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

New York, 3 – 7 May 2021

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 cooperation between the Danish State institutions that work to ensure the national standardization of place names has worked well since the 2019 session of the “new” United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and is developing further. The institutions involved are the name research group at the University of Copenhagen, the national mapping and surveying authority, the Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency and the Danish place names committee. The Committee formally nominates name forms to be standardized (authorized) by the Danish Ministry of Culture and is, in principle, open for membership to any State institution to which standardization is relevant. Currently, ten institutions are represented, including the University of Copenhagen and the Agency. The standardization agenda includes the following:

- Defining a normative set of rules for the correct spelling of Danish place names
- Taking steps to formalize the implementation of a spell-checking procedure in the Agency’s register entitled “*Danske stednavne*” (“Danish place names”) in the future
- Taking steps to formalize the definition of roles and the future cooperation between the Danish place name committee and the Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency.

Other headlines of the report will be the following:

- Digitizing the essential archives belonging to the name research group at the University of Copenhagen and the place name committee, in the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which underlies the need for ease of access, ease of use and expansion of the archives for research and formal standardization proceedings

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- General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union, which complicates sustainable activities such as open access to digital research archives
- Registration of certain German versions of Danish place names in the Agency's "*Danske stednavne*" register (2020 was the centennial of the reunion of Nord Schleswig with Denmark)
- Project concerning registration of Denmark's colonial place names (initiated by researchers at the University of Copenhagen)
- Description of the variety of use cases for the "*Danske stednavne*" register, which is used as a primary public data resource for geographical names by, for example, rescue and emergency services, environmental data registers and travel planning services; in a recent project, use was made of named built-up-areas to calculate indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals
- Agency of Data Supply and Efficiency and the Danish bureau of statistics have done work on establishing a precise definition of what a built-up-area (city/ town/village) is, including a description of the "200-meters' principle"
- Renewed publishing strategy for the national and historical book series *Place Names of Denmark*; the place names committee published the first volume in 1922, and approximately two thirds of the country is covered.

REPORT FROM DENMARK ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIRST SESSION

1. GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES STANDARDIZATION BOARDS

The Commonwealth of the Danish Realm consists of Denmark and the self-governed autonomous regions of the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland have all Geographical Names Commissions, all with full jurisdiction in their respective areas. The job of the commissions is to establish and maintain authorized spellings of geographical names and to guide authorities and the public about the correct spelling of geographical names in public use.

2. REGISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

For the Commonwealth of the Danish Realm, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have now taken over the registration and administration of geographical names over their own areas. Therefore, there are no longer national mapping agency geographical names registers in Denmark containing Greenlandic and Faroese geographical names. By updating the topographical maps of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands the Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency (Styrelsen for Dataforsyning og Effektivisering, abbreviated: SDFE) collaborates with the local geographical names authorities on the geographical names for display on maps. The Greenlandic place-name authority Oqaasileriffik have submitted a technical report on the work done in Greenland to collect and register place-names.

The responsibility for the official administration and regulation of geographical names in Denmark is shared between the Danish Place-Name Committee and the Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency (SDFE). The Place-Name Committee is responsible for deciding the spelling of Danish geographical names and in that process secure the cultural-historical values associated with geographical names. However, the Committee is not specifically obliged to register geographical names, only to authorize the spelling of them and publish the list of authorized and standardized name-forms, currently containing approximately 25,000 geographical names. The Agency is responsible for the collecting and registering of geographical names in the register *Danske Stednavne* ('Danish Place-names'), and at the same time a classification and location of the names. There are in the region of 155,000 geographical names in *Danske Stednavne* (including the 25,000 names authorized by the Committee).

3. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE NAME RESEARCH SECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN AND THE PLACE NAME SECTION OF THE NATIONAL MAPPING AGENCY

Since the First Session of UNGEGN Denmark has seen a further strengthening of the cooperation between the Name Research Section at the University of Copenhagen and The Place Name Section at the national mapping and surveying authority The Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency (SDFE). The University of Copenhagen's Name Research Section permanently holds the chair of the Danish Place-Name Committee and administrates the secretariat. The agenda of the cooperation is to ensure an authorised spelling control and standardization of place-names in registers carried by the Agency.

