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## Place name issues in Algerian legislation and their impact on sustainable development

إشكالية تسمية الأماكن في القانون الجزائري وأثرها على التنمية

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### Abstract:

Toponymy, a branch of onomastics, is the study of place names, their meanings, origins and symbolic representations. In many developed countries, a committee on geographical names is responsible for ensuring the uniform use of geographical names. Algeria, unlike the others, is a country that hardly has such a policy. This research has shed light on the problematic issues of place names in Algerian legislation. It also sought to identify the implications for the country's sustainable development. In conclusion, a call for action is strongly encouraged to help realise the importance of this branch of study.

**Keywords:** Toponymy, place names in Algerian legislation, development.

**المخلص:**

تعد الطوبونيميا فرعا من فروع علم دراسة أسماء الأعلام. تدرس الطوبونيميا أسماء المواقع، معانيها، أصلها وتصنيفها. تخصص العديد من الدول المتقدمة لجنة خاصة بدراسة الأماكن والتي تحرص على توحيد أسماء مواقعها. على عكس هذه البلدان، لم تتبع الجزائر إلى غاية يومنا هذا سياسة طوبونيمية محضة تتكيف والمعايير الدولية.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على إشكالية تسمية الأماكن في القانون الجزائري مع الإشارة إلى أثرها على تنمية البلاد بصفة عامة. تطرح الإشكالية كيفية تعامل القانون الجزائري على إقامة مراسيم تضبط تسمية الأماكن في البلاد والتي تمكن من تنظيم الفضاء الجزائري. هذه الدراسة محاولة منا لتوضيح أهمية تبنى سياسة طوبونيمية مقيدة بمراسيم صارمة تطبق لتنظيم تسمية الأماكن بالجزائر وأثرها على التنمية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الطوبونيميا، تسمية الأماكن بالقانون الجزائري، التنمية.

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## 1.INTRODUCTION

History, geography and linguistics are three fields of study that have contributed to the emergence of toponymy. Since then, it has been a source area that serves many other disciplines and, if well taken care of, contributes to the development of a country at different levels, such as social, political, economic and linguistic. As a branch of onomastics, toponymy is made up of different categories, each specialised in a particular field. The uninhabited places (e.g. fields, small parts of forests) are called microtoponymy, the names of streets, roads, etc. are called

hodonymy, the names of water bodies are called hydronymy, and the names of mountains are called oronymy". (Zgusta, 2014)

It should be noted that toponymy is very important in the sense that it allows us to go back in time and discover the history of the place studied, the way of life of its people and their way of thinking. In this sense, the subject offers an effective policy for any country. In fact, it is this policy that determines the country's level of development by measuring the extent of its economic growth.

The interest in place names and their meaning has long been a concern of many developed countries. Because their importance is not limited to linguistic study, these countries have created a national toponymy commission to ensure that they have a firm grip on toponyms throughout their national territory. Examples of such commissions are the US Board on Geographical Names (BGN), created in 1890; the Geographical Name Board of Canada (GNBC), created in 1897; and the French Commission nationale de toponymie (CNT), created in 1999.

My paper seeks to shed light on the problematic issues of place names in Algeria and the extent to which they affect the country's sustainable development.

## **2-Place-Naming Policy in Algeria:**

It should be noted that during the colonial period, the French controlled the naming of places in Algeria. However, after independence, Algeria's geographical naming policy was abandoned. In fact, the country had enacted several laws, some of which were applied and others that never saw the light of day.

In the past, Algerian legislation entrusted the Ministry of the Interior with the task of supervising the naming process. By 1965, an enforceable decree had been issued giving new names to 114 communes.

The following is a chronological list of decrees taken from the official gazettes of the General Secretariat of the Government.

## وزارة الداخلية

مرسوم رقم 77 - 40 مؤرخ في أول ربيع الأول عام 1397  
الموافق 19 فبراير سنة 1977 يتعلق بتسمية بعض الأماكن  
والبنايات العامة

1-Decree no. 77-40 of 19 February 1977 on the naming of certain places and public buildings.

Article One of the decree gives the People's Municipal Assembly the power to name streets and public squares.

**المادة الاولى :** تحدد تسمية الشوارع والساحات العامة  
بموجب مداولة للمجلس الشعبي البلدى .

The second article of the same decree stipulates that any deliberation on honouring a foreigner must be authenticated by the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**المادة 2 :** تخضع المداولة لمصادقة وزير الداخلية ورأى وزير  
الشؤون الخارجية اذا كانت تكون تكريما لاجنبي، ولمصادقة  
الوالي ورأى وزير قدماء المجاهدين، اذا كانت تكون تكريما  
لجزائري أو تذكيرا لحدث تاريخي .

In the case of honouring an Algerian or commemorating a historical event, the deliberation is subject to the authentication of the prefect and the opinion of the Minister of the Mujahideen.

2. Decree no. 81-27 of 7 March 1981 on the creation of a national dictionary of the names of towns, villages and other places.

مرسوم رقم 81 - 27 مؤرخ في أول جمادى الأولى عام  
1401 الموافق 7 مارس سنة 1981 يتضمن اعداد  
قاموس وطنى لأسماء المدن والقرى والاماكن  
الأخرى \*

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Article One of this decree instructs the People's Municipal Assemblies to:

- To study the names of all the places already named and to adjust them carefully.
- To examine the names that do not correspond to our traditions

and, if necessary, to consider new names.

المادة الاولى : تكلف المجالس الشعبية البلدية  
بما يأتى :

- دراسة تسمية جميع الاماكن التى لها أسماء  
من قبل، وضبطها ضبطا دقيقا ،
- مراجعة التسميات التى لا تطابق تقاليدنا  
والنظر فى وضع تسمية جديدة ان اقتضى  
الامر، تلائم الخصائص المحلية .

