

23 June 2017

Original: English

**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8-17 August 2017

Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity

Dictionary of Estonian Place Names (2016)

Submitted by Estonia**

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by Peeter Päll (Estonia)

Dictionary of Estonian Place Names (2016)¹

Summary

In 2016 a large dictionary of Estonian place names was published as a result of a longtime collective work. The dictionary aims to be a summary of useful information on place names: names spelling and pronunciation, use of locative cases, earliest records of names, explanations of names' etymology, etc. Name articles also include local folklore on place names and names in the sign language. Altogether the dictionary has 6,011 articles that cover names of populated places and natural features. An online version of the dictionary is planned for the end of 2017 or early 2018.

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In 2016 a large dictionary of Estonian place names („Eesti kohanimeraamat“) was published, an outcome of more than 7 years of collective work. This was a joint effort by the Institute of the Estonian Language (the main coordinator of the work), the Võru Institute and the Estonian Literary Museum. The dictionary was compiled by 22 authors, including those who provided information on folklore about place names and on names in the sign language. Editors of the dictionary were Peeter Päll and Marja Kallasmaa. Marja Kallasmaa was also the author of about a half of the name articles.

The dictionary is the first attempt in Estonian to gather and publish in one volume the main facts and explanations of Estonian place names. Earlier monographs or reference books on Estonian place names in general were available either in German (Paul Johansen's „Die Estlandliste des Liber Census Daniae“ 1933, Lauri Kettunen's „Etymologische Untersuchung über estnische Ortsnamen“ 1955, „Baltisches historisches Ortslexikon. Teil I. Estland“ 1985) or concerned some regions in Estonia (Valdek Päll's monograph on place names in northern Tartumaa 1969–1977, Marja Kallasmaa's monograph on place names in Saaremaa 1996–2000, and in Hiiumaa 2010).

The dictionary contains 6,011 place name articles comprising names of all official populated places. If one includes information on other places mentioned in the articles (smaller villages or features, not having separate articles) the number of places will rise to 11,000. The dictionary has 1,112 pages (including 54 map pages), there are more than 150 illustrations, index of name variants mentioned in the articles (more than 25,000), index of map



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Kohanimeraamat on kokkuvõtlik ülevaade Eesti kohanimedest, nende vanusest, kujunemisest ja etümoloogiast. Esitatud on nime hääldus, kohakäänete kasutus, koha kihelkonna- ja mõisakuuluvus, lühike kohalugu jpm. Sõnaraamatus on 6211 artiklit, sh kõik ametlikud külanimed, valik muid asulanimesid ning tähtsamad piirkondade ja looduskohtade nimed. Mitmele artiklile on lisatud viipenimed ja kohapärimus, raamatu lõpus on kaardilisa.

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names (11,000) and the table of administrative units in Estonia 1866–2016. Introductory texts cover place names' research in Estonia, history of names of populated places, multilingual name variants and various spellings of Estonian names.

A full name article would give information on a) the name spelling and pronunciation; b) the use of locative cases (either exterior or interior locative cases are used for place names, and the choice is often not predictable); c) local variants of place names (often phonetic modifications but also there might be completely different names); d) earliest dated records of names; e) the type of the named feature (populated place, hill, island, lake, etc.); f) location of the named feature (according to both modern administrative division /county, municipality/ and historic division /parish, manor/) and a map reference; g) short history of the locality (mainly concerning name changes); h) explanations or main hypotheses on the name's etymology; i) folklore about the name; j) short information on other meaningful places within the locality (parts of villages, annexed villages); k) author's name (initials); l) list of sources; m) name used in the Estonian sign language. Articles are not uniform in their coverage, only a few have the complete inventory.

The overall aim of the dictionary is to give compact and reliable information to the wide public, therefore an effort was made to write it in an easy-to-read style, avoiding difficult terms. At the same time thorough research was done in order to verify the correctness of information as presented in earlier name research. Also, several parts of Estonia had remained poorly researched. As a result, the dictionary contains a lot of new information and the data on earliest records of several place names has been updated. About 1/8 of place names in the dictionary remain of indefinite origin or are difficult to explain. Preliminary estimates show that about a half of place names originate in appellatives (including dialectal or obsolete terms), about 24 % are clearly of anthroponymic origin and 12 % are either of appellative or anthroponymic origin (as ancient anthroponyms were often based on appellatives, it would be difficult to distinguish them from 'pure' appellatives).

The dictionary articles were planned as location-centered, i.e. a name article would analyze all names that have denoted the same locality. This principle has sometimes been difficult to maintain, as names have shifted their place in the landscape and for earliest recordings we do not have any cartographic data to show the exact locations of named places. Also, the same name could refer to different places, there are many places in Estonia that bear names like Aruküla (< *aru* 'grassland', *küla* 'village'), Metsaküla (< *mets* 'forest'), Mõisaküla (< *mõis* 'manor'), Mäeküla (< *mägi* 'hill, mountain'), Nõmme (< *nõmm* 'heath').

A novel aspect of the dictionary is the combination of scientific etymology with folk etymology, i.e. stories on how the local people themselves explain their names (names folklore). Sometimes these stories are contrary to 'scientific' view, sometimes they complement each other. In some cases 'popular' explanations are the only ones on offer, especially when trying to explain motivation behind etymologically transparent names (e.g. why a village is named *Jiriküla* 'George village' – there were many people with the name Jüri living there).

Another novelty is the presentation of names in the Estonian sign language. Altogether 59 name signs have been included that cover most cities and places that have merited a special sign in the language. Name signs refer often to significant features in the locality (university, gates, type of landscape), some are based on name phonetics (like initial letters), or are simple translations of transparent names.

All named places have been located in maps which constitute a part of the dictionary. Maps have been specially designed to give the historic administrative division (parishes, manor limits) together with modern names.

The dictionary will help to understand the multilingual history of place names in Estonia, name articles mention name variants in Swedish, German, Russian, Latvian, Polish, etc. giving also due respect to linguistic minorities in Estonia. Relationship between names in different languages is complex, sometimes the Estonian name originates in a German surname (e.g. *Voldi* manor is named after Wolffeldt), while the name used in German was in fact of Estonian origin (*Voldi* manor in German was named *Tabbifer* with a typical Estonian place name ending *-vere*).

Besides practical value the dictionary could be considered as a contribution to safeguarding place names as cultural heritage. Name articles shed light on how old are the names (more than 500 names are dated back as early as the 13th century) and what may be their etymology. Place names in Estonia have been quite stable despite the turbulent history. For example, out of ca 490 names mentioned in Liber Census Daniae (the list of villages dated around 1241) about 450 can be positively located in modern landscape and some 400 names are still in use. Therefore, the dictionary can be used as a reference source when deciding on possible name changes that occur during the current administrative reform. The Place Names Act in Estonia (1997) stipulates that preference should be given to names with historic and cultural value.

The publication of the dictionary was noted widely in the media. The main author of the articles, Marja Kallasmaa, won the Wiedemann Language Prize for 2016 and the dictionary itself was voted the best Language Action of the Year 2016.

It is expected that the dictionary will also be available freely online, hopefully by the end of 2017 or early 2018. However, many of the articles need to be updated because the administrative reform under way at the moment will change the administrative locations of the named places, and some 80 names will have to be modified or changed because duplicate names within one municipality will not be allowed according to the Place Names Act. Also, possible corrections to other data will be done if needed and this information will be distinguished for those having the paper copy of the dictionary.