

GEOGRAPHISCHE NAMEN *PLACE NAMES*

DECODING OF PLACE NAMES AS GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION TOOLS

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Zusammenfassung

Entschlüsselung geographischer Namen als Quellen geographischer Information

Aus einer geographischen Perspektive dienen geographische Namen nicht nur der Identifizierung von Objekten in Karten und im Gelände. Sie sind darüber hinaus eine hochwertige Quelle geographischer Informationen. Geographische Namen bezeichnen ein bestimmtes Objekt, beschreiben es manchmal auch und liefern darüber mehr oder weniger deutliche (transparente) Informationen. Jeder geographische Name enthält aber auch Informationen über ein Objekt, die nur in ihrem jeweiligen Kontext durch die individuelle Analyse des einzelnen Namens erschlossen werden können. Denn mit jedem geographischen Namen verbindet sich eine einzigartige Vorstellung vom damit bezeichneten

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Objekt. Deshalb sind geographische Namen wichtige Werkzeuge des Geographen beim ‚Lesen‘ und Interpretieren der Landschaft.

Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen von geographischen Namen als Quellen geographischer Information besser verständlich zu machen. Deshalb werden Informationen, die aus geographischen Namen gewonnen werden können, nach der Art der Informationssammlung, der Interpretation und der Übermittlung durch die Bewohner des vom Namen bezeichneten Ortes mit den Mitteln der Feldforschung, ethnographischer Bestandsaufnahmen, der Dokumentensichtung in Archiven und von Mental Maps analysiert. Ferner wird auf die Fähigkeit geographischer Namen hingewiesen, den Diskurs über ein geographisches Objekt zu beeinflussen. Schließlich wird eine Kategorisierung der Beziehungsarten zwischen geographischen Namen und ihren Nutzern vorgeschlagen.

Schlagwörter: Toponomastik, geographische Namen, geographische Informationen, Diskurs über geographische Objekte, raumbezogene Konzepte

Summary

From the perspective of geography, place names are not only identifiers on maps and in the territory. They also constitute a source of geographic information of enormous value. Place names designate and, eventually, describe the place they refer to and they provide more or less explicit information about it. But each name also codifies specific information about the place that may only be decoded in its particular context, through the individual analysis of a toponym. Each place name is tied up with a specific and unrepeatable idea of the place. Consequently, place names are valuable tools for geographers in their task of ‘reading’ and analysing places.

This paper aims at achieving a better understanding of the possibilities and boundaries of place names as geographical information tools. Thus, information derived from place names is analysed by the way it is collected, interpreted and transmitted by the residents of the place through fieldwork, ethnographic surveys and documentary archive analysis as well as mental maps. Also, the ability of place names to influence the discourse about a certain place is highlighted. Finally, a categorisation of the relationships local residents establish with the place names they use is proposed.

Keywords: Toponomastics, place names, geographic information, territorial discourse, idea of the place

1 Place names in geography

A place cannot be fully understood without its toponym. Place names are the first and foremost factor for the recognition and appropriation of places. Naming a place implies recognising its existence. Place names are, it follows, inherent to geography, the science of places.

Toponymy is an essential field of geographical science in two ways. First, place names are valuable geographic identifiers, instruments for the processing, interpretation and dissemination of geographical information. In this regard, place names are essential in terms of spatial data infrastructure (PARKER 2001, p. 2), the reading and interpretation of maps (JORDAN 2009, p. 1), and the transmission and dissemination of geographical information (PAIGH 2004, p. 29). Second, toponyms are in themselves a source of geographical information. Toponyms are a link between humans and the territory, and they are loaded with significant cultural meaning (KERFOOT 2009, p. 3). They are a historical testimony of the culture that created them (ROSSELLÓ 2004, p. 52 in TORT I DONADA 2011, p. 57), and as such, an essential part of our cultural heritage (UNGEGN 2011, p. 36).

Despite the importance of toponymy within the framework of geography, the study and analysis of place names has traditionally been taken on by other disciplines, such as linguistics and philology, which are fundamentally interested in toponyms as linguistic signs (ARROYO ILERA 2010, p. 300). Toponymy has always been of interests to geographers, but, commonly, as a complementary tool for the interpretation of landscapes. DORION & HAMELIN denounced, as far back as 1966, that traditional geography was failing to show enough interest in toponymy's potential as a scientific discipline in its own right (DORION & HAMELIN 1966, p. 196): "Toponymy is not the complete science that we could wish it was; it lacks the necessary polyvalence for being an autonomous science."

In recent times, however, the geographical analysis of toponyms is undergoing a critical reformulation (ROSE-REDWOOD et al. 2010, p. 466), a process, which follows an increasing interest in aspects of toponymy related to the examination of the origin, evolution and use of place names and their potential as a source of information in territorial studies. This trend is fostering the development of a real toponymic science, which can be connected with a progressive and growing focus on the study of symbols, including place names. Place names are closely related to power and politics – issues, which are increasingly regaining their traditional central stage position (see ROSE-REDWOOD et al. 2010, p. 466). It can also be connected with a soaring interest in geographical information at the beginning of the age of digital spatial data infrastructures, as GOODCHILD rightly points out: "The need to make easy translations between place names and coordinates has led to increased interest in digital gazetteers and to the processes of naming places, in a revival of the old and largely discredited field of toponymy." (GOODCHILD 2004, p. 712)

New geographical approaches to toponymy revolve around what could be called the *metalinguistic* function of place names. In its more traditional approach, geography has focused on examining what the place name describes in order to obtain information about the place. In recent works, for example, place names have been used to pinpoint certain manifestations of climate change (SOUSA et al. 2010), or they have been an efficient tool for the reconstruction of historical wooded and agricultural landscapes (LÓPEZ LEIVA & CUEVAS 2013). Also, within the framework of spatial data infrastructures, the understanding of place names has proven to be an essential factor in the development of geographic ontologies (LAURINI 2015).

From a modern geography perspective, more recent approaches to the study of place names pay close attention to the naming process and its cultural implications. For JORDAN "place names have important functions [...] in making use of natural resources when

they reflect natural characteristics, in cultural transformation of the geographical space by shaping it visually and mentally, in identity building with individual members of a cultural group and with a cultural group in total as labels and in supporting emotional ties.” (JORDAN 2012, p. 129) Place names are now considered more than innocent spatial references or passive artifacts; they are embedded in social power relations and identity struggles, which concern both places and people (ALDERMAN & INWOOD 2013, p. 212). Specifically, the study of urban toponymy has been revitalised by the emergence of a “critical toponymies” approach (LIGHT & YOUNG 2014, p. 1), an ongoing trend, which fosters the analysis of place names viewed as commodities or the use of endonyms and exonyms, among other related issues.

