The Changes Made to Place Names in the Course of the Administrative Reform

PEETER PÄLL

Administrative reforms inevitably lead to changes in place names, as merged municipalities may acquire a new name and there may be the need to avoid the repetition of place names within one municipality. Both of these types of changes also occurred in the course of the administrative reform carried out in 2017.

Earlier changes to the names of rural municipalities

By way of introduction, let us make a brief historical digression.[1] The first major administrative reform in the territory of Estonia, primarily in

[1] See also T. Pae, M.-J. Maidla, E. Tammiksaar, 'Vallanimede küsimus 1930. aastate vallareformis' – Keel ja Kirjandus 2016, No 10, pp. 755–769. Issues related to the names of rural municipalities during the First World War have been discussed by A. Must in his book Muutugu ja kadugu! Baltisakslased ja Esimene maailmasõda (Tartu 2016, pp. 32–37). The data used in this article is taken from the reference work by L. Uuet Eesti haldusjaotus 20. sajandil (Tallinn, 2002) and from the sources collected for the Place Names Database of the Institute of the Estonian Language (a summary is available at http://www.eki.ee/knab/valik/kbeehald.pdf).

northern Estonia, took place from 1891 to 1892 and partly also later. Its purpose was to merge some small manor municipalities that had been formed on the basis of the 1866 act on peasant communes. The rural municipalities resulting from these mergers were not always necessarily named after the largest and most important manor. For example, some fairly spontaneous mergers and separations resulted in the Taevere rural municipality in Suure-Jaani and the Võhmuta rural municipality in Järva-Jaani, which had previously been quite small manor municipalities. As a result of the reform, the names of the new rural municipalities were often dissociated from the names of the former manor municipalities, sometimes by using Russian names (e.g. in 1891, Triigi → Aleksandri, Laagna → Peetri (Russian: *Петровская волость*, Petrovskaya volost), Palvere → Nikolai). The Russification of names intensified later on, especially during the First World War (in 1913 Väätsa → Romanovi, in 1915 Riisipere → Sergejevi, in 1916 Kirna → Aleksei, Võhmuta → Ivanovi). These last changes were repealed fairly soon after the 1917 February Revolution, and then after Estonia gained independence, the course was set for the Estonianisation of names. The first example here is the renaming of the Vardi (German: *Schwarzen*) rural municipality in the county of Harjumaa to the Varbola rural municipality in 1919 (in 1917 it had been for a short while the Mihaili rural municipality).

While in the 1920s and 1930s there were few changes in the names of rural municipalities, towards the end of that period, the movement to Estonianise the names, led by the Estonian Nationalist Union, gained momentum. Not only did they dislike the names that were clearly foreign (Skarjatina, Voltveti), but they also disapproved of names that were fully adapted but had been derived from a foreign personal name; for example, Aaspere (from the family name Hastfer), Holdre (< Holler), Leebiku (< Klebeck), Riidaja (< Freytag).

By the time of the 1938–39 rural municipal reform, the Estonianisation of names had already reached its peak, which is why the 1938 act on the organisation of place names and names of registered land units

prescribed that foreign place names had to be changed. New names of rural municipalities had to be Estonian (and have Estonian origin) and short (names consisting of several parts were not recommended). For the implementation of the act, the Place Names Board was established at the Ministry of the Interior, whose task was to review the names of rural municipalities and present its opinion. A preparatory meeting focusing on the names of rural municipalities was held on 31 August and the first meeting of the Board on 7 September 1938.

The reasons for changing the names of rural municipalities can be divided into several groups:

1) the replacement of foreign names, including those of foreign origin (Kilingi → Saarde, Kloostri → Padise, Laatre → Mõisaküla[2] → Rajangu, Puurmanni → Kursi, Riisipere → Nissi, Taagepera → Vaoküla, Taali →Paikuse, Voltveti →Tihekõnnu → Tihemetsa);
2) the preference for historical names (Koonga → Soontagana);
3) the replacement of long or other unsuitable names (Pranglisaarte →Prangli, Järva-Jaani → Järvani → Võhmuta, Tsooru → Lepistu);
4) the correction of names according to their local pronunciation (Hallinga →Halinga, Talli → Tali);
5) the Estonianisation of the names of border rural municipalities (Skarjatina behind Narva →Raja; in Setomaa, Irboska → Linnuse, Kulje → Kalda, Laura → Lõuna).

