AN OVERVIEW OF THE PLACE NAME SYSTEMS OF TWO COASTAL AREAS IN ESTONIA

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Abstract: This article describes the place name systems of two Estonian coastal regions. There are settlement names as well as independent microtoponyms and this is characteristic of both regions. The main difference of the place name register of the Vergi peninsula in North Estonia is the earlier marginal part of agronyms, which today has fully perished. However, the percentage of hydronyms equals the percentage of settlement names. The proportion of agronyms in the Körkvere region is decreasing, but it still has an important role in the register in addition to settlement names. While the farm names of Körkvere are fixed and not subject to changes related to the owner, the farm names of Vergi are influenced by personal names and parallel names are also used in naming farms. Of the names in the Körkvere region 35% have been preserved since 1933 and 57% of the names on the Vergi peninsula have been preserved since 1967. Their loss is mainly caused by extralinguistic factors: for farm names the developed name tradition is also important.

Keywords: toponyms, name change, rural place names, socio-onomastics, place name system.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the place name systems of two coastal areas in Estonia. One of them is the Kõrkvere region on the biggest island in Estonia – Saaremaa, which is located in West Estonia. This is where my roots are and my sense of place name system is based on that tradition. I conducted several place name collection fieldwork activities there between the years 2004 and 2007. When I went to collect the place names from the second coastal area – the Vergi peninsula on the northern coast of Estonia in 2013 and 2015, I presumed that the situation of place names would be quite similar to the situation on the island of Saaremaa. At the beginning, it seemed very different compared to Saaremaa. In my article, I want to take a close look at those two place name systems to ascertain the kinds of dissimilarities there are (if any) and how extensive they are.

About the field of study

The Kõrkvere region is situated on the coast of East Saaremaa, approximately 175 kilometers from Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. The Vergi peninsula is located

on the coast of North Estonia, about 90 km from Tallinn. The settlements in both regions have existed for centuries and the villages are relatively small and densely populated.

Historically, the activities in the Kõrkvere region in Saaremaa have included agriculture and coastal fishing, while on the Vergi peninsula on the northern coast, the livelihood has mostly been connected to the sea – fishing, seafaring, boatbuilding and maritime trade. Today, the Vergi peninsula is more of a summer resort area, where the permanent residents are mostly older people and the population is dramatically increased by seasonal holidaymakers. In the Kõrkvere region, the population is more permanent, but it also increases in summer.

Both regions are characterized by a subdivided coastline with many shallows, but the beaches on the northern coast have much more boulders. The landscape in both regions is flat: the inland of the Vergi peninsula on the northern coast is covered with forests; in the Kõrkvere region on the island of Saaremaa, there is more arable land than forest areas.

Research material

In order to compare the place name systems of the two regions, I restricted the research areas to 26 square kilometers where the number of residential houses is almost the same. Both regions constitute a whole where the long-time natives are familiar with each other and they have places they use in common.

The material for the research comes from two sources. I collected the contemporary onomasticon myself by means of fieldwork. From 2004 to 2007, I collected 358 place names from eight villages in the Kõrkvere region, and from 2013 to 2015, I collected 330 place names from seven villages on the Vergi peninsula. The earlier material for comparison comes from the place name catalog of the Institute of the Estonian Language. The place names of Kõrkvere date back to the year 1933 (490 names) and the names of the Vergi peninsula date back to 1967 (411 names). In total, 646 name objects with 686 names in Kõrkvere and 478 name objects with 563 names in Vergi are analysed.

Place name system

The place name system (or place name association or place name set) is a complex of place names used by the inhabitants of a certain territory. Estonian place name researcher Marja Kallasmaa has detected that the Estonian place name associations seem to fall into two types. The first type consists mainly of toponyms based on independent stem words and includes numerous natural and cultivation names. This type of name association is characterized by the abundance of cultivation names, while natural names are mainly primary names and fewer names are derived from other place names. The first type of name systems is mainly found on coastal areas and islands, where soils are poorer and people hold on to the traditional division of lands. The first

type is older and originates from strip-farming times, when the patches of land belonging to a household were scattered across the village territory. The name associations of the first type can be found in the areas of cluster villages and linear villages (Kallasmaa 2000b: 65, 71).