In general, new approaches to place names in geography share an interest in the rich and varied geographical information conveyed by place names, the analysis and valorisation of which involves reflection and interpretation. Within this framework, we propose to move forward in the definition of this information and what lies beneath it addressing its range, analysis and evaluation. This is hardly groundbreaking, but most previous works do not consider the holistic dimension of place names, addressing specifically their social projection (i.e. KLEIN 2000; ROSE-REDWOOD & ALDERMAN 2011), their links with a given local identity (KOSTANSKI & PUZEY 2014) or their immaterial value (LIGHT 2014), without taking into consideration that information contained within place names can be extremely diverse (sometimes even opposite). Also, systematic ethnographic studies of place names that take into account their different origin, evolution and the diverse processes by which they have been affected do not abound especially at the local scale.

This work presents our contribution to the discussion about the information range of place names, as well as new empirical information and a methodological proposal. Since it can be, at a certain level, systematically categorised, this information is referred to as encoded, yet it is self-evident that each toponym must be analysed individually.

2 The geographical information encoded in place names

By naming a place, the name immediately acquires a specific meaning. This meaning is subsequently projected in a specific territorial discourse. ‘Territorial discourse’ alludes, in this case, to the act of referring to a place. Mentioning a name to designate a place involves adopting a position in the discourse, associating the place to the specific ‘idea of the place’ contained within the name. Therefore, we can talk about a piece of geographical information, which is codified in, and conveyed by, a place name in the discourse. It is, then, within the framework of language that toponyms deploy their full potential as geographical information tools; the name used, and also the way it is used, may provide specific information within the discourse.

In this section, we address, firstly, what are the limits of the information conveyed by place names and, secondly, the theoretical frame through which we believe place names need to be understood.

2.1 The range of information encoded in place names

In their role as sources of information, toponyms are part of the communication process between human beings and places. In some way, place names express the human perception of places. The ideas, which individuals develop in connection to a place are part of the meaning of the place name. These ideas may change in response to new information, become more consolidated or perhaps disappear. Toponyms can also evoke ideas, which have no connection with the place they designate (as *Australiastraße*, in Hamburg, may remember the country of Australia), but which are part of the information conveyed by them. This may happen because place names are primary names, which makes them malleable in the individual and collective perception and interpretation. Also, as constantly evolving references, they can acquire unlimited meanings with use.

In this regard, each toponym has its own unique and unrepeatable meaning. Each place name provides specific and individual information, and for this reason many authors insist that it is necessary to study toponyms both individually and collectively in order to fully understand the information conveyed by them. MARTÍNEZ DE PISÓN ponders: “What is, in short, the most correct thing to do? [...] To thoroughly examine place names, to find what lies beneath them. [...] Toponyms must therefore be scrutinised, leaving none aside. [...] For the moment that is enough: to reopen another door, traditional and significant but sometimes forgotten, for geographers.” (MARTÍNEZ DE PISÓN 2010, p. 25)

A toponym is associated with the imagery or imaginary¹⁾ of the place, which the toponym refers to, and the true range of its meaning is therefore defined by those who use it. The toponym *Sea of Japan*, for instance, is a place name loaded with complex undertones because it may reflect the idea that Japan exercises a certain degree of control over that sea. Furthermore, the use of this toponym also implies taking sides, endorsing a certain appropriation by Japan of a place, which North and South Korea could also claim and, to some extent, brand for themselves by insisting on the use of the toponyms *East Sea of Korea* and *East Sea*, respectively, which are just as loaded as *Sea of Japan*. These toponyms, and the polysemic meaning of the information they convey (not only the geographical position of the sea, but also which country has the right to determine its name), are at the centre of a heated debate (MURPHY 1999; ORMELING 2014).

This example illustrates that, in a way, place names are “power-embedded” (BERG & VUOLTEENAHO 2009, p. 14). In this sense, for example, toponyms can be used as propaganda (MONMONIER 1991, p. 88) or may reflect the “spatial mental structures” of their users (LUCAS I VIDAL & ORDINAS 2012). It is possible to conclude that toponyms convey complex and unlimited geographical information, an information, which has an effect on whether a place name is consolidated in, or disappears from, the collective perception, as well as on the way the place name is disseminated or communicated. In order to extricate this codified information, the origin and evolution of a place name and the way it is transmitted must be examined in detail.

¹⁾ The term “imaginary” seems more accurate in this context, as it refers to the ability of developing, to a certain extent, a social perception of a place (LO & MCKERCHER 2015, p. 105), rather than “imagery”, which normally implies visualisation. A place name is associated with an idea of the place it refers to, which is shaped by personal and social perceptions.

2.2 Analysing place names from a geographical perspective

The analysis of the information encoded in toponyms must begin with the definition of the epistemological range of place names from the point of view of the geographical discipline.

In a general sense, toponyms are understood as proper names of a place (UNGEGN 2007; ICOS 2015), which permit the unequivocal identification of a place. In this capacity as proper nouns, toponyms exist in language, and it is, as previously indicated, in language where the full potential of the geographical information they contain is realised. Toponymy is, therefore, idiosyncratic in the sense that it exists and is used within the framework of language, in contrast with the majority of geographical data, which pertain to the territory. In order to understand this idea, we need to approach the interpretation of place names from a geographical perspective, a perspective where the linguistic and semiotic definitions of the toponym as a proper noun in language are taken into consideration.

First, from a linguistic perspective and according to the descriptive theory of proper nouns, place names as nouns constitute unequivocal markers of objects. For authors such as RUSSELL & STRAWSON, place names are unique words used to designate any place of sufficient interest (RUSSELL 1948 in TORT I DONADA 1999, p. 46). They do not necessarily describe any of the place's properties, because genuine proper nouns lack descriptive meaning (STRAWSON 1959, p. 21 in PELLICER GARCÍA 2012, p. 77). But they may reflect traces of the reality of the place, as they always provide descriptive information, whether it is shared by its users or not. Thus, place names do not express the full meaning of the place they name, but they may convey information about the place and its context. In the case of *Schwarzwald* ('Black Forest'), for instance, the name probably arises from the dark canopy of evergreens. *Schwarz* alludes to the dark and shady vegetation, thanks to which the Schwarzwald is amongst the better known natural and touristic areas in Central Europe. The descriptive content of the name is associated to the place, but perhaps *Green Dense Forest* could have been more accurate. The term provides objective information of the place, although this understanding of the forest as *black* is not necessarily true to reality, or may have evolved.

