

28 January 2019

Original: English

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**United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names  
2019 session  
New York, 29 April – 3 May 2019  
Item 14 of the provisional agenda \*  
Exonyms (Working Group on Exonyms)**

## **Border between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ drawn by place names**

Submitted by Austria\*\*

### **Summary**

The distinction between endonyms and exonyms for place names symbolizes the distinction between “ours” and “theirs” in geographical terms, between geographical features in a community’s own territory and features in the territory of another community. The names of geographical features in the community’s own territory are endonyms (names from within). Endonyms are symbols of appropriation. Whoever owns a feature or has responsibility for it usually reserves the right to name it. The function is similar to that performed by flags, coats of arms or logos. For geographical features outside its own territory, a community will usually adopt existing names, translating them into its own language or adapting them morphologically or phonetically. In contrast to the names of features in its own territory (endonyms), they are exonyms, needed by a community to mark features outside its own territory in such a way that their use is comfortable, meaning they are pronounceable and easy to communicate. In contrast to endonyms, exonyms are not symbols of appropriation and do not express claims, but indicate the importance of a feature for the community and its relations with it, in other words, its network of external relations. Exonyms help to integrate a foreign feature into the cultural sphere of a community and help to avoid exclusion and alienation. Starting from a cultural and geographical perspective, the full report is aimed at demonstrating the following:

- The distinction between endonyms and exonyms precisely reflects the distinction between “ours” and “theirs” and therefore refers to borders and territoriality, in other words, to basic human attitudes and basic features of human life, and is for that reason an essential toponymic issue.
- Exonyms also have the function of debordering, of integrating the alien into one’s own cultural sphere, and are tools for international networking and acquiring a dense mental map. They are, in contrast to earlier concepts,

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\* GEGN.2/2019/1

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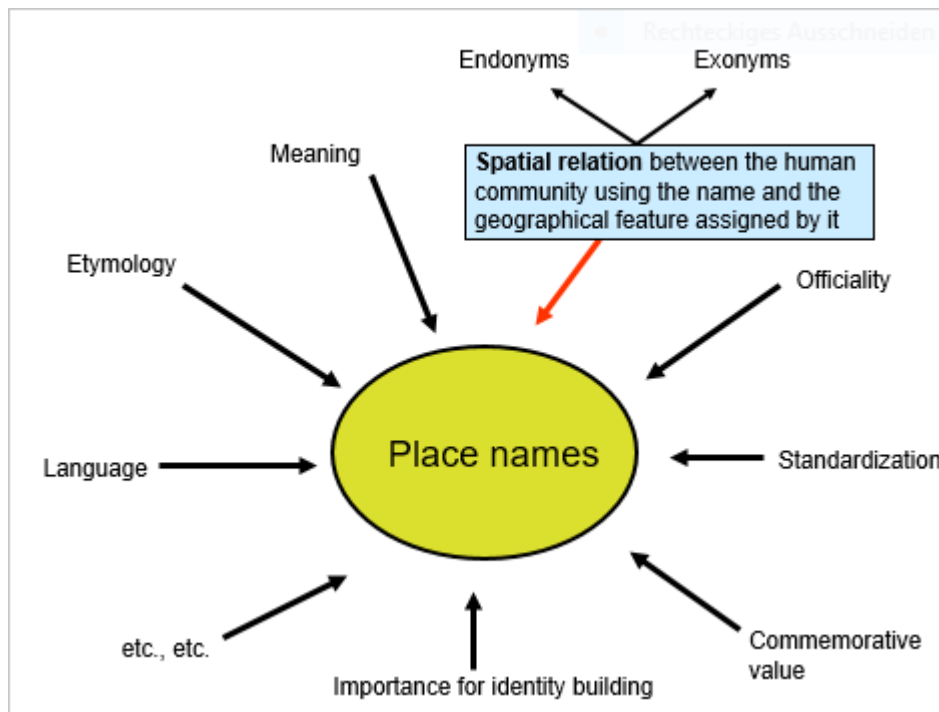
including those expressed in resolutions adopted at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names recommending the reduction of exonyms, a category that transcends borders and facilitates international contacts, although it is also true that using exonyms requires political sensitivity.

