



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General

2 July 2007

Original: English

---

### **Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

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 Eight Conference**

#### **Report of Finland**

Submitted by Finland \*\*

---

\* E/CONF.98/1.

\*\* Prepared by Sirkka Paikkala, Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and Teemu Leskinen, National Land Survey of Finland.

## **Report on the situation in Finland and the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

### **1. Names authorities and their tasks**

There is no specific law covering place names in Finland. The Finnish Parliament has expressed a wish (187/24.5.1957) that in decisions concerning place names, officials should consult experts in onomastics. The wish has been followed by administrative orders by ministries and central boards but because it has no legal force, it has not been very effective. In 1996, the situation was discussed at the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and a working group was founded to study if a place name law was needed. The report of the working group was submitted to the Ministry of Education in October of 1997, which, in turn, asked 30 different authorities and representatives of Finnish culture to give their statements on the report. In April 1998, 21 statements were sent to the Ministry of Education. After that, there has been no progress in this matter.

The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland assumes the right and responsibility for providing normative recommendations for place names. Its Language Planning Department takes care of Finnish names, its Swedish Department of Swedish names, and its Department for Minority Languages of Saami names. The recommendations provided by the Institute are based on linguistics, cultural history, local tradition, and the practical demands of everyday life.

The statutory obligation to ask for a statement only covers the municipal names: according to the law (Act on Local Authority Boundaries 1997/1196), it is the municipal council's task to decide which name the municipality is given, and each municipal council involved in the merger must approve the new name of the merging municipalities. If none of the names of the merging municipalities is accepted as the new joint name, the councils will have to ask the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland to issue a statement on the new proposed name.

The power of decision on names of other administrative units belongs to various administrative bodies. Names in town and city plans (names of districts, streets, squares, parks, etc.) are confirmed by the Ministry of Environment but the actual naming is under the responsibility of local authorities. The National Land Survey decides on the names of cadastral villages. The Survey's regional offices have the final decision on the names of farms and estates given originally by their owners.

Central and regional organizations have the right to decide on names relating to their sphere of activities. Thus, for example, the Itella Corporation (Formerly Finland Post Corporation) decides on the names of post office districts and the VR-Group Ltd. (the

railway company) decides on the names of railway stations. The Finnish Road Administration has delegated the right to make decisions concerning names on road signs to its nine regional offices.

The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland acts as an authoritative organ in matters relating to the standardization of place names by providing guidance for administrative bodies and by checking the Finnish, Swedish, and Saami names on the maps prepared by the National Land Survey. The work is based on onomastic field research conducted since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of this research, in 2007, about 3.2 million annotated place name entries based on field-collection and 625,000 name cards collected from old documents have been entered in the archives.

## **2. Office treatment of names**

The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland is responsible for the office treatment of Finnish (the Language Planning Department), as well as that of Swedish names (the Swedish Department) and Saami-language names (Department for Minority Languages). The work concentrates on (1) checking and correcting names on maps to be published, (2) statements and recommendations on various names, such as the names of municipalities and administrative areas, villages, public buildings and enterprises, as well as municipal road names, (3) organizing onomastic training for cartographers, municipal name planners, students and teachers, (4) acquiring and providing information on spelling, pronunciation and inflection of domestic and foreign names in Finland.

### **(1)**

Finnish topographic maps are mainly produced by the National Land Survey of Finland, which also maintains a Real Estate Register. The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland has been checking the names on national topographic maps covering the entire country since 1976. In the period between 2004 and 2007, the work focused on the northernmost Lapland. In fact, the National Land Survey of Finland started the finalisation of the mapping of the region in 2004, with the objective of preparing the Topographic Database covering the whole country in 2007. Since the northernmost Lapland is Saami area, a large part of the work consisted of checking the names in North Saami, Inari Saami, and Skolt Saami. A large number of names were also collected, for example a total of ca. 1,500 North Saami names, a total of ca. 500 Inari Saami names and a total of ca. 100 Skolt Saami names were added to the Topographic Database, the Geographic Names Register and the Basic Map.

### **(2)**

Name planning in Finland has been centrally affected by the reform of the municipality and service structure, of which the objective is to reduce the number of municipalities by, e.g., municipal mergers until ca. 200 municipalities will be left. The ongoing project has led to a considerable number of planned and already realized municipal mergers, as the different municipalities have voluntarily considered their options in case of a change. Since 2002, 35 municipalities have changed their names, and at the beginning of 2007, there were a total of 416 municipalities. Since the reform also affects the names of the

municipalities, there has been public debate on which names are given to municipalities and on what grounds they are given in connection with the municipal mergers. Further, in 2002, there was a lively public debate on street names in Helsinki, especially on memorial names given after individuals.

From 2002 to 2007 the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland has issued general recommendations on, e.g., the merging municipalities (report under item 9, National standardization), regional names and the inflection of Estonian names in Finnish (report under item 10, Exonyms). Recommendations have also been given on the names of sparsely populated regions, planned names, and names of streets, as well as on the preservation of the names of postal code areas.

