

18 March 2019

English

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

New York, 29 April–3 May
2019 Item 7 (a) of the
provisional agenda*

National and international standardization of geographical names: names collection, office treatment, national authorities, features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation

Kramnitse or Kramnitze – it's not so eazy...

Submitted by Denmark**

*GEGN.2/2019/1

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Kramnitse or Kramnitze – it's not so easy...

This working paper is based on the paper ‘Divergence and Convergence within Standardizing Danish Place-Names’, presented at the UNGEGN symposium ‘Role and Importance of Expert Knowledge in the Standardization of Geographical Names’, Brussels, 12 October 2018.

Summary

The paper presents a case of re-standardization of a Danish place-name handled by the Danish Place-Name Committee in 2018. A local community applied for a form *Kramnitze* instead of the standardized form *Kramnitse*. This was problematic because standard Danish orthography does not include a z. The history behind both name-formation and standardized form became essential for the decision that a form *Kramnitze* could be accepted as a standardized, Danish form.

It is not every day that the orthography of Danish place-names makes headlines in the news media – but sometimes it does happen. The ‘hottest’ location in Denmark within the latest years, in terms of toponymy, is a small coastal community of summer residences on the island of Lolland in the southernmost part of the country. Here, the residents want the official name form *Kramnitse* changed for *Kramnitze*, as this is considered to be the original way to spell it and always had been, until the bureaucrats in Copenhagen changed it.

The ignorant bureaucrats in this case are the Danish Place-Name Committee, a board formed in 1910 with the task to standardize place-name orthography in Denmark. While the main challenge of the committee back then was to standardize the existing corpus of place-names according to contemporary Danish orthography in general, the still existing committee’s primary task nowadays is to advise the Ministry of Culture, the decisive body on the matter, on the suitability of new place-names as well as on a continuous stream of requests for changes on already existing names. Thus, the case of *Kramnitse* refers to the latter group.

Kramnitse apparently belongs to a small group of Danish place-names in *-itse*, which are all found on the southern islands of Lolland, Falster and Møn. The bulk of these *itse*-names appear to be of Wendic origin, that is a Slavic group of peoples living along the south-western coast of the Baltic Sea during the Viking Age and the High Middle Ages. Presumably, the south-Danish *itse*-names were formed in the 11th-13th centuries as part of a Wendic settlement on the islands. However, not all place-names in *-itse* in Denmark have a genuine Wendic origin, as some originally Danish names have been adapted to the Wendic-sounding form known on the islands. Based on the oldest recorded spelling forms and its late occurrence as a settlement name, *Kramnitse* most likely belongs to this subgroup of ‘false *itse*-names’, probably taking off in a Danish name **Krammenæs* (: ‘the cape where goods are traded’), which may have been altered to sound more like the nearby villages of *Tillitse* and *Kuditse*.

In the case of *Kramnitse* on Lolland, the only known settlement on the narrow south-coast cape for long was the house of a customs officer, which around 1850 changed its name from *Kramnisse* to *Kramnitse/Kramnitze*. In the 1860s, the name *Kramnitze* was applied to a new coastal settlement of fishermen and their families in the vicinity of the existing house. During the 20th century, the fishing community transferred into a settlement dominated by summer residences.

The conflict concerning the generic form *-itse* vs. *-itze* involves the entire group of *itse*-names on Lolland and Falster, not just *Kramnitse*. Although place-name orthography in Denmark has been a fluctuant phenomenon until the formation of the Danish Place-Name Committee in 1910, a form with *-itze* has evidently been the most widespread spelling practice for all the ‘genuine *itse*-names’ throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Except within the cartography of the Danish military in the mid-19th century and onwards, where the form *-itse* was preferred to the German-sounding form *-itze*.

When the learned toponymists of the Danish Place-Name Committee took up the question around 1920, they did not like the /z/ either, since this was explicitly considered ‘non-Danish’ and ‘German-sounding’. The committee produced a list of ‘linguistically ideal suggestions’ for numerous place-names around the country, and in the case of the *itse*-names it advocated an alternative form *-ese*, based on the local pronunciation. However, from the very beginning, most of the committee’s suggested forms were met with local resistance,

and a public hearing with the local municipalities on Lolland in 1934 clearly showed a local preference for the form *-itze*. But as the /z/ remained unacceptable for the committee, it was eventually decided to introduce the military form *-itse* as the new standard form for all *itse*-names.

The place-name orthography norms implemented by the Danish Place-Name Committee in the period 1922-1969 have been continuously challenged. Local preference for older forms, usually the ones seen in 19th-century documents and maps, has led to a widespread existence of parallel name forms with spelling variations (e.g. /au/ rather than the official /av/; /th/ rather than /t/; and /x/ rather than /ks/), especially in regard to names on farms, houses and streets. Farm names were authorized until 1969, but since then all three categories have fell outside the committee's authority. The public feeling often seems to be that such 19th-century forms are the 'original and true' forms, unlike the ones enforced by the bureaucrats in Copenhagen. Furthermore, there is a widespread sense that place-name orthography ought to be a local matter, since the local inhabitants have some sort of ownership to the names.

In the recent decades, many local place-name deviations have, in fact, been authorized by the Place-Name Committee, when it has complied to official requests for name changes. The committee usually only comply to such changes reluctantly, after having tried to explain why the normative form is preferable. Also, the historical background of the name is examined and it is evaluated to what degree a change would disagree with orthographical norms and the existing local toponymy in general. The Place-Name Committee could, of course, apply a completely dismissive policy towards all counter-normative requests, but since such requests are usually only applied for when the alternative name forms already have been in local usage for long, even by the local authorities, the committee also has to consider the need for name homogeneity. And when a deviation form first has been legalized in one case, it becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss requests for similar deviation forms elsewhere.

When the local community of Kramnitse some years ago officially applied for a change to *Kramnitze*, it was denied by the committee. The community then collected historical evidence to back their request, which also received support from the local municipal council and by a signature petition from the majority of the local community. The committee then re-evaluated the case, and found that the request not only seemed to be backed by all local parties involved as well as by the history of the name, one could also argue that a /z/ in this case could be allowed without creating a precedent, since it applied to a place-name element of non-Danish (i.e. Wendic) origin – if not in the case of Kramnitse itself, then to the group of *itse*-names in general. Thus, on 30 August 2018, the Place-Name Committee informed the municipality of Lolland that it had complied to the local wish for a change to *-itze*, not just for Kramnitse, but also for Tillitse and Kuditse. Furthermore, the committee encouraged that the municipality applied for similar forms for its remaining place-names in *-itse*.

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[Illustrations; to be placed anywhere in the text]



Distribution of recorded place-names in -itse in Denmark. While the dots in brown colour represents names believed to have a medieval Wendic origin, the name Kramnitse (in red colour) is more likely to have a different origin, e.g. Krammenæs, which in the 19th century have developed into a form similar to the genuine itse-names. Map by Johnny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen 2019.



On the south-western coastline of Lolland, Denmark, one meets several road signs that allegedly will lead you to Kramnitse (with a /s/). But when you get to the actual settlement, another sign welcomes you to Kramnitze (with a /z/). Photo by Sascha Helsingren Hansen 2018.