

PAIKKALA, Sirkka (Helsinki/Helsingfors, Finland)***Places, names & stories – a pilot project on geographical names in Finland¹⁾****Contents***Summary*

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Summary

Place names are often very old talk about places. Such talk may survive even when its features or the language on which it is based has already disappeared or changed its nature. Names have been given to places that have been necessary: passage routes and places to be avoided or dangerous places, places for fishing and hunting, boundary marks, dwellings, cultivated lands, mountains and valleys, and holy places. A large part of the world's place names and the stories related to them go further back in history than the written documentation on them. Especially where the constructive culture has not been preserved and the written documentation is still young, place names can offer a way to reach further back to the past, to act as vestiges of culture.

Names are the part of the immaterial cultural heritage of the community in which they are used. Place names, their history and the stories related to them root people in their environment, and provide them with a spiritual foundation, as well as an indigenous local identity.

This paper presents a project carried out at the local level in Finland, where place names, the related cultural heritage, and place-name awareness and knowledge have been promoted. The project Places, names & stories represents a perspective on nomenclature that could be labelled as 'mental geospatial information'.

1 Introduction

Although the first permanent settlement in Finland was created some 9,500 years ago, the country's historic buildings and its towns and villages are generally not very old compared with those of Europe's ancient civilisations. Finland's literary culture also has a relatively short history, with the majority of early texts dating back no further than the modern era – though there are quite a number from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries too. The early texts are mainly in either Swedish or Latin. The conscious development of written Finnish and works of Finnish literature did not begin until the nineteenth century. Although much of Finland's historic architectural environment has not been preserved (not least because wood was the principle material used) and the country's literary culture

emerged only relatively recently, valuable insight into Finnish history can nevertheless be gained by examining archaeological remains and other vestiges of culture in the form of the intangible cultural heritage. The latter includes place names and verse, songs and other traditions preserved orally.

2 'European Heritage Days' in Finland in 1999

The 'European Heritage Days' events held in Finland in 1999 concentrated on the following theme: *Place names – the memory of places*. The aims were to draw attention to the importance of place names as an essential element in our surroundings, to the way

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in which they convey a message from the past to the present, and to how they connect people with their surroundings and give them a sense of identity.

The ‘European Heritage Days’ were a nationwide series of events organised principally by the Ministry of the Environment, the Finnish Association for Local Culture and Heritage, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the National Board of Education and the National Board of Antiquities. The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland worked closely with these bodies and supplied the necessary specialised material suitable for general use.

During the course of the year, various publications were also produced and seminars and exhibitions arranged on the place-names theme, and a TV programme made about names in the built environment and about their planning, perpetuation and demise. In addition to all this, work was also conducted with organisations and individuals at the local level to ensure that local people would be interested and involved. – More information on the activities undertaken during 1999 is given in PAIKKALA (2001) and in WP22 (see list of references).

3 Record of place names from the period before permanent settlement

A sequel to the national place-names project initiated in 1999 subsequently emerged when one particular Finnish municipality, Tervo, decided to pursue its own venture in the form of a project named *Places, names & stories*, covering the period 2005–2008. The aim was to gather information and document oral tradition regarding local names and places on a systematic basis, and then to make it available in digital form on the Internet.

The project goal was defined as enhancing the feeling of community established through oral and written traditions and to strengthen the sense of local identity. This was seen as important not only for the area’s permanent residents but also for those with holiday homes there and those born in the area. The plan was that new and previously poorly accessible material concerning the life and other aspects of the municipality would be published on the Internet, making it freely accessible by all. The intention was also to explore specific uses for this information.

This *Places, names & stories* project was thus pursued at the grass-roots level: in a single municipality and with the aid of interested parties locally. The municipality in question, named Tervo, is located in central Finland. It has a surface area of approximately 500 km², of which lakes account for almost one third. With so many lakes, there are also many islands in Tervo.

