SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FUNCTION OF PLACE NAMES ON MAPS

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Abstract

Place names, geographical names or toponyms are frequently regarded rather as decorative elements on maps and for this very reason treated by cartographers not always with utmost care. This paper is to highlight the importance and the various functions of place names on maps.

It starts with the principal question, whether it is only by the name that a geographical feature on a map is identified – an assumption to be found in cartographic literature. It is demonstrated that this is not the case, since already the cartographic symbol identifies the feature by its position on the two-dimensional map field. Even a "mute map" without any place names is fully understandable for a user, who is acquainted with the area portrayed. Feature identification just by the cartographic symbol is even possible, when cartographic symbols due to the density of contents and for the sake of better readability are not geo-referenced in full geometrical precision. They will nevertheless indicate feature category and the spatial relation between several features and thus allow precise identification of the feature. So the importance of place names is overestimated, when they are regarded as identifiers of a feature.

Having argued against this overestimation of place names on maps, the paper turns to highlighting their real functions, which are important enough. These may be subdivided into (1) functions for users not acquainted with the name (and place) to be found on the map and (2) partly only additional functions for readers acquainted with the name and/or the place to be found on the map.

For **users not acquainted** with with the name (and place) to be found on the map the place name has in the first line the function of facilitating map use. Identification of a place indicated by a cartographic symbol becomes much easier, when it is in addition explained by a place name. This must result in the demand to attribute names to as many geographical map features as possible.

In a second function place names enable search for places. Place names indices or name search functions with interactive electronic maps enable the reader to search for a place on the map via the place name. Without place names this would not be possible.

In a third function place names tell more about the character of a geographical feature. While the cartographic symbol indicates just a feature category like mountains, passes, lakes, glaciers, rivers, forests, populated places, etc., the place name may specify the character of a certain geographical feature. This is mainly the case when the meaning of the generic and/or the specific element of a composed place name are transparent to the reader.

In a fourth function place names inform on cultural history and language (and implicitly on culture) of a place. This is a function closely related to the former one, but different insofar as it refers not only to transparent name elements. It results from the fact that – except for recent renamings – a place name has usually a long tradition and reflects in this way history and diachronic cultural stratification of a place. While this function benefits in the first line professional researchers and much less other map users, also other map users learn from the place name, which language(s) is/are spoken at a certain place. And depending on his/her familiarity in matters of language and cultures he/she may derive from this information a more or less complex picture of the cultural situation in this place. This function is, however, confined to endonyms in the sense of names in the local language, and does not apply to exonyms in the sense of names used in other languages for a certain place.

For **readers acquainted** with the name and/or the place to be found on the map, place names have the (partly additional) functions of labels and of activating emotional relations.

In the symolic function of a label a place name represents a space-related concept filled with contents. When reading the name, the user recalls all he/she knows about this place, i.e. activates his/her concept of the place. In this function place names are very similar to flags or coats of arms.

Users acquainted not only with the place name, but also with the place, especially persons with emotional ties to a certain place, feel a certain emotion, when they read the name on the map. Reading the name consciously makes them not only recalling their factual concept of the place (as with the function before), not only recalling their memories of the place as it looks like, but also memories of persons and events they are associating with it. Reading the name activates their emotional ties, their "feel of a place".

Finally the paper highlights specific functions and benefits of exonyms, when used on maps addressing a monolingual audience, and names in minority languages as special, but very important names categories.

As regards the use of **exonyms** in domestic, not international cartographic communication it is stated that they had the benefits of

- facilitating pronunciation, which in turn favours using and memorizing names and supports in this way the acquisition of topographic knowledge;
- being more stable than endonyms;
- being especially useful in historical and ethnographic contexts;
- indicating the importance of geographical features and traditional relations in trade, politics and culture;
- relating geographical features outside a language community to features within.

As regards **names in minority languages** it is argued that they function as labels as well as in activating emotional relations such as place names do in general with readers acquainted with the name and place to be found on the map, but that these functions were especially important for linguistic minorities for two reasons: linguistic minorities feel much more the challenge of demonstrating their existence and of showing that the (co-)shape the identity of a place, also by place names; for the speaker of the minority language his/her name is something very personal, intimate, his/her specific emotional tie with the place.