The second type consists of village and farm names, while the number of natural and cultivation names is relatively small, and not even those few are independent, but they are derived from farm or village names. For example, the property of *Jaani talu* (farm) included *Jaani heinamaa* (meadow), *Jaani karjamaa* (pasture), *Jaani mägi* (hill) etc. The second type is connected with parceling lands into lots, a process that began in the mid–19th century and lingered, in places, up to the year 1940 (Kallasmaa 2000a: 65–68; 2000b: 125–126; 2005: 140; 2012: 256). The traditional use of land was changed, so instead of community fields where every farm had their own part of land, the land was measured in a way that every farm received their private land close to their farmyard. In order to do that, the farm houses from older farmsteads were taken to the new lots and densely populated villages became dispersed villages. After the scattered landholdings had been consolidated, the farms became separate entities and their mutual connections loosened (Kallasmaa 2000b: 126). The second type of place names can be seen mainly in dispersed villages, especially in newer ones that evolved in the 19th century (Kallasmaa 2000b: 71).

About the two regions researched one can say that although new farmsteads were created on the borders of existing hereditary farm lands during the parceling of land, the hereditary farms were still left in their former places and the general settlement view of the villages was preserved.

Estonian name researcher Evar Saar has complemented those name systems with data regarding natural landscape division and intensity of land use. In the second type of name systems, i.e. the name system of parceled farms, it is not enough to use only general names when the landscape is very heterogeneous. In Võrumaa in South Estonia, the names used before parceling also exist in microtoponyms in the dispersed villages, because it was necessary to preserve them due to the varied landscape. If an area with an extremely diverse relief is meant for agricultural use, names are created for hillocks, but for a forest with a similar relief, names are not needed. If the landscape is flat and there is no need to name all the places, then even archaic villages display low name density (Saar 2007: 88–89, 92–93).

Division of place names

Place names have been divided into five groups: settlement names, i.e. oikonyms; agricultural names, i.e. agronyms; hydronyms, i.e. names of waterways; terrain names, i.e. names of landscape objects; and artefact names, i.e. names of man-made objects. The division of names in the two regions today and in the 20th century can be seen in Figure 1.

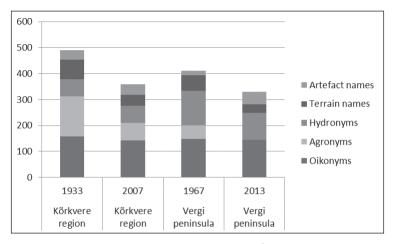


Figure 1. A quantitative comparison of toponyms

Settlement names

Settlement names (in this case, names of villages, parts of villages and farms) make up the most significant part of the material. The villages in both regions have been very stable and, during the parceling of land, the densely populated coastal villages researched were not turned into dispersed villages. Differences in the settlement names of the two regions lie in farm names. When it comes to farms, the difference of naming patterns is largely caused by tradition, but for other places, the landscape and its structure determine whether and which objects can be differentiated by means of names (e.g. whether fields, hills or bodies of water exist in the landscape or not).

There are two options in the Estonian farm name tradition. In the traditional name system, certain farm names are used and its habitants (also the new ones) are called according to the farm name (Saar 2007: 95). That kind of naming tradition is common, for example, in the western part of Võrumaa in South Estonia (Faster and Saar 2002: 182). This is also the case of the Kõrkvere region on the island of Saaremaa. When people talk about a farm or visit it, they use a farm name, for example: Andruse, Antsu, Eeru and Pärdi farms. Hereditary names are known to everyone and used every day. Persons' last names are used rarely, if ever; a farm name is always used before a person's first name. For example, although my name is Marit Alas, it is not important, because I live in Laasu farm, so the village community calls me Laasu Marit. And if someone new moves into the farm, the name of the farm is usually preserved and the new inhabitant is called after the farm name. In the course of land parceling, all the farms in Estonia got their official names. In the areas where the old farm names (already used by the people for a long time) also remained as official farm names after parceling, those names continued to be used for a long period of time (Troska 1995: 67). Compared to the year 1933, in Kõrkvere 53% of the old farm names analysed have been preserved, 26% have perished, 19% have been added and only 2% have been changed.

Most of the changes in the register were caused by the destruction of a farm or the construction of a new one; modifications due to change of ownership are marginal in the register of farms in the Kõrkvere region.

