
INFLUENCES OF RENAMING STREETS ON URBAN MEMORY: THE CASE OF TURKEY

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Streets are the essential components of the social structure and spaces of memory that encapsulate previous experiences. Memory is similar to cities for it also has a vital structure. Thus, it is indeed possible to observe actions such as forgetting, recalling and storing data, etc. at the urban scale. When the components of the urban memory are removed, the interaction is interrupted, and such components are removed from the urban memory and, thus, forgotten. Toponymy is the study of place names (toponyms), their origins, meanings, use and typology. The place naming conventions worldwide reveal that each country/region has created a system based on their culture. In Turkey, street names were introduced in the early years of the Republic. Concepts related to the Republic, historical figures that came to the fore during the Independence War and Atatürk are frequently used in Turkey. In recent years, streets and roads have been renamed in order to reshape the collective memory. In this context, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence of the changes in street and road names on urban memory. It also aims to discuss the general theme of the conference within the scope of preservation of urban culture and urban memory. The study argues that street names have a direct influence on and bear the traces of the natural and socio-economic structure of the area they are located in.

Keywords

street names, urban memory, urban toponymy, cultural heritage, Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

Street is defined as a road with houses along its both sides that is narrower and shorter than a main road (Url-1¹). This definition can be misleading and insufficient. Because it only addresses the physical characteristics of streets. Streets, however, also feature a wide range of characteristics such as social, cultural and historical features. Therefore, streets are where people begin living together and where communal life, sharing and movement emerge.

The history of streets date back to 8,000 years ago (Lillebye, 2001²). In ancient times and in the middle ages, streets were primarily used for transportation purposes. However, after the Renaissance, they were ascribed with an aesthetic importance. Streets were then attributed as symbols or architecture and urban components. In the mid-19th century, the influences of the Baroque period became prominent. Following the Industrial Revolution, the increase in the rate of private car usage played a significant role in transportation planning and the design of streets. During the late 19th century and the early 20th century, modernist influences and the principles of Enlightenment dominated. Enlightenment is defined as “being destructively creative and creatively destructive at one and the same time”. This concept is grounded on the opinion that something new cannot be created without any destruction. In the aftermath of the II. World War, major parts of cities were destructed (Harvey, 2010:³ 29-30). With Haussman’s projects, Paris was considered as “the first prototype of the modern city” (Kostof, 2007⁴). Urban spaces in the majority of the cities in the 20th century were designed and organized in a systematic fashion. The boulevards of the 19th century gave way to the highways of the 20th century (Berman, 2010⁵). Particularly in the 1960s, many opposed streets and roads that are focused on vehicular traffic. Jacobs (1961⁶) emphasized the liveability in the streets. According to Jacobs, projects carried out on streets back in the time led to a poor image, and the urban memory was destroyed. From then on, more attention was paid to how streets were used and designed. In numerous cities, several projects were developed to reclaim streets. Nowadays, life on streets is prioritized, and consumption-oriented artificial streets are designed at times (pps.org⁷).

STREETS ARE THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SPACES OF MEMORY THAT ENCAPSULATE PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES.

According to the Turkish Language Association dictionary⁸, memory is “the power of retaining past experience and its relation with the past”, “mind, recollection, remembrance”. The brain stores anything we see, hear and learn in order to recall them when necessary in the future. From time to time, it makes the necessary arrangements on the information stored so as to compress and relocate certain information, which then leads to forgetting (Türksoy, 2006⁹).

Cities have a multi-layered and living structure, thus they also have a memory. Therefore, actions such as forgetting, recalling or storing information occur in cities as well. Urban memories sometimes change or disappear due to the rearrangement and reshaping of various components in cities. When the components of the urban memory are removed, the interaction is interrupted, and such components are removed from the urban memory and are thus forgotten. Disasters that change the physical structure (such as earthquakes, fires, etc.) are the primary reasons behind the loss of urban memory. In addition, certain breaking points and discontinuities arising from social, economic and political changes (e.g. migration) are other factors that lead to urban memory loss.

