Section 3 Regional activities and different applications

Chapter 7 **Street name standardisation**

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7.1 Introduction

Street name standardisation is just as necessary, for both national and international communication, as place name standardisation.

In place name standardisation, place names are processed by a recognised toponymical authority on the basis of a number of rules and normative criteria that are essentially aimed at guaranteeing the univocity of these place names. Univocity is to have only one standardized spelling form for the name of each geographical feature in each writing system. Street name standardisation answers the same criteria, but also respects some specific rules both regarding the standardization of the generics that form part of the street names and also regarding the standardisation of the material support of these street names, that is the street signs.

But there is a difference: place names often are the result of spontaneous action by the local population (it is the inhabitants themselves that name a place, on the basis of its usefulness or its specific characteristics. This leads to place names that result from the practical usage of these named features, based on free, popular imagination. This actually seems to be a natural process. And this is opposed to the attribution of street names, which often, if not always, is a process steered by the administrative or political authorities of a country.

Before we continue we should first define the term 'odonym' or 'street name':

"An odonym or street name is a proper name that designates a street."

In the same way one could define odonymy as the study of street names, or, more general, as the study of urban names, whether it is street names, names of buildings, institutions, constructions like bridges, public parks, or even monuments that have an important commemorative character.

7.2 Short historical development of street naming: between popular spontaneity and political interventions

In the past, it did not use to be the task of the administrative or political authorities in a country to take charge of the street naming process, just as it did not take charge of toponymy either. Place names in the past did not only allow for the location and identification of topographical features, but they also used to inform us about the functions of these features. This resulted in spontaneous names in the local languages, for example Cedar Mountain (the mountain where cedars grow) or Boar River (the river on which banks wild pigs roam).

It is only in the last two centuries, especially so for developing countries, that street naming has been taken up by (local) authorities. Since then it has become the exclusive privilege of these authorities to decide about and select the street names.

This is why official street name standardisation, from its inception, also has been subjected to a number of specific administrative criteria that will be exposed below.

7.3 General principles of street name standardization

The attribution of street names should be significant, taking into account the diverse contents that have a direct or indirect relationship with the named object: the

names selected should refer to the history of the country or the city and its memories, to the flora and fauna in its environment. These street names should open up the world nearby or further away by referring to places or countries with which relationships or bonds of friendship exist, with whom cooperation has been established, or with the world of science, of arts or of sports., etc.

The attribution of names can be an act of homage or recognition for the great personalities that have marked the history of the location, of the city or the country as well as of persons with a global impact such as Nobel prize laureates who, by their work or by their acts, have delivered an important contribution to the development and well-being of humanity.

That is why, in order to give concrete form to this approach, criteria for street name selection will be favoured that support the sense of belonging to a town or to the country and its opening to the world.

To this end every country should be able to establish its own specific criteria. Those listed below just serve as an example.

> Whenever there is a need for the attribution of street names, there immediately is also a need for its standardization.

Just like toponyms, odonyms (street names) can be constituted from a generic and a specific part. Each of these parts needs standardisation.

Standardisation of the orthography of specific place name parts
Stemming from the fact that the specific parts of street names usually derive from personal names, one should take great care to respect the orthography of these personal names, and copy the exact orthography from the population register. No deviations should be allowed. The name should be written in capital letters, or at least the first letter of the name should be a capital, and the name never should be abbreviated.

Standardisation of the orthography of the generic parts of place names

Here one first should define the various levels of streets and roads, and link them with matching generics. But one also should take account of the fact that some countries use the same definition for all types of streets and roads. Consequently, they would not distinguish between avenues, streets, boulevards, etc.

The generic parts one would encounter in an agglomeration could be the following (this list is not complete, but just serves to give some examples):

- ✓ **Lane:** street, with trees on both sides, flower beds and lawns that allows for the passage of vehicles and walkers into a garden, a park or wood.
- ✓ **Avenue**: Artery of the road network that serves as collector. This artery would provide access to the local streets.
- ✓ **Boulevard**: Major artery of the road network that links several town sectors
- ✓ **Intersection:** Intersection point with obligatory driving direction
- ✓ **Lane**: public country road
- ✓ **Blind alley**: road that comes to a dead end,
- ✓ **Arcade**, small covered street usually prohibited for vehicles.
- ✓ **Foot-bridge**: narrow bridge reserved for pedestrians.
- ✓ **Bridge:** construction by which a road, aqueduct, or a conduit crosses a water course, a depression or another road**.**
- ✓ **Promenade**: Road especially adapted for promenaders

- ✓ **Street**: local public road part of the local network
- ✓ **Alley**: small narrow road
- ✓ **Footpath**: narrow road destined for pedestrians
- ✓ **Rotunda/Roundabout**: circular crossing.
- ✓ **Square**: exposed small or large open public space in a city or village, usually surrounded by public buildings, where several streets or avenues would end, and where frequently commercial, festive or public events are held.
- ✓ **Square park**: small public garden, usually fenced, in the centre of a square

7.4 Selection of names reflecting the importance of the parts of the road network.

The importance of the parts of the road network should be matched by the importance of the persons or concepts these road network elements are named for. According to a logical and standardised hierarchy one should define the order of attribution of names, in function of the criteria linked to the type of road concerned, such as the importance and quality of the name selected (international, national, regional or local renown, and related to a political, scientific, artistic, sports or military background).

