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The History of Settlement Names Standardization in the Hungarian Language: Principles, Methods, and Achievements

Abstract

In Hungary, the standardization of geographical names — particularly official settlement names — has a history spanning more than a century. This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the core principles underlying national standardization practices for settlement names. These principles include monoreferentiality, historical authenticity, toponymic and linguistic accuracy, semantic motivation, and etymological transparency. The paper also examines how and why the relative importance of these principles has evolved over time. In addition, it discusses the impact of international standardization practices on the aims, methods, and outcomes of national efforts in Hungary. The study draws on both previous scholarship and primary sources relating to current policies and recent developments. It demonstrates that contemporary standardization practices — both in present-day Hungary and in neighboring countries with Hungarian-speaking minorities — are primarily concerned with preserving the historically developed toponymic integrity of the Hungarian linguistic area within the Carpathian Basin when defining official settlement names. In line with international trends in geographical names standardization, recent years have seen increased cooperation among experts, policymakers, municipalities, and local communities in decision-making processes. The present survey provides grounds to assume that achieving sustainable outcomes in the domain under study requires a careful balance between respect for historical traditions and adaptation to contemporary patterns of name use.

Keywords

Hungarian language; toponymy; settlement names; geographic name standardization; naming principles; naming authorities; Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names; Termini Hungarian Language Research Network

For citation

Bölcskei, A. (2026). The History of Settlement Names Standardization in the Hungarian Language: Principles, Methods, and Achievements. *Voprosy onomastiki*, 23(2), 209–228. https://doi.org/10.15826/vopr_onom.2026.23.2.027

Received on 31 August 2025

Accepted on 10 October 2025

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История стандартизации ойконимов в Венгрии: принципы, методы, результаты

Аннотация

В Венгрии стандартизация географических названий — прежде всего официальных названий населенных пунктов — имеет более чем столетнюю историю. В данной статье представлен всесторонний обзор основных принципов, лежащих в основе национальной практики стандартизации ойконимов. К ним относятся монореферентность, историческая аутентичность, топонимическая и лингвистическая точность, семантическая мотивированность и этимологическая прозрачность. В статье также рассматривается, как и почему со временем менялась относительная значимость этих принципов. Кроме того, анализируется влияние международных практик стандартизации на цели, методы и результаты работы соответствующих государственных органов в Венгрии. Исследование опирается на предшествующие научные работы и на первичные источники, касающиеся текущей политики и недавних изменений. Показано, что современная практика стандартизации названий населенных пунктов — как в самой Венгрии, так и в соседних странах, в которых проживает венгероязычное меньшинство, — в первую очередь направлена на сохранение исторически сложившейся топонимической целостности венгерского языкового ареала в пределах Карпатского бассейна. В соответствии с международными тенденциями в области стандартизации географических названий в последние годы усилилось сотрудничество между экспертами, государственными органами, муниципалитетами и местными сообществами в процессе принятия решений. Настоящий обзор дает основания полагать, что достижение устойчивых результатов в области стандартизации требует тщательного баланса между уважением к историческим традициям и адаптацией к современным моделям использования географических названий.

Ключевые слова

венгерский язык; топонимия; названия населенных пунктов; стандартизация географических названий; принципы именования; органы, регулирующие именование географических объектов; Венгерский комитет по географическим названиям; сеть исследований венгерского языка Termini

Для цитирования

Bölcskei A. The History of Settlement Names Standardization in the Hungarian Language: Principles, Methods, and Achievements // Вопросы ономастики. 2026. Т. 23, № 2. С. 209–228. https://doi.org/10.15826/vopr_onom.2026.23.2.027

Рукопись поступила в редакцию 31.08.2025

Рукопись принята к печати 10.10.2025

1. Scope of the Survey

In Hungary, the standardization of geographical names, particularly official settlement names, has a history that spans over a century. The present paper aims to provide an overview of the evolution of the fundamental principles employed in the country's national standardization processes for settlement names over the years. In addition, it examines how international practices of geographical name standardization have recently influenced the aims, methods, and outcomes of these processes. The article comprises a review of the extant literature on the subject, as well as an analysis of primary sources concerning current policies and the latest developments.

2. The Periodization of Hungarian Settlement Names Standardization

The history of Hungarian settlement names standardization, from our perspective, can be divided into six periods: (i) 1898 to 1920; (ii) 1920 to 1939; (iii) 1939 to 1945; (iv) 1945 to 1954; (v) 1954 to 1989; and (vi) 1989 to the present day. Although the linguistic procedures applied when creating new or changing existing names have always been similar, the hierarchy of standardization principles has fluctuated over time.

