

16 March 2021

English

**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names
2021 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 Sweden

Submitted by Sweden **

Summary

The report of Sweden is divided into six sections. The first section provides a short overview of the legislation and of the main authorities involved in the standardization of geographical names. The second, on names in multilingual areas, includes comments on the activities carried out to increase the density of minority language place names in the Sami and Tornedalian areas in Sweden. The third section offers a description of several government initiatives aimed at increasing support for national minorities and minority languages in Sweden. The Institute for Language and Folklore is one expert body that has been consulted on these initiatives. This section also reports on the Institute's efforts to enhance educational and cultural activities within minority language revitalization for the national minorities through government grant schemes. The fourth section offers a presentation of the work of the Geographical Names Network. The Network is consulted on specific name questions, including issuing recommendations on names of organizations and authorities and names relating to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication *Utrikes namnbok* (a list of translations of names of countries and designations for their nationals). The fifth section presents the updated place names register at the Institute of Language and Folklore. Its collections of place names comprise, in total, some 3.7 million index cards. The database publishes place names used in Sweden from the earliest times to the present day, with information on their meanings, spelling and pronunciation. The final section provides a list of articles and books on place names and place name standardization written by Swedish experts.

The following resolutions adopted at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names are particularly relevant to the present work on name standardization in Sweden.

- 1972: resolution II/36 (E/CONF.61/4) on problems in minority languages (sects. 2–3)
- 2002: resolution VIII/9 ([E/CONF.94/3](#)) on geographical names as (intangible) cultural heritage (sect. 5)

* GEGN.2/2021/1

** Prepared by Ebba Berling Åselius, Leila Mattfolk, Annette C Torensjö

Swedish national name standardization – in brief

Since 2000 the ‘Historic Environment Act’ (Sw. *Kulturmiljölagen*) has included a section on observing ‘good place-name practice’. The emphasis lies on preserving place-names as part of the nation’s cultural heritage. Good place-name practice means spelling place-names in accordance with the rules of the Swedish language unless established spellings justify otherwise, and not changing place-names that are established by long usage unless there is good reason to do so.

The Act applies to central and local government activities relating to place-names, and states that the names approved by Lantmäteriet (*the Swedish Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority*) are to serve as a guide. These names have been scrutinized by place-names experts and have assumed the role of a standard.

The supervision of the Act is the responsibility of the Swedish National Heritage Board (Sw. *Riksantikvarieämbetet*). The national place-names authority in Sweden is, however, Lantmäteriet. Its responsibilities in this area are to officially adopt place-names and to provide advice and make recommendations relating to place-names. An important task of Lantmäteriet is to determine the names used in basic geodata, i.e. on maps and in databases.

The third main part involved in Swedish place-name standardization and preservation of place-names is the Institute for Language and Folklore (Sw. *Institutet för språk och folkminnen*). The Institute makes recommendations on applications concerning the adoption of place-names. Most of this is done collaboratively with Lantmäteriet, a form of cooperation that has existed for over a century. The Institute’s Department of Archives and Research in Uppsala (*Avdelningen för arkiv och forskning i Uppsala*) has a Names Advisory Officer, with overall responsibility for place-names standardization within the Institute.

The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board (*Ortnamnsrådet*) is an advisory body to Lantmäteriet. Its main responsibilities are to work with Lantmäteriet to develop principles and formulate goals for policies relating to place-names and to disseminate information promoting good place-name practice in the country. The authorities mentioned above, together with the Sami Parliament, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Transport Administration, the universities and the Swedish Local Heritage Federation, are members of this Board. The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board has no formal decision-making powers, but acts in an independent capacity, providing advice and promoting dialogue.

Furthermore, the local, municipal governments of Sweden (290 in all) are responsible for urban toponymy (streets, squares, parks, city blocks etc.) as well as for urban and rural addresses, which contain a considerable number of place-names.

Minority languages

The Historic Environment Act’s provisions on good place-name practice also protects minority-language place-names. Central and local government authorities are asked to highlight the presence of minority languages in Sweden. In 2014, an amendment to the Historic Environment Act resulted in the addition of Meänkieli, formerly known as Tornedal Finnish, as a protected minority language mentioned in the relevant section of the Act. The section now reads: ‘Names in Swedish, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli shall, as far as possible, be used in parallel on maps and on road and other signs in multilingual areas.’

Previously it was not possible to register place-names in Meänkieli in the place-names register, which meant that many names in Meänkieli were incorrectly registered as being Finnish or Swedish.

Work to amend the inaccurate language encoding of place-names in the north of Sweden began in February 2019 and was completed by Lantmäteriet in 2020. As a result, fewer place-names are encoded as Swedish and the number of place-names in Sami and Meänkieli has increased. It is now possible to report exact figures for the number of place-names by each officially recognized minority language. For a complete list, see the report submitted by Norden Division, *Standardized geographical names by language in the Nordic national mapping agencies' and names authorities' data sets in January 2021*.