1 Introduction

Place names, geographical names or toponyms (these terms are used as synonyms in this paper) are frequently regarded rather as decorative elements on maps and for this very reason treated by cartographers not always with utmost care. This paper is to highlight the importance and the various functions of place names on maps.

2 Does a toponym on maps identify the geographical feature?

Let us start with the principal question, whether it is only by the toponym that a geographical feature on a map is identified – an assumption to be found in cartographic literature (e.g. Kretschmer & Stani-Fertl, 2008, p.126).

Cartographic symbols – whether they have the visual appearance of point symbols, linear or areal symbols – do not only mark a concept, but also a certain geographical feature.

While the concept marked by the cartographic symbol is explained in the legend, the geographical feature for which the cartographic symbol stands, can be derived from the map. A circle symbol, e.g., may in general indicate the feature category of populated places, i.e. a general concept that is explained by the legend. On the map, however, due to its geo-referenced location as well as due to the fact that it is embedded into the context of other map symbols, the circle indicates a certain city, a certain town or a certain village.
A user well-aqcuainted with the topography of a certain region may very well be able to derive the specific meaning of the circle even if no place name is added.
The same is true for line symbols with the general meaning of rivers or borders. While in the legend they are explained as markers of their general concept, on the map they assume a certain shape and location and identify in this way a very concrete geographical feature. A map reader acquainted with the topography shown by the map will be able to interpret them correctly, even if no toponyms are given.

So it may be stated that place names facilitate map interpretation and map reading, but they are not necessary to indentify a feature. Feature identification is already provided by the pure cartographic symbol when it is located on a map.

This is even true, when cartographic symbols, due to the density of contents and for the sake of better readability, are slightly shifted related to their correct geometrical location – as it is frequently the case with thematic maps. Cartographic symbols lose then their strict geo-reference. But they do not (and must not[1]) essentially change their spatial relation to other symbols in their surroundings. And due to this context they still identify the geographical feature they represent.

3 Functions of place names on maps in general

What then are the functions of place names on maps? They are manyfould and important enough as it is to be demonstrated by the following paragraphs.

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[1] Since this is a precondition of methodologically correct cartographic representation.

3.1 Functions for users not acquainted with the name (and place) to be found on the map

<u>Place names facilitate map use.</u>

If the name to be found on the map (and accordingly the place marked by this name) is not known to the reader, the place name facilitates map use.
Identification of a place indicated by a cartographic symbol becomes much easier, when it is in addition explained by a place name. If a reader not acquainted with the topography shown on the map would try to identify an unknown place without a place name, he/she would have to compare the map in use with other maps or cartographic source materials that do have a place name for the place in question or compare the geographical co-ordinates of the place in question with other sources. Thus, map interpretation would become a complicated and tiresome task.

This fact must result in the demand to attribute names to as many geographical map features as possible. When for graphical reasons it is impossible to attribute names to every single feature, at least major and more important features as well as features with exceptional characteristics (This refers especially to thematic maps.) are to be named. It should be possible to address all signficant issues and places of a map by mentioning their names.

<u>Place names enable search for places.</u>

Place names indices are customary components of atlases, road maps or city plans. So are name search functions with interactive electronic maps. They enable the reader to search for a place on the map via the place name in the index or by inserting a place name into the search function. Without place names this would not be possible.

<u>Place names tell more about the character of a geographical feature.</u>

While the cartographic symbol indicates just a feature category like mountains, passes, lakes, glaciers, rivers, forests, populated places, etc., the place name may tell more about the specifics of a certain geographical feature.

This additional information can be provided by the **generic element** of a composed place name, if the meaning of the generic is transparent.[2] Composed place names with a generic element are in turn most frequent with names of natural features like *Coastal Range,* where the generic element *Range* specifies the feature within the wider category of mountains (indicated already by the cartographic symbol), or *Duck Creek,* where the generic element *Creek* characterizes the feature more precisely within the wider category of running waters (indicated already by a blue line symbol).