2.1. The first period: 1898–1920

In Hungary, the most important settlement name standardization project was carried out between 1898 and 1920 (especially between 1898 and 1912, see below) by a board of experts referred to as the National Committee for the Registration of Settlements (Országos Községi Törzskönyvbizottság). The Committee was established for this particular purpose in 1898 by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal), which supervised and financially supported the work of the board. The Committee was expected to act in accordance with Act 4 of 1898 on the standardization of settlement names. The law demanded the elimination of allonyms (i.e., variants of names indicating the same settlement) and the avoidance of homonymy (i.e., identical name forms indicating different settlements) among settlement names in Hungary, whenever the names were used in an official context. The Committee, in trying to put into practice the principle of “one settlement – one name” required by the law had, in fact, the right to form and propose settlement names for official use; the suggested toponyms became official (and thus theoretically unchangeable) settlement names only after approval by the Ministry of the Interior [Mező 1982: 45–47, 116; Mikesy 2020: 48].

In 1898, in its Rules of Procedure, the Committee specified the steps of the standardization procedure (i.e., data collection, expert reports, decision

by the Committee, remarks by the local and county authorities, reconsideration and a new decision by the Committee in case of local objections, confirmation by the Interior Minister, publication of the decree in the gazette called *Budapesti Közlöny* (*Budapest Gazette*), and recording the standardized settlement name in the national register), the orthographic rules to be followed in name spelling (e.g., settlement names should be written as one word, archaic or foreign spelling conventions should be avoided) and the measures taken to disseminate the standardized settlement names [Mező 1982: 46, 115–116].

By 1898 settlement name standardization in Hungary had become necessary primarily as a consequence of the increasing centralization in public and military administration, as well as a result of the effort to provide national services (e.g., communication networks, postal services), all of which required unambiguous orientation throughout the territory of the country. Settlement names developed in the period of non-official naming practices (*de jure* before 1898) could not guarantee reliable orientation at a national level, because their stock displayed such features as homonymy,¹ paronymy,² and allonymy³ (all being inevitable when names evolve spontaneously); and some settlement names contained constituents that might mislead those seeking to locate places based on their names.⁴ The elimination of these confusing name forms was one of the main priorities of the Committee at the beginning of its activity: although the board discussed the name stock of each county separately, identical and paronymous name forms, as well as settlement names including the same second constituent were debated together at the first appearance of a relevant name form, regardless of county affiliation [Mező 1982: 115, 120–132; Mikesy 2020: 48].

Settlement names developed in the period of non-official naming practices were accepted by the Committee as official names if they were characteristically Hungarian and occurred only once in the country; or if they were generally known as names for administrative or economic centers (e.g., county seats, industrial and

¹ Examples include lexical homonymy (e.g., *Iványi* in Baranya, Bereg, Gömör and Kis-Hont Counties), grammatical homonymy (e.g., *Kölcse*n, Bereg County and *Kölcse* in the locative case in postal addresses: *Kölcse*n, Szatmár County), and phonetic homonymy (e.g., *Vajkócz*, Abaúj-Torna and Ung Counties and *Valykócz*, Sáros County) [Mező 1982: 123–125].

² Examples include lexical paronymy (e.g., *Cseke*, Baranya County and *Cséke*, Vas, Szatmár, Zemplén Counties), grammatical paronymy in the locative case (e.g., *Csap-on*, Ung County and *Csapó-n*, Zala County) [Mező 1982: 125–128].

³ Examples include orthographic variants (e.g., *Kicsorna* ~ *Kitsorna*, Bereg County), formal variants (e.g., *Kelenye* ~ *Ipoly-Kelenye*, Hont County), language variants (e.g., *Koncza* ~ *Zekeschdorf*, Alsó-Fehér County), and complex variants (e.g., *Mező-Erked* ~ *Szász-Erked* ~ *Artyud*, Kolozs County) [Mező 1982: 128–131].

⁴ E.g., 1898: *Sáros-Bukócz* was an habitation in Zemplén and not in Sáros County, *Somogy-Uzsopa* was a habitation in Bihar and not in Somogy County [Mező 1982: 131–132; 1999: 332, 339].

mining towns), as well as names for settlements considered significant because of their cultural, national and family-historical connections.⁵ Of the homonymous settlement names, the one that denoted the biggest,⁶ oldest⁷ or most central settlement,⁸ as well as the one that lacked a suitable distinctive addition⁹ had the best chance of remaining unaffected. Settlement names violating the above criteria were changed by the Committee. These changes involved adding distinctive constituents to settlement names;¹⁰ modifying the name form;¹¹ reviving historical names of settlements;¹² eliminating dialectal forms and archaic spellings;¹³ (partial) translations;¹⁴ arbitrary interpretations of foreign names,¹⁵ etc. [Mező 1982: 133–138; Mikesy 2020: 49].

Parish councils, local historians, as well as lay and ecclesiastical authorities were asked about the historically and locally used Hungarian, as well as foreign name forms in questionnaires. Moreover, parish and county councils were given the opportunity to comment on the settlement-name forms suggested by the Committee for official use in their territories by being given access to the minutes prepared during board meetings. However, in most cases, local authorities could not effectively influence the final recommendations. Instead, the Committee made the final suggestions for standardized settlement names with the help of experts: geographers, cartographers, historians, and linguists were involved in the process; authentic historical data were provided by the National Archives of Hungary [Mező 1982: 114–120].