The second name tradition refers to the situation in which inhabitants did not consider it important for farm names to stay unchanged. The focus is on the farm family name - the farm is called after the people living there. An additional name can be the official surname, its adaptation, the traditional surname of the lineage or the person's individual name (Saar 2007: 95). This kind of naming tradition is popular in the eastern part of Võrumaa in South Estonia (Faster and Saar 2002: 183), in Tartumaa (Joalaid 2000: 142), in Setumaa but also in East Finland (Faster 2013: 208). A system in which not the attachment of the name to the farm place is considered important but its connection with the person can also be seen in the farm register of the Vergi peninsula. It is the custom there that people are called by their family name + first name. If I were a local, they would call me Alase Marit. The farms are also called by the surnames of people living there, e.g. Küti, Uutmani. In addition to that, in the area of interest and in other parts of Estonia, we notice (cf. Troska 1995: 66) a widespread phenomenon – a farm or family is referred to using several different names. Farms are called after their inhabitants' family name, the official farm name or its derivative, inhabitants' first name or nickname, while previous owners' family name or some other variant can be used in parallel. It is possible for different variants to come up even during a single conversation situation. For example, the official name of the farm is Männiotsa, but it is also used as Männiku, an adaption. The farm is also called after the owner's last name, Aare. The place name catalog of the Institute of the Estonian Language also includes the parallel names Aamani and Mülbachi, obtained from the surnames of previous owners. For the locals, this name usage is logical and variability is a normal thing. For me, as an outsider, it was sometimes hard to understand whether we were still talking about the same place or another one. The important feature of the farm names of Vergi is variability – there are patterns based on owners' (forenames or) family names or the official names of the farms, while there are cases in which several variants with parallel names are combined.

One can see in Figure 2 that parallel names also occur in Kõrkvere but their proportion is lower compared to the farm register of Vergi. On the peninsula, the occurrence of parallel names within farm names in the years 1967 and 2013 is 26% and 31% respectively, whereas in Kõrkvere, the percentage of parallel names is 6% in 1933 and 12% in 2007.

The parallel names occurring in the Kõrkvere region in Saaremaa are more likely registered in the names of newer farms, built in the 20th century. For example, the official name of a farm is *Välja*, but it is called *Rooma* after the owner's surname. The same tendency is in Vergi – the newer the house, the more likely it is to be called with parallel names. On the one hand, this may be due to the fact that there is not enough time for the name to root. On the other hand, it seems that this surname-based pattern, in addition to which official names are used, is very viable. This is also reflected in

Figure 2, in which one can see that, in the course of time, the number of parallel names has increased.

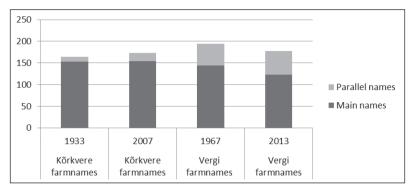


Figure 2. The proportion of parallel names and main names per period and region

When observing only the main names of the Vergi peninsula, the proportion of farm names that have persisted since 1967 until today is 72% (see Figure 3).

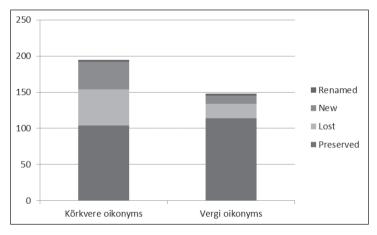


Figure 3

Although the main names are well remembered, they are not always the names used in real communication situation. Over one quarter of the farm names of the Vergi peninsula are parallel names. In most cases, the farm names derived from inhabitants' surnames or forenames do not constitute a highly persistent group. Starting from 1967 until today, 42% of parallel names have been preserved, 30% have perished, 20% have been added and 8% have changed. For example, the parallel names of Metsala farm (*Pooni*), Männikuotsa farm (*Aamanni*) and Allika farm (*Opmanni*) have been preserved – all these names are derived from the owners' family name. The largest part

of parallel names that perished consists of names of farms that do not exist anymore. Newly emerged farms are referred to by means of several names in parallel (e.g. Jaagu-Looritsa farm is also called Ruudi maja (house) after the owner's first name), but parallel names of farms that were previously known by one name have also come up (e.g. in the material from 1967, there was only the farm name Kuusiku, but today even the informants admitted that the name predominantly used is Palmari, after the owner's surname).