The area has been settled since the Stone Age. In the late Middle Ages, it formed part of a wider wilderness region in which tribes from further south would come to hunt and fish. Around the sixteenth century, the area saw its first permanent settlement with the arrival of slash-and-burn cultivators. Prior to this, and continuing into the seventeenth century too, the area was also used by the Sámi people, who lived a nomadic life there. Some of them became assimilated into the settler population while others were displaced to areas further north. The Sámi are the only minority in the European Union with official status as indigenous people. The permanent settlements in the Tervo area became well established in the seventeenth century, and many of the families there today go back many generations, even 500 years.

Even today, most of the people in Tervo earn their living from agriculture, though many are also employed in other sectors, including the wood processing and fish processing industries. The number of inhabitants is almost 2,000, or about 5 per km². In the 1950s Tervo’s population was still in excess of 4,000, but the migration to towns and cities elsewhere in the country has taken its toll since then. This structural change has affected all rural areas in Finland. Despite this, Tervo’s population doubles during summertime because many people own log cabins and other holiday homes – there are close on 900 of these in Tervo.

Although the population has declined and the older generation been replaced by the new, different temporal layers have been preserved in geographical names found in the area. These have been passed on through oral tradition from one generation to the next, and new names have emerged wherever there has been a need. Many names have also disappeared from active use, mainly due to the changes that have occurred in people’s means of livelihood and in the settlement pattern. Many of the names connected with the wilderness period began to disappear with the changeover to a farming culture. Likewise, a lot of names have been forgotten in recent decades with the shift in agriculture and forestry from labour-intensive methods to machinery and automation. The depopulation of an already sparsely populated area has served to accelerate this change. Nevertheless, the names of the most important places have remained, having endured for hundreds of years, since before the period of permanent settlement. The names of the largest lakes may even date back more than a millennium.

4 Information collected for the project

The Tervo project involved the systematic collection of three types of data, which, to the best of our knowledge, has not previously been performed in such a way in Finland at the level of a single municipality.

<p><u>Kalakukko</u></p> <p>kalakukko: -kukolla</p> <p>Tervo, Juurikkaniemi (3:12A)</p> <p>Kallis Suostunmäen eteläpäässä. "se on semmuotoinen kuin kalakukko semmoinen siltä ja piöre." (< Sisko Huuskon, s. 1915.)</p> <p>Tervo Ella Tolonen 1968</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The name in standard Finnish. 2. The form in local dialect and how it is declined 3. Location (municipality, village and reference to the map) 4. Description: Rocky outcrop at the southern end of Suostunmäki. "It's shaped like a fish pie, kind of smooth and round" (informant: Sisko HUUSKONEN, b.1915). 5. Municipality 6. Collector's name 7. Year of collection (1968)
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Fig. 1: A name entry for Tervo

Firstly, the local history society obtained a copy of all the geographical names listed for the Tervo area in the national Names Archive held at the Research Institute for the Language of Finland. The archive corpus contains geographical names covering the whole country and extending back to the early nineteenth century. This data, gathered by scholars, researchers, teachers and students, was recorded by interviewing local people. Today, the Names Archive contains a total of approximately 2.7 million place-name entries, most of them Finnish names, but many in Swedish or Sámi. They include information on pronunciation and the location and description of the place, and often also oral tradition and background details, even etymological information, told by local people concerning the name or the place. The number of archive entries for Tervo is about 3,000.



Fig. 2: A traditional fish pie, kalakukko. Photo: Sirkka PAIKKALA 2008

The *Kalakukko* has a variant name *Kukkokallio* which is not easy to understand from the surface of the name: *kukko* is 'cock', but *kalakukko* 'fish pie'; *kala* 'fish', *kallio* 'rock'. The meaning of both names is 'rock shaped like a fish pie'.

Secondly, copies of early maps and the documentation pertaining to their contents were obtained from the Finnish National Archive. This contains an abundance of place names, including names at a very local level. Most of the maps are from the late eighteenth century. These maps were particularly valuable for seeing how names have been retained or modified over time.

