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English

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

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda *

Reports: Divisions of the Group of Experts

Report of the Norden Division

Submitted by the Norden Division **

Summary:

The full report outlines the activities carried out by the Norden Division since the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and includes materials of common interest to the Division.

The main activity for the Norden Division was participation in online meetings, at which members presented ongoing work and discussed current issues, both shared and specific to individual countries. The Division Chair also used the opportunity of these virtual meetings to report from the meetings held by the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names together with other Chairs of divisions of the Group of Experts.

A first meeting was held on 9 February 2022, at which 13 members attended, representing Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. A second meeting was held on 9 January 2023, at which 16 members attended, representing Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The full report will refer to reports and working papers to be given by Division members at the 2023 session.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** Prepared by Emily Lethbridge (Iceland) and Peder Gammeltoft (Norway)

Report of the Norden Division

This is the report of the Norden Division, compiled on the basis of the two Division meetings held in 2022 and 2023. In what follows below we outline details of issues discussed among the Division's members. We draw attention in particular to two items discussed that we feel are of universal interest and importance: item 2.4 (Use of crowd-sourcing methodology to collect data pertaining to geographical names) and 2.7 (Climate change and geographical names). We invite all interested parties to read the entire report nonetheless.

1. Meetings held by the Norden Division 2021-2023

Two online meetings were held online at which members of the Norden Division presented ongoing work and discussed current issues, both shared and specific to individual countries.

The first meeting was held on 9th February 2022, at which 13 members attended representing Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The second meeting was held on 9th January 2023, at which 16 members attended, representing Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The presence of a representative from the Faroe Islands (Kristin Magnussen) was particularly welcomed.

In addition to these meetings, the co-chairs Emily Lethbridge (Iceland) and Ingvil Nordland (Norway), attended the two meetings for Bureau and Division Chairs: the inaugural meeting on Friday 19th November 2021, and the second meeting on Friday 9th December 2022. A Norden Division committee meeting was held ahead of the inaugural Bureau and Division Chair meeting, on the 19th November 2021.

2. Issues discussed at Norden Division meetings

2.1. Reports from Bureau and Division Chairs meetings and discussion about issues covered in Bureau and Division Chair meetings

- Ongoing discussion about hosting and maintenance of Division webpages and information
- An open discussion was held about the working paper on exonyms put forward by the Working Group on Exonyms at the 2023 meeting
- Support for collaboration with UN-GGIM was expressed at the 2023 meeting

2.2. Progress and challenges of individual countries regarding standardisation of geographical names

- A new government initiatives for national minorities in Sweden

2.3. Development and maintenance of geographical names web services

- Work on the development and maintenance of geographical names web services continues in Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

- Challenges include: technical interruptions to services when servers go down and the security of data is possibly compromised; reduced work capacity as cuts are made to staff at institutes; continuing uncertainty about the real impacts of EU's *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) with regard to the collection and digitisation of geographical names for use in research and standardisation.
- Positive developments include: permanent funding of Greenland's Language Secretariat (*Oqaasileriffik*) and a second new position alongside the existing one as of January 2023 to work on place-name matters and updating the place-name register; cataloguing of all working drafts and other materials in the Icelandic Place-name Archive for the first time.

2.4. Use of crowd-sourcing methodology to collect data pertaining to geographical names

- Iceland (at a national level) and Denmark (at municipality level) have both utilised crowd-sourcing to collect data on geographical names. This method of data collection can be effective but it also presents challenges (e.g. regarding ensuring data quality).
- The Norden Division notes the general potential but also the challenges of this methodology in place-name collection and research, and invites the Group of Experts to share their experiences where relevant, and to discuss matters of best practice.