The generic element of, e.g., a mountain name may thus specify the feature related to altitude *(hill, upland, mountain)*, size *(mountain, mountains),* shape *(plateau, escarpment, range, peak, pinnacle)* or even function *(divide)*.

But also many names of anthropogenic features have indicative transparent generic parts. Cases in point are, e.g., names of cities like *Newcastle* or *Newport*, where the generic elements *castle* and *port* tell something at least about the historical function of the place, if not about a function still important or about a characteristic of current identity.

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[2] It happens, however, that the meaning of a generic is opaque. This is most frequently the case, when the generic belongs to an older form of the same language or has been adopted from another language.

Generic elements in names of populated places may in this way characterize more precisely its legal position *(city, market, village, borough)*, its current or historical function *(port* in *Newport, bruck,* i.e. '*bridge*' in *Innsbruck, furt,* i.e. '*ford*' in *Frankfurt, castle* in *Newcastle, burg,* i.e. '*castle*' in *Salzburg*).

Besides the generic element of a place name also a transparent **specific element** can be indicative in respect to character and properties of a place, although they may also refer not to current, but historical characteristics and properties.

Cases in point are transparent adjectives such as *new/old, great/little, upper/lower, warm/cold,* also *black/white* with running waters[3], adjectives indicating directions *(north/south)*, adjectives derived from

- country names *(Uherské Hradiště, Uherské* meaning '*Hungarian*'),
- region names *(Bohemian Forest [Böhmerwald], Thuringian Forest [Thüringer Wald], Câmpulung, Moldovenesc* meaning '*Moldavian*'),
- ethnonyms *(Frankfurt am Main,* i.e. '*Ford of the Frankonians*'; *Kroatisch Minihof, Kroatisch* meaning '*Croatian*'; *Valašské Meziřiči, Valašské* meaning '*Valachian*')
- and anthroponyms *(Port Elizabeth, Saint Petersburg [Sankt Peterburg])*.

With large map scales, characteristics of a place specified more precisley by the place name can become important also for orientation in the field, not the least for military purposes and in cases of emergency. On maps for military use generics are therefore very frequently translated into the language of the audience.

<u>Place names inform on cultural history and language (and implicitly culture) of a place.</u>

This is a function closely related to the former one, but different insofar as it refers not only to transparent name elements. It results from the fact that – except for recent renamings – a place name has usually a long tradition and reflects in this way history and diachronic cultural stratification of a place. Petar Ilievski puts this very well, when he says: "What fossils are to biology, and sediments to geology, toponyms are to cultural history of a country because they reflect the various ethnic, economic, political and other changes in the past of the country." (quoted after Jačeva-Ulčar, 2009, p.169).

Place names are affiliated to a certain current language, but many evolved from a language spoken earlier at a certain place. They have very often just been "appropriated" by a later language by means of morphological or phoentical adaptation. This refers especially to names of geographical features of outstanding importance already in earlier history, like large rivers or cities founded very early.

Right when their meaning is not transparent to the modern reader, they are a wide and fertile field for linguistic and cultural research. They enable to investigate into settlement and cultural history and are, e.g., very reliable indicators as regards the temporal sequence of settlement, i.e. for answering the question, who (which language) was earlier at a certain place. They reflect, however, not only the temporal sequence of linguistic and cultural layers, but throw also light on cultural characteristics, predominant economic orientations or religious beliefs of earlier populations.

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[3] *Black* indicates in the context of running waters usually the larger, slowly running water, while *white* is a metaphor for the smaller, faster running, foaming water.

It is true that this function benefits in the first line professional researchers and much less other map users. But every map user learns from the place name, which language(s) is/are spoken at a certain place. And depending on his/her familiarity in matters of language and culture he/she may derive from this information a more or less complex picture of the cultural situation in place.

It is also true that this function is confined to endonyms in the sense of names in the local language, and does not apply to exonyms in the sense of names used in other languages for a certain place.