Thirdly, the local history society obtained copies of old tales, anecdotes and other stories collected in Tervo during the 1930s from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. In all, there are more than 600 such stories, many of which concern place names. The most elderly of the local people interviewed were born in the 1840s. They gave accounts of a time that was very different to the present. In their world, humans, nature and what we now term the supernatural were all very much intertwined. Charms and spells and guardian spirits were an integral part of life, and one did not recover from an illness solely with medication but with the aid of incantations. The interviews also tell of powerful soothsayers, healers and others with special powers; spirits, ghosts and apparitions; the devil and giants; omens, premonitions and prophecies; mythical flames and islands with treasure plundered in raids and battles; times of persecution (tribal wars and oppression under Russian rule) and death and

grieving; and the Sámi people and the arrival of settler families. Some of the name-related stories and name descriptions have come about only later on, inspired by the name itself, while others refer to things that have happened at the place in question. An example of the latter, and a lost tradition, is the story concerning the *Akkoinlähde* spring:

Akkoinlähde ‘Old Women’s Spring’ – a clear-running spring on flat ground next to a mire near the limits of the parish.

“When I was doing some work for the land survey some 20 years ago I visited the spring, and the old folk at that time told me that some bundles of money had been found there, in the spring. Coins and human bones had also been found, and in the old days even a child’s body. They said the spring was a sorcerer’s stamping ground, and that in return for putting money there you could use the spring for magical deeds. Regarding the child’s body, some said that the child was already dead, while others said that it could have been thrown in alive as a sacrifice to increase the magical powers of the spring. – – – The spring has been a source of magic and is far from anybody’s home. That’s what people said about it. You could think of it in this way: it was the devil who was believed to take children away, and the devil could take the form of a sorcerer or someone else who, as a sacrifice, could have put a child in there either alive or by first killing it, in order to improve the power of the spring.” – 1937; told by farmer P. H. born 1865.

Some of the stories are migration narratives that have been linked with the same types of places found elsewhere in Finland and Europe. These include stories about treasure that is there for the taking for anyone who can ride a night-old colt across night-old ice, present a night-old boy-child or go there unclothed on midsummer’s night and remain silent when the treasure guardians arrive. Other stories include tales of the mythical dog-headed, human-bodied *Cynocephali*, which, in the Finnish version, are used by the Russian army to track down the enemy. Furthermore:

“*Cynocephali* walk on two legs, just like people, and in other ways too they’re less like other creatures and more like us. They’ve used their noses to track down those they despise. It’s a Russian army officer who uses them to hunt down the enemy and to spy in Finland, and once they’ve got wind of the enemy, there’s no escape.” – 1937; told by farmer P. M. born 1860, Tervo.

5 Local discussion of the information obtained

Since local people in Tervo were very interested in finding out more about the place names, a couple of presentations based on selected data were given there. Following this, the local history society has since arranged more than 30 village meetings at which local maps and archive entries have been discussed with local people. At the same time, any new information that came to light on the names and any further stories were recorded, and the present-day map locations of already archived place names were verified with local people. The locations of fishing grounds, in particular, were specified in more detail. In 2006, a public exhibition of old village maps was held, at which further information was given on the project, particularly with holiday-home summer residents in mind.

It soon became apparent that local people were very keen for this project, which had begun as a grass-roots experiment, to be expanded. It was also clear that there was sufficient interest to justify material being made available to all residents in the municipality as well to those who had moved away and anyone else with an interest. The project was expanded and an amount of funding was obtained from the EU Leader+ programme, which funds local rural development projects.

Using the funding obtained for the project, it was possible to hire someone to produce material for the municipality’s website. The rest of the work has been carried out by local volunteers. The website was opened in April 2008 and is headed *Places, names & stories*. It can be found in Finnish at <http://www.tervo.fi/tervo-seura/> and in English at http://www.tervo.fi/tervo-seura/eng_index.php.

The following information can be browsed on the website:

- Maps and documentation from the major land reform of the late 18th century, by village
- Stories of Tervo from the Finnish Literature Society’s 1930s archive material
- Background and context for place names in Tervo
- Tervo local history society publications on architectural heritage and related matters

Under the heading ‘Land reform’ (The oldest maps of Tervo and the 18th century land reform documents), a list of all the villages in the municipality is given, and by clicking on these you can access the relevant maps and documents.

