



The presence of minority and indigenous languages in urban naming

**Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on Place Names 2023
Jointly organised by the University of the Free State and the Joint ICA/IGU
Commission on Toponymy**

Bloemfontein (South Africa), 26–29 September 2023

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EDITOR



UJ Press

The presence of minority and indigenous languages in urban naming

Published by UJ Press

University of Johannesburg

Library

Auckland Park Kingsway Campus

PO Box 524

Auckland Park

2006

<https://ujpress.uj.ac.za/>

Compilation ©Chrismi-Rinda Loth 2025

Chapters © Author(s) 2025

Published Edition © Chrismi-Rinda Loth 2025

First published 2025

<https://doi.org/10.64449/9781997468639>

978-1-997468-62-2 (Paperback)

978-1-997468-63-9 (PDF)

978-1-997468-64-6 (EPUB)

978-1-997468-65-3 (XML)

This publication had been submitted to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process prior to publication and all recommendations by the reviewers were considered and implemented before publication.

Proofreading: UJP

Cover design: Hester Roets, UJ Graphic Design Studio

Typeset in 10/15pt Cambria

This text was written using the ZRCOLA input system (<http://zrcola.zrc-sazu.si>), developed at the Science and Research Centre of SAZU in Ljubljana (<http://www.zrc-sazu.si>) by Peter Weiss.



PEER-REVIEW PROCESS

Abstracts submitted to the symposium were judged independently by two members of the symposium's scientific committee (made up of experts in the field) with regards to relevance to the symposium's theme, scientific rigour, originality, and contribution to the subject field. Authors whose abstracts were accepted after the stage-one review process were included in the conference presentation programme. Authors who wished to do so submitted their full papers for the conference proceedings. The Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on Place Names 2023 involved a rigorous double-blind peer-review process of the full papers. The review panel comprised six national and international experts on the subject of place names. Based on the outcome of the peer-review process, papers for the proceedings were selected based on the following criteria:

- Whether or not the paper disseminates original research
- Relevance to the theme
- Quality of organisation and writing

The rigorous double-blind peer-review process by the scientific review panel provided valuable comments and constructive criticism. Authors whose papers were accepted were provided with the anonymous reviewers' comments and requested to submit their revised papers. Provided that all comments were appropriately responded to, the final papers were included in the conference proceedings (ISBN: 978-1-997468-62-2). The members of the peer-review panel were not involved in the review of their own authored or co-authored papers. The role of the Editor was to ensure that the final papers incorporated the reviewers' comments, that the papers fully adhered to academic standards, and that the papers were arranged into their final order, as captured in the table of contents.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF THE PROCEEDINGS

- Prof. Theodorus du Plessis (University of the Free State, South Africa)
- Prof. Peter Jordan (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria / University of the Free State, South Africa)
- Dr Matjaž Geršič (Anton Melik Geographical Institute, Slovenia)
- Dr Boga Manatsha (University of Botswana, Botswana)
- Prof. Sambulo Ndlovu (University of Eswatini, Eswatini)
- Prof. Mabileba Kolobe (University of the Lesotho, Lesotho)

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FOREWORD

The seventh International Symposium on Place Names (ISPN) was held 26–29 September 2023 on the Bloemfontein campus of the University of the Free State, South Africa. These Proceedings are a collection of double-blind, peer-reviewed papers from the symposium. A note of sincere gratitude from myself as well as the ISPN Organising Committee to the reviewers for their valuable contribution.

ISPN 2023 was jointly hosted by the Department of South African Sign Language and Deaf Studies (incorporating the Unit for Language Facilitation and Empowerment) at the University of the Free State and the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy. This event was held as a partly dual event with the 27th International Afrilex Conference (African Association for Lexicography). Keynote sessions, workshops, and social events were open to delegates from both meetings. Prof. Thapelo J. Otlogetswe (University of Botswana, Botswana), the Africa keynote speaker, included a place-names aspect in his consideration of creating truly African dictionaries in his address, “Making African dictionaries African”. The international keynote speaker, Prof. Myriam Vermeerbergen (KU Leuven, Belgium, and Stellenbosch University, South Africa), provided an overview of lexicographic endeavours in sign languages, including toponymic considerations, in her talk “Sign language lexicography: A snapshot of past, present and future approaches”. Practising experts in their respective fields presented the two pre-conference workshops. These events were aimed at providing practical guidance to the audience. Dirkie Ebersohn from the National Institute for the Deaf (South Africa), presented on “Creating a bilingual Sign Language/English video glossary: The process at the National Institute for the Deaf (South Africa)”. From the Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu provided guidance on “Geographical names data processing and management: Data processing, database management and production of geographical names information and gazetteers”.



