

## Politics of street names and the reinvention of local heritage in the contested urban space of Oradea

ÁGNES ERŐSS<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Ethnically and culturally diverse settlements in Central and Eastern Europe often witness local power-struggles along ethnic/linguistic boundaries that may centre on the visibility of ethnic groups and minority languages in public space (KETTLEY, C. 2003; BRUBAKER, R. *et al.* 2006; MURZYN, M.A. 2008; DRAGOMAN, D. 2011; CSERNICKÓ, I. and MÁTÉ, R. 2017). The majority ethnic group, as the possessor of power is in a more favourable position to control and/or limit the access of minorities to be visually present in the cityscape. The aim of this paper is to show (1) how the public space is re-structured and ethnicised by politics and practices of street naming; and (2) how the contestation over public space contributes to the evolution of alternative city-text. The research was carried out in Oradea/Nagyvárad, a multi-ethnic town in the Romanian-Hungarian border zone. After describing the spatial features and effects of contestation over street names, based on the analysis of press, interviews and survey data the research shows how the local political deal, the evolved individual/minority coping strategies, and the recent interest in tourism development have contributed to the reinvention of local heritage. Finally, looking at the intensified interest towards local heritage (on behalf of both local government and minority politicians) the question arises: whether heritage might enhance the dissolution of the ongoing conflict centred on street names?

**Keywords:** public space, toponymy, street names, local heritage, Oradea, Nagyvárad

### Introduction

The relationship between power and public space has been one of the main interests of geographical research (MASSEY, D. 1994; MITCHELL, D. 2003; LOW, S. and SMITH, N. 2006; RISBETH, K. and ROGALY, B. 2017). When explaining the importance of public space STAEHELI and MITCHELL highlight that “For those people who are marginalised, finding a space to be seen or heard, (...) is vital to their ability to develop a political subjectivity; (...) and to their struggle to gain recognition from the state and the political community.” (STAEHELI, L.D. and MITCHELL, D. 2007, 809). The inherent social power of being visible in public space explains the conflicts centred on place naming, commemorative place names or multilingual inscriptions, as for a minority group these can be perceived as “struggle

to be seen and heard within public space” (ALDERMAN, D. and INWOOD, J. 2013, 229). Tremendous amount of research has illustrated the struggle of minority or marginalised communities in place naming (BERG, L.D. and KEARNS, R.A. 1996; ALDERMAN, D. 2000; MERRIMEN, P. and JONES, R. 2009; KITADA, E. 2016), politics of place names in geopolitical conflict zones (COHEN, S.B. and KLIOT, N. 1992; KLIOT, N. and MANSFIELD, Y. 1997; KADMON, N. 2004) or postcolonial setting (YEOH, B. 1992, 1996).

Great body of research applies a different approach and study the place naming from the power's perspective. Political transformations go hand in hand with shifts in the symbolic landscape. The new possessor of power takes efforts to inscribe its hegemony into the landscape, in many cases by erasing or silencing counter narratives (HOBBSAWN,

<sup>1</sup> Geographical Institute, Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, H-1112 Budapest, Budaörsi út 45. E-mail: eross.agnes@csfk.mta.hu

E. 2015; TÁTRAI, P. and ERŐSS, Á. 2016). Symbolic space appropriation strategies can take various forms: demolishing the previous regime's symbols are usually followed by the installation of new symbols, reinterpretation or even appropriation of previously existing ones (HARRISON, S. 1995). Naming and renaming streets is one of the generally applied symbolic acts as it proves the potency of "power to consecrate or reveal things that are already there" (BOURDIEU, P. 1989, 23). Street names have a clear practical function (orientation); people use them in everyday situations (DAVID, J. 2013) and this mundanity makes them so powerful. Only by mentioning a street name it appears in casual conversations, thus, unintentionally speakers communicate the official narrative and ideology. Consequently, street names "mediate between political elites and 'ordinary' people." (AZARYAHU, M. 2009, 54) and can be perceived as manifestations of banal nationalism (BILLIG, M. 1995). Commemorative street names are especially powerful tools in urban landscape: they enable "an official version to be incorporated into spheres of social life which seems to be totally detached from political contexts or community obligations, and to be integrated into intimate realms and interaction and realities." (AZARYAHU, M. 1996)

Since the birth of nationalism the previously ethnic neutral place designations have been replaced by the names connected to the ethnic based concept of nation. Thus, in settlements where more ethnic communities reside, tensions may occur over unequal representation (and access) of ethnic groups in the public space (YIFTACHEL, O. and YACOBI, H. 2003; OKTEM, K. 2005). Ethnically and culturally diverse settlements in Central and Eastern Europe often witness local power-struggles along ethnic/linguistic boundaries that may centre on the visibility of ethnic groups in public space. The local majority – as the possessor of power – is in a more favourable position to control and/or limit the access of minorities to be visually present in the cityscape (BRUBAKER, R. *et al.* 2006; ZAHORÁN, Cs. 2016). In such settlements,

urban space can easily become the subject of power struggle between rivaling ethnic groups, where the majority dominates the relationship. In parallel, the minority group may keep alive an 'other', alternative urban space which contributes to the existence of a 'doubled world' (BARNA, G. 2000) or an alternative city text (AZARYAHU, M. 1996).

