the local centres of culture. The events ended with a local place-names quiz and concert. More than 300 place names were collected in these days.

Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, continued to consult on place names. More than 400 answers on toponomastic issues were given for state institutions and all interested citizens.

Consultations on the spelling of foreign geographical names, etc. are available at the Department of Language Development of the Latvian Language Agency. The public webpage <http://www.valodaskonsultacijas.lv> maintained by Latvian Language Agency offers answers to various questions about the spelling and pronunciation of the Latvian language, including information on the geographical names of Latvian.

The proceedings of the international scientific conference “Onomastic Investigations” was published in 2020 by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia. The volume “Onomastic Investigations II” comprises 15 articles on the origin, semantics, history, motivation, grammar, structure and digitizing of place names.

Articles on Latvian toponymy have been included also in a book on Latvian surnames (Mežs, I., Stafecka, A., Siliņa-Piņķe, R., Kovaļevska, O. *Latviešu uzvārdi arhīvu materiālos: Kurzeme, Zemgale, Sēlija = Latvian Surnames in Archival Sources. Kurzemes, Zemgale, Selija*) Rīga: LVA, 2019, pp. 38.–73.) and in a periodical, devoted to language practice (Valodas prakse: vērojumi un ieteikumi = *Language practice: observations and recommendations*) Nr. 14. Rīga: LVA, pp. 131.–135.), both issued by the Latvian Language Agency.

Articles on Livonian place name collection and use have been published (e.g. Ernštreits, Valts (2020). Livonian place names: Documentation, research, problems, and opportunities. *Eesti ja Soome-Ugri Keeleteaduse Ajakiri = The Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (ESUKA – JEFUL)* Vol. 11, N 1, 213-233.)

The Latvian Geospatial Information Agency deals with information on its work on geographical names standardization and other toponymic issues in the section “Areas of Work” (<https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/areas-work>) of its website.

Lectures and popular discussions on different aspects of geographical names was included also in programmes of public events:

- 1) “*A Place Names Hour*” during the Latvia’s anniversary event organized by the Latvian National Library in 2019;
- 2) Evening of conversations “*About places and names*” in series of public conversations “*Language evenings. About a language – is it interesting?!*” organized by the Latvian Language Agency in 2020. Afterwards transcript of it was published in a book (Par valodu – tas ir interesanti?! Sarunas = *About a language – is it interesting?! Conversations. Language evenings*. Rīga: LVA, 2020, 204.–231. pp).

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

The most significant state cartography 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 in digital version was completed in 2020. All the toponymy for this map was updated by the Laboratory of Toponymy;

2) The **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000** (2792 sheets) is being prepared in digital version only. The 4th edition is in process. The toponymy for this map is being compiled and updated by cartographers using geographical names data from the Place Names Database and the National Register of Addresses, with advice/assistance of the Laboratory of Toponymy. The 4th edition is very special in sense that the first time in the practice of national cartography the cartographic features such as watercourses and waterbodies are linked with the UID of the features of the Place Names Database.

Toponymic work at the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency as far as it is 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 and elaborated and updated along with the cartographic production updating cycles).

The **Latvian Geospatial Information Agency Map Browser “LĢIA Karšu Pārlūks”** 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 this institution. 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 Place Names Database are also accessible there. The Map Browser is available at <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv>.

The private cartography and geospatial intelligence solution company “*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*” is the only enterprise in Latvia preparing world and national atlases and cartographic editions for schools. The **map viewer “Baltic Maps”** (<http://www.balticmaps.eu>) maintained by the company offers geographical names search on the maps prepared by “*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*”. Geographical names are presented in original languages (in original script (if Latin) or romanized).

8. 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 a list of standardized Latvian names of the countries and regions of the World (*Valstu un teritoriju atveidojumi latviešu valodā*), and a list of Latvian names of the countries, languages and regions of the European Union Member States (*Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu reģioni*) . The section 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 cartography and geospatial intelligence solution 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).

9. List of links

A. Legislative Acts

- 1) Official Language Law (Valsts valodas likums): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/14740-official-language-law>;
- 2) Regulations Regarding Geographical Names Information (Vietvārdu informācijas noteikumi): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/243610-regulations-regarding-geographical-names-information>;
- 3) Geospatial Information Law (Ģeotelpiskās informācijas likums): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/202999-geospatial-information-law>;
- 4) Data on administrative and territorial division of Latvia: Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas (Administratīvo teritoriju un apdzīvoto vietu likums): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/315654-law-on-administrative-territories-and-populated-areas>
- 5) Regulations on Addressing (Adresācijas noteikumi), in Latvian only: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/278402-adresacijas-noteikumi>;
- 6) Laws and Regulations of the Republic of Latvia in English: (https://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=60_109_111)

B. Geographical names and maps of Latvia

- 1) Place Names Database of Latvia (Latvijas Vietvārdu datubāze), public version (in Latvian only): <https://vietvardi.lgia.gov.lv/>, description in English: <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/place-names-database-0>;
- 2) Database of Livonian Place Names: <http://www.livones.net/lili/en/vietvardi/>;
- 3) Standardized Names of Countries and Territories in Latvian: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2018/218.9>;
- 4) Standardized names of regions of the European Union Member States in Latvian: https://vvc.gov.lv/image/catalog/dokumenti/ESdalibvalstu_reioni_21.05.2012.pdf;
- 5) Latvian Geospatial Information Agency Map Browser (LĢIA Karšu Pārlūks) <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv/karte/>, description in English: http://map.lgia.gov.lv/index.php?lang=2&cPath=4&txt_id=88
- 6) Historical maps portal of the Latvian National Library (LNB *Vēsturisko karšu portāls*): <http://kartes.lndb.lv/>;
- 7) Historical Maps Portal “Dodies”: <https://vesture.dodies.lv/>
- 8) GISNET Map Browser (Soviet topographic maps of Latvia and a historical national map, scale 1:75 000, compiled in 1920-30-s): <http://kartes.gisnet.lv/>
- 9) Jāņa Sēta Map Browser [Balticmaps](https://balticmaps.eu/lv) (user interface in Latvian, English and Russian): <https://balticmaps.eu/lv>.

Further information may be obtained from:

Latvijas Ģeotelpiskās informācijas aģentūra
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