Among the interventions on urban space, those carried out on streets are the most remarkable. The political, cultural, economic and social interventions on streets wipe out or reproduce certain information in the urban memory. Therefore, due attention should be when streets are designed and named. Urban memory should be managed in the best way possible, and the unique values in cities should be preserved.

In this context, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence of the changes in street and road names on urban memory. In order to evaluate the impact of the changes in street names in Turkey since the 1930s, the research provides a comparative analysis and assessment of the legal background in Turkey, written historical documents and findings about various settlements.

STREET AND ROAD NAMES (URBAN TOPONYMY) AND FUNDAMENTAL APPROACHES

Toponymy is the study of place names (toponyms), their origins, meanings, use and typology. Toponymy, which is a branch of onomastics, focuses on different aspects (such as meaning, formation, origin and distribution) of the names given to settlements or physical characteristics. The word toponymy is derived from the Greek words τόπος (τόπος) ('place') and όνομα (όνομα) ('name').

Urban toponymy is researched by many disciplines including but not limited to geography. Urban planners should also pay due attention to toponymy given the fact that naming has a structure that changes and develops with urban dynamics. Streets and roads are the least changing components of urban geography, and they are "both products of design and spaces of social life..." (Çelik et al 2007¹⁰). Place names are a critical part of the sense-making process, and they also provide information to the inhabitants of the city, enable the contact between different generations, and introduce values (Azaryahu, 2011¹¹).

There are two different approaches to naming streets and roads. The French approach is mainly focused on what street and road names remind, and deals with the origins, formation and classification of these names (Kooloos, 2010¹²). The second approach, which is mainly advocated by Azaryahu, gained prominence in the 1990s. Maoz Azaryahu acknowledges the remindful characteristic of street and road names; however, he mainly highlights the role of political struggles and the social processes during the creation of the collective memory. He also puts specific emphasis on the role of street names during the formation of nation-states and identities. Political regimes make use of history not only to legitimize their sovereignty but also to reinforce their authority. In this respect, street naming is one of the methods to dominate the urban space and to create a collective memory. Public memory, which is built through social processes and shaped by cultural characteristics, can be reproduced by cultural codes, social values, ideological opinions and the dynamics of political power (Azaryahu 2009 cited by Aliağaoğlu & Yiğit, 2013¹³).

Place names are not defined by the shifts in the political perceptions of successive generations and by the changes in the national and local authorities. The historical and geographic origins of settlements and their inhabitants, significant individuals and events that played an important role in the history of settlements, natural characteristics, the conditions that changed due to security, and ancestral ties are the factors that are critical in street naming. Past and current economic activities and the spatial growth of settlements due to population increase can also be listed among these factors (Özkan & Yoloğlu, 2005¹⁴; Aliağaoğlu & Yiğit, 2013).

STREET NAMING AROUND THE WORLD

The analyses reveal that the size of streets and the significant buildings along them influence the street names in Europe, while numbers are used more frequently in the U.S. In some countries, there are companies that archive the data about place names. For instance, place names in Canada are compiled in the Natural Resources Canada inventory. The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) collects place names in the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB). The GNBC partners with the McGill University in their projects (Url-2¹⁵). In the U.S., the Board on Geographic Names (BGN) supervises place names. Place names are kept in

the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). Place naming studies are also supported by the Placenames Research Center at the University of Alabama (Url-2). In the United Nations, the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) perform the studies pertaining to place names (Url-2). In Ireland, the Committee on the Standardization of Geographic Names was established in 2000. The purpose of the committee is to organize the national geographic names in unison. In this respect, nine ministries and other organizations are also involved under the supervision of the National Mapping Organization (NMO) (Url-3⁶).

The number of studies about place naming is higher in certain countries. In one of his studies, Azaryahu (2011) indicates that there are plenty of studies in the U.S. and mentions that the examples in countries such as Italy, Greece, Serbia and the Netherlands are interesting and quite a few in number. However, there are not many studies that focus on Latin American, Asian and African countries. Azaryahu expresses that examples of naming in South African cities, which were colonies in the past, in locations such as East Berlin, Bucharest, Budapest and Moscow, which were part of the Eastern Bloc in the past, and in Singapore, which was also a colony in the past, are “dramatic”. In such cities, shifts in the political atmosphere were utilized as a tool to reproduce the collective memory (Azaryahu, 1997 et al. cited by Baysan, Kara, 2014¹⁷).