Researchers of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland have worked as expert members of, e.g., the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki. On 15 September 2004, the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki gave the recommendation on Commemorating individuals, companies, and communities in the planning of new place names in Helsinki. The recommendation is in harmony with the UN resolution VIII/2, Commemorative naming practices for geographical features (report under item 7, Measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names).

(3)

Since 2002, the Research Institute has arranged two one-day annual discussion and training events for onomastic researchers and name planners, as well as for students in onomastics at different universities. Seminars have focused on presenting research, which is being planned or under way. The events have attracted 30–40 participants.

Since 2002, the Research Institute has arranged training courses on onomastics and cartographic names for the staff of the regional offices of the National Land Survey. Courses have also been arranged for students of land survey at the Helsinki University of Technology, students of Finnish at the University of Helsinki, and schoolteachers.

In the period between 2001 and 2006, the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and the University of Helsinki had a joint five-year professorship of Finnish in the field of onomastics. After that, the teaching on onomastics at the university level has been carried out by docents. The Department of Finnish of the University of Helsinki has held one semester-long course in onomastics every year, besides which there have been a couple of other courses at other universities. The students of Finnish, Swedish and Saami can opt for onomastics as the field they want to specialize in.

(4)

The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland checked Finnish edition of *The Reader's Digest World Atlas, Finnish edition* in 2005, and compiled a handbook of orthography of the place names of the Russian Federation (report under item 10, Exonyms). The Institute has also, in the spring of 2007, by request, sent material on the

Finnish exonyms referring to places in Europe to the Exonyms Working Group working in connection with the EuroGeoNames project.

The Research Institute maintains a daily toll-free telephone line to answer name-related questions. A considerable number of the questions the telephone advice line receives have to do with the correct use of foreign place names. Questions concerning names of companies, administrative units and associations have increased, which probably means that the everyday problems with place names are shifting from the field of the traditional place names towards a more urban and administrative environment.

The general public receives information on names through the media. The name planners and researchers of the Research Institute answer questions from the public on the TV- and radio programs and write articles on names in newspapers and magazines.

### **3. Field collection of place names**

The basic material of place name treatment in the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland consists of the place names collected by interviewing local inhabitants in the entire country. The systematic collection of the Swedish-language names has been completed. The collection work done in the Finnish areas in the past few years has been mostly renewed collection. During the period 2002 - 2006, the Institute's names collection has been supplemented with ca. 19,000 name entries, of which ca. 1,000 are North Saami names.

### **4. Toponymic databases and websites**

The Finnish National Land Survey's (NLS) *Geographic Names Register* (GNR, report under item 12, Toponymic data files) is a toponymic-cartographic database serving the needs of geographic names standardisation and information service together with national geographic information and map data production. The main objective in the GNR design was the management of multilingual geographic names in a multi-scale and multi-product GI-environment.

The principal data source of the GNR is the NLS's *Topographic Database* (TDB). The database includes, among other geographic information, over 800,000 natural and cultural feature names presented in the Basic Map 1:20,000. The spelling and location of the names have been checked and approved by the Finnish, Swedish and Saami experts of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland.

The GNR comprises the *Place Name Register* (PNR) and the *Map Name Register* (MNR) integrated as a single database. The PNR is scale-less, contains no cartographic data, but data on place names' feature type, feature location, approved spelling and language. The MNR includes the product- and name-wise cartographic parameters for the selected names of the PNR. The data model of the GNR: A *Place* has one or more *Place names* that may occur one or several times as *Map names* in different cartographic products.

The MapSite is a popular map and place name service provided by the National Land Survey. Launched in 1996, it was the first national Internet map service in Europe. A renewed version of this free service is now available at <http://www.karttapaikka.fi> → English. (Report under item 13, toponymic websites)

The website of the Research Institute includes advice and material on name planning for the general public, e.g., a list of countries, capitals and nationalities in Finnish. (<http://www.kotus.fi>).

## 5. Publications

The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland publishes bulletins in Finnish (*Kielikello*) and in Swedish (*Språkbruk*). These publications also discuss name planning and give recommendations.

### Books 2002 - 2006

Literature related to geographical names published in Finland in 2002–2007:

Hakulinen, Kerkko (2006). *Paikannimet* [Place names]. Helsinki, WSOY. ISBN: 951-0-27676-6. 612 p. Includes 6 200 entries of world's place names: names of the continents, countries, important towns, noteworthy natural sites and names of the first-level administrative regions. The entries are given in a form suited to the Finnish language, i.e. many of them are exonyms. The names and the words included in them that refer to the type of the place (e.g. *meri* 'sea' or *sea*) are also given in the official languages of the country and in English.