⁵E.g., *Nikla*, Somogy County, the home of the 18th–19th-century poet Dániel Berzsenyi; *Mezőkeresztes*, Borsod County, the scene of a battle in 1596; *Nádasd*, Vas County, the place where the Nádasdys, a Hungarian aristocratic family, came from [Mező 1982: 136–138].

⁶E.g., *Iványi*, Bereg County, compared to *Drávaiványi*, Baranya County, and *Balogiványi*, Gömör–Kis-Hont County [Mező 1982: 135; 1999: 158].

⁷E.g., *Málnás* (1366: *Malnas*), Háromszék County, compared to *Kismálnás* (1904: *Kismálnás*), Vas County [Mező 1982: 135; 1999: 236, entry *Málnás* (Vas); FNEsz 2: 86].

⁸E.g., *Tass*, Pest County, compared to *Nyírtass*, Szabolcs County [Mező 1982: 136; 1999: 382].

⁹E.g., *Szabar*, Vas County, compared to *Herczegszabar* (possessed by Archduke Karl Ludwig of Austria and his heirs), Baranya County, and *Zalaszabar*, Zala County [Mező 1982: 138; 1999: 345; FNEsz 2: 544, entry *Székelyszabar*].

¹⁰*Szent-Iván* → *Bakonyszentiván*, Veszprém County (situated in the Bakony Mountains) [Mező 1999: 360].

¹¹*Grics* → *Gercse*, Vas County [Mező 1982: 173; 1999: 127].

¹²*Dechtár* → *Bertalanfalva*, Liptó County [Mező 1982: 187; 1999: 87].

¹³*Nádalla* → *Horvát nádálja*, Vas County [Mező 1999: 149; Mikesy 2020: 49]; *Bessenszög* → *Besenyszög*, Heves County [Mező 1982: 163; 1999: 52].

¹⁴*Alsó-Jablonka* → *Alsóalmád* (*alsó* ‘lower’, *alma* ‘apple’, suffix -*d* ‘being provided with’), Zemplén County; *Kolbach* → *Hidegpatak* (*hideg* ‘cold’, *patak* ‘creek’), Szepes County [Mező 1982: 198–199; 1999: 197, 23].

¹⁵*Strelec* (*sztrelec* ‘shooter’) → *Őrszentvid* (*Szent Vid* ‘Saint Vitus’), Zala County (situated in the Őrség region) [Mező 1999: 341; Mikesy 2020: 49].

The proposed name forms elaborated by the Committee had to meet the requirements of six basic principles. Firstly, monosemy (or monoreferentiality): each standardized settlement name could designate only a single settlement, and each settlement could bear only a single official settlement name in the country. Secondly, only historically authentic names were adopted (e.g., obsolete name forms recorded in medieval charters were revived).¹⁶ Thirdly, names were approved if they fitted into the toponymic system of Hungarian settlement names (e.g., the Hungarian names were chosen as official forms rather than the names of foreign origin in case of allonyms).¹⁷ Fourthly, the name forms were also expected to be semantically motivated (e.g., constituents were required to reflect contemporary reality).¹⁸ Fifthly, the names had to be (linguistically) accurate (e.g., contrastive distinctive additions were expected to occur in pairs,¹⁹ personal names as first constituents were preferred to appear in morphologically marked possessive structures).²⁰ Finally, the adopted names were meant to be etymologically transparent (e.g., misleading letter combinations producing semantically opaque name structures had to be avoided)²¹ [Mező 1982: 138–152; Mikesy 2020: 49].

The earliest set of official settlement names in Hungary was created between 1898 and 1912, in the first and most significant national standardization project completed by the Committee. As a result, a comprehensive *Gazetteer of Hungary* was published in 1913,²² which, in many respects, is regarded as a standard in the earth sciences even today [see HUNGEO'96]. Between 1913 and 1920 some minor corrections to the 1913 settlement-name stock were implemented: for

¹⁶E.g., *Ottova*, Sopron County, regained its previous name differentiated by the distinctive addition *Seleg-*, the old name for the river Vulka, and became officially known as *Selegszántó* [Mező 1982: 147; 1999: 289].

¹⁷E.g., in Nagy-Küküllő County the Hungarian name *Kőhalom* was made official for a settlement established by Saxon immigrants instead of the German name *Reps*; the name *Királylubella*, Liptó County, including a second constituent of Slavic origin, which was suspected to have reference to a lady, was officialized as *Királyhölgye* 'Lady of the king' [Mező 1982: 139, 145; 1999: 204, 181].

¹⁸E.g., *Tótkeresztúr* 'Croatian Keresztúr' was renamed as *Magyarkeresztúr* 'Hungarian Keresztúr', Sopron County, because, by the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it was inhabited by Hungarians [Mező 1982: 233; 1999: 393].

¹⁹E.g., the change of *Rás* → *Felsőrás* to correlate with the neighboring *Alsórá*s, Gömör and Kis-Hont County [Mező 1982: 223; 1999: 319].