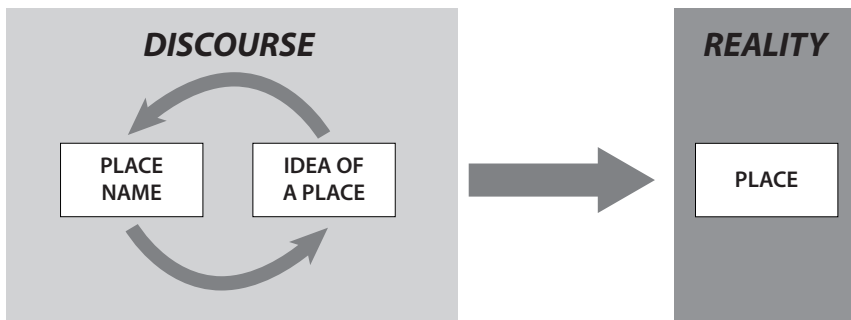
Second, from a semiotic perspective proper nouns are biased linguistic elements because their creation, use or omission in any context involves the adoption of a specific discourse. In the case of place names, they are arbitrary names that because of their development within a specific territorial and cultural context become non-arbitrary and full of meaning as a sign or symbol. According to RADDING & WESTERN, "we care for names because they have layers of meaning beyond the ordinary word; without any conscious effort, we are thereby understanding place-names as *signs*." (RADDING & WESTERN 2010, p. 399) In its role as a symbol, the assignation of a name to a place establishes the basis for the definition of the place's essence, which can thereafter be interpreted and understood. TUAN asserts that, within the framework of proper place nouns, the ability to name confers the power to raise something to the category of being, make visible what was invisible, and assign things a certain character (TUAN 1991, p. 688). From a semiotic perspective, the toponym is a sign with the ability to contain a subjective 'idea of a place', which not only includes information about the place in itself, but also about what the place symbolises

and evokes. *Schwarzwald* is a clear enough example, with its inescapable romantic and bucolic associations.

The postulates of the descriptive theory of proper nouns and the precepts of semiotics²⁾ converge in the aforementioned geographical perspective. From a geographical point of view, the place name as a proper noun is a linguistic sign, which, within the framework of the discourse, enables an exclusive idea of a place and contains specific information about the place itself.

It follows that, when referring to a place, the toponym designates, first and foremost, the idea of the place. Such an idea exists in the discourse, which in reality is embodied as the place. The toponym, as a 'proper place noun', does not immediately refer to the place, but to the idea of the place. It is the essence of human communication, that in order to understand a reality, the 'idea of reality' needs to be confronted. In the process, which results from the assignation and use of a geographical name, the name and the idea of place exist in language and are physically embodied in the place (Fig. 1). In this regard, toponyms only exist and are used in the framework of language.

The mere use or omission of a place name in a given communicative context can modify the associated idea of place and, by extension, influence the transmission of the geographical information related to the geographical entity to which it refers. It becomes evident, in this context, that the full understanding of toponyms demands detailed examination, as they codify the ideas of the places they designate.



Usually, the geographical name is created in order to respond to the need to designate a place, which has been previously conceived (Idea of place → Place name), but it also often happens (ever more frequently in recent times) that a place is created in order to give a pre-existing name notoriety and publicity (Name → Idea of place). The place name thus emerges as a crucial factor in the identification of the place in the discourse, and this enables the identification of the place in reality.

Source: Authors' figure

Fig. 1: Place name, idea of a place and place from a geographical perspective

²⁾ Semiotics, as the study of signs globally, and linguistics, as the specific study of signs in language, often diverge in their approach to proper nouns, but their ideas are nevertheless complementary from the point of view of geographical science.

3 Case study: Toledo, analysis of information codified in place names

The range of codified geographical information conveyed by toponymy has been addressed through the analysis of evidences of codification in paradigmatic case studies. Consequently, a case study has been chosen in which the toponymy is both dense and active. The metropolitan city of Toledo, a former royal seat situated 70 km from Madrid and the capital of the Castilla-La Mancha region, was selected for this study. Toledo was chosen because its toponymy is very heterogeneous, and also because the city has been subject to a series of complex urban, historical and social processes, which can be of assistance in the identification of clues concerning the relationship between the city's inhabitants and place names.

The analysis of the information contained within a place name involves reflection and a systematic process that includes compilation and interpretation of qualitative data. Codified geographical information is indicated by the way each place name emerges, is transmitted and evolves, consolidates or disappears. For this reason, the collection of information has to operate on three different levels:

- On the first level, fieldwork was considered essential for the understanding of toponyms. The visualisation of place names *in situ* reveals certain aspects concerning the relationship between persons and the place to which they allude.³⁾ Thus, during fieldwork we specifically focused on the aspects, which are more relevant from a toponymic point of view: Signposting, clarity of the reference, valorisation of the toponym as immaterial heritage, etc.
- Secondly, a documentary and ethnographic analysis was undertaken. This was deemed crucial for the identification and understanding of the mechanisms involved in the promotion and dissemination of certain place names in society. It involved the study of maps, published works and modern and historical documents; this examination was paramount for a full comprehension of the scope of toponyms within the framework of the territorial discourse.
- Finally, two experimental surveys, aimed at identifying the direct relationship between individuals and place names, were carried out. The target of these exercises was to recognise particularly valuable and paradigmatic toponyms for the theoretical-methodological approach described and thus examine in detail the key to human place/name interaction. The following exercises have been carried out:
 - Survey and mental maps: This involved 135 street interviews with inhabitants of Toledo, and its aim was the collection of their mental maps of this place. They were asked to stress the toponymic dimensions of their everyday contexts. A number of questions were posed in order to facilitate the production of a mental map and also to help them reveal their perceptions of toponyms and the associated ideas of place.
 - Survey for the compilation of toponymic information: A number of street interviews were carried out in order to confirm or discard dubious or confusing toponymic references.

³⁾ "Fieldwork should be thought of as encompassing the whole range of human encounters occurring within the uneven social terrain of the field." (CLOKE et al. 2004, p. 4) Certainly, place names play an important role in the relationship between individuals and are inherent to the field.

Not all the data compiled are relevant in every case; each name has its own unique personality, and the relevance of the geographical information contained within is equally idiosyncratic. For this reason, we attempted to characterise specific examples in order to assist the identification of codified geographical information typologies.

The detection of toponymic information, which is not immediately apparent demands the integrated analysis of the whole corpus of data. The interpretative analysis of the information conveyed by each name is a strongly iterative, multi-layered process.⁴⁾ Due to their coherence with the subject under scrutiny, specific guidelines of actantial analysis⁵⁾ and analogical hermeneutics⁶⁾ are used.

Through the examination of a series of toponymic references, which are particularly representative of the limits of place names as sources of information the work revealed the scope of toponymy as a valuable informative tool for territorial analysis. Some examples will now be discussed.