In this way, for the grand arteries like boulevards and avenues, names should be selected of personalities that own their renown to an exceptional contribution towards human development.

It is also suitable to go for favoured name themes, that are linked to the specific characteristics of the site – if these can be found – for instance select names of scientists for those streets that run towards the university or to research institutions, select names of famous medical scientists to those streets that run towards hospitals, and select names of animal or floral

species for roads that are close to a zoological or botanical garden, etc. This procedure can be called systematic appellation. In order to establish an equilibrium, and to diversify the names, it is also recommended to select names that refer to vegetation species.

The obligation for a direct (tangible) link to exist between the name and the named object, i.e. the road or street, is not required. It is perfectly suitable to name a road *lilac tree street*, even if both in the past and the present no single trace of this vegetable species can be found there! Here tribute would be paid to the beauty of the tree, not to its presence.

Finally, only those persons can have a street named after them, that died a certain number of years ago (the number would be different per country).

7.5 Standardization of the street sign supports

A good street name signage will help towards a better traffic circulation and will increase the possibilities for orientation and locating a destination. A place name sign is an essential location or orientation element, as it helps to guide users in finding their destination. Street name signage facilitates and accelerates access to first aid, distribution of the mail, and rapid intervention in case of disasters.

A proper signage also contributes in providing a town or a municipality with a feeling of identity; and through this common identity in turn it provides the town with a sense of coherence. The signage supports a valorisation of the cultural and historical heritage of the municipality or the town.

The street sign itself can become a true symbol of the city and even a tourist gadget. The Paris name sign for instance can be cited as an example of a material object

that constitutes an integral part of the cultural heritage of the city and a true touristic object.

That is why great care should be applied to the choice of sign supports, both from the point of view of the selection of the materials (that should be sustainable), of the script (legibility, sustainability), the colours (contrast), the additional information that may serve as an explanation of the name selection) as well as the place (on the wall close to a street corner or on a freestanding pole) where the sign is applied.

Several choices can be made here, and there is evidence of international experiences here as well.

7.6 Some international examples of street name signage

The example of France
The example of France shows that every municipality may have its own particular type of street signs, which may lead to a sense of identity.
We may refer to the following examples:

Municipality of Paris
- Street signs are applied to walls
- The blue street name signs with white script in a green rectangle with a crescent on top indicating the arrondissement provides three types of information:
- The generic and specific parts of the street name written in white capital letters
- The number of the arrondissement (city quarter) written in white letters
- The generic and the specific are written one beneath the other (see figure 7-1).

Figure 7-1 Example of a Paris street sign

Municipality of Vitry sur Seine:

Vitry is a municipality in the southern suburbs of Paris, about 7 kilometres from Paris centre. This white street name sign (see figure 7-2) hangs on a dark brown post and bears the following information:

- The municipality name written in red letters

- The municipality emblem

- The generic and specific street name parts written in black (big characters written in lower case letters only)

- Information about the person the street was named for

- His or her date of birth and demise

- The specific parts have been placed beneath the generic parts

Figure 7-2 Example of a street name sign from Vitry sur Seine

Municipality of Kremlin-Bicêtre

The town of Kremlin-Bicêtre is located in the southern suburbs of Paris about 5 kilometres from Paris centre. Here, the rectangular street name signs with a blue background are attached to black poles. The signs have a white rectangle of a distinct shape, and bear the following information (see figure 7-3):

- On top the name of the town, below both the generic and specific street name parts, written in white capital letters, followed by the qualifications of the person the street was named after

- The generic and specific parts of the street name have been placed one beneath the other

Figure 7-3 Street name sign from Kremlin-Bicêtre

Examples from Belgium

In the Belgian capital Brussels, which is officially bilingual, the rectangular street name signs are bilingual French/Dutch (see figure7-4). White characters as well as the logo have been placed on a blue or green ground. In figure 7-5 the complete street name has been translated (Rue des Néfliers (French) = Mispelaarsstraat (Dutch)). In English, this signifies 'Medlar tree street'. Note that the specific and generic street name parts are on different lines. If the specific part is a personal name (as for instance Mr Boileau), this of course would not be translated. Note that in French the generic (rue or avenue) is not attached to the specific, while in Dutch it is. Figure 7-5 also is proof of the attempt to have as short a place name sign as possible, and to have the specific part stand out, as that would be the part the travellers would be looking for. When the specific part needs no translation, it should not be repeated, so instead of Avenue Boileau/Boileaulaan, the joined solution in figure 7-5 has been selected, instead of the complete translation.

