

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

19 July 2012

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

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

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 Ninth Conference
(for distribution only).**

Report of Norway

Submitted by Norway**

* E/CONF.101/1.

** Prepared by: Mr. Botolv Helleland, State Place-Name Consultant, The Norwegian Language Council, Norway

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

Report of Norway

Summary

Submitted by Norway

Prepared by Mr. Botolv Helleland, State Place-Name Consultant, The Norwegian Language Council, Norway

The Norwegian Place-Name Act of 1990 with amendments in 2005 continues to be enforced, but it is being met with protests, as the standardization process sometimes leads to new spellings of place-names. Such protests encouraged some parliamentarians to suggest an amendment to the Place-Name Act, which will be voted on later this year. A new law for registration of property, *Matrikkelloven* or the Land Register Statute, took effect on January 1, 2010, and regulates the assignment and management of addresses in the 430 municipalities in Norway.

Norway designated the year 2009 as the “Year of Cultural Inheritance” and declared its intention to activate, cultivate, and preserve the cultural heritage in a number of areas, including place-names. A pilot project to assess the time and cost required to revitalize the collection microtoponyms and complete the digitization of existing place-name material was initiated by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

The spelling of place-names in minority languages used in Norway is for the most part in the process of becoming stabilized. Yet there are still problems of a legal, practical and linguistic nature when it comes to real equality of status between majority and minority languages, which in the last instance include North Sami, Lule Sami, South Sami and Kven (Finnish).

Sentralt stedsnavnregister (SSR, the national registry of place-names) is Norway’s official registry of place-names in public and official use. The Norwegian Mapping Authority is responsible for running and developing the registry under the provisions of the Place-Name Act. As of June 16, 2011, there were about 910,000 place-names and about 1,050,000 names of all types with different spellings in SSR. When a spelling of a place-name is approved following a completed application process, it is added to the registry SSR.

The Norwegian Language Council, Place-name Services and the Norwegian Mapping Authority meet once annually to discuss the legal, scholarly and administrative questions connected with the orthographical rules for place-names.

A) LEGISLATION

a. The Place-Names Act

The Norwegian Place-Names Act of 1990 with amendments in 2005 (<http://www.lovdato.no/all/hl-19900518-011.html>) provides a general protection for place-names as part of the intangible cultural heritage. The first paragraph of the act states that “the intention of this act is to preserve place-names as cultural inheritance”. However, in practice its effect is limited. There are two provisions in the law that apply to place-name preservation. The first is that a place-name must be used in accordance with its local tradition. For instance, an inherited place-name should not be moved to a place where it does not belong originally. Sometimes this rule is broken by housing companies because a particular name may “sell” better. The municipal authorities are encouraged to prevent such breaches.

The second provision relating to the protection of place-names is the rule that place-names should be standardized on the basis of the inherited local pronunciation. The reason is that the inherited local pronunciation is looked upon as the primary one, as it is handed down from generation to generation. However, in some cases locals have protested to officially standardized names. This applies particularly to families that have an alternative form of the name in question as their surname, for instance *Schee* for the standardized form *Skeie* and *Wiig* for the standardized form *Vik*.

Such protests encouraged some parliamentarians to suggest an amendment to the Place-Name Act, and quite unexpectedly the National Assembly (Stortinget) voted unanimously in favor of a proposal to instruct the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to prepare such an amendment. The proposed text has been sent out for hearing in relevant administrative bodies and organizations. Both the Mapping Authority and the Norwegian Language Council argue against the proposal, as it will open the way for a variety of spellings of the same name, depending on the owner’s view. Seen in light of the requirements for the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage, this initiative is regarded as a step backwards. Still, it is correct to say that most Norwegian place-names will be safeguarded under the existing provisions of the Act.

b. Decisions on the spelling of place-names

The Norwegian Mapping Authority is responsible for supervising the law and sets the spelling of the vast majority of geographical names. The municipality decides on the choice and spelling of street and road names. To implement the provisions of the Act five regional name advisory services have been established for Norwegian place-names, plus one for Sami and one for Kven place-names. Moreover, an appeals board was set up to rule on complaints filed regarding decisions on the spelling of place-names.