In Vergi, when new households are built and become important enough that locals need to name them, the same parallel name tradition is continued. In the Kõrkvere region on the island of Saaremaa, the new name can also be based on an owner's last or first name, but usually the amount of parallel names is marginal.

Agricultural names

The second big group consists of names of cultivated lands. Agronyms are the most unstable type of names, since they depend on people's use of land. If a field is unused, it will stop being a field. The stability of a reference and the continuity of traditions are prerequisites for the preservation of place names (Ainiala 2002: 186). People are continually cutting down on the agricultural use of land. Of all place names in both regions, names of cultivated lands have disappeared most often. If occurrence of agronyms is observed proportionally, the percentage of the agronyms in the observed areas has dropped. While there were 32% agronyms in the entire material in the Kõrkvere area in Saaremaa in 1933, this number decreased to 19% by 2007. There were 13% agronyms in the 1967 material of the Vergi peninsula in North Estonia, but in 2015 there were practically no agronyms anymore. A comparison can be made with the Skaistgirys surroundings in North Lithuania: the agronyms in the material of 1935 constituted 34% and by 1995 this number decreased to only 8% (Bartkutė 2006: 59).

Since 1933, 64% of agricultural names in Saaremaa have disappeared (see Figure 4). One of the reasons is that from the end of 1930s until today, the arable land has decreased about 5 times in size. In Soviet times, several small fields and meadows were also united into one big form. Thus, many small field names vanished. Although 64% of the names in Kõrkvere have disappeared, 14% new names have emerged. In addition to transparent new names (*Uuepõllu* 'new field', *Esimene koppel* and *Teine koppel* 'first paddock' and 'second paddock'), other recent names in the Kõrkvere region have been formed based on the existing name stock. For example, the map from the year 1787 (EAA.2072.3.426d) already shows the name *Sarwe Pöld* (field), and the name *Sarvepõld* (field) is also the same in 1933 and 2007. The new meadow next to this field is called *Sarveväli* only in the material from 2007. There are also places designated with the farm name *Jausa*: 1787 *Jaucksa Michel Pöld* (field), 1933 *Jausapõld* (field), *Jausapõllud* (meadows).

Since 1933, 14% of agricultural names have been preserved – this is not so bad for over 70 years. Many stems live on in nature names as well. In Saaremaa, the use of community land lasted a long time. Even in the 1990s, there were pasture lands for all the village cows and lambs and the entire community needed those agricultural names.

Agriculture has always been a marginal activity on the Vergi peninsula. There was little arable land and livelihood has generally been connected to the sea. Although I collected some agronyms in 2013, the names can be considered lost, because their references are totally gone. My informants also told me that in the earlier times, if some field names were needed, fields were called after the farm to which they belonged: for example, $T\~onise$ farm > $T\~onise$ $p\~old$ (field). Nowadays, there are no agricultural names on the peninsula at all.

The situation in Finland also shows the tendency of disappearance: on average half of the names of cultivated lands used in the 1960s and 1970s have been lost (Ainiala 2002: 186).

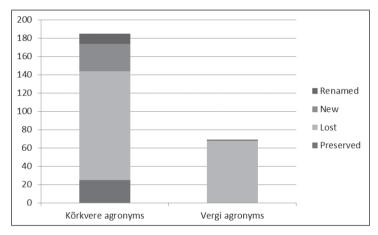


Figure 4

Hydronyms

Hydronyms are names that designate bodies of water (bays, rivers, lakes, seas, underwater reefs, shallows, depths, fishing spots, etc.) and bodies of land located on the boundary between water and land (islets, peninsulas, seacoasts, beaches, etc.). The percentage of hydronyms has been relatively stable: the place name register of Vergi contained 32% hydronyms of all names in 1967 and in 2015 the proportion was 31%. As opposed to the agronyms of Kõrkvere, the name cluster of the Vergi region has the same amount of hydronyms in the place name cluster (see also Figure 1). The proportion of the hydronyms of Kõrkvere in the material of 1933 was 13%, while in the stock of 2007 it was 18%. The increase in the total number of names in the Kõrkvere region is caused by the fact that earlier names of the coastal pastures and meadows were categorized under agronyms, but being withdrawn from agricultural use, the (new) names moved to the group of hydronyms. The comparison with data from North Lithuania also shows the stability of the hydronyms. The proportion of hydronyms among all names was 11% in 1935 and 1995 (Bartkutė 2006: 57).

