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**Toponymic education and practice and international
cooperation: existing education and practice**

The social and cultural value of place names

Submitted by Norway**

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1. Scholarly viewpoints

The protection of names was hardly a matter of interest beyond the fact that it was acknowledged early on that place-names represented important values in terms of cultural and linguistic history. Not until the latter half of the 20th century did place-name care gain wider justification and experience increasing interest, both in the broad section of the population and among name scholars. Since the 1970s numerous conferences and meetings have been held around the world. A representative expression of the viewpoints that have marked the communities of name scholars in this field is to be found in a report that was adopted at the symposium with the title *Ortsnamsvård och ortnamnsplanering* [Place-name care and place-name planning] held in Hanaholmens kulturcentrum in Esbo from 23–25 September 1977:

Place-names are an important part of our geographical and cultural environment. They identify geographical entities of different kinds and represent irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of well-being and feeling at home.

Place-names are therefore of major social importance. Society must also bear the responsibility for taking care of the place-name heritage and seeing to it that place-name planning is carried out in such a way that the functionality of the place-name stock is preserved and the cultural heritage is protected in a rapidly changing society.

In all the Nordic countries society has established institutions with the task of collecting, processing and storing place-name material. These institutions' expert knowledge and material can and should be utilised by all bodies that have to deal with questions relating to place-names (NORNA-rapporter 13, p. 211).

2. The function of names

In normal language usage all names have a deictic or monoreferential function. What is particular to place-names is that this monoreferentiality applies to places or localities, i.e. these names have an address function. Every language community has at any time at its disposal the stock of names that the members of society need to communicate with one another. New names are given as the need for them arises, and old names disappear when there is no longer any use for them.

A place-name normally exists in relation to a geographical object, real or imagined, and when this object changes character, the reference of the name changes. This important function of place-names means that they are an essential linguistic tool that most people use many times a day, and for this tool to function as well as possible in an increasingly complicated society, the authorities want to regulate names in certain ways and in certain contexts, e.g. when it comes to the written form, what name is to be chosen, and what area they are to apply to.

The address function of place-names is fundamental, but like other language they function on several levels. In addition to the cognitive level (level of understanding) Thorsten Andersson (1994: 8) reckons with an emotive level (level of feeling), e.g. *Paradise* and *Hell*, an ideological level, e.g. *Bethel* as the name of a religious assembly house, *Karl-Marx-Stadt* for the former (and present-day) *Chemnitz*, and a community-creating level, e.g. when Saami-speaking people identify with *Dædno* and Norwegian speakers with *Tana*. All people have a name community around them with which they are familiar, and which they know as their own, at the same time as they have other names in common with larger groups in what one may call a structural hierarchy. Magnus Olsen (1939: 9ff.) formulated this in a three-tier model: (1) the place-names that the people on a farm or in another micro community have in common, in contrast to (2) the place-names which are common to a whole rural district or a town, and (3) the place-names which are common to the whole nation. People who belong to the same language community – and to an even greater degree if they belong to the same local community – will on the whole be familiar with the same names and feel themselves tied to them. These names become a part of their linguistic and local identity. Also through their close connection with the dialect place-names represent an important environmental factor, and for the individual certain place-names may have a special experiential value.

3. Naming

Naming has mainly followed two paths, namely what one may call spontaneous or popular naming, and baptism. The vast majority of place-names that are given today belong to the first type and are the result of a process of lexicalisation with its starting point in a description of the object bearing the name. The prototype of the Nordic place-names is a propriated terrain appellative, if necessary compounded with a distinguishing element that specifies in more detail or modifies the content of the main element. Even if the individual name appears as an original description of the name object, the naming will to a certain degree have been governed by analogy, i.e. new names are produced on the pattern of other names in the area or of other names that the name-givers are altogether familiar with. This is one of the reasons that certain types of names have a tendency to appear with greater frequency than others in certain areas. One form of analogy also occurs in the case of metonymic naming, the fact that name-givers borrow a name from another name object and transfer it to a new object on the basis of a real or imagined likeness. Giving a locality a name by naming it after another named object approaches an act of baptism, but the difference is that older names after which localities have been called have as a rule attached themselves gradually to the new place. On the other hand one can speak of baptism when streets, roads, squares and other name objects are given prescribed names through special resolutions. It is true that some of the names that are given formalised status in this way have been informally used earlier for the same name object or a part of it.

