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**11<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8 -17 August 2017

Item 5 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 10<sup>th</sup> Conference (for distribution only).**

**Report of Finland**

Submitted by Finland\*\*

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## Summary

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 in the Geographic Names Register of the National Land Survey of Finland. The work is based on onomastic field research conducted since the beginning of the 20th century, linguistic considerations, cultural history, local tradition and the practical demands of everyday life.

The main measures relating to the standardization of place names in 2012–2017 have been the proposal to enact legislation on place names, and the digitalization of the names collection (Names Archive) of the Institute for the Languages of Finland.

In January 2014, the working group on clear administrative language appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, published a plan of action to improve the language of authorities (*Hyvän virkakielen toimintaohjelma*, “Action Plan for Clear Administrative Language”). As one concrete proposal concerning the communication of the authorities, the plan of action includes a suggestion for enacting an Act on Place Names to clarify the usage of traditional place names and the planning of new official names.

The digitalization of the names collection (Names Archive) of the Institute for the Languages of Finland began in 2014. The project aims to convert all of the archive’s place name cards, data capture maps, and the related attributes and metadata into digital format. The objective is to open the digital archive by the end of 2017.

In 2012–2017, the Institute has continued to check the names on the Place Name Register maintained by the National Land Survey of Finland. Printed and electronic publications have been compiled of place names, including exonyms and settlement names, and recommendations and statements have been given on name planning and the spelling and use of place names.

The Geographic Names Register (GNR) of the National Land Survey of Finland (NLS) is the authoritative geographic names data repository of Finland and one of the elements included in the national and international spatial data infrastructure. The GNR, initially developed in the late 1990s, was entirely renewed in an NLS development project during 2010–2014. The reform covered the names data model and database, the names data management and integration with the production of national maps, the production application as well as the production lines and organization of work. The GNR named feature classification was also renewed, as were the GNR information services and data products.

# **Report on the situation in Finland and the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Tenth 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 then Research Institute for the Languages of Finland and in 2011 the Institute for the Languages of Finland joined forces with the National Land Register of Finland to propose to their respective Ministries (Ministry of Education and Culture, and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) that legislation be enacted on place names. More information is available in the previous Report of Finland at the 10<sup>th</sup> UNCSDGN:

[https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/10th-uncsdgn-docs/econf/E\\_CONF.101\\_80\\_Report%20of%20Finland%20.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/10th-uncsdgn-docs/econf/E_CONF.101_80_Report%20of%20Finland%20.pdf).

In January 2014, the working group on clear administrative language appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, published a plan of action to improve the language of authorities (*Hyvän virkakielen toimintaohjelma*, “Action Plan for Clear Administrative Language”), more information in WP 27/7 of the 28th UNGEGN Session: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/28th-gegn-docs/WP/WP27\\_Plain%20language%20and%20geographical%20names.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/28th-gegn-docs/WP/WP27_Plain%20language%20and%20geographical%20names.pdf)). As one concrete proposal concerning the communication of the authorities, the plan of action includes a suggestion for enacting an Act on Place Names to clarify the usage of traditional place names and the planning of new official names. In summer 2014 a suggestion for a text on enacting the law was sent to the Ministry of Education and Culture to be included in the government platform. However, there has not been progress in the matter so far.

In conjunction with the drafting of the Government Report on the application of language legislation, to be published in 2017 and to be submitted to the Parliament, the Institute for the Languages of Finland has pointed out that Finland lacks a specific act on place names. The report should, in the chapter on the needs to improve language legislation, mention the enacting of such an act.

### **Institute for the Languages of Finland**

The Institute for the Languages of Finland 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 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of this research, in 2017, about 2.7 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 the Environment but the actual naming is under the responsibility of local authorities. The National Land Survey of Finland has 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 Posti Group Ltd. (formerly Itella Corporation, the post company) 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 Transport Agency 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. The person responsible for office treatment of Swedish names at the Institute participates regularly in the meetings of the Geographical Names Network in Sweden.

#### (1) Checking and correcting names on maps

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 2012–2014, the Institute checked the names of 74 Basic Map sheets in scale 1:20 000 and 1:25 000, proceeding in 2014 to check the names on the Place Name Register maintained by the National Land Survey of Finland. A total of 1,440 names were changed on this register in 2014–2016, and altogether more than 37,000 names were checked. Of these, the spelling of 36,000 names was checked systematically.

#### (2) Statements and recommendations on place names

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 the previous conference in 2012, there have been 19 municipal mergers, and 25 place names are no longer names of municipalities. At the beginning of 2017, there were 311 municipalities in Finland.

