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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 10th Conference (for distribution only).**

Report of Norway

Submitted by Norway**

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Legislation

In Norway, the standardization of geographical names have merited special legislation. The Norwegian Place-Name Act of 1990 applies to the choice of and use of the standardized forms of geographical names in official contexts. The Act was put into force in 1991, with amendments made effective in 2006 and 2015. The Act, with regulations, provides standardization principles for Norwegian, Saami and Kven (Finnish) geographical names. The Norwegian Mapping Authority is responsible for implementing the Act and settles the spelling of the vast majority of traditional geographical names in Norway, including names of natural features and settlement names. The Government is the decision-making body for names of administrative divisions, while the municipalities decide names of roads and streets and other urban names. Six regional Name Consultancy Services, with a secretariat and consultants for Norwegian, Saami and Kven (Finnish) geographical names provides advice and guidance on geographical name matters. The Norwegian Language Council administrates the Name Consultancy Services for Norwegian and Kven geographical names, while the Saami Parliament of Norway administrates the Name Consultancy Services for Saami geographical names. An appeal committee under the chairmanship of a court judge is set up to handle complaints related to the standardization of geographical names.

The revised Norwegian Place-Name Act of 2015 enforces the use of correct spelling in official use, and helps to clarify the responsibilities between the municipalities and the Mapping Authority. However, the most significant change in the 2015 Act concerned the spelling of names on smallholdings. About 70% of the Norwegian population has a geographical name as their family name. In most cases, these names are settlement names, usually of farms and smallholdings. The corresponding family names, however, usually carry a more conservative spelling, following an older (Danish) norm. Many landowners have objected to the standardization rules of the Place-Name Act, as they, in their view, compromises their identity: the rules change the spelling of names they consider to be "theirs". With the latest amendment, the owner of a smallholding has the right to decide the spelling of the geographical name of his or her property as long as documentation of such spelling can be obtained. Both the Mapping Authority and the Language Council argued against this amendment, as it will potentially pave the way for a variety of spellings of the same name, depending on the individual owner's view. The linguistic expertise also feared that this amendment would contribute to undermine geographical names as intangible cultural heritage. Since July 2015, 253 names of single holdings have been determined. Out of these, the owner decided the spelling of 73 names. The revised Act has led to fewer cases than expected.

The revised Place Name-Act was effective in almost two years before new regulations were finally passed and put into force in May 2017. The regulations contain standardizing principles for geographical names, as well as detailed rules of procedure. Previously, the regulations included comprehensive (linguistic) spelling rules for geographical names, mainly intended as a tool for toponymic/linguistic practitioners. The new regulations gives the Norwegian Language Council and Saami Parliament of Norway legal authority to establish detailed spelling principles for geographical names. The Language Council is currently preparing such principles for Norwegian geographical names, and hope to finalize this work by the end of 2017. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs must approve the spelling principles before they are valid.

In April 2017, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs announced that the Government is discussing the power of decision in geographical name matters. The aim is find a solution that gives the municipalities more influence, and even the final word, in the standardizing of geographical names. This happens concurrent with an ongoing governmental reform in Norway, where the idea is to transfer more power and responsibility to the municipalities as they evolve into larger units.

[Maps, registers, gazetteers and toponymic data files](#)

The Norwegian Mapping Authority has released its central national datasets as open data and has opened up for free display of maps and geospatial data. This includes geographical name data. Users, who wish to view digital maps directly on the web without downloading them, can go to the Norwegian Mapping Authority's pages www.norgeskart.no (detailed digital map of Norway) and www.seeiendom.no (property data map).

The Mapping Authority is responsible for running and developing *Sentralt stedsnavnregister* (The Central Place-Name Register). The Place-Name Register contains the approved forms of geographical names in accordance with the Place-Name Act, and contains about 996,000 geographical names with 1,178,000 spellings of 975,000 named places. About 105 000 spellings are determined by law. (Status May 2017: 963 846 Norwegian names, 26 212 North Saami names, 1 553 Lule Saami names, 1 803 South Saami names and 2 516 Kven names).

The earliest version of the Norwegian Place-Name Act did not distinguish between *gårdsnavn* – the official name of a farm or land unit and *bruksnavn* – the name of individual farms and smallholdings. Until the amendment in the Place-Name Act in 2006 was put into force, both the names of farms and the names of smallholdings were registered in the Central Place-Name Register as smallholdings. This change is implemented in the system, but separating the objects must be done manually. From 2016, The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has funded a project that aims to separate these categories.

