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The Place-Name Collection Project in Møre and Romsdal, Norway

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Introduction

Place-name studies have been a common thread throughout Arne Kruse's career, beginning with his master's thesis of 1983, which dealt with names on fishing grounds and bearings used by fishermen in Smøla in Norway. The thesis allowed him to combine his interest for place-names and dialect with his personal experiences of coastal fishing. Names of fishing grounds and bearings are rarely written down (though a few private collections exist). Rather, the names belong to an oral tradition specific to local fishermen, and Arne learned them from the people who used them in their trade.

Thus, Arne had a relevant background for the place-name collection project in his home county, Møre and Romsdal, on the west coast of Norway. The project was formally closed in 1995, but the finishing work continued. The project was organised by the University College in Volda, with the college's Peter Hallaråker as project leader throughout. It ran from 1985 to 1995, with Arne working as a researcher 1987–89, and was funded by the Møre and Romsdal county council, the Norwegian Mapping Authority in Møre and Romsdal, and the Arts Council of Norway.

The aim of the project was to collect as many place-names as possible, and the pivotal choice of method was to let non-professional locals do the collection. A total of about 200,000 place-names were collected. These names, with relevant information, were analysed by researchers and digitised. They are now easily accessible to the public in the county atlas.[1]

There is a considerable interest in place-name collection in Scotland these days, which is expressed in a number of local collections as well as published volumes such as *The Place-Names of Fife* series.[2] For this reason, a presentation of the county project and the methodology chosen may be of interest to a Scottish audience.

Hallaråker outlines the four steps of the project: 1) collection of place-names, carried out by local collectors, 2) scientific analysis of the collected material, 3) digitisation, and 4) publication.[3]

Collection by local place-name collectors

This was a crowd-sourcing project in the sense that the collection depended on local collectors in all thirty-eight municipalities of the county, with no formal training in place-name research. All collectors received basic training in the form of an introductory course, arranged by the project leader and the researchers Arne Kruse and Tor Erik Jenstad. The course included some theoretical background and guidelines as to which place-names and what information to include. The focus, however, was on practical work and instructions on how to carry out the actual

1. *Fylkesatlas Vestland*, https://www.fylkesatlas.no/stadnamn_alle. Accessed 4 July 2022.
2. Taylor and Márkus 2006-2013.
3. Hallaråker 1989: 49.

collection. Courses were arranged in all the municipalities, and a local coordinator was appointed.

The basis for the collection was the printed 1:5,000 map series. Each of the maps are identified by a place-name and a code. All place-name lists and recordings were organised by map sheet and marked with map name and code. The place-names lists were in standardised forms, to ensure that the required information was included for every place-name. Names already recorded on the maps were to be included in the collection, and each collector was responsible for a specific area in which they would collect as many names as possible. Equipped with map sheets, name lists, and tape recorders, they were ready to start.

Figure 1: Part of place-name list two of twelve for the map Øksenvåg BH 119-5-1 in Averøy. Standardised form, phonemic spelling, and nature or culture code has been added by the project team. All other entries by the collectors.

The heading for each name list would include name and number of the map, the municipality (*kommune*), name of informant and year of birth, name of collector, and year of collection (see Figure 1). The collected names were given sequential numbers for each map and a grid reference (column 1 and 2). After that, the place-names were entered into the list (column 3, *stadnamn*).

Finding a suitable written form could be quite a challenge, since it was basically an oral collection and many of the names had never been rendered in writing before. The instruction was to spell the place-names in a rough dialect form with common letters, as close to the pronunciation as possible. The phonemic spelling (*fonemskrift*) was not to be filled in; this was left to the project leaders. The collectors filled in the preposition (*prep*) used with the name and the locality type (*stad, lokalitetstype*). In addition to locality type (a), the final column could be used for additional information, e.g. present and former use of the place (b), traditions, and older names (c). In the printed maps corresponding to the name lists, the location of the place-name was indicated only by a number, placed centrally in the object.

In spite of the structured outline, the actual organisation would vary. Many collectors would interview local informants, whereas some would only collect names they knew personally. Occasionally, the lists and maps were sent from house to house. Some collectors would record the names as they were collected. Quite often, however, the name lists were completed first and then the lists were recorded.