²⁰E.g., *Ábrahámfalva* 'Abraham village' → *Ábrahámfalva* 'Abraham's village', Sáros County [Mező 1982: 212; 1999: 17].

²¹E.g., *Kiszáblát* 'Little Záblát' → *Felsőzáblát* 'Upper Záblát', Trencsén County, to eliminate the cluster *sz* (the conventional letter combination for the alveolar voiceless fricative sound in Hungarian) [Mező 1982: 151; 1999: 192].

²²However, due to time constraints caused by historical circumstances prior to the First World War, the Interior Minister was unable to officially recognize any settlement names in Árva, Fogaras, Hunyad, and Liptó Counties. The settlement names in these counties thus escaped standardization [Mező 1982: 114; Mikesy 2020: 48].

instance, some local authorities that filed appeals against the new names of their settlements regained the old name forms;²³ or some new, ideologically determined settlement names were imposed during the short period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919²⁴ [Mező 1982: 266–274]. In 1920, however, when, as a result of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary lost almost two-thirds of its territory and its settlements, the conditions for settlement name standardization essentially changed.

2.2. The second period: 1920–1939

In the nearly 80 years between 1920 and the change of the political regime in Hungary in 1989/1990, the principles adopted in settlement name standardization were basically determined by such facts as the size of the name stock under supervision, the prevailing state ideology, and the responsible administrative bodies. Changes in the number of settlement names were triggered partly by external, politically determined factors (e.g., repeated territorial changes affecting Hungary over time), and partly by internal factors based on the natural development of settlement patterns in the country (e.g., the establishment of new or joint settlements), as well as by the speech community's demands for new name forms (e.g., the initiation of settlement-name changes).

In the second period, i.e., between 1920 and 1939, all names denoting settlements that had belonged to Hungary prior to 1920 were taken into account when new standardized name forms were introduced in the country: the Committee consistently rejected a settlement name for official use in Hungary if the same name form had already been adopted to identify a habitation in the former Hungarian areas. This was partly explained by practical considerations (e.g., avoiding ambiguities in birth and residence register data used for identifying citizens; ensuring unambiguous orientation in transportation), but was primarily motivated by political and ideological reasons (indicating the claims of the Hungarian State to the territories ceded in 1920). The Committee also intended to preserve all the other principles that had led to the successful national standardization of settlement names in the previous era. In creating names for new and joint settlements, as well as in changing them, the principle still most strongly emphasized by the Committee was historical authenticity.²⁵ New names formed on the analogy of existing settlement names were also

²³ E.g., 1902: *Bakonypéterd* → 1913: *Bakonypeterd* [Mező 1982: 47–49; 1999: 36].

²⁴ E.g., 1919: *Marx-falva* and 1870: *Erzsébetfalva* → 1919: *Leninváros*; both names were changed soon [Mező 1982: 266–274; 1999: 240; FNEsz 2: 339, entry *Pestszenterzsébet*].

²⁵ E.g., 1934: *Pusztaszer* got its name by reviving the name of a deserted medieval village on its site [Mező 1982: 276; 1999: 314].

common.²⁶ Settlements could not be named after living persons [cf. 86.960/1928 document by the Ministry of the Interior, quoted in Mező 1982: 274–281].

2.3. The third period: 1939–1945

In the third period, to reduce the risk of military and civil disorientation in wartime, only a few modifications to settlement names were implemented. Most importantly, the Hungarian names for settlements re-annexed to Hungary by the Viennese Awards (1938 and 1940) were confirmed based on the principles of the first period. The Committee's decisions, however, were slightly contradictory with respect to the sources from which the actual name forms were derived: names for habitations in Northern Hungary were restored on the basis of the 1913 *Gazetteer of Hungary*,²⁷ while settlements in the Transcarpathian region were mostly given back the names by which they had been known before 1898.²⁸ This duality is reflected in the 1944 *Gazetteer of Hungary*, the result of the second national standardization project undertaken by the Committee. This second project was less wide-ranging than the one carried out between 1898 and 1912, when the area of the country was considerably larger and only non-standardized settlement names were available as input data: still, it required the Committee once again to pay attention to all settlement-name forms in the Hungarian language area during this revision process [Mező 1982: 281–286; Földi 1993: 107; Beregszászi 1997: 357; Szabómihály 2007b: 190].

2.4. The fourth period: 1945–1954

After restoring the post-Trianon borders of Hungary in 1945, the names of settlements in the lost territories fell beyond the competence of the Committee again. In the last ten years of its existence, the Committee was expected to serve the ideology of the new (socialist) regime. In this period, a few name forms suspected of contradicting the ideals of the new political climate were identified and replaced with more acceptable names, though historical and linguistic authenticity was still thoroughly respected by the Committee.²⁹ Attempts to change traditional names

²⁶E.g., 1877: *Soroksárpéteri* → 1931: *Pestszentimre* (a settlement named after Szent Imre, or Saint Emeric of Hungary, and located on the Pest side of the capital). The new name was similar to older Hungarian settlement names that commemorated the patron saint of the local church and also to settlement names that had distinctive additions indicating a significant nearby town [Mező 1982: 276; 1999: 298; FNSz 2: 339].

