

**Twenty-ninth session  
Bangkok, Thailand, 25 – 29 April 2016**

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**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Report of the Divisions**

## **Report of the Norden Division\***

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Resolutions concerned:

I/8, II/4, II/28, II/29, III/5,

III/17, III/20, V/13, VIII/1,

VIII/2, VIII/5, IX/4, IX/5

**Content:**

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## **I. Divisional meetings**

Since the 28th Session in New York 2014, the Norden Division has held two meetings. The first meeting took place on April 29th 2014 at the 28th UNGEGN Session; the second at the Department of Nordic Research at Copenhagen University on September 12th 2015 as part of the joint meeting of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, the Working Group on Implementation and Evaluation, the Working Group on Publicity and Funding and the Norden Division in Copenhagen, September 9th-12th 2015. The next Division meeting will take place in connection with the current 29th UNGEGN Session in Bangkok 2016.

There were 13 persons present at the 2014 Norden Division meeting, where the Norden Division homepage was discussed and an update on INSPIRE, EuroGeoNames and ELF (European Location Framework) was given (please see the [2014 Minutes](#) for more information). At the 2015 meeting in Copenhagen, there were 17 persons present and items such as news from the Norden Division area, the Norden Division homepage and an update on the ELF cooperation were discussed (please see the [2015 Minutes](#) for more information).

With experience from the joint meeting with the Baltic Division, as reported in the Norden Division Report from the 28th UNGEGN Session ([W.P.24/4](#)), it was with great pleasure that the 2015 Norden Division Meeting could be held in cooperation with other UNGEGN bodies, namely the three abovementioned Working Groups. There is always much to learn from joint meetings and the Norden Division encourages other divisions to consider joint divisional meetings – or meetings organized together with Working Groups.

## **II. Norden Division homepage**

The Norden Division has had its own homepage since 2008: <http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/> . In 2015, there was a minor revision of most of the texts on the homepage in order to reflect current legislation of the divisions member countries. The homepage fulfils its aim in presenting concise and up-to-date information about UNGEGN and the Norden Division.

## **III. Joint Norden Division project**

As reported in previous Norden Division Reports, geographical names used by indigenous and minority language groups are standardized, maintained and disseminated at a national level even though these groups as entities are often transnational. To remedy this, the Norden Division is considering producing an online web-service based resource for these geographical names of the Norden Division area.

With the release of official or nationally standardized NMA geographical names in Denmark, Finland and Norway (and to some extent in Sweden) through web-services, this possibility has become increasingly feasible. However, the final decision on whether to undertake this project, or not, has not been made.

## IV. Geographical name laws and geographical name usage within the Norden Division area

### Finland:

#### *Legislation*

In May 2014, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland organized a meeting concerning the need of an act on geographical names proposed in 2011 jointly by the National Land Survey of Finland and the Institute for the Languages of Finland and again in 2014 as a part of the Action plan of the Working Group for Clear Administrative Language appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It was agreed that the Ministry of Education and Culture shall continue to promote the proposal.

#### *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*

Finland ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in May 2013. Finland's National Board of Antiquities is responsible for the implementation of the treaty and is preparing an action plan for the national implementation. The Institute for the Languages of Finland has pointed out that enactment of a geographical names act should be included in the action plan in order to ensure the correct usage of geographical names within the administration.

### Iceland:

#### *Legislation*

The first comprehensive legislation on geographical names in Iceland was passed in Parliament on March 3rd 2015. The aim is to promote the protection of geographical names and naming traditions in the country as part of the local cultural heritage and to ensure that it will be maintained for future generations. Also to ensure uniform administration of geographical names so that the naming process is open, transparent and effective. In the act, municipalities are granted a greater role in the process, both with regard to name changes but also when new natural phenomena emerge in the ever changing nature of Iceland.

The act states that the National Land Survey of Iceland is responsible for registration, maintenance and dissemination of a geographical names database in consultation with the Institute for Icelandic Studies. In addition, the act states that the contents of the database shall be accessible to anyone and can be used and reused without any charge. Currently, this database contains more than 100.000 geographical names, mainly stored as polygons but also as points and lines.

The Geographical Name Committee now has the role to advise the municipalities in the naming process and to review and evaluate new or changed names. It has also the authority of decision if there is a dispute about geographical names.

## Norway:

### *Legislation*

A revision of the Norwegian Place-names Act of 1990 with amendments of 2005 was passed by the Parliament (Norwegian: *Stortinget*) on 19th June 2015 (though a considerable minority voted against) and came into force July 1st 2015. The new law gives land owners the right to decide on the spelling of the names of their single holdings. This means that names of single holdings bearing the same name as the main farm may be spelt differently, for instance *Wik*, *Wiig*, whereas the name of the main farm is spelt *Vik*. From July 2015 till January 2016 about 50 owners of single holdings have taken advantage of this new right and made their own decisions. For farm names as well as other groups of geographical names the main rule is to base the spelling of the inherited pronunciation and current spelling rules. Most names are decided by the Norwegian Mapping Authority on the advice of the geographical names consultancies.

