

**Twenty-fifth session
Nairobi, 5–12 May 2009**

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Reports of the divisions

Report of the Norden Division*

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Report of the Norden Division

(Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Sámi-speaking areas)

SUMMARY

This report describes the activities of the Norden Division since the last session in New York, 2007. The Norden division has held two division meetings, one in New York in August 2007 and one in Copenhagen October 2008, where a number of issues, including the ones mentioned below, have been discussed. One of the most significant developments during this period has been the establishment of the Norden Division homepage:

<http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/>, where information about UNGEGN, Norden Division and the Norden Division members may be found.

Otherwise, the focus of the Norden Division has mainly been on the following issues: a) problems of implementation of the resolution on commemorative naming of living or newly deceased persons (resolution VIII/2, E/CONF.94/3), a resolution occasionally overlooked by local councils and municipalities, b) local developments in geographical name laws and geographical name usage and c) administrative reforms.

Furthermore, the Norden Division is active in two other UNGEGN Working Groups: the *Working Group of Implementation and Evaluation/Publication and Funding*, as well as the *Working Group on Toponymic Terminology*.

Report of the Norden Division (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)

I. Norden Division meetings 2007-2009

Two Norden Division Meetings have been held during this period. The first meeting was held on 24. August 2007 in New York. This meeting was attended by 9 members of the Norden Division and discussed a range of topics, such as Toponymic guidelines, the Nordic place-name database as well as change of chairmanship. More information about the 2008 Norden Division Meeting can be found at:

<http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/about/programme/ny070824/>. The second meeting was held in Copenhagen 8.-9. October 2008 at the National Survey and Cadastre. The meeting was attended by 20 participants from the Norden Division area, as well as Helen Kerfoot, chair of UNGEGN. The two-day meeting agenda was relatively extensive, covering several division-related subjects, such as: Geographical name legislation, Implementation of resolutions, Linguistic minorities and geographical name usage as well as news from Working Groups with Norden Division member participation. A problematic issue of geographical name standardization is the quality and reliability of the name-data sources used by international companies in their electronic media/web-applications. A status of this issue was made and discussed. Recent developments in the *EuroGeoNames* and *INSPIRE*-directive were also presented. More information about the 2008 Norden Division Meeting can be found at: <http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/about/programme/cph081008-09/>.

II. Norden Division homepage

The issue of a Norden Division homepage has been given top priority. Shortly after the 2008 Division Meeting, the new Norden Division homepage was released: <http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/>. The home page is organized according to UNGEGN Resolution I/4 from 1967 on National Standardization. The aim of the homepage is to present concise information about UNGEGN issues within Norden Division area with links to additional information within UNGEGN structure and within the national authorities of the Norden Division.

III. Implementation of UNGEGN resolutions

The main focus of this item among the member states of the Norden Division has been on the problems of implementation of the resolution on commemorative naming of living or newly deceased persons (resolution VIII/2, E/CONF.94/3). Local councils and municipalities are occasionally reluctant to follow this resolution and in e.g. Denmark the municipality of Lemvig voted 2008 for the establishment of Johnny Madsens Vej, called after a local, still-living, rock musician. This led the Danish Place-Names Commission (Stednavneudvalget), to issue a press-release informing of the inappropriateness of this naming practice in relation to the above-mentioned resolution. Since then the municipality of Varde has voted for the establishment of Otto Frellos Plads, called after a local, still-living, painter. This decision was made in spite of knowledge to the resolution and advice from the Danish Place-Names Commission.

IV. Geographical name laws and geographical name usage

All countries within the Norden Division have laws and regulations on language use but only a few Nordic countries have specific laws on geographical names, such as Greenland and Norway. Elsewhere in the Norden Division countries, regulations are either embedded in other, non-name-specific, laws (Iceland, Sweden) or exist in the form of departmental orders (Denmark, Finland). The Faroe Islands, however, do not have any departmental order or law, specific or otherwise concerning geographical names. This means that the rights, principles and rules for standardization of geographical names vary considerably from country to country in the Norden Division area (see also: <http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/legislation/>). However, the standardization practices of geographical names are relatively similar within the Norden Division area. Below, the most recent developments concerning geographical name legislation and geographical name usage will be outlined:

Iceland: The issue of geographical names as part of the intangible cultural heritage was not held in high esteem by the state company Landsvirkjun when they built the hydropower project Kárahnjúkar in Eastern Iceland and sank about 100 places with place names in the Háslón reservoir. The Place Name Institute asked Landsvirkjun in February 2006 to register the names, include them on a map and make a report about them, which the company accepted.

Norway: In early 2009, a parliamentary proposition to change aspects of the Norwegian Place-Name Act was forwarded. If accepted, the proposition will allow every farm owner the right of veto on the spelling of his farm's name. As this is in direct conflict with the intentions of the Norwegian Place-Name Act as well as the standardization principles set up by UNGEEN, the Norwegian Mapping Authority (Statens kartverk) as well as the Norwegian Language Council (Språkrådet) on behalf of the national geographical name consultants have objected this proposition. The chair of the Norden Division has also contributed with a letter of objection.