²⁷E.g., 1913: *Léva* → 1920: *Levice* → 1944: *Léva* [Szabómihály 2007b: 190].

²⁸E.g., 1898: *Zuella* → 1913: *Zellő* → 1939: *Zuella* [Földi 1993: 107; Beregszászi 1997: 357].

²⁹E.g., 1772/1941: *Eszterháza* → 1950: *Fertőd*, Győr-Sopron County, to avoid the reference to the Esterházy, a Hungarian aristocratic family and the possessors of the estate; 1491: *Kajászószentpéter*

to ideologically motivated, structurally unique names were rejected.³⁰ Though names for new and joint settlements of the period were still standardized on the basis of the earlier principles, name changes in the 1950s were occasionally influenced by the personality cult [Mező 1982: 286–292].³¹

2.5. The fifth period: 1954–1989

In 1954, when the National Committee for the Registration of Settlements was dissolved, settlement names standardization processes changed significantly. Between 1954 and 1989, habitation names in the country were supervised by the Presidential Council, a central legislative body. In this period, settlement names could be changed in justified cases, and name changes initiated by political organizations (e.g., local, district and county councils) were implicitly encouraged.³² Name forms used to identify settlements of historical importance in the former Hungarian areas were sometimes allowed to be adopted in Hungary as well.³³ The centralized practice of settlement name standardization put less emphasis on scientific considerations than the previous procedures: though archival reports were regularly consulted to determine the historical authenticity of the habitation names proposed by the local authorities, these reports were not necessarily respected. In the 1970s and 1980s, the first Committee on Geographical Names (see below), an advisory board of experts, was regularly consulted when establishing new standardized settlement-name forms; however, its recommendations were sometimes disregarded by the administrative authorities responsible for making decisions [Mező 1982: 292–296; Mikesy 2020: 50; 2021: 53; 2022a: 40; 2023a: 38].

2.6. The sixth period: 1989 — the present day

In Hungary, geographical name standardization today is the responsibility of the Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names (Földrajzinév-bizottság).

‘St Peter-on-Kajászó’ → 1950: *Kajászó*, Fejér County, to get rid of the ecclesiastical reference — but both *Fertőd* ‘Marshy’ and *Kajászó* ‘Keve’s dry stream’ are medieval name forms [FNESz 1: 469, 668].

³⁰ E.g., *Örményes* ‘Full of eddies’ was not changed to *Új Élet* ‘New life’ for toponomastic considerations; *Csévharaszt* was not substituted with *Csillag* ‘Star’ for the same reason [Mező 1982: 288; FNESz 2: 300; 1: 469, 668].

³¹ E.g., 1768: *Dunapentele* ‘St Pantaleon-on-Danube’ → 1951: *Sztálinváros* ‘Stalin-town’, today’s Dunaiújváros, Fejér County [FNESz 1: 399].

³² E.g., 1531: *Győrszentmárton* → 1964: *Pannonhalma*, Győr-Sopron County to reduce the number of settlement names with religious associations; 1882: *Tiszaszederkény* ‘Szederkény-on-Tisza’ → 1970: *Leninváros* ‘Lenin-town’, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Russian politician’s birth, today’s Tiszaújváros, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County [FNESz 2: 314, 27].

³³ E.g., 1851: *Kiskirályság* ‘Little king’s wooded hill’ → 1954: *Eperjes* ‘Where there are strawberries’, Csongrád County, compared to *Eperjes*, the traditional Hungarian name of Prešov, Slovakia [FNESz 1: 420].

The Committee's main concern is to standardize the names of certain types of geographical entities found within Hungary and to influence the use of native or foreign toponyms in Standard Hungarian. Its opinion can affect, albeit only to a limited extent (e.g., through expert evaluation), the standardization of Hungarian habitation names outside Hungary. After the 1989/1990 change of the political regime in Central and Eastern European countries, each successor state attempted to reconsider and codify the rights of its minorities, which inevitably affected the potential use of minority settlement names as well. Hungarian minority habitation names, however, for several reasons, were still confusingly varied in practice at the turn of the millennium (see below). Thus, at the beginning of the 2000s, experts from neighboring countries with Hungarian minorities — supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences — initiated a collaborative project aimed at facilitating the effective and appropriate standardization of Hungarian minority toponyms for settlements and geographical features in the relevant countries [cf. Bölcskei 2012; Mikesy 2024].

2.6.1. The Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names (HCGN)³⁴

In Hungary, following earlier attempts at military cartography between the two world wars, cartographers realized the importance of using standardized geographical names on maps by the second half of the 20th century. Consequently, the first Committee on Geographical Names, specialized in map name writing, was established under the supervision of the national cartographic office in 1963. Although this committee did not have the authority to make decisions about official settlement names, it acted as an advisory and consultative board on habitation names upon request (see above). The recommendations of its working group on settlement names were characterized by a strong commitment to historical accuracy and the preservation of established habitation names [Radó 1970; Mikesy 2020: 50–53, 56; 2023a: 36–38].

