

13 March 2023

English

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

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda *

**Reports: Governments on the situation in their
countries and on the progress made in the
standardization of geographical names**

Report of Denmark

Submitted by Denmark **

Summary:

The Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency changed its name to the Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure in June 2022 in connection with a reorganization. The reorganization did not result in changes within the Agency's mapping department, which is responsible for collecting, registering and mapping Danish place names.

An important recent initiative is crowdsourcing names. The functionality for this is already established. Municipalities are encouraged to supply the register with relevant information, such as the names of local schools and sport facilities. Direct involvement of the municipality in the registration of place names will ensure and up-to-date and valid register.

The current management system used for place name registration is outdated; a new system developed by the Agency based on ArcGIS will be ready for use in the second quarter of 2024. In addition, a new data model is being developed.

The Name Research Archive (newly named in 2022) at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, Copenhagen University, administers the secretariat of the Danish place names committee and contributes linguistic expertise on standardization matters. In the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) shutdowns, the focus on digital accessibility has increased. The Name Research Archive is contributing to an ongoing digitalization project at the Department, the aim of which is to make all physical archives available online. In 2021/22, a unique and important collection was scanned. The collection, a part of which is the product

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** Prepared by associate professor Rikke Steenholt Olesen (Name Research Archive, University of Copenhagen, Chair of the Danish Place Name Committee) and senior adviser Marie Pallisgaard Thomsen (Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure)

of a crowdsourcing initiative of the Danish place names committee, contains records, primarily of field names, written in phonetic transcription. The material will be publicly accessible in 2023.

In 2022, the Name Research Archive and the place names committee celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the book series *Danish Place Names*. The digital version of the series is a database with the same title. In the future, the plan is to incorporate standardized place names into the database. It will then be possible to track changes over time, locate the named localities on a map and extract lists.

Such a plan depends on institutional willingness to support the maintenance of data and infrastructure. In April 2022, the server hosting the website that provides access to the Danish Place Names database (and other databases) was hacked, and a new and secure solution has yet to be put in place. While in many ways catastrophic, this situation will lead institutions to prioritise the security of research data and infrastructure in the future.

An important and urgent task for the near future is updating the list of standardized Danish place names. A number of irregularities identified in 2021 and 2022 need adjustment, and the place names committee and its secretariat need to decide on a strategy to avoid irregularities and errors in the future.

Report from Denmark on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since 2nd session 2019

1. Danish Mapping authorities: Status and future plans

1.1 New name and organization

In June 2022, The Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency changed their name to The Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure (SDFI). Two new departments were added to the agency, Broadband and Wireless infrastructure. The agency is now responsible for both national data distribution and infrastructure for data distribution. The new organization have not lead to re-organization of or changes within the mapping section (“Mapping”, in Danish: Kortlægning) that is responsible for collecting place-names and for classification and registration of named localities within the national digital registry Danish Place-names (in Danish: Danske Stednavne).

1.2 Ideas about using crowdsourcing in the municipalities

The Danish municipalities (in all 98) are responsible for naming different types of municipal institutions as for instance schools, nursing homes, libraries, and sport facilities. These names of local places and institutions are in addition to affiliated data an important part of the national infrastructure and thus relevant to collect and incorporate in the register Danish Place-names.

In practice, the municipality employees already have direct access to supply the register with new data and/or adjust existing data in the register through a log-in-function. It is a fact, however, that many of the employees are not aware of this possibility. A survey addressed at four different municipalities revealed that prior to the survey, the employees did not know about the national register or the possibility of registration and adjustments. A positive result was though, that every employee expressed a clear interest in updating these types of information in the national register.

On that basis, specific communication targeting municipal employees was initiated by SDFI. The aim was to inform generally about the register and its use and to inform in detail about the possibility of

self-log in for updating information. The goal is to engage as many municipalities as possible and thereby ensure an ongoing supply of data and that the contents of the digital register at any given time represents correct and updated data.