3.1 Unofficial consolidated place name: *Barrio del Circo Romano* ('Roman Circus Quarter') (Case Study 1)

The toponym *Barrio del Circo Romano* refers to an urban area of the city, which is located near the northern sector of the city wall, in the historical centre. The area includes a small complex of buildings with some historical value, barren plots of land, parks and semi-abandoned areas. It is believed that the area is rich in archaeological remains, specifically remains corresponding to the Roman circus, but archaeological excavations have yet to be carried out in most of the area. For some inhabitants, this area is a small, isolated enclave, which is not considered part of the historical centre to the south, nor does its urban landscape bear any resemblance to the social and cultural idiosyncrasy of the area to the north (the so-called Barrio de Santa Teresa). In this regard, this urban context seems to be firmly consolidated in the collective imaginary of the city. It is therefore logical that a specific toponym (*Barrio del Circo Romano*) has emerged to refer to this quarter, in spite of it not having a discrete administrative personality.

The place name *Barrio del Circo Romano* is, in this case, a geographical marker of the different historical and social processes undergone by the place, especially the constant demands of the inhabitants. Fieldwork has revealed that the Roman archaeological remains have been subject to significant neglect. Given the scant remains still in place, it is hard to believe that a full-scale Roman circus once stood here. This archaeological

⁴⁾ This involves, therefore, the analysis of meaning in the broadest possible sense. Place names, as "words, images and practices, then, are capable of being what area termed *signifiers*; that is, they can communicate information." (DIXON 2010, p. 393) Interpretative or content analysis is, then, referred to the manner in which the particular meanings expressed by a name can be discerned.

⁵⁾ Within the framework of toponymy, we are interested in the consideration of all three axes of actantial description: Desire, power and transmission (HÉBERT 2006, p. 71), which are related to the role of names in the act of communication.

⁶⁾ Analogical hermeneutics suggest that almost everything can be regarded as text (BEUCHOT & COCA 2013, p. 11). In this regard, in the framework of geographical analysis, the city could be 'read' as a text. In this context, toponymy plays a crucial role in the reading and interpretation of this text.

complex has been somewhat brushed aside by urban planning, and a very small portion of the remains have been valorised in the context of an urban park. A large portion of the remains are inside private houses and on barren plots of land (Fig. 2).



Source: Authors' photograph

Fig. 2: Remains of the Roman circus of Toledo inside the grounds of an abandoned camping area (Camping Circo Romano), which was closed over a decade ago

Despite the value of the site in terms of heritage, the place is not included in the itineraries suggested in touristic guides and is almost totally absent from urban signs. Even the major thoroughfare that runs across the Roman circus, traditionally known by the inhabitants of the city as *Paseo del Circo Romano*, nowadays lacks any signs to this effect. In his work “Historia de las Calles de Toledo”, the historian J. PORRES MARTÍN-CLETO makes the following statement about this avenue:

“We do not know why some inhabitants use this name [Circo Romano] in their postal and phone addresses; since Rey Pastor’s map the avenue has been referred to as ‘Paseo del Cristo de la Vega’ (and previously as ‘Paseo de la Vega Baja’). Its location beyond the city wall may explain why any signs with its real name are lacking; it seems likely that the inhabitants of the area, most of whom are connected in one way or another with foreign visitors, have deemed this name as more touristic, because it draws a link with the nearly totally destroyed Roman circus rather than with the Mudejar and Romanesque chapel that replaced the Visigothic Basilica of Santa Leocadia.” (PORRES MARTÍN-CLETO 2002, p. 366)

The street survey has confirmed the uncertainty, which surrounds the denomination of this sector of the city. While some of the interviewees were sure about the name of the sector and its nature as an independent area of the city, others question whether the area formally belongs to one of the larger, nearby areas (Santa Teresa, Reconquista). The

results shown below demonstrate the lack of definition regarding the existence of the area as an independent urban sector and its limits (Tab. 1).

Roman Circus Quarter. Answers to the question “What is the name of this quarter?”	
Literal answer (literal translation)	Name given to the place
I have been living my entire life in here, but I think...I think it is <i>El Circo Romano</i> .	<i>Circo Romano</i>
<i>Circo Romano</i> , in there you can see what is left of the circus and is still preserved.	<i>Circo Romano</i>
<i>Santa Teresa</i> , I think, I don't know.	<i>Santa Teresa</i>
<i>Circo Romano</i>	<i>Circo Romano</i>
This I cannot say it precisely, I don't know well, I live in Santa Teresa.	N/A
This is <i>Barrio del Circo Romano</i> . There you can see the circus remains indeed.	<i>Barrio del Circo Romano</i>
This <i>Circo Romano</i> , and that is <i>Santa María</i> .	<i>Circo Romano</i>
Of course, this is the <i>Barrio del Circo Romano</i> .	<i>Barrio del Circo Romano</i>
As the park, <i>Circo Romano</i>	<i>Circo Romano</i>
<i>Reconquista</i>	<i>Reconquista</i>
<i>Santa Teresa</i> , I am not sure.	<i>Santa Teresa</i>

Source: Toponymic street survey, November 2013

Tab. 1: Selection of representative answers to the survey carried out in Barrio del Circo Romano

The work carried out in the Barrio del Circo Romano has revealed, on the one hand, a certain level of disagreement among the local inhabitants, who desire the valorisation of the Roman remains and the area in general, and public agencies, who generally have not deemed this a priority. Toponymy thus bears witness to the valorisation of civil empowerment and the touristic expectations of local inhabitants, embodied in their historical demands.

On the other hand, the independent idiosyncrasy of this sector of the city can also be detected. It materialises in the dissemination of unofficial place names, which are connected to the place's most iconic feature, the Roman circus. The reference exists, but it alludes to a diffuse place the limits of which require specific analysis.⁷⁾

In this example, the name is codified as a social and historical emblem, and the way it is treated in the documentation and the territory reflects the prevalence of unresolved issues.

⁷⁾ The specific analysis of this sector's reference area is addressed in a previous work carried out by the authors (VÁZQUEZ HOEHNE & RODRÍGUEZ DE CASTRO 2012).

