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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION: TREATMENT OF NAMES
IN MULTILINGUAL AREAS

Treatment of names in bilingual areas in Finland**

Paper submitted by Finland

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Two official languages are spoken in Finland: Finnish and Swedish. A third language, Lappish, is spoken as a vernacular in three mutually incomprehensible dialects. There are 4,580,000 speakers of Finnish; 299,700 (6 %) speakers of Swedish, and 2,000 (6 %) speakers of Lappish.

The Finnish-Swedish area

According to law a municipality is bilingually Finnish-Swedish or Swedish-Finnish if more than 8 % or at least 3,000 of its inhabitants speak Finnish or Swedish. The percentages for the language groups are checked every tenth year. At present there are forty-one bilingual municipalities; Finnish is the majority language in twenty-one of them, while Swedish is the majority language in twenty of them. There are 396 monolingually Finnish municipalities and twenty-four monolingually Swedish municipalities, sixteen of which are in the Åland Islands.

In bilingual areas the names in both languages are indicated on road markers and street signs, on maps of the areas, etc. The name used by the local majority is given first. When the linguistic proportions prevailing in a municipality change, the order of the names is also changed. If the place has no officially accepted or generally used name in the other language cartographers and editors do not attempt to invent one for the map or other publication by translating or using some other means.

In bilingual municipalities and the villages settled areas, post offices, railroad stations etc. have officially sanctioned names in each of the two languages, the same often holds true of natural features. For example Finn. Sipoo, Swed. Sibbo (municipality), Finn. Laupunen, Swed. Löpö Finn. Kauklahti, Swed. Köklax (railroad station), Finn. Linnavuori, Swed. Kulhoklint (hill). Seventy-one monolingually Finnish municipalities also have an officially sanctioned Swedish name which is to be used in Swedish, e.g. Swed. Lahtis (town, Finn. Lahti), Birkala (municipality, Finn. Pirkkala), and six monolingually Swedish municipalities also have an official Finnish form, e.g. Maarianhamina (town, Swed. Mariehamn), Finn. Maalahti (municipality, Swed. Malax).

The Finnish-Lappish area

Lappish is spoken in the five northernmost municipalities. There are no municipalities which are monolingually Lappish, and in only one municipality is Lappish the language of the majority. From a practical standpoint all speakers of Lappish know Finnish as well. On road markers and maps the Finnish name comes first, followed by a Lappish name if one is in general use. Even though Lappish does not have the status of an official language an effort is made to use a large number of Lappish names in maps intended for national use. The legends of general maps are not printed in Lappish because there has been no practical reason for doing so.