Talking about cities in CEE, the effect of post-socialist transformation also need to be addressed. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, post-socialist cities went through rapid political, economic and social changes, which made general impact on urban spatial processes. While suburbanisation, gentrification, urban regeneration or recently re-urbanisation hit those cities in different scales and forms (BADYINA, A. and GOLUBCHIKOV, O. 2005; KOVÁCS, Z. 2009; SÝKORA, L. and BOUZAROVSKI, S. 2012; VAN ASSCHE, K. and SALUKVADZE, J. 2012; SALUKVADZE, J. and GOLUBCHIKOV, O. 2016), the redefinition of city image, the reassessment of cultural heritage and identity were equally necessary. The re-creation of (national) identity and city image is comprised by complex dynamics of remembering and forgetting that can be traced in the restructuring of urban iconography (AZARYAHU, M. 1997; NADKARNI, M. 2003; LIGHT, D. 2004; PALONEN, E. 2008; DIENER, A.C. and HAGEN, J. 2013; ERŐSS, Á. *et al.* 2016). Similarly, important the reformulation of city image for tourism purposes (PUCZKÓ, L. *et al.* 2007; ROZITE, M. and KLEPERS, A. 2012; GRAZULEVICIUTE-VILENISKE, I. and URBONAS, V. 2014). As tourism industry has developed to be a significant segment of economy in the globalising world, it further urged the articulation of policies and strategies in issues of heritage management and commercialisation or branding and marketisation of city image (GUZMÁN, P.C. *et al.* 2017). Consequently, in post-socialist cities the reformulation of city image is a diverse process in which the re-evaluation of socialist past and the (re)invention of heritage and identity is intertwined inviting various actors in different power positions to the discussion (MURZYN, M.A. 2008).

As recent studies of post-socialist cities, like Belgrade or Riga exemplifies “particular efforts have been made to highlight the diversity of all cultures, civilizations, social systems that left their traces” (JOKSIMOVIĆ, M. *et al.* 2014, 229) in the cityscape. At the same time such an approach opens the floor to wide variety of cultural heritage interpretations (ROZITE, M. and KLEPERS, A. 2012). According to one definition, heritage is “understood as the diverse ways in which material and intangible relics of the past are used by contemporary societies as social, political and economic resources” (GRAHAM, B. 2000, 7). Even though, basically anything can be considered as heritage that somebody wish to pass on to the next generation (HOWARD, P. 2003), actually the list of cultural heritage is highly embedded into power relation and politics (HARVEY, D.C. 2010), additionally in politics of identity (GRAHAM, B. and HOWARD, P. 2008). According to critical heritage studies, heritage “embodies relationships of power and subjugation, inclusion and exclusion, remembering and forgetting”, where the power wish to control not only the content what to remember, but also the interpretation of the past (HARRISON, R. 2010, 1). HARRISON makes distinction between official and unofficial heritage. In his view, unofficial heritage bears significance to individuals or communities, but it is not protected by legislation. Unofficial heritage can be a building, but can take a less tangible form as well, for instance “set of repetitive, entrenched, sometimes ritualized practices that link the values, beliefs and memories of communities in the present with those of the past” (HARRISON, R. 2013, 14–18.)

The aim of the study is – by applying the example of Oradea – to illustrate how public space becomes contested and ethicised and in which ways local heritage can be reinterpreted in a culturally diverse city with rich cultural heritage. After briefly summarising the history of Oradea, the paper focuses on street names and the ethnicised contestation emerged on naming rights and visualisation of place names. By analysing interview data and questionnaire survey, the study reveals

the diverse political and individual strategies evolved to tackle the contestation, contributing to the reinvention of local heritage.

### Introduction of the research site, Oradea

Oradea (Nagyvárad, Groswardein), the seat of Bihor county in north-western Romania has a more than 900-year-old history. Founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the Hungarian king, Saint Ladislaus. Before World War I it belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom and had a predominantly Hungarian population (about 90%). Throughout the centuries, it grew into a prosperous town with rich historical heritage of regional and even national importance. The golden era of modern Oradea was the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, when both the wealthy elite and the city council financed sizeable constructions. Grandiose art nouveau palaces and elegant public buildings in eclectic style were raised as spatial manifestations of boosting economy (*Photo 1*). Renowned figures of Hungarian and Romanian culture chose Oradea as a place of residence. Beside the temples of Roman and Greek Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches, marvellous synagogues served the sizeable, predominantly Hungarian speaking Jewish population.

After World War I, the Romanian Kingdom obtained Oradea, which became a peripheral border town in the enlarged state territory. In the interwar period, the city had to accommodate to the new political conditions while it also had to tackle consequences of economic downturn. Following the Second Vienna Treaty, between 1940 and 1944 it became part of Hungary again. During the last months of the Hungarian rule, the sizeable Hungarian speaking Jewish population, that played important role in the economic, social and cultural life of Oradea, perished in death camps (*Remember...*, 1985).

After 1945, Oradea was awarded to Romania. In the decades of communism, the proportion of Hungarians gradually decreased. Since 1973, Romanians form the



Photo 1. One of the architectural gems of Oradea, The Black Eagle Palace (Palatul Vulturul Negru/Fekete Sas Palota). Built in 1907–1908, architects Marcell Komor and Dezső Jakab. (Photo by the author)

majority in the local population (VARGA, E.Á. 1999). Probably due to the lack of financial resources (IUGA, L. 2014), a great proportion of historic buildings in the city-centre could avoid demolition; the socialist urbanisation transformed rather the northern and southern parts of the town.

The collapse of the Ceausescu regime in 1989 hit hard Oradea: the closure of factories increased unemployment that resulted in the outmigration of the (mainly ethnic Hungarian) population. Nowadays Oradea is a municipality, with nearly two-hundred thousand citizens. According to the 2011 census, 23.7 per cent of its population declared Hungarian ethnicity, while the ratio of Romanians was 67.8 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [http://ispmn.gov.ro/maps/county/26564\\_bh\\_limba2011\\_maghiar](http://ispmn.gov.ro/maps/county/26564_bh_limba2011_maghiar)

All in all, in the last hundred years, Oradea went through several major regime changes, each was followed by the almost complete erasure of the previous regime's symbols (FLEISZ, J. 2000) and introduction of a new toponymy and set of statues and commemorative tables (ERŐSS, Á. and TÁTRAI, P. 2010).

### **Power of street names: major shifts in toponymy**

Data shown in *Table 1* reflect the hegemonic endeavour of consecutive power formations. Analysing relationship between the ethnic structure of the population and the ratio of street names with ethnic connotation, one can find that these two indicators only coincided during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Nev-

Table 1. Relationship between the ethnic composition of the inhabitants\* and the ethnic connotation of street names\*\* in Oradea/Nagyvárad, 1900–2006.

