

EXPO ZARAGOZA 2008 AND ITS IMPACT ON URBAN PLACE NAMES¹

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RESUMEN: En 2008 Zaragoza organizó la Exposición Universal, cuyo *leitmotiv* fue el agua y su profunda significación histórica para Aragón. Evidentemente, la influencia de tal acontecimiento sobre el desarrollo urbanístico de la ciudad se reveló muy honda. Pues bien, queremos abordar en el marco de este humilde artículo los principales hechos neonomásticos ligados a esta expansión urbanizadora: *la Torre del Agua, el puente del Tercer Milenio*, etcétera.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Toponimia urbana. Nuevos procesos onomásticos. Zaragoza. Aragón. España.

ABSTRACT: In 2008 Saragossa organized the Expo Zaragoza 2008, whose *leitmotiv* was the water and its historic high significance for Aragon. Obviously, the influence of that event on the town's urban development has been very important. We just want to deal with the onomastic processes connected with this urban planning: *la Torre del Agua (the Water Tower), el puente del Tercer Milenio (the Third Millenium Bridge)*, etc.

KEY WORDS: Urban place names. New onomastic processes. Zaragoza. Aragón. Spain.

RÉSUMÉ : L'Exposition Universelle organisée par Saragosse en 2008 avait pour *leitmotiv* l'eau et son rôle historique en Aragon. Bien évidemment, l'impact d'un tel événement sur le développement urbain de la ville fut très profond. Aussi cet humble article se propose-t-il d'aborder les principaux faits néo-onomastiques liés à cette expansion de l'urbanisme : *la Torre del Agua (la Tour de l'Eau), el puente del Tercer Milenio (le pont du Troisième Millénaire)*, etc.

MOTS CLÉS : Toponymie urbaine. Nouveaux procédés onomastiques. Saragosse. Aragon. Espagne.

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In 2008, Saragossa, capital city of the Aragonese autonomous region, in the northeast of Spain, organized an International Exposition whose *leitmotiv* was «Water and sustainable development».² For three months, over one hundred and thirty participants, among countries, autonomous communities and enterprises, presented and shared their proposals in relation to the above mentioned topic with the almost six million visitors who attended the meeting.

Obviously, the influence of this decisive milestone for the life of the city has proved very deep regarding town planning. The process has affected old avenues which have been remodelled (*paseo de la Independencia, paseo de Echegaray y Caballero*, etc.), but it has specially meant the redimension of the space traditionally called *meandro de Ranillas (Ranillas Meander)*, where the Expo took place, and which has suffered a radical urban transformation due to the building of bridges, pavilions, avenues, squares, a big hotel, an aquarium, a small amphitheatre, a conference hall, etc.

In the humble work that I present here, I will focus precisely on the analysis of the fundamental onomastic unities linked to this urban development.³

NEW URBAN PLACE NAMES IN THE EXPO 2008

Here are, then, the most significant urban names bound to the International Exposition with a brief comment.

El puente del Tercer Milenio (the Third Millenium Bridge)

The founding of Zaragoza by Augusto as a Roman militar colony can be traced back to the year 27 before Christ, in the context of several expeditions directed up the Ebro River against the people of the Cantabrian mountain chain (Cantabrian, Asturian, Galician). Consequently, Zaragoza is a bimillenary city which has crossed the chronological border of the year two thousand with the clear will to grow and endure. What better symbol, then, than a bridge with such name to show this innermost aspiration?

The bridge, in short, is a work built to connect Zaragoza with the site of the Expo, and is – apparently – the world's largest suspended concrete arch bridge,

² Thus Saragossa picked up the baton from other big cities like Paris, Seville, Hannover or Turin, which have also hosted the great event that has been held since 1881.

³ Although the granting of such project can be kindly expressed as a victory of the city, the truth is that the idea of organizing an International Exposition was from a business and political Aragonese elite that, perhaps inspired by the recent Sevillian experience, was looking for effective and feasible means to invigorate and revitalize the economy of the region, to modernize its communications, and to publicize the place in the world. However, due to the fact that the choice of Zaragoza took place when the town (and the region) was governed by a coalition – which could be described as centre-left – between the Aragonese Regionalist Party (PAR) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), it will not be too difficult to guess who obtained the greatest political profitability from all this movement.

because each one of its two support piers are anchored solely on each side of the Ebro River.

La Torre del Agua (the Water Tower)

Here is the emblematic building of the Expo, intended to make visible as no other else the above-mentioned slogan «Water and sustainable development», thanks to the combination of an outstanding height (76 meters) and a fanciful drop-shaped section. Its glazed volume and its diagonally designed profiles offer a changing perception of the building by virtue of sunlight during the day and artificial light at night, when it changes into a luminous lighthouse.

The Tower is, therefore, a metaphor half way between architecture and sculpture which means a call of attention upon the necessary rationalization of this element, scarcer and scarcer in the current world.