In 1989, Government Decree No. 71/1989 (amended by Sections 4 and 7(c) of Government Decree No. 19/1992 and Section 18(2)(x) of Government Decree No. 276/2006) set up a new interdepartmental Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names, involving representatives of ministries, government institutions and experts from several professional fields (cartography, transport, water conservancy, nature conservation, rural development, public administration, national minorities, foreign affairs, linguistics, history, geography, education, etc.). The legal basis

³⁴ A comprehensive discussion of all aspects of the work of the Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names, based on its minutes and documentation, is provided in a series of papers by Gábor Mikesy [2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b; 2023a; 2023b; 2024; see also FB].

for the present Committee, currently operating under the umbrella of the Ministry for Rural and Settlement Development (which has also been responsible for the government supervision of cartography, mapping and surveying since January 2024) was created by Government Decree No. 303/2007 on the establishment and registration of official geographical names in Hungary (amended, among others, by Government Decree No. 36/2011).

The Committee advises on and, where authorized, decides on the official Hungarian names of geographical features of national significance; establishes names for nature conservation areas; and deals with transport and communication names. However, the Government has the right to decide on official geographical names whenever considerable public interest is involved. The Committee also acts in an advisory capacity in cases involving official Hungarian names for administrative units, (parts of) settlements, and public places. It is also responsible for verifying minority toponyms in Hungary, as well as Hungarian names in domestic use for foreign geographical entities (cf. Section 4(1)-(3) of Government Decree No. 303/2007).

In its expert statements and recommendations regarding settlement names, the Committee aims to adhere to the norms that have been established historically in Hungarian national standardization processes. Names for new or reorganized habitations in the country must be unique with respect to contemporary and historical Hungarian settlement names. In establishing official settlement names, historical names (e.g., names of incorporated or deserted villages), local name use, as well as the present geographical and social reality (for the sake of appropriate semantic motivation) are taken into consideration by the Committee. The Committee also considers the views of local communities, administrative bodies and other organizations, as well as the latest findings in the natural and social sciences. Name forms must follow the rules traditionally developed in the course of Hungarian place-naming practices. Only coherent, linguistically correct settlement names are accepted. In Hungarian, habitation names should be written as one word, regardless of their internal structure. Settlements (with the exception of detached farmhouses) cannot be named after living persons. The use of numerals in names is restricted.³⁵ The Committee promotes the inclusion of minority settlement names on maps and in gazetteers. Already established official settlement names can only be changed if the use of identically or similarly sounding (homonymous or paronymous) name forms causes confusion; if actual usage has clearly changed recently; or if the names are no longer considered appropriate for the public interest. Settlement names preserving historical traditions cannot be modified. To establish and maintain conditions for standardized name use, the Committee, among other linguistic decisions,

³⁵For the use of numerals in Russian toponymy, see [Dambuev 2022].

determines the correct spelling of name forms (cf. Section 5 of Government Decree 303/2007) [Fábián et al. 1998; Mikesy 2024: 39–42].

Official geographical names, including those of settlements, are registered and updated in the *Gazetteer-Database of Geographical Names (Földrajzinév-tár)* [see MF], which is managed by the Lechner Knowledge Center (formerly FÖMI Institute of Geodesy, Cartography and Remote Sensing, Budapest) (cf. Section 6 of Government Decree No. 303/2007). The MF must not deviate from the digital *Gazetteer of Hungary* [see MH], edited by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal), which serves as the primary official source for contemporary Hungarian settlement names [Mikesy 2024: 45–46]. This latter dataset was published annually in book form between 1992 and 2019 under the title *Magyarország Közigazgatási Helynévkönyve (Administrative Gazetteer of Hungary)* (cf. Section 6(2) of Government Decree No. 303/2007). A series of Gazetteers of Hungary, published largely in accordance with censuses between 1873 and 2003, are also regarded as important sources of historical and contemporary official settlement names.

Since the 1960s, the HCGN has been collaborating with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), an expert body responsible for the international standardization of geographical names [Mikesy 2022a: 47–49]. The HCGN contributes to international standardization processes in two major ways. Firstly, it implements and promotes the principles of name standardization developed by the UNGEGN and provides toponymic data from Hungary to the international community. Secondly, it fulfils an administrative and coordinating role at regular intervals within the ECSEED (East Central and South-East Europe Division), a regional division of the UNGEGN. In addition, HCGN representatives regularly present reports and working papers on current projects at UNGEGN and ECSEED sessions.³⁶ HCGN members and associates also participate in UNGEGN working groups, including the WG on Exonyms, the WG on Toponymic Terminology, and the WG on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.³⁷ With regard to its type, the HCGN is presented as an example of a national, board-based naming authority in UNGEGN documents [Kerfoot 2006: 109]. In recognition of its effectiveness, the HCGN has been appointed Chair of the ECSEED on three occasions: from 1972 to 1977, from 1992 to 1998, and most recently from 2025 to 2028 [see ECSEED].