The increased density of place-names in the Sami and Meänkieli areas is also due to new lists of place-names being reported to Lantmäteriet, either by private individuals or by representatives of the different Sami reindeer herding communities. The listing work is usually run by study-circle groups using existing maps, in which the groups discuss the names that exist and then mark the area or place that the name refers to. The Sami Parliament also reports new place-names to Lantmäteriet. Since 1 October 2018, the Sami Parliament has (together with the Institute for Language and Folklore) been given the responsibility to make recommendations on applications concerning the adoption of Sami place-names and to examine names proposed for use in Lantmäteriets' basic geodata.

Government initiatives supporting national minorities and minority languages in Sweden

Minority languages have been emphasized in different governmental investigations over the last years. For one thing, the Institute for Language and Folklore and the Sami Parliament were given a joint government assignment to analyze the need to collect, maintain and scientifically study archive material related to Sami cultures and languages. The results of this analysis were presented to the Swedish government in 2019. The report (in Swedish only) is available at <https://www.sametinget.se/131357>.

Second, the Institute for Language and Folklore was also given a government assignment to propose how to establish language centers for the national minority language groups. In the report, the investigators propose language centers for the national minority languages Finnish, Meänkieli, Yiddish and Romani chib. The report highlights, among other things, the importance of locating the language centers close to the language users, and suggest language centers for Finnish in Uppsala, and for Yiddish and Romani chib in Stockholm in the mid part of Sweden, and for Meänkieli in Kiruna and Övertorneå in northern Sweden, where most Meänkieli speaker live. The investigation was presented to the Swedish government in 2019. The report (in Swedish only) is available at <https://www.regeringen.se/493ce6/contentassets/056ce0691bdc475d94f0195608d50c48/sprakcentrum-for-nationella-minoritetsprak.pdf>.

Third, the Institute for Language and Folklore has in a governmental assignment made a suggestion for an action plan for the preservation of the minority languages in Sweden. The plan emphasizes the importance of education about and in the minority languages. The importance of the use of minority place names on road signs and on maps is emphasized in an appendix to this action plan. The action plan (in Swedish only) is available at [Handlingsprogram för bevarande av de nationella minoritetsspråken finska, jiddisch, meänkieli och romska \(isof.se\)](https://www.regeringen.se/493ce6/contentassets/056ce0691bdc475d94f0195608d50c48/handlingsprogram-for-bevarande-av-de-nationella-minoritetsprakerna-finska-jiddisch-meankieli-och-romska-isof.se)

The Swedish government has proposed a new law concerning the consultation order in questions relating to that regards the Sami population. Its purpose is to guarantee the Sami speakers influence on issues concerning their own affairs. The government bill is given to the Riksdag, but has not yet been enacted. The government bill (in Swedish only) is available at <https://www.regeringen.se/4af6de/contentassets/ff8132cb67484ff59302098255cee14d/en-konsultationsordning-i-fragor-som-ror-det-samiska-folket-prop.-20202164.pdf>

The Geographical Names Network

The Geographical Names Network is concerned with geographical names of all kinds, but its main focus is on how foreign names should be handled in Swedish and how Swedish place-names should be used in international contexts. The network brings together a range of organizations involved in various ways with names and their standardization. The network includes representatives of Lantmäteriet, the Institute for Language and Folklore, Uppsala University, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Radio Sweden, the Swedish Standards Institute (SIS), the EU institutions, and the Institute for the Languages of Finland and expert terminologists.

The network is consulted on particular questions related to names, including those relating to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' publication *Utrikes namnbok*. This is a list of translations of names of Swedish authorities and organizations, official titles etc., together with names of countries and designations for their nationals. In addition, the network's activities encompass a wide range of other name issues, including foreign personal names, names of organizations and authorities, and official titles in the public sector. The network publishes its recommendations (in Swedish) on the webpage [Råd och rekommendationer - Institutet för språk och folkminnen \(isof.se\)](https://www.isof.se/och-rekommendationer)

The booklet *Utrikes namnbok* ([Utrikes Namnbok 11e reviderade upplagan \(regeringen.se\)](https://www.regeringen.se/utrikes-namnbok)) also contains names of Swedish government agencies, Swedish organizations and EU bodies, Swedish titles used in the public administrative system and country names. The terms are given in seven languages: Swedish, English, German, French, Spanish, Finnish and Russian.

The main body of the text in the *Utrikes namnbok* is written in Swedish, but the multilanguage list can be used without knowledge of Swedish. The terms listed in the sections on agencies and organizations (Myndigheter och organisationer) and titles (Titlar) are only applicable to the Swedish administration and cannot be applied to corresponding organizations in other countries. The country names are the official names used by Sweden.

