



SUMMARY OF ARTICLE: [HTTPS://DX.DOI.ORG/10.12795/REA.2024.I47.10](https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2024.i47.10)

Recovery of place names in rural areas using participatory social mapping. The case of Herencia (Ciudad Real, Spain)

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KEYWORDS

Cultural geography
Toponymy
Intangible heritage
Landscape
Citizen science
Castilla-La Mancha

TOPONYMY, CITIZEN SCIENCE AND PARTICIPATORY SOCIAL MAPPING

This study proposes the possible cultural and geographical recovery of forgotten, omitted or poorly geo-referenced place names, which may have been incorrectly, inaccurately or deficiently treated in official topographic cartography. The research aims to promote the development of these processes of inventorying and analysing the names of the territory to preserve the connection between place and place name before this important intangible heritage disappears. Collecting and recovering this cultural legacy before it is lost by those who have continued to use them daily is an exercise of singular importance and urgency.

Traditional approaches to toponymy are nowadays reinforced by the advantages introduced by geographic information technologies. In addition, participation in local community processes is beginning to consolidate as a constant in today's societies. Both of these insights enable the generation of local geographic information, well framed in the conceptions of Neogeography, given that they allow the relationship between the collaborative approaches of citizen science and participatory social mapping.

In this context, the approaches that can be developed from toponymy around citizen science are particularly interesting. This type of science is based on the scope of scientific advances because of popular collaboration to provide information from different social actors (neighbours, amateurs, autodidacts, etc.) with extensive knowledge about realities close to their socio-cultural or professional environment. The current transcendence of these proposals is associated with a growing number of projects and collaborations well framed in initiatives such as the *White Paper on Citizen Science in Europe* or the *Observatory of Citizen Science in Spain*.

Social participation is thus consolidated as a fundamental action in the generation of information and knowledge, making it possible to associate its contributions to participatory mapping as one of the essential work axes for the acquisition of geographic knowledge. Its processes are based on the integration of knowledge of the place where the actors live with the feedback of experts and include the use and transfer of



geographic information technologies through multiple resources. Participatory mapping and social mapping apply a qualitative method of territorial research related to the need to obtain local knowledge based on information provided by local people through participatory action. This orientation is supported by multiple tools and represents an approach increasingly used in many studies, the results of which are expressed in maps or in documentary databases of various uses, among which place names occupy a prominent place due to their association with intangible culture.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This study hypothesises that the basic cartography at detailed scales published by the Public Administrations in Spain does not reflect the toponymic wealth of a territory that could be included in it. Two basic objectives are proposed: 1) To detect possible omissions, variants and location errors in local micro-toponymy not included in official cartographic documents; and 2) To recover those toponyms that still survive in the collective memory through processes of analysis, contrast and verification based on participatory social mapping workshops with senior local informants with knowledge of the territory.

The general approach of the research, focused on the Spanish municipality of Herencia (Ciudad Real), is based on the evaluation and analysis, at municipal scale, of local place names that are not included in the official cartography published in the topographic maps of the National Geographic Institute (IGN). The main approach used focused on the exploitation of oral sources to obtain and collect information through a participatory social mapping project. The work developed has followed the bases used in citizen science and took place in a framework of municipal collaboration, where different local informants professionally related to the territory under study were contacted. The concepts and procedures used were based on the principles of social mapping and participatory mapping, suitably adapted to toponymic research and to the characteristics of the territory and the informants. The specific methodological procedure finally applied consisted of five phases. The initial phase (1) consisted of the design of social mapping workshops for the collection of toponymic information with a proposal for original planning and presentation of the general theoretical-introductory framework of the project. The training phase (2) comprised: (a) a training course for monitors to acquire the basic knowledge of toponymy and cartography necessary for the development of the recovery process; and (b) a teaching-learning workshop, this time aimed at the participating local community, oriented towards the systematic collection of toponymic information, georeferenced and classified by entities, based on a data collection sheet. The participatory phase (3) constituted the determining phase of the procedure for the collection of information. In this phase, interviews and participatory work sessions were carried out, focusing on the analysis and interpretation of the selected cartographic series aimed at detecting: omissions of toponyms, possible variants, lack of toponymic information and possible naming and/or location errors. The fieldwork phase (4) contrasted the information collected in the workshops. Finally, the results phase (5) specified the organisation, analysis and evaluation of the toponyms collected.

RESULTS

Most of the toponyms obtained correspond to names that do not appear in the official cartography but are popular and still in use among the older local population that has been linked to work in rural areas. Another set, less numerous but also relevant, is related to the detection of variants of place names included in the maps, but which the participating population identifies with other names. In addition, and thirdly, different names have also been collected which, despite appearing on the maps, are not correctly located due to technical errors or lack of knowledge at the time of the initial cartographic configuration. These location errors, although they do not constitute a formal recovery per se, have also been considered to contribute to achieving the best possible toponymic accuracy. Finally, omissions or confusions have been detected between the designations used by neighbouring municipalities for the area under study or for adjoining



areas between municipalities. All these situations are likely to encourage the ignorance and forgetfulness of this local micro toponymy with the consequent risk of cultural loss, which work of this nature can avoid. The application of the aforementioned methods has made it possible to recover a total of 266 toponyms linked to 315-point, surface and linear georeferenced enclaves. Most of them (79.3 %) correspond to names not included in the official cartography used, while the rest (20.7 %) are related to variants in the names, often associated with the existence of location errors and cartographic inaccuracies. The results have been grouped into large groups (constructions, roads, places and other toponyms of interest), ordered from the highest to the lowest number of toponyms recovered. The simplified classification established allows us to highlight the dominance of the names of the buildings and roads collected (68 % of all the names recovered). For their part, the different names have been classified into 10 different types of toponyms, among which the origin or anthroponymic presence (35 %) and the group of "various" (41 %) have stood out for their abundance, highlighting the great diversity of the names recovered. From the point of view of distribution, most of the recovered locations (40.3 %) are within a radius of less than 5 km from the centre of the municipality's population centre, a density that increases significantly (to 76.8 %) when considering those within an area 10 km away. This result shows the greater control of areas close to the population and the need to extend the studies to more remote rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

The work carried out shows stimulating contributions to the knowledge of the local toponymic heritage, with recoveries, relocations, inventory of variants and cultural and popular valuations of great interest, which highlight the importance of this type of studies, still scarce in many regions. The results obtained have made it possible to increase the culture of the local environment and favour the understanding of landscape or territorial dynamics. The toponyms collected are valid for approaches to documentation and correction of cartographic bases and for useful practical applications oriented towards certain territorial actions or policies at different scales. This has already been the case in the study area, where these results have been used in local management initiatives for the signposting of rural paths and enclaves in the municipality.

The data collection mechanism has been an interesting example of citizen science entrusted to social groups of notable cultural interest due to their demographic and professional representativeness. It has been found that participatory social mapping represents a valuable tool for the creation and updating of maps through the recovery of place names, although it is not without its challenges and problems.

Finally, the work highlights the need for more in-depth studies using other historical and linguistic documentary sources, and the relevance of expanding the sample and the search for informants who can provide complementary information and contribute to the enrichment and reliability of this type of catalogue.