# The border between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ drawn by place names

## 1 Introduction

From a cultural-geographical perspective, to which especially Yi-Fu TUAN (1977, 1990, 1991) and Don MITCHELL (2000), but also R. ROSE-REDWOOD, D. ALDERMAN and M. AZARYAHU (2010) have essentially contributed, the endonym/exonym divide with place names arises when place names are regarded under the aspect of the spatial relation between the human community using the name and the geographical feature assigned by it. This is just one of many aspects of place names (Fig. 1), but a very important, because it coincides with two basic human attitudes: (1) to differentiate between ‘mine’ and ‘yours’, ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ as well as (2) territoriality, i.e. the desire to own a place – a desire expressing itself at all the various levels of human activity and community building, from the desire to have a work place, a flat or house at one’s own disposal up to states, who strive for exerting their power and law on a well-defined territory. This divide has therefore always a political, social and juridical meaning and is for this reason very sensitive and frequently a source of political conflict.

Fig. 1: Aspects of place names



Endonyms are symbols of appropriation. Who owns a feature or has the responsibility for it, usually reserves the right to name it. This function of endonyms resembles that exerted by flags, coats of arms or logos. Endonyms mark a territory surrounded by borders.

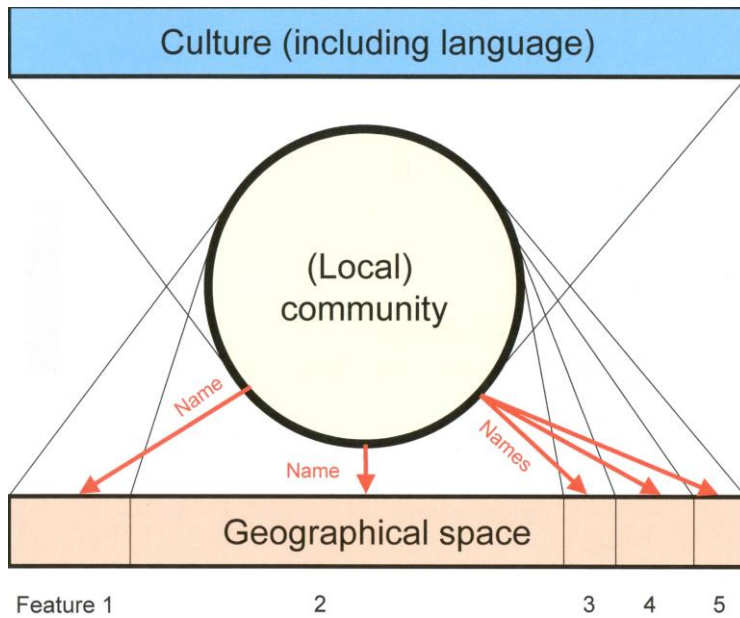
For geographical features outside its own territory, a community will usually adopt existing names, translating them into its own language or adapting them morphologically or phonetically. In contrast to names for features on its own territory, i.e. endonyms, these are exonyms, needed by a community to address such features in such a way that it is comfortable, i.e. that the use of these names is easily pronounceable and easy to communicate. In contrast to endonyms, exonyms are not symbols of appropriation and do not express claims. Instead they indicate the importance of a feature for this community and the relations it has with it, i.e. its network of external relations. Exonyms help to integrate this foreign feature into the cultural sphere of a community and help avoid exclusion and alienation (BACK 2002). (It can, however, not be denied that exonyms can also be misused in the sense of political claims or at least political nostalgia.)

So, while the endonyms/exonym divide marks the border between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ in the territorial sense, exonyms have also a function of debordering, of connecting us with others.

This paper will elaborate on this topic by at first highlighting briefly the relation between human communities and place names and then presenting some examples as regards the endonyms/exonym divide. Finally, it will also show, how exonyms reflect the networks of external relations of some European communities.

## 2 Human community and place name

Fig. 2: The place-naming process



In the place-naming process three factors are involved (see Fig. 2): The community in the sociological sense of a group of people, an identity group feeling to have some characteristics in

common, not necessarily interacting on a regular basis and knowing each other. It can vary in size from a family/partnership to a nation and the community of global citizens.