The theme of ISPN 2025 was “The presence of minority and indigenous languages in urban naming”, though submissions on other toponymic issues were accepted as well. Urban place names, i.e., the names of streets, squares, and other intra-urban structures, contain cultural and symbolic value and reflect political power. They can be descriptive, such as when they indicate direction, a landmark, or the function of a structure; they can be commemorative, reminding of persons, institutions, or events; or they can be neutral, such as when they are numbered or bear the names of flowers, birds, or planets. They serve as markers of the spatial relationship between humans, groups of humans, and all that encompasses the urban landscape. With this theme, we explore both formal and informal naming, what it means to name shared spaces, what roles these names play in social dynamics, and how these names can be managed.

A recurring recommendation throughout the studies presented here is the need for authoritative guidelines. However, such regulatory frameworks have to be considerate of the deep connection between the lived experiences of the communities within which the naming takes place, the richness of linguistic diversity, and the inevitability of multiple names. While standardisation is useful in pragmatic terms, the fact that place names serve as linguistic and cultural artefacts cannot be neglected. Innovative measures must be developed to document and present place names in non-mainstream languages, such as dialects that are not standardised or signed languages that do not have written forms. The history of the names of places, as well as the etymologies of those names, could be presented in an accessible manner to the general public, an outlook that was echoed in the symposium’s closing speech presented by Prof. Peter Jordan (then outgoing chair of the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy). Given that the majority of the papers in this selection explore naming in either indigenous or minority languages, the papers highlight the importance of critical evaluation of place-naming, a deeper understanding of naming processes, and the documentation of place-name etymologies.

The first paper, by Jordan, presents the problems associated with commemorative place names. Results from a survey of commemorative place names in Austria are presented, but the findings are supported by global case studies which render the results generalisable. Attention is drawn to a common regulatory gap in this regard. The focus then turns to two studies in the Kingdom of Lesotho, where the names of chiefs are considered in naming. Both these studies explore the Sothofication (from English to Sotho) of the place-namescape of the capital Maseru in the postcolonial era. In the absence of an official place-name authority, this development can be considered a natural expression

of cultural appreciation. Kolobe, Mokala, and Mosebi identify the themes prevalent in street naming and emphasise, in particular, the role of toponyms in conveying and transmitting cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge. Offering a more detailed look at the power dynamics at play during different administrative eras, Rapeane-Mathonsi includes flags as semiotic devices for consideration. These two studies both relied on input from the local community to identify and document the place names.

The next two surveys also depend on community collaboration, the first relating to a minority group and the second to a marginalised minority community. Geršič, Horvat, and Pipan show how Slovenic microtoponyms in Hungary document historical developments in terms of land ownership, inter-ethnic relations, and linguistic maintenance. Challenges of place-name planning for a language that is being officialised but not standardised, and the modus for which no considerations are made in the official guidelines, are explored by de Lange, Kotoyi, Mapeshoane, and du Plessis in their paper on toponyms in South African Sign Language.

Once again thank you to all the authors who submitted their papers and diligently worked in the reviewers' feedback. Your participation and effort make this Proceedings a publication that contributes to the quality of toponymic research.

The Organising Committee, including the host, Prof. Annalene van Staden (Head of the Department of South African Sign Language and Deaf Studies), would like to thank all local and international delegates who participated in the 2023 Symposium. Your in-person attendance and the ensuing collaborative engagements continue to stimulate toponymic research in Southern Africa.

Chrismi-Rinda Loth 

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Okonjima, Namibia

July 2025

