

Unofficial Urbanonyms of Latvia: Tendencies of Derivation

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Abstract

The research is based on the questionnaire addressed to young Latvians (study carried out together with an MA student of the University of Latvia Sintija Doniņa). Material for this paper – more than 700 lexemes – was collected from Riga and other largest cities of Latvia. The goal of the study was to gain insight into the main models of coining slang urbanonyms, as well as their motivation and functions. The most often recorded slang urbanonyms in all cities under review were the names of the fast-food restaurants *Hesītis* // *Hesīts* (= ‘Hesburger’) and *Maķītis* (= ‘McDonald’s’), which also have the largest number of different variants. The most widespread model of derivation were shortened forms of the urbanonym: suburb names *Boldis* // *Boldža* (= *Bolderāja*), *Čieris* (= *Čiekurkalns*) often used also with Latv. diminutive suffixes *-ītis* or *-iņš*: *Čierītis*. The way of derivation could be the following: suburb *Āģenskalns* > *Āģis* > *Āģītis* > *Āģīts*. Suffix *-ene*, which is characteristic for appellative slang lexemes, is used also in street-names: *Avotene* (= *Avotu iela*); Slavonic diminutive suffixes in slang urbanonymy are widely spread in Riga and in the eastern part of Latvia. There are also well-known acronyms: *KK*, *C-iela*, as well as numerous metaphoric urbanonyms. Mostly, these slang urbanonyms have negative or neutral connotation.

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Unofficial names or slang toponyms (mostly urbanonyms¹) have recently become of specific interest in many countries and languages (see Paunonen (2000, 2006, 2010), Paunonen and Paunonen (2002), Ainiala (2003, 2004, 2006), Ainiala and Vuolteenaho (2005, 2008, 2009), Ainiala *et al.* (2009), Ainiala and Lappalainen (2010), Protassova and Reponen (2011), Vlahova-Angelova (2008), Streljčova (2011), Vasiljeva (2012), Sharipova (2012a, 2012b), Györffy (2013), Zujeva (2014), etc.). This branch of modern socio-onomastics was untouched for many years in the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), as no material was collected, nor were there any studies carried out on it. Only during the last five years interest in the subject has arisen – especially among young researchers.²

To start with some quotations which explain the place and importance of slang toponyms in use: Hungarian onomastician Erzsébet Györffy (2013: 80-86) emphasizes that slang toponyms have a special role in the toponymic system of a language: ‘their status is observable both in pragmatic and linguistic conditions of name giving’. According to

¹ The terminology used in this article is based on the newest dictionary of Latvian linguistic terms (VPSV 2007): *urbanonym* – toponym which names geographical object of the town/city (‘vietvārds, kas nosauc pilsētā esošu ģeogrāfisku objektu’) (VPSV 2007: 413); *slang toponym* – a proper name of a place, both inhabited and uninhabited, that is regarded as very informal, more common in speech than writing, and is typically restricted to a particular context or group of people (VPSV 2007: 413); *colloquial toponym* (VPSV 2007: 342) and *unofficial toponym* are both often used as synonymous terms.

² There have been several reports and publications on this subject in Latvian and Lithuanian onomastics during recent years: for reports see Balode (2009b, 2010, 2011b) and Račickaja (2014a, 2014b) and for publications see Balode (2004a, 2004b, 2009a, 2011a, 2014), Doniņa (2013) and Doniņa and Balode (2015).

Györffy, ‘one of the most important features is that during slang name giving the denotatum already has a name and the motivation is to give a different name from the already existing one’. According to the well-known Finnish researcher Heikki Paunonen (2010), unofficial toponyms are not marked on the maps, they exist only in our memory. They exist while they are in active use. Slang names exist in our minds, and each of us makes our own map with our own names, and this map is being supplemented the whole life. Nevertheless, slang names are part of urban culture, part of the history of the city, and also an important part of collective identity. (Paunonen 2010, 1: 6) It is a well-known fact that slang or unofficial names are mostly used by young people. Why is it so? After studying languages of youngsters, Latvian sociolinguists Vineta Ernstsone and Laura Tidriķe found that young people’s speech style is an expression of protest and denial against the dominant language culture with its correctness and language standards (Ernstsone and Tidriķe 2006: 101). Also the introduction of the *Slang Dictionary of Latvian Language* shows that individuals demonstrate their knowledge and their belonging to a specific stratum of society, belonging to like-minded groups (Bušs and Ernstsone 2006: 6).