Year	Romanian %	Hungarian %	Year	Romanian %	Hungarian %
1900*	6.4	89.6	1956*	36.0	59.0
1902**	2.1	97.7	1957**	62.5	37.5
1930*	26.3	53.7	1977*	53.9	44.1
1931**	92.7	7.3	1980**	93.3	6.7
1941*	5.2	92.1	2002*	70.3	27.6
1942**	0.9	99.1	2006**	89.9	10.1

Source: ERŐSS, Á. and TÁTRAI, P. 2010.

ertheless, even in that period the local Hungarian government made effort to monopolize the street names favouring Hungarian figures, excluding the Romanian or other ethnic groups.

Nationalising states have an endeavour to monopolise the public sphere in ethnic-cultural terms by erasing or appropriating spatial memories of other ethnic groups in cities like Wrocław/Breslau or Lemberg/Lviv (LAGZI, G. 2013) or Cluj/Kolozsvár (BENEDEK, J. and BARTOS-ELEKES, Zs. 2009; BARTOS-ELEKES, Zs. 2016). Minority initiatives to gain visibility are traditionally perceived as threats or at least acts questioning solidarity towards the state. As Dragoş DRAGOMAN noted “ethnic struggle between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania lately became symbolic and non-material. It now uses mechanism of differentiation and power in order to spatially mark the dominance by items as flags, road signs, street names, churches and statues.” (DRAGOMAN, D. 2011, 121). This leads to the ethnicisation of public space (HOFMAN, M. 2008), that is reflected in the street names of Oradea. *Figure 1* shows street names according to their ethnic connotation. (Rule of selection: historical and cultural figures, events, dates, places that clearly belong to either Romanian or Hungarian culture marked with purple or yellow colours). In 2005 Oradea had 739 streets, out of which 57 per cent was ethnically neutral. Street names with Romanian connotation dominated the city centre, while Hungarian names concentrated in such areas, where they traditionally live in higher concentrations.

Only two important public places had Hungarian related names commemorating mainly artists and/or figures with local links (was born or lived/worked in Oradea) rather than representative figures of Hungarian national culture.

### Politics of street names in Oradea

An interview conducted with a Hungarian member of the local government in 2013 shed light on the political dimensions and local deals of street naming. As he remembers, in the early 1990s “there were huge fights” in the city council, because the idea to name the main square after St. Ladislaus, the Hungarian king, who had found the town in 11<sup>th</sup> century, was absolutely unacceptable for the Romanian majority. While “Ady<sup>3</sup>, of course, could be awarded, as he had made love here, he had become a big poet here, no problem.” Eventually – following long debates – a narrow, peripheral street was named after St. Ladislaus and a long, frequently used street in the centre became the Ady Street. The case reveals the different symbolic value of commemorative street names: even though St. Ladislaus was the one who established Oradea, he was also perceived as a key figure of Hungarian national history, which made

<sup>3</sup> Endre Ady (1877–1919) is one of the most important Hungarian poets. He worked as a journalist and published his first successful volumes while living in Oradea/Nagyvárad. Importantly he met his muse and lover, Adél Brüll during his stay in the town.

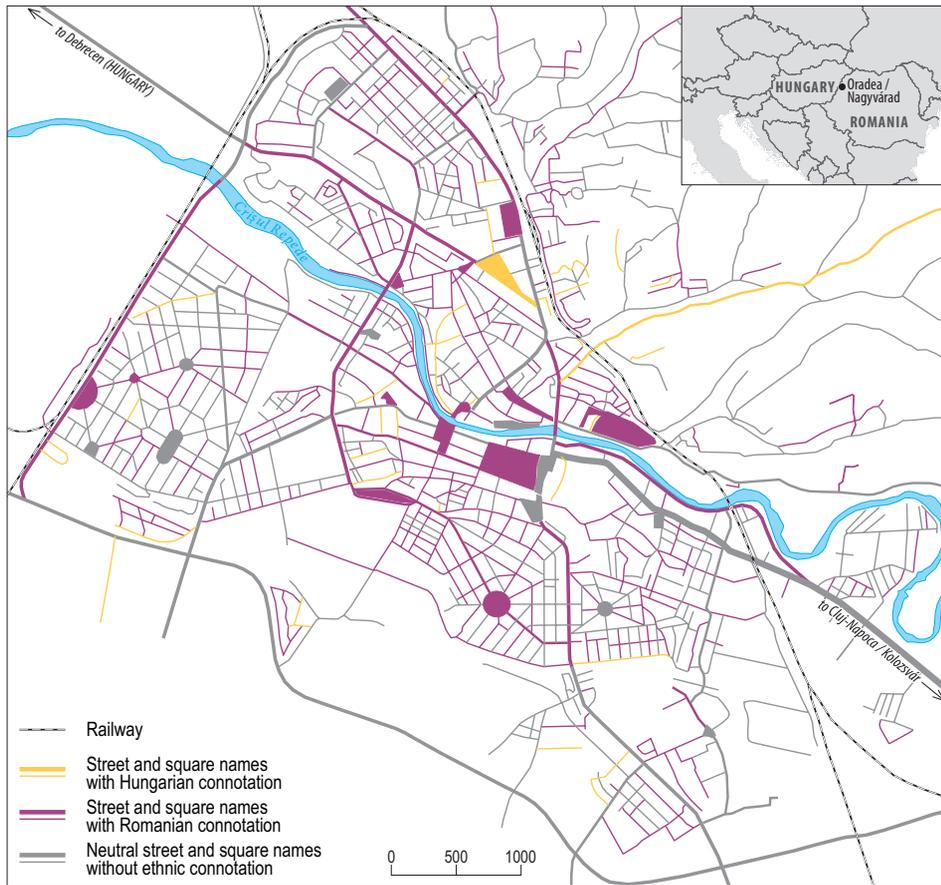


Figure 1. Street names in Oradea according to ethnic connotation in 2005. (Edited by TÁTRAI, P.)

his figure less acceptable to the Romanian majority (i.e. as it might evoke national sentiments). Whereas *Ady*, strongly related to the Hungarian culture and the history of the town, was primarily seen as a poet and journalist, who lived in Oradea. Thus, by highlighting his local relevance, embeddedness in Oradea's history, he was accepted in the pantheon of local heroes, and commemorated in a central street.

