

1st Circular, Call for papers

GeoNames Symposium 2026 “The heritage value of microtoponyms” Hermagor, Austria, 12-13 October 2026

Theme

Microtoponyms not in the sense of smaller toponyms, but of toponyms referring to smaller features like scattered farmsteads and scattered houses, fields, pastures, fences, stones, springs, ditches etc. (names for typically urban features like streets, squares, stadiums excluded), and in general used locally by only a limited number of people exist in high density in predominantly rural, agriculture-oriented areas and societies. They represent there the most intimate namescape, the toponymy of geographical features named by the farmer and the village population in their narrower surroundings according to their perception and indicating what looked essential or striking for them. More than other place-name categories they are ‘condensed narratives’ in two directions: in describing the feature and in indicating the cultural and economic background of the name-givers. They are thus also and even specifically a part of the intangible cultural heritage as highlighted by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 and as increasingly recognized also by UNGEGN.

Right this place-name category, however, is very much in danger to fall into oblivion – at least in the Global North – due to the conversion from agricultural to industrial and service-oriented societies, for which rural land use is not as important and by which the former patchwork of rural land use has been merged into larger entities. The current older generation offers in many cases the last opportunity to respond to questions on this place-name category, to get it documented and preserved as a source of research into former land use and perception of the environment. It is for this very reason that many surveys on microtoponyms have been initiated in recent years, and exchange of results and opinions would be very useful.

The Symposium is to respond to this demand and to offer not only on-site information and exchange of opinions, but also the publication of results by proceedings.

Subthemes (with no claim to be exhaustive):

- The theoretical background of place names in general and more specifically microtoponyms as cultural heritage
- Microtoponym surveys in different parts of the world – results and experiences
- Naming motives as documented by microtoponyms
- Specific challenges of microtoponym standardization
- Ways of preserving traditional microtoponyms in an urbanized environment

Venue and time

The Symposium will take place in Hermagor, Carinthia, Austria, the venue of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting 2014 (see Fig. 1), on 12 and 13 October 2026. The venue is accessible also by train and about one hour from the Klagenfurt airport from where connection flights to the international hub Vienna [Wien] are available and two hours by train

from the Graz airport, from where connection flights depart not only to Vienna, but also to the even larger international hubs Frankfurt, Munich [München] and Zurich [Zürich].



Figure 1: The participants of the Working Group on Exonyms meeting 2014 in front of the venue

Organization and complementary events

The Symposium under the auspices of the UNGEGN Dutch- and German-speaking Division (DGSD) will be organized by its Chair Peter Jordan, supported by the Austrian Board on Geographical Names chaired by Roman Stani-Fertl, and co-organized by the ICOS Working Group on Toponymy chaired by Peter Jordan, the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy chaired by Matjaž Geršič and Elena Dai Prà as well as the Municipality of Hermagor-Presegger See with its Mayor Leopold Astner. Like earlier GeoNames symposia it will be open not only for DGSD members, but also for all UNGEGN members and beyond, i.e. for all who are interested. English will be the conference language.

It will be held in conjunction with a 2-days meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Place Names as Cultural Heritage (WGPNC) and a 2-days meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms (WGE) resulting in a full week of toponymic events with some synergy effects. These other meetings are also accessible for participants in the Symposium.

In addition, a common excursion for participants of all meetings to a multicultural valley across the Italian border (Val Canale/Val Cjanâl/Kanalska dolina/Kanaltal) with a quadrilingual linguistic landscape (see Fig. 2) will be offered. Depending on registration for the toponymic events, the excursion will be scheduled for Tuesday, 13 October, in the afternoon, or Saturday, 17 October, the whole day. A fee will be requested for bus transport and (eventually) lunch. Registration for the excursion starts 1 April 2026.



Figure 2: Quadrilingual (Italian/German/Slovenian/Friulian) welcome sign of a village in Val Canale/Val Cjanâl/Kanalska dolina/Kanaltal

Abstract submission

Should you wish to present a paper, please fill in the form sheet enclosed and send it to peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at by 31 January 2026 at the latest indicating author and paper title and including an abstract in the length of ca. 200 words. Also participants, who do not want to present a paper, are kindly requested to announce their participation by 31 January 2026. Participation in the Symposium is for free.

A Scientific Committee composed of DGSD representatives will review the abstracts received after this call. By the end of February 2026 abstract submitters will be informed about acceptance. A preliminary Symposium program will be disseminated by the end of March 2026.

Sponsoring of young scientists

A local science fund (Herfried-Berger-Fonds) offers young scientists in the sense of university graduates in their first years of professional experience support with their travel expenses, when they present a paper.

Proceedings

After a double-blind reviewing proceedings of the papers presented at the Symposium are to be published as Volume 10 of the toponymic book series “Name & Place” edited by Peter Jordan and Paul Woodman. Volume editors have still to be found.

Accommodation and catering

Our venue is a hotel pleasantly located near to a lake in an alpine valley. A train station with a train every hour (not at night) is right behind the hotel. For the days from 11 to 17 October 2026 it offers up to 60 rooms with shower/WC, satellite TV, telephone, radio, hairdryer, safe, bath towels, bathrobe, minibar, partly also balcony, including full board (breakfast, coffee breaks, lunch, dinner) and the use of a spa with indoor pool and sauna at a preferential (group) price of € 149,- per person/night based on double occupancy and € 169,- per person/ night in a room for single use. Rooms are also reserved for the weekends before and after our meeting week, but not at this preferential rate. Please reserve your room directly with Alpen Adria Hotel & Spa via <https://www.hotelkaernten.com/gruppenreisen-kaernten,info@alpenadriahotel.at> or telephone +434282 2666. The offer is valid up to the end of April 2026.

You are, of course, free to find your own accommodation in the wider surroundings. Please, consult for this purpose https://www.nassfeld.at/en/Service/Nassfeld-A-Z/Tourismusburo-Information_az_30419

The organizers are, however, not able to cover any travel and accommodation expenses except the dinner on the second Symposium day (13 October), to which we will be invited by the Municipality Hermagor-Presegger See.

Important dates

31 January 2026: Call for papers and registration for the Symposium ends

End of February 2026: Information about paper acceptance

End of March 2026: 2nd circular with preliminary Symposium program

End of April 2026: Room reservation in the Alpen Adria Hotel at preferential rates ends

Hermagor, 31 October 2025

Peter Jordan

Chair, UNGEGN Dutch and German Speaking Division (DGSD)

on behalf of the organizers:

UNGEGN Dutch and German Speaking Division (DGSD)

Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO)

ICOS Working Group on Toponymy

Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy

Municipality Hermagor-Presegger See

Registration form

Please, return to peter.jordan@oeaw.ac.at by **31 January 2026**.

Name.....

Affiliation.....

Country.....

E-mail.....

☐ I will participate in the symposium GeoNames 2026 “The heritage value of microtoponyms” in Hermagor, Austria, 12 and 13 October 2026

☐ I am a young scientist and ask for financial support of my travel expenses (Please, explain also why you qualify as ‘young scientist’: date of birth, date of university graduation, current occupation)

☐ I wish to present a paper

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Abstract (about 200 words):