3. Decree no. 84-09 of 4 February 1984 on the regional organisation of the country.

قانون رقم 84 - 09 مؤرخ فى 2 جمادى الاولى عام  
1404 الموافق 4 فبراير سنة 1984 يتعلق بالتنظيم  
الاقليمى للبلاد.

This law organised all the communes of each wilaya. For example, according to article seventeen of the same decree, Tlemcen comprises 53 communes, Tebessa 28 and Tizi Ouzou 67.

4. Decree no. 97-104 of 5 April 1997 on the naming and renaming of places and public buildings.

مرسوم رئاسي رقم 97 - 104 مؤرخ في 28  
ذي القعدة عام 1417 الموافق 5 أبريل  
سنة 1997، يتعلّق بتسمية الأماكن  
والمباني العموميّة وإعادة تسميتها.

This law covers places and public buildings such as squares, streets, localities and memorials.

5. Decree no. 14-01 of 05 January 2014 on the naming and renaming of institutions, places and public buildings.

مرسوم رئاسي رقم 14-01 مؤرخ في 3 ربيع الأول عام  
1435 الموافق 5 يناير سنة 2014، يحدد كيفيات  
تسمية المؤسسات والأماكن والمباني العمومية أو  
إعادة تسميتها.

This law is an extension of Decree 97-104. The latter adds articles concerning the renaming of groups of residential buildings, collective facilities and the various roads in the commune.

In 2008, Algeria created for the first time a toponymic database containing all the place names that appear on Algerian cartography. The number of toponyms was estimated at more than 600,000, according to Farid Benramdane (researcher at the University of Mostaganem) during a study day held in Zeralda in 2008.

On 09 July 2014, Ennaharonline published an article announcing the start of the operation of naming public places in Algiers within a year. In this context, the Wali of Algiers, Mr Abdelkader Zoukh, affirms the importance of such a procedure in the sense that it contributes to the progress of daily life.

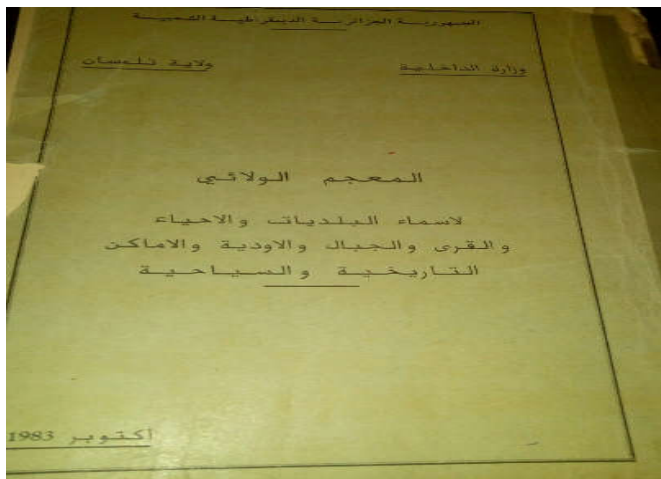
Generally speaking, the success of any plan is determined by the implementation of the plan and the commitment to the task at hand. In order to measure the success of the Algerian toponymy policy, it is necessary to look at the implementation of the laws that regulate the toponymic situation throughout the national territory.

A study of Decree No. 81-27 of 7 March 1981, which provides for the creation of a national dictionary of the names of towns, villages and other places, shows that only one dictionary has been produced to date, dating from October 1983.

It is worth mentioning that the administrative division in 1983 is



different from the current one. According to the former division, the commune of Béni Saf belonged to the wilaya of Tlemcen. However, according to the new law, it became a commune of Ain Timouchent. Taghzout is another example of the urgent need for a new toponymic dictionary. It was declared to be part of the commune of Remchi. However, the late administrative division made Taghzout part of Ain Tallout, another commune still in Tlemcen.



In addition to the creation of a national toponymic dictionary, which will contain an updated version of the place names, it is essential to create an official toponymic committee with the aim of systematising a clear toponymic policy in Algeria. Members, including historians, linguists and geographers, will be selected and given the responsibility of resolving issues related to place names in Algeria. Therefore, a step towards solving these problems would be to recruit a specialised team to work on the development of place names throughout the country and to define a clear toponymic plan, given its importance in contributing to the sustainable development of the country.



Another important aspect that shows that the naming policy in Algeria is lagging behind is the errors found on the signposts.

As shown in Figure 1, the two signs next to each other indicate two different directions and distances to El Marsa and Chetaibi. Such a case is a real problem because it causes disorientation. The result of this negligence on the part of the authorities is confusion and chaos.

The above facts clearly show that the naming policy in Algeria has failed to take even the most basic but rudimentary steps in relation to place names, i.e. the creation of an official committee to ensure the establishment of a unified plan of standardised geographical names.

### **3-Why are place names important?**

Wherever you go, you will find place names everywhere. Algeria's vast territory of 2,381,741 square kilometres means that it must have a considerable number of geographical names. These are essential because they are part of everyday life. Not only do they help to identify a place, but they also make it easier and quicker to find it. Above all, place names represent the national identity of any country, as they carry within them a set of cultural traits linked to that local area.

#### **4-Conclusion:**

It is important that every place has its own name. As life today is more technologically oriented, its wise use brings many benefits to the country. Linking toponymy and technology is one way of doing this. The control of geographical names in Algeria makes it easier to reach the various corners of the country. In the event of an emergency, for example, indicating and finding the destination becomes a simple and straightforward task, since the GPS helps to indicate the exact location.

By recognising the importance of a better and more effective naming policy, the creation of a national dictionary will certainly encourage the creation of an online information system that includes all existing geographical names.

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