Nevertheless, the *spatial* differentiation in the aforementioned case points to the importance of location of commemorative street names: to be visible in the centre usually carries greater symbolic value. Nevertheless,

when analysing the debates over naming streets after Martin Luther King Jr. in Greenville and Statesboro, ALDERMAN and INWOOD pointed to the ambiguous nature of the deals. The streets in the two cities named after King was either in the periphery, or – even though a wide avenue got baptized after him – it was actually far from the previously used space of African American commemorative events. Eventually, they conclude that both cases contributed to the reproduction of the already existing racial boundaries and spatial segregation in urban space, – the opposite of King's legacy (ALDERMAN, D. and INWOOD, J. 2013).

Apart from the ethnic connotation of street names, their *visualisation* and visibility also need to be addressed. Romania ratified laws and regulations that guarantee minority language use, including the display of bilingual or multilingual settlement names, street names or names of institutions in settlements where the share of ethnic minority reaches 20 per cent or more within the local population (VERESS, E. 2006).

In practice, the implementation shows great variety in regions of Romania and highly dependent on local political relations (DRAGOMAN, D. 2011; CREȚAN, R. and MATTHEWS, P.W. 2016). In Oradea bilingual street name plates are still under negotiation, so as the demand of certain Hungarian politicians and civic activists to increase the share

of Hungarian related street names until it would coincide with the ratio of Hungarians in the population.

Since 2007, the tension left the chambers of local council and entered the streets of Oradea. The Hungarian youth association, called EMI (Erdélyi Magyar Ifjak / Hungarian Youth in Transylvania) launched street actions: they painted the old, once existing Hungarian names on buildings (family houses or shops) with the owners' previous consent.

For the next couple of weeks the streets in Oradea turned into a 'playground' between 'painters' and 're-painters', latter ones perceived the street action as an illegal aggression against the majority/existing rules (*Photo 2*).



*Photo 2.* Scenes from the EMI activists' street action. The official (Romanian) street names above, below the once existing, Hungarian street names. The painted signs were either repainted or carved. (Photos by Kocsis, K.)

The conflict over street names in Oradea has not ended: Hungarian associations or parties from time to time fix Hungarian street name plates below the Romanian ones, accompanied by great media interest (*Photo 3*).

Meanwhile, a silent deal was accepted in the city council: names of newly opening streets follow the ethnic proportions (ca. 25% will be named by the Hungarian community, 75% by Romanians) – without ethnically neutral names. However, the scope of proposed street names is limited: the local government has a strong desire to prefer figures (Romanians and Hungarians) who were notable in the local history of Oradea or Bihor County. Thus, names of personalities of Hungarian national history remains absent from the list of street names. As the same interviewee phrased: “To denominate [streets] after politicians are not our primary goal (...) we rather look for such persons who did something for Oradea.”

### The reinvention of local heritage in Oradea

The silent deal or agreement does not cover or solve all the debates about street names, but it leads to noticeable consequences. First, the visibility guaranteed by this agreement is limited, as new streets are opening in the outskirts of Oradea, so their symbolic power is weaker than of a street in the centre. Second, to compile a list of people with local relevance requires engagement in local heritage and tremendous amount of work. The Hungarian community has developed numerous civic associations, which are engaged both in research and dissemination of local heritage (for instance: For the scientific Bihar Research: <http://eng.biharkutatas.hu/>; Partium and Bán-ság Committee for monument protection and memorials: <http://www.pbmet.ro/>). The body of knowledge prepared by them is an important contribution to compile biographies of notabilities. They publish the results, organ-



*Photo 3.* Local Hungarian politician place a Hungarian street name plate on the building of the city council.  
Source: [http://itthon.ma/erdelyorszag.php?cikk\\_id=20200](http://itthon.ma/erdelyorszag.php?cikk_id=20200). Accessed: 12.11.2017

ise conferences and with the student paper competitions they make efforts to engage with the younger generations. Another project worth mentioning is a Hungarian language course book, titled “My town, Oradea”/”Az én városom, Nagyvárad”. It targets 8–10 year-old pupils introducing Oradea, its history, built heritage, famous personalities to the kids (<http://csodaceruza.hu/?p=5865>).

Considering that local traditions and urban legends make places alive and liveable (DE CERTEAU, M. 2011), the community work fostering reinvention of local histories might induce feeling of belonging and attachment to the place. Nonetheless, everyday practices legitimise places of remembrance: social actions transform a space into a place (DE CERTEAU, M. 2011), shape individual and community place identity (PROSHANSKY, H. *et al.* 1983) and engender attachment to places (MASSEY, D. 1994; EHRKAMP, P. 2005). In this sense, I argue that activities like digging up libraries to map a local figure’s life, or followings blogs, attending public talk about the history of the town can be considered as social actions that induce affection, feeling of belonging to a place (LOVELL, N. 1998). The growing consciousness about the history of the locality might contribute to the empowerment of local Hungarian community.

Finally, in the evaluation of the interviewee, the silent deal puts the Hungarian community in a relatively favourable position over Romanians: “since this was a Hungarian town for such a long time, for us it’s not a problem to create a long list of figures with local relevance and importance. On the other hand, for Romanians, well...” This opinion suggests that even though Hungarian street names and figures of national importance have remained absent from the centre of the city the silent deal in a sense favours the local Hungarian community.

### Do street names matter?

Taking into account the frequent changes of street names, the conflicts over street name

plates and the overall contestation over public place the question arises: how people think about street names? What is the relevance of street names in their everyday lives? In the last couple of years there is a growing demand to study how street names are perceived by people (AZARYAHU, M. 2011; CREȚAN, R. and MATTHEWS, P.W. 2016).