The Complaint Committee of geographical names has decided upon close to 30 cases. Approximately one third of the complainants received support from the Committee.

### *Saami geographical names*

By law road signs in Saami municipalities shall have the Saami name on top. This makes sense in most cases but can leave to confusion in some situations, mostly larger cities, where the Saami name is less used. The administration recommends making the order of names voluntary.

### *Geographical Names Register*

*Sentralt Stedsnavnregister* (The Central Place-Names Register), which was founded on the Place-Names Act and administered by the Mapping Authority, contains the approved forms of geographical names in accordance with the Place-Names Act. So far, 121 000 names have been approved and entered into the register. However, many more names – of close to one million recorded names – are still to be approved according to the regulations.

A new version of the Central Place-names Register is presently being developed. The system is expected to be fully up and running in May 2016.

A new internet solution connected to SSR has been launched. The solution focuses on searchability in the geographical names register within predefined restrictions. These restrictions can be language, object types or authorised/non-authorised spellings.

## Sweden:

### *Geographical names and Swedish population registration:*

The Swedish Population is since January 1, 2016 registered according to a new district division, with 2 523 districts. The geographic form of the district, as well as the names of the districts, are based on a former division into ecclesiastical parishes. The names of the districts were specially investigated by Lantmäteriet (the Swedish mapping, cadastre and real estate authority), in

consultation with the Swedish National Heritage Board and the Institute for Language and Folklore and other agencies and organizations.

### *Administrative divisions of Sweden*

The Counties (Swedish: län) of Sweden are the first level administrative and political subdivisions of Sweden. Sweden is divided into 21 counties. A government committee will propose a new county and county subdivision which should result in that Sweden is divided into substantially fewer counties. The governmental investigation shall be based on the needs of citizens and commercial needs including transportation, labour, health care, education, culture and a healthy environment. The Committee should emanate its work from the municipal boundaries and the boundaries of the so-called labour market regions or functional regions. The aim is to create an appropriate subdivision and effective organizations that causes permanent benefits including a better adaptation to demographic, nutritional, geographical and environmental conditions. The division will also provide a stable economic environment in the newly formed county councils, improving consistency between citizens' needs and their ability to exercise democratic influence and increased opportunities to accountability. The Institute for Language and Folklore and Lantmäteriet has pointed out the need of good geographical name practice in the Committee's work. The final report is due in August, 2017.

### *Minority languages*

Sweden has ongoing work to present and consolidate geographical names in the minority languages. There is cooperation between several state authorities that includes maps, road signs and addresses. The Institute for Language and Folklore also provides financial assistance to the work with a word book in Meänkieli and a school project to learn Meänkieli.

### *Implementation of UNCSGN Resolutions*

In the national work regarding implementation of the UNCSGN resolutions the Institute for Language and Folklore together with Lantmäteriet and the Place-Names Advisory Board have agreed on a recommendation on the use of commercial names in government controlled business. The recommendation is mainly directed to the municipalities. A similar recommendation regarding commemorative naming is in action since 2004.

To ensure good geographical name practice in the work at other government authorities and at municipalities continuous training is conducted by the Institute for Language and Folklore and Lantmäteriet.

### *Geographical Names Network in Sweden*

The Geographical Names Network (in Swedish Namnvårdsgruppen) is a group under the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs responsibility that has been functioning since 2013. This network was created in order to be more aware and gain knowledge on how to use foreign names of countries and other important geographical locations in the world. The purpose of the group is to provide guidance on matters of principle, to give advice or recommendations in individual name issues, not just geographical names but also names on authorities and job titles in public service. We shall also

develop the Swedish terminology on this and furthermore promote good geographical name practice.

The Geographical Names Network shall promote uniformity regarding geographical name practice and give principal advice on how to use foreign geographical names in different official situations, such as news reporting and other official circumstances. Together with this, the group will provide foreign users of Swedish geographical names with correct names and advice how to use them. For example when it comes to the use of diacritics used in Swedish and Saami languages.

Information, advice and recommendations are published on the internet and for this purpose we have a web page on the homepage of Lantmäteriet ([www.lantmateriet.se](http://www.lantmateriet.se)).

The Geographical Names Network consists of the most relevant and important participants dealing with Swedish geographical name official activities: Lantmäteriet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute for Language and Folklore including the Language Council of Sweden, the University of Uppsala, the Swedish Centre for Terminology, Radio Sweden, the Swedish Standards Institute, the Swedish Translation Service in the General Secretariat of the EU Council and the Institute for the Languages of Finland. The Geographical Names Network shall be consulted in issues concerning questions of foreign names, for instance the publication *The Book of Foreign Names* (in Swedish *Utrikes Namnbok*) – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ official book about how to use foreign geographical names. *The Book of Foreign Names* is intended for employees at Government offices, authorities and organizations but is also used by journalists and the general public. *The Book of Foreign Names* contains country-names and names of EU agencies. The publication also contains translations into English, German, French, and Spanish and to a certain extent into Finnish and Russian of names of authorities and important organizations in Sweden. In addition to this it also presents job titles in state services.