In addition, Finland will soon undergo an administrative reform which will also affect the names of administrative regions. The Institute for the Languages of Finland recommended in 2016 that the established names of *maakunta* in Finnish and *landskap* in Swedish should be used to refer to these regions based on the current regional division. The recommendation was adopted.

In 2012, the Finnish Language Board issued a statement on the use of former municipality names after municipal mergers. More information in WP 101/82 of the 10th UNCISG: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/10th-uncisg-docs/econf/E\\_CONF.101\\_82\\_Recommendation%20on%20the%20use%20of%20former%20municipality.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/10th-uncisg-docs/econf/E_CONF.101_82_Recommendation%20on%20the%20use%20of%20former%20municipality.pdf)

In 2014, the Finnish and Swedish Language Boards discussed the various terms related to municipality names (such as *pitäjäsocken* to refer to a parish or a local/administrative unit; *kunta/kommun* to refer to a municipality; and *kaupunki/stad* to refer to a town/city). According to the Boards, all municipalities could in administrative terms be called *kunta* (a municipality), whereas *kaupunki* (a town) should refer, as it originally did, only to a densely built and populated area. In the Local Government Act, however, *kaupunki* is still an administrative term which the municipalities may use as they see fit.

The Institute for the Languages of Finland has in 2012–2017 issued general recommendations on name planning, official and public service names, the organization of name suggestions contests, and the use of foreign place names in the Finnish language. The Institute has issued statements on the names of municipalities, post offices, railway stations and authorities as well as on the Finnish edition of the ISO standard *3166-1-2013 Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions. Part 1: Country codes*. A statement has similarly been issued on the names of the sections of the Baltic Sea for the publication by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) of *S-23 Limits of Oceans and Seas*. Statements of a language-political nature have been given on the translation of place names and on the use of Finnish-language place names by the authorities and in cartographic products issued in Finnish. Municipal road names have been checked especially when unilingual Swedish-language municipalities have become bilingual and have started to operate in both Finnish and Swedish.

In 2013 the Parliamentary Ombudsman issued a statement on using the Finnish names *Ahvenanmaa* (*Åland Islands* in English) and *Maarianhamina* (Finnish for the capital of Åland Islands; *Mariehamn* in Swedish) in the maps of the National Land Survey of Finland. According to the judgement, established Finnish place names can be used in cartographic products serving the general public, even if the Åland Islands is officially a unilingual Swedish-speaking region. This decision was in accordance with the statement issued by the Institute for the Languages of Finland.

Two specialists of the Institute for the Languages of Finland have worked as expert members of the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki.

### (3) Onomastic training

The Institute for the Languages of Finland has organized onomastic training for name planners in municipalities and for translators on using foreign place names in Finnish.

The Institute has arranged training on onomastics and cartographic names for the staff of the National Land Survey.

Since 2001, the teaching on onomastics at the university level has been carried out by docents, since 2012 also by a university lecturer. 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 (in the University of Oulu) can opt for onomastics as the field they want to specialize in.

#### (4) Acquiring and providing information on names

The Institute maintains a toll-free telephone line to answer name-related questions. A trial chat service was launched in spring 2017, and information is given in publications, on Twitter (@Kotus\_tiedotus in Finnish; @Sprakinstitutet in Swedish) and on the Facebook page for Clear Administrative Language (@virkakieli).

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

### 3. Field collection of place names and digitalization of the Names Archive

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 2012–2017, the Institute's Names Archive has been supplemented with around 5150 name entries, of which about 150 are North Saami names.

The digitalization of the Names Archive began in 2014. The project aims to convert all of the archive's place name cards, data capture maps, and the attributes and metadata related to them into digital format. The objective is to open the digital archive by the end of 2017. More information in WP 28/16 of the 29<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Session: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/29th-gegn-docs/WP/WP28\\_16\\_Digitalisation\\_of\\_the\\_Names\\_Archive.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/29th-gegn-docs/WP/WP28_16_Digitalisation_of_the_Names_Archive.pdf)

### 4. Symposiums

The East Sea Society and the Northeast Asian History Foundation hosted *The 21th International Seminar on Sea Names: Heritage, Perception and International Relations* in Helsinki on 24–26 August, 2015. Among the audience were experts from the Institute for the Languages of Finland, and one of the speakers was the Institute's onomastic specialist Sirkka Paikkala with a presentation entitled *Perceptions on Sea Names and Marine Region Names in the Vicinity of Finland*,

<http://eastsea1994.org/data/bbsData/14910993811.pdf>. In October 2016, Sirkka Paikkala spoke about the *Åland Islands Question – Names, Politics and Name Policies* (<http://eastsea1994.org/data/bbsData/14911234581.pdf>) in the 22<sup>nd</sup> *International Seminar on Sea Names. Seas and Islands: Connecting People, Culture, History and the Future*, held in Jeju, Republic of Korea.