This article is based on a questionnaire on slang urbanonyms addressed to young Latvians. The study was carried out in 2012-2013 together with Sintija Doniņa – an MA student of the University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities. The goal of this study was to gain insight into the main models of coining slang urbanonyms and their motivation and functions. The material consisted of more than 700 lexemes collected from the capital of Latvia, Riga, and other largest cities of Latvia in order to represent distinct parts of the country: Riga (Latv. *Rīga*, 306 different urbanonyms collected), Valmiera (Latv. *Valmiera*, northern part of Latvia, 121), Kuldīga (Latv. *Kuldīga*, western part of Latvia, 114), Rēzekne (Latv. *Rēzekne*, eastern part of Latvia, 93), Bauska (Latv. *Bauska*, southern part of Latvia, 82) (see Fig. 1).



Fig.1. Map of Latvia – cities (*Rīga*, *Kuldīga*, *Bauska*, *Valmiera*, *Rēzekne*) where the unofficial urbanonyms were collected

The most often mentioned names in this collection are the following: names of parts of the city, suburbs, street names, road names (odonyms), names of shops, coffee-bars, clubs (ergonyms). Whereas the most rarely mentioned slang names in this questionnaire are water names (hydronyms) e.g. almost the only ones: *Ķīstis* (5x³) // *Ķīstītis* (4x) (= lake *Ķīšezers* in Riga); *Aleksene* (1x) (= river *Alekšupīte* in Kuldīga); *Nabīte* (1x) (= lake *Nabas ezers* in Kuldīga); *Kovšiks* (15x) // *Kaušiks* (1x) (= lake *Kovšu ezers* in Rezekne).

Usually the meeting places of youth do not have official names, so they are named and used in their narrow circle, for instance:

- *Bočkas* (< Russ. *бочка* ‘barrel’ = meeting place near two barrels in Rezekne);
- *Černobiļa* (< *Chernobilj* = empty building near the pontoon bridge in Bauska);
- *Pentagons* (5x) (< *Pentagon* = sport field in Bauska);
- *Kvadrāts* (< Latv. *kvadrāts* ‘square’ = meeting place near St.Peter’s church in Riga);
- *Astotnieks* (2x) // *Astoņnieks* (6x) (< Latv. *astoņi* ‘eight’, ∞ = playground in Bauska: the shape resembles the number 8).

Particularly large group of ergonyms (names of bars and clubs) are used in Riga, for instance:

- *Džasts* (3x) // *Justs* (1x) (= bar/club *Just*);
- *Empīrs* (1x) (= club *Empire*);
- *Esītis* (1x) (= club *Essential*);
- *Feņķis* (3x) // *Feņka* (3x) // *Fēnītis* (2x) (= gambling club *Fēnikss*);
- *Hārdijs* (2x) (= club *Ed Hardy*);
- *Koijoti* (24x) // *Koijots* (1x) // *Kojoī* (2x) (= club *Coyote Fly*);
- *Piektdienis* (1x) (= club *Melnā Piektiena* /‘Black Friday’/);
- *Pulkvedis* (3x) (= club *Pulkvedim neviens neraksta* /‘Nobody Writes to the Colonel’/).

A lot of school names (mostly in Riga, but also in other cities) have been recorded during the questionnaire, for example:

- *Draudziņa* (3x) // *Natālija* (4x) (= *Natālijas Draudziņas vidusskola* /Secondary school of Natalia Draudzina/ in Riga);
- *Francis* (1x) (= *Rīgas Franču licejs* /Riga French Lyceum/ in Riga);
- *Hanza* (8x) // *Hanzene* (10x) (= *Rīgas Hanzas vidusskola* /Riga Hansa Secondary School/ in Riga);
- *Mauriņa vidusskola* (1x) (= *Rīgas 64. vidusskola*) – unofficial name derived from the surname of previous headmaster of the school – Mauriņš);
- *Jūrene* (1x) (= *Latvijas Jūras akadēmija* /Latvian Maritime Academy/ in Riga);
- *Ķīmiķi* (3x) (= *Latvijas Universitātes Ķīmijas fakultāte* /Faculty of Chemistry, University of Latvia/ in Riga);
- *Fifaks* (1x) // *Visvaldis* (2x) // *Visvalža pils* ‘castle of Visvaldis’ (3x) (= Faculty of Humanitarian Studies, former Faculty of Philology, University of Latvia,

