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**National standardization: treatment of names in
multilingual areas**

Guidelines for the planning of names in a bilingual area

Submitted by Finland**

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Finland is officially a bilingual country. According to Finland's constitution, Finnish and Swedish are the national languages and official state languages. The central principle is the equal status of the national languages. In 1991, the Saami speakers were also granted the right to use the Saami language(s) when dealing with the authorities. On the Finnish language legislation and the use of Finnish place names in foreign-language texts; cf. National Standardization: Treatment of Names in Multilingual Areas. Translators and place names in Finland. Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. New York, 13 – 22 January 1998. E/ CONF. 91/ L.16, 11 November 1997.

Tendency towards Finnish forms

Most place names in Finland are Finnish. The Saami-language names can be found in the northernmost parts of the country. The old place names in the south-western archipelago and the province of Åland, as well as on the western and southern coast areas are Swedish. While Åland is still Swedish-speaking, the linguistic proportions have changed on the coast in the past few decades. The countryside has remained more or less Swedish, but the towns have become more Finnish, as more and more Finnish-speaking people have moved there. It is especially the densely populated towns of the capital region that have become strongly Finnish. The growing proportion of Finnish people constitutes a threat to Swedish, which has widely become a minority language, and especially to the old Swedish-language place names. The tendency towards Finnish is less a threat to the Swedish names of the countryside than to those of the urbanised areas. The rural names are preserved or changed like before, spontaneously alongside with the language of the local people. The names are marked on the maps in their local forms used in practice. The place names marked on maps in the countryside are Swedish in the Swedish-speaking areas. The names are in Finnish and Swedish in the bilingual areas in case the inhabitants use the name in both languages. If the name is only used in one language, there is no artificial form in the other language, formed just for the purposes of a map.

It has proved problematic to transfer place names into the other language of the area especially in the growing southern cities that are becoming more and more Finnish, above all in the case of names in town plans. They require many new planned names, especially names of regions and streets. The place names in the officially bilingual municipalities are formed both in Finnish and in Swedish. The general principle in the planning of names in Finland is that the old place names of the region in question should be prioritised as far as possible. The old names in the regions that are becoming more Finnish are Swedish.

Research into Finnish-Swedish loan names

There are two principal ways of borrowing place names from another language: the names can be borrowed either as such, substituted with the phonetic structure of the borrowing language, if necessary, or they can be translated. All names can be borrowed as such. It is only possible to translate names that include elements with recognisable meaning.

In the 1970s, the spontaneous loaning of place names in the Finnish-Swedish countryside was studied comprehensively. The research showed that the majority of the loan names in either language had been adopted into the other language as such, with a substituted phonetic structure, if necessary. It turned out that translation was rare as a borrowing method among the spontaneously developed place names of the countryside. Spontaneous translations became more common in the bilingual municipalities only in the 20th century, as more and more Finnish-speaking population moved there. Some of the translations are official translations of the village names formed by the authorities.

Place names as historical documents

As the Swedish-speaking municipalities have become more Finnish, their traditional Swedish-language place names have become endangered. Their preservation is not merely an onomastic question. It is also a question of the preservation of the historical and cultural values of the coastal area. The old Swedish names reflect the previous phases of settlement by their mere existence. The biggest threat to these historical values is the translation of the names. If the Swedish place names are borrowed into Finnish by translating, the translated names look like ordinary Finnish names. Thus, the information of the old Swedish settlement in the region that the original name involved is completely lost. The same applies to the Saami-language names in the Finnish-Saami regions in the northernmost Finland.

Guidelines for names in bilingual areas

The official name planning, together with name planning officials of more and more municipalities have adopted the position that place names have to be preserved in their original language also for the other linguistic group in bilingual areas. This is not just about Swedish-language names in the use of the speakers of Finnish but also Finnish-language names in the use of the speakers of Swedish. The municipalities have expressed repeatedly a wish for new, precise guidelines for the name planning in bilingual regions.

The name planners of Finnish, Swedish and Saami of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland have jointly drafted guidelines for the name planners of bilingual regions. The guidelines were published in 2001 in the info bulletins of Finnish and Swedish language planning (Samuli Aikio & Sirkka Paikkala & Peter Slotte: *Ohjeita kaksikielisten alueiden nimistösuunnitteluun/ Anvisningar för namnplanering inom tvåspråkiga områden* [Guidelines for name planning in bilingual regions]. Kielikello 2/2001; Språkbruk 3/2001). The guidelines concern the name planning of both Finnish-Swedish and Finnish-Saami regions. The Finnish and Swedish Language Boards of the Research Institute have approved of the guidelines.