The second factor is the community's culture including language; culture understood in the most comprehensive sense as the totality of all human expressions.

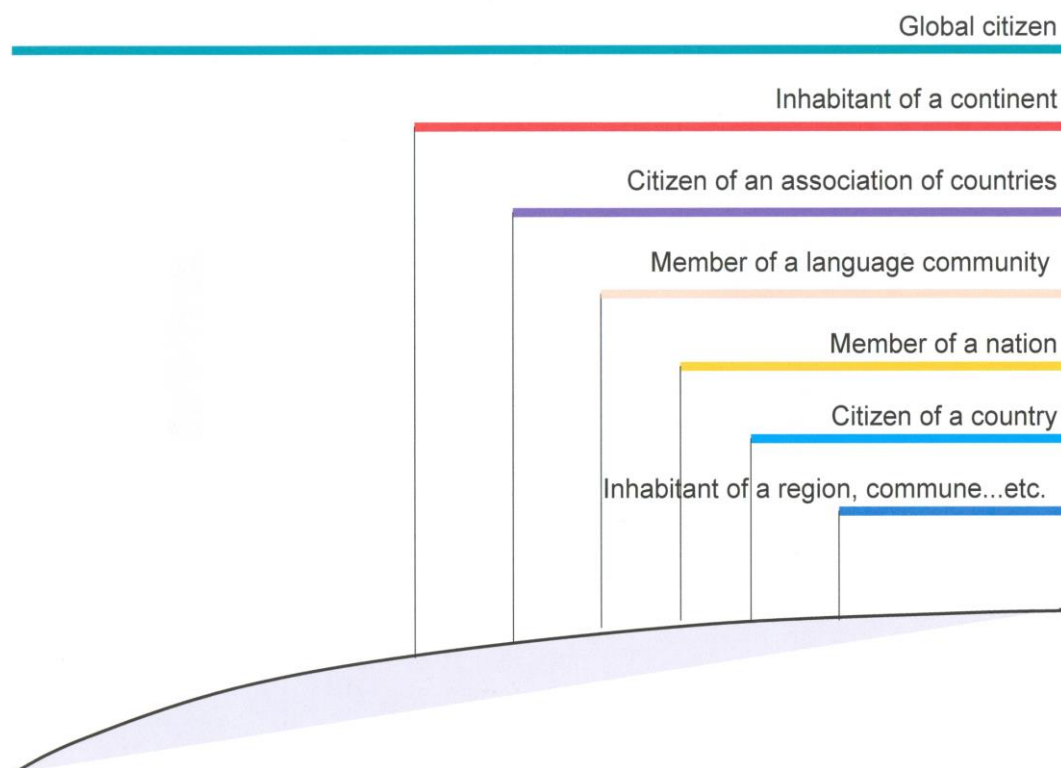
The third factor is geographical space subdivided into geographical features; geographical space understood according to Wilhelm Leibniz as the totality of all relations between physical-material features.

The only actor in this process is the human community inhabiting a certain section of geographical space, having developed a certain culture and language, structuring complex geographical space mentally into features on the background of its culture and – led by its specific interests – marking these features by place names

Of course, also an individual can assign a name to a feature, but such a name will not get into use, assume communicative value and persist, if it is not accepted by the community. So it is at the end always the community, who acts in this process.

Place names used by a community for features on its own territory (= endonyms) are (among other means) markers of the community's territory, since names are also symbols for appropriation. Who owns a feature usually has the right to name it. This function of proper names in general, but of place names in particular, is also expressed by Genesis 2:20, when it says: "The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field,..."

Fig. 3: Multiple space-related identities



It is, however, also a fact that we usually do not belong to only one community, but rather to a multitude of them – we have in fact multiple identities, also multiple space-related identities (see Fig. 3). We are not only inhabitants of a village, commune, city, region. We are at the same

time citizens of a country. We are also members of a nation, a language community (e.g. the English). We are citizens of an association of countries like the European Union. We may even feel as inhabitants of our continent or to be global citizens, when we engage ourselves for questions like climate change, global disparities in development etc.