The heading ‘Stories’ (Stories of times long past) sets out all the tales, anecdotes etc. It also includes a search function which can be used to look for particular place names, personal names or other information, for instance all the places where it is told that treasure has been found...

Under the heading 'Places' (*Paikan muisti* 'Memory of places') a map is shown, marked with numbered grid squares. By clicking on the relevant number and name in the list adjacent to the map you can view the map sheet in question and zoom in to the scale you require. The grey spots on the map are place names for which further information appears below the map by clicking on the spot in question. The information given consists of the name and description of the place plus any further details available. An example of the latter:

“On Pulkkilansaari island there’s an inlet by the name of Venäänkaarre ‘Russians cove’. It’s said that in some unspecified battle the Finns were on the tail of a group of Russian soldiers who’d come from the east, and it was here that they found and then killed them. It’s also said that in the 1800s they found an old-fashioned bayonet nearby.” – 1937; told by farmer’s son E. K. born 1899, Tervo.

6 To conclude

At the village meetings held in Tervo, the data collectors noticed that oral tradition and story-telling were alive and well, although such gatherings facilitating these are rare nowadays. People seemed happy to come together to discuss or hear about information concerning themselves and their local area. At the village meetings, the recollections were normally begun by one of the more elderly people there, and the younger ones then contributed additional information. Like unscrewing the top on a fizzy drink, the mention of a place name resulted in an audible release: names almost forgotten were remembered and stories began to gush forth, including those that could be classified as today’s folklore and tomorrow’s cultural history.

Documenting and recording place names and folklore in Finland began in a more systematic fashion in the

nineteenth century, spurred on by the awakening of the national spirit. The aim at the time was to gather information for linguists and historians, to show that it was possible for Finland to become a modern nation-state using the language spoken by the majority of its people. The language of administration and of the country’s aristocracy was at that time still Swedish, and nineteenth-century Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian empire. The data collection was gradually expanded from the search for ancient and unusual names to the cataloguing of all place names, whatever their age or location. This process was, in most respects, complete by the 1980s. It was the first stage.

Research on geographical names that focuses not on collecting and cataloguing in the field but on analysing material from national archive collections can be regarded as the second stage in the development of the discipline: such research at the doctoral thesis level began in Finland during the 1930s. The Tervo place name project is an example of the third stage, however, where the information gathered on an area is returned to be accessed by those whose backgrounds and lives it concerns. With Finnish society having gone through major social changes in recent decades, Finns have now begun to explore their rural roots. To this end, a great many local history publications, genealogy surveys and books about place names have been produced. The collection and research undertaken in earlier decades has naturally proven invaluable in this.

There are plans to continue the Tervo project. Further information will be added on, for example, the names brought to the area by Karelians resettled there after Finnish Karelia was ceded to the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War. They were given smallholdings to cultivate, and while they naturally used the local names they also used names of their own making and afforded certain places a particular meaning as a result of their presence. Many of these resettled



Fig. 3: Tervo landscape. Photo: Pentti VÄNSKÄ 2000



Fig. 4: A man from Tervo. Photo: Topi IKÄLÄINEN 1979

Karelians moved away in the 1960s and later, but the names remained.

There are also plans to use the place-name information in local schools, for instance in history and art classes. It is also hoped that the project might lead to commercial product ideas in the tourism business and for local produce and foodstuffs. The material will also be useful when future place names are planned. Builders of new holiday homes in the area have already made inquiries about old place names. This side of the project is only just beginning, but it does demonstrate how residents too can feel strongly about preserving their heritage.

A place is not merely the physical geographical terrain, nor is its name simply a label indicating the location. The meaning of a place is created through the lives lived there: the identity it conveys is made up of the physical environment and people's individual and collective experiences. These can include memories, fantasies, experiences and myths absorbed into the culture. This "mental geospatial information" attaches people to places, making them no longer bystanders but participants.

7 References

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