So far more than 100.000 geographical names have been authorized since the Place-names Act came into effect on July 1, 1991. During the first half of 2012 approximately 1600 names were authorized according to the provisions of the law. The number of name cases handled by the Appeals Board since 1991 is about xxx.

c. The Land Register Statute

A new law for registration of property, *Matrikkeloven* or the Land Register Statute, took effect on January 1, 2010. (<http://www.lovdato.no/all/nl-20050617-101.html>). It replaced an earlier law on property division. One of the provisions of the new law is concerned with the assignment and management of addresses. The goal is to assign street/road addresses to all instances in the country (residences, offices, business locations, vacation homes, etc.) which do not already have such addresses. Each of the 429 municipalities in the country is responsible for assigning the addresses in

cooperation with the place-name consultancies and the Mapping Authority. The spelling must be in accordance with the norms set down in the Place-Names Act. By January 1, 2015, the assignment of street addresses should cover 90 per cent of the population.

The regulations also open for assigning an additional address based on a local place-name. A person may then have the following (fictive) address: *Peter Berg, Fjellvegen 5, Langvik, 6998 Romsdal*, where *Langvik* is optional. The main reason for allowing an additional address was that historical associations as well as private persons feared that local names might fall out of use if only street addresses were to be used.

The Norwegian Mapping Authority has the responsibility for the training of municipal employees and for the dissemination of information to the municipalities, in regard to both the Land Register and Place-Name Statutes. To facilitate these responsibilities, the Mapping Authority cooperates with a national organization named GeoForum. Divisions of this institution have held regional courses throughout Norway in 2010–2012, but the course outline and program were developed by the Mapping Authority with the assistance of the Place-Name Advisory Services. These courses are primarily intended for employees working in the addressing offices of the municipality or responsible for place-names.

The guidelines for the assignment of addresses are available (only in Norwegian) at www.statkart.no/nor/Matrikkel/Adresse/Adresseveileder/. A handbook on addresses and place-names is also available on the Web (<http://www.statkart.no/nor/Matrikkel/Adresse/>). A number of regional courses for county and municipal officials have been held over the last couple of years. Most municipalities have established rules for assigning street names. A committee has recently submitted a comprehensive set of street name rules for the municipality of Oslo.

The following principles for choosing an address name are recommended:

- The name must fit into a comprehensive system of addressing
- The name should build on and be a continuation of local name traditions
- The name should be suited to the place
- The name should not be obscene or comical
- Names should not duplicate or closely approximate existing names
- The name should be easy to write, read, and pronounce
- Names of living persons should be avoided, and the name of a deceased person should not be used until 5-10 years after the death of the person. Names of people who lived recently should be written as they were spelled by the bearer. It is in general advisable to restrict the use of personal names.
- Classification names (names of animal and plant species, minerals, constellations, etc. in a subdivision or neighborhood) may be used when desirable, but such naming easily becomes a cliché and should be restricted.

B) COLLECTION AND DIGITIZATION OF PLACE-NAMES

a. Towards a database of Norwegian Place-Names

Over the last couple of decades a large part of the existing place-names collections recorded on filing cards and other paper formats has been digitized, and the universities and other institutions working with place-names have agreed to establish a Norwegian place-names data base, aiming at coordinating existing collections in electronic form with the ability to communicate with each other. This is a long term project and still many more names like microtoponyms should be collected and digitized. Several municipalities have developed their own digital place-names databases. One particular task is to ensure the professional quality of the various collections.

b. 2009, The Year of Cultural Inheritance

Norway designated the year 2009 as the “Year of Cultural Inheritance” and declared its intention to activate, cultivate, and preserve the cultural heritage in a number of fields, including place-names, with the goal of making its population more aware of cultural values and at the same time acting as a reminder of the joint responsibility for safeguarding inherited objects of cultural importance. The Research Group of Onomastics at the University of Oslo in cooperation with the Norwegian Names Association (<http://www.norsknamelag.no/index.html>) suggested a number of activities relating to place-names (geographical names). The purpose of the agenda below is to inform and stimulate individuals as well as public and private organizations responsible for various fields of cultural activities to include place-names in their programs. Place-names make part of the intangible cultural inheritance and represent important values in a society, not only as indispensable addresses or labels attached to the surroundings, but also as historical texts and identity markers. Academics and other trained personnel are encouraged to give lectures on place-names and organize courses in the collection and standardization of local place-names. It is also recommended to establish cultural paths where the place-names are used for revitalizing the past.

