

# Commemorative naming practices in Finland

prepared by Ulla Onkamo (ulla.onkamo@kotus.fi), Institute for the Languages of Finland

In the 22nd session of UNGEGN in Vienna 2006 Finland presented the working paper *Commemorative naming practices in Helsinki, Finland* (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEgn/docs/23-gegn/wp/gegn23wp44.pdf>). It introduces the principals which the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki (the capital of Finland) follows in its commemorative naming practices (adopted in 2004). They are in harmony with the recommendations of the UNCSGN resolution VIII/2. The recommendations include for example a five year long waiting period after an individual's death before using the name as a commemorative name. Most of the principals adopted in 2004 have actually been followed by the committee since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Institute for the Languages of Finland (formerly *the Research Institute for the languages of Finland*) gives guidance on municipal name planning nationwide. It has given recommendations on commemorative naming since the 1980's, for example advised to avoid naming after foreign or living individuals. Nowadays the principals of the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki are also followed by the institute. Recommendations on name planning are available in Finnish at the institute's website [http://www.kotus.fi/ohjeet/nimistonsuunnittelun\\_ohjeita/muistonimet\\_ja\\_nimikkopaikat](http://www.kotus.fi/ohjeet/nimistonsuunnittelun_ohjeita/muistonimet_ja_nimikkopaikat).

## Enquiry concerning official naming practices in 1999

In 1999, the Institute for the Languages of Finland in cooperation of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities organised an enquiry concerning official naming practices in municipalities. 52 % of all the municipalities answered.

According to the enquiry, 55 % of the municipalities who answered the enquiry have *sometimes* given place names included in the town plan after living individuals (other options for answering were *never* and *often*). This was a surprisingly big part noting that the biggest cities in Finland have cautiously given commemorative names after living individuals.

## Recent examples of single commemorative names in publicity

***"Sibelius Airport"*** (name of an airport)

In 2015, the project group for the jubilee year of the composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) made an initiative to rename *Helsinki Airport* (*Helsinki-Vantaan lentoasema* fi, *Helsingfors-Vanda flygplats* sv) after Sibelius. Finavia, a state-owned company in charge of the airport, appreciated the possibility to use the composer's name for the airport. However, Finavia decided not to rename the airport. The main reason was the active marketing already made for the brand *Helsinki Airport*. Finavia's manager stated: "Changing the name requires investment of millions of euros. We don't see that it would benefit tourism in Finland as effectively as the present name easily connected with the destination."

***Tarja Halosen puisto*** fi, ***Tarja Halonens park*** sv ('Tarja Halonen Park', name of a park)

In 2015, a park in Helsinki was named after the former president of Finland (2000–2012) Tarja Halonen (living individual). The city of Helsinki has given commemorative names after all the former presidents of Finland. Because the initiatives have been submitted by the Helsinki City Board the Place Names Committee has not been able to ignore them. Three of the names were given after living individuals.

***Katri Helenan raitti*** ('Katri Helena road', name of a road)

In 2014, *Kauppakatu*, the main road of the center of the municipality Tohmajärvi (4 700 inhabitants) was planned to be renamed after the famous singer Katri Helena (living individual) born in Tohmajärvi. Some of the local residents objected the renaming. The official name of the road was not changed, but *Katri Helenan raitti* became an unofficial name to honour the singer and to bring positive publicity for the municipality.

***Aalto-yliopisto*** fi, ***Aalto-universitetet*** sv, ***Aalto University*** en (name of an underground station)

In 2013, the town board of the city of Espoo (270 000 inhabitants) decided to name a planned underground station after the university Aalto University, which technical departments are located in Otaniemi. The university has been named after the architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) in 2010, when three separate universities united. Aalto University has three campuses, two of them located in the neighbour city Helsinki. The name planners of the city of Espoo had previously proposed the station to be named *Otaniemi* fi, *Otnäs* sv, according to the well-known name of the district and resisted naming after the university.

***Helsingin yliopisto*** fi, ***Helsingfors universitet*** sv, ***University of Helsinki*** en (name of an underground station)

In 2014, the town board of the city of Helsinki decided to rename the underground station *Kaisaniemi* fi, *Kajsaniemi* sv (derives from the place name *Kaisaniemi*) after the University of Helsinki, which main campus is located in Kaisaniemi, yet it has several campuses around the city. The University of Helsinki had a jubilee year in 2015. The change was validated by emphasising for example the significance of the university as a local operator. The Place Names Committee of the city resisted changing the established name.

In the beginning of 2016, 18 members of the Helsinki City Council submitted an initiative to bring the previous name of the underground station, *Kaisaniemi*, back in use. However, the Place Names Committee and the name planner of the city of Helsinki did not support the change and stated that changing names back and forward is not desirable.

Contact details:

Ulla Onkamo  
Senior Specialist, Name Planning and Guidance  
Kotimaisten kielten keskus, Institutet för de inhemska språken  
Institute for the Languages in Finland  
Hakaniemenranta 6  
FI-00530 Helsinki  
Finland  
+ 358 295 333 289  
ulla.onkamo@kotus.fi