So, who is the community in place, when it comes to define, whose name is the endonym (the name from within a community) and the exonym (the name from without)? According to the subsidiarity principle it is always the local group: The name for the Earth is an endonym in all languages, because we are all inhabiting the Earth. The name for Austria is an endonym in German, Slovene, Burgenland-Croatian, Hungarian and some other minority languages, because these are the languages of local, autochthonous communities. The names for Vienna or Salzburg are endonyms just in German, because their autochthonous inhabitants are German-speakers, while the English name *Vienna* for Wien and the Italian name *Salisburgo* for Salzburg are exonyms, because the two cities have neither autochthonous communities of English nor Italian mother tongue.

Based on this concept, the endonym can be defined as the name accepted and used by the local community while the exonym is the name not used by the local community and differing from the endonym. Thus, the endonym/exonym divide corresponds exactly to the divide between space and place in the sense of Yi-Fu TUAN (1977), i.e. the divide between (neutral) space and this section of space, to which a certain human community has assumed relations. “Naming turns space into place”, as Bill WATT (2009, p. 21) puts it, is very much to the point, although it must be conceded that naming is not the only agent in this respect.

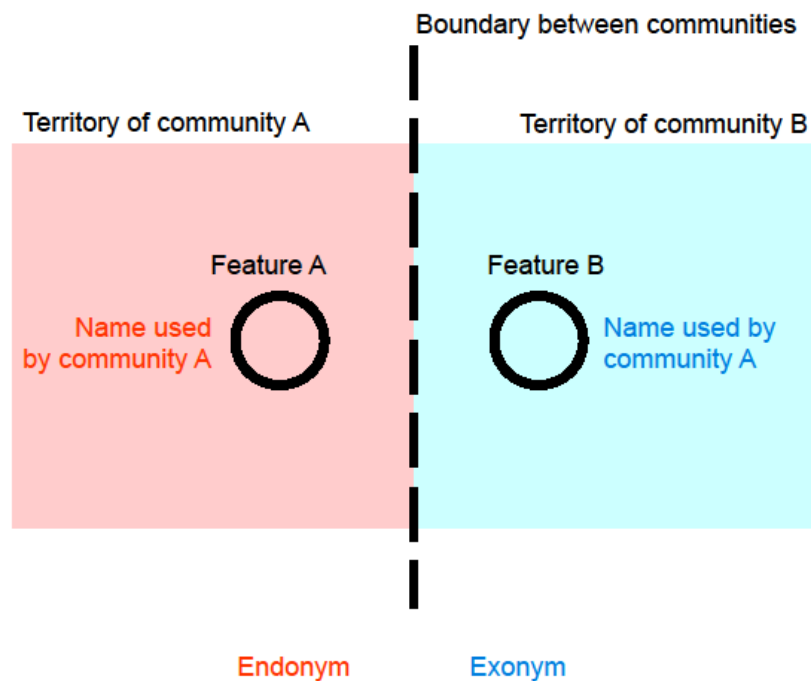
These all-comprehensive definitions of endonym and exonym deviate from the definitions in the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names, edited by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), since the latter have been tailored to the purpose of standardization. UNGEGN defines endonym as “name of a geographical feature in an official or well-established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated. Examples: Vārānasī (not Benares); Aachen (not Aix-la-Chapelle); Krung Thep (not Bangkok); Al-Uqşur (not Luxor).” (KADMON 2007a, p. 2) UNGEGN defines exonym as “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.” (KADMON 2007a, p. 2)

While these definitions style language and officialty differentiating criteria between endonym and exonym, especially Paul WOODMAN has repeatedly hinted at the fact that the divide can exist also within a language, that a place name can be an endonym also in a non-local language (e.g. *Vienna International Center*, *Vienna International Airport*) and that an official name is not necessarily an endonym, but can be imposed by an occupation force and not be accepted by the local community – as it occurred with German *Litzmannstadt* for the Polish city of Łódź during World War II (see, e.g., WOODMAN 2012a, 2012b). These arguments have also been brought forward in several meetings of the UNGEGN Working Group Exonyms, but did not result in new definitions.