Some name proposals were rejected because they were misleading with regard to the extent of the area they referred to; for example, Harjuranna (a common name for the rural municipalities of Harku and Vääna).

The initially rejected Alutaguse for the rural municipalities near Narva, still came into use later on (the Board had recommended the name Laagna).

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[2] The names listed above also include provisionally proposed names.

The 1938–39 reform introduced new names that had been derived from historical records; for example, Põdrala (< 1223 *dorff podereial*, later the manor *Morsel Podrigel*), Tihemetsa (derived from Ticonas recorded in 1560, which was interpreted as *Tihekõnnu and which was changed to Tihemetsa by the Place Names Board), Vaoküla (derived from the earlier records of the Taagepera manor's German name *Wagenküll*). One name, Rajangu, was invented; it was derived from the name Raja proposed by the Laatre rural municipality, but the latter had already been promised to the rural municipality beyond Narva.

In 1991, the year Estonia's independence was restored, some former names of rural municipalities were also restored (Alaküla → Räpina, Lauka → Kõrgessaare, Mehikoorma →Meeksi, Riidaja →Põdrala). As voluntary mergers of rural municipalities gained momentum in the second half of the 1990s, in the year 2000 the Place Names Board, which had been restored in 1994, adopted recommendations for the selection of the names of rural municipalities.[3] According to these, the first preference was to be given to the names of territorial divisions with a long and continuous tradition, for example parishes. Suitable candidates also included the traditional names of rural municipalities and the names of natural areas, while one had to avoid names that were misleading in terms of the extent of the area they referred to; for example, situations where the borders of the area that was the source of the name and the borders of the new rural municipality to be formed did not overlap to a significant extent. The second option was to name the new rural municipality after its centre (or main town) with the warning to avoid settlement names that had not traditionally been used to designate a larger area.[4] There was a general recommendation to prefer short, well-sounding names that were clearly distinguishable from other names, and to avoid

[3] http://www.eki.ee/knn/knn_vald.htm (14.12.2017).

[4] This recommendation was based on the case where there was interest in merging the Karksi rural municipality and the city of Karksi-Nuia into the rural municipality of Karksi-Nuia, disregarding the fact that Karksi was the name of the historical parish.

the mechanical joining of the names of merging rural municipalities into hyphenated names (as previously with Kastre-Võnnu, Laitsna-Rogosi).

Changes to the names of rural municipalities in the course of the 2017 reform

When the 2017 local government reform was launched, the Place Names Board discussed the recommendations once again on 28 June 2016, and the final revised list included six recommended sources for names, of which the first two were considered to be the most important[5]:

1) names of parishes and old rural municipalities;
2) names of the centres of rural municipalities;
3) prominent names (of natural objects) in the territory of merging rural municipalities;
4) county names containing a compass point;
5) new names;
6) compound names (with a hyphen) of merging rural municipalities.

In accordance with the applicable procedure, the Place Names Board should have provided its opinion on the names of rural municipalities or cities to the Government of the Republic immediately before the latter made a decision on a merger. However, this ruled out the possibility of intervening in the choice of a name at an earlier stage and, considering the short deadline for the local government reform, would have put the government under pressure had there been a build-up of several unsuitable names. In order to ensure faster feedback on the choice of a name early on in the process, a task force for the names of rural municipalities was set up under the Place Names Board in June 2016 (Raivo Aunap, University of Tartu; Liisi Lumiste, Tallinn Urban Planning Office; Peeter Päll, Institute of the Estonian Language; Evar Saar, Võro Institute; Ilmar

[5] https://haldusreform.fin.ee/static/sites/3/2016/11/vallanime-soovitusi-03-11-2016.pdf (14.12.2017).

