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

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries  
and on the progress made in the standardization of  
geographical names since the Seventh Conference**

**Urban Place Names Project**

**Submitted by Finland\*\***

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In Finland, we have traditionally collected place names only from the countryside, which is why the collections of the Names Archive only include rural names. Rural names have also served as principal research material. During the 1999 European Heritage Days in Finland with the theme *Place names – The Memory of Places*, it was brought up that we lack information on urban place names and a collection project would be necessary.

The official urban nomenclature has been on the increase in the past few decades. As the towns have grown, it has been necessary to create a large number of new official names. Some 300,000 new names have been planned, especially for suburbs and other areas, and for streets, parks and squares. The principles of name-giving, e.g. those governing thematic group names, have not been documented in any way in most towns. The information on these principles can still be obtained by interviewing people that have been involved in the name planning. To develop name planning, we also need research data e.g. of the users' opinions and attitudes towards name planning and planned official names.

In order to collect information on and to initiate research into urban nomenclature, we launched the Urban Place Names project. It was started in 2001, and is carried out jointly by the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and the Finnish Departments of six universities. Urban Place Names consists of partial research projects, most of which are conducted by students. The students write various academic papers on the subject. At the moment, the number of students involved in the project is 25, but it is expected that their number will increase and that departments of other linguistic subjects will also join. The members of the steering group of the project (Terhi Ainiala, Ritva Liisa Pitkänen, Laila Lehikoinen ja Kaija Mallat) are from the Research Institute and from the Finnish Department of the University of Helsinki.

Urban nomenclature has not been studied extensively in Finland, and the research done so far has focused nearly exclusively on official place names, especially street names. The unofficial popular place names have mostly remained outside of the scope of the research.

The principal objective of this project is to acquire data on the unofficial place names. The perspective and method are, to a great extent, socio-onomastic: the research focuses on the variation and stratification of place names. One of the objects of research is the differences in the knowledge of names and the need for names between different individuals and groups of people. Other topics cover, for example, the macro toponyms of the urban environment, i.e. the names that most inhabitants of the town know. There is no existing material available for the study of unofficial place names, so the researchers collect their own material by conducting interviews in the field.

The project will last for three years, and it will be concluded at the end of 2003. Since socio-onomastic research into urban nomenclature has not really been done before, the project will probably provide us with an entirely new field of research and fresh perspectives to the study of place names.

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