

Commemorative place names in Estonia

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Commemorative names in the general system of place names

- Motivated by the desire to commemorate or honour a person (sometimes also an event, another place etc.)
- Formed on the basis of existing names and have a clear commemorative function
- Have been especially numerous in the context of colonial powers
- Carry strong sentimental and historical-ideological values
- A form of memory politics and may be interpreted as symbolic monuments
- Strongly influence public perception of what is considered important in society, while simultaneously shaping people's identities and reinforcing collective memory
- Reflect societal values and ideological attitudes
- Particularly evident in urban toponymy

Commemorative names in Estonia

- A commemorative name is a place name assigned in memory or honour of a person (Place Names Act 2003).
- In their modern form emerged in the early years of the Republic of Estonia. In 1923, the Tallinn City Council approved the first official Estonian-language list of street names, in which commemorative names were written out in full.
- Historical layers:
 1. Early 20th-century national naming (emphasising cultural figures)
 2. Ideological and political naming during the Soviet period
 3. After the restoration of independence reassessment and renaming
- Main principles now: commemorative names should not be created excessively; individuals with strong local connection should be preferred; creating commemorative street names should be limited (better: park names).

Assignment and requirements of commemorative names

- A commemorative name must include the person's given name(s) and surname or their full pseudonym.
- Names derived from personal names due solely to a connection with a place are not considered commemorative.
- Principles of assignment:
 - Cannot be assigned during a person's lifetime. Within **five years** as of the person's death a commemorative name may be assigned **only** upon the consent of the minister in charge of the policy sector.
 - Excessive use of commemorative names should be avoided.
 - Proposals may be initiated by authorities or individuals.
 - Decisions must consider the person's contribution, connection to the place, and relation to Estonia.

Assignment and requirements of commemorative names

- 2020: The name of a person shall not be used as a commemorative name if that person has acted against the foundation of the Republic of Estonia, permanence of its constitutional order or restoration of the independence of Estonia.
- 2023: If a commemorative name has been assigned based on such a personal name, or if it is clearly incompatible with Estonian historical and cultural context, including associations with persons, symbols, or events opposing the Republic of Estonia, the minister shall propose changing the name. The minister shall request an opinion from the Place Names Board to determine the inappropriateness of the name.

Structure and form of commemorative names

- Should include the person's full name (given name(s) + surname), e.g. *Amandus Adamsoni tänav* (street), *Karl August Hermannini tänav*, *Ferdinand Johann Wiedemanni tänav*
- Including the given name is important for clarity, e.g. J. Kunder: writer Juhan Kunder (1852–1888) or Soviet army lieutenant Jakob Kunder (1921–1945)? *Tamme tänav* (Oak street) vs. *Jakob Tamme tänav*
- Occasionally, titles have been included, e.g. *Kapten Anton Irve tänav*, *Kindral Laidoneri plats*, but this practice (common in the 1920s–30s) is no longer recommended. 2004: *Anton Irve tänav*, *Johan Laidoneri plats*
- Commemorative names may also be based on pseudonyms, provided they are used in full, e.g. *Lydia Koidula tänav*, *Mait Metsanurga tänav*, *Ernst Särgava avenüü*

Structure and form of commemorative names

- Street signs must not omit given names, as they must clearly indicate the commemorative nature of the name. If the name is short, it should be written out in full (e.g. *Anna Haava, Paul Kerese*). If there are multiple given names, they may be abbreviated (e.g. *F. R. Kreutzwaldi*). In addresses and maps, given names may also be abbreviated.
- What about intention to honour two individuals simultaneously? E.g. *Aino and Oskar Kallas* > *Aino and Oskar Kalda/Kallase tänav*?
- According to spatial data regulations, an address must be clear, concise, culturally appropriate, and consistent with the address system. Therefore, long names or those containing conjunctions are generally impractical and may cause confusion in both physical and digital environments.