Tomusk, Language Inspectorate; Väino Tõemets, Ministry of Finance), whose work was organised by Kadri Teller-Sepp. The task force worked until December 2016 and during that time provided the rural municipalities holding merger negotiations 18 longer opinions as well as short opinions using email and telephone consultations.

The main problems that emerged in the choice of new names for rural municipalities are highlighted below.

1. **Inventing new names** Although this source for names was not completely ruled out, the Place Names Board and its task force did not expect that it would be used excessively and that new names would be offered instead of place names with a lengthy historical tradition; for example, Lääneranna (instead of Lihula), Põhjaranniku (instead of Toila or Kohtla), Kehtnakandi (instead of Kehtna). Some of the new names were too general and not useful in specifying the exact location (cf. the western shore (*Lääneranna*) or the northern coast (*Põhjaranniku*) of Estonia), or the proposed name was some kind of a hybrid (Kehtna + Järvakandi > Kehtnakandi). In the end, out of these names an official decision was only made on Lääneranna, as at the beginning the task force was not too resolute in fending off such names.
2. **Taking advantage of major and well-known place names** – including proposing names with 'territorial pretentions' Some merging rural municipalities found it tempting to take advantage of a name's renown and marketability despite the fact that the name proposed did not have any direct association with the respective region or that the meaning of the name was broader (or sometimes narrower) than the territory of the merging rural municipalities. For example, some names proposed for rural municipalities were the names of lakes on a border (the name Peipsi (from Lake Peipus) was requested simultaneously by two groups of rural municipalities – one in the county of Jõgevamaa and the other in the county of Tartumaa; the name Võrtsjärve was requested by the rural municipalities

that had a centre in Elva on the eastern side of the lake Võrtsjärv). The most ambitious name proposal was the rural municipality of Põhja-Liivimaa (Northern Livonia) for the rural municipalities in the southern part of the county of Pärnumaa (currently, there are two rural municipalities – Häädemeeste and Saarde), although it was known that the entire northern part of the former Governorate of Livonia – southern Estonia and Saaremaa – could be considered as Põhja-Liivimaa. Another difficult case was the name of the Lahemaa rural municipality that was proposed by the rural municipalities of Haljala and Vihula. The new rural municipality would have covered only the eastern part of the area known as the Lahemaa natural region (leaving out the part in the Kuusalu rural municipality). At the same time, it would have been larger than the actual region because a part of the Haljala rural municipality is not associated with Lahemaa. As the Kuusalu rural municipality protested, the name Lahemaa was not approved and instead, the rural municipality was formed with the name Haljala, based on the name of the parish. A great deal of conflict arose concerning the name of the Mulgi rural municipality (proposed for the merging rural municipalities of Abja, Halliste, Karksi and Mõisaküla), as it covered only a part of the historical region known as Mulgimaa. As the rural municipalities around Helme, which had for a while considered the name Lõuna-Mulgi (South Mulgi), chose the name Tõrva, and the Tarvastu rural municipality merged with the Viljandi rural municipality, then in the end there were no other contenders for the name Mulgi, which was approved as the name of the above-mentioned merged rural municipality. The Place Names Board also approved the name of the Alutaguse rural municipality with some reservations, although historically Alutaguse has designated a larger area and after the 1938–39 reform the Alutaguse rural municipality was actually situated in the northern part of Vaivara.