In a research<sup>4</sup> conducted with local Hungarian and Romanian students who were born in or moved to Oradea, we found that inhabitants use landmarks to orient in the town, rather than street names. However, when referring to street names, they frequently use shorter or colloquial names instead of the official ones. In the questionnaire survey respondents were asked to name the meeting places where they usually fix an appointment. After evaluating the results (n=208) the representative main square, Piața Unirii (n=84) and the Strada Republicii (n=75), both situated in the centre, were named as favourite meeting points. Nevertheless, less than half of the respondents referred to these places by their actual official names. In both ethnic groups respondents favoured mentioning some iconic building as meeting point in the Piața Unirii (e.g. ‘by the Vulturul Negru’), instead of the official name of the square. Hungarian respondents mainly used the Hungarian name of the Piața Unirii (n=52, Szent László tér / St. Ladislaus Square), whereas they referred to Strada Republicii (n=30) by its colloquial name [Main Street (n=18) or Pedestrian street (n=12)].

During the interviews it turned out, that Hungarian respondents sometimes did not even know the current official name of the given street or the use of official street names is rather situational: appears either in official-administrative context or when they

<sup>4</sup> The research was conducted in 2008, among Hungarian and Romanian students studying in Partium University and University of Oradea. The research was aimed to reveal ethnic differences in spatial practices of Hungarian and Romanian university students. We combined data from questionnaire, structured interviews and mental mapping surveys. The research was financed by the University of Bern. Participating researchers were Patrik TÁTRAI (geographer) and Krisztina RADVÁNYI (sociologist).

talk to Romanians. Beside colloquial names, local Hungarian youth refer to street names that were official in the times of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and thus, belong to the Hungarian past of Oradea. Keeping alive and using in everyday conversational situations, the Hungarian street names have become in-group codes, in many cases indicators of one's Hungarian identity. A similar phenomenon was described for instance in Cluj, the cultural centre of Transylvania. According to Réka PLUGOR (2006) many local Hungarians feel that using traditional Hungarian street names is a sign of respect towards past and signals a commitment and statement of being part of the Hungarian community. Importantly, since the Hungarian street names were absent from the public space and official documents for decades, their survival have been secured in the intergenerational communication in the Hungarian community. The alternative Hungarian city text manifested in the virtual net of old street names might function as a cement of group cohesion for Hungarians (BARTH, F. 1969) and a tool of out-grouping towards Romanians. However, it also symbolises a delicate line between local Hungarians and non *Oradean* Hungarians. Respondents, who came to study to Oradea from other parts of Transylvania mentioned that upon their arrival they faced difficulties when asked for orientation from local Hungarians, as the names mentioned by them were not indicated on maps or official papers. With time, they learnt the Hungarian street names. Thus, being Hungarian does not necessarily mean that one will be able to "read" this alternative city text. The knowledge of local Hungarian toponymy is a sensitive indicator of belonging to the local Hungarian community, being *Oradean* Hungarian (or "*váradi*" as they say).

### Local heritage as mitigation of struggle over street names?

(Re)development and promotion of multi-layered local heritage has been one of the

most noticeable hence challenging processes in post-socialist cities (RÁTZ, T. *et al.* 2008). Traces of 'ancient' history, or signs of multiculturalism are reassessed, commercialised and capitalised (NARVSELIUS, E. 2015). Such revival of the past is especially visible in the former Saxon settlements in Transylvania, Romania. In Sebeş, following the decision of the local mayor, the traditional German and (if exists) Hungarian street names were placed below the official street name plates, usually printed on a different table with different colours. According to the report, the historical street name tables intend to symbolise the multi-ethnic character of the community (SZUCHER, E. 2013). On the other hand, written in old German characters, these alternative street name plates serve as a visual proof of the ancient history and rich heritage of the former Saxon towns, a symbolic capital that conveyed value can quite easily be transformed into actual capital, as a commercialised heritage (PUCZKÓ, L. *et al.* 2007). The potential financial benefits deriving from the multilingual street name plates transcend the comment of the mayor of Sebeş: before the decision was made about placing multilingual street name plates displaying historical toponymy, it was taken into account that majority of visitors were arriving from Hungary, whom would feel positively about looking at Hungarian street names (SZUCHER, E. 2013). Highlighting the (potential) economic benefits motivating or justifying (place) naming has been studied in the research of place naming as commodity (LIGHT, D. and YOUNG, C. 2014). Articles in present special issue also touch upon the role of heritage in local identity formation (SEMIAN, M. and NOVACEK, A. 2017) and heritage as potential income generating factor in different types of tourism (LIRO, J. *et al.* 2017; JELEN, J. and KUČERA, Z. 2017).

Recently, arguments in the same vein seem to appear in policy documents, whereas the example of Saxon towns are widely referred to as good practices. Not long time ago, Oradea's cultural diversity and built heritage was rather overlooked by local government

as a possible source of generating income. In the last couple of years though, the development of tourism appeared in the local government's policy documents. Both the City Development Strategy for 2015–2020 and the Masterplan for 2030 tackles the renovation of built heritage and development of multicultural and historic tourism as the focal points of Oradea's future prosperity (ȚOCA, C.V. and POCOLA, B.M. 2015; BORMA, A. 2016; MORAR, C. *et al.* 2016). Interestingly, most probably not independently from the recent turn of the city council towards recognition and re-invention of multicultural character of the town, a local Hungarian politician started to campaign for Hungarian street names applying the example of Saxon towns (Az Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt Sajtóirodája 2017).

## Conclusion

In local narratives, Oradea is labelled as a multi-ethnic place, where Hungarians and Romanian co-exist peacefully, and the conflicts are intruding from the top level, from the sphere of politics (FILEP, B. 2016). If we consider that in the last hundred year Oradea went through numerous major political transformations, when each regime change was followed by a new toponymy, then we might assume that the reoccurring street name changes have been perceived by many local inhabitants as one of those top-down "intrusions" to their individual lives.

By analysing street names in Oradea, it was demonstrated how the urban space gets restructured into areas with different symbolic value. The importance of locality in the mutual acceptance of street names was also pointed out. As the case of Ady Street in Oradea shows, if the commemorated person is not political figure and has local connection, s/he is more acceptable for the majority, which is reflected in the more prestigious location of the street named after her/him.

