

Editorial

Urban Place Names: Introduction

Sergei Basik

School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Conestoga College, 299 Doon Valley Drive, Kitchener, Ontario, N2G 4M4, Canada; sbasik@conestogac.on.ca; Tel.: +1-519-748-5520 (ext. 3892)

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Urban place names are multidimensional phenomena. They have multiple impacts, reflections, and reactions in our everyday life. As the spatial onomastic manifestations of human activities, urban toponyms both mirror and absorb all aspects of human existence, including the political, economic, and cultural complexity of the world.

The current Special Issue of *Urban Science* aims to contribute to the field by exploring the urban landscapes through the prism of toponymy, the study of place names. There is no monopoly on toponymy, which is an interdisciplinary field of study. The long-established methods in onomastics have been exploring the place names from various linguistic points of view [1]. The traditional etymological aspects of research still play an essential role in many national schools of onomastic studies. However, contemporary multidisciplinary critical toponymic scholarship analyzes the place names and place naming as a combination of complex and contested processes between urban places, identities, and power [2]. Notably, the main goal of this Special Issue is to bring together urban toponymic studies scholarship, both from traditional onomastic perspectives, also including socio-onomastics and historical toponomastics, and from the critical toponymic perspective. However, the goal here is to avoid overemphasizing Western (mostly Anglophone) toponymic research principles and approaches and to examine new areas of spatial relationships and interconnections between people, language, culture, urban landscapes, development, and political power in different regions of the world.

Three dimensions of urban place names noted in this Special Issue have various relationships and implications. In a growing body of political toponymic scholarship, the legacies of colonialism, post-colonialism, nationalism, the transitions of states to new socio-economic models, the politics of toponymic commemoration, and the toponymic questions of social justice have been considered [3]. The political context of urban place naming, unquestionably, is an ever-changing element. A recent example is Belarus, where the newly minted vernacular urban toponyms, such as a courtyard in Minsk named Plošča Pieramien (the Square of Changes), represent the symbolic ideological battlegrounds of toponymic resistance against the brutality of the autocratic political regime.

The economic dimension of urban toponyms is a relatively new but burgeoning subfield of toponymic studies, which includes the toponymic commodification, the renaming of urban public spaces for corporate sponsors, and the selling of naming rights [4]. The study of this neoliberal urban onomaturgy offers new insights on the role that the marketing technology implemented by powerful actors plays in toponymic transformations and the production of urban space.

Lastly, the cultural dimension of urban place names includes a more traditional vision of toponyms as cultural vehicles of language and history and depictions of a specific area's natural environment. Simultaneously, the cultural aspects are interconnected with the toponyms' political and economic characteristics, reflecting a complex system of interrelated processes in the urban toponymic landscape.

The collection of papers in this Special Issue represents a combination of research methodologies and approaches from different perspectives and analyzes the urban toponymic systems in several regions outside the Western world. The paper by Francesco Cavallaro, Francesco Perono Cacciafoco, and Zhi Xuan Tan is based on the historical toponomastics approach in urban place names studies.

Using the examples of ten place names from the multilayered urban toponymic system of Singapore, the authors reanimate the theoretical model of sequence occupance used in human geography and its related fields. Consequently, the connections between various historical and cultural processes and the dominating role of colonial naming practices were revealed through diachronic and synchronic analyses of urban place names.

From the standpoint of critical toponymy, Melissa Wanjiru-Mwita and Frederic Giraut discuss the urban toponymic system in colonial Nairobi, Kenya, where the British colonial power shaped the urban nomenclature on an ethnic basis, with the dominance of the English pioneer-based settler place names. The authors state that, despite the majority of the population, there were very few local names in the urban toponymic system, which alienated the Africans. Driven by historical and archival materials, the paper concludes that the urban place names played the role of spatial signifiers of colonial hierarchical inequalities.

The next study, by Shaun Tyan Gin Lim and Francesco Perono Cacciafoco, explores the naming system of Singapore's Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system. Applying the mixed linguistic and historical toponomastics methods, the authors analyze and classify this specific subgroup of urban place names. Distinctly, the findings reveal that the naming practices for different types of stations, both newer and older, illustrate a specific shift from descriptive to associative naming—a new trend in regional urban toponyms.

Lastly, in a brief commentary, Liora Bigon discusses the problems occurring in critical toponymy in terms of its often Eurocentric research topics, methodologies, and regional focus. A comment suggests that there is a need for new research approaches and methods for understanding toponyms' spatial characteristics in the urban Global South. The author argues that this theoretical and methodological shift can advance towards creating global urban toponymy and a de-colonization of the traditional Eurocentric understanding of the processes affecting urban place names systems outside the Western realm.

Undoubtedly, both classic onomastics and critical toponymic approaches will continue to contribute to toponymy as a specific field of study. In addition to the well-established thematic areas and scholarly agendas in these scientific "streams", expanding the research scope both inside and outside the European and Western urban contexts will enhance the theoretical and methodological bases and find new investigation paths. In addition, it is also crucial not to ignore the toponymic scholarship outside the Anglophone academic community. Importantly, another potential line in toponymic research that will also be beneficial for further empirical and methodological expansion in urban place names studies is related to the utilization of contemporary technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Finally, the coordination of efforts by scholars representing different disciplinary perspectives will also help to fix the problem of the inconsistency of scientific terminology in the field (e.g., toponymy as a field of study or as a set of toponyms within a region). In essence, the development of urban toponymic studies depends on the transdisciplinary collaboration of various intellectual traditions.

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