COUNTRY NAME	1TH STREET NAME	2ND STREET NAME	3RD STREET NAME
Austria	Main Street	Field Alley	Station Street
Czech Republic	Garden Street	Short Street	Station Street
Denmark	Lark Street	Birch Street	Angle Street
France	Church Street	Church Square	Grand Street
Germany	Main Street	Village Street	School Street
Ireland	Main Street	Grand Canal Way	Royal Canal Way
Luxembourg	Church Street	Field Street	Meadow Street
Netherland	Church Street	School Street	Mill Street
Poland	Field Street	Forest Street	Sunny Street
Russia	Central Street	Youth Street	School Street
Spain	Main Street	Church Street	Royal Street
Sweden	Ring Road	Grand Street	School Street
Switzerland	Station Street	Main Street	Village Street
United Kingdom	High Street	Station Road	Main Street

TABLE 1 Table 1: The most common street names in Europe Source: Url-418

When we analyse the table, it is evident that the streets in Europe are named after their condition, their surroundings and the significant buildings located along them. Main Street, School Street, Station Street and Church Street (respectively) are the most popular names in Europe.

	STREET NAME	NUMBER		STREET NAME	NUMBER
1	Second	10,866	11	Pine	6,170
2	Third	10,131	12	Maple	6,103
3	First	9,898	13	Cedar	5,644
4	Fourth	9,190	14	Eighth	5,524
5	Park	8,926	15	Elm	5,233
6	Fifth	8,186	16	View	5,202
7	Main	7,644	17	Washington	4,974
8	Sixth	7,283	18	Ninth	4,908
9	Oak	6,946	19	Lake	4,901
10	Seventh	6,377	20	Hill	4,877

TABLE 2 Table 3.2. The 20 Most Common Street Names in the US

Source: Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Geography Division, 1993 (Url-719)

According to the table, “Second Street” is more popular than “First Street” in the U.S. It looks like “Second Street” is more popular on account of the fact that a considerable amount of “First Streets” are named as “Main Street”.

The place naming conventions worldwide reveal that each country/region has created a system based on their culture. Streets in Europe are named after the important buildings located on them, numbering is more common in the U.S., and block and building numbers are preferred over street names in Far Eastern countries.

HISTORICAL AND LEGAL BACKGROUND OF STREET NAMING IN TURKEY

Toponymy in Turkey is a subject of academic research carried out by various disciplines including but not limited to history, literature and geography. The “Turkish Place Names Symposium” organized on 11-13 September 1984 was the most important event in the field. However, no other symposiums followed this event. The foreword of the symposiums proceedings book indicates that the place names in Turkish that were used in Central Asia, the names of various Turkish cultures, and the names of phratries and significant Turkish figures were replaced with inadequate names over the past 40-50 years; yet, the use of such names is limited to official purposes as the inhabitants continue using the previous names (Url-8²⁰).

The committees on place names in Turkey and around the world operate pursuant to the rules and recommendations of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) (Url-9²¹). The Committee of Experts on Geographical Names in Turkey has not published any studies on street and road names.

In his 2010 study titled “Toponymic Studies in Turkey”, Güven Şahin indicates that there are 284 studies focused on toponymy. Out of these, 152 are books or articles, 69 are symposium or conference proceedings, and 63 are theses or PhD dissertations (Şahin, 2010²²).