El hotel Hiberus (the Hiberus Hotel)

The Ebro, the great river of the city, has been historically under threat towards the regions of the Levante coasts, more densely populated, and also more subjected to a savage property speculation, which has resulted in a greater need for water. Aragon and to a small extent other regions of the basin (specially the more southern Catalonia) have always opposed any diversion attempt. The last one was promoted not many years ago by the central government of the conservative right wing Popular Party and it meant a certain decline of this political party in Aragon.

Thus, the Ebro River, whose meander embraces the Expo site, is also in itself some natural landmark against absolute outmoded water policies: policies in the antipodes of, or far away from, the nowadays so proclaimed *sustainable development*.

Its ergonymic presence to name here a hotel appears in the Latin form of the name: *Hiberus*.⁴

Avenida 2008 (2008 Avenue)

In the already long history of the city of Zaragoza to which we briefly alluded above, year 2008 could not be just another chronological reference. It should remain

⁴ The most authoritative variant does not contain the letter *h*; thus, we find *Iberus* in authors such as Caesar (*De bello civile*, I, 60), but the variant with *h* is also attested: «non procul a flumine Híbero» (Livy, XXXIX, 56.1). Likewise, the name is clearly recorded, in accordance with its high strategic value, in the Greek authors: «διαβάς τὸν Ἰβηρα ποταμόν» (Polybius, III, 35.2); «ἐκτὸς τοῦ Ἰβηρος ποταμοῦ» (Strabo, III, 3.8). As can be seen, in the Aragonese and Castilian evolution of the name *Ebro* < *EB(Ε)RO, the stress of the first syllable has remained, which is the one which reflects the Greek and which would be the one of the language that created the name (Iberian). It is likely that the Romans, on the other hand, pronounced *Hibérus*, due to the mechanic rules of Latin stress, which forced the second syllable to be stressed if it was a long one, as in this case (hence the Greek *η*).

registered in the city catalogue of names indelibly, in accordance with the dimension of the fact it frames; hence the incorporation of such representative date to name a wide avenue in the Expo.

Anfiteatro (Amphitheatre)

Placed in the hearth of the Expo, and used for the celebration of musical events during this period, it is obvious that the amphitheatre is not a big civil engineering work (in that respect, its capacity is modest, as it has been limited to six thousand people), but it can certainly be converted into a functional place where several outdoor leisure and artistic activities can be carried out.

Pabellón de Aragón, pabellón de España, pabellón del Puente (Aragon Pavilion, Spain Pavilion, Bridge Pavilion)

Shaped as a grand fruit basket, the Aragon Pavilion was the venue for the exhibition about the history, the people and the constant process of development of the Aragonese autonomous region. On the other hand, the Spain Pavilion was an ecological building which, designed to look like a poplar wood, released the real situation of water in the world. Finally, the Bridge Pavilion – as its own name indicates – appears as a hybrid building which has a double use, because, besides serving to cross the river, it is intended to function as a loud knock on people in order to raise their consciousness about the importance and significance of the intelligent management of water.

Nevertheless, maybe the most significant aspect of these and other similar elements is that – apparently – they are going to be reused within the project *Expo Zaragoza Empresarial* (Expo Zaragoza Business Sector), whose main aim is to transform this urban sector into a comfortable and functional site for the installation of firms and businesses.⁵

Centro de Conferencias Expo 2008 (Conference Centre Expo 2008)

This centre was the first devoted to be a *water tribune*, that is, a reflection forum on the world situation of water, and to be the venue for the conferences and sessions from each of the countries taking part in the Expo. However, it is now bound to become one of the essential pillars of the urban development.

⁵ This business park will offer a triple urban layout which can be summarized as follows: 1) *Edificios Ronda* (*Ronda Buildings*), a collection of twelve buildings with a surface of eighty thousand square meters to host big and medium-sized companies; 2) *Edificios Ebro* (*Ebro Buildings*), five buildings for a total of fifty-five thousand square meters facing the Ebro River; *Edificios Actur* (*Actur Buildings*), other five buildings which add up to twenty-eight thousand square meters and which will be allocated for business administration and management (the name *Actur* – acronym for the Spanish syntagm *actuación urbanística*, that is ‘urban action’ – refers to its alignment facing Zaragoza urban growth area on the left bank on the Ebro River, which was projected during 70s and developed in the 80s of last century.

Indeed, irrespective of its iconic value, this was an architecture type that the city was demanding from an eminently practical perspective to hold all types of artistic, scientific, and business activities. The challenge – this is clear – should be that of making profitable its surface of more than twenty two thousand square meters in near future.

Acuario fluvial (River Aquarium)

This main element of the Expo, built under the slogan «Water landscapes», affords us a general view of the most important rivers of the world, thanks to a route covering six hundred meters. It is the biggest fresh water aquarium in Europe, as it is laid out throughout eight thousand square meters.

Thus far, we have shown some of the main toponymic unities related to the urban development of Zaragoza promoted by the episode of its International Exposition.

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