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Standardization of Geographical Names**

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**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity (including indigenous,
minority and regional language names).**

Bringing Place-Names Closer to the Locals

Submitted by Norway **

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Summary

Every local community has its own place-names stock which helps to define its surroundings. At the same time the place-names make up part of the identity of the people. They are compressed texts that tell us something about the places to which they have been attached, and something about those who gave the names. So every place-name is a message which the present generations should preserve and learn to read.

The place-names in a local community have a lot of potential to awaken the curiosity of residents and visitors. To utilize this resource and make the place-names more interesting, as well as make them function as a link to the past, the municipal government can enlist the services of experts in the field of name research, and then make the material available electronically through a separate portal on the municipal Web site.

Place-names may also be utilized as an interesting topic for teaching units combining language studies with settlement history and natural history. Maps and photographs will provide material for posters and PowerPoint presentations. One way of opening up the cultural landscape for everybody is to establish cultural paths.

This concept may contribute to raise the level of consciousness that locals have regarding the place-names that surround them, and also give people an increased awareness of why it is important to coordinate the spelling of place-names. It will also be a way to improve the quality of the tourist experience of the area.

Bringing Place-Names Closer to the Locals

In daily life we do not look upon place-names as something peculiar. They exist as a matter of course. We use them when we need them without asking questions about their history. But if questions are asked about how place-names come into existence, why, and what they mean, then many people will start wondering. It is possible to imagine a map without names, and even a landscape without names, but most people would then say that something is missing. Place-names function as a means of defining places and finding one's way to places, to institutions, to friends, etc. Place-names are in fact indispensable for organizing one's surroundings. At the same time they make up part of the identity of the people of a certain area and function as social signals of a common ground. Every local community, small or large, has a great number of place-names at its disposal.

Place-names are not only addresses and identities, they are also living stories which have come into existence at different periods in the local people's past. They are compressed texts that tell us something about the places to which they have been attached, and something about those who gave the names. So every place-name is a message which the present generations should preserve and learn to read. The place-name material of a local community comprises an incredible amount of details, both transparent stories like *Kvalvika* 'the whale's bay', *Lindås* 'the linden tree hill', *Kuvadet* 'the cow ford', *Trædet* 'the enclosure', as well as more puzzling names like *Bømlo* 'the swollen one', *Lofoten* 'the foot of the lynx' (metaphoric), *Troms* 'the [island in the] current'.

The place-names in a local community have a lot of potential to awaken the curiosity of residents and visitors. To utilize this resource and make the place-names more interesting, as well as make them

function as a link to the past, the municipal government can enlist the services of experts in the field of name research, and then make the material available electronically through a separate portal on the municipal Web site. A good starting point would be the name of the municipality itself, its meaning and origin. The next level might proceed with links to several other areas, for example, a) other well-known place-names in the area, b) a list of farm names in the community, c) a list of the names of geographical features in the landscape, d) general information on the importance of place-names to document linguistic and historical developments, on the rules for deriving standard spellings, and how place-names might be used as educational resources and «edutainment» for visitors and community members alike. From point d) links can be provided to the results of efforts to collect and document local place-names, information about where they are stored, the areas where names have not yet been collected, and methods used to collect names.

Vinje, a municipality in West-Telemark in Norway, has enlisted the services of a consultant scholar in onomastics, with the mandate to design a place-name resource for the municipal Web site. Most of the names may be presented using electronic maps or aerial photographs provided by the Mapping Authority (<http://kart.statkart.no/adaptive2/default.aspx?gui=1&lang=2>)

Several main points are presented here:

Vinje, Old Norse (ON) *Vinjar*, plural form of a lost word *vin* 'meadow, pasture', which had already disappeared from the language in the Viking Age, documented in the name of Vinje parish, *Vinje kirchia* [church] in 1360. The name is found in various forms in 40 farm names, and also as the last element in almost 1000 place-names.

Other names of rural districts, for example Rauland, ON *Rauðaland*, from ON *Rauði* 'bog iron' and *land* 'parcel, land plot', Øyfjell, ON *Eyjafjall*, from ON *ey* 'lowlying land by a lake' and *fjell* 'mountain tract', etc. More information on rural place-names and farm names is found in *Norske Gaardnavne* (19 vols.; most of them available online at http://www.dokpro.uio.no/rygh_ng/rygh_felt.html).

Names of striking natural formations: Lake Totak, from ON *þot* 'whistling wind' and ON *agr* 'lake'; Falkeriset, from *falk* 'falcon' and *ris* 'ridge'. There is a legend from the time of the Black Death in 1349 connected to Falkeriset, about a horse named Førnesbrunen, who transported the deceased from the scattered farms at Møsstrand to the church at Rauland.

Local names (microtoponyms): *Hestedokki* 'horse hollow', a small hollow near Rauland Church, where according to the legend, the horse Førnesbrunen is buried.

Street and road names used in addresses may also be linked to the main page. Here information will be found on the meaning of the names, the reason for the name choices, and when the names were approved.

Material suitable for teaching units and tourist purposes will also be found.

Place-names may also be utilized as an interesting topic for teaching units combining language studies with settlement history and natural history. Maps and photographs will provide material for posters and PowerPoint presentations.

One way of opening up the cultural landscape for everybody is to establish cultural paths. There may be old foot paths in an area that lead through landscapes of cultural interest, where such things as building sites, woodland barns, bridges, ruins, rock carvings, mills, saws, enclosures, etc, are found. By producing brochure guides and posting signs along the way, it is possible to revitalize the past in its original context. Each site along the path should have a sign with the name on it and a short explanation of the meaning and the background for the name. Cultural paths should be discussed and created together with local people, who also cooperate in collecting the data.

In order to bring life to place-names in recreational areas and along footpaths, signs with short texts telling about the names and their background can be set up. This will add quality to what people experience along the way. Signs with name explanations can also be put up in rural areas that residents and tourists pass through.

This concept will raise the level of consciousness that locals have regarding the place-names that surround them, and also give people an increased awareness of why it is important to coordinate the spelling of place-names. It will also be a way to improve the quality of the tourist experience of the area.