### 3 Examples

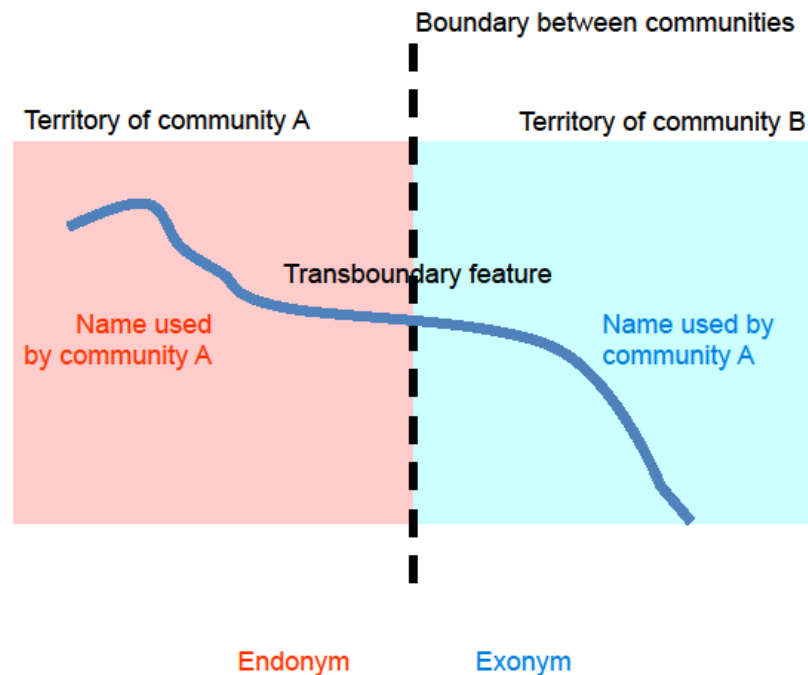
When features are located within community boundaries (see Fig. 4), it is pretty clear, whether a name has endonym or exonym status. Names used by a community for features located exclusively on the own territory are endonyms. Names used by a community for features located exclusively outside are exonyms. If a place is inhabited by more than one community, e.g. in minority situations, the place can have more than one endonym. This is certainly the case with Brussels, where Dutch *Brussel* and French *Bruxelles* are both endonyms, while English *Brussels* is an exonym. If somebody from outside the community uses the name applied by the local community, he/she uses the endonym.

Fig. 4: Features located within community boundaries



If transboundary features are affected (see Fig. 5), a name is (of course) valid for the whole feature, but has endonym status only up to the boundary and assumes exonym status on the other side. This means, e.g., that the German name *Donau* is a name for the entire river Danube from the confluence of its sources Brigach and Breg to its mouth, but has endonym status only in Germany and Austria, where it crosses German-speaking communities, while it assumes exonym status from Slovakia downstream.

Fig. 5: Transboundary features



#### 4 Debordering by the use of exonyms

Let us finally address the debordering, integrating function of exonyms by the examples of three linguistic communities. As already mentioned, exonyms indicate the importance of a feature for a community, the relations it has with it, i.e. in their totality the community's network of external relations.