³⁶For examples, see the Sessions pages on the UNGEGN and ECSEED websites [UNGEGN; ECSEED].

³⁷See the relevant pages on the UNGEGN and ECSEED websites [UNGEGN; ECSEED]. See also [Bölcskei & Mikesy 2016] and the volumes of the book series *Name & Place — Contributions to Toponymic Literature and Research* [Jordan et al. (Eds.) 2011; Jordan & Woodman (Eds.) 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016a; 2016b; Jordan et al. (Eds.) 2018; Dollimore & Watanabe (Eds.) 2020; Dollimore & Jordan (Eds.) 2021].

2.6.2. The Termini Project: Settlement Names Re-standardization in Areas with Hungarian Population outside Hungary

In the decades after World War II, the official use of Hungarian settlement names in neighboring countries with significant Hungarian minorities was, in most cases, not allowed [Szabó Mihály 2008: 42]. In the 1990s, new legislation in these states introduced lists of Hungarian habitation names permitted for use on road signs or in official contexts. These names were often new forms rather than the traditional Hungarian standardized settlement names from 1913 or 1944, for ideological (see below) or practical reasons (i.e., recent changes in settlement patterns). However, these new Hungarian settlement names did not always fit into the Hungarian toponymic system, and some were incorrectly spelled. Often, they were taken from outdated sources and lacked their traditional distinctive additions, or were completely devoid of historical authenticity. Some were literal translations of contemporary foreign names. It is therefore not surprising that local residents often rejected them [Zalabai 1995; Szabó Mihály 2007b: 192, 198; 2013: 58–60].

The rules did not mention Hungarian settlement names in localities where the proportion of Hungarian inhabitants was less than 20–25% (depending on the country), which was the threshold required for the official use of Hungarian minority habitation names. Nor did the legislation address Hungarian names for settlements bearing a protected name in the official language of the state (e.g., settlements named after national historical figures). Although the laws listed the permitted Hungarian settlement names, these lists were not updated regularly by the authorities. Moreover, the legal status of some of the listed Hungarian name forms (e.g., road sign names *vs.* official names) was not clearly delineated [Szabó Mihály 2007a: 191, 193; Molnár Csikós 2015: 60; 2020: 108]. The favorable political climate observed in Transcarpathia (Ukraine) in the early 1990s, which supported and, in more than 40 cases, even restored historical Hungarian place names, was not sustained [Lizanec 1999].

Further complexity arose from the inconsistent use of Hungarian settlement names within the local ethnic Hungarian communities themselves, where multiple allonyms were employed, including early vernacular forms, loan translations and recently introduced variants. By the turn of the 21st century, Hungarian-inhabited settlements in neighboring states often had several competing Hungarian names, ranging from historical standardized forms from 1913 and 1944 to new legislative creations from the 1990s and vernacular variants (with or without distinctive additions) shaped by language contact [Szabó Mihály 2007b: 195]. Under such conditions, Hungarian names could no longer fulfil their primary function of unambiguous identification. Therefore, the accurate identification of several settlements inhabited by Hungarian minorities could only be achieved by using the names standardized

for them in the official languages of the respective countries [Szabó Mihály 2008: 46]. The situation was even more problematic for relief features, as their names were not codified by the successor states at all [Szabó Mihály 2007a: 157–158]. The names adopted on maps of the Carpathian Basin featuring Hungarian toponyms were not consistent either. Ultimately, it was at the cartographer's discretion whether the names were determined by physical geography or political boundaries [Farágó 2001: 21–23].

To address these challenges, Gizella Szabó Mihály [2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009] proposed the re-standardization of Hungarian settlement names in minority regions in a way that would codify a single official Hungarian name form for each settlement inhabited by Hungarian minorities. These re-standardized names should also be registered and, from time to time, updated in a (digital) gazetteer. In order to provide official Hungarian settlement names that are acceptable to all parties, she argued that the re-standardization procedure should follow new principles. The official Hungarian minority settlement name should coincide with the variant generally used by the local Hungarian population (i.e., the previous principle of “historical authenticity” should be replaced by the principle of “vernacular language use”), even if this results in homonymy among Hungarian settlement names (i.e., the principle of “one settlement : one name” — which successor states often interpret as a manifestation of the idea of proclaiming the unity of historical Hungary — could be abandoned). The author did not appreciate the practice in Hungary of disregarding the Hungarian minority place names codified by the successor states in the 1990s, and of using the sometimes out-of-date 1913 and 1944 settlement names on maps and in publications. She also disapproved of the attempts to resolve the issue of identification by compiling dictionaries that enumerate the various names for settlements in former Hungarian areas [e.g., Sebők 1997; Lelkes 1998; Hajdú-Moharos 2000], as these merely increase the number of competing allonyms.

