



London's street names tend to honour generals, battles and royals

ALAMY

## Street names show why great cities are worlds apart

Tom Whipple, Science Editor

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Roam the streets of Paris, from Rue Paul Cezanne to Boulevard Voltaire, and you get a sense of national pride based on great artists and thinkers.

Roam [London](#), from King George Street to Wellington Street via Montgomery Street, and you get a sense of national pride based on royals and successful generals. Unless you go to Vienna, you are unlikely to find foreigners honoured anywhere with their own road.

Scientists have analysed thousands of street names in four great cities, to see how the people we give a road to reflect a country's

values. “Studying culture and specifically a society’s value system is a difficult task,” Marios Constantinides, from Nokia Bell Labs in Cambridge, said. Streets, he and his colleagues contended, provide a method. “This offers an alternative way, using technology and data science, to capture how it is a society’s value system changes.”



Paris lauds its artists and thinkers

The streets of London suggest that the British seem to value scientists and artists far less than people who wielded power. Since the Great Fire of London, there have been seven decades in which military leaders were the most or second-most likely profession to have a road named after them in London.

In Vienna, the home of Klimt and Schiele, there was no year when artists were not the most popular street name. In Paris, too, streets were most likely to be named after Left Bank writers or artists that gave the city its reputation.

Only in New York do ordinary people get a look in because of the recent decision to name roads, such as Deputy Chief Orio J Palmer Way in the Bronx, after victims of the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Edyta Bogucka, from the Technical University of Munich, said: “What does it mean that London celebrates royals and Vienna celebrates artists? This helps us reflect on cities, and whether they represent the values we live now.”

The analysis, published in the journal PLoS One, showed with one exception how inward looking most cities are. Vienna alone chose to recognise its place as the geopolitical hub of Central Europe in its street names. More than half its named streets are from people outside Austria. One group is served even more poorly than foreigners. In Paris, before 1980, only 1 per cent of streets were named after women. After a drive to include women such as in Allée Nina Simone, since 2010 4 per cent of new roads honoured a female. Britain is a little better, largely because of queens.

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