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

Geographical names standardization in Greenland

Submitted by Greenland**

Summary:

Geographical names standardization in Greenland dates back to 1 February 1934, when a geographical names committee was established in Denmark through an executive order. The objective was to attain an overview of the names and number of localities in Greenland. In 1984, this responsibility was transferred to the Greenland Home Rule authorities, although a law establishing a geographical names authority, the Greenland Place Name Committee, was not adopted until 1989.

On 1 January 1996, single authorization was introduced, meaning that only Greenlandic-language geographical names are standardized. Where two names exist for one locality – i.e. a Greenlandic name and a Danish or foreign name – the Greenlandic geographical name is the only valid form in official use. In cases where no Greenlandic name exists for a locality, the existing Danish or foreign geographical name form is used.

The most recent law on geographical names dates from 2017, when the Government of Greenland established the framework of obligations of the Greenland Place Name Committee. The Committee has the authority to standardize geographical names in Greenland. Its office is located on the premises of the Language Secretariat of Greenland (*Oqaasileriffik*).

The Committee maintains a register of approximately 33,000 geographical names. Of those, approximately 27,000 names were derived from the original collections from the 1930s and the 1950s. The register is kept in an open-source system maintained by the Language Secretariat of Greenland.

For two years, the Government of Greenland has cooperated with the Danish Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency and the Danish Ministry of Defence on a mapping project of Greenland. The Language Secretariat of Greenland is in charge of quality assurance, to

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ensure that the spelling of geographical names and the corresponding location information are correct. In this connection, the Language Secretariat of Greenland is adopting the basic data programme of the Government of Greenland, which involves migrating the geographical name register from one system to another. Previously, locations associated with geographical names were registered as points. In the new basic data programme, they are registered as polygons, which is an improvement in the design of the register. Nevertheless, there have been some challenges, as follows:

(a) The previous system operated with only one layer of geographical names, making it difficult to attain an overview of the content. The new system will implement two layers, in order to monitor which names need to be reauthorized and which have already been approved;

(b) Another challenge concerns the 2019 law on personal data protection, one consequence of which is that personal data stored in the register must be removed, making it difficult to determine the connection between the content of the register and the minutes of meetings at which the Committee took its decisions.

The strategy of the Committee is to prioritize quality over quantity. It is working hard to achieve a more systematic workflow, comprehensive data curation to remove duplicates, etc. In addition, the technical upgrade to a two-layer system will improve efficiency and strengthen cooperation with other authorities in Greenland

Report from Greenland on national and international standardization of geographical names: names collection, office treatment, national authorities features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation

1. Standardization of geographical name collection.

The Greenland Geographical Names Collection contains approximately 33,000 geographical names. The names are registered in a digital geographical name register covering all Greenland. The register is publicly available through an open-source system managed by Oqaasileriffik (The Language Secretariat of Greenland), with technical assistance from the Asiaq Greenland Survey.

In these years, the digital geographical names register is undergoing an update. The update takes place in conjunction with the topographical mapping of Greenland of the Danish Agency for Data Supply & Efficiency (SDFE). a project running 2018-2022. This project is managed by SDFE, and is carried out as a cooperation between the Government of Greenland and the Danish Ministry of Defence. The A.P. Møller Foundation has funded the project. This project also includes Greenland's 33,000 geographical names, and Oqaasileriffik is in charge of quality assurance of geographical names.

In connection with the project, the digital geographical names register is to be migrated from one data system to another, currently used by the Government of Greenland, called the Government of Greenland Basic Data Program. Initially, the geographical names were registered as points, but in the new system, the geographical names are being registered as polygons in 2021. This work is changing the concept of the register and comes with a number of challenges. The main two challenges are being as follows:

1. The first challenge is the actual work involved in drawing polygons. The process is semi-manual, and sometimes complex. Up until the most recent geographical names field work (2008-2013), the register used to enter work notes directly in authorized geographical names layer. As a result, both authorized and unauthorized names are 'blended together' in a single layer in the program. This year, during the work on establishing polygons, we are categorizing the geographical names one by one, using the archive of geographical names, to attain a correct content overview of the register. The outcome of this work will furnish us with a much better overview and enable us to query, among other things, which geographical names have been authorized by the Greenland Place Name Committee, and which ones are yet to be authorized.
2. The second challenge concerns the 2019 personal data General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The current digital geographical names register was established prior to the GDPR regulations becoming law. The register, which is open for all to access, also contains personal names, as any person acting as an informant or source during the last geographical names field work campaign was recorded by name in the directory. It has been a challenge to go comply to the GDPR regulations,

but at the recent UNGEGN Norden Division Meeting in September 2020, it was advised to make reservations for when the register was digitised in relation to when the GDPR regulations stepped into force. This advice is now abided to until the register is migrated to the Basic Data Program, when all person sensitive content will be made unavailable for the public.

The above challenges and their resolve are part of the process of updating and standardizing the geographical names register. This work is undertaken as a cooperating between Greenland and Denmark – with some advice from the UNGEGN Norden Division.

2. Office treatment

The administrative office of *Greenland Place Name Committee* is housed in Oqaasileriffik, in Nuuk, the capitol of Greenland. Here, daily operations and case processing of geographical names inquiries names are handled. The Committee has by law the authority to authorize geographical names. Its members are appointed by the Government of Greenland at 4-year intervals.

I Oqaasileriffik also houses the archive of the *Greenland Place Name Committee*. The oldest parts of the archive derive from the 1930s, in accordance with the establishment of a geographical names committee in Denmark, on 1. February 1934. The second-oldest content of the archive comprise of material from geographical names collection campaigns carried out during the 1950s. These are original collections which are still in used in the daily standardization management work, including the abovementioned polygonizations of geographical names localizations. Data from both collection periods contain approximately 27,000 geographical names throughout Greenland. The most recent geographical names collection campaign is from the period 2008-2013, as noted above.

The archive also houses a number of geographical names collected in the 1970s. Their use is, however, minimal when it comes to determining the location of geographical names. Coordinates are given for the location, but as there are no maps, it is difficult to ascertain correct location of names.

In 1984, geographical names standardization responsibilities were to the then Greenland Home Rule, although it was not until 1989 that the *Greenland Place Name Committee* was announced. The transfer of the responsibilities led the board to start discussing the implementation of so-called *single authorization* for Greenlandic geographical names in the early 1990s. The consequence of single authorization for Greenlandic geographical names means is that in cases where a locality has both a Greenlandic, a Danish, and/or a foreign name, only the Greenlandic place name will be officially recognized. In cases where a Greenlandic place name does not exist, the existing recorded name will receive authorization. The principle of single authorization came into use by the Place Name Committee on January 1, 1996, as approved by the board shortly prior.

For information on how many geographical names have two name forms and how many have only a Danish or foreign spelling, please see the Danish country report. These figures are the latest but will change slightly in connection with the

ongoing project with polygonization and categorization of geographical names by Oqaasileriffik.

The most recent law pertaining to the *Greenland Place Name Committee* is from 2017. It forms the framework for the committee's tasks and administrative duties. By law, the committee is subject to, among other things, to collaborate with other agencies, both within and outside of Greenland, engaged in geographical names management. Thus, the committee cooperation with other agencies outside of Greenland, among other things, inquiries both to and from Greenland. Inquiries from Greenland have involved more knowledge about how farms are named in Iceland, geographical names categorization system in Nunavut, contact to UNGEGN, in particular the Nordic Division, etc.

Point for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to express its views on the report and discuss the issues raised in support of strengthening the operations and work of the Group of Experts.