Streets in Turkey were named for the first time in order to facilitate census taking in 1927 (Erim, 2013²³). The first regulation on street naming during the Republic was the Law on Street Naming and Numbering published in the Official Gazette on 20 April 1927. Article 5 of the law included provisions on how streets could be assigned with numbers instead of names. The decree introduced on 7 October 1939 also included provisions aimed at regulating how streets are named. The Regulation on Numbering enacted on 21 March 1963 provided further details on street naming. Article 4 of the regulation set forth that “streets shall not be named with obscene or ludicrous names; street names shall not be long or difficult to pronounce; street names shall have Turkish origins and shall not be inherited from other languages; the existing name of a street or a square shall be preserved as long as it is

not obscene or ludicrous and as long as it is not repeated; otherwise, it shall be named as lower street, upper street or middle street based on its topographic characteristics, or as fountain street, baker street or mill street based on its other characteristics or it shall be named after persons who are important in the local or national history.” Article 5 of the regulation indicated that “In the event that numbering is adopted instead of naming streets, the numbers should be consecutive such that the numbers shall proceed in numerical order beginning from the centre of the town (running north-south, west-east or vice versa)”.

Pursuant to the Regulation on Numbering enacted on 21 March 1963 “street names shall be grouped together so that they address national heroes, statesmen, well-known figures who were raised in the settlement or who served the settlement, artists (such as authors, poets, musicians, painters and sculptors), other cities, rivers or mountains, flowers or trees, foreign figures or places”.

Article 11 of the Regulation on Addressing and Numbering enacted on 31 July 2006 indicates that “neighbourhoods, villages, hamlets, localities, housing clusters, squares, boulevards, streets and roads shall be named or numbered, and buildings shall be numbered; and the same name or number shall not be used for different neighbourhoods, localities, housing clusters, boulevards, streets or roads located in the same municipal boundary”; however, the regulation does not provide any further details regarding the matter.

It is evident that the laws and regulations enacted in Turkey encourage the use of historically significant figures when naming streets. The General Directorate of Civil Registration and Nationality produced statistics to rank the most popular street, road, boulevard and square names in Turkey. Concepts related to the Republic, historically significant figures who came to the fore during the Independence War, and Atatürk are the most popular names in Turkey (Url-10²⁴). Historic rumours, stories and the names of significant people who lived on the street in question were also used. However, these are now considered as unusual names as they lost their significance over time.

	SRBS NAMES	AMOUNT
1	Atatürk	3,618
2	Cumhuriyet (Republic)	3,008
3	Fatih (Conqueror)	1,403
4	Gül (Rose)	1,331
5	Okul (School)	1,212
6	Karanfil (Carnation)	1,211
7	Lale (Tulip)	1,200
8	Menekşe (Violet)	1,197
9	İnönü	1,089
10	İstiklal (Freedom)	1,075

TABLE 3 Table 1. The most common street/road/boulevard/square (SRBS) names in Turkey
Source: General Directorate of Population and Citizenship Affairs (Url-1125)

A similar process applies when street names are changed in Turkey. Street names are changed after the decision taken by the council of the relevant municipality/metropolitan municipality is approved by the governor. Most of the time street names are changed to eliminate duplications and to prevent mix-ups in addresses, while sometimes political developments may be behind such changes.

Street names reflect the history and aesthetics in a city. Some street names are also humorous or satirical. Many suggest that the law and the relevant regulations that were enacted in the early years of the Republic were aimed at imposing the new values on society and at wiping out the past by reiterating the new ideals and by rebuilding a collective consciousness and a collective history in order to create a nation (Pulur, 2007²⁶).

However, the purpose of some changes in street names are not quite clear. For instance, in 2007, the 29th Street in one of the neighbourhoods in Ankara was renamed as the 61st Street, while the 61st Street in the same neighbourhood was renamed as the 29th Street. Similarly, the 14th Street was renamed as the 74th Street. These changes caused a great confusion among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood (Url-12²⁷). In some cases, inhabitants apply to relevant authorities to have the name of a street changed if its current name is obscene or inappropriate. For instance, a street named “Ayyaş Sokak” (“Drunkard Street”) may be renamed as “Hacı Sokak” (“Pilgrim Street”). There are also instances where streets are renamed for marketing purposes. The promotion of “Cezayir Sokağı” (“Algeria Street”) as “Fransız Sokağı” (“French Street”) is a remarkable example to such occasions.