Figure 7-4 Brussels bilingual street name sign

Figure 7-5 Brussels bilingual street name sign, with the specific untranslated

Figure 7-6 Brussels bilingual street name sign

In figure 7-6 a 'traquet' or 'zwartkeeltje' is a bird species called 'wheatear' in English.

The example of Canada

Québec city

Here the street name sign is attached to a building. It has a pronounced rectangular form, with a blue foundation and a white rectangle which contains the name starting with a capital letter, on the same line (see figure 7-7).
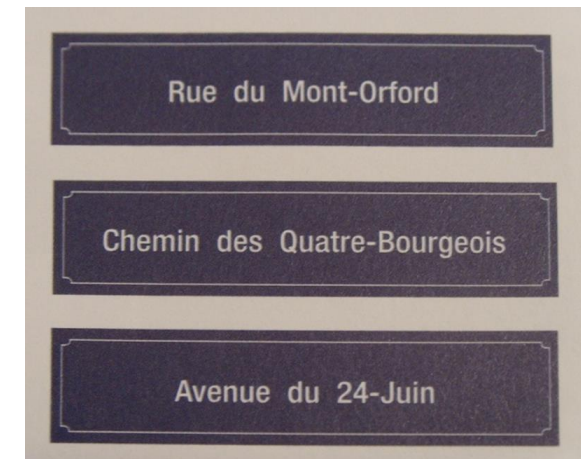

Figure 7-7 Street name examples from Québec

The example from the Republic of Korea

Here the blue street name sign with white characters bears:

-an indication of the (range of) numbers of the row of buildings in a block

-the street name in Korean (and Chinese, see figure 7-10) characters with its transcription in Roman letters

-an indication of the (16th) district in which the street is situated.

Figure 7-9 Street name sign from Seoul (ROK)

Figure 7-10 Triscriptual name sign from Seoul, with street names in Korean, Roman and Chinese characters.

The example from the Czech Republic

Figure 7-11 Street name sign from Prague

The street name sign in figure 7-11 is from Prague. Here the rectangular red street name sign with a stylised white border bears the name in the same colour as the border. Below the street name in large characters, the name of the city quarter in which the street is situated is listed in smaller characters, also in capital letters.

Figure 7-12 Street name from Istanbul

Example from Turkey:

Figure 7-12 shows a street name sign from Istanbul. The red part indicates the street name and the numbers of the buildings on this block; the white part contains the name of the neighbourhood or city quarter and the lower, blue part contains the name of the city district.

Example from the United States

UNGEGN-participants would be familiar with the street name signs in New York city, particularly those close to the United Nations Building where the UNGEGN-meetings are being held.

Figures 7-13 and 7-14 show two types of street name signs used in New York City: one on a green background with the image of the statue of Liberty, and one on a blue background, with a white border. Both signs have their lettering in white.

Figure 7-13 street name sign from New York city, with logo (freedom statue) attached.

Figure 7-14 Street name sign from New York City, with the numerals in Arabic or Roman characters

New York also has some examples of street names written on the pavement (see figure 7-15).

Figure 7-15 New York street name sign applied to the pavement

Example from Spain

Figures 7-16 and 7-17 show Spanish examples on a marble support with engraved letters enhanced in black.

Figure 7-16 and 7-17 Spanish place name signs

Why is it necessary to add Roman transcriptions to street names and place name signs?

In a world without boundaries one should try to avoid confusion regarding toponyms in general and street names in particular – to improve both information transfer and communication. That is why it is advocated to write toponyms and street names not only in the local script, but also in the Roman alphabet, following a conversion system approved by the competent authorities of each country or by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Figures 7-18 and 7-19 show unilingual examples, and signs such as these are to be avoided.

Figure 7-18 Street name sign from China

Figure 7-19 street name sign from Algeria

The street name sign from Malaysia (see figure 7-20), from the city of Kuala Lumpur, is rectangular and has a blue background with Arab script in yellow characters and Roman script in white letters with, in orange Roman characters, the name of the city and the local postal code.

The street name sign from Algeria in figure 7-21 has the street name in Arabic script on top, followed by its conversion into the Roman alphabet. Beneath, information has been added on the person the street was named after. The city arms including the Atlas lion, have been added to the name sign.
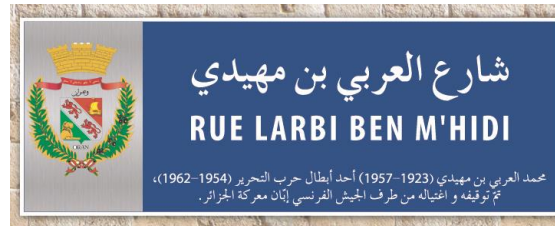

Figure 7-21 Bilingual and biscriptual name sign from Alger, with the name in the Arabic alphabet (official language alphabet) and in the Roman script.

One should rather favour to have street name signs in the local language with their Roman script version added, as in the following examples (figures 7-20 - 7-22):

Figure 7-20 Street name sign from Kuala Lumpur

Figure 7-22 Name sign from Den Pasar, Indonesia with the name in Roman alphabet (official alphabet for the Indonesian language) and in the Balinese script.