## **V. Cooperation with other Divisions and Working Groups**

As mentioned above, the Norden Division held its 2015 Meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, together with the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, Evaluation and Implementation, and the Working Group on Publicity and Funding. In conjunction with the meeting, the meeting participants visited the recently opened Copenhagen UN City. The concept of a joint meeting and a seminar was found to be so successful that the Norden Division is willing to partake in similar events in the future.

Norden Division members are very active in UNGEGN, not only holding Working Group Convenorships, but also giving several Working Papers at the 29. UNGEGN Session, including under Agenda Items:

- 4: Reports of the Divisions  
- *Report of the Norden Division* (Norden Division).

- 9: Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers  
- *The renewed Geographic Names Register of the National Land Survey of Finland* (Finland).
- 10: Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology  
- *Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology* (Sweden).
- 13: Activities relating to the Working Group on Publicity and Funding  
- *Report of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding* (Denmark).
- 16: Activities relating to the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage  
- *Digitalisation of the Names Archive* (Finland).  
- *From paper to bytes – digitising geographical name records* (Denmark).  
- *Report of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage* (Sweden).
- 17: Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use  
- *Updating of Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors* (Finland).
- 18: Other toponymic issues  
- *Online guidelines for the use of proper names in the Finnish Language* (Finland).
- 20: Activities relating to the statutes of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names  
- *Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names* (Sweden).

## VI. Geographical names news in the Norden Division area

### Denmark:

#### *The Danish Geodata Agency split into two*

As part of the plan of the Danish government: *Better balance - Government institutions closer to citizens and businesses*, the Danish Geodata Agency was split into two separate agencies on October 2nd 2015, namely the *Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency* with location in Copenhagen and the *Danish Geodata Agency* with location in Aalborg.

The *Danish Geodata Agency* will be responsible for tasks relating to property and cadastral matters and on hydrographic surveying and nautical charts. The *Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency* will be in charge of geospatial data and infrastructure and will thus be in charge of the area pertaining to geographical names.



## Finland:

### *Gazetteer of Finnish Exonyms and index of names of major inhabited places*

The Institute for the Languages of Finland will publish an updated version of the Gazetteer of Finnish Exonyms online in 2016 (printed version published in 2013, [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/28th-gegn-docs/WP/WP26\\_Exonyms.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/28th-gegn-docs/WP/WP26_Exonyms.pdf)), as well as an updated version of the index of names of major inhabited places with declension instructions. Both online publications will be free of charge.

## Norway:

### *Geographical Names Research, Archives and Consultancies*

The University of Oslo has decided to discontinue the Place-Name Research Group and its associated archives which over the past 25 years has been a part of the Institute of Linguistic and Scandinavian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities. The archives will be re-established at the University of Bergen, but with less academic and financial resources.

The Place-Names Consultancies of South Eastern Norway, which so far physically have been attached to the University of Oslo, have moved to the Norwegian Language Council building downtown.

### *Online Geographical Names Application*

Another new Norwegian internet solution has been established, called [Norsk Stadnamleksikon](#). The 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 Norsk Stadnamleksikon.

### *Meetings*

The annual meetings of the Mapping Authority and the Place-Names Consultancies were held in September 2014 and October 2015, dealing with various problems attached to standardizing and using geographical names.

The Norwegian Names Association is due to hold its general assembly on 18th November 2016, combined with a conference on name research.

## Sweden:

### *Geographical information of Sweden in the computer game Minecraft*

A landscape model of Sweden is released in the popular computer game Minecraft. The model is based on the geographical information in scales between 1:50 000 – 1:100 000 and contains

geographical information from the national maps and elevation data. This means that Sweden will be like a virtual world in the game Minecraft.



This release is an effort to get the younger generation to use and see the possibilities of geographical information. This is a possibility to build Swedish maps in a well-known environment for young people and at the same time spread knowledge and use of geographical information and geographical names. Minecraft is a computer game with its endless opportunities for the players to build and create their own worlds. With this contribution players have access to a nationwide model of the landscape with lakes, mountains, geographical names, roads and railways. In addition, a function for teleportation is created to easily find to their city and neighbourhood.

Local administrations in the municipalities and companies have recognized the game's ability to quickly and easily create three-dimensional environments and there are several examples of how they use it in the municipal planning work.

Read more: <http://www.lantmateriet.se/en/Nyheter-pa-Lantmateriet/nu-slapper-lantmateriet-hela-sverige-i-minecraft/>