The Year of Cultural Inheritance in 2009 was considered a good opportunity to increase the collection of local place-names, especially microtoponyms, and several courses in collection methodology were held at local historical associations by staff members at the universities. Each name was to be written on a form with columns for the spoken form, standardized form, what the name refers to and other information about the name and the named place. The names were also to be plotted in on maps in a suitable scale, for instance 1:5000, and preferably entered into an electronic map. The informants were to be elderly locals who know the area and the dialect well. After having completed the collection the material was to be entered into a database and made available to the general public on the Internet. Place-names collection might also be done individually by any interested person, just by interviewing elderly locals and writing down the information – hopefully an enjoyable activity that would bring the interviewer and the interviewees closer to the past – and would be a fine way of spending some hours without TV.

c. A pilot project for collecting and digitizing place-names

In 2009 the Ministry of Culture awarded significant grants for use in the following three areas: 1) to make a national survey of the status of the existing place-name collections at the universities and professional institutions; 2) to evaluate the amount of time needed to digitize existing paper-based place-name resources; 3) to try out a method for collecting local place-names (microtoponyms) with the assistance of older members of the community. The project was completed in 2011, and a report has recently been submitted to the Ministry. According to the report, ca. 15 man-years would be needed to digitize the existing collections at the University of Oslo. The report also recommends that scholars be employed in temporary positions in each of the four regions where the most work is yet to be done to teach methodology and organize the process of place-name collection.

C) MINORITY LANGUAGES

The Place-Names Act of 1990 with subsequent amendments has laid down the principle that multiple forms of place-names in multilingual areas shall be used on maps, signs and other official documents according to traditional use and in conformity with inherited name usage, and the spelling of place names in these areas is for the most part in the process of becoming stabilized. Yet there are still problems of a legal, practical and linguistic nature when it comes to real equality of status between majority and minority languages, which in the last instance include North Sami, Lule Sami, South Sami and Kven (Finnish). Sami is an administrative language in 6 municipalities in Northern Norway. In 2005 Kven was acknowledged as a separate language in Norway.

In Norway the Sami language has official status and is used as an official language in addition to Norwegian in six municipalities in Northern Norway. The Norwegian place-name law decrees that Sami place names should be used on maps, signs and other official documents according to traditional use. Provisions of the law also define the different areas in which, respectively, North Sami, Lule Sami and South Sami orthography should be used. That means that the old Sami orthography gradually is being changed to the new spelling norms: the new North Sami orthography approved in 1979, the new Lule Sami orthography from 1983, and the South Sami orthography. That is the case for the official maps and also in the toponymic database at the Norwegian Mapping Authority. This has been done in its essence according to Resolution nr. 36, *Problems of minority languages*, of the second UN conference on geographical names in 1972.

Both Sami and Kven place-names are included in the Mapping Authority name database

(<http://kart.statkart.no/adaptive2/default.aspx?gui=1&lang=2>). The Kven place-name service has established its own database of Kven place-names, with many parallel names in Sami and Norwegian (<http://www.kvenskestedsnavn.no/>). Eventually, this database will have 10,000 name entries. At this time, about 10% of the articles have been edited.

D) MAPS, REGISTERS, GAZETTEERS AND TOPONYMIC DATA FILES

The main Topographic Map Series "Norge 1:50 000", which used to be published by the Mapping Authority, has since 2004 been published by the private company Nordeco (Ugland).

Sentralt stedsnavnregister (SSR, the national registry of place-names) is Norway's official registry of place-names in public and official use. The Mapping Authority is responsible for maintaining and developing the registry under the provisions of the Place-Name Act. As of June 16, 2011, there were about 910,000 place-names and about 1,050,000 names of all types with different spellings in SSR. When a spelling of a place-name is approved following a completed application process, it is added to the registry SSR. Following this, only the approved spelling will be used by official agencies. All other spellings of the name will then be void and they shall not be used on official maps or documents. Spellings that were in use before the Place-Name Act took effect on July 1, 1991, may be used officially until another spelling has been approved via an application process. The same name may thus have several "approved" and official spellings, all of which are registered in SSR. During the first six months of 2012 about 1600 place-names have been approved.