This includes:

- Defining a normative set of rules for the correct spelling of Danish place names
- Taking steps to implement a spell checking procedure in the Agency's register *Danske Stednavne* ('Danish Place Names') in the future
- Taking steps to define the roles and future cooperation between the Danish Place Name Committee and The Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency.

The Name Research Section at the University of Copenhagen has worked together with the Danish Language Council to define a set of orthographic rules for place-names. First edition has been approved by the Place-Name Committee, and has been used by the Agency to spell-check all 130.000 names in the "Danske Stednavne" register that have not already been authorized by the Committee.

This process gave valuable inputs to the definition of orthographic rules. A procedure for the future spell checking of new registrations in “Danske Stednavne” has been outlined and accepted (in principle) by the Committee, and the future procedure is being considered, as well as a plan for the future cooperation between the Committee and the Agency. Both institutions join their efforts in working for the standardization of geographical names in Denmark.

4. REGISTRATION OF A NUMBER OF GERMAN VERSIONS OF DANISH PLACE NAMES

The Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency has adopted some German versions of Danish place-names in the Southern region of Jutland, close to the Danish-German border, in the “Danske Stednavne” register – for example *Apenrade* as a second form of *Aabenraa*. 2020 marked the centennial of the reunion of Nordschleswig with Denmark, so there were historical celebrations of this event and the peaceful and harmonic coexistence of the Danish-speaking majority and the German minority in this region. The registration of German versions of names was welcomed as part of this celebration. The selection was made by counting all towns and cities with more than 1000 inhabitants, plus a few well-known and significant localities. The source for the German names was contributed by the organization of the German minority BDN.

4. THE GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES’ REGISTER “DANSKE STEDNAVNE” IN USE AS COMMON PUBLIC BASIC DATA

Since the Basic Data Program¹ has been fully implemented for geographical data in Denmark, data from the register “Danske Stednavne” have been easily accessible via a shared distribution platform, the Data Distributor, which also contains data from other registers like the Danish Address Register, the Civil Registration System, the Central Business Register, and the Building and Dwelling Register. All the contained data are standardized and thus, combinable and coherently usable by different systems, both in the public and private sectors. Free of charge, with very liberal license conditions, and of course with respect to data privacy and GDPR. In general, geographical names provide an intuitively easy way to make provisions for first-class management by the Danish administration, citizens and private enterprises, and when these data are compliant with the common basic data model, they are easy to use between systems and registers. The intention of the Basic Data Program is to let innovation happen by providing free and easy access to these data registers, and geographical names have a huge potential for being used in digital administration. Here are a few examples of use cases:

- Emergency agencies and the police use geographical names for alerting and coordination of action in case of accidents.
- The transportation network in Denmark has a common journey planner on the internet, which uses geographical names to provide easy search facilities.
- The Danish Environmental Portal makes use of geographical names from “Danske Stednavne” to optimize the search interface for natural environmental data.
- Municipalities make use of the names of waterways with their geographical data representation to manage nature conservation like weed cutting.
- The real estate agents and companies in Denmark have a common website where all houses and properties for sale are searchable. To visualize the surroundings of advertised houses, features like named forests and lakes are shown in a quick web map solution.
- The Agency has developed a comprehensive search component based on the “Danske Stednavne” register’s 155,000 geographical names, all with fixed specified locations (polygons, lines or points). This search component is used in many web solutions containing maps.
- In a recent project, use was made of named built-up-areas, forests and parks to calculate indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals: degree of accessibility to public transport (11.2.1), and average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use (11.7.1). The named built-up areas in “Danske Stednavne” are the most accurate geographic

¹ <https://eng.sdfe.dk/data-creates-value/basic-public-data/>

registrations of cities, towns and villages in the country and are used in many different contexts.

5. DIGITISING PLACE-NAME ARCHIVES

The archives of the Danish Place-Name Committee were in 1960 conferred to the University of Copenhagen's new Department of Name Research today's Name Research Group at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics and thereby the obligation to maintain and expand the archives became a university matter. The responsibility for standardising Danish place-names remained formally with the Committee. The linguistic and often historical analyses implied in the standardisation process were then, and are now, carried out by the professional name researchers represented in the committee (currently three of in all thirteen members representing in all eleven state institutions). The contents of the archives are an essential basis for research and the accessibility is crucial.

