

Street Names and Identity. Official Naming in a European Capital of Culture

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Abstract

Street names are links to the past. The semantic content of many names reflects historical traditions and various cultural aspects of the urban area, sometimes also of the nation and the international community. As appointed European capital of culture in 2008, Stavanger (Southwest-Norway) and the neighbouring city Sandnes have made commitments to promote cultural heritage and regional identity. The street names of the two cities reflect historical traditions, activities, events and development of mentality, as well as characteristic features in the local dialect. With some exceptions the names seem to help promote cultural curiosity and create regional identity, and may thus be said to match the vision, values and goals of the Stavanger 2008 cultural programme.

1. The Stavanger 2008 cultural programme

As appointed European capital of culture in 2008 (together with Liverpool) by the European Union, Stavanger and the neighbouring city Sandnes have made commitments to promote cultural heritage and regional identity in years to come. The vision of the *Stavanger 2008* cultural programme, “Open port”, can be understood in its Scandinavian sense ‘open gate’, as well as in its English meaning of ‘open port’. One of the objectives for Stavanger 2008 is contribution to “cultural curiosity and tolerance”, another one enhancement of “regional identity and pride”. “Cultural heritage and development” is mentioned among the values. With their own history, tradition and culture as a starting point, the two cities wish to incorporate values and ideas from the whole world and thus form the future.

With a population of approximately 190 000 Stavanger and Sandnes form Norway’s third largest urban area, next to Oslo and Bergen, however, with a higher growth of the population per cent than the two bigger cities (Helle et al. 2006: 500). There are approximately 15 km between the two city centres.

The programme of Stavanger 2008 may be seen in relationship with different aspects of urban life and culture, e.g., official naming. How is cultural heritage and identity reflected in the cities’ names, and how is the special character of the two cities expressed in the names? In this context it is relevant to study the linguistic content and form, as well as the values that politicians wish to promote through the official naming.

The link between cultural heritage and memory on the one hand and identity on the other has in recent time been emphasized by researchers as well as urban planners. Some researchers take the view that collective identity and cultural memory have become important due to an identity crisis in the post-modern era (Bauman 2000, Krogseth 2007). Dissemination of our cultural heritage is a necessary base for identity.

2. Naming process and naming principles

In major Norwegian cities the *official* naming of streets, squares, etc. dates back to the mid 19th century; however, a number of names were given in mediaeval times. Bergen established a street name commission in 1822, Oslo in 1847 and Stavanger in 1861 (Stemshaug 1985: 140). In Stavanger the commission evaluated the existing names of streets, etc., and suggested new names (Næss 1967). From 1861 to the present day politicians have regularly given new names and decided the linguistic form.

The city council of Stavanger has also decided the naming procedures and principles to be followed. The inhabitants are invited to suggest names. There is a recommendation to use toponyms that already exist in an area. The council of the city area is invited to give its opinion, and two national name advisers evaluate the written form. The final decision is made by the street name council. Similar procedures and principles are followed in Sandnes. The street name register of Stavanger contains 1750 names, and that of Sandnes 800.

In addition to the official names there are unofficial ones. They are used in the dialect, often with an element of humour, sometimes as an alternative to an official name. One example from the labour quarters of Stavanger is *Ølklemma* /'ø:lklemlã/ ('the beer trap'), a place where one could buy beer and liquor, "at that time a Sodom", according to a local historian (Henriksen 1953: 90).

Some official names are in the dialect used in a grammatical form which differs from the official form; this may apply to gender, definite form and composition. Examples are: *Nytorget* (neuter), pronounced /'ny:tãrjã/ (feminine), *Fiskepiren* (*e*-composition), pronounced /'fiskapi:ren/ (*a*-composition) and *Haugvaldstads gate* (indefinite form), pronounced /'haugvalstaga:dã/ (definite form).

3. Official naming in Stavanger and Sandnes

3.1 Mediaeval times

In the toponyms of a mediaeval city, like Stavanger, one expects to find several historical layers, reflecting the development of the city – in this case from a religious centre in early mediaeval times to a modern international city and oil capital. The names are believed to represent different stages of development, including a change of mentality throughout the generations, e.g., with regard to social classes, gender and the dialect versus the written standard.

The name *Stavanger*, Old Norse *Stafangr*, is often mentioned in mediaeval sources, consisting of the elements *angr* 'fjord, bay', and *Staf* 'stick, pole', probably describing the bay which now is called *Vågen*, and the headland on the eastern shore, called *Skagen* (Særheim 2007: 216). The name *Skagen*, 'straight headland', is also mentioned in mediaeval sources (*de Skaganom* 1296). It now denotes a street alongside the bay.

Several names refer to mediaeval institutions, e.g., *Olavskleivå* (*kleiv* 'steep road') to a St. Olav monastery. *Kannikbakken* (*bakke* 'steep road') and *Kannikgata* are linked to the property of the canons of St. Svithun's church, Stavanger Cathedral, built in the 1120s. St. Svithun is the patron of Stavanger; Svithun was a bishop in Winchester approx. 800. *Pedersgata* refers to St. Peter's church and a connected hospital, founded in 1270 by King Magnus Lagabøte (the 'law-reformer'), referred to by *Hospitalgata*.

