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Report of Sweden

(National standardization – Official treatment of names)

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Addresses, place-names and legislation in Sweden

The Swedish Act concerning Ancient Monuments and Finds was revised in 2000. A paragraph on place-name standardization was added to chapter 1. It is called Good place-name practice (Sw. “*God ortnamnsed*”) and reads as follows:

Central and local government authorities shall follow a code of good practice when handling place-name questions.

This entails that

- established names shall not be changed without strong reasons for doing so,
- the spelling of place-names shall normally follow accepted linguistic rules unless there are other, well-established spellings,
- the effect on established names shall be considered when new names are created, and
- Swedish, Saami and Finnish names shall, as far as possible, be used together on maps, sign-posts and other signs in multi-lingual areas

Names that have been approved for use on public maps shall be used in the approved form also in other contexts.

The tendency in Swedish place-name standardization is obvious. The aspect of preservation is being emphasized, which is a healthy sign. It is important, though, not to forget the strictly linguistic aspects of the matter. The accentuation on “established” names in the law may cause problems when it comes to decide whether a linguistically incorrect name should be regarded as established or not. There will certainly be a number of cases with differing interpretations.

There are, however, certain factors that indicate that linguistic correctness should take precedence. It is stated in the Government’s commentary on the code of good place-name practice that the regulation means that adopted rules for language correctness shall be followed. It is not intended to “support archaic spellings”. The normative function of the place-name register at the National Land Survey is also a guarantee against incorrect spelling. This database is now being built up and is near completion, and most of the contents (more than one million names) is to be found on the public maps today. In that way the database will be a “confirmation” of place-names already standardized.

But there is one problem, oddly enough connected to the Swedish population and housing census (Sw. *Folk - och bostadsräkningen, FoB*), which by the way is a project encouraged and supported by the UN. Future censuses are planned to be based entirely on information from different administrative sources. To reach this goal a register of housing units is needed. A precondition for such a dwelling register (Sw. *lägenhetsregister*) is that each Swedish municipality establishes location addresses (Sw. *belägenhetsadresser*) in the required amount. Therefore, today's most important place-name project in the country is the re-organisation of the addressing system in rural areas, a major task for the municipalities (290 in all).

A large part of this process involves changing today's PO/letter-box addresses and substituting them with addresses based on settlement names or road names. This will make it easier for rescue services, the police, taxis and others to find the dwelling quickly. It is also positive that this is a way of promoting the use of place-names, considering the great importance and impact of postal addresses (that will be part of the location addresses).

The other side of this coin is the pressure of time and the lack of sufficient resources within the local authorities. The task is gigantic and ought to involve place-name expertise to an extent that reminds of the means that were at our disposal during the property designation reform for 20 years (until 1995). Then there were special units at our three place-name authorities (The National Land Survey [*LMV*], The Institute for Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research [*SOFI*] and The National Heritage Board [*RAÄ*]) with one mission only: to examine the property names in the old real estate registers before they were entered in the new computerised registers. The size and importance of today's address project is equal to that reform and includes a great number of names that has never before been checked as regards linguistic correctness, but the former expert units do not exist any more.

The final words of the place-name paragraph state, as we have seen, that names that have been approved for use on public maps shall be used in the approved form also in other contexts. "Public maps" in this respect includes maps produced by the local authorities of Sweden. In the new addresses decided upon by the local authorities a number of place-names occur that would not be approved in the "ordinary" name examination, e.g. names with archaic or so called decorative spelling. Since there are plans to produce municipal and, consequently, public address maps this creates a dilemma. If place-names of that kind are published on such public maps those maps can not be regarded as being in accordance with good place-name practice.

In order to help the local officials in charge the Swedish Standards Institute produced a national "location address" standard in 1998, without involving name expertise, though. The standard is currently being revised, and this time the Place-Name Advisory Board is represented in the working group dealing with name issues.