Case Study 1: *Barrio del Circo Romano*: Geographical information codified in the toponymic reference:

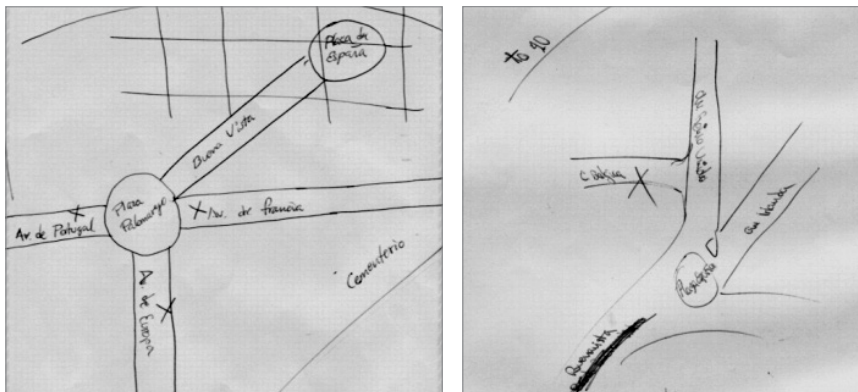
- The toponym functions as an emblem in social and heritage terms.
- Whether the toponym is used or not is reflective of the historical conflict and demands.
- There is an open debate about the area, which the place name references.

3.2 Social place name in consolidation phase: *Ronda de Buenavista – Plaza de España* ('Buenavista Circular Street – Spain Square') (Case Study 2)

The Ronda de Buenavista is a circular street that runs through the city area of Buenavista. In its uppermost sector, the street converges in a large square with two major avenues (which run across the eastern area of this part of the city, Calle Reino Unido and Avenida de Irlanda). Due to its configuration (it is dominated by broad pavements and some interstitial spaces) the square gives the impression of being one of the sector's nodal points.

The square is officially part of the Ronda de Buenavista and is, therefore, not regarded as an independent urban feature. However, the mental maps collected and the surveys carried out have revealed that local residents perceive the existence of a square-like public space, referred to as *Plaza de España* or *Plaza España* ('Spain Square').

The place name *Plaza de España* emerged from the conceptualisation as a public space of the interstitial spaces, which were formed by the convergence of the three major thoroughfares. Some residents, in fact, think about this as a distinct place, and therefore believe that it merits a name. Several mental maps collected during the survey clearly illustrate this idea (Fig. 3 and 4).



The residents interviewed were asked to draw the map of their neighbourhood as they saw it, including the toponymic information that they thought relevant.

Source: Street surveys, October 2012

Fig. 3–4: Mental maps containing the reference of *Plaza de España*

Buenavista is a newly built district. Most buildings are dated to the last three decades (LÓPEZ-COVARRUBIAS 2013, p. 254). Generally, the toponymy has been planned, and neutral street names (country and city names, for example) have been selected. This is typical for Spanish urbanism in recent decades. Thus, the emergence of an unofficial name in the collective imaginary of residents is especially significant. The origin of this place name may be explained by the presence of a small market at the western end of the square, which is known as *Mercadito Plaza España* ('Spain Square Little Market').

Whether this can explain the emergence of this unofficial name in full or not, it seems clear that, among some residents, it has been a very important contributing factor to the generation of an idea of a square. Street surveys seem to confirm this idea (Tab. 2). When asked about it, the residents say that the place exists, and that therefore it needs to have a name.

In this case, the name *Plaza de España* and its variations have been attributed to the central space of the Buenavista district because this place 'needs' a name. First and foremost, this place name bears witness to the development of a new place in the area. In a way, the name codifies information concerning the urban evolution of the area. It even reflects the character of the local residents, who look for a name for a place that, in their

Plaza de España. Answers to the question "What is the name of this square?"	
Literal answer (literal translation)	Name given to the place
<i>Plaza de España</i>	<i>Plaza de España</i>
<i>Rotonda de los olivos</i> ('Olive tree roundabout')	<i>Rotonda de los olivos</i>
I think <i>Plaza de Irlanda</i> ('Ireland square'), but I am not sure...	<i>Plaza de Irlanda</i>
<i>Plaza grande</i> ('Big square'), even although it is a roundabout.	<i>Plaza grande</i>
This is the <i>Zona de la avenida de Irlanda</i> ('Ireland avenue area').	<i>Zona de la avenida de Irlanda</i>
This is the <i>Plaza de España</i> .	<i>Plaza de España</i>
I think it is named <i>Plaza de Buenavista</i> .	<i>Plaza de Buenavista</i>
This is the <i>Plaza de Buenavista</i> .	<i>Plaza de Buenavista</i>
I do not know at all.	N/A
This is the <i>Plaza de Irlanda</i> .	<i>Plaza de Irlanda</i>
<i>Plaza de España</i>	<i>Plaza de España</i>
<i>Ronda Buenavista</i>	<i>Ronda Buenavista</i>
<i>Plaza de España</i> [...] all this area has squares with names of countries.	<i>Plaza de España</i>
The <i>Rotonda de Buenavista</i>	<i>Rotonda de Buenavista</i>

In general, all interviewees assume that a square exists and for this reason a name is necessary. Toponyms play, in some way, a role in indicating different ideas of place. *Plaza de Buenavista*, for instance, stresses the role of the square as a nodal point for the district.

Source: Toponymic street survey, November 2013

Tab. 2: Selection of representative answers to the survey carried out in Plaza de España

opinion, should have one. If this was a recurrent feature of the area, it could be said that the toponym conveys the idea of a certain degree of civil initiative on the part of the residents.

Regarding the choice of the specific denomination *Plaza de España*, it seems clear that the name of the market has played a role; this is, moreover, coherent with the surrounding toponyms, which make reference to foreign countries. It is possible that the market has led the residents to err and associate a name with a place that does not exist; also, it is plausible that the residents have been using an existing reference to name an entity to which they feel a strong attachment.

At any rate, the power of a place name in the collective construction of place is self-apparent. The de-codification of the information conveyed by the toponym is, in the case of *Plaza de España*, valuable for the examination of issues such as urban planning and the identification of non-explicit geographical references.

Case Study 2: *Plaza de España*: Geographical information codified in the toponymic reference:

- The toponym allows to identify a new, and previously unrecognised, geographical reality.
- The toponym reflects the collective appropriation of space.
- The toponym may reflect the personality and interests of the local residents.

3.3 Absence of a name for an actual place: Junction between Arroyo Street and Esparteros Street (Case Study 3)

Case Study 3 refers to a public space located in the district of Santa Bárbara, at the junction between two of the area's main streets. In contrast with the previous case study, there is an actual square equipped with the appropriate street furniture, but it lacks a name. Street signs and maps only refer to *Calle del Arroyo*. The local residents seem to be unaware of a specific name for the square.

In contrast to the previous case, no need to give this square a name has been felt, despite its clear role as a functional node of the neighbourhood. Calle del Arroyo is one of the busiest streets in the area and is often used to enter and exit the district. Some local residents recognise the existence of a square, which, in fact, they assiduously use (Tab. 3).