The updated geographical names register at the Institute of Language and Folklore

The Institute for Language and Folklore hosts an archive containing geographical names that consists of approximately 3.7 million archive cards. The archive has been built up since the early 20th century, and the cards contain information on how different names are pronounced, how they have been written in older times and where you can read more about them in different kinds of literature. The archive cards contain all the background information you need in order to interpret geographical names, but rarely any information about the interpretations themselves.

In 1994, the first digital version of the name collections was created. The experience of digitization was limited at that time, and the design of the database came to be characterized by analogous thinking. Very little of all the information on the archive cards was registered in the database and made searchable.

The digital name register has therefore now been renewed and launched with a new interface and with a new, hierarchical, structure, where the names are superordinate to the archive records. The idea behind this is partly that it will be easier to see how many different places with the same name are listed in the register, and partly to eventually enable positioning on maps of the place-names in the register.

In the register, the official name forms that are used on Lantmäteriet's maps are used, but since the archive cards have been added over a long period of time, there is variation in how the names have been entered. The name *Ålmeboda* in Småland is, for example, written *Elmeboda* on some archive cards. Both variants therefore appear in the register, even though they refer to the same locality and need to be merged. These types of errors are corrected as they are detected, but since they can only be corrected manually, name by name, it is a time-consuming process.

There was no possibility to supplement the old digital register with new material, but this shortcoming has now been remedied. To date, more than 5,500 new digital records have been added. The vast majority of these contain references to name interpretations in scientific literature from the last twenty-year period, which is why it is now much easier to find references to the latest research on different place-names and place-name elements.

The new register is available at <https://placename.isof.se/PlaceNamePublic/place-names>.

Recent articles and books on geographical names and geographical name standardization by Swedish experts

Kerfoot, Helen & Helleland, Botolv. 2020. International activities. Annette Torensjö and Sweden in the limelight. In: *Namn och namnvård: Vänskrift till Annette C. Torensjö på 60-årsdagen den 18 november 2020*. Ed. by Staffan Nyström, Svante Strandberg & Mats Wahlberg, Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Pp. 67–84.

Mattfolk, Leila & Neumüller, Kristina, 2020. Till frågan om ortnamnsbegreppets avgränsning. In: *Namn och namnvård: Vänskrift till Annette C. Torensjö på 60-årsdagen den 18 november 2020*. Ed. by Staffan Nyström, Svante Strandberg & Mats Wahlberg, Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Pp. 97–101.

Nilsson, Leif. 2020. Nettan, Nypan Nilsson. Namnvårdare med focus på god ortnamnsd. In: *Namn och namnvård: Vänskrift till Annette C. Torensjö på 60-årsdagen den 18 november 2020*. Ed. by Staffan Nyström, Svante Strandberg & Mats Wahlberg, Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Pp. 109–114.

Good place-name practice. The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board's Guide to the Standardisation and Preservation of Place-Names. Gävle 2019. [English translation, slightly revised, of God ortnamnsd. Ortnamnsrådets handledning i namnvård. Lantmäteri-rapport 2016:9.] [GOOD PLACE-NAME PRACTICE \(lantmateriet.se\)](https://lantmateriet.se)

Nyström, Staffan. 2020. Stockholms namnberedning 100 år 1920–2020). De första åren. In: *Namn och namnvård: Vänskrift till Annette C. Torensjö på 60-årsdagen den 18 november 2020*. Ed. by Staffan Nyström, Svante Strandberg & Mats Wahlberg, Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Pp. 115–124.

Nyström, Staffan, 2019: Saltsjöqvarn, 79 & Park och Nockeby. Namn och namntrender i det växande Stockholm. In: *Ortnamnsällskapet i Uppsala årsskrift 2019*. Pp. 35–44.

Nyström, Staffan. 2019. Place-name Policies in Scandinavia and Elsewhere. In: *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*, 160. Jg. (Annals of the Austrian Geographical Society, Vol. 160. Wien (Vienna) 2018. Pp. 263–279. <https://austriaca.at/?arp=0x003a9fc9>

Utrikes namnbok. Svenska myndigheter, organisationer och titlar, EU-organ och länder på engelska, tyska, franska, spanska, finska och ryska. 11:e reviderade upplagan. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, Utrikesdepartementet 2020. [Utrikes Namnbok 11e reviderade upplagan \(regeringen.se\)](https://regeringen.se)

Wahlberg, Mats. 2020. Memorialnamn i Uppsala. In: *Namn och namnvård: Vänskrift till Annette C. Torensjö på 60-årsdagen den 18 november 2020*. Ed. by Staffan Nyström, Svante Strandberg & Mats Wahlberg, Uppsala: Uppsala universitet. Pp. 197–214.