The preservation of place-names applies first and foremost to the inherited and spontaneously given name stock, but also names as a result of planned naming are an integrated part of our cultural heritage.

The planned naming of places is something that has been going on first and foremost over the last 100-150 years in the Nordic countries, even though there are many examples of such naming from earlier times. For example, the Swede, Bo Jonsson, gave his newly acquired estate the name *Gripsholm* around the year 1360 after a stay in Germany. German models were also the basis for the names of castles and forts such as *Akershus*, *Bohus*, *Tavastehus*, which are all attested in the 14th century, like *Landskrona* (1413), *Vänersborg* (1642). A number of Scandinavian towns and fortresses have been called after royal persons through a more or less managed process, like *Frederiksborg*, *Frederikshavn*, *Kristianssæde* in Denmark, *Lovisa*, *Kristinestad*, *Vasa* in Finland, *Fredrikshald* (now *Halden*), *Kristiansand*, *Kongsberg* in Norway and *Filipstad*, *Karlskrona*, *Kristinehamn* in Sweden. When Oslo was destroyed by fire in 1624, the city was rebuilt in the shelter of Akershus fort and was by royal decree given the name *Christiania* after the Dano-Norwegian King Kristian IV, a name that was also intended to provide a religious connotation.

The earliest official naming in the form of street names first appears in the major cities. Some towns had town plans as early as the Middle Ages, and in the beginning existing traditional names were used for districts and streets, but as long as these names had not received any official stamp, there were liable to change. As the towns gradually developed and new areas were brought under regulation, naming of a more planned form was carried out. The street names in Helsinki were laid down for the first time in 1820, while the first street name committee came a hundred years later. Stockholm got its first printed map with street names in 1733, but not until an announcement on 7 March 1832 did the street names in the city acquire an official character. The majority of the major and many of the smaller Nordic towns have their own surveys of the development of street names. In Norway it seems that Bergen was the first to appoint a name committee, which in 1822 was to make proposals for "permanent designations for all such streets, alleys, passages leading to the wharves, and public squares as might be found to have no or undecided names". Gradually other towns and local authorities followed suit, and today all local authorities have an organised system for the giving and planning of names, often incidentally not without some contribution from name scholars.

The naming of streets, roads, squares and other public and immovable objects is an important administrative activity for local authorities in all the Nordic countries. The giving of names takes place either through the bringing in of existing names in the area, or through the creation of new names. In recent times category naming (names arranged according to meanings groups) has been usual, for example names of birds in one area, names of animals in a second and names of artists in a third. Usually there has been some hesitation about using the names of people who are still alive. The Swedish name scholar Bengt Pamp (1978) has pointed to the following aspects that should be considered when new names are to be chosen: (1) distinctiveness/functionality, (2) linguistic economy/orthography, (3) tradition, (4) etymology, (5) pronunciation, (6) acceptability (the name must not have an offensive or comic effect), but is aware that these may be

mutually contradictory. The usual practice in all the Nordic countries is that a political body in the local authority passes formal resolutions on new names.