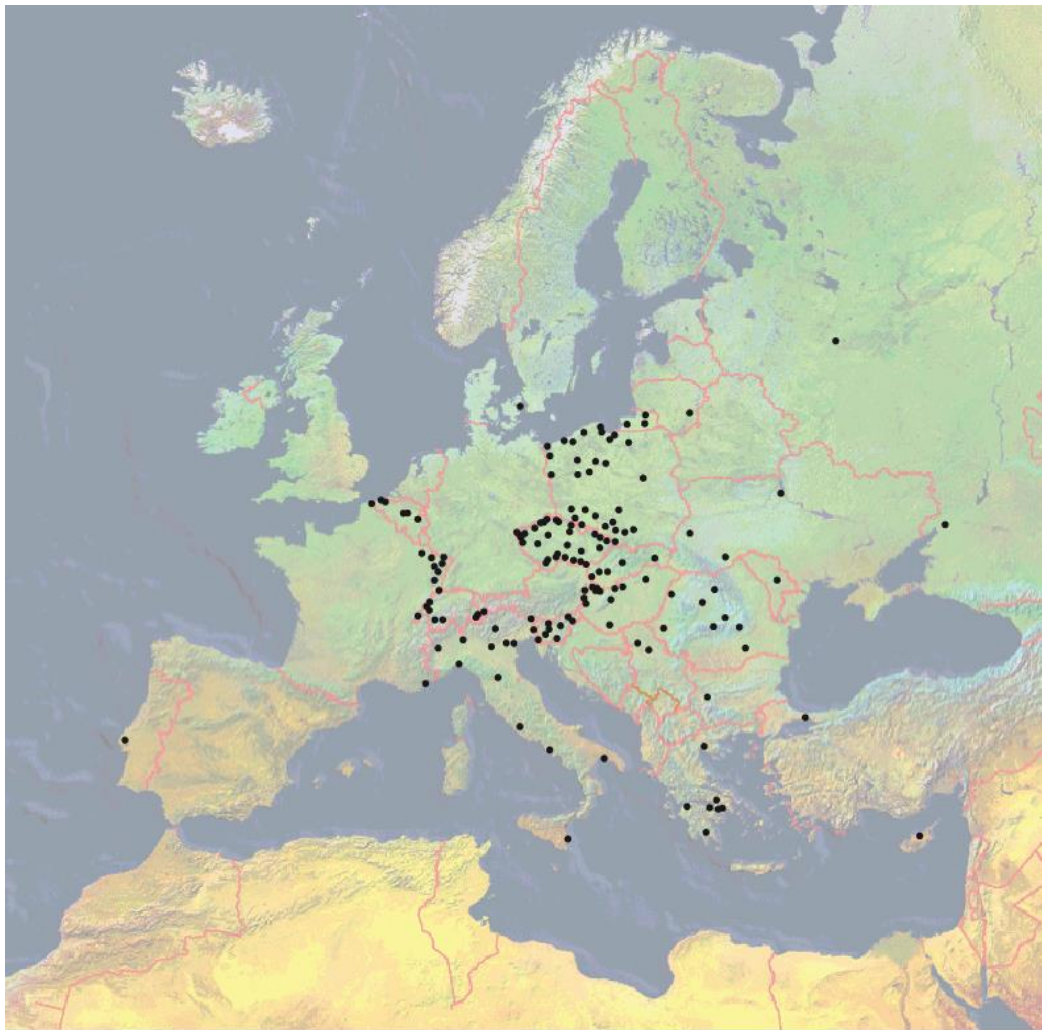
Mainly by translation of endonyms or by their morphological and/or phonetical adaption to the receiver language, exonyms facilitate to address foreign features, help integrating a foreign feature into the cultural sphere of the receiver community and help avoid exclusion and alienation.

Three maps to follow will demonstrate the network of a specific community's cultural, political and economic relations in present and history as indicated by its use of



exonyms. All three maps show exonyms of a certain community just for populated places – not for other feature types like water bodies, mountains, landscapes or countries. The reason is that names for water bodies, mountains, landscapes or countries are much more frequently translated into the receiver language and become in this way exonyms. The network of relations is thus somehow distorted. It is, however, also distorted by some linguistic factors: linguistic relation and closeness of languages, easiness to pronounce a certain name, spread of trade languages.