3. **Applications to start from scratch** In some places it was agreed that the name of the new rural municipality would not be based on the names of any of the merging rural municipalities. This often ruled out reasonable name variants; for example, the common name chosen for the rural municipalities of Haaslava, Mäksa and Võnnu was the Kastre rural municipality, although the parish name Võnnu would have been more justified. The common name chosen for Kõo, Kõpu, Suure-Jaani and Võhma was the Põhja-Sakala rural municipality, based on a reconstruction of a historical name, instead of the Suure-Jaani rural municipality that would have been based on the name of the centre.
4. **Horse-trading** Without mentioning any names, it was said that in some places there was some horse-trading over the name of a new rural municipality in the style of 'we will get the centre of the rural municipality, you will get the name of the rural municipality'. There is no need to explain that this, too, did not contribute to a rational choice of a name.
5. **Areas that were difficult to name** Sometimes the area that emerged as a result of the merging of rural municipalities was so large that it was impossible to find a suitable historical name for it. For example, the rural municipalities in the Järvamaa county which did not merge with Paide and Türi got the name Järva rural municipality, although the latter covers only the eastern and northern parts of the historical county. The rural municipalities from Noarootsi to Kullamaa that merged in the northern part of the Läänemaa county got the name Lääne-Nigula rural municipality, although the parish with the same name makes up only a small part of the territory of the new rural municipality.

At the end of 2016, the names of the voluntarily merged rural municipalities and cities were submitted to the government for approval. In several cases, the Place Names Board submitted a dissenting opinion or

a recommendation for consideration. The government took into account five of them, approving the names Haljala rural municipality (initial proposal Lahemaa rural municipality), Kehtna rural municipality (Kehtnakandi rural municipality), Rõuge rural municipality (Haanjamaa rural municipality), Toila rural municipality (Põhjaranniku rural municipality) and Võru rural municipality (Võhandu rural municipality).[6]

As the voluntary mergers of rural municipalities were followed in 2017 by mergers initiated by the government, some approved names of rural municipalities changed because at that stage, the decisions were made on the basis of the proposals of the Place Names Board. For example, even though the city of Kiviõli and the Sonda rural municipality had voluntarily merged to form the Kiviõli rural municipality, after their subsequent merger with the Lüganuse rural municipality, the name of the merged rural municipality was chosen on the basis of the parish name Lüganuse.

In total, there were 51 voluntary mergers and government-initiated mergers. In 36 cases (71%), the new municipality preserved the name of one of the merging rural municipalities or cities, in 4 cases the name was preserved together with a changed generic term (Elva city → rural municipality, Mustvee city → rural municipality, Tõrva city → rural municipality, Valga city → rural municipality) and in 11 cases (22 %) a new name was given to the rural municipality (Alutaguse, Hiiumaa, Järva, Kastre, Lääne-Harju, Lääneranna, Mulgi, Põhja-Pärnumaa, Põhja-Sakala, Saaremaa, Setomaa). Of the latter, only Lääneranna is a completely new name, while the rest are based on existing place names.

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[6] Some recommendations had been made in a lenient form; for example, the Place Names Board preferred the names Lihula (instead of Lääneranna), Lääne-Mulgi, Abja-Mulgi or Halliste-Karksi (instead of Mulgi) and Võnnu (instead of Kastre), but these were not taken into account by the government. As there were two municipalities in Hiiumaa that merged at the first stage of the reform, the Board proposed the name Hiiu rural municipality, but the government opted for the Hiiumaa rural municipality, expecting the merger of all municipalities on the island.

The following is an overview of the division of the names of merged municipalities on the basis of the recommendations of the Place Names Board:

- names of parishes and old rural municipalities[7]: Anija, Antsla, Haljala, Häädemeeste, Jõgeva, Kambja, Kanepi, Kehtna, Lääne-Nigula, Lüganuse, Märjamaa, Otepää, Peipsiääre, Põltsamaa, Põlva, Rakvere, Rapla, Rõuge, Räpina, Saarde, Saue, Tartu, Toila, Tori, Viljandi, Viru-Nigula, Võru, Väike-Maarja (in total 28);
- names of centres: Elva, Haapsalu city, Mustvee, Narva-Jõesuu city, Paide city, Pärnu city, Tapa, Tartu city, Tõrva, Türi, Valga, Vinni (12);
- prominent names (of natural objects) in the territory of merging rural municipalities (including names of regions); Alutaguse, Hiiumaa, Järva, Mulgi, Saaremaa, Setomaa (6);
- county names containing a compass point: Lääne-Harju, Põhja-Pärnumaa, Põhja-Sakala (3);
- new names: Lääneranna (1);
- compound names of merging rural municipalities: none;
- unclassified: Kastre (1).

