

Iceland- Emily Lethbridge speaking notes to accompany slide

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Iceland.

1. Public awareness

There is long-standing and widespread public interest in geographical names in Iceland, with frequent news coverage and debate at national and local levels, in public and private.

- In 2021, for example, in the lead-up to the volcanic eruption at Geldingadalir in the south west of Iceland there were many earthquakes in the surrounding area. Discussion on social media and in the press interrogated the use of area names Reykjanes, Reykjaneshryggur, Reykjanesskagi and Suðurnes, in efforts to determine which name referred to the area under scrutiny correctly. These various names have currency in technical fields (e.g. volcanology or meteorology), and they may or may not be in alignment with local usage and language practices or traditions.
- The language advisor to the Icelandic Broadcasting Service commented that „Although journalists and commentators are well-informed it’s not possible to know everything about the specific language practices of locals. One aspect of protecting a language involves the correct usage of place-names and suchlike, so that we know how the landscape lies and what places are called“
- Specialists and the general public alike are often engaged – and invested – in knowing which name to use.

It is worth noting, too, that there is an interesting trend at the local or municipal level in Iceland towards inviting public input when a new name needs to be adopted, or there is a dispute over variant forms of a geographical name used by different parties.

- A recent example here was a questionnaire that a municipality sent out to residents inviting them to decide whether a certain gully should be referred to as Stekkagil, Geirseyrargil, Stekkjargil, or some other name entirely.
- 205 answers were sent in, and Stekkagil won with 64.4%.
- [Geirseyrargil received 24.9% of the vote, Stekkjargil 7.8%. And then there of course a few joke suggestions too. „GillMcGillFace“ being one.]
- [Other recent examples of suggestions from the public being sought include when smaller municipalities have merged together to form new, larger ones, and when the lava field from the Geldingadalir eruption needed a name.]

2. Training

As is the case with other countries, place-name collection in Iceland has always relied heavily on local participation and collaboration.

- A recent initiative developed by the National Land Survey of Iceland and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies utilised crowd-sourcing techniques to collect geographic co-ordinate data for toponyms in a year-long trial.
- This approach was made possible after the launch of the online Icelandic place-name record resource Nafnið.is

- 12 courses were held around Iceland at which local people were shown how to use the Land Survey's online tool for linking topographical features with recorded (or unrecorded) names, and around 17,600 place-names were added to the official database in this way.

3. Conclusion

The move towards public involvement in different ways of course also brings certain challenges with it.

- In the case of naming competitions or polls, geographical names are protected by Icelandic law and new names must fit established naming practices and conventions, as well as work grammatically. There is potential for tension if popular names are not considered viable by specialists.
- In the case of crowd-sourcing, questions about the integrity of data collected might arise, and this approach also creates a great deal of work for specialists who process the data.

Nonetheless, we believe that the trend towards actively soliciting input from non-specialists should be viewed as a positive one, and that checks and balances can be introduced to mitigate undesirable outcomes.

Our experiences demonstrate that Individuals and communities are interested in, and even invested in, place-names at local and national levels. By encouraging wider participation, awareness of the importance of place-names as intangible cultural heritage can be raised, and opportunities to disseminate knowledge are created.

Thank you for your attention.