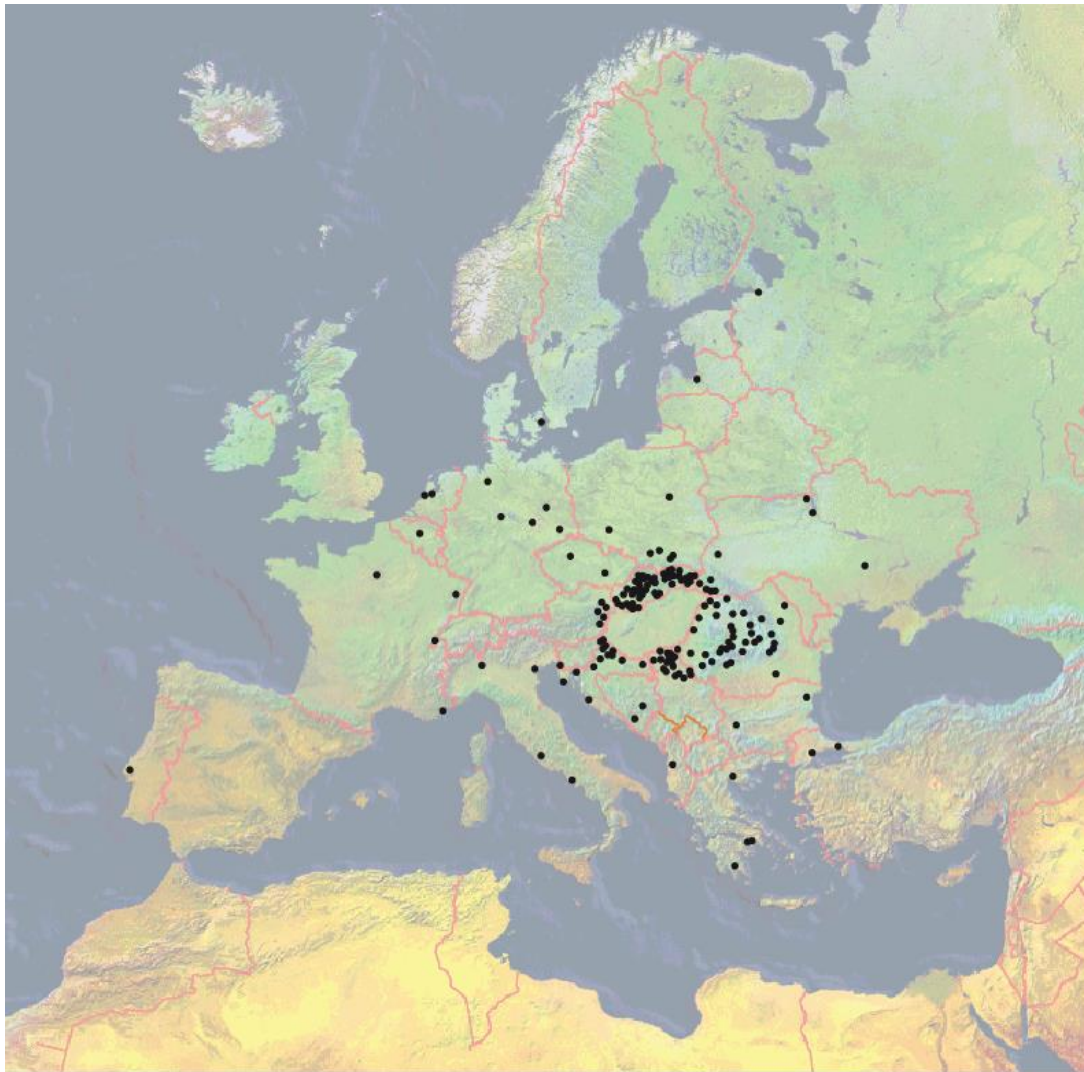
Fig. 6: German exonyms of populated places used in Austria (Source: AKO 2012)



German exonyms frequently used in Austria (see Fig. 6) show the network of relations of the Austrian German-speaking community. It is dense in the lands of the former Holy Roman Empire, i.e. Northern Italy, the Bohemian Lands, Belgium. It is also dense in East-Central Europe with former German settlement and territories of former empires with Germans as dominant groups. The pattern of cultural networks is, however, distorted by the gradient in language prestige from West to East: Almost no German

