



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General

3 July 2007

Original: English

---

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

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

Item 9 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**National standardization:**

**Office treatment of names**

### **Recommendation on the changes of municipality names in Finland**

Submitted by Finland\*\*

---

\* E/CONF.98/1.

\*\* Prepared by Sirkka Paikkala and Pirjo Mikkonen, Research Institute for the Languages of Finland, Finland.

## **Names of new and merging municipalities in Finland**

In the past few decades, the reform of the municipality and service structure has been a heated topic of public debate in Finland. The reform would entail a decrease of the number of municipalities through, e.g., municipality mergers to ca. 200. The number of municipalities was the biggest in the present Finland in 1945, when they totalled 558. 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. At the beginning of 2007 there were 416 municipalities in Finland.

The reform will also affect the names of municipalities. No matter if there were just two municipalities to merge, let alone if there were more, the new emerging municipalities would have to be named. 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.

In 2005, the new *large municipalities* became a heated topic of debate. In view of the issue's importance for people's identity and the entire linguistic landscape of the nation, the Finnish Language Council of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland considered the names of the merging municipalities in its meeting of 13 February 2006, and issued a recommendation with the main principle that the old traditional names should be preserved and that the local names tradition and the names' suitability to the current orthography would be paid attention to whilst creating new names.

### **Main principles of the recommendation by the Finnish Language Council:**

1. The objective is to preserve in use the habitual names as widely as possible, e.g., by retaining the names that are no longer used as municipal names as names of parts of the municipality, e.g., population centres or quarters of a town.
2. It is recommendable that the municipalities could agree that one of the names of the merging municipalities would become the name of the new municipality. One specific group is constituted by cases where the surrounding municipalities of a large town are merged into the urban centre. In such cases the name of the new municipality will be naturally determined as the name of the central town.
3. If the merging municipalities have previously been part of a common parish or municipality, the old common name should preferably be adopted as the new name of the municipality.

4. The history or environment of the region may include a name (that is possibly no longer used actively), which could be given a new referent in the municipal merger. This could work at least if all of the municipalities in the merger have previously been part of that particular historical area. Another option would be to adopt the name of a village that has grown big and widely known.

5. Whilst considering new names, name patterns characteristic of the region, such as the vocabulary used in names of dwellings, should be used.

6. It should be already considered at the planning stage how the name could be translated into Swedish. It can be expected that the linguistic conditions of the municipalities might change after the mergers, making the Swedish names necessary.

7. What should be **avoided**?

- Double names, such as *Helsinki-Vantaa*, since they lead to constant difficulties of orthography and inflection.
  - Fixed phrases, such as *Perämeren kaupunki* [the Town of the Bothnian Bay], which has been suggested as the possible common name of the towns in the region of the Bothnian Bay.
  - In order to avoid mix-ups, the names of provinces etc. and their parts.
  - Words not typical of the nomenclature in the area.
-