The name Kastre is difficult to classify, as the manor municipality with that name last existed in the 19th century. By the 20th century, it had merged with Võnnu to become the Kastre-Võnnu rural municipality, which existed until the 1938–39 rural municipal reform. If we take Kastre to be a historical fortress name, it could perhaps be included in the third group. The third group in the above classification has been extended with the names of regions, which were not mentioned specifically in the original wording of the recommendations.

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[7] The delimitation of the first two groups is somewhat arbitrary. Here the names are rather included in the first group if the new name is based on the name of the rural municipality that was used before 1940.

The classification of the choice of names by post-merger municipalities

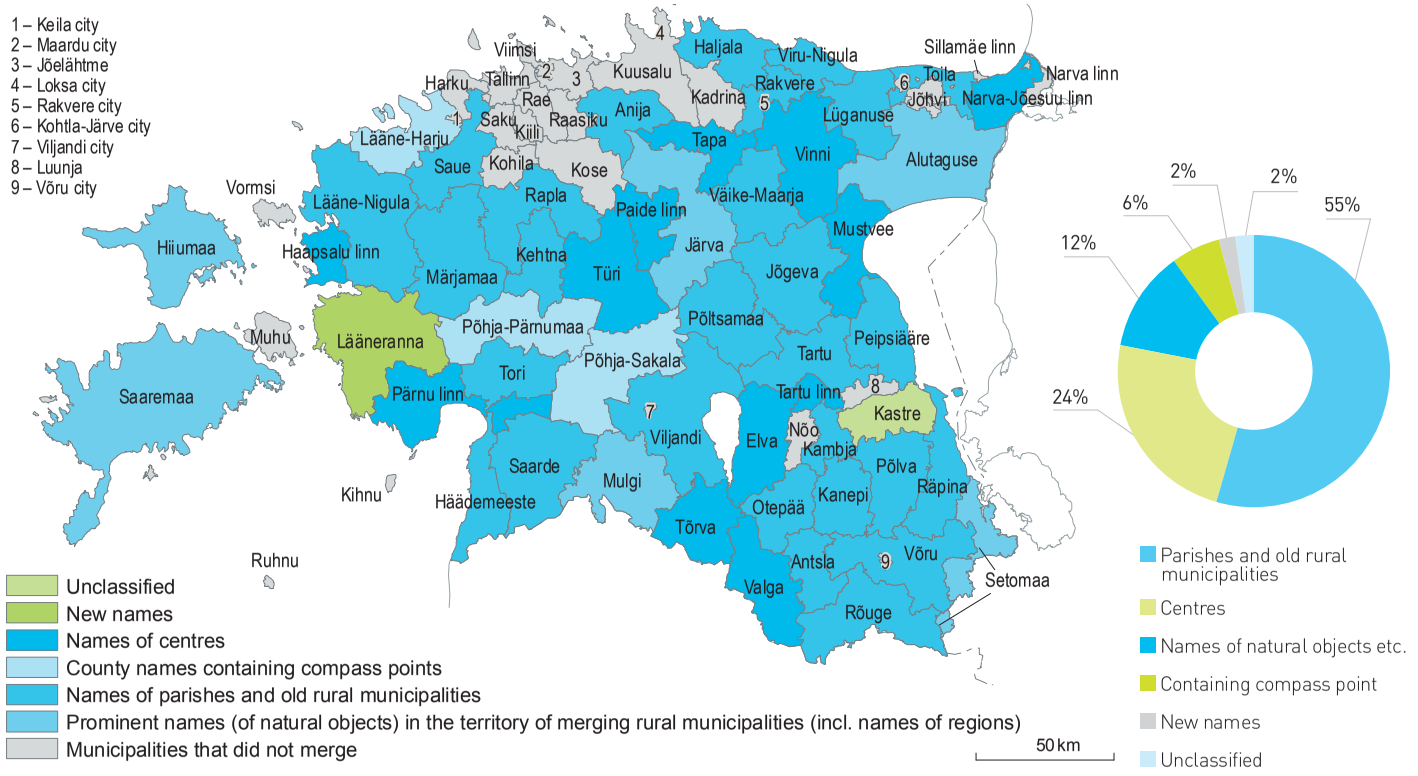

Figure 1.

If we compare the 2017 administrative reform with the reform carried out at the end of the 1930s with a focus on the names of rural municipalities, then it is of course apparent that during the previous reform great importance was attached to the Estonianisation of the names and preference was given to shorter names. Furthermore, quite a few new names of rural municipalities that had not existed before were introduced at the time of the previous reform (Assamalla, Iru, Kalda, Lepistu, Linnuse, Lõuna, Piiri, Põdrala, Rajangu, Raudna, Ruusmäe, Tihemetsa, Tõdva, Vaoküla, Voore etc.). In the recent administrative reform, emphasis was laid on the preservation of historical identity. Although the Estonian origin of the names was acknowledged (it was added to the recommendations that historical names in a foreign language, such as Maritima or Rotalia, were not suitable), this was not the primary concern. Furthermore, the shortness of the names no longer appeared to play a role, as some names that were chosen also included cumbersome hyphenated forms (Põhja-Pärnumaa, Põhja-Sakala). One might perhaps generalise that name-related disputes focused primarily on which identity was stronger – that of a centre (e.g. Ülenurme, Mäksa) or a region (Kambja, Võnnu). In several cases it was the identity of a region that lost out, particularly when it was associated with parishes (Iisaku, Kodavere, Lihula, Torma, Võnnu etc. were discarded). However, there are also examples of cases where the identity of a region won (Häädemeeste, Saarde, Tori, Viru-Nigula), partly thanks to the choices made by the government (Kambja, Lüganuse, Rõuge).

