

Toponyms and their heritage significance:
The case of the Maghreb region
MALAK ALASLI¹⁰

Place names, like other names, are a requisite element of human language. However, they are generally taken for granted. Place names do not only serve to designate geographical features but can frequently reveal a narrative. They can unveil trails to a past cultural landscape and register the sequence of human migration and settlement in an area. Names are an indispensable and valuable part of our daily life. They perform a positive influence in preserving and appreciating the local community's culture and strengthening the identity of the people living in the present and the future. They are repositories of natural and cultural history and linguistic heritage; in other words, they sustain a country's heritage. UNGEGN officially declared that geographical names are significant elements of individuals' cultural heritage, necessitating preservation and protection in today's rapidly growing world.

Toponymy regards the set of place names on a cartographic document, where the cartographer plays a notable role in creating or preserving different forms of place names. Toponyms engage in the universal communicative dimension of

¹⁰ Institute of Cartography and Geoinformatics, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (Hungary).

all human language. They do not only primarily apprise the orientation in space but denounce it with more precision. Beyond their practical purpose of location or orientation in space, they hold an undeniable cultural dimension where they convey data about the area's history and ecology, revealing the components of culture and psychology of the communities in which they emerge.

Heritage research of a place should incorporate both current and historical or misused place names. Various geographical denominations have been adopted and reused in other places. Nevertheless, they are regarded as historical accounts as they carry data on the background of the name providers, their original homeland, and the emotional ties to where they originated from. Therefore, the place name is seen as a window to the past. Hence the goal of investigating the connection between the misuse of the place name and its emotional ties. How can the misuse or misinterpretation of place names provoke cultural misunderstandings? What is the effect of place names on cultural heritage?

This work will also attempt to collect the most common variants of the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) place names from Hungarian school atlases. In the specific case of the Maghreb, it is essential to talk about the bilingual presentation of place names and how it influences the sense of identity. Moreover, it is also important to increase awareness of the proper place name as an endeavor to preserve the national culture and uphold the local history of communities. An added goal is to examine whether the use of variants (orthographic, semantic, phonetic variants, etc.) affects the perception of heritage and whether people of the Maghreb sufficiently apprehend the significance of their place names. To what extent do the Maghreb people understand their toponyms? How does a name contribute to the meaning and associations of a place?

Geographical names bear a connection to the nation's cultural heritage. They store knowledge about the natural and cultural circumstances of the time they were coined and hence serve as a memory of places that function as historical documentation. Furthermore, they are part of the local language and history and designate a bond between communities and their environment. This paper asserts that by persevering and adopting the official names assigned to a place, both the cultural heritage of that area and the national identity are maintained and strengthened.