To mitigate the conflict that regularly enters the streets, a silent agreement in the local government was achieved to commemorate

persons with local importance, who were active in the local community, rather than historic persons or politicians. This policy induced a novel interest in local Hungarian minority to seek its heritage.

Nevertheless, street names, more precisely the maintenance of Hungarian street names can also be comprehended as an alternative city text. Inherited from parents to children, Hungarian street names secure and maintain a virtual link between different times of the existence of the community: they are able to recall past in the present, while by fostering and passing them to the next generation, they become 'investment' to the future of the community. Noteworthy, that the alternative city text often communicated via in-group codes, makes self-identification possible, probably strengthening in-group cohesion and safeguarding the ethnic group.

Recent developments show increasing interest toward local heritage. Policy documents tackle it as a possible source of income (heritage tourism). Whereas local minority politicians seem to perceive the heritage revival as an opportunity: by installing multilingual street name and information tables proving the rich heritage of the town, eventually minority language and culture might gain more visibility in centrally located urban spaces as well. Even though the approaches toward local heritage of local power and minority group is different, the question might arise: Whether local heritage can become a suitable tool to dissolve the conflicts in this contested urban space?

*Acknowledgement:* Part of the research was carried out in the frame of SefoNe EU FP6 project and financially supported by the University of Bern. I am especially grateful to Patrik TÁTRAI, with whom I carried out the research between 2007–2009, and who compiled the database of street names, and also to Krisztina RADVÁNYI for her professional contribution to the survey. I would like to thank to Károly Kocsis, Monika VÁRADI, Béla FILEP, Egon NAGY and Zsombor BARTOS-ELEKES for their guidance and advices.

## REFERENCES

- ALDERMAN, D. 2000. A Street fir for a King: naming places and commemoration in the American South. *Professional Geographer* 52. (4): 672–684.
- ALDERMAN, D. and INWOOD, J. 2013. Street naming and the politics of belonging: spatial injustices in the toponymic commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr. *Social & Cultural Geography* 14. (2): 211–233.
- AZARYAHU, M. 2009. Naming the past: The significance of commemorative street names. In *Critical toponymies: The contested politics of Place naming*. Eds.: BERG, L.D. and VUOLTEENAHO, J., Aldershot, Ashgate, 53–70.
- AZARYAHU, M. 1996. The Power of commemorative Street Names. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14. (3): 311–330.
- AZARYAHU, M. 1997. German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The case of East Berlin. *Political Geography* 16. (6): 479–493.
- AZARYAHU, M. 2011. The critical turn and beyond: the case of commemorative street naming. *ACME* 10. (1): 28–33.
- BADYINA, A. and GOLUBCHIKOV, O. 2005. Gentrification in Central Moscow – A market process or a deliberate policy? Money, power and people in housing regeneration in Ostozhenka. *Geografiska Annaler Series B Human Geography* 87. (2): 113–129.
- BARNA, G. 2000. Mentális határok – megduplázott világok (Mental boundaries – doubled worlds). In *Folklorisztika 2000-ben: folklór – irodalom – szemiotika: tanulmányok Voigt Vilmos 60. születésnapjára*. Eds.: BALÁZS, G., CSOMA, Zs., JUNG, K., NAGY, I. and VEREBÉLYI, K., Budapest, ELTE BTK, 689–701.
- BARTH, F. 1969. *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*. Boston, Little Brown.
- BARTOS-ELEKES, Zs. 2016. The history of street-name changes in Transylvania. In *Place-name changes*. Eds.: WOODMAN, P. and JORDAN, P., Hamburg, Dr. Kovač, 37–54.
- BENEDEK, J. and BARTOS-ELEKES, Zs. 2009. Symbolic Spatial Usage in the Historic City Centre of Cluj-Napoca. In *Descriptio Transylvaniae*. Eds.: CSIKI, B. and BARTOS-ELEKES, Zs., Cluj-Napoca, Cholnoky Jenő Geographic Society – Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 95–108.
- BERG, L.D. and KEARNS, R.A. 1996. Naming as Norming: ‘Race’, Gender, and the Identity Politics of Naming Places in Aotearoa, New Zealand. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14. (1): 99–122.
- BILLIG, M. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*, London, SAGE.
- BORMA, A. 2016. 2015 – The year of tourism revival in Oradea. *Annals of the University of Oradea, Economic Science Series*. Tom. XXIV. 1<sup>st</sup> Issue / July 2015. Available at: <http://steconomiceuoradea.ro/anale/volume/2015/n1/077.pdf>
- BOURDIEU, P. 1989. Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory* 7. (1): 14–25.
- BRUBAKER, R., FEISCHMIDT, M., FOX, J. and GRANCEA, L. 2006. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- COHEN, S.B. and KLIOT, N. 1992. Place-names in Israel’s ideological struggle over the Administered Territories. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82. (4): 653–680.
- CREȚAN, R. and MATTHEWS, P.W. 2016. Popular responses to city-text changes: street naming and the politics of practicality in a post-socialist martyr city. *Area* 48. (1): 92–102.
- CSERNICKÓ, I. and MÁTÉ, R. 2017. Bilingualism in Ukraine: Value or Challenge? *Sustainable Multilingualism* 10. (1): 14–35.
- DAVID, J. 2013. Street names – Between Ideology and Cultural Heritage. *Acta Onomastica* LIV. 1–8.
- DE CERTEAU, M. 2011. *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press.
- DIENER, A.C. and HAGEN, J. 2013. From socialist to post-socialist cities: narrating the nation through urban space. *Nationalities Papers* 41. (4): 487–514.