The Institute for the Languages of Finland and the Institute of the Estonian Language (Eesti keele instituut) co-hosted two Estonian-Finnish seminars on language planning and maintenance. One was held in Helsinki in 2014 and the other in Tallinn in 2015, both also featuring work done on onomastic planning and maintenance.

## **5. Toponymic datasets and services**

The Geographic Names Register (GNR) of the National Land Survey of Finland (NLS) is the authoritative geographic names data repository of Finland and one of the elements included in the national and international spatial data infrastructure. The GNR, initially developed in the late 1990s, was entirely renewed in an NLS development project during 2010–2014. The reform covered the names data model and database, the names data management and integration with the production of national maps, the production application as well as the production lines and organization of work. The GNR named feature classification was also renewed, as were the GNR information services and data products. The reform of the GNR was reported in WP 27/9 of the 29<sup>th</sup> Session of UNGEGN, [https://unstats.un.org/Unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/29th-gegn-docs/WP/WP27\\_9\\_NLS\\_GNR\\_renewed.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/Unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/29th-gegn-docs/WP/WP27_9_NLS_GNR_renewed.pdf).

The GNR comprises the primary Place Name Register (PNR), containing information on over 800,000 named places and their standardized names, and the Map Name Register (MNR), an operational dataset holding the cartographic attributes (placement, typography) related to the PNR names selected to be presented in the NLS cartographic product in question. The spelling and location of the names have been checked and approved by the Finnish, Swedish and Saami experts of the Institute for the Languages of Finland and the University of Oulu.

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.

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 2012–2017**

### (1) A campaign for clear administrative language

In accordance with the recommendation of the Action Plan for Clear Administrative Language, a campaign (*Virkakielikampanja*) in 2014–2015 worked to improve administrative language use. The campaign was coordinated by the Institute for the Languages of Finland, but also involved were many other administrative bodies. The Institute published a series of slides on good public names, devised two tests to assist the

work of onomastic planners and compiled guidelines for the planners of official names and street names. The materials (in Finnish) are available at the Institute website: [https://www.kotus.fi/ohjeet/nimistonsuunnittelun\\_ohjeita](https://www.kotus.fi/ohjeet/nimistonsuunnittelun_ohjeita)

(2) A gazetteer on Finnish Exonyms

In March 2013, the Institute for the Languages of Finland published a book setting out exonyms used in Finnish. More information in WP 26/14 of the 28th UNGEGN Session: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEEN/docs/28th-gegn-docs/WP/WP26\\_Exonyms.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEEN/docs/28th-gegn-docs/WP/WP26_Exonyms.pdf). The book is currently being digitized, and the objective is to publish it online in 2017.

(3) An online service on the correct use of proper names

*Kielitoimiston ohjepankki* [A guidelines bank of the Finnish Language Office] was published by the Institute for the Languages of Finland in April 2015. It is an online service covering Finnish orthography and grammar, as well as the correct use of proper names (including endonyms and exonyms) in the Finnish language. The service is available free of charge at <http://www.kielitoimistonohjepankki.fi/>. More information in WP 26/18 of the 29<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Session: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEEN/docs/29th-gegn-docs/WP/WP26\\_18\\_Guidelines\\_Bank.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEEN/docs/29th-gegn-docs/WP/WP26_18_Guidelines_Bank.pdf)

(4) An online service for settlement names in Finland

In December 2016, *Asutusnimihakemisto* [An index for settlement names] was published free of charge at <http://kaino.kotus.fi/asutusnimihakemisto/>. It contains over 20,000 Finnish names of towns, villages and other inhabited places. The database gives guidelines on the correct spelling and inflection of the names of inhabited places. See also Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda of the UNCSGN 2017, National standardization.

(5)

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.

(6)

The Institute website was renewed in 2015. It includes advice and material on name planning for the general public. ([https://www.kotus.fi/ohjeet/nimistonsuunnittelun\\_ohjeita](https://www.kotus.fi/ohjeet/nimistonsuunnittelun_ohjeita)).

(7)

The MapSite is a popular map and place name service provided by the National Land Survey. Launched in 1996, it was the first national online map service in Europe. The service was renewed in 2016 and is available at <https://asiointi.maanmittauslaitos.fi/karttapaikka/?lang=en>.