³ The number enclosed in brackets after a slang urbanonym shows the number of answers in the questionnaire (2012-2013).

address – Visvalža Street 4a; the last two names in student slang are alluding to historical person Visvaldis – ruler of the ancient Baltic kingdom’).

There are several oikodomonyms which are widespread not only among youth, but also among other generations:

- *Ķīnas mūris* ‘wall of China’ in Riga;
- *Mauzolejs* (= building in Stirnu Street in Riga);
- *Staļina dzimšanas dienas torte* ‘birthday cake of Stalin’ // *Staļina kūka* ‘Stalin’s cake’ // *Staļina smaids* ‘Stalin’s smile’ // *Tramplīns* ‘launching pad’ // *Zinātņu augstceltne* ‘skyscraper of the science’ // *Kolhoznieku nams* ‘house of the collective-farmers’ (= building of the Academy of Sciences of Latvia in Riga).

These slang urbanonyms most often have negative or ironic connotation, but sometimes they are used with neutral or even positive connotation, for instance:

- *Lielā māja* ‘Large House’ (= main building of Latvian University in Riga);
- *Baltais nams* ‘White House’ (= building of National Opera in Riga);
- *Sīmanene* // *Sīmanis* (= St. Simon’s Church in Valmiera);
- *Baltā baznīca* (3x) ‘White Church’ (= Lady of Sorrows Cathedral in Rezekne);
- *Krievu baznīca* (2x) ‘Russian Church’ (= Orthodox Church in Rezekne);
- *Sarkanā baznīca* (2x) ‘Red Church’ (= Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rezekne);
- *Māmuļa* ‘Dear Mother’ (= Latviešu biedrības nams ‘Building of Latvian Society’ in Riga).

According to the data gathered in the questionnaire, the most popular unofficial urbanonyms in Latvia are the following: slang name *Hesītis* (= fast food restaurant *Hesburger*) which is recorded in Riga – 85x and in Kuldīga – 44x. (Doniņa 2013: 55) In northern city Valmiera the most popular slang toponym is a bridge name *Dzelzīts* (= *Dzelzs tilts* ‘Iron Bridge’), in southern Bauska – the most popular slang name *Staķiks* (= fuel station *Statoil*). Usually one topo-object has one or two slang names. The only exception: nine different slang names recorded in Riga naming fast food restaurant *McDonald’s*:

- *Maķītis* (74x) // *Maķīts* (38x) // // *Mačītis* (1x) // *Maķis* (2x) // *Mahītis* (1x) // *Makijs* (1x) // *Maķiks* (1x) // *Makčiks* (1x) // *Makdaks* (3x) (Doniņa 2013: 17).

In all five cities of Latvia young people use such slang urbanonyms as:

- *Rimīts* // *Rimītis* // *Rimčiks* (= shop Rimi);
- *Superghetto* (= shop Supernetto);
- *Hesīts* // *Hesītis* (= Hesburger);
- *Staķiks* // *Staķis* (= fuel station *Statoil*) (Doniņa 2013: 56).