2.5. Public-facing courses and events organised by members of the Norden Division

- A seminar was held on the occasion of 100 years of the publication series *Danmarks Stednavne* (<https://nors.ku.dk/forskning/navneforskning/kalender/arkiv-for-navneforskning/>), and a book was published to mark the occasion. (<https://nors.ku.dk/publikationer/webpublikationer/navnestudier-46/>)
- A public conference was held on the occasion of the centenary of the Norwegian Place-Name Archive (<https://www.nordicsocioonomastics.org/norwegian-place-name-archive-turns-100-years/>), where the portal *Norske stedsnavn/Norske stadnamn* was launched. The proceedings of the conference are available as an open publication (<http://ojs.novus.no/index.php/NON/issue/view/264>).
- An e-learning course on name planning was published by Finland, and an online manual on name planning will be published by the end of 2023.

2.6. Organisation of the Norden Division committee in the future, the Division's roles and future joint activities

- For various reasons, the rotating chairship of the Norden Division has fallen out of sync. At 2022 meeting, the committee proposed the reintroduction of a structured rotating chairship from 2025, taking into account the workload and burden of responsibilities for smaller countries.
- The suggestion from the 2021 to organise online workshops or seminars twice a year was made again in the 2022 meeting; a schedule will be finalised in the near future. These seminars will be open to any interested parties.
- The suggestion was made in the 2022 meeting to find ways to actively support the participation of the Faroe Islands in Norden Division activities.

2.7. Impact of climate change on landscape features and geographical names

- Members from Greenland and Iceland have given details of cases in each country where landscape change related to climate change has resulted in consequences regarding geographical names.

- In some instances, melting glaciers reveal new features that have not have names before and individual stakeholders (local authorities, local residents, scientists, or tour-guides, for example) wish to give names to these newly-revealed features. In other cases, landslides or avalanches have altered the landscape and the names either of new features, or older features, have been the focus of discussion. It is believed that the future will bring more cases like these as the natural hazards of this kind become more frequent on account of the warming climate, and it is therefore important that local/national naming authorities are aware of individual cases and respond as appropriate and necessary.

- The Norden Division notes the global relevance of this challenge and its consequences with regard to the use of geographical names for the Group of Experts and invites the Group of Experts to share their experiences where relevant, discussing what common frameworks might be developed globally to record and map these instances. The Norden Division also notes the existence of the report submitted by Australia for the 2nd UNGEGN session on Geographical names and the environment in which it is noted (p. 2) that “It is appropriate to recognize the alignment of UNGEGN’s strategic intent with environmental concerns. In relation to the SDGs, UNGEGN recognizes that they aim to ‘address global challenges, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice.’” Also directly relevant here is the section on climate change and SDGs (pp. 4-5) https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/2nd_session_2021/documents/GEGN.2_2021_CRP125_7_Geographical-names-and-the-environment.pdf.

3. Changes to the Norden Division committee

Co-chair Ingvil Nordal (Norway) announced her decision to step down as co-chair at the Norden Division meeting in December 2022. Emily Lethbridge (Iceland) remains as chair, with Peder Gammeltoft (Norway) as vice-chair.

4. Reports and Working Papers given by Norden Division members

Division Report (Agenda Item 4 b)

- Report of the Norden Division, GEGN.2/2023/55/CRP.55

Country reports (Agenda Item 4 a)

- Report of Denmark, GEGN.2/2023/64/CRP.64

- Report of Finland, GEGN.2/2023/30/CRP.30

- Greenlandic place names: status and future plans, GEGN.2/2023/53/CRP.53

- Report of Iceland, GEGN.2/2023/56/CRP.56

- Report of Norway, GEGN.2/2023/18/CRP.18

- Report of Sweden, GEGN.2/2023/70/CRP.70

Working Papers

- Update of toponymic guidelines: Finland, GEGN.2/2023/52/CRP.52 (Agenda Item 6 b)
- Publication and archiving of information on the geographical and linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts on the Group's website, GEGN.2/2023/77/CRP.77 (Agenda Item 9)

Working Group Reports

- Report on the activities of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding, GEGN.2/2023/13/CRP.13 (Agenda Item 9)
- Report of the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy, GEGN.2/2023/14/CRP.14 (Agenda Item 10)