### *Other gazetteers and publications related to geographical names*

*Kielitoimiston sanakirja* [the Dictionary of Contemporary Finnish] [Electronic database] (2017) / Eds: Eija-Riitta Grönros (editor-in-chief) & al.; Institute for the Languages of Finland and Kielikone Oy. Publications by the Institute for the Languages of Finland, ISSN: 2323-3370.

*Kreikan paikannimet* [Greek geographical names] 2011. Eds. Kimmo Granqvist and Sirkka Paikkala. The material is to be continuously updated. Copyright © Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus [Research Institute for the Languages of Finland]: Helsinki. <http://kaino.kotus.fi/kreikanpaikannimet/> URN:NBN:fi:kotus-20118; ISSN 1796-041X.

*Kunnat ja kuntapohjaiset aluejaot – Kommuner och kommunbaserade indelningar – Municipalities and Regional Divisions Based on Municipalities 2015*. Käsikirjoja – Handböcker – Handbooks 28. Tilastokeskus – Statistikcentralen – Statistics Finland. Helsinki. 94 pp. ISBN 978-952-244-528-5 (pdf), [http://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yksk28\\_201500\\_2015\\_13520\\_net.pdf](http://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yksk28_201500_2015_13520_net.pdf)

*Maat, pääkaupungit ja kansalaisuudet* [Countries, capital cities, nationalities] (2000). Eds. Sirkka Paikkala & Saara Welin. The material is to be continuously updated. Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus [Research Institute for the Languages of Finland]. [https://www.kotus.fi/julkaisut/nimijulkaisut/paikannimijulkaisut/maat\\_paakaupungit\\_ja\\_kansalaisuudet](https://www.kotus.fi/julkaisut/nimijulkaisut/paikannimijulkaisut/maat_paakaupungit_ja_kansalaisuudet)

*Names of countries in seven languages* (Finnish, Swedish, Saami, English, French, German, Russian; 2009). Editor-in-chief: Sirkka Paikkala, ed. Minna Salonen. The material is to be continuously updated. Copyright © Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus (Research Institute for the Languages of Finland). URN:NBN:fi:kotus-20117, ISSN 1796-041X. <http://kaino.kotus.fi/maidennimet/index.php?h=en>

*Suomalainen paikannimikirja* [Place Names Lexicon of Finland] (2007). Chief editor: Sirkka Paikkala; sub-editor: Eeva-Liisa Stenhammar; other editors: Pirjo Mikkonen, Ritva Liisa Pitkänen, Peter Slotte. Helsinki, Karttakeskus: Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus [Research Institute for the Languages of Finland], 2007. 592 pp. ISSN 0355-5437, ISBN 978-951-593-976-0. The publication was presented in the 26<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN session, WP 28.

*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 4.9., May 2017 prepared by Ulla Onkamo and Teemu Leskinen). Available at <https://www.kotus.fi/toponymicguidelines>.

*Venäjän federaation paikannimiä, oikeinkirjoitus- ja painotusopas* [Place names in the Russian Federation. Handbook of spelling and stress] (2010). Facsimile of a 2006 publication edited by Martti Kahla, Pirjo Mikkonen, Ida Kempinen & Anna Charnaya.

Helsinki, Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. ISBN: 952-5446-18-2. 361 pp.  
<http://scripta.kotus.fi/www/verkkojulkaisut/julk11/> (pdf)  
URN:ISBN 978-952-5446-47-0; ISSN 1796-041X

Mattfolk, Leila & Vidberg Maria (eds), *Svenska ortnamn i Finland*. Institutet för de inhemska språkens webbpublikationer 32. - An inventory of the most important Swedish place names in Finland; about 4,250 entries. URN:NBN:fi:kotus-201221, ISSN 2323-3370. <http://kaino.kotus.fi/svenskaortnamn/>. The publication was presented in the 10th UNCSGN 2012, WP 101/79. The material is to be continuously updated.

### *Atlases*

*GT tiekartasto Suomi - Finland 2017*, = *GT-väгатlas* = *GT Road Atlas* = *GT-Strassenatlas* 1:200 000/1:250 000/1:100 000. Karttakeskus. ISBN: 978-952-266-406-8. 336 pp.

*Karttakeskuksen suuri maailmankartasto* [Comprehensive World Atlas by Karttakeskus] (2011). Index of names. Affecto Oy Finland/Karttakeskus. ISBN 978-951-593-422-2. 288 pp.

*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). Previously published with practically the same contents in 2004 under the title *GAIA: suuri maailmankartasto* [GAIA: Comprehensive World Atlas]. ISBN: 951-593-964-X. 264 pp.; index of 70,000 names.

## **7. Addresses**

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