Sources

Aikio, Samuli & Paikkala, Sirkka & Slotte, Peter (2001). *Ohjeita kaksikielisten alueiden nimistösuunnitteluun* [Guidelines for name planning in bilingual regions]. – Kielikello

2/2001. Information bulletin of name planning. Helsinki: Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. p. 26–31.

Aikio, Samuli & Paikkala, Sirkka & Slotte, Peter (2001). *Anvisningar för namnplanering inom tvåspråkiga områden* [Guidelines for name planning in bilingual regions]. – *Språkbruk* 3/2001. Tidskrift utgiven av Svenska språkbyrån. Helsingfors: Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. p. 18–23.

Zilliacus, Kurt (1980). *Ortnamnsförråden vid språkgränsen i Finland : Presentation av ett forskningsprojekt*. [Place names reserve on the Finnish linguistic border. Presentation of a research project] – *Ortnamn och språkkontakt. Handlingar från NORNA:s sjätte symposium i Uppsala 5–7 maj 1978*. Ed. Thorsten Andersson, Eva Brylla, Allan Rostvik. NORNA-rapporter 17. Uppsala: Nordiska samarbetskommittén för namnforskningen.

The entire guidelines are as follows:

A Name Planner's Catechism

- ☒ Remember that a good name takes into account the cultural values and people's needs, strengthens the feeling of being at home and increases comfort. An ideal name is easy to remember, pronounce and write; however, do not try to achieve this too mechanically.
- ☒ Find out the existing traditional place names for the background of the plan, also by interviewing the inhabitants. Aim at using primarily the established place names already in use in the area. Obtain copies of the name collection projects in the area (available at the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland) and apply the information to map bases, if necessary. You can also restore old names that have been lost, found e.g. only in old maps, documents or literature, if you can locate them in the planned area.
- ☒ Apply the current spelling rules. If a name can be found in a basic map published by the National Land Survey of Finland, conform to the spelling of the basic map.
- ☒ Do not translate the following names:
 - *Village names in the land register*. Choose the form of the name marked in the basic map. Use a name with a form in the other language only if its use is established in unofficial contexts. The ending of the name, expressing the type of the place, should be written in the official languages of the municipality (Finnish *-tie*/ Swedish *-vägen*/ Saami *-geaidnu* 'road'; *-puisto*/*-parken*/*-spatnju* 'park', etc.).
 - *Farm names*. Use a name in another language only if it is established in the region. The names of farms and estates are also included in the land and real estate registers,

and translated names do not have the same referent as the original names. However, you should check the current spelling of the name.

- *Personal names or surnames, or both.* The names are closely connected to their bearer, which is why a translated name, or a name adapted to another language, does not refer to the same person as the original name. If a name consists of several parts, check if the parts should be written together or separately (Finnish *Aleksis Kiven katu* – Swedish *Aleksis Kivis gata* "Aleksis Kivi Street").

- *Established natural names or names of cultivation,* widely familiar among the people in the region and with an instructive function. Use a translation in the other language of the area (e.g. Finnish *Pitkäjärventie* (*pitkä* 'long', *järvi* 'lake', *tie* 'road') – Swedish *Långträskvägen*) or a modification (e.g. Swedish *Brobybäcken* (*bro* 'bridge', *by* 'village', *bäck* 'brook') – Finnish *Ruupyynoja*) only if its use is established. Such established, widely used names include the names of important areas, such as bigger hills, swamps and marshes, islands, lakes, and waterways whose names are well-known by both linguistic groups.

- If you choose a name of a small location which only appears in old maps or is known merely by a small group of users, and which can be lexically translated, you can revive it by a translation (e.g. the present park name Swedish *Silkesängen* (*silke* 'silk', *äng* 'meadow') – Finnish *Silkkiniitty*).

- ∅ If the use of a name of settlement, nature or person, established in only one of the languages in a planned name turns out to be problematic for the users, or if it is otherwise problematic, build the name on a totally different basis (e.g. Swedish *Hagalund* – Finnish *Tapiola*, Saami *Gieddemielli* – Finnish *Onnelantörmä*). However, you should only resort to this method rarely, since it is not the best possible from the point of view of recognition.
- ∅ When creating an entirely new name (e.g. thematic name) in a bilingual area, try to create the forms in both languages simultaneously and in co-operation with an expert of the other language. In cases where the names are formed in one language and only from its perspective, we are often faced with a situation where a direct translation is impossible. It may be necessary to change the theme considerably or at least to give up the planned name.
- ∅ Evoke a distinctive atmosphere in areas that have not been previously built by taking into account the local names, vocabulary, history and nature of the plan. If it is necessary to create new names in previously settled areas, try to find the suitable solutions in co-operation with the users.