There were undoubtedly also other disputes that took place under the guise of name disputes, which had to do with power; that is, whose word would prevail, but it is difficult to generalise about these. The disputes and the chosen names caused bitterness in a number of places; time will tell which of these names will remain and which will not be accepted in the end.

In the recent administrative reform, the problem that the terms designating administrative divisions and settlement units are in some

cases ambiguous remained unresolved. When one had already become somewhat used to the fact that 'city' could also designate a settlement unit without municipal status (e.g. Otepää city in Otepää rural municipality), then the Administrative Reform Act (Article 14(1)) provided for the possibility that the type of a new municipality formed as a result of a merger of a city and a rural municipality (rural municipalities) could remain a 'city'. The *Riigikogu* generously permitted the application of this principle also retrospectively for previously merged cities and rural municipalities (Article 14(2)). This generosity created a situation where one and the same name can simultaneously designate an administrative division (a larger area) and a settlement unit (a smaller area). There are now in total five municipalities that have ambiguous names: Haapsalu city, Narva-Jõesuu city, Paide city, Pärnu city and Tartu city.[8]

These cases will certainly cause problems in communication and require further explanation and cumbersome clarifications.[9] The requirement that a name (e.g. Pärnu city) be written twice in an official postal address – first to designate the administrative division and then the settlement unit – has already received public attention. The problem needs further discussion; while four of these cases could be resolved by changing 'city' to 'rural municipality' (e.g. Haapsalu rural municipality), Tartu rural municipality already exists and it would be unacceptable to give Tartu city a different name.

The case of the double meaning of 'city' has clearly to do with a political incentive that was offered to the local authorities of merging municipalities in the hope of dispelling their potential resistance to

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[8] Cf. Otepää city, which is an unambiguous designation that only stands for a settlement unit.