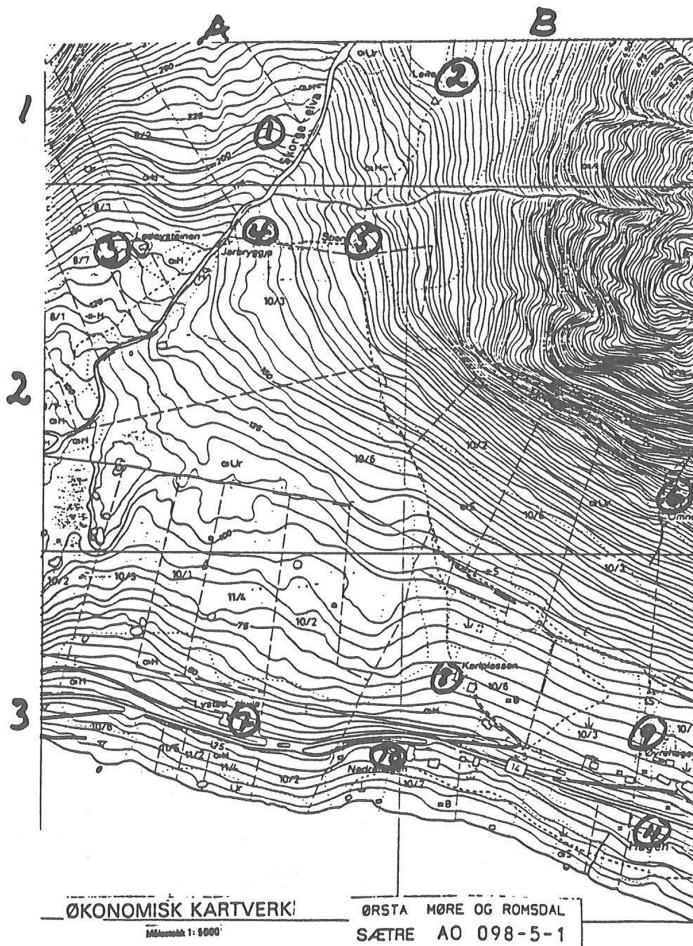Figure 2: Part of map with place-name numbers,
Sætre map no. AO 098-5-1, Ørsta municipality.

Scientific analysis

The local collections resulted in a large number of handwritten name lists with corresponding annotated maps and tapes containing the sound recordings. This material was handed over to the project team for processing, who would check that all necessary information had been included.

Standardisation of the written form of the place-names, as well as their simplified phonemic transcription, was left to the researchers. The pronunciation was recorded and thus safeguarded, but written forms were still necessary for databases and mapping, as well as scientific analysis. Standardised forms facilitate the searching, recognition, and comparison of names and name elements.

Even when standardised place-name forms in the project had no official status, the researchers adhered to the main principles of the Norwegian Place-Name Law of 1990.[4] According to that law, place-names should be standardised on the basis of the traditional local form, using the spelling principles of the Norwegian language. If place-names contain lexical words, these should normally be spelled according to the standard spelling. Regional forms are allowed to some extent. In Figure 1, all names have an additional form written above the line, which is the suggested standardised form. All these names are compounded of common words in the lexicon, so the standardisation is quite straightforward. When place-name elements are opaque, the pronunciation is the only guideline.

Phonemic spelling (column 4) was also left to the researchers. Even though some collectors complained that there were not enough letters in the alphabet to render the place-names adequately, an introduction to phonemic writing was not seen as a realistic part of the training for the collectors.[5] However, it is true that the dialects have a number of phonemes that do not have counterparts in the standard alphabet. In addition, a number of the major dialect dividing lines in Norwegian cross Møre and Romsdal, so the dialects differ greatly within the county.

4. 'Lov om stadnamn (stadnamnlova)', *Lovdata*, https://lovdata.no/lov/1990-05-18-11. Accessed 12 September 2022.
5. Hallaråker 1995: 201.

A simplified phonemic transcription system was established for the project, primarily based on the twenty-nine standard letters of the Norwegian alphabet, using small and capital letters. The approach was systematic in the way that capital vowels signify open vowels and capital consonants symbolise palatal letters. In addition, a few special signs found on standard keyboards were used, such as '9' for the velar nasal (*ng*) and '$' for the palatal fricative (*sj/sh*). When all columns of the place-name lists were filled in, these were digitised by student assistants.

Prior to filling in the phonemic spelling in the name lists, members of the project team established phoneme catalogues for every municipality, the idea being that the local dialect forms a phonemic and morphologic system of its own. The phoneme catalogues included a phoneme inventory, phonological rules (e.g. *v* is pronounced *f* in front of a *t*), and morphosyntactic rules. Traditionally, the phoneme inventory of the southern dialects include a 'double set' of vowels – closed and open – whereas the northern dialects have a wide range of consonants, including a set of palatals. A typical morphosyntactic feature is the change from velar to palatal when the definite article is added, as in *haug – haujen* ('mound – the mound'). This is reflected in no. 13 and 14 in Figure 1: collector's form -*håjin*, standardised form -*haugen*, and phonemic spelling -håjiN (N indicating palatal). The advantage of phonemic spelling is that it refers to an abstract system, rather than absolute values. Phonetic spelling can never be fully precise.