The Norwegian Mapping Authority has gone through the different ISO standards to arrive at the character set that is as complete as possible for Sami characters. In this connection it seems to be most natural to take as a basis ISO 8859-10 - Latin alphabet, which was published for the first time in 1992. It has been adapted for the following languages: Danish, English, Estonian, Finnish, Faroese, Greenlandic, Icelandic, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Sami (North, Lule and South Sami), Swedish

and German. This is an 8-bit character set in conformity with ISO 2022 or ISO/IEC 4873. The data are stored in a relational data base on a UNIX machine and are accessed from client programs on the users' PCs. The work will be done in respect of the UNGEGN resolutions concerning the use of exonyms and endonyms and of names in multilingual areas. No date is set for the completion of the database.

SSR is an Oracle-base which is to contain approved spellings of place-names. To start with, all of the place-names digitized from the map series NORGE 1:50,000 (ca. 728 maps with ca. 350,000 place-names) were uploaded. As a starting point, the resulting database was mainly used in-house by the Mapping Authority to manage the production of their maps. Today, it is the main database in Norway for official place-names, and it is also used extensively outside the Mapping Authority.

A system for access to the legal processes involved with the approval of place-names has been developed for use in connection with the administration of place-names laws, *SSRSak* [SSR case]. It employs an Application Programmable Interface (API) with the Oracle-base to upload new place-names and edit existing ones. API is also used as a connecting element to update place-names in the mapping databases when maps are produced.

The SSR database is presently (2012) being used for many other official map services. This is done by facilitating an open connection to the base via a Web service (WS) for official use, for example by municipalities and national agencies.

A special service provides direct Internet access to the SSR database: <http://kart.statkart.no/adaptive2/default.aspx?gui=100002&lang=2>

At the present time, this service is only for Norwegian users. During the last few years this database has been expanded to include nautical charts of large parts of the North Atlantic Ocean and the Barents Sea.

In addition, a whole new database concept is being developed, in which it will be possible to plot in the position of every single geographical feature, pictures of the feature in question, sound files with the pronunciation its name, as well as other information connected to the feature. The concept conforms to INSPIRE, the European standard for place-names, so that it will eventually be possible to partner with a European WS service. A method to upload local name archives from around the country is also under consideration.

E) TOPONYMIC GUIDELINES

The existing version of Norway's Toponymic Guidelines for Map Editors and Other Editors (<http://www.statkart.no/filestore/Profil/Stedsnavn/ATT1163050.pdf>) was presented at the 9th Conference. These guidelines will be updated after the handling of a proposed amendment to the Place-Name Act.

F) EXONYMS

The official Norwegian list of foreign geographical names, published 1991 by the Norwegian Language Council, is constantly being updated. The guiding principle of using the individual country's spelling as a basis (that is endonym) was followed to a great extent, though consideration is being given to a certain reduction of diacritics. The list is accessible on the Internet: http://www.sprakrad.no/nb-NO/Sprakhjelp/Rettskrivning_Ordboeker/Geografiske_namn/.

G) MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

The Place-Names Services of the Norwegian Language Council and the Norwegian Mapping Authority meet once a year to discuss the legal, scholarly and administrative questions involved with setting standard forms of place-names. Representatives from the Norwegian Public Roads Administration and Norwegian Coastal Administration and other agencies are often invited to attend the meetings.

Two conferences were held in 2007 and 2008 at the University of Oslo on names and identity, during which place-names and identity had its own sessions, several of which took up the role street names play in relation to people's identity. The papers from the two conferences have been edited and published in the series, Oslo Studies in Language (2012) and are available in Open Access online (see <https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/osla/index>).

The National Conference on Onomastics was held in Oslo, November 19-20, 2009. The first day was devoted to discussions on the place-name archives located at various institutions and how these could be coordinated and digitized for the Norwegian place-name database. On the second day papers on one of the pillars of Norwegian onomastics, Magnus Olsen, in connection with the 100th birthday of the journal *Mål og Minne* (Language and Memories), that he had edited for 40 years. A Nordic symposium on etymology in place-names was held in Halden May 11- 13, 2010.