- DRAGOMAN, D. 2011. Ethnic Groups in Symbolic Conflict. The “Ethnicisation” of Public Space in Romania. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 11. (1): 105–121.
- EHRKAMP, P. 2005. Placing identities: Transnational Practices and local attachments of Turkish immigrants in Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31. (2): 345–364.
- ERŐSS, Á. and TÁTRAI, P. 2010. Ethnic features of symbolic appropriation of public space in changing geopolitical frames: the case of Oradea/Nagyvárad. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 59. (1): 51–68.
- ERŐSS, Á., MICHALKÓ, G. and GALAMBOS, I. 2016. Pathos and the mundane in the symbolic space of 1956 revolution: the case of Corvin-passage, Budapest. *Almatourism: Journal of tourism, culture and territorial development* 7. (5): 44–60.
- FILEP, B. 2016. *The Politics of Good Neighbourhood. State, Civil Society and the Enhancement of Cultural Capital in East Central Europe*. Border Regions Series. London, Routledge.
- FLEISZ, J. 2000. *Nagyvárad története évszámokban* (History of Oradea in data of year). Oradea, Literator.
- GRAHAM, B. and HOWARD, P. 2008. Heritage and Identity. In *The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity*. Eds.: GRAHAM, B. and HOWARD, P., Burlington, Ashgate, 1–15.
- GRAHAM, B., ASHWORTH, G.J. and TURNBRIDGE, J.E. 2000. *A Geography of Heritage: power, culture and economy*. London, Arnold, 284.
- GRAZULEVICIUTE-VILENISKE, I. and URBONAS, V. 2014. Urban regeneration in the context of post-Soviet transformation: Lithuanian experience. *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 15. (6): 637–643.
- GUZMÁN, P.C., PEREIRA RODERS, A.R. and COLENBRANDER, B.J.F. 2017. Measuring links between cultural heritage management and sustainable urban development: An overview of global monitoring tools. *Cities* 60. 192–201.
- HARRISON, R. 2010. Introduction. In *Understanding the politics of Heritage*. Ed.: HARRISON, R., Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1–4.
- HARRISON, R. 2013. *Heritage: Critical approaches*. London and New York, Routledge.
- HARRISON, S. 1995. Four types of symbolic conflict. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1. (2): 255–272.
- HARVEY, D.C. 2010. Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: temporality, meaning and the scope of heritage studies. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7. (4): 319–338.
- HOBBSAWM, E. 2015. Introduction: Inventing traditions. In *The Invention of Tradition*. Eds.: HOBBSAWM, E. and RANGER, T., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1–14.
- HOFMAN, M. 2008. New spatial theories and their influence on intercultural dialogue observing relational space in Oradea. *Eurolimes* 6. 92–100.
- HOWARD, P. 2003. *Heritage. Management, Interpretation, Identity*. London and New York, Continuum.
- IUGA, L. 2014. The old city and the rhetoric of urban modernization in Romania (1950–1970s). In *VisibileInvisibile. Percepire la città tra descrizioni e omissioni*. VI Congresso AISU: Catania, 12–14 settembre 2013. Eds.: ADORNO, S., CRISTINA, G. and ROTONDO, A., Scrimm Edizioni, 2287, e-book, 161–175. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/9525266/The\\_Old\\_City\\_and\\_the\\_Rhetoric\\_of\\_Urban\\_Modernization\\_in\\_Romania\\_1950s-1970s](https://www.academia.edu/9525266/The_Old_City_and_the_Rhetoric_of_Urban_Modernization_in_Romania_1950s-1970s)
- JELÉN, J. and KUČERA, Z. 2017. Approaches to identification and interpretation of mining heritage: the case of the Jáchymovsko area, Ore Mountains, Czechia. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 66. (4): 321–336.
- JOKSIMOVIĆ, M., GOLIĆ, R., VUJADINOVIĆ, S., ŠABIĆ, D., JOVANOVIĆ POPOVIĆ, D. and BARNFIELD, G. 2014. Restoring tourist flows and regenerating city’s image: the case of Belgrade. *Current Issues in Tourism* 17. (3): 220–233.
- KADMON, N. 2004. Toponymy and geopolitics: the political use – and misuse – of geographical names. *The Cartographic Journal* 41. (2): 85–87.
- KETTLEY, C. 2003. Ethnicity, Language and Transition Politics in Romania: The

- Hungarian Minority in Context. In *Nation-building, ethnicity and language politics in transition countries*. Eds.: DAFRATY, F. and GRIN, F., Budapest, ECMI, 243–266.
- KITADA, E. 2016. Commemorating racial violence: Street naming and segregation in New York City, 1999. *Nanzan Review of American Studies* 38. 21–34.
- KLIOT, N. and MANSFIELD, Y. 1997. The political landscape of partition: The case of Cyprus. *Political Geography* 16. (6): 495–521.
- KOVÁCS, Z. 2009. Social and economic transformation of historical neighbourhoods in Budapest. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie / Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 100. (4): 399–416.
- LAGZI, G. 2013. Multicultural past and present in the cities of Central Europe: The cases of Wrocław/Breslau and L'viv/Lemberg. *Darbar Ir Dienos* 60. 191–204.
- LIGHT, D. and YOUNG, C. 2014. Toponymy as Commodity: Exploring the Economic Dimensions of Urban Place Names. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39. (3): 435–450.
- LIGHT, D., NICOLAE, I. and SUDITU, B. 2002. Toponymy and the Communist City: Street name in Bucharest, 1948–1965. *GeoJournal* 56. (2): 135–144.
- LIRO, J., SOEJAN, J., BILSKA-WODECKA, E. and SOEJAN, I. 2017. Multiculturalism and multiethnicity in the cityscape: The case of Białystok's religious landscape. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 66. (4): 337–351.
- LOVELL, N. ed. 1998. *Locality and Belonging*. London and New York, Psychology Press.
- LOW, S. and SMITH, N. 2006. *The politics of public space*. New York, Routledge.
- MASSEY, D. 1994. *Space, place and gender*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- MERRIMEN, P. and JONES, R. 2009. 'Symbols of Justice': the Welsh Language Society's campaign for bilingual road signs in Wales, 1967–1980. *Journal of Historical Geography* 35. (2): 350–375.
- MITCHELL, D. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York, Guilford Press.
- MORAR, C. DULCA, M. and NAGY, GY. 2016. Brownfields regeneration, between sustainable Urban development and cultural heritage. The former military sites in Oradea, Romania. *Journal of Urban and Regional Analysis* 8. (1): 75–84.
- MURZYN, M.A. 2008. Heritage Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. In *The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity*. Eds.: GRAHAM, B. and HOWARD, P., Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 315–346.
- NADKARNI, M. 2003. The death of socialism and the afterlife of its monuments. Making and marketing the past in Budapest's Statue Park Museum. In *Contested pasts. The politics of memory*. Eds.: HODGKIN, K. and RADSTONE, S., London, Routledge, 193–207.
- NARVSELIUS, E. 2015. Spicing up Memories and Serving Nostalgias: Thematic Restaurants and Transnational Memories in East-Central European Borderland Cities. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23. (3): 417–432.
- OKTEM, K. 2005. Faces of the city: Poetic, mediagenic and traumatic images of a multicultural city in Southeast Turkey. *Cities* 22. (3): 241–253.
- PALONEN, E. 2008. The city-text in post-communist Budapest: street names, memorials, and the politics of commemoration. *GeoJournal* 73. (3): 219–230.
- PLUGOR R. 2006. A szimbolikus konfliktus kivetítődései Kolozsváron (Reflections of symbolic conflict in Cluj-Napoca). *Erdélyi Társadalom* 4. (2): 59–81.
- PROSHANSKY, H., FABIAN, A.K. and KAMINOFF, R. 1983. Place identity: Physical world socialization of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3. (1): 57–83.
- PUCZKÓ, L., RÁTZ, T. and SMITH, M. 2007. Old City, New Image. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 22. (3–4): 21–34.
- RÁTZ, T., SMITH, M. and MICHALKÓ, G. 2008. New Places in Old Spaces: Mapping Tourism and Regeneration in Budapest. *Tourism Geographies* 10. (4): 429–451.
- Remember 40 years since the massacre of the Jews from Northern Transylvania under Horthyst occupation*. București, Federation of Jewish Communities in the S. R. of Romania, 1985.