The absence of a name, in this case, is in sharp contrast to the previous example. (The name was chosen arbitrarily.) Some of the local residents do not recognise the existence of the entity and others only identify it through its function in everyday life, not as a distinct entity that requires a name. In this instance, the direct references to the place are indicative of the use given to the place and some degree of appropriation. ("Where the old folk sit." "Where I keep my little savings." etc.)

In this case, the survey carried out to collect toponymic information confirmed that the local residents doubted the existence of the square (Tab. 4). Only one of the interviewees, a child,⁸⁾ referred to this place as *La Plaza* ('The Square'), maybe because it works as a

⁸⁾ The survey also collected, whenever possible, the age, gender and provenance of the interviewees.

Square in the junction between Arroyo Street and Esparteros Street. Identification of the place through a photograph (literal translation of the answers)		
Mentions to the square	Mentions to parts of the square	Mentions to other places
Santa Bárbara Center, where the old folk sit	Castilla-La Mancha bank office, in Arroyo Street	Next to Santa Bárbara Street
One square of the quarter	CCM (standing for Castilla-La Mancha bank)	Arroyo Street and the O.N.C.E. kiosk
A square where Caja Castilla-La Mancha is located.	A bank office	Around Arroyo Street, over there
A little square, which name I do not remember.	Where it is located Castilla-La Mancha bank.	Where I keep my little savings, in Arroyo Street.
A square of here	CCM bank	Savings bank, next to Santa Bárbara Avenue
A square where there is a park.	Castilla-La Mancha bank, Arroyo Street	Arroyo Street

Concerning the mental maps, and in order to know their position with regard to toponyms, the interviewees were asked to identify certain places, which are relevant from functional and social points of view. (A photograph of these places was shown to them during the interview.) The answers revealed little interest in toponymy, in sharp contrast with other areas of the city. Most interviewees did not even recognise the place as a square, referring to its contents or other related entities instead.

Source: Field survey, October 2012

Tab. 3: Answers given by the interviewees when asked about the square in the junction between Arroyo Street and Esparteros Street

meeting point for his group of friends. Some local residents even stated explicitly that the square has no name or that there is no square. Others evaded the question by referring to a different place.

It seems likely that, in this case, the lack of an official name facilitates the doubts regarding the existence of the place. It is also plausible, however, that local residents in this area have but a limited interest in their immediate surroundings, or that, alternatively, the place is so firmly rooted in their imaginary that the urban landscape evidence, which points to the existence of a square goes unnoticed.

In any case, in this instance the toponym reveals something about the personality of the local residents and the neighbourhood itself, especially when compared with the case of *Plaza de España*. Buenavista and Santa Bárbara are very different districts as far as the profile of the average resident is concerned, and this is confirmed by both the community's interest in toponymy in general and by the way in which place names are regarded. In Santa Bárbara, a lack of general interest in local toponymy has been detected, despite the fact that the district is not lacking in heritage value in the context of the historical centre.

On the other hand, the name, or lack thereof, codifies the everyday role played by the designated place. Almost all interviewees recognised the place and immediately as-

Square in the junction between Arroyo Street and Esparteros Street. Answers to the question “What is the name of this square?”	
Literal answer (literal translation)	Name given to the place
<i>Santa Bárbara, inside Esparteros area</i>	<i>Santa Bárbara, dentro de la zona Esparteros</i> (‘inside Esparteros area’)
<i>This is Esparteros Street.</i>	<i>Calle Esparteros</i>
<i>Arroyo Street</i>	<i>Calle Arroyo</i>
<i>The square</i>	<i>La Plaza</i>
<i>Santa Bárbara Avenue</i>	<i>Avenida Santa Bárbara</i>
<i>Castilla-La Mancha Bank</i>	<i>Caja Castilla-La Mancha</i>
<i>Esparteros Street</i>	<i>Calle Esparteros</i>
No idea, dude	N/A
The name of the quarter is <i>Santa Bárbara</i> .	Answer refers to the quarter (<i>Santa Bárbara</i>).
There is no square, it is <i>Esparteros Street</i> .	<i>Calle Esparteros</i>
It has no name. There it is Esparteros Street and over there Arroyo Street. And there, Santa Bárbara Avenue.	No tiene nombre. (It has no name.)

Source: Toponymic street survey, November 2013

Tab. 4: Selection of representative answers to the survey in the square located at the junction between Arroyo Street and Esparteros Street

sociated it with a neighbouring (*Avenida de Santa Bárbara*) or related (*Caja Castilla-La Mancha*) place name.

Case Study 3: Junction between Calle del Arroyo and Calle Esparteros: Geographical information codified in the toponymic reference:

- The conceptualisation and everyday use of the place/name is connected with the idea of community.
- There seems to be a lack of interest in recognising the existence of this place.
- The lack of denomination may be indicative of the personality and the interest of local residents.

3.4 The marketing potential of official place names: *Centro Comercial Zoco Europa* (‘Shopping centre Zoco Europa’) (Case Study 4)

The Zoco Europa shopping centre is located at the western end of the district of San Antón, to the north of the historical centre. It is a semi-abandoned building, where most shops are closed and hardly anyone goes. It is, nevertheless, located in a consolidated residential area, directly opposite an urban park with the same name (*Parque Zoco Europa*).

Place names like *Zoco Europa* clearly demonstrate the evocative power of toponymy. This place aspired to become a reference in the area, but failed. The progressive abandonment of the shopping centre and its dereliction has turned the toponymic reference into a symbol of a fiasco, which evokes judgements on the role played by the place in urban planning policies. The name has the power to generate notably aggressive reactions among the local residents (Tab. 5).

Ideas stimulated by the name <i>Zoco Europa</i> (literal translation)	
– political corruption	– under-use
– ruined business	– Waste , because it has been closed.
– Crisis closed it.	– It is a shame, because it is closed.
– shopping centre	– It is dead.
– closed shopping centre	– abandoned shopping centre
– empty and abandoned shopping centre	– It is abandoned.
– disaster	– neglected
– desert	– abandoned
– closed because of the crisis	– abandoned

This question was included in the interview and mental map in order to highlight the evocative power of toponymy. Answers regarding the *Zoco Europa* had little to do with personal experience, but rather were connected with judgements on the origin and current state of the place.

Source: Field survey, October 2012

Tab. 5: Literal answers to the question: What comes to your mind when you hear the toponym *Zoco Europa*?

Regarding the Parque *Zoco Europa*, which is located right at the entrance of the shopping centre, it is worth mentioning that the extension of the name of the shopping centre to the immediate environment was a territorial strategy aimed at imposing the shopping centre as a reference on the whole district. In their answers, some residents drew a direct link between the park and the shopping centre.

