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**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 Finland

Submitted by Finland**

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

1. Names authorities and their tasks

Initiatives on place names legislation

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.

On 19 December 2011, the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and the National Land Survey of Finland made a joint proposal through their respective Ministries (Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry), suggesting that the Finnish Government should take action for the preparation of an Act on Place Names and setting up of an official body in charge of place names.

Institute for the Languages of Finland

At the beginning of 2012 the name *Research Institute for the Languages of Finland* was changed to *Institute for the Languages of Finland*. The institute is an institute of expertise under the auspices of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It is the leading language planning authority, steering and developing the Finnish and Finland Swedish standard languages. Its activities are laid down by the Act on the Institute for the Languages of Finland 1403/2011, which has replaced the Act on the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland of 1976 (48/1976, 591/1996) (<http://www.finlex.fi>).

According to the Act on the Institute for the Languages of Finland, the institute is devoted to the study and language planning of Finnish and Swedish. It also coordinates the activities of the Saami, Romani, and Sign Language Boards.

The Institute for the Languages of Finland acts as an authoritative and coordinating organ in matters relating to the standardization of place names by providing guidance for administrative bodies and by checking geographical names on the maps prepared by the National Land Survey.

The work is based on onomastic field research conducted since the beginning of the 20th century. As a result of this research, in 2012, 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.

The recommendations provided by the Institute are based on linguistics, cultural history, local tradition, and the practical demands of everyday life.

The names of municipalities

The statutory obligation to ask for a statement only covers the municipal names: according to the law (Act on Local Authority Boundaries 2009/1698), 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 Institute for the Languages of Finland to issue a statement on the new proposed name.

The names of other administrative units

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.

2. Office treatment of names

The Institute for the Languages of Finland is responsible for the office treatment of Finnish names (the Language Planning Department), as well as that of Swedish names (the Swedish Department). The Giellagas Institute at the University of Oulu takes care of Saami names. 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 and street 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 2007 and 2011, the names of 369 Basic Map sheets in scale 1:25 000 were checked.

(2)

Name planning in Finland has been centrally affected by the reform of the municipality and service structure, the objective of which is to reduce the number of municipalities. The ongoing project has led to a considerable number of planned and already realized municipal mergers, as different municipalities have voluntarily considered their options in case of a change. Since 2007, 88 municipalities have changed their names, and at the beginning of 2012, there were a total of 336 municipalities.

From 2007 to 2012 the (Research) Institute for the Languages of Finland has issued general recommendations on, e.g., the merging municipalities. 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. Especially municipal mergers cause changes to the street names when identical street and road names in the new municipality need to be eliminated, and names in another language need to be created in cases when a monolingual municipality turns officially bilingual.

Two researchers of the (Research) Institute for the Languages of Finland have worked as expert members of the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki.

See also the recommendation *Address names of islands with identical names, Finland*, Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda of the UNCSGN 2012, National standardization,
b) Office treatment of names.

Proper names of public administration and services, and their planning

In 2009, the Finnish and Swedish Language Boards issued a joint statement expressing their serious concern about the shortcomings of the planning of official names and that, e.g., linguistic and onomastic experts were not consulted whilst planning the reforms of regional administration, although the State had a special institute for such expertise – the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. The two Boards underlined that good and clear official language also includes names; choosing and planning them; how well they localize their referents and how linguistically correct they are. Thus, the Boards proposed that up-to-date regulations on public nomenclature should be drafted in cooperation with the ministries dealing with name issues.

In 2010 and 2011, the Parliamentary Ombudsman made statements on the quality of the names used by authorities. The statements concerned the foreign-language names of public hospital services (*Stroke Unit* and *Carea*) and the abbreviation *Trafi* for the Finnish Transport Safety Agency (fi *Liikenteen turvallisuusvirasto* – sv *Trafiksäkerhetverket*), which did not reveal as such that the referent was a public authority. According to the Ombudsman's decisions, the official name of a public authority shall have such linguistic form, contents, and structure that it is recognized as a name of an authority and that it can be distinguished from, e.g., names of businesses. The name shall also be presentable in both national languages, i.e. Finnish and Swedish. Further, the Ombudsman suggested that it should be considered whether the criteria and practices applied to drafting the names of public authorities, including abbreviations and additional names, should be separately regulated.