The see (bishopric) of Stavanger was founded approximately 1125, which is recognized as the founding year of the city. This institution is reflected in *Bispeladegård* ('the bishop's farm'). The mediaeval cathedral school is referred to in *Skolebekken* (a brook). Old field names are represented: *Arneageren* ('Arne's field'), linked to *Arnegard* (*j Aarne gardhe* 1404), 'Arne's farm'.

Official names referring to mediaeval institutions are historical links and contributions to a collective memory and consciousness of the city's oldest history. However, quite a few names found in written sources from that time are not included among the official names. This especially applies to farm and habitation names (Helle 1975: 150–153).

Sandnes, at present one of Norway's fastest growing cities, was founded in 1860. The name means 'sandy headland'. Even though this is a young city, the urban area is expanding into former farmland where farming has been continuous since the Bronze Age. Some of the oldest toponyms, especially settlement names, seem to date back to that period. The names are signs of old and continuous habitation and activity in the area.

3.2 Activities, traditions and topographical features

Many activities and traditions are mentioned in the street names. Some refer to communication and transport: *Strandgata* leads to the harbour ('the strand'). Earlier, at *Buseneset* one could get on a ferry (ON *búza*) to cross the fjord. *Tjodveien* is the old road for the common 'people' (*tjod*). *Rosenkildegata* contains the name of an old trade firm, the House of Rosenkilde.

Some names refer to the shipping industry: *Skippergate* (sailors), *Verven* (shipyard), *Steinkargata* and *Dokksmauet* (both refer to docks). Rope was manufactured in *Banevigsgata*. In younger names the oil industry is mentioned: *Heidrunveien* and *Statfjordveien* (referring to oil fields in The North Sea).

Street names mention old handicraft and trade: *Kiprå* and *Bøkkersmauet* refer to coopers, *Høkkergata* to hucksters (small grocer), *Garvergata* to tanners, *Seilmakergata* to sailmakers and *Smeaheiveien* to blacksmiths. Sandnes was founded on pottery and brick works: *Simonsbakken* includes the name of an old potter; *Altonagata* and *Altona* (brickyard) refer to workers from Altona (Hamburg), who took part in this industry.

Various parts of old town life and culture are mentioned. *Skanssegata* is situated by the old battery of the harbour. *Brønngata* refers to a well in the street and *St. Hans gate* to an assembly place for celebration and bonfire on Midsummer Day. *Asylgata* is named after an institution where children from labourers' homes were taken care of while their parents were at work. *Klubbegata* is named after a still existing institution where men from the upper and middle classes used to meet for drinks and conversation.

Some names are connected with religious life, reflecting that Stavanger has been a centre of missionary work in Norway: *Misjonsveien* (site of the oldest Norwegian missionary organization), *Brødregata* (*brødre* 'brothers', a religious group connected with the Herrnhut-movement), *Emmausveien* and *Vaisenhusgata* (property and home for orphans, run by the local home mission).

Several names describe farming and farm land: *Løkkeveien* (*løkke* 'paddock', in the outskirts of the old town), *Kjelvene* (*kjelve* is a local word for 'meadow'), *Molkeholen* (a hill where the cows were milked), *Markageilen* (a cattle track), *Dugane* (cultivated land, used to be bog).

Many street names include a topographical name – of a bay, headland, island, lake, stream, bog or mountain. The name is most often older than the street. The names give an impression of the landscape before it became part of the city, e.g., *Holmegate* (*Holmen*, 'the small island'; earlier called *Kuholmen*: the cows used to graze there).

Many topographical names were included in the street names when the two cities expanded into areas that earlier belonged to neighbouring municipalities: *Kjervastadveien* (containing the name of a farm from the Iron Age, *Kjervastad*), *Dreggjavikveien* (a bay where boats used to be anchored), *Iglemyrveien* (a bog with leeches; earlier used in medicine). The names refer to the landscape and working processes within farming, fishing, sailing, etc. This way of naming is in accordance with the recommendation to use already existing names when naming new streets and areas.

3.3 Memorial names

Approximately 390 names of streets, etc., in Stavanger are so-called memorial names, containing the names of approximately 370 different persons. The persons chosen normally represent the upper or middle classes, which illustrates the values among people in important political positions.

Only a few streets are named after women, in Stavanger only 50 streets, while 338 are named after men. Among the 49 women chosen only 13 have had a special link to the Stavanger region. Most of them belong to the national scene, e.g., representing arts and culture (Amalie Skram), science (Botaniker Resvoll), sports (Sonja Henie), the royal family (Dronning Maud) and mediaeval history (Dronning Ragna).

For the men the situation is different. 113 of the 318 men represented have had a strong link to Stavanger and the region, being outstanding persons within enterprise, business, politics, education, culture and social life. This difference is obviously due to attitudes with regard to gender. The merits of men have been regarded as more valuable than the contributions of women. In the 1970s and 80s, however, the representation of women improved considerably, e.g., with eight streets named after women and eleven after men in the 1980s.