Sweden: Since 2000, the Swedish Heritage Conservation Act (Kulturminneslagen) has included a section on 'good place-name practice', with an emphasis on the importance of protecting and preserving geographical names as part of the nation's cultural heritage. According to answers from the Swedish municipalities the Act has been instrumental in increasing the awareness, of geographical names, especially concerning the preservation and management of geographical names as parts of the intangible cultural heritage, and as necessary linguistic expressions for daily use. The Heritage Conservation Act also covers the treatment of geographical names in the minority languages Saami and Finnish in Sweden. This has led to increased visibility for Saami, Finnish and Meänkieli (Torne Valley Finnish) on maps and road signs.

V. Cooperation with other Divisions and Working Groups

The Norden Division cooperates with other UNGEEN Divisions and Working Groups, and a status was given at the latest Norden Division Meeting. Botolv Helleland, Norway, reported from the recent meeting in the *Working Group of Implementation and Evaluation/Publication and Funding*, as did Staffan Nyström report from the ongoing work in the *Working Group on Toponymic Terminology*. Of main importance is the recently established contact to the 'Terminology Group' of ICOS (The International Council of Onomastic Sciences) with the aim of a possible coordination of UNGEEN and ICOS terminology lists. Another issue of this Working Group is the revision of *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*.

VI. Status for *Toponymic Guidelines*

Nearly all Norden Division member countries submitted revised versions of *Toponymic Guidelines* at the last UNGEGN-Session in New York 2007. Denmark will, however, be submitting an updated version at this venue, owing to new administrative reforms in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Additionally, the Swedish National Survey (Lantmäteriet) has published an extensive *Toponymic Guidelines* in 2007 in both Swedish and English (available on Swedish National Survey at: http://www.lantmateriet.se/upload/filer/kartor/om_kartor/Toponymic_Guidelines_2007_6.pdf), and Finland updates its *Toponymic Guidelines* annually.

VII. Feature type harmonization

The most recent developments here are that work on feature type harmonization has been initialized in Iceland in cooperation between The National Land Survey and the Department of Onomastics in The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

VIII. Administrative reforms

The Danish Realm, i.e. Denmark, Faroe Islands and Greenland, has recently undergone a substantial administrative reform in 2007 and 2008. Currently, most developments in administrative reforms are taking place in Sweden, where the 290 local municipal authorities are reorganizing the address system in rural area. This project includes a large number of geographical names, many of which have never before been subjected to standardization. Additionally, there are also fears that a number of old names will be abolished in this process, which would be in conflict with the code of good place-name practice, see item IV, above. The Swedish Standards Institute has revised the national standard for location addresses in 2007, where provisions on good place-name practice have been taken into consideration.

Sweden: As a result of several administrative reforms the 2,500 Swedish church parishes (*församling*) and civil parishes (*socken*) have developed separately during the 20th Century, the latter finally losing all function. In the year 2000, the Swedish Church and the State of Sweden were separated. One consequence of this was that the Church was assigned to make decisions on the division of parishes and on their names. Since then, in only eight years, the Church has decided on a large number of parish mergers, resulting in the loss of more than 1,000 parishes and parish names. In order to preserve the historically very important administrative unit, the parish, actions have been taken towards a revival of the original civil parishes by using them in national registration, in the form of a Government Enquiry.

Finland: In the past few decades, a major administrative reform has taken place regarding the municipality and service structure. The reform would entail a decrease of the number of municipalities through, e.g., municipality mergers. In 1946 when the number was at the highest, there were 558 municipalities in total. The ongoing reform has led to a considerable number of planned and already realised municipal mergers, on voluntary basis. At the beginning of 2009, altogether 99 municipalities had merged into 32 municipalities. In this process 73 municipality names have disappeared, although they remain as names of settlements. At the time of writing, there are 348 municipalities in Finland.

ANNEX

Laws on place-names and place-name usage

Denmark: There are no specific laws concerning geographical names in Denmark. The guidelines for standardization of geographical names in Denmark have been given in a departmental order of 1984. Standardization of geographical names is settled by recommendation of the Danish Place-Names Commission (Stednavneudvalget) to the Minister of Cultural Affairs. Additionally, the spelling of street names are a concern for the individual municipalities, under the provision of the Streets Act (Vejloven) and the Danish Language Act (Reskrivningsloven). The dual geographical name administration rarely causes problems, bar occasional non-adherence to especially UNGEGN-Resolution VIII/2, E/CONF.94/3 (Commemorative naming practices for geographical features) on behalf of some municipalities.

Linguistic minorities

Denmark: The Danish Realm comprises one official language: *Danish* and two regional languages: Faroese and *Greenlandic/Inuit*. Additionally, when Denmark ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, German (spoken by the German national minority in Southern Jutland) was recognized as a minority language. This charter stipulates the right of the German minority to use their own forms of geographical names. However, at the time of writing no steps have been taken to establish a policy for own geographical name usage for this minority.

Status for Toponymic Guidelines

Denmark: All Norden Division member states have recently revised their toponymic guidelines. At the present session-meeting, Denmark will be presenting an updated version of its Toponymic Guidelines, necessitated by recent changes in administrative structures in Greenland and the Faroe Islands.