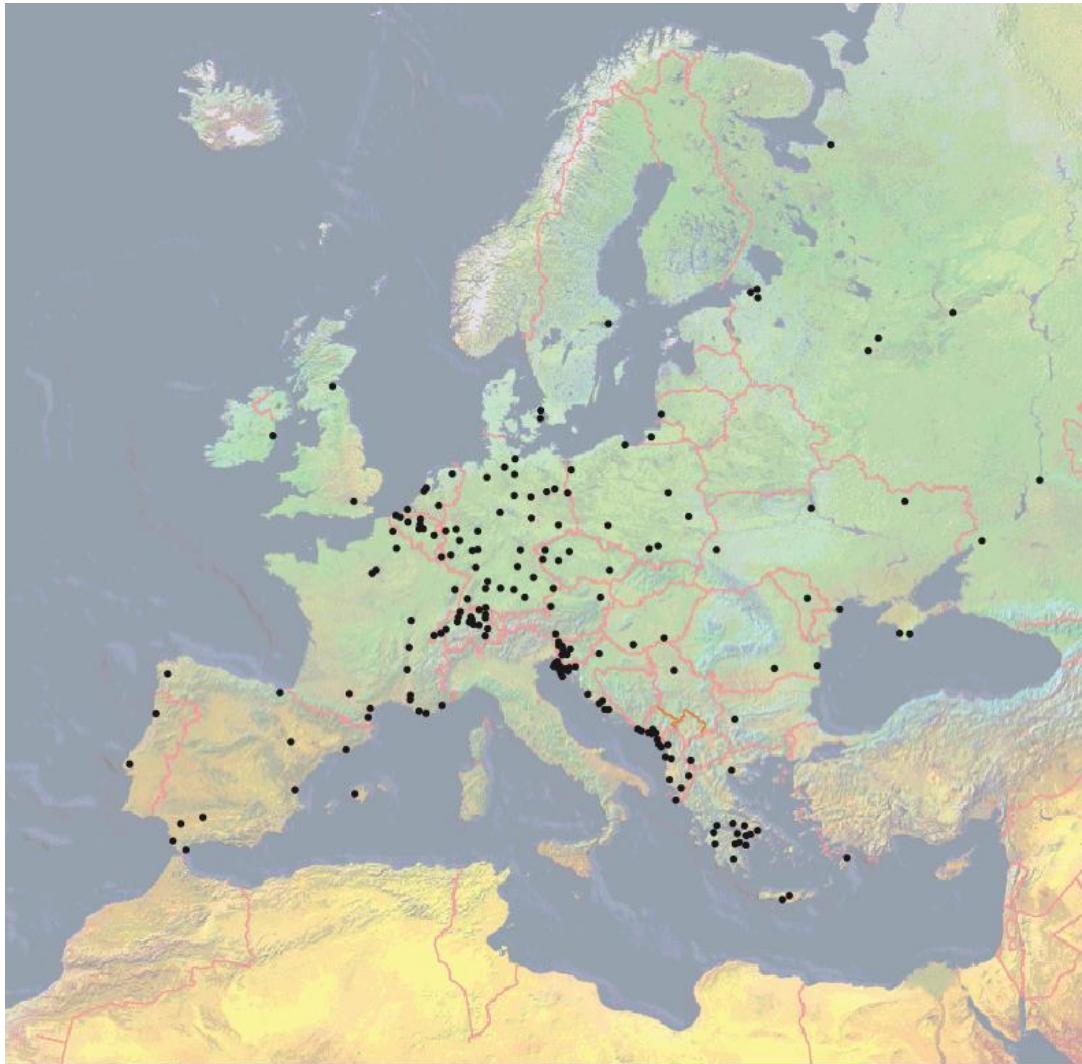
exonyms for populated places appear in the anglophone and francophone sphere. These are well-known trade languages in Austria, almost everybody knows how their endonyms are spelled and pronounced.

Fig. 7: Hungarian exonyms of populated places (Source: DUTKO 2007)



The pattern of Hungarian exonyms in frequent use (see Fig. 7) reflects the former Hungarian Kingdom and Hungary's traditional trade relations to Northern Italy and Northern Germany.

Fig. 8: Italian exonyms of populated places (Source: TONIOLO 2002)



The pattern of Italian exonyms in frequent use (see Fig. 9) highlights the Venetian trade network in the Eastern Mediterranean and again the former Holy Roman Empire, of which Northern Italy was a part.

## 5 Conclusions

Departing from a cultural-geographical perspective the paper has tried to demonstrate that

- the endonym/exonym divide reflects precisely the distinction between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ and refers in this way to borders and territoriality, i.e. basic human attitudes and basic features in human life, and is for this very reason an essential toponymic issue;
- exonyms have also the function of debordering, of integrating the alien into one’s own cultural sphere, are tools of international networking and acquiring a dense mental map. They are – in contrast to earlier conceptions, also expressed by UN resolutions recommending the reduction of exonyms – the category transgressing borders and facilitating international contacts, although it is also true that using exonyms requires political sensitivity.

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