In 2012, the Finnish Language Board issued a statement on the *use of former municipality names after municipal mergers*; see Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda of the UNCSGN 2012, National standardization.

(3)

Since 2008, the (Research) Institute has arranged a one-day annual discussion and training event 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 2008, 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.

Since 2001, the teaching on onomastics at the university level has been carried out by docents, since 2012 also by a university lector. The Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies of the University of Helsinki has held one (half-) semester-long course in onomastics every year both in Finnish and Swedish, 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 Institute maintains a 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 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 2007 - 2011, the Institute's names collection has been supplemented with ca. 8,600 name entries, of which ca. 400 are North Saami names.

4. Symposiums

The Nordic name symposium *Namn och kulturella kontakter* [Names and cultural contacts] (NORNAs 37th symposium) was organized in Haapsalu, Estonia in May 2008. The symposium was organized by the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. There were 31 participants and 20 presentations. Based on the presentations given in the symposium, a collection of papers was published (2009) under the same name, containing 16 papers. The themes included standardization of place names, multilingualism and loaning of place names, and planned names.

The Nordic symposium *Namn i stadsmiljö* [Names in urban milieus] (NORNAs 42th symposium) was organized in Helsinki in November 2011. It was organized by the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. There were 45 participants and 22 presentations. A collection of papers, based on the presentations, is forthcoming. The collection's themes will include planned names and place name planning.

The international name symposium *Urban place names* was organized in Helsinki in 2009. It was organized by the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. There were 58 participants and 42 presentations. The themes included "urban development and name management". No separate publication will be made.

5. Toponymic datasets and services

The Finnish National Land Survey's (NLS) *Geographic Names Register* 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 geographic information 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 1:25,000. 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 and University of Oulu.

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 GNR data is disseminated e.g. through standard WFS (Web Feature Service) interfaces. The geographic names WFS products include two GML profile schemas for the Place Name Register, serving a little different use case purposes, and one schema for the Map Name Register.

During 2011–2012 the National Land Survey has opened its topographic and names datasets to the public and to companies to be used free of charge. Thus, the National Land Survey implements the objectives set in the Programme of the Finnish Government for making public databanks available to all interested parties.

6. Publications, campaigns and websites in 2007–2012

(1)

The Story of a Place Name: Campaign for the cultural environment 2010, Finland

In 2010, a **campaign** for cultural environment was organized in Finland, jointly coordinated by the Finnish Local Heritage Federation and the European Heritage Days.

The goal of the campaign was to enhance the esteem of and care for the cultural environment, promoting people's interest in their immediate surroundings. During the campaign, attention was also paid to place names. The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland, the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, the National Land Survey of Finland and the name and town planners of the three cities in the metropolitan area – Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa – prepared a joint **exhibition** on place names in Finland. The exhibition, named “The Story of Place Names”, toured the municipalities near Helsinki and was given a website in the web service of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland in Finnish ([Paikannimen tarina](#)), Swedish ([Ortnamns berättelser](#)) and North Saami ([Báikenama muitalus](#)).

In 2011, the exhibition was presented in the 26th session of UNGEGN (WP 32, Campaign for the cultural environment 2010, Finland). The English version *The Story of a Place Name* was completed at the end of 2011 and is available on the website <http://www.kotus.fi/index.phtml?l=en&s=3763>.

(2)

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

(3)

The website of the Institute includes advice and material on name planning for the general public (<http://www.kotus.fi>).

(4)

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. The service is available at <http://kansalaisen.karttapaikka.fi> → English.

(5)

A grassroot level project with an aim to systematically gather information and documentation on oral tradition concerning local names and places was carried out by local people in Tervo municipality in central Finland. One of the objectives of the project (2005–2008) was to make the information available in the Internet. The website, “*Places, names & stories*” was opened in April 2008 and is available in Finnish from <http://www.tervo.fi/tervo-seura> and in English from http://www.tervo.fi/tervo-seura/eng_index.php.

A more detailed description of the project (available also from the above mentioned website): Paikkala, Sirkka. *Places, names & stories – a pilot project on geographical names in Finland*. In: Jordan, Peter; Bergmann, Hubert; Cheetham, Catherine; Hausner, Isolde (eds.): *Geographical Names as a Part of the Cultural Heritage*. Wiener Schriften zur Geographie und Kartographie, vol. 18, pp. 65–70. Wien 2009.

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