A renewed version of the Place-Name Register, as presented at the 28. Session of UNGEGN in New York, was realized and put into production in 2016. All geographical names from the old register are converted to the new register. The client for the new register is based on Java, and the users will always load the latest version of the software. The database is an Oracle database and the application has a change service that makes copies of the database and hold this copy up to date at all time. The same service is used to create the distribution database, which is the fundament for all map production.

The web client Norgeskart (detailed digital map of Norway) is also renewed. This solution shows WMS (Web Map Service), and is available in English. WFS service based on INSPIRE specification is established, plus a new complete WFS that shows all places with geographical names and spellings from the Place-Name Register.

The Mapping Authority will make new services for download based on the new WFS where GML is converted to the Norwegian standard SOSI. SOSI is a service that contains almost all information from the Place-Name Register. An ELF (European Locator Framework) WFS shows only the legal spellings of geographical names. At the same time, the indexed search service with type ahead functionality for SOAP and REST searching continues.

The Mapping Authority has completed the collection of place names from almost all map series. For official land maps in all scales, the work is fulfilled – on sea chart series, a few maps in large scale are still in the process of transfer.

The Norwegian Pilot Guide (*Den norske los*) consists of sailing directions for the Norwegian coast, Svalbard and Jan Mayen, and is a supplement to the nautical charts. The Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation has passed a motion to make this publication available free of charge, and this is currently being revised and digitized. At the same time, the geographical names in the Pilot Guide will be synchronized with the Central Place-Name Register.

Toponymic guidelines

Norway's Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors was revised in 2014. With the latest amendments in the Place Name-Act and its regulations, a revision is needed. Due to the ongoing governmental reform in Norway, the names and numbers of counties and municipalities in chapter 5 is no longer valid. A new version of the Toponymic Guidelines is expected within 2017.

Street addresses

Unique addresses with street names and numbers help ensure that others can find a specific address more quickly in case of emergency and/or in order to deliver services or goods. To provide such benefits, the Norwegian government initiated a project to create road addresses with street names for every household, business and building within the country. The project, led by the Mapping Authority, officially ended in 2014, but the work is still ongoing. In May 2017, 90 % of all address objects have an official street address. The regional Place-Name Consultancy Services have spent a large amount of time and resources the past few years providing advice in the naming of roads and streets for the municipalities.

Geographical names and linguistic minorities

Although the Place-Name Act and the Saami Act have been in force for over 20 years, their implementation is lacking at several levels. One positive development, however, has been in representing Saami geographical names on road signs. The Norwegian Road Commission has decided that Saami geographical names will feature on existing road signs and when new road signs are being put up. The Norwegian Road Commission guidelines state that requirements from laws and amendments to the laws must be followed. This guideline points out that the spelling of place names must follow the rules given by the Place-Name Act. If a geographical name is used in the area and has an approved spelling, the Saami name shall also be used on road signs. The Norwegian Road Commission expresses that from now on, they will follow their own guidelines and the laws and amendments that says how to use the Saami place names in public. According to the Norwegian Road Commission, all places that require multilingual road signs will be put up within April 2019.

A white paper on the Saami language, *Hjertespråket - Forslag til lovverk, tiltak og ordninger for Samiske språk*, https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2016-18/id2515222/_has been published. Among other things, the white paper discusses the safeguarding and use of Sami geographical names. The committee refers to historical events, where Saami geographical names have been silenced, rewritten to Norwegian and removed from maps. Saami geographical names now have strong legal protection. Both the Saami Act, the Place-Name Act and international obligations protect Saami names. The Committee emphasizes the duty of public authorities to actively promote the use of Saami names in the Saami language areas, possibly parallel to Norwegian and Kven geographical names. The white paper also presents suggestions for action.

The renewed regulations for the Place-Name Act were put into force in May 2017. Until then, three Saami languages were included in the regulations. Now, Eastern (Skolt) Saami language is included also. This means that Eastern Saami geographical names will be represented and used in public official contexts.

A positive development relative to the Saami geographical names is that there is a tendency for municipalities to also want a Saami name for the municipality. Since 2013, ten municipalities has decided on Saami names.