3.2 (Additional) functions for readers acquainted with the name and/or the place to be found on the map

Place names function as labels.

Users already acquainted with a certain place name (not necessarily with the place) benefit in the first line from a place name's label function. In the symbolic function of a label a place name represents a space-related concept filled with contents. When he/she reads the name, the user recalls all he/she knows about this place, i.e. activates his/her concept of the place.
If he/she is not personally acquainted with the place, this concept corresponds at least to acquired knowledge, more frequently to an image developed during lifetime and sometimes strongly supported by image building.
In this function place names are very similar to flags or coats of arms.

Place names activate emotional relations.

Users acquainted not only with the place name, but also with the place, especially persons with emotional ties to a certain place, i.e. in the first line inhabitants, people having been socialized in a certain place or people, who have acquired a close relation to a certain place in their later life (e.g., as frequent vacationers), feel a certain emotion, when they read the name on the map. Reading the name consciously makes them not only recalling their factual concept of the place (as with the function before), not only recalling their memories of the place as it looks like, but also memories of persons and events they are associating with it. Reading the name activates their emotional ties, their "feel of a place". (Tuan, 1977, pp.183f)

4 Specific functions of exonyms on maps

According to the most recent definition of the United Nations an exonym is the "name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken, and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated. Examples: *Warsaw* is the English exonym for Warszawa (Polish); *Mailand* is German for Milano; *Londres* is French for London; *Kūlūniyā* is Arabic for Köln. The officially romanized endonym *Moskva* for Москва is not an exonym, nor is the Pinyin form *Beijing*, while *Peking* is an exonym. The United Nations recommends minimizing the use of exonyms in international usage." (Kadmon, 2007, p.2)

Although the United Nations recommend to avoid exonyms in international communication and do certainly not promote the use of exonyms in general, exonyms have a lot of advantages in communication between speakers of the same language and therefore also with cartographic publications adressing a certain language community, e.g. with school atlases. Here, just the most important are to be mentioned.

<u>Exonyms facilitate pronunciation, which in turn favours using and memorizing names and supports in this way the acquisition of topographic knowledge.</u>

Since exonyms are pronounced according to the rules of the receiver language, they can be used easily and with certainty. This is not so much an advantage opposite endonyms of the major world languages, for it can be expected that educated speakers of most receiver languages know how to pronounce words in English, French or Spanish. But already with smaller European languages this may be different, not to mention Arabic and other African and Asiatic languages.

Strictly speaking, even with very common foreign languages like English, French or Spanish the speaker of a certain receiver language has only the alternative between a correctly pronounced exonym and a more or less incorrectly pronounced endonym. Would the speaker try to pronounce an endonym strictly according to the rules of the donor language, he/she would have to interrupt his/her speech to adjust articulation. This is even true for simple and common endonyms like *London, Roma* or *Moskva*. Adjusting to another articulation mode may even in these simple cases impress the listener negatively, affected. The unfavourable impression may arise that the speaker wants to "demonstrate his tolerant, liberal, progressive attitude, that he is versed in the ways of the world and well acquainted with foreign countries and languages". (Back, 1983, p.64)

Easy pronunciation produces in consequence other advantages. Names easy to be pronounced can easier be kept in mind and enlarge topographic knowledge. No fear to be blamed encourages a more frequent use. This in turn promotes the topographic precision of oral communication.

<u>Exonyms are more stable.</u>

Except for adaptations to new orthographic rules of a receiver language, exonyms are stable, while endonyms change with official language, official script, transcription systems and by official renaming.
While, e.g., the German exonym *Lemberg* has not changed for centuries, the corresponding endonym has only in the last six decades changed from *Lwow* (Polish) via *L'vov* (Russian) to *L'vív* (Ukrainian), not to mention the various transcription modes of the Russian-Cyrillic and Ukrainian-Cyrillic original versions.