The names of coastal areas and peninsulas form the biggest group among hydronyms in both observed regions. The difference lies in the preservation of the names. While 57% of the names indicating the boundary between water and land have been preserved, in Kõrkvere this percentage is only 37%. One of the biggest influencing factors is the higher percentage of agricultural activities in the Kõrkvere region than on the Vergi peninsula. A large part of the names designating coastal areas in 1933 that perished by now were connected with the fact that land was used as coastal pastures and meadows. Nowadays, some areas are neglected, filled with reeds and their names have been forgotten. Land is slowly but constantly taking over the sea in the Kõrkvere region, and some of the lost names are names of previous islets that became part of the peninsula. For example, the *Valgevassika laid* (islet) has grown into the *Kääru* peninsula, whose name occurs in the materials of 1933 and 2007, the name *Valgevassika laid* occurs only in the material of 1933.

At the same time, 35% new names referring to the coastal area in the Kõrkvere region were added. Their formation mainly used the earlier name cluster (as also regards the rest of the new hydronyms in Kõrkvere). The name Sarwe Põld ('field of Sarve') indicated above among the agronyms dating back to 1787 is reflected in the database of 2007 in the coastal names Sarvemäe tagune ('area behind the hill of Sarve'), Sarve sääre nukk ('spit of the foreland of Sarve') and Sarvemäe abajas ('inlet of the hill of Sarve'). The amount of new names in Vergi is small and mainly transparent descriptions (Väike rand 'small beach' and Vahvlikivi 'stone resembling a waffle') or settlement names are used. For example, the name Pedassaare rand (beach) after the name of Pedassaare village is preferred instead of the earlier name Võrkrand.

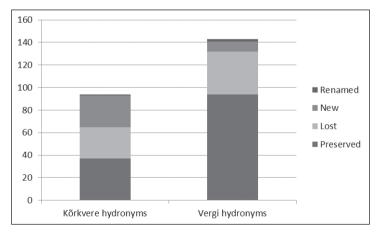


Figure 5

As Figure 5 shows, on the Vergi peninsula 66% of the hydronyms have been preserved and 27% have perished. Moreover, there are 6% new names and 1% changed

names compared to 1967. In the Kõrkvere region 39% of the hydronyms have been preserved compared to 1933, 30% have perished or been added and 1% have changed.

For Kõrkvere, it is characteristic that place names form name clusters; the lost and emerged names are often part of some name clusters, so they can easily variate, come and go. Name clusters are, for example (see also the examples of *Sarve põld* above), *Kääru roog* (2007, coast), *Keero Heunama* (1787, meadow), *Kääru heinamaa* (1933, 2007, meadow), *Käärumaa* (1933, coastal rangeland), *Käärumägi* (1933, 2007, hill), *Käärumäetagune* (2007, meadow), *Käärumäe põld* (1933, 2007, field). I doubted my collecting methods since this cluster-system did not come out from the Vergi peninsula material. However, upon comparing it with earlier collections, the result turned out the same, which is not common for Vergi.

Terrain names

The landscape and its subdivision essentially determine what places get a name. The proportion of terrain names within all the names in the Korkvere region was 16% in 1933 and 12% in 2007. The material of the Vergi peninsula also shows a decreasing tendency. There were 14% terrain names in 1967 and currently there are 10% (see also Figure 1). The hill names form the biggest part of terrain names in Kõrkvere (69%). On the Vergi peninsula this number amounts to 31%; forest names prevail on the peninsula (52%, as opposed to 14% in Kõrkvere). The landscape on the Vergi peninsula is very flat and the inland is covered with forests. Only some higher places on roads and single high grounds in forests are identified by means of hill names. There are a marginal number of hill names on the Vergi peninsula, but compared to 1967, they are very well preserved. By comparison with 1933, 60% of the hill names in Kõrkvere have perished. The cause is again a drop in the importance of agriculture, since a large part of the perished hill names denoted higher places on cultivated lands: for example, a bigger field called Valmepõld (field) and its name were recorded in 1933 as well as in 2007. A part of this field, called *Vesiaia ots*, with the hill name *Vesiaiamägi* were only present in the 1933 material. Preserved hill names denote higher grounds in bigger public places, as is the case on the Vergi peninsula.