1.3 A new place name management system and data model in 2023 and 2024

The mapping authorities have in 2022 decided to develop a new place-name management system. The reason is that the current management system used for place-name registration is outdated. From 2024 and onwards the technology will no longer be supported. The new system will be based upon ArcGIS Pro-technology and implemented in 2023 and 2024. The project start is scheduled to Q3 2023 and the system scheduled to be up and running during Q2 2024. Regardless of whether it is the old or the new system, Place-name data are to be continuously accessible via the Data Distributer (a shared data distribution platform, which also contains data from other registers).

A new data model will also be launched within the next year. The present model contains defects and missing categories since it was at the latest maintained in 2015. It is therefore required to bring the data model up to date. All the main users have been involved in the process and many of the proposals are incorporated in the new model.

2. Danish Place-name Committee/Name Research Archive: Status and future plans

2.1 Introduction: Historically the Danish Place-name Committee was established in 1910 as a ministerial committee with its own archives, consulting activities, publication projects and employees. One of the committee's main task was to establish standardized forms of Danish place-name for governmental and educational use. In 1934, the Greenlandic Place-name Committee was established in Denmark to assure a systematic collection of Greenlandic place-names and to ensure authorized forms of place-names in Greenland. The Greenlandic Committees responsibilities were all transferred to Greenland in 1984. In 1960, the archives and the academic staff became a part of an independent university department and the Place-name Committee concentrated on standardization matters, which is still the committee's main task. Today, the former independent university department is a section called Name Research Archive. It is a part of the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen. The section represents the core of academic name research in Denmark (not including the Faroe Islands and Greenland) and holds the secretariat of the Danish Place-name Committee per ministerial resolution. The Danish Place-name Committee consists of appointed members (appointed by the Ministry of Culture) from in all eleven institutions all using place names in their work. In addition to three members from the Name Research Archive (University of Copenhagen), the represented institutions are: The Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure (national mapping authorities), The Danish Road Directorate, Statistics Denmark, Nature Agency (Ministry of environment), Royal Palaces (Ministry of Culture), The Danish Language Council, PostNord (national postal services), KL - Local Government Denmark (association and interest organization of Danish municipalities), Danish National Archives and the Church Ministry.

2.2 Digital accessibility of place-name collections

In the wake of the Covid 19-shutdowns, the focus of digital accessibility via web has come into focus not only as open data politics and public service, but also as a necessity. The Name Research Archive is a part of a continued digitalization project at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics. The ambition is to make all parts of the department's physical archives digitally accessible. In 2021 and 2022, one of the most important place-name collections originally initiated by the Danish Place-Name Committee in the 1920s was scanned by students and enrolled in a publicly accessible digital platform called Sprogsamlingerne.ku.dk ("language collections"). The collection contains records from almost all Danish parishes (ca. 2000), primarily records of fields names in phonetic notation. Many of these fieldnames are now out of use as well as the dialects they represent. The collection is unique, provides

important information about local pronunciation, and is relevant for instance in standardization matters.

2.3 100 years anniversary of the book series Place Names of Denmark

In its early days, the Danish Place-Name Committee started the book series Place Names of Denmark (In Danish: Danmarks Stednavne). The series is a lexicographically formed publication of primarily settlement names. It contains historical forms of the place-names and identifications and interpretations of the place-name elements. The series was from 1960 and onwards continued under the auspices of the university department and is still today a central task for employees at the Name Research Archive. The year 2022 was the anniversary year for the first book in the series as it was published in 1922. The anniversary was celebrated with the publication of the 27nd volume (The Place-names of the Isle Læsø) after a nine-year pause. In addition, two anniversary publications were published (open access) aiming to increase knowledge of the book series, of name research, of the Danish Place-Name Committee and standardization of place names.