These ideas formed the basis of the project that was launched by the Termini Hungarian Language Research Network (Termini Magyar Nyelvi Kutatóhálózat) in the early 2000s, focusing on the re-standardization of geographical names in the Carpathian Basin. The Termini website informs us about the methods (i.e., compiling lists of the settlements and relief features bearing several Hungarian names; identifying name forms used by the local population; checking suffixation as used locally in settlement names; preparing geographical names glossaries and discussing them with experts and the responsible political organizations), as well as the probable results (i.e., preventing traditional Hungarian geographical names from falling into oblivion; familiarizing the general public with the locally used name forms) of this procedure [Termini Magyar Nyelvi Kutatóhálózat 2017]. At the same time, the project was clearly a part of a broader concept of organized

language management involving the entire Hungarian speech community [Szabó Mihály 2008: 50], an important subfield of synchronic linguistics that pays equal attention to the varieties of the Hungarian language spoken both within and outside present-day Hungary [see Péntek 2004; Lanstyák 2006].

The re-standardization project was successfully implemented in two countries with Hungarian minorities: Serbia and Slovakia. In accordance with the 2002 Federal Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in Serbia, the National Council of the Hungarian Minority (NCHM), with the help of public consultation in 2003, determined Hungarian names for 266 of the 287 settlements in municipalities where the Hungarian language had official status in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. In 2004, the NCHM's language committee established the Hungarian names of settlements in Vojvodina municipalities that had not introduced Hungarian as an official language. The guiding principles included a preference for traditional or historically grounded Hungarian settlement names (even if they diverged from their Serbian equivalents); acceptance of Hungarian names created artificially during the standardization process of 1898–1912, provided they had become established since then; and in cases where a settlement had multiple Hungarian names, the variant approved by the local inhabitants was favored. Once published in the Official Gazette of Vojvodina, the list of accepted settlement names became official. Despite all efforts, however, some inconsistencies emerged: some settlement names were not widely known or used locally; some differed from the historically established forms; some Hungarian names were given to settlements with a negligible Hungarian population; and some names appeared in an incorrect form on the list [Molnár Csikós 2015: 61–64; 2016: 146–147; 2020: 108; 2021; 2023: 146–147].

In 2004–2005, the HCGN reviewed the officially recognized Hungarian settlement names in Vojvodina, proposing versions for use in Hungarian media, geographical publications, and on maps. This sometimes resulted in discrepancies ranging from different spellings to entirely different names. While the HCGN aimed to create a standardized system that avoided homonymy across borders, the Vojvodina process emphasized historical continuity and current local usage to ensure the long-term sustainability of the approved settlement names. Since its initial publication, the list of official Hungarian settlement names in Vojvodina has not been regularly supervised by the responsible national naming authority. The practical implementation of the list continues to encounter obstacles, including local resistance, administrative inconsistency, and occasional acts of vandalism directed at bilingual signs, particularly in areas with few Hungarian residents or where the Hungarian and Serbian names differ significantly [Molnár Csikós 2015: 64–65; 2016: 148; 2020: 109; 2021; 2023: 147].

In Slovakia, the Government Decree No. 211/1999 on the use of minority languages in public administration necessitated the revision of the 1994 list of Hungarian minority settlement names. This process involved consultation with experts (including linguists, historians and geographers), politicians, municipalities and, to a limited extent, local Hungarian inhabitants. Expert supervision prioritized the 1913 and 1944 gazetteer forms (to avoid homonymy), correction of orthographic errors, restoration of traditional distinctive additions (not endorsed by the responsible ministry), adherence to Hungarian toponymic conventions, and respect for the preferences of municipalities. The project methodology was in accordance with international standardization trends [Szabó Mihály 2013: 60–63; 2024: 86–87].

Consequently, a revised list of Hungarian minority settlement names was published in Government Decree No. 534/2011. Based on historical sources, this list includes Hungarian minority names for settlements that were named after Slovak historical figures in the last decades. While the 2011 list did not eliminate name variants, it reduced their number; decreased homonymy; and strictly adhered to contemporary Hungarian orthography. The listed habitation names have been generally accepted in the relevant municipalities. According to the current version of the Act on the Use of Languages of National Minorities in Slovakia, localities in which a national minority constitutes at least 15% of the population are permitted to use the minority name for the settlement and its constituent parts in official contexts [Szabó Mihály 2013: 64; 2024: 87, 91].

3. Conclusion

Throughout its hundred-year history, even in the most challenging political situations, the standardization of settlement names in Hungary has, to varying degrees, followed the same basic principles. To be considered optimal for official use, standardized habitation names were expected to be monosemic (or monoreferential), historically authentic, toponymically and linguistically accurate, semantically motivated, and etymologically transparent. The Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names, which advises on settlement names in Hungary, aims to preserve the legacy of these earlier practices in an attempt to sustain the toponymic integrity of the Hungarian language area in the Carpathian region. In the early 2000s, the Termini Hungarian Language Research Network launched a project to re-standardize the highly diverse and often inconsistent Hungarian names for settlements inhabited by Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries. Initially, this project seemed to abandon the conventional principle of monoreferentiality in the Hungarian language by favoring contemporary local name usage, even if this resulted in homonymy. However, the standardization of Hungarian minority

settlement names currently appears to be returning to monosemy, seeking a balance between historical authenticity, local preference, and state ideology.

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