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THE FIRST ICOS “METHODS OF ONOMASTICS” SUMMER SCHOOL IN HELSINKI (26–30.08.2019)

The International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS) organised its first ever Summer School at the University of Helsinki on August 26th-30th 2019. The course took place in the Metsätalo building in the centre of Helsinki. Its objective was to bring together young onomastic scholars from all over the world, to develop their methodological skills and provide them with the opportunity to establish new relationships. There were 21 participants from 15 countries, including Iran, Zambia, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Iceland, Poland and others. The summer school was targeted at PhD students, but also those MA students who intended to pursue PhD studies upon graduation. Over the course of five intensive days, participants were offered a plethora of interesting events including a text workshop, a Three Minute Thesis (3MT) workshop, presentations, excursions to the Institute for the Languages of Finland and to the University of Helsinki Almanac Office.

The opening remarks were made by Lasse Hämäläinen, the postgraduate representative of ICOS. After the official part, the participants had the opportunity to listen to the presentation “Introduction to the methods of onomastics” by Terhi Ainiala (University of Helsinki) and Paula Sjöblom (University of Turku), which was a brief overview of different methods in onomastics. In the afternoon, every student had the opportunity to improve his or her speaking skills in a three-minute speech, meant to develop the participants’ capacity to explain their research briefly and effectively in language appropriate to a non-specialist audience. It is worth highlighting that this type of speech and event is gaining in popularity all over the world.

Tuesday 27th of August started with a lecture, “Toponomastic fieldwork”, given by Janne Saarikivi (University of Helsinki). The professor spoke about his excursions to Karelia to collect local toponyms. Afterwards, Unni Leino (University of Helsinki) delivered a presentation entitled “Using place name corpora in research”. At the end of the presentation part, there was an opportunity to learn about a unique project being implemented in association with the Institute for Languages of Finland, conducted in the years 2014-2017, which involved the digitalization of the Names Archive (available at <https://nimiarkisto.fi/>). The last part of the second day of the summer school was an excursion to the Institute for the Languages of Finland (<https://www.kotus.fi/en>), established in 1976 under the auspices of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and currently employing 80 people. Ulla-Maija Forsberg, Director of the Institute, pictured its overall aims: increasing the knowledge of the languages of Finland and their role in culture and society, fostering linguistic equality in Finland, and name planning. The Institute gives recommendations on proper names, their spelling and usage (inflection and pronunciation), and on the planning of new names. Alongside two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, Finland also has several minority languages, including North Saami, Inari Saami and Skolt Saami. Therefore, proper names are part of Finland’s cultural heritage.

The third day was the most practical one of the whole summer school. Every student had to write texts at the workshop, for instance a manuscript, parts of a monographic thesis, a research plan, summaries, etc. The participants were divided into four groups. Everybody played the role of both a commentator and a presenter of somebody else’s paper. These classes were of great value for young scholars who are just starting their scientific career and seek advice from experienced

researchers. Moreover, there was an overview of the interest areas from the countries that the young onomasticians came from.

The organisers of the summer school prepared three interesting lectures on Thursday, 29th August. First, Janne Saarikivi presented the subject of contact onomastics — the characteristic features of toponymy as the language contact phenomenon — explaining and amply illustrating the difference between substrate and borrowing in toponymy. Next, Jaakko Raunamaa gave a talk on “The study of historical personal names”. Finally, Johanna Virkkula (University of Helsinki) raised the issue of practical and ethical concerns during the collection of anthroponyms. At the end of the fourth day, the organisers prepared an excursion to the University of Helsinki Almanac Office (<https://almanakka.helsinki.fi/en/>), located in the astronomical observatory in the city centre of Helsinki. Director Minna Saarelma-Paukkala discussed the main tasks of the Almanac Office. It takes care of the matters regarding the Finnish calendar, preparing seven different calendars with namedays for the Finnish, the Swedo-Finnish, the Orthodox and the Saami population, and, interestingly, also special calendars with cat, dog and horse names. It is worth noting that the tradition of namedays is extremely strong in Finland and still cultivated, to the extent that Finns celebrate even the namedays of their pets. In response to this need, special animal name calendars are printed out. The Almanac Office also regulates the appearance of new names and officially enters them into the calendar, as well as annually running the rankings of the most popular names, in every decade of 20th century.

The last day was as intensive as the previous one. Terhi Ainiala raised the issue of urban toponymy, taking as an example the city of Helsinki, with particular attention to the official and unofficial names in the urban space. In the next lecture, Väinö Syrjälä (University of Stockholm) discussed linguistic landscape in onomastics: its definition and object of study, as well as the perspectives of such research. Afterwards, Paula Sjöblom talked about “The Cognitive approach to names”. The scholar explained the basic concepts of cognitive linguistics and the history of the discipline. The last part of the day belonged to Lasse Hämäläinen with two presentations: “Experimental research and Big data, quantitative methods, and the Internet”. He gave a lot of practical tips for young scholars who are just starting out in their careers.

The Summer School was very successful. It was an opportunity for onomastic students from different countries and various academic environments to get to know each other better. It was not common to notice the differences in the approach of researchers from different countries. A school like this can contribute to the unification of onomastic research and the exchange of experiences and perceptions. Young scientists can also make contacts and show their research to a wider audience. The ICOS organisers expressed the hope that this summer school would be the beginning of a new tradition and a course like this would take place regularly in the future.