The biggest landscape name group on the Vergi peninsula consists of forest names. Since a forest is mainly formed by a forest massive whose subdivision is small, the forests on the paths have got names although given the area the name density could be much bigger. It should be noted that 56% of the forest names have disappeared and practically none have been added. The cause may be a weaker connection of people with forest, e.g. there are no forest meadows in this region anymore and people do not get their firewood from the forest themselves. According to Evar Saar (2008: 68), the situation in South Estonia, Võrumaa, is opposite: there the forest place name register has become denser in the past half a century. According to Saar, the reason is that the Soviet times did not bring along such big changes on forestry as they did in agriculture. The preservation of places has allowed the keeping of older and newer names (Saar 2008: 68). Most forests on the Vergi peninsula belong to the state and personal

connection of the people with the forest is weaker. In addition, it was not possible to move freely in the forests of Vergi during the Soviet times due to the border area.

As Figure 6 shows, there is the same amount of terrain and water related names in Kõrkvere, but terrain names have been preserved more poorly. Terrain names in Vergi are more marginal compared to hydronyms. The number of preserved and perished terrain names is relatively equal.

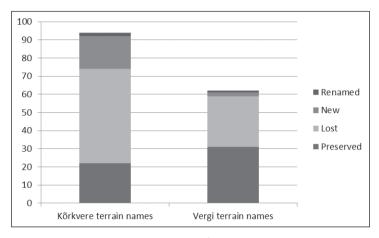


Figure 6

Artefact names

The names of artefact or man-made objects are very unevenly presented in different collections, and the entire group is very uneven due to consolidation of different objects. Most of the names of the artefact name group are road names. Of these, 59% have been preserved and 34% have perished in Kõrkvere. The main reason for their perishing is the disappearance of the sites. The joining of small fields and changing of the landscape during the Soviet period also led to the loss of small roads in-between the former fields. The naming of forest rides in Vergi has been more important than the naming of roads. Since the preservation of forest rides is mandatory, thanks to the permanent sites almost all names of forest rides have been preserved. Another reason for their preservation is their use in orienting from the sea.

Summary

In conclusion, it can be said that the place name systems of the Kõrkvere region and Vergi peninsula belong to the first type of place name associations based on earlier as well as current collections. In addition to settlement names, microtoponyms are also abundant and are not usually derived from the settlement names. Proceeding from tradition, the current register of the Vergi peninsula does not contain agronyms, instead of which hydronyms prevail. The main place name register of Kõrkvere comprises

agronyms in addition to farm names. The biggest difference lies in the farm names of the two regions. While resident names in Kõrkvere are subjected to farm names, on the Vergi peninsula farm names are more and more related to personal names (especially family names, less to first names or nicknames). It is also characteristic to use parallel names in case of farm names, which in Kõrkvere is rather an exception.

As Figure 7 shows, the largest and best-preserved group of names consists of settlement names in both regions. The least permanent are agronyms. Hydronyms can generally be regarded as persistent and terrain names tend to perish more easily.

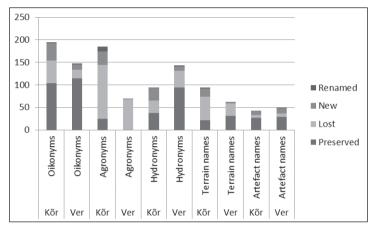


Figure 7

Since 1933, 35% of the names have survived, 42% have perished and there are 20% new names and 3% changed names in the entire stock of names in Kõrkvere. It has been possible to compare the names of the Vergi region with the database from 1967 in the absence of a good earlier database. Among others, due to the short time interval and lack of non-constant agronyms, in total 57% of the names have been preserved and 42% perished of the names of the Vergi peninsula and there are only 7% new and 2% changed names. By comparison, in Skaistgirys, North Lithuania, 30% of the name clusters have survived from 1935 (Bartkutė 2006: 59). The proportion of perished names of different villages in materials about Finland (unfortunately settlement names are not included here) is 34–71%, on average half of the names of the 1960s have disappeared (Ainiala 2010: 298–299). Hence, it can be said that the preservation of the place names observed can be compared to the neighboring areas and the general tendency is rather towards the perishing of the names.

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