From topoderivational point of view the most common way of coining new slang urbanonyms is to shorten the forms of the official name, most often eliminating the second

component of compound name, for example: *Āģis* (< *Āgenskalns*), *Bastejs* (< *Bastejkalns*), *Čieris* (< *Čiekurkalns*), *Ķeizis* (< *Ķeizarmežs*), *Ķendzis* // *Ķenga* (< *Ķengarags*), *Zass* (< *Zasulauks*), or eliminating the second part of the collocation, for instance: *Ezis* // *Ezīts* // *Ezītis* (< coffee-bar *Ezītis miglā* ‘Hedgehog in the Fog’). There are much fewer examples where the first component of compound is eliminated, for instance: *Ciems* (< *Ilģuciems*), *Saule* (< *Jauna saule*), *Netto* (< *Supernetto*). Sometimes only the middle component of the collocation is saved:

- *Barons* (< *Krišjāņa Barona iela* ‘Street of Krišjanis Barons’);
- *Francis* (< *Rīgas Franču licejs* ‘Riga French Lyceum’);
- *Hanza* (< *Rīgas Hanzas vidusskola* ‘Riga Hansa Secondary School’);
- *Kongress* (< *Rīgas Kongresu nams* ‘Riga Congress Centre’);
- *Pirmā* ‘the first’ (< *Rīgas Valsts 1. ģimnāzija* ‘Riga State Gymnasium No. 1’).

There is only one example which is coined as one compound slang name from two separate official toponyms: *Čakmarijas iela* (= *Čaka iela* ‘Čaks Street’ and *Marijas iela* ‘Marija Street’).

Acronyms and abbreviations made from official toponyms are a particularly common feature of youth slang, for example:

- *ČBK* // *Čēbēkā* (< club *Četri balti krekli* ‘Four White Shirts’ in Riga);
- *GēCē* // *GāCē* (< *Galerija Centrs* ‘Gallery Center’ in Riga);
- *KK* (< *Kreisais krasts* ‘Left Bank’ in Riga);
- *ZZ* (< park *Ziedoņdārzs* ‘Spring Garden’ in Riga);
- *A-kojas* (< student hostel in *Auseklis Street* in Valmiera);
- *B-kojas* (< student hostel in *Beāte Street* in Valmiera);
- *Z-kojas* (< student hostel in *Zvejnieku Street* in Valmiera);
- *C-iela* (< *Cēsu Street* in Valmiera);
- *T-iela* (< *Tērbatas Street* in Valmiera);
- *MK* (< *Multiklubs* ‘Multi-Club’ in Valmiera);
- *ZB* (= building *Ziemeļblāzma* ‘Aurora Borealis’ in Rezekne);
- *DK* // *DeKA* // *Dekā* // *Dekaška* (= *Rēzeknes kultūras nams* ‘Rezekne Culture House’) < Russ. *дом культуры* ‘house of culture’.

Unofficial names are very often derived with Latv. suffix *-ene* which is characteristic also for appellative slang lexemes (Ernstson and Tidriķe 2006: 36). A lot of toponyms coined with the help of this suffix have been recorded in the youth slang in Riga, for instance:

- *Avotene* (= *Avotu iela* ‘Spring Street’);
- *Brīvībene* (= *Brīvības iela* ‘Freedom Street’);
- *Čakene* (= *Čaka iela* ‘Street of Aleksandrs Čaks’);
- *Dzirnavene* (= *Dzirnavu iela* ‘Mill Street’);
- *Gogolene* (= *Gogoļa iela* ‘Street of Gogol’);
- *Jūrmalene* (= highway to Jūrmala);
- *Kuģene* (= *Kuģu iela* ‘Street of Ships’);
- *Matīsene* (= *Matīsa iela* ‘Street of Mathias’);

- Valdemārene // Valdžene (= Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela ‘Street of Krisjanis Valdemars’).

Suffix *-ene* is also typical for slang ergonyms in Riga:

- Čilene // Čillene (= Čili Pica);
- Hanzene (= school *Rīgas Hanzas vidusskola*);
- Jūrene (= *Latvijas Jūras akadēmija* ‘Latvian Maritime Academy’);
- Kaļķene (= *Rīgas Tehniskās universitātes ēka* ‘Technical University building in Kalku Street’);
- Šahene (= *Rīgas Šaha skola* ‘Riga Chess School’);
- Tvaicene // Psihene (= *Rīgas Psihoneiroloģiskā slimnīca* ‘Psychoneurological Hospital of Riga in Tvaika Street’).