In the case of *Zoco Europa*, the ability of the place name to convey judgements is particularly relevant. Place names often codify judgments about the places they refer to and the actions with which these places are connected.

On the other hand, the toponym also embodies territorial marketing strategies. The reference to *Europa* ('Europe') was meant to project a modern and cosmopolitan image in the context of a provincial capital, in combination with the traditional reference conveyed by the word *Zoco* ('traditional market'); this shows the application of an almost imperceptible, but nevertheless present, territorial marketing strategy. Inevitably, selling a house in the proximity of *Zoco Europa* and in the (peripheral) district of San Antón, have very different undertones. However, given the ability of *Zoco Europa* to evoke negative notions, it is probably better to use the latter reference.

Case Study 4: *Zoco Europa*: Geographical information codified in the toponymic reference:

- The toponym bears witness to a fiasco in terms of urban planning.
- The toponym points towards the marketing policies, which lie behind the building project.
- The toponym evokes judgements on the part of local residents.

3.5 Fuzzy place name reference: *Barrio de Santa Bárbara y Barrio del Hospital* ('Santa Bárbara Quarter and Hospital Quarter') (Case Study 5)

The toponym *Barrio de Santa Bárbara* refers to a neighbourhood in the proximity of the historical centre of the city; both areas are separated by River Tajo. The district was created in the 1910s as a working-class area, which was initially built for railway workers and their families (LÓPEZ-COVARRUBIAS 2013, p. 108). The physical limits drawn by the railway lines to the north, the junction of two major roads to the east, a private estate to the south, and the River Tajo to the west clearly delimitate the idea of *Santa Bárbara* within very clear boundaries, which has resulted in a strong feeling of community.

Several buildings at the western end of the district have some historical value: Specifically, a group of low houses near the provincial hospital, the historical Castle of San Servando and the neo-Renaissance complex of the Military Academy. Although, in principle, this area could be regarded as part of Santa Bárbara, it is in fact held in the collective imaginary as a separate entity, as shown by the qualitative information collected. We could, to a degree, talk about a sub-neighbourhood, the Hospital, within the neighbourhood of Santa Bárbara (Fig. 5).

Despite the evidence provided by physical, historical and demographic limits, the fieldwork carried out revealed that the area around the hospital had a certain degree of independence. On the one hand, the orographic boundaries are significant enough to affect the local residents' territorial praxis (e.g. their walking routes) because both areas are separated by a small streambed (Fig. 6). On the other hand, a certain lack of willingness to include the hospital within the boundaries of the Santa Bárbara district can also be detected. Street signs, for example, differentiate this area from the rest of the district, which prompts the collective imaginary to maintain this segregation (Fig. 7).

Both the mental maps (Fig. 8, 9 and 10) and the surveys show that a part of the residents does not consider the area around the hospital part of the neighbourhood of Barrio de Santa Bárbara.

The toponym *Barrio de Santa Bárbara* refers to a differentiated area and also to a more ambiguous area, which cannot be identified with it with any certainty, although the historical, geographical and administrative evidence points in the opposite direction. In the case of *Santa Bárbara*, at any rate, the toponym codifies information concerning the local residents' geographical praxis and their imaginary. Some local residents do not see this other area as belonging to their neighbourhood, to their everyday lives, but rather as some other place with ill-defined limits.



The map shown here and other official documents do not reflect discontinuities in the urban structure, which are, however, apparent in the results of fieldwork, the examination of other documentation and the street survey.

Source: Topographic Map of Spain 1:25,000, Sheet 629c4

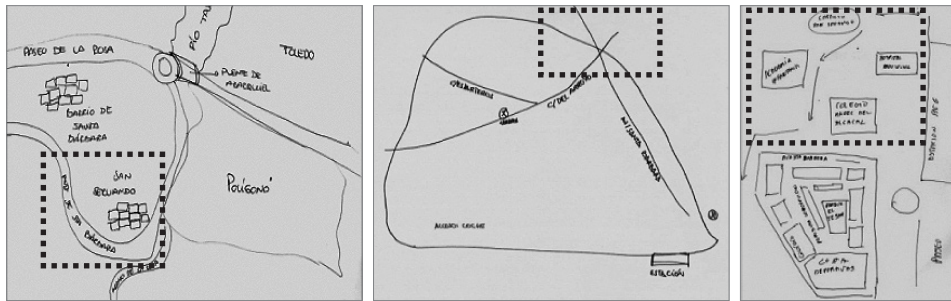
Fig. 5: Reference to the toponym *Barrio de Santa Bárbara* (solid line) and ambiguous reference *Barrio del Hospital/Barrio de Santa Bárbara* (interrupted line)



Signposts are particularly revealing with regard to the toponymic imaginary. In order to reach Santa Barbara, this place needs to be traversed, which separates it from Santa Bárbara. In addition, despite the historical value of the district, the signage presents the idea that this is part of the urban periphery, a place without historical interest.

Source: Authors' photographs

Fig. 6–7: View of the centre of Santa Bárbara from the hospital and street signs located between the hospital and the Castle of San Servando



The interviewees were asked to draw a mental map of what they considered to be their neighbourhood. In these cases, the hospital area (dotted lines) either appears as an entity that is independent of the neighbourhood or not at all.

Source: Field survey, October 2012

Fig. 8–10: Mental maps of the district of Santa Bárbara

Similarly, this case illustrates the impact of signage on the toponymic imaginary. In ambiguous situations, signals may be used to channel behaviour. In this case, a neighbourhood, which could have a certain historical or heritage value (not only the sub-areas under consideration) re-affirms its peripheral and residential nature through street signs.

These examples are presented as testimony of the scope of toponyms as an instrument for the codification of very heterogeneous information. It is probable that other toponyms are not so readily recognisable in this capacity, but all place names, to a greater or a lesser degree have the ability to convey unique geographical information about the place to which they refer.

Case Study 5: *Barrio de Santa Bárbara*: Geographical information codified in the toponymic reference:

- The toponym reflects the residents' social practices and collective imaginary.
- Signage has an effect on the place name and also, intentionally or otherwise, on its meaning.
- There is a debate about the area, which the toponym denotes.

4 Towards a methodology for the de-codification (and valorisation) of place names

As previously noted, trying to define the range of the information conveyed by place names in an urban context is not a completely new subject (VUOLTEENAHO & KOLAMO 2012, p. 136). Yet, it is also true that unofficial names remain largely unexplored, owing to the fact that their origin, roots and authorship are generally unknown (NYSTRÖM 2009, p. 773). Thus, as previously remarked, it is essential to address toponyms on an individual

basis, and many local initiatives, such as the yearbooks issued by the Place Name Society of Uppsala (ORTNAMNSSÄLLSKAPET I UPPSALA 2015) are beginning to show an increasing awareness in this regard. Also, in order to decode the information conveyed by every place name, it is paramount to examine the motivations that lie behind their creation, modification or disappearance.