2.4 The digital version of Place-names of Denmark

The book series constitute the basis of a database by the same name. Data in the database are free and open data. The display includes mapping (Google maps/Open Street Map) on parish level. The basic form of a place-name is always the standardized form - if the place name is standardized. The Danish Place-Name Committee and its secretary have decided that standardized forms should systematically be added to the catalogue of source forms. This means that it will be possible to follow changes within the corpus of standardized names over time (1919 - present time). Information about new place-name standardizations and changes of standardizations since the last paperback versions of the corpus were published in 1978 and 1985 are not digitally available to the public. As a test, the database was in 2021 updated with new names pr. 2007 of municipalities (a reform resulted in many new names). The aim in the end is to make the database a primary entrance to access extracts of standardized Danish place-names that will also display linguistic and historical details for the user. It is also the plan, instead of present map services to implement high quality maps from the Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure and link to other data, for instance the digitized archives and lemmas in dictionaries. At present time standardized Danish Place Names are continuously published simply in an excel sheet that can be downloaded from the Danish Place-name Committee's homepage.

Unfortunately, the server that hosts the database Danish Place Names was hacked in April 2022. Data are intact, but a new and secure website is essential. The list of standardized place-names is unaffected. Web access to the databases is still not reestablished. This is deeply regrettable both to public users and to researchers that are depending on these tools and data. Institutions and funds support all kinds of initiatives towards more open data, digital accessibility and linked data, but the enthusiasm when it comes to supporting maintenance of already established research data infrastructures is limited. In society in general, though, and Denmark is an almost fully digitized society there is an increase in the awareness of digital vulnerability and security will be a central priority in the future.

2.5 Problems with the current list of standardized place names

The Danish Place-name Committee's main tasks are to consult in standardization matters (mainly municipalities) and to decide on spelling of Danish place-names (linguistic approach). The committee has a long tradition of close cooperation with especially the mapping authorities, who register place names (geographic approach, mapping of named places). Both institutions has registers of place-names, but the scope, purpose and practical use of the lists are different and only a selection of named places in Denmark has standardized name-forms (ca. 25.000). As each standardized place-name is marked in the register of the mapping authorities, it has at least since the 1990's been normal

procedure to extract a list of standardized place-names from the mapping authorities register along with additional data as localization (to parish, municipality and region) and classification of name-bearer type (i.e. settlement, manor-house, stream). In recent years, it has become clear, that the current authorization list based on an extract from 2013 (since then manually adjusted) contains a number of irregularities seemingly associated with the implementation of a management system at the mapping authorities around 2012. It has a direct consequence for the municipalities if an already standardized place-name is unintentionally not on the list as the Road authorities only accept standardized forms on road sign from public roads. The mapping authorities and the place-name committee plan jointly to secure valid data in any future extracts.

2.6 Enforcement of correct spelling of place-names

The address authority in Denmark is a section at the same agency as the mapping authorities. All governmental and educational institutions are per legislation obliged to use standardized language including standardized place-names. "Supplemental village-names" are in addresses used for a narrower specification of a location. In cases where such a supplemental village-name has a standardized form, the standardized form is the only correct form and the form any governmental institution is obliged to use. Based on a somewhat vague wording in the current executive order for the address register, the address authorities (the Danish municipalities) are on certain conditions allowed to deviate from the general set of rules. As a result, alternative spelling forms of standardized village-names appear on, for example, social security ID cards that contain the citizens' addresses. The Danish Place-name Committee has observed an increasing state of confusion. Both citizens and municipalities understandably understand village names that appear on social security IDs, as correct forms. The confusion occurs when the Road authorities reject a name-form as a non-standardized form. Instead of recognizing the obligation to use the standardized form, the municipalities apply for a change of the standardized form. In some cases, the Danish Place-name Committee cannot accommodate the name form and this is of course both frustrating and highly inconvenient. The situation is bordering on the absurd, as the primary aim of standardization is linguistic alignment and not the opposite. It is The Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure (SDFI) who defines the detailed rules on regarding supplemental village-names and the Danish Place-name Committee will look into the challenge together with SDFI.