
**United Nations Group of Experts On
Geographical Names
2019 session**

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Item 5 (a) of the agenda ***Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names**

Report of Sweden

Submitted by Sweden**

Summary:

The national report of Sweden is divided into six sections. The first, on national standardization, provides a short overview of current legislation and of the main authorities involved in the standardization of geographical names. The second, on names in multilingual areas, contains information on minority language names and the responsible authorities. The third focuses on two ongoing committee reports concerning the Sami-speaking minority in the north of Sweden. The fourth includes information on an English online version of a booklet (published in Swedish in 2001 and revised in 2016) on good place-name practice. The fifth provides an updated presentation of two Swedish working groups – the Place-Name Advisory Board and the Geographical Names Network – that provide information and advice to different stakeholders. The sixth section contains a description of two research projects involving field collection of place names on the island of Öland and in the city of Uppsala, a rural and an urban landscape, respectively.

The following resolutions adopted at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names are particularly relevant to the present work on name standardization in Sweden:

- 1972: resolution II/36 ([E/CONF.61/4](#)) on problems of minority languages
- 2002: resolution VIII/9 ([E/CONF.94/3](#)) on geographical names as cultural heritage
- 2007: resolution IX/4 ([E/CONF.98/136](#)) on geographical names as intangible cultural heritage
- 2012: resolution X/4 ([E/CONF.101/144](#)) on discouraging the commercialization of geographical names.

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1. Swedish national name standardization – in short

‘The Historic Environment Act’ (Sw. *Kulturmiljölagen*) was revised in 2000 and 2013. Since 2000 it includes a section advocating ‘good place-name practice’ in central and local government activities. Emphasis is on the importance of preserving place-names as a part of the nation’s cultural heritage. Place-names must be spelt in accordance with generally accepted rules of linguistic correctness, and established names must not be changed without good cause. Names that have been approved by Lantmäteriet (the Swedish Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority) shall be used in their approved form in the work of central and local government.

The supervision of the Act is the responsibility of the Swedish National Heritage Board (Sw. *Riksantikvarieämbetet*). However, the role as national place-names authority is performed by Lantmäteriet). The third main part involved in Swedish place-name standardization is the Institute for Language and Folklore (Sw. *Institutet för språk och folkminnen*), especially its Onomastics Department (Sw. *Namnarkivet*) and the Swedish Language Council (Sw. *Språkrådet*).

The Place-Names Advisory Board (Sw. *Ortnamnsrådet*), appointed by Lantmäteriet, has an overall consultative responsibility. The authorities mentioned above – together with a few others – are members of this Board (see below).

Furthermore, the local, municipal governments of Sweden (290 in all) are responsible for urban toponymy (streets, squares, parks, city blocks etc.) as well as urban and rural addresses containing a large amount of place-names.

2. Minority languages

The national language policy in Sweden states that everyone is entitled to a language, and emphasizes the right to use and develop one’s own (minority) language. The Institute for Language and Folklore is responsible for language care and maintenance as regards Finnish and Meänkieli. The Sami Parliament (Sw. *Sametinget*) is in charge of the Sami languages. The responsibility of Lantmäteriet is to make sure that minority language place-names are standardized and written in a valid orthography, and used on public maps and road signs. Place-names in Meänkieli were strengthened by an amendment to the Historic Environment Act in 2013.

In the Sami-speaking areas of Sweden Sami place-names occur on official signs as well as on the official maps. The Sami-speaking people use different spoken variants of Sami, and in Sweden four written standards are recognized. These different orthographies are also reflected in the written forms of the names. As from 2001, following a decision by Lantmäteriet, all four of the Sami orthographies – North, Lule, Ume and South Sami – are presented on the official maps. The Ume Sami orthography, however, gained official status as late as April 2016. An orthography for a fifth variant, Pite Sami, is now being prepared.

3. Two government assignments concerning minority languages

Minority languages in Sweden have been in focus for governmental investigations during the last years. The Swedish government has stressed the importance of a strong impact from the national minorities regarding the cultural heritage, including language, personal names and place-names. Since October 1, 2018, the Sami Parliament is appointed as an advisory body on issues concerning Sami place-names and Sami personal names.

The Institute for Language and Folklore and the Sami Parliament have been given a joint government assignment to analyze the need to collect, maintain and scientifically study archive material related to Sami cultures and languages. The results of this analysis will be presented to the government in June 2019.

Secondly, the Institute for Language and Folklore has been given the government's assignment to propose how to establish language centers for minority language groups. In their first interim report, the investigators propose a language center for Finnish to be placed in Uppsala, and a language center for Meänkieli in Kiruna and in Övertorneå. The report highlights, among other things, the importance of locating the language centers close to the language users. Half of the country's Finnish speakers live in the mid parts of Sweden, and some central institutions for research and education in Finnish are to be found in this part of the country. In the case of Meänkieli, the most endangered varieties are spoken around Kiruna in northern Sweden, while the dominant variety is found in Tornedalen, where Övertorneå is situated. The government assignment also includes investigating the conditions for language centers, or corresponding functions, for the national minority languages Yiddish and Romani chib. A final report will be submitted in October 2019.