This type of topoderivation (with Latv. suffix *-ene*) is well-known in slang speech of other cities under review as well:

- Krievene (= *Valmieras 2. vidusskola* ‘2nd Secondary School of Valmiera’ in Valmiera);
- Valstene (= *Valmieras Valsts ģimnāzija* ‘Valmiera State Gymnasium’ in Valmiera);
- Viesturene (= *Viestura vidusskola* ‘Viestura High School’ in Valmiera);
- Limbene (= *Limbazi Street* in Valmiera);
- Gotene (= *Bauskas Gotiņu fabrika* ‘Factory of Sweets “Gotiņa”’ in Bauska);
- Ķirbacene (= *Ķirbaksala* island in Bauska);
- Liepene (= *Liepu Street* in Bauska);
- Putnene (= *Bauskas putnu fabrika* ‘Broiler Factory’ in Bauska).

Quite popular suffixes are used in derivation of slang urbanonyms – Latv. diminutive suffixes *-ītis/-īts*, *-iņš* which are added usually to shortened forms of urbanonyms:

- Ķīpīts < Ķīpītis < *Ķīpis < Ķīpsala (name of island in Riga);
- Memīts < Memītis < *Memis < monument *Memoriāls* in Valmiera);
- Bruņinieciņš (= street *Bruņinieku iela* in Riga);
- Centrītis (= market place *Rīgas Centrāltirgus*);
- Čilītis // Čilīts (= Čili Pica);
- Fēnītis (= club *Fēnikss*);
- Ķīsītis // Ķīsīts (= lake *Ķīšezers*);
- Mežītis (= park *Mežaparks*);
- Vansītis (= bridge *Vanšu tilts*);
- Vērmanītis // Vērmanīts (= park *Vērmanes dārzs*) (a well-known slang name already in the 1920s, used by youth and elderly generation as well).

Very often Latvian diminutive suffixes *-iņš*, *-ītis* are added to foreign names of the shops or restaurants which in Standard Latvian are used in indeclinable form, e.g.:

- Depiņš (= *Depo*);
- Lidiņš (= *Lido*);
- Topiņš (= *Top*);

- *Dunītis* // *Dunīts* (= *Duni*);
- *Elvītis* // *Elvīts* (= *Elvi*);
- *Esītis* (= *Essential*);
- *Ikītis* (= *Iki*);
- *Narvītis* // *Narvīts* (= *Narvesen*);
- *Rimītis* // *Rimīts* (= *Rimi*).

Some other Latvian suffixes (-*enieks*, -*inieks*, -*nieks*) are also recorded coining unofficial urbanonyms:

- *Studentnieks* (= Studentu klubs club in Riga);
- *Vidzemnieks* (= Vidzemes tirgus market in Riga);
- *Kultūrniece* (= Kuldīgas Kultūras centrs in Kuldīga);
- *Vantinieks* // *Vantenieks* // *Vanšinieks* // *Vanšenieks* (= bridge Vanšu tilts ‘Shroud bridge’ in Riga);
- *Salenieks* < **Sala* < *Salu tilts* (= ‘Island bridge’ in Riga).

Also some Russian diminutive suffixes (-*iks*, -*čiks*, -*ka*, -*aška*) are rather popular, especially in Riga’s slang, for example:

- *Agenčiks* (= part of the city *Āgenskalns*);
- *Barončiks* (= shop Barona centrs);
- *Centriks* (= part of the city *Centra rajons*);
- *Čīļiks* // *Čilliks* (= bar/restaurant *Čili Pica*);
- *Domčiks* (= square Doma laukums);
- *Elviks* (= shop *Elvi*);
- *Grizņiks* (= part of the city *Grīziņkalns*);
- *Lubančiks* (= street *Lubānas iela*);
- *Juglaška* (= part of the city *Jugla*);
- *Maksimka* (= shop *Maxima*);
- *Pļavčiks* (= part of the city *Pļavnieki*);
- *Purčiks* // *Purvčiks* (= part of the city *Purvciems*);
- *Rimčiks* // *Rimiks* (= shop *Rimi*);
- *Stačiks* // *Staķiks* (= *Statoil*);
- *Tirzīks* (= street *Tirzas iela* and the surroundings);
- *Zemitančiks* (= bridge *Zemitāna tilts*);
- *Zepčiks* // *Ziepčiks* (= part of the city *Ziepkalns*);
- *Zoļīks* (= part of the city *Zolitūde*).