As a part of a fusion of departments in 2017 a relocation and an organisational reduction of square meters were imposed on the Name Research section. A large part of the physical archives were digitised which in practise meant were scanned as photos and made available online on *Digitale samlinger* 'Digital Collections'² to ease the accessibility for both researchers and the public. The project was managed by former Chair of the Danish Place-name Committee, Peder Gammeltoft. The physical archives were transferred to climate-secured basement locations within a relative short distance from the office facilities of the researchers. Thereby access to non-digitised collections remained possible. However, the lack of accessibility during the lock-downs caused by the pandemic has underlined how important digital access is. An initiative to make important, but non-digitised records digital and accessible was taken during fall 2020 as a part of a larger institutional effort towards amendments of the already digitised archives and their functionalities. As simply scanned photos, the records are inexpediently static and an infliction of dynamic functions such as extended options for adding metadata is currently developing.

Relevant and necessary for both name research in general, counselling, case management and for standardization matters are two non-digitised parts of the name research archive. The valuable and unique place-name collection called *Indberetningerne* 'the reports' consists of an almost nation-wide collection of place-name reports generated from the 1920's to the 1980's. In addition, the administrative documentation concerning the on-going operations of the Place-name Committee from 1910 to ca. 2010 (such as correspondence, protocols, case managements and minutes from annual meetings) is stored physically and thereby not available to researchers in periods of lock downs. The Place-Name Committee's archives of administrative character needs to be accessible only to the Name Research Group at the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, but the ideal accessibility of *Indberetningerne* is full open access and attainability through the university webpage *Digitale Samlinger*. As soon as physical attendance at the university facilities becomes possible again, the process of digitising these collections will be launched.

6. GDPR AND SUSTAINABLE ACTIVITIES AS OPEN ACCESS

Unlike before, the Danish implementation of the 2018 EU legislation on General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) in general excludes protection of deceased individuals' data, but includes protection of deceased individuals' *sensitive data* within a period of ten years from time of death. In general, personal data as names, ages and addresses are categorised as *common* and *non-sensitive* information that for instance genealogy researchers are free to publish online. Sensitive data can only be published with consent from alive individuals or ten years after an individual has died. Defined as sensitive data, are for instance information about ethnic origin, health conditions and sexual

² <http://digitalesamlinger.hum.ku.dk/>

orientation, but information about for instance trade union affiliation and political or religious beliefs are also categorised as sensitive data. The records of *Indberetningerne* contain common personal data such as informants' names and addresses and to some extent information concerning professions of informants, which could reveal a belief or affiliation and thereby sensitive data. A title of parish vicar for instance. The informants most probably agreed orally with a research use of their personal data, but not with a public display. Most informants of the 1980's were more than 60 years old at the time of the interview and are probably deceased more than a decade ago. However, some may be deceased less than a decade ago and a few might even still be alive. The issues currently need to be resolved, but the expectation is that *Indberetningerne* can be published without restrictions caused by GDPR.

7. RENEWED PUBLICATION STRATEGY OF PLACE-NAMES OF DENMARK

Before 1960 (c.f. part 5) the Danish Place-name Committee carried the responsibility of publishing Danish place-names within a series named *Place-names of Denmark*. The centenary of the first volume is in 2022. Since 1960 the series has been undertaken by professional name researchers at the university as a fundamental obligation. The series compile historical and linguistic information that forms a sustainable base for standardised forms of historical settlement names. In all 26 volumes are published the latest in 2013 by professor Bent Jørgensen (former chair of the Place-name Committee)³. The traditional publication strategy has been books by individual authors, a delimitation of geographical areas according to the larger historical administrative units in Danish called *herreder* 'hundreds' and a main focus on settlement names. These are quite comprehensive areas considering the number of place-names. In addition, the research is extremely time consuming and the publication rate is too slow to match the present institutional demands. Three traditional publications will be published in the coming years. This year, *Place-names on Læsø*, in 2022 *Place-Names in Ods Herred* and in 2023 *Place-Names in Merløse Herred*. As a part of a new and optimised publication strategy, the future goal is to co-publish the names of smaller areas every, or every second year. Place-names are at the same time published digitally in the historical database *Danmarks Stednavne*. Currently, it is exploited whether the database should also function as a platform for displaying when standardised forms were established and when (if the case) standardised forms were changed.

³ https://nors.ku.dk/publikationer/trykte_serier/danmarks_stednavne/