

**22<sup>nd</sup> SESSION OF UNGEGN  
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Division)**

**Agenda item 16  
Standardization in multilingual Areas**

*Kven Place-Names*

In Norway there are two groups of minority languages, Saami (North Saami, Lule Saami, Skolte Saami, South Saami) and Kven (Finnish). This brief outline applies to the use of Kven place-names in official contexts.

Kven place-names are mainly distributed over an area from Lyngen in the county of Troms to Pasvik in the eastern part of the county of Finnmark, in the ancient settlement area of the Kvens, but traditionally important towns outside this area, such as Tromsø (*Tromssa*) and Bergen (*Peruna*), also have Kven names. In some local authority areas, such as Alta (*Alattio*), there are about a thousand Kven names, many of these being the names of haymaking areas, of properties in the form of land, and of fishing areas along the River Alta or Altaelva (*Alattionjoki*). Many places and natural localities in Troms and Finnmark have parallel names in all three local languages (Saami, Kven, Norwegian).

Place-names are important elements of our cultural heritage as they often function as a unique window on our history, and they provide information on the use of natural resources and on events about which we can find no other material. Place-names are not least important as part of our collective local identity. This is something we notice particularly well in discussions about place-names: it is not a matter of indifference what places are called and how their names are spelt. Such discussions usually become heated. Whether or not we can interpret names does not always mean so much; linguistically “opaque” names also function just as well as linguistically “transparent” names.

In 1991 came the Norwegian *Place-Names Act*, which regulates the spelling of place-names. In pursuance of section 3 of the Act, Saami and Finnish (i.e. Kven) names that are in use among the local population shall normally also be used by the public authorities on maps and signposts, and in registers etc. When the written form of Kven names is to be laid down, Finnish orthography (spelling) is used, but it is the local pronunciation that is the starting point. All approved written forms of place-names are to be entered in a Central Register of Place-Names, for which the Norwegian Mapping Authority is responsible.

Since the beginning of the 1990s there have been four regional name consultancy services for Norwegian names, and a joint service for Saami and Finnish (Kven) place-names. In 2002 a separate service was established for Kven place-names. This service is located at Finnmark College.

Local authorities and the Norwegian Mapping Authority are important partners in this co-operation, but the name consultancy service normally provides information about Kven place-names and is pleased to offer advice to anybody who is interested in place-names.

As part of the work on highlighting the languages and cultures of the Saami and the Kvens, the Norwegian Government will lay the ground for multilingual names of municipal and county authorities for those local government authorities who want this, as stated in a Report to the Storting, or national assembly, (St.meld. nr. 33 (2001-2002)). The work on multilingual signposts is proceeding very slowly. At the beginning of 2004 only seven trilingual signs had been put up; six of them were in Porsanger, and the seventh was in Vadsø. Many more local authorities ought to rise to the occasion here!