(1)	The name reflects attraction/rejection or a degree of affinity with the place (see Case Study 4: <i>Zoco Europa</i>): Local residents remember a specific place through its name because it causes attraction or rejection due to personal experiences.
(2)	The name becomes a reference element (see Case Study 1: <i>Circo Romano</i> , and Case Study 2: <i>Plaza de España</i>): Local residents recognise a specific name because it is linked to a place which functions as spatial reference.
(3)	The name has an evocative power (see Case Study 1: <i>Circo Romano</i> , Case Study 4: <i>Zoco Europa</i> , and Case Study 5: <i>Santa Bárbara</i>): Local residents remember the place name, which has an evocative value, normally through personal experiences or indirect information.
(4)	The name activates personal memories and a sense of identity (see Case Study 2: <i>Plaza de España</i> , and Case Study 5: <i>Santa Bárbara</i>): Local residents employ the toponym as emotional label with the ability of evocating personal memories and living experiences.
(5)	The name is part of daily life (see Case Study 2: <i>Plaza de España</i> , and Case Study 3: <i>Junction Arroyo-Esparteros</i>): Local residents highlight a name/place because it is an essential part of their daily life.
(6)	The name's phonetic and/or linguistic perception has an influence on the imaginary of the inhabitant (see Case Study 1: <i>Circo Romano</i> , and Case Study 4: <i>Zoco Europa</i>): Local residents allow the name to influence their ideas of the place because of the linguistic/semantic and/or phonetic meaning of the name.
(7)	The name refers to the current meaning of the place (see Case Study 3: <i>Junction Arroyo-Esparteros</i> , and Case Study 5: <i>Santa Bárbara</i>): Local residents link the place name to the value of the designated entity within the context where it is located.
(8)	The name refers to the historical meaning of the place (see Case Study 1: <i>Circo Romano</i>): Local residents link the place name to the value of the designated entity in a historical context.
(9)	The name motivates toponymic regards (see Case Study 2: <i>Plaza de España</i>): Local residents generally pass judgment on the place name by itself, without taking the place the name refers to into account.
(10)	The name stimulates a spontaneous idea (in Case Study 3: <i>Junction Arroyo-Esparteros</i>): The toponym stimulates a spontaneous idea in local residents, with no relation with the place, nor with the name, without any explicit (or known) origin.

These typologies have been established through the combined analysis of fieldwork, documentary work and survey. Several possible connections between these typologies and the examples are specified in each typology.

Tab. 6: Local resident/place-name relationship typologies from a geographical scope

Place names, as co-creators of meaning (AZARYAHU 2011, p. 31), are based upon intention; their origin and evolution cannot be separated from the information they contain. Toponyms are, indeed, labels for geographic features that are regarded as worth recognising (WOODMAN 2012, p. 111), and this relates them to a specific intentionality. The intentional use of a given toponym to refer to a place can furnish the discourse with a specific meaning connected with that place; if a place name is left out of the discourse (ectonymy), for example, it could be heading towards extinction (DURÁN 1998, p. 2). In our opinion, the key for the analysis of the information contained in a place name lies in the intentionality, which that place name reveals. In this sense, our long-term research goal is the identification and assessment of the relationships and mechanisms of interaction between humans and toponyms, as well as the interpretation of the intention that lies behind the use of place names within the discursive framework. The categorisation of these relationships will facilitate the proposal of a methodology aimed at the definition of the information conveyed by place names within the framework of the territorial discourse. The analysis, which was carried out at three levels including the in situ interpretation of the toponym (fieldwork), the archive and ethnographic work, and the study of the collective imaginary (mental maps and street surveys), is targeted at examining the relationship between humans and places holistically. On the basis of the empirical work carried out in Toledo, at least ten typologies of the relationship between local resident and toponym were identified (Tab. 6).

The valorisation of place names as vehicles for geographical information rests upon the integrated analysis of these relationships, which are currently in the process of being tested and validated according to widely accepted criteria for qualitative data assessment (logic consistency, credibility, auditability and transferability) (FRANKLIN & BALLAU 2005 in SALGADO 2007, p. 74).

5 Conclusions and future work

Throughout this paper we describe the role of place names as geographical items, which codify information about the place they designate. De-codifying, in this context, means examining the toponym and seeking within it the geographical information that anyone who is not fully acquainted with the place name cannot identify at first sight. This implies putting together the individual and social understanding of every place name in order to extract information that may be relevant for geographical analysis. Although it is clear that every toponym has to be analysed individually, this proposal aims to advance in the discussion of the critical role played by the information conveyed by urban toponymy at a general level.

Thus, the decoding process has allowed us to examine the wide range of values and meanings, which are tied to the toponyms, among which five case studies have been selected owing to their richness and singularity: A claiming place name, paradoxically linked to a historical reality (Case Study 1: *Barrio del Circo Romano*); a non-official place name of general use because of its context (Case Study 2: *Plaza de España*); an ectonym in

embryonic state (Case Study 3: *Calle Arroyo-Esparteros*); a new place name used as commodity, with heritage value, but tied to the idea of neglect or failure of the place, which it names (Case Study 4: *Zoco Europa*) and, finally, a place name, the perception of which rests on the imaginary of the local residents (Case Study 5: *Barrio de Santa Bárbara*). These examples illustrate the sort of codified information that can be revealed through the analysis of place names.

Through the analysis of these and other names from a geographical point of view, we propose several relational categories that may be used as a starting point for a systematic analysis of place names. This analysis is deemed to be especially useful for issues such as the accurate identification of areas that place names allude to and the optimisation of the deputation mechanisms, which are applied to geographical gazetteers. Within the framework of the work in progress, we have concentrated our efforts on defining the limits of the information conveyed by place names as well as highlighting the need of addressing place names and the information they convey from a holistic geographic perspective.

Hopefully, in future works we shall be able to put forth further mechanisms for the de-codification of place names while increasing our empirical data. Our case study, on Toledo, presents the wide variety of toponymic casuistics, which are characteristic of most urban areas, and is being analysed in depth. Ultimately, we hope to be able to evaluate and establish different tools and methodologies for the collection and analysis of urban place names and the diverse information contained thereof.

In this regard, it is worth stressing that toponyms, in their role as proper nouns of place, must be regarded as the essential channel through which the territorial discourse is constructed. We are convinced that an on-going effort is necessary to revise and valorise immaterial heritage in general and toponyms in particular.

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