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NAME AND PLACE

**Ten essays on the dynamics
of place-names**

*Edited and translated by
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On the concept of locality*

Two articles by Albøge et al. (1976: 13–25) and Falck-Kjällquist (1976: 27–39) presented under the heading “Locality and Name” in NORNA-rapporter 10, *Ortnamn och samhälle*, posit the existence of both named and unnamed localities as a basis for the formulation of the problem. Both accounts try to pinpoint why some localities are named and why others are not.

The starting-point for the contribution by Albøge et al. is the locality itself. Primarily through the registration of the classificatory nature of the locality, the attempt has been made to highlight which types of localities become objects of naming more frequently and which more rarely. At the same time, the survey tries to establish whether it is possible to establish characteristic traits for each category which can distinguish named localities from unnamed ones.

The method of investigation is thus a comparison between named and unnamed localities within the same category of locality (hills, cultivated areas, settlements), as well as between the individual categories. This comparison, however, presupposes that an adequate material for unnamed localities can be established, and this only seems to be possible for some of the categories in the survey.

In order for the unnamed locality to be made comparable with the named one, it is necessary to establish that it belongs to the same category. This criterion seems to be difficult to fulfil, particularly for unnamed topographical features. The naming process actually structures nature into delimited elements; topographical features become localities. But the nature of the structuring created by means of naming cannot be predicted, owing to the existence of various latent structuring possibilities whose realisation yields different results. An example of various latent possibilities in the material pertains to elevations. They may be structured into individual locality units, a hill, but also into locality units which designate parts of a

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hill or several hills. Thus, a comparison between named localities and a description of topographical conditions based on the stock of locality-designating appellatives cannot be carried out.

The principal question is whether or not a natural feature is only defined as a locality as the result of naming. If this is the case, there are weighty theoretical objections to be made against comparisons of this kind.

Falck-Kjällquist claims that the reason that some localities are named while others are not must be found in the function of the localities. The notion that there is a close connection between naming and presence or absence of a practical function connected with the locality has been central to this work. Practical function should thus more often lead to naming than the lack of such a function.

As suggested by Falck-Kjällquist, it is doubtful whether it is possible to single out localities which can be proven never to have had any practical function. All localities may function as points of orientation and can thus be said to have a practical function in some situations. The concept of practical function must be defined closer if it is to be used as a differentiating criterion.

One objection, however, affects the entire theoretical basis of this survey. It has so far not been possible to prove that there is such a specific relationship between naming and practical function which makes it relevant to isolate this particular factor in a study of naming motives. The Swedish survey itself points to a number of examples of localities with a practical function which are not named.

Even working from the prerequisite that the concept of practical function is accepted as useful and relevant, the actual execution of an analysis of function is difficult to make. Only in rare instances do we find information about the function of the locality at the time of naming. A reconstruction founded on the semantic content must be rejected for reasons of method. This is because it is in principle impossible to presuppose a similarity in the motive of name formation and the naming motive. It is arbitrary and also very rare that the reason for naming a locality is mirrored in the linguistic elements chosen as name elements.

In spite of the theoretical objections made to the two surveys under the heading "Locality and Name", it is far from irrelevant that

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they are presented here. As is the case for a number of other subjects treated at the NORNA-symposium *Ortnamn och samhälle*, they have not earlier been the subject of isolated and in-depth treatment within the field of Nordic onomastics. It is only through tests such as the above-mentioned ones that theoretical problems may be given an explicit form which may constitute the basis for a reformulation of the theoretical issue.

Bibliography

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