*Kielitoimiston sanakirja [Dictionary of the Language Planning Office]* [Electronic database] (2004) / Red: Marja Lehtinen (editor-in-chief), Eija-Riitta Grönros (editor-in-chief) & al; including *Asutusnimihakemisto [Index of Names of Dwelling]*: Ritva Korhonen (ed), Tiina Manni-Lindqvist. Helsinki, Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and Kielikone Oy. Publications by the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland, ISSN 0355-5437. Material: Book ISBN: 952-5446-11-5

*Kunnat ja kuntapohjaiset aluejaot – Kommuner och kommunbaserade indelningar – Municipalities and Regional Divisions Based on Municipalities 2007*. Käsikirjoja – Handböcker – Handbooks 28. Tilastokeskus – Statistikcentralen – Statistics Finland. Helsinki. 95 pp. ISBN 978-952-467-656-4.

*Maiden nimet suomeksi, ruotsiksi, saameksi, englanniksi, ranskaksi ja saksaksi* [Country names in Finnish, Swedish, Saami, English, French and German] (2003). Ed. Saara Welin. Helsinki, Research Institute for the Languages of Finland, ISBN: 952-5446-00-X. 182 p.

*Venäjän federaation paikannimiä, oikeinkirjoitus- ja painotusopas* [Place names in the Federation of Russia. Handbook of spelling and stress] (2006). Ed. Martti Kahla, Pirjo

Mikkonen, Ida Kempinen & Anna Charnaya. Helsinki, Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. ISBN: 952-5446-18-2. 361p.

*Toponymic Guidelines for Map Editors and Other Editors, Finland* / prepared by Sirkka Paikkala in collaboration with Teemu Leskinen and Kerkko Hakulinen. 4th, revised edition (version 4.3, May 2007) is available at <http://www.kotus.fi/index.phtml?l=en&s=510>

*National Geographic Information Strategy 2005-2010*. Finnish National Council for Geographic Information. Finnish Government Information Society, Police Programme. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, publication 10a/2004. Helsinki 2005. ISBN 952-453-229-8. [http://www.mmm.fi/en/index/frontpage/land\\_survey/paikkatietojenyhteiskaytto/kansallinen\\_enpaikkatietostrategia.html](http://www.mmm.fi/en/index/frontpage/land_survey/paikkatietojenyhteiskaytto/kansallinen_enpaikkatietostrategia.html).

*Maps and geographic information - essential elements in a well-functioning society. Public mapping strategy 2001-2010*. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. Mikkeli 2002. ISSN 1238-2531. ISBN: 952-453-069-4. 28 p. [http://www.mmm.fi/en/index/frontpage/land\\_survey/kartoitusjakartat.html](http://www.mmm.fi/en/index/frontpage/land_survey/kartoitusjakartat.html).

## Atlases

*Suuri maailmankartasto* [The Reader's Digest World Atlas] (2006). Hannakatri Hollmén, Aino Kervinen (red.). Original: The Reader's Digest world atlas. Helsinki: Valitut palat [The Reader's Digest]. ISBN: 951-584-697-8. 302 p.

*SuurAtlas, suomalainen maailmankartasto* [Comprehensive Atlas, Atlas in Finnish] (2006). / Risto Pekkanen, Seppo Voutilainen, Erkki-Sakari Harju] ; [names: Mikko Lantz]. Helsinki : Genimap , 2006 (Helsinki : Mainos ja Etiketti). Was previously published with practically the same contents in 2004 under the title *GAIA: suuri maailmankartasto* [GAIA: Comprehensive World Atlas]. ISBN: 951-593-964-X. 109 p.

*Gaia, suuri maailmankartasto* [GAIA: Comprehensive World Atlas] (2004). Ed. Risto Pekkanen, Seppo Voutilainen, Erkki-Sakari Harju; names: Mikko Lantz. Espoo, Weilin + Göös. ISBN: 951-593-899-6. 108 p.

*GT-tiekartasto 2007, Suomi-Finland = GT-väгатlas = GT road atlas = GT-Strassenatlas* PAINOS: 13. p. 1:200000, 1:250000, 1:100000. Helsinki, Karttakeskus (WS Bookwell) ISBN: 978-951-593-038-5. 336 p.

*Autoilijan tiekartasto: Suomi-Finland = Väगतlas = Road atlas = Strassenatlas*. 1:650000, 1:800000, 1:40000. Helsinki, Map Centre (WS Bookwell) ISBN: 978-951-593-044-6. 64 s.

*Aino, suuri Suomen kartasto* [Aino, Comprehensive Map of Finland]. Also includes information pages, thematic maps, and an index. Map scale varies. Vantaa, Genimap Oy, 2005. ISBN: 951-593-963-1

*Suomalaisen Maailman atlas* [Atlas of the Finnish World]. Map scale varies. Helsinki : Genimap , 2006 (WS Bookwell). Index of names. ISBN: 951-593-005-7. Finnish.

## **9. Addresses**

Research Institute for the Languages of Finland  
(Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus)  
Sörnäisten rantatie 25  
FI-00500 HELSINKI  
(<http://www.kotus.fi>)

National Land Survey of Finland  
(Maanmittauslaitos)  
P.O.Box 84  
FI-00521 HELSINKI  
(<http://www.nls.fi>)