<u>Exonyms are needed in historical and ethnographic contexts.</u>

There is no doubt that historical events, places and persons have to be marked by names that were valid at the point of time when the event happened or which are conventional in historical terminology and literature of the receiver language. Thus, it is clear for German speakers to use German *Königgrätz* and not Czech *Hradec Kralové* in the context of the battle and German *Auschwitz* instead of Polish *Oświęcim* when mention is about the concentration camp. The same is certainly true for Hungarians, when they speak about *Pozsony* as their historical capital.

But not only historical context urges the use of the (historical) exonym, also an ethnographic context. Thus, ethnographic maps of the Romanian, Hungarian or German ethnic diaspora will certainly not hide away the respective Romanian, Hungarian and German names.

But when exonyms are useful to enable a discourse on historical and ethnographic topics, it makes also more sense to use them in current contexts in order to preserve the knowledge of their meaning and their spatial reference.

This is no pleading for the preservation of historical exonyms, just a hint at an additional field of application.

<u>Exonyms indicate the importance of geographical features and traditional relations in trade, politics and culture.</u>

Exonyms have developed for geographical features important enough to a language community to be named differently from the endonym. Old and outstanding trade centres like Cologne [Köln], Leipzig, Cracow [Kraków], Milan [Milano] or Venice [Venenzia] have due to their global commercial and cultural relations accumulated a long list of exonyms in many different languages. Thus, throughout history a spatial pattern of exonyms has emerged that very precisely reflects the sum of historical relations of a language community with places and regions outside of it. Exonyms may therefore very profitably be used to document relations in trade, politics and culture.

<u>Exonyms relate geographical features outside a language community to features within.</u>

Especially within the Central European cultural space sharing not only a long common history, but also many traditions and customs, many geographical features, but also things of daily life like dishes, sausages, cheese, restaurants, music groups are named after places in other countries, naturally by exonyms. Would the respective exonyms get out of use, the meaning of these names would not be transparent anymore.

5 Specific functions of minority names on maps

<u>Minority place names function as labels.</u>
<u>Minority place names activate emotional relations.</u>

These are functions not basically different from functions mentioned under item 3.2. But they are especially important for linguistic minorities for the following reasons:

(a) While cultural majorities must not prove and defend their identity daily (except in ethnically mixed and border regions), minorities are usually in a much more defensive position. They feel much more the challenge of demonstrating their existence and of showing that the (co-)shape the identity of a place. To find "their" name on the map corresponds to this desire. They take the appearance of "their" name as a proof that this is (also) "their" place.

(b) The place name constitutes an emotional tie between the speaker of a minority language and the place as it does with speakers of the majority language. But while the name in the majority language is the name for the place used in daily communication, the name in the minority language is for the speaker of this language something very personal, intimate, in a way his/her personal name and specific emotional tie with the place.

For these two reasons it would be wise of administrations and majority populations to admit minority place names also on maps. This would contribute to a minority's feeling of being welcome and at home.

6 Conclusions

The paper shows that although place names on maps have no role in identifying geographical features or places, they have nevertheless a lot of important functions.
General functions of place names on maps are according to this paper (1) facilitating map use, (2) enabling search for places, (3) providing additional information about characteristics of a geographical feature, (4) providing information on the cultural setting of a place.
As functions confined to readers acquainted with the name and/or the place to be found on the map (5) the label function and (6) the function of activating emotional ties with a place are highlighted.

The paper further identifies specific functions of exonyms and names in minority languages on maps. Specific benefits of exonyms when they are used for addressing a domestic audience are attributed to the facts that they (1) facilitate pronunciation, which in turn favours using and memorizing names and supports in this way the acquisition of topographic knowledge; (2) are in general more stable than endonyms; (3) are especially useful in historical and ethnographic contexts; (4) indicate the importance of geographical features and traditional relations in trade, politics and culture; (5) relate geographical features outside a language community to features within.

The special importance of showing names in minority languages on maps is explained by the reasons that (1) linguistic minorities feel much more the challenge of demonstrating their existence and of showing that the (co-)shape the identity of a place, also by place names and that (2) for the speaker of a minority language his/her name is something very personal, intimate, his/her specific emotional tie with the place.

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