

Work with Place Names in Estonia

In my presentation I am going to give an overview of what has been done with place names in Estonia during past year.

As you are all aware of the Estonian Place Names Board has been called upon to work through the problems of standardizing place names, and the direction, coordination and organization of related activities. Our statutes provide that meetings will take place at least twice a year, and in addition, working groups will meet and training will be organized.

- During past year we worked actively on preparing the amendments to Place Names Act. As the preparations are done we are in the phase of promoting the changes and negotiations. Hopefully in the near future we can present the amendments to the Government and from there it will be forwarded to Parliament for deliberation and passing the amendments in to the law.

Why it had to be done?

The law now implemented has some problems as some of the provisions can be misinterpreted and the new regulations will remove these problems.

As a significant change in the amendment is the ruling of assigning place names to land units. The cause for these changes is that land units must have a location address and that they are in accordance with requirements established for place names.

In designation of commemorative names we have included an amendment, following the recommendation of UN 8. Place Name Conferences (Berlin, 2002) resolution 2 paragraph 2, that no commemorative name can be approved within five years of the passing of the person without the agreement of the Minister responsible for Regional affairs. The Minister responsible for regional affairs will take into account the opinion of the Place Names Board.

After acceptance of the amendments we have planned trainings for the place name authorities throughout Estonia to give them overview of the new requirements.

- Simultaneously with the preparations of amendments to the law we are preparing a draft for a new development plan in standardization of place names.
- As a traditional event the Place Name Day was held for the ninth time in the past year in Jõhvi, Ida-Viru county, in the new Jõhvi concert hall. The aim of the Place Name Day is to acknowledge the historical-cultural background of the place names and of their practical value. The speciality of the event is that it is focused solely on the place names of region of the event.
- There has been a significant amount of changes in the Estonian administrative

division.

Several historical populated places and their names have been restored. For example, restoration of three historical populated places on Naissaar island near Tallinn, which as being historically Swedish based population have alternative place name in Swedish: Lõunaküla / Storbyn, Tagaküla / Bakbyn and Väikeheinamaa / Lillängin. During the past year we reestablished as populated places Vana-Sonda (Sonda municipality); Helda, Kalda and Sadala (Juuru municipality), Villavere (Viru-Nigula municipality) and Vana-Aespa in Kohila municipality.

Some populated places have applied and gained status of a small borough and some of small boroughs have become boroughs. These have been populated places where change of status is based on the development in infrastructure or growth in population.

- Place Names Board is active and cooperating with various activists in the field of place names. At the same time we are involved in various fields.

In co-operation with Estonian Maritime Administration we have established sea shallows as official place names (attached is a list and a map). Now we are in process of establishing names to bays.

An interesting task was approving names to bridges and barrages in southern Estonia on Võhandu river. The forerunner in this task is sporting club Ekstreempark NGO, which organises Võhandu marathon and is interested in promoting river tourism on Võhandu river. In general, they are the same names used by the Estonian Road Administration for national roads. For lesser bridges, which are not in official use, names are well known. As always, the aim is to get the objects on official signs for bridges and to promote water tourism (the list of names and a map is attached)

- One of our main priorities is the Place Names Register.
<http://xgis.maaamet.ee/knravalik/>

One of our biggest goals is to widen the data collection and to gather place names from various databases. The goal for near future is to collect in the register 200,000 place names (mainly natural features).

As of 1st of January 2012 in Place Names Register we have 35,321 named features with 38,367 place names, which shows the growth of more than 1,700 new place names.

Most important and laborious named features are:

Traffic surfaces ~ 15200 (growth ~ 400);

Street names ~ 7551 (growth ~300);

Small places (special address units) ~ 720 .

Some interesting facts: in the register we have 2162 lakes with 4512 place names – of them 1231 with official principal name and 611 islands with 1272 place names – of them 597 with official principal name.

Thank you for listening my brief overview of our activities.