Unofficial place names in Latvia are often coined using semantic word-formation: they could be observed as metaphors, for instance:

- *Burkāns* // *Markovka* ‘carrot’ (= building in orange colour in Riga);
- *Cepešpanna* ‘frying-pan’ (= restaurant *Vairāk saules* in Riga);
- *Naudas maiss* ‘sack of money’ (= totalizator place *Optibet* in Riga);

- *Milda* // *Augstā meiča* ‘high girl’ (= *Brīvības pieminēklis* ‘Monument of Freedom’, founded in 1935 in Riga);
- *Parks uz Elli* ‘park to hell’ (= park *Nordeķu parks* in Riga);
- *Putnu būris* ‘bird cage’ (= harbour near the Museum of Valmiera – visual similarity with a cage, in Valmiera);
- *Titāniks* ‘Titanic’ (= St. Simon’s Church in Valmiera);
- *Šķūns* ‘shed’ (= shop *Viss lauksaimniekiem* ‘everything for farmers’ in Kuldīga).

Paronomasia or play on words is very popular in the unofficial language of youth. It can also be observed in slang urbanonyms, for instance:

- *Cooldīga* (= city *Kuldīga*);
- *Supergetto* // *Ghetto shops* // *Superene* (= shop *Supernetto* in Kuldīga);
- *Negatīvs* (= club/bar *Pozitīvs* in Kuldīga);
- *Rococo* (= club *Coco* in Rezekne);
- *South Park* // *Southparks* (= *Dienvidu rajons* ‘South district’ in Rezekne);
- *Horseburger* (= *Hesburger* in Bauska).

Sometimes, though rarely, slang toponyms show dialectal features, for example, Livonian dialect (the so called Courland variety or *tāmnieku* dialect) in Kuldīga’s material:

- *Kuldž* // *Kuldža* // *Kūldža* (= city *Kuldīga*);
- *Stendž* // *Stendžs* // *Stendža* (= bar/club *Stender’s* in Kuldīga);
- *Priedž* // *Priedža* // *Prieduška* (= part of the city *Priedaine* in Kuldīga).

Briefly touching upon the origin or etymology of the slang toponyms, one can conclude, that mostly slang urbanonyms are of Latvian origin, but in Riga (the capital of the country) and Rezekne (eastern part of Latvia) there are many names of Slavonic origin in use (some of them coined like calques) (Doniņa 2013: 56; Doniņa and Balode 2014):

- *Kukuška* (= *Dzegužkalns* hill in Riga), cf. Latv. *dzeguze* ‘cuckoo’, Russ. *кукушка* ‘idem’;
- *Kraska* (= *Sarkandaugava* part of the city in Riga), cf. Latv. *sarkans* ‘red’, Russ. *красный* ‘idem’;
- *Ļotene* (= airport *Rīga*), cf. Russ. *лёт* ‘flight’;
- *Butka* (= *Reval Hotel* in Riga) < Russ. *будка* ‘hut, shanty’;
- *Staruška* (= old part of Riga *Vecrīga*) < Russ. *старушка* ‘grannie’;
- *Čortovka* (= youth meeting place behind apartment houses in Maskavas Street in Rezekne) < Russ. *чёрт* ‘devil’.

There are several examples of urbanonyms of English origin used in all Latvian cities under review:

- *Indoors* (= skatepark in Kuldīga), cf. Eng. *indoor-*;
- *Skeiītis* // *Skeiītīšs* (= skatepark in Kuldīga), cf. Eng. *skate*;
- *Pentagons* (= Latvian State Police Department in Gaujas Str. in Riga);
- *South Park* // *Southparks* (= *Dienvidu rajons* part of the city in Rezekne).

This article provides a short insight into main models of coining slang urbanonyms and main derivation tendencies in the speech of the Latvian youth. It would be of great interest to compare these slang names with unofficial urbanonyms used by other (elderly) generations in Riga, as well as with the slang names used by young people in other cities and towns of Latvia. No doubt, there are parallels in coining unofficial urbanonyms in other languages – this item is the question of future socio-onomastic research.

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