- RISBETH, C. and ROGALY, B. 2017. Sitting outside: conviviality, self-care and the design of benches in urban public space. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Doi: 10.1111/tran.12212
- ROZITE, M. and KLEPERS, A. 2012. Out of the Soviet Union: the re-emergence of Riga as a tourist capital. *Current Issues in Tourism* 15. (1–2): 61–73.
- SALUKVADZE, J. and GOLUBCHIKOV, O. 2016. City as a geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia – A globalizing metropolis in a turbulent region. *Cities* 52. 39–54.
- SEMIAN, M. and NOVÁČEK, A. 2017. The reinterpretation of histories in identities of newly established regions: The case of Local Action Groups in Czechia. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 66. (4): 307–319.
- STAEHEL, L.A. and MITCHELL, D. 2007. Locating the public in research and practice. *Progress in Human Geography* 31. (6): 792–811.
- SÝKORA, L. and BOUZAROVSKI, S. 2012. Multiple Transformations: Conceptualising the Post-comunist Urban Transition. *Urban Studies* 49. (1): 43–60.
- SZUCHER, E. 2013. *Alternatív utcanevek: Besztercén normalitás, Kolozsváron álom* (Street name alternatives: Normality in Bistrița, only a dream in Cluj). <https://kronika.ro/erdelyi-hirek/folytatodik-az-utcanevharc> Accessed: 02.12.2016.
- TÁTRAI, P. and ERŐSS, Á. 2016. Toponymic silence in contested geographical spaces: The neglect of place-name changes in Cyprus and in Central and Eastern Europe. In *Place-name changes*. Eds.: WOODMAN, P. and JORDAN, P., Hamburg, Dr. Kovač, 385–401.
- ȚOCA, C.V. and POCOLA, B.M. 2015. Searching for Development of Medium-sized Cities in the European Union: A Study Case on Oradea. *Eurolimes* 19. 85–98. Available at: <http://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/46393>
- VAN ASSCHE, K. and SALUKVADZE, J. 2012. Tbilisi reinvented planning, development and the unfinished project of democracy in Georgia. *Planning Perspectives* 27. (1): 1–24.
- VARGA, E.Á. 1999. *Erdély etnikai és felekezeti statisztikája II. Bihar, Máramaros, Szatmár és Szilágy megye* (Ethnic and religious statistics of Transylvania II. Județul Bihar, Sathmar and Sălaj). Miercurea Ciuc / Csíkszereda, Pro-Print.
- VERESS, E. 2006. Nyelvhasználati jogok a román közigazgatásban (Rights of language use in Romanian public administration). *Romániai Magyar Jogtudományi Közöny* 4. (2): 35–41.
- YEOH, B. 1992. Street names in colonial Singapore. *Geographical Review* 82. (3): 312–322.
- YEOH, B. 1996. Street naming and nation building: toponymic inscriptions of nationhood in Singapore. *Area* 28. (3): 298–307.
- YIFTACHEL, O. and YACOBI, H. 2003. Urban ethnocracy: ethnicization and the production of space in an Israeli mixed city. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21. (6): 673–693.
- ZAHORÁN, Cs. 2016. Trikolórok, farkasok és turulok földje. Magyar és román szimbolikus gyakorlatok Erdélyben 1989 után (On the land of tricolors, wolfs and turuls. Hungarian and Romanian symbolic practices in Transylvania after 1989). *REGIO* 24. (1): 226–281.

#### On-line sources:

- Az Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt Sajtóirodája 2017. *Pert nyert a Néppárt a nagyváradi polgármesteri hivatal ellen* (Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania won against the Mayor's Office in Oradea). Published on 28.06.2017. [http://itthon.ma/erdelyorszag.php?cikk\\_id=20200](http://itthon.ma/erdelyorszag.php?cikk_id=20200) Accessed: 11.11.2017.
- [http://ispmn.gov.ro/maps/county/26564\\_bh\\_limba2011\\_maghiar](http://ispmn.gov.ro/maps/county/26564_bh_limba2011_maghiar) Accessed: 8.11.2017.