Geographical names archives, field collection and digitization of geographical names

The University of Oslo decided in 2014 to discontinue the Language Archives, including the associated Name Archives and its Place-Name Research Group. In May 2016, the archives were transferred to the

University of Bergen, albeit with less academic and financial resources. It is still unknown if the relocation of the Language Archives will result in a vitalization of the Name Research environment of Norway. Only parts of the Norwegian geographical name archives is digitized and available online. Consequently, the remaining staff at the University of Oslo, as well as the regional Place-Name Consultancy office based in Oslo, no longer have physical access to the archives. The University of Oslo, which traditionally has been the leading institution for toponymic research and education in Norway, will no longer offer courses in geographical names. The situation at the other universities in Norway is similar. Consequently, the toponymic expertise needed for the implementation of The Norwegian Place-name Act is rapidly decreasing, and the recruitment of staff for the regional Place-Name Consultancy Services administrated by the Norwegian Language Council is therefore challenging. Due to the difficult recruitment situation, together with retrenchment measures, a possible restructure of the four name Consultancies Services for Norwegian geographical names is expected.

Since 2014, the Norwegian Language Council manages a grant scheme for field collection of geographical names on behalf of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The objective with this scheme is to stimulate local actors (municipalities, non-government organisations with an interest in the area, including local historical societies, farmers groups, school classes etc.) to collect micro-toponyms by covering some of the fieldwork expenses. An online application for registration is developed for this purpose. This application has a solution for using electronic maps and aerial photos to mark the names of places and features. It is also possible to upload files with sound-recordings of the local pronunciation of the name as well as pictures of the name object. Unfortunately, so far the application for registration and its content is only available for those receiving grants from the Language Council.

The Norwegian Geographical Name Dictionary, *Norsk stadnamleksikon* (Samlaget 1997), is digitized and available online (www.norskstadnamleksikon.no). The internet solution is based on the Danish *Danmarks Stednavne* application. Searching for a geographical name or ending of a geographical name gives you geographical references as well as linguistic articles from the dictionary. The digital version includes some revised and some newly written linguistic articles.

The Place-Name Consultancy Service for Kven geographical names, administrated by the Norwegian Language Council, has established its own database of Kven names, with many parallel names in Saami and Norwegian (<http://www.kvenskestedsnavn.no/>). This database has been expanded over the past few and currently contains over 8000 linguistic articles.

[Geographical names and the local government reform](#)

The majority in the Norwegian Parliament instigated a local government reform after the last election in 2013. The idea of the reform is to transfer more power and responsibility to the municipalities when they are larger units. The government has encouraged municipalities to discuss merges locally with neighboring municipalities. During this parliamentary term, which ends in 2017, the names of new municipalities have been much debated, particularly in local newspapers all over Norway.

The Place-Name Act does not apply on names of administrative divisions. However, its purpose and principles is taken into consideration in the process of naming the new units. After a meeting with The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation in January 2016, The Norwegian Language Council agreed to offer guidance in questions regarding the naming of new municipalities. The municipalities are not obliged to obtain a statement from the toponymic expertise, and only a few municipalities have consulted the Language Council directly for advice. However, the subject is highly debated in local newspapers. The first official request came from Vestfold County, and concerned the merge between the two municipalities Tjøme and Nøtterøy. Both municipalities wanted the

name *Færder*, which originally is the name of a group of islands outside Tjøme. Place Name Consultant Botolv Helleland was involved in the responding letter, and expressed his concern about choosing names that have no tradition as names of administrative units. The choice of the name *Færder* shows a trend of municipal branding that compromises the Norwegian geographical name tradition. More general, the name of the new administrative unit should be one that is relevant to the wider community in the area. Preferably, a combination of two or more names should be avoided, as well as names that are newly constructed. Names of administrative units should be easy to pronounce, spell and write.

The local government reform also includes a reduction of counties, *fylke* in Norwegian. There is an ongoing discussion in Norway about the use of the terms *fylke* and *region*. The Language Council and the Place Name Consultancy Services encourage continuing the use of the term *fylke*.

Meetings and conferences

The Mapping Authority and the Place-Name Consultancy Services administrated by the Norwegian Language Council assemble yearly to discuss legal, professional and organizational matters regarding the standardization of geographical names. There are approximately 30 participants at these meetings. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has been represented in the meetings in 2014 and 2016. The revision of the Place-Name Act and its regulations has been a central discussion point at these meetings over the past five years. Other topics discussed have been: the situation for the Name Archives, the use of geographical names in NRK (Norwegian Public Broadcasting Corporation), the use of geographical names in the Norwegian Coastal Administration, geographical name practice in The Norwegian Public Roads Administration, street naming, the choice of one geographical for name objects with multiple names in the same language, detailed linguistic spelling rules and the standardization of geographical names in Skolt Saami and in Kven.