The street renaming process in Turkey is controlled by local authorities. Therefore, politics has a considerable influence on street names. Street names are sometimes changed as part of election rallies or due to concerns on failing to achieve a favourable result in the elections. There may also be occasions when street names are changed in order to keep good relations with other countries or to show goodwill to sister cities. “Bangabandhu Şeyh Muciburrahman Bulvarı” (“Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Boulevard”), “Willy Brand Caddesi” (“Willy Brand Street”), “Arjantin Caddesi” (“Argentine Street”), and “Filistin Caddesi” (“Palestine Street”) in Ankara are such examples.

EVALUATION OF TOPONYMIC STUDIES IN TURKEY

Toponymic studies on street and road names are generally performed at an academic level. The article titled “Urban Identity and Urban Image in the İstanbul Metropolitan Planning Process” authored by Suher et al. in 1996 is an important piece of work. In their article, Suher et al.²⁸ studied 45,200 streets and roads in 27 districts, 27 municipalities and 575 neighbourhoods within İstanbul municipal boundaries and then focused on select samples. The authors classified street names by district, municipality and vicinity, and categorized street and road names based on the data on the natural, social and built environments. The study also discussed the role of street names in the image of İstanbul and the influence of the numbering system adopted in newer districts on identity.

In their work titled “A Typological Attempt for Turkey”, Aliğağoğlu and Uzun (2011) evaluated 4,825 street, boulevard and road names in 24 different cities and classified these under 8 categories. According to the study, naming streets after significant people is quite common in Turkey. The study also revealed that numbering is widely used in new residential areas and in industrial and organized industrial zones. According to the study, street names also reflect the landmark buildings and land uses along the street in question. Likewise, “Cumhuriyet” (“Republic”) is a very popular name. “Dostluk” (“Friendship”) and “Kardeşlik” (“Brotherhood”) are also commonly used (Aliğağoğlu & Uzun, 2011).

Baysan and Kara’s study in 2014 titled “District, Boulevard, Avenue and Street Names in Aydın: Urban Toponymic Features” not only traced the political influences on street names but also endeavoured to reveal the importance of place names for the cultural structure of cities (Baysan & Kara, 2014).

In her thesis, Selime Araz (2015²⁹) analysed 664 streets and roads (70 streets and 594 roads) in the Ayvalık district of Balıkesir. The study demonstrated that street and road names were not influenced by the images of urban identity in Ayvalık. In particular, names that originate from the characteristics of the natural and the built environments are very few in number. The characteristics of the district may have limited influence on street names due to the dominance of historically significant figures and events on the street names. The findings of the study also indicated that street and road names in Ayvalık fail to address the values in the city adequately.

EVALUATION

Urban memory has a multi-layered and vital structure, and it sometimes changes or disappears due to the rearrangement and reshaping of various components in cities. Street names help transmit the urban memory to future generations, and renaming streets is usually an intervention grounded on political motives. Naming the streets, which are used recurrently by inhabitants, leads to a recollection/memory. The concepts in inhabitants' memories may be changed or forgotten due to the fact that the collective memory has the capability to reshape history. In recent years, numbering has been widely used to name streets in many cities. However, the numbering convention impairs the ongoing originality and continuity in street names and imperils the urban memory.

In this context, this study evaluated the impact of the interventions made on street names on urban memory and the relevant consequences in Turkey.

In summary, names bear the traces of identity and carry various meanings, and they reinforce the sense of belonging and continuity in cities. Such influences also lead to stronger bonds between cities and their inhabitants, and help inhabitants of cities become urban dwellers. The sense of belonging to a place and its continuity underpins the development of identity and memory.

Street naming should be carried out so as to inform the inhabitants of cities, to develop an urban identity and to contribute to the collective memory. It is only then possible to enable contact between different generations, to preserve the urban memory, to highlight all characteristics of cities with rich components of urban identity and to provide the permanence of these components. This would also lead to reinforced feeling of belonging among the inhabitants.

When the recent research studies referred in this study are evaluated, it is observed that street names, which are the essential components of the built environment and the urban pattern, have a direct influence on and bear the traces of the natural and socio-economic structure of the area they are located in. Therefore, streets should be designed and named by paying the due attention. Urban memory should be managed in the best way possible, and the unique values in cities should be preserved.

Notes on contributor(s)

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