[9] For example, in the online version of Eesti kohanimeraamat (a reference book on Estonian place names), for the entry on Pärnu city as a settlement unit, its administrative attachment has been explained with the wording 'a city in Pärnu county in the administrative jurisdiction of Pärnu city'. This means that 'city' as an administrative division in the five above-mentioned cases has been replaced with 'the administrative jurisdiction of city'. This is certainly not ideal but helps to avoid the misunderstanding that a 'city' as an administrative division could be seen as the same as a 'city' as a settlement unit.

giving up established names. The question of whether a municipality is led by a rural municipal mayor or a city mayor should actually be an issue of tertiary importance and could have been resolved the way it was done in Saaremaa, where it was decided that the rural municipal mayor of Saaremaa would also perform the functions of the city mayor of Kuressaare. In what way is the identity of Narva-Jõesuu city more important than that of the cities of Kuressaare or Valga (both have disappeared as administrative divisions) should be a separate topic for the government in an analysis of the results of the administrative reform.

Changes to village names

It came as a surprise to many people that as a result of the administrative reform, village names, too, had to be changed, as names could not be repeated within one municipality. There are many Liivakülas, Metsakülas, Mõisakülas and so on in Estonia; some of them happened to be in one and the same new rural municipality. Under the applicable laws, official village names are approved by the Minister of Public Administration, on the basis of proposals made by the local authorities.

The Place Names Board drew up a short list of recommendations on how to change the names of the villages that had the same name (20.12.2016[10]). With regard to the history of names, the most sparing solution was considered to be complementing the repeated names with a qualifying attribute; for example, with the name of the respective former manor, the name of a merging rural municipality, or in some cases the name of a neighbouring village. In individual cases, one could consider restoring a historical variant of the name of the settlement or altering the name in another way. In any case, all settlement names had to be considered as having historical value and it was recommended not to merge settlements with neighbouring villages.

[10] http://www.eki.ee/knn/knn_kulanimede_soovitused.pdf (14.12.2017).

From April to June 2017, the members of the Place Names Board gave rural municipalities concrete recommendations as to what kinds of names they could consider. The task was difficult due to the fact that some combinations of mergers of rural municipalities and hence also repeated names were disclosed at the last minute. Some of the proposals were approved by rural municipalities but in several cases they proposed their own variants. A detailed overview of the steps taken and the ways in which the names were chosen in rural municipalities is provided in the explanatory memorandum added to the list of the settlement units in Estonia (RT I, 16.10.2017).[11] Saaremaa had the greatest number of repeating names that needed to be changed; it was agreed early on that the village with the largest population would not be required to change its name. This principle was also applied later on in other cases, and so the number of names to be changed could be nearly halved.

For various reasons, some rural municipalities did not take the initiative to change the repeated names, and therefore it was necessary to apply point 1 of Article 21 of the Place Names Act that obligated the Place Names Board to approve, by a resolution, official place names based on named features for which place names had not been established by a names authority and where it was necessary for an official place name to be established. At the proposal of the Place Names Board, the Minister of Public Administration approved the village names in the merged Hiiumaa rural municipality, and in the Märjamaa and Võru rural municipalities.

The majority of the villages whose names had to be changed were new settlement villages that had emerged on lands expropriated from the manors in the 1920s. These were often villages that had been merged with their neighbouring villages in the course of the 1975–77 rural settlements reform and that had been restored in 1997–98. Apart from

[11] https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/171010_asustusuksuste_nimistu maarus_sk__0.pdf (14.12.2017).

that, there were also relatively old villages; for example, Kirderanna[12] (former Rannaküla, named after the manor, an earlier record of which probably dates back to the year 1506), Laevaranna (former Rannaküla, first mentioned as a farm name probably in 1645), Pöide-Keskvere (a former manor, first mentioned in 1645).