It is also interesting to study the use of title in street names. The title is included in some names to show an important position: *Byfoged Christensens gate* (city magistrate), *Losoldermann Natvigs vei* (master of the pilots at sea), *Consul Sigval Bergesens vei* (consul). In street names from Stavanger containing a woman's name only two of the persons are mentioned with a title: *Botaniker Resvolls gate* and *Dr. Martha Persens gate*. The situation for men is different: 52 men are mentioned with a title. This difference is obviously due to the different attitudes concerning men and women, but it is also due to the fact that very few streets were named after women before 1950 – the use of title was more common in earlier generations.

In a few examples only the first name of the person is mentioned: *Børehaugen*, *Jensahagen*, *Gitlesmauet* and *Finklasmauet*, i.e., *Børe*, *Jens*, *Gitle* and *Finkel*. The names are made in the same way as normal toponyms, in accordance with the dialect. Another example is *Tidesmauet*, where the first part of the surname, (*Jacob*) *Thideman*, is adjusted to the local language.

3.4 Group naming

In the 1960s and 70s, when the area and population of the two cities expanded, it was common to name groups of streets with similar semantic elements, e.g., words or names representing animals, plants, geology, astronomy, mythology, sports, etc. Normally the names had no link to tradition in the area. In some cases new constructed names were chosen instead of already existing toponyms, e.g., names containing names of actresses (*Johanne Dybwads gate*, *Agnes Mowinckels gate*) and mountain summer farms (*Lauvastølveien*, *Stranddalsveien*) in an area with several local toponyms referring to farming, e.g., *Jonsvoll*, *Gjetarshaugen*, *Skultahagen*, *Berghagen*, *Hushagen*, *Nedrehagen* and *Hestahagen*. The politicians did not follow the naming principle to use place names that already existed in the area.

Another way of naming streets in a group which is quite common, is the use of the same name element, often an already existing place name, e.g., *Gravaren*, and different endings: *Gravarsbråtet* ('steep hill'), *-kroken* ('hook'), *-lia* ('mountainside'), *-tunet* ('yard'), *-veien* ('road'), and *-verket* ('brickyard').

3.5. The local dialect

More elements from the dialect have been introduced in the official names of Stavanger and Sandnes in the last 20–25 years. This is a result of the dialect movement in Norway, which started in the early 1970s, and the growing understanding of the relationship between toponyms and local identity. Elements from the dialect are used to emphasize that the names are part of the local

culture. They represent continuity as well as individuality, due to the fact that the dialect is unique. Typical local words are used, e.g., endings like *-foren* ('wet piece of land [with a brook]', cf. English *ford*; *Stanglandsforen*) and *-been* ('small piece of land'; *Forusbeen*).

Some grammatical forms in the dialect are used, e.g., definite feminine nouns ending in *-å* (instead of *-a*, which is the national norm): *Torvmyrå* ('the peat marsh'), *Sandgåddå* ('the sandy path'). Other feminine nouns are written in accordance with the national standard, with an *-a*: *Elvegata* ('the street by the river').

In some names pronunciations typical for the dialect but different from the standard language are marked: *Ramslandsbergjet* (*-berget*, 'the mountain'), *Tostenkroken* (the personal name *Torstein*), *Vibestraen* (*-stranden*, 'harbour'), *Kvednaholen* (*Kverna-*, 'mill'). But there is inconsistency also on this point; the same word has got different forms in different names: *Kvednaberget–Kvernevik* (*kvern*), *Vibemyr–Vipeveien* (*vipe* 'lapwing'), *Hatleveien–Hasselveien* (*hassel* 'hazel'), the last mentioned in accordance with the standard, the other one with the dialect.

Quite a few names are composed in accordance with the dialect, e.g., with *-a* in *Klasaskjeret*, *Jensahagen*, *Lassaveien*, *Heiamyrå* and *Myrabergjene*. There is, however, inconsistency also on this point; the same name element has different forms in different names: *Ulvaryggjen–Ulveveien* (*ulv* 'wolf'), *Sundtagårdsveien–Sundtebakken* (*Sundt*, a surname).

In some names old grammatical forms are used, in accordance with the dialect. *Skredbakka* and *Hagabakka* contain an old case ending *-a* of *bakke* 'hill, slope'. Words and grammatical forms reflecting Danish influence are kept in *Sølyst*, *Bjergsted* and *Rosenli*.

4. Conclusion

The street names of Stavanger and Sandnes give an impression of great diversity with regard to historical background, semantic content and grammatical form. They reflect different stages of the development of the cities. The cultural dimension also applies to the linguistic form. Urban names are connecting links to the past and signs of continuity. The names also represent individuality, due to the fact that they are unique and contain characteristic linguistic elements. With some exceptions the names seem to help promote cultural curiosity and create regional identity, and thus match the values and goals of the Stavanger 2008 cultural programme. They represent cultural heritage and development, and might contribute to the creation of regional identity and the vision of open ports.

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