4. Values to be preserved in place-names

A great deal has been said and written about the value of place-names, and about the view that it is important to take care of them and protect them. The arguments for this may be found in several factors. In the first place it is a matter of historical documentation. The majority of place-names have arisen as expressions describing certain properties of the locality that has been given the name, and they thus provide information about natural and cultural circumstances at the time the names were given in the areas to which they belong. For the Nordic stock of place-names one may reckon with a time span of well over two thousand years – the oldest names can possibly be traced back to the Bronze Age. Place-names have a special property of being part of our cultural heritage in the sense that they tell us something about the locality of which they are the name; in other words, they provide important supplements to the history of where people settled. One can also see place-names as a reflection of the interplay between man and Nature through different periods of time. The many regional name studies that have been carried out in the Nordic countries show that place-names provide a multifaceted and detailed picture of human existence in relation to our surroundings. In addition to their content in terms of the natural environment and cultural history, names represent an important part of our linguistic heritage. This understanding of place-names as a historical and linguistic source has long been central within the community of name scholars and has in the course of time opened up the way for a broader commitment within the protection of names and also manifested itself in the legislation in several countries. In this perspective one must also see the increasing concern with place-names in multilingual areas. It is a well-known fact that Saami place-names in Norway, Sweden and Finland have been discriminated against in relation to the majority languages in these countries, and they still are to a certain extent, even though in principle they now enjoy equal status. The same applies to Finnish-language names in Norway and Sweden which have also had to exist in the shadow of the main languages (see Helander 1994).

5. Collection of place-names

It is a self-evident task for all countries and regions to take care of their place-names, and since around 1900 it has been a priority aim to collect place-names, either in the form of certain name categories or in the form of collection in depth in selected areas. In this work great weight has been placed on registering the pronunciation that has been handed down, since it best reflects the linguistic basis of names, especially where one lacks old written forms. At the same time the scientific archives have built up systematic collections of older written forms, but it is the collection in the field of oral material that has been, and is, most important with a view to taking care of as much as possible of the wealth of names still to be found in older tradition. The museum aspect of name protection that is represented by the collection and archiving of place-names has also been made to apply on the political level. Thus the Norwegian Storting [The national assembly] emphasised in a report on cultural policy that

our place-names are an important cultural resource and source of cultural policy that function as cultural identification for people. A large part of our stock of names is now in danger of disappearing because the pattern of settlement and the structure of economic life are rapidly changing, and because the informant [who] belongs to the generation that knows place-names and often the context into which they fit, is gradually dying out.

However, it is not the museum aspect that most people think of when it is a matter of protecting names, but changes that are happening in their own name community. When established place-names are removed by administrative or other devices, or when they are moved from their original community, many people feel this to be a form of encroachment. The environmental factor that a name constituency represents for the individual is an important argument for the protection of names.

6. Exonyms

A special section of the place-names seen as the cultural heritage are those that are called exonyms, i.e. foreign place-names that have a form different from that used in the country where the object of the name is to be found (on the definition see Raper 1996: 128). Examples of this are the Swedish name forms *Florens* and *Kjöpenhamn* for the Italian *Firenze* and Danish *København*. All the major language communities have such names, and in the individual language there are part of the linguistic heritage. At the same time they represent a problem with respect to international communication (see various approaches to this problem in NORNA-rapporter 68). The UN has in a number of resolutions expressed the view that internationally one should as far as possible use names in accordance with the endonym principle, i.e. use the giver-country's form of the name (Raper 1996: 43 ff.). A Norwegian form like *Kautokeino* for the Saami *Guovdageaidnu* is not reckoned as an exonym, but represents a part of the same kind of tradition (cf. Helander 1999: 137 ff.).

7. Concluding remarks

In the discussion on name protection one must take account of the living organism that place-names in a society represent. Its place-names are functional to the extent that they have a place in its communication system, and when they no longer are so, they fall out of use. Name change and name death have occurred all the time in step with the external circumstances. Therefore one cannot without reservation resuscitate names that do not have a sustainable object linked to them. To a certain degree one can re-activate place-names by linking them to active name-bearers, for example through administrative measures like addressing, map production, signposting, naming of new objects etc. In selected areas one can designate name protection areas in the same way as one designates landscape protection areas. And not least one can bring to life the name landscapes of the past through activity within local history such as the writing of the history of rural residences and farms.

As is apparent from this survey, place-name care is a "burning" issue that both laymen and experts are concerned about. Traditionally problems concerning the spelling of place-names have been at the centre of focus, and indeed they still are, but in recent decades protection of place-names as part of the immaterial cultural heritage has come more into the foreground. At the same time one can see that today's open society with its increasing internationalisation and liberation of market forces constitutes a competitive factor for both public name care and the environmental values, whatever that might mean in the longer term.

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