All in all, changes were made to 50 village names, including 31 in Saaremaa and 9 in Võrumaa. Nine villages were merged with other villages, including eight in Saaremaa and one in Võrumaa. On the basis of the neighbourhoods that were transferred from Kohtla-Järve to Narva-Jõesuu, two new villages (Sirgala and Viivikonna) were formed.[13]

A closer look at the changed names reveals that most of them acquired a qualifying attribute. This was either the name of a parish or rural municipality, including an old manor municipality (Kaarma-Jõe, Kihelkonna-Liiva, Laitsna-Hurda, Pöide-Keskvere, Püha-Kõnnu, Pühalepa-Harju, Rõuge-Matsi, Valjala-Ariste), the name of a region (Sõrve-Hindu), the name of a neighbouring village (Kaali-Liiva, Rootsi-Aruküla, Vaigu-Rannaküla), or another name (Kahrila-Mustahamba after the historical village of Kahrila). Another possibility that was used was restoring an earlier form of a name. For example, Salevere in the former Koonga rural municipality was changed to Salavere, although the Place Names Board recommended reviewing that name once again because it had a misleading similarity with another Salevere village. In a few cases, the qualifying attributes Suur- or Väike- were used, although the respective villages were far away from each other. For example, te village of Ula in the former Salme rural municipality was renamed Väike-Ula, while Ula village, which preserved its name, is situated in the former Pöide rural municipality. The former settlement villages Koidu, Põlluküla, Tamsalu and Viira were merged with Randvere village in the former Lääne-Saare rural municipality and the new village was named Suur-Randvere, while

[12] Here the new, changed names have been used as the main name.

[13] http://www.eki.ee/knn/muutunud_kylanimed_2017.htm (14.12.2017).

the Randvere village without an attribute remained in the former Pöide rural municipality.

In several cases, the possibility was used to alter a name, by adding to it a new element (Laheküla → Allikalahe, Liiva → Liivaranna, Nõmme → Liivanõmme, Rannaküla → Kirderanna and Laevaranna, Veere → Veeremäe) or by changing a part of a name (Väljaküla → Väljamõisa, Nõmme → Nõmjala[14]). In five cases, a completely different name was introduced, such as the name of a natural object (Laheküla → Tirbi, Rannaküla → Rooglaiu), a parallel name of a village (Kallaste → Vodi) or the name of a (group of) farm(s) (Metsaküla → Lussu, Pulli → Põdramõtsa).

Except in the case of the formation of the Suur-Randvere village, the reason for merging villages was often the fact that the residents did not consider the name of their village important enough and preferred it to be merged with a neighbouring village. The Laheküla village in the former Orissaare rural municipality was merged with Maasi, the Mõisaküla village in the former Salme rural municipality was merged with Kaugatoma, the Rannaküla village of the former Laimjala rural municipality was merged with Saareküla etc.

The changes to the village names were made over a relatively short period of time, which is why the Place Names Board approved some names (Kirderanna, Salavere) 'provisionally', in order to avoid problems in the address system. The relevant rural municipalities will be sent a recommendation to review these names once again.

Conclusion

The 2017 administrative reform was carried out in two stages: voluntary mergers and government-initiated mergers. The names that were proposed during the first stage gave rise to frequent disputes, as due to its sensitivity, this question in several rural municipalities was left

[14] It was said that the name had been used on the day of villages and that it had been derived from its location between Valjala and Laimjala.

among the last to be discussed, which often did not help. Therefore, the names from the first stage include a larger number of those that were not the first preference of the Place Names Board. As the right of initiative belonged to the government in the second stage, who also accepted the Board's preferences, the proposed names were more in line with the recommendations. All in all, one could perhaps be satisfied with the names of rural municipalities, as the general picture is better than expected.

The need to change village names was largely an unintended consequence of the reform, as in an ideal case, name changes should be avoided altogether. Due to the short time for preparations, it was not possible to propose alternatives in the administrative and address systems, which would have helped to avoid the repeated names. In the long-term, it is probably reasonable to propose alternatives, as it is likely that there will be new mergers in the future that will affect subsequently repeated village names.