4. Good place-name practice: The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board's Guide to the Standardization and Preservation of Place-Names

'Place-names and name care' (Sw. *Ortnamn och namnvård*) is a publication series from Lantmäteriet. Each issue covers a specific topic within the field of place-names, name care and name standardization. The series is aimed at readers with an interest in place-names who wish to learn more. In 2016 a second, revised edition of no. 6, a printed guide called *God Ortnamnsred. Ortnamnsrådets handledning i namnvård* (84 pp., in Swedish only, originally publ. in 2001) on place-name standardization and good place-name practice was published, primarily aimed at local authorities in Sweden involved in official naming activities. Now the Swedish text of the second edition has been translated into English. The English version, with minor updates, will be digitally published in the spring of 2019 and accessible on the website of Lantmäteriet at the following webpage: <https://www.lantmateriet.se/sv/Kartor-och-geografisk-information/Ortnamn/Skriftserien/>

5. Two Advisory Bodies

(a) The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board

The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board (Sw. *Ortnamnsrådet*) is an advisory body to Lantmäteriet, Sweden's national place-names authority. As well as from Lantmäteriet itself, the board members are drawn from the Institute for Language and Folklore, the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Sami Parliament, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Transport Administration, and the universities. Its main responsibilities are to work with Lantmäteriet to develop principles and formulate recommendations for a policy relating to place-names. The Place-Names Advisory Board has no formal decision-making powers, but acts in an independent capacity, providing advice and promoting the concept of 'good place-name practice'.

The Board meets twice a year. A wide array of issues has been dealt with at the board meetings over the past two years. Recurring points are minority language place-names and how to increase awareness of good place-name practice in municipal bodies. Furthermore, the Board has discussed unofficial use of names in several contexts and how to make alternative names available for specific purposes such as rescue services. Another topic has been the increasing tendency among estate agents and housing companies, in urban settings, to create marketable and trendy names taking little account of their linguistic correctness or suitability from a cultural heritage perspective. Occasionally the Board invites guest speakers representing other place-name stakeholders, most recently the Swedish Local Heritage Federation. A few items are permanent on the agenda such as reporting on activities within the Swedish Geographical Names Network and UNGEGN.

(b) The Geographical Names Network

During the last couple of years, the Geographical Names Network (Sw. *Namnårsgruppen*), initiated by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and established in 2013, has been working on three

recommendations concerning names of official authorities in Sweden. The recommendations give advice on: 1) how to form linguistically correct names of authorities, following good naming practice, 2) how to name sections within authorities, and 3) how to create linguistically correct abbreviations and acronyms used for the names of authorities. The recommendations will be made available online (in Swedish only).

The Geographical Names Network consists of a group of experts from a number of authorities and organizations. The aim of the group is to raise awareness of and gain knowledge about how to use, pronounce and spell – in the best (standardized) way – all kinds of names, e.g. foreign names of countries and other important geographical places in the world, foreign personal names, and names of institutions and authorities. The group wishes to provide guidance on matters of principle, to promote good place-name practice, to make recommendations on individual name issues, and to develop Swedish terminology.

6. Two research projects

(a) Field Names in the Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland

The project 'Field Names in the Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland' (Sw. *Ägonamn i världsarvet Södra Ölands odlingslandskap*) has collected about 3,000 field names from 12 of the 14 parishes in the area – names that were used in 1960 and/or in 2015. These names form an important immaterial part of the world heritage site that has not attracted much attention until now, even though the area was included on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2000. Thanks to the local heritage societies we have been able to locate all these names and place them on a digital map that will be accessible online. The analysis shows that there have been structural changes from 1960 to 2015 both within the naming system and within the farming system. A comparison shows great name losses and more radical changes than we had imagined, but the results also show that many field names are still in use and that there is a great interest from both the inhabitants and the local authorities to preserve and promote these names.

(b) The Onomastic Landscapes of Uppsala

Proper names are a prominent feature in all linguistic landscapes. Not only do they have an identifying function (monoreferential reference), names also have the ability to turn space into place. A given name is the result of a choice among linguistic possibilities. For example, the choice between the official and the unofficial name variant for a central square in the city is an ideological statement, as is the choice between a Swedish and an unofficial name used by e.g. Arabic-speaking inhabitants in Sweden for the same location.

The project 'The Onomastic landscapes of Uppsala' by the Institute for Language and Folklore studies the names visible on signs etc. in the city of Uppsala. That is the linguistic landscape constituted by the toponyms and commercial names in the cityscape. It discusses which signs in the linguistic landscape that have the identifying function of a name, which ones do not, and why and how these signs fit into the grammatical category of names.

The study is based on empirical data collected through field studies and from photos of linguistic landscapes. An informant group was asked to take pictures of names in the linguistic landscape, and by interviewing the informants and discussing their photos with them, the scholars aim to reach a greater understanding of what the name users consider to be proper names, as well as of the role played by minority languages in the onomastic landscapes. The results and observations of the study relate to established theories of proper names and multilingualism, and test hypotheses of discourse and geosemiotics.

Bibliography (project b)

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