Analysis of commemorative names

- 279 commemorative names (Place Names Register):
 - 223 names of streets / traffic areas
 - 48 names of bus, tram, or trolleybus stops
 - 4 names of parks
 - 3 names of squares
 - 1 air transport object
- Name clusters = primary name + secondary names
 - *Paul Kerese tänav* + *Paul Kerese* (2 bus stops)
 - *Nikolai von Glehni tänav* + *Nikolai von Glehni põik* (lane)
 - *Mihkel Pilli tänav* + *Mihkel Pilli haru* (branch)
- Cleaned data: **225 commemorative names > 147 eponyms**

Distribution analysis

Nationwide (5+ settlements):

- Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald – 11
- Lydia Koidula – 11
- Eduard Vilde – 8
- Carl Robert Jakobson – 6
- Anton Hansen Tammsaare – 5
- August Kitzberg – 5

= National core – Estonian national awakening and the classical literary canon

Regional (2–4 settlements):

- Jakob Hurt – 4
- Johann Voldemar Jannsen – 4
- 3: Adamson, Haava, Viiralt, Keres, etc. (12)
- 2: Tuglas, Faehlmann, Smuul, Tolstoi etc. (9)

= Second group – well-known, but not universally „obligatory“

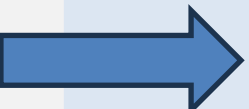
Local (1 settlement): 118 eponyms

Strongly localized, each settlement shapes its own memory space.
Clearly layered system: a national canon and a local memory layer.
Toponymy simultaneously reflects national identity and local memory politics.

Distribution analysis

Cities vs small towns / settlements

- Large cities (Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu):
 - Very large number of eponyms
 - Include all “major names”; many unique and specific individuals
- Smaller settlements:
 - Limited selection
 - Dominated by: names from the national core, occasionally local figures

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- Recurrence: “canonical names” (Kreutzwald, Koidula, etc.) appear almost always in cities. In smaller places they appear selectively.
 - Cities = concentration of memory, a “full cultural set”
 - Small settlements = limited selection

Historical layering

Core of the national awakening: Kreutzwald, Koidula, Jakobson, Hurt, Jannsen

- Dominate throughout Estonia

20th-century cultural figures: Tammsaare, Vilde, Kitzberg, Tuglas, etc.

- Widely distributed, but slightly less than awakening figures

Soviet / Russian names: Gagarin, Majakovski, Gorki, Pavlov, Krõlov, etc.

- Geographically concentrated: Ida-Viru County (Narva, Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve)

→ Estonian commemorative toponymy is historically layered.

Regional differences

Generic terms

- Dominant generic term: **tänav** 'street' – **195**
- Others:
 - tee** 'road' – 15
 - puiestee** 'boulevard' – 5
 - park** 'park' – 4
 - väljak** 'square' – 3
 - allee** 'avenue' – 1
 - lennujaam** 'airport' – 1
 - plats** 'plaza' – 1


Density of eponyms

Large centres

- Tallinn, Tartu → very high number of names
 - national core
 - regional layer
 - local individuals

Smaller settlements

- very limited selection (1–3 names)
- typically: one “major name”, one local figure



Memory density is spatially uneven: cities = dense memory space, smaller settlements = sparse and selective

Representation of cultural fields

- Literature (incl journalists) – ca 30% (Kreutzwald, Koidula, Vilde, Tammsaare, Kitzberg, Tuglas, etc.)
- Art and architecture – ca 17% (Adamson, Kits, Köler, Laikmaa, Okas, Viiralt, etc.)
- Science and education – ca 12% (Wiedemann, Baer, Forselius, Käis)
- Music – ca 10% (Härma, Kapp, Tobias, Tšaikovski)
- Politics – ca 9% (Poska, Päts)
- Sports – ca 3% (Keres, Lurich)
- Military – ca 2% (Irv, Kuperjanov)
- Others

The Estonian memory space is strongly literature-centred.

→ Culture (literature + art + music) clearly dominates.

Politics is not central → a contrast with many other countries.

Memory politics is clearly culture-oriented rather than military or institutional.

“Absence analysis”

Gender

- clear male dominance
- very few women: Koidula, Haava, Härma, a few others

Ethnic distribution

- Russian names present, but regionally limited (Ida-Viru County)

Contemporary figures

- very few (e.g. Lennart Meri, Ott Arder)

General synthesis

- The system of commemorative names in Estonia is structured on three levels:
 1. national layer (small, recurrent, literature-centred)
 2. regional layer (moderately distributed names)
 3. local memory layer (dominant but diffuse)
- This is influenced by historical layering (national awakening vs Soviet period)
- Estonian commemorative toponymy functions simultaneously as a carrier of national identity and an expression of local memory politics.
- The memory politics is clearly culture-oriented.

Thank you

Aitäh

Paldies

Ačiū

Dziękuję