Table 1: Adapted version of the information for the place-name Litlvasshaugen after the scientific analysis.

Place-name: Litlvasshaugen

Number	14
Standardised form	Litlvasshaugen
Collector's form	Litjvasshåjin
Phonemic spelling	/"liHvas,hå:jiN/
Municipality number	1554
Municipality name	Averøy
Map number	
Additional info	
Map name	BH 11951
Square	Øksenvåg
Tape nr	B3, 4
Informant	Paul Øksenvåg, Petrine Alvheim
Collector	Tove Skaret
Preposition	oppå
Locality type	

Problems and perspectives

Although the collection can be considered a success, the project team was well aware of potential problems. The main challenge in a project involving such a large number of collectors with no linguistic training is to make sure that the collection is carried out in a systematic manner and in a uniform way in all municipalities, ensuring that the material is suitable for scientific study. To deal with this, as we have seen, all collectors received basic training, and important instructions were repeated. The place-name lists were standardised to make sure the required information was included. Finally, all the municipalities signed a contract with the county's

research institution, Møreforsking, in which they obliged to follow these instructions. Hallaråker concludes that the collection is systematic on the whole, and that the information provided about the place-names is reliable.[6] This means that the desired standard was achieved. The highest-quality output originated in municipalities where the local project coordinator had a linguistic background.

The map-sheet approach ensures systematic registration, but there are potential drawbacks. As Hallaråker points out, the discrepancy between social and cultural units and printed maps caused problems when collectors were mainly interested in collecting names from their own neighbourhood.[7] Norway does not have rural villages in the traditional sense, but rather groups of farms, which are often the result of the division of one original settlement. Many collectors were mainly interested in collecting names from their own estate or neighbourhood, and in some cases, they would cut up and glue together maps so that they would cover their area of interest.

The collection in the 1980s and 1990s was based on printed maps. New digital tools can certainly simplify parts of a collection process, and everyday smartphones can now be used to find coordinates as well as record the pronunciation of place-names. But even in a digital world, maps or grid systems are required to get an overview of an area, so traditional tools are hardly out of the game.

Publication and use of the material

There is always a danger that collections are stored in a closed archive, out of reach of the public. In the early years of the

6. Hallaråker 1995: 117.
7. Hallaråker 2003: 11.

project, the project leader envisaged place-name publications for the individual municipalities as well as a place-name lexicon for the county.[8] This has not been realised. What has been manifested instead is a digital publication, which makes the material more easily accessible for the public. Digitising the material is a continuous process, carried out by the county archive of Møre and Romsdal, in cooperation with its counterpart in Sogn and Fjordane. The place-names are georeferenced, and by clicking the name in the map, access is provided to a fact sheet similar to the one in Figure 3.

Hallaråker had a fourfold aim for the project: cultural, practical, scientific, and pedagogic.[9] The former means safeguarding the place-names for the future, which has certainly been accomplished. In addition to names already mapped, the collection includes a wealth of previously unrecorded names, such as field names and names of minor topographical features.

The collection is also of practical use. Road addresses have recently become mandatory for all inhabited houses in Norway. This meant that a large number of addresses had to be established, and many municipalities used the collection to find material for suitable road names. The collection is also useful for the Norwegian Mapping Authority, which is responsible for the registration of official place-names. The localisation of a place-name is easily checked on the county atlas website, and the pronunciation is invaluable for the standardisation. As seen above, place-name law prescribes that the spelling should be based on the local pronunciation.

The collected material has hardly been used for scientific purposes to the extent that the project team envisaged. This is partly due to the decline of place-name studies in Norwegian

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8. Hallaråker 1989: 51–52.
9. Ibid.: 47.

universities, which is not to be discussed here. The collection preserves valuable material, but the value of the collection would be significantly enhanced if the place-names were interpreted. This does not necessarily imply printed publications. Instead, interpretations of place-names or place-name elements could be published digitally, the obvious advantages being is that digital material is easy to improve upon and open to everyone. The raw material is certainly available and waiting for further utilisation.[10]

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10. Tor Erik Jenstad, Arne Kruse's colleague as a researcher, has provided information and notes to this contribution.