

*designation* of intended purpose, not an observation of actual use. The so-called function would not change except by official recognition or decree, and therefore is indistinguishable from designation. Therefore, by this argument, so-called functional classification is just as much a designation as the kind of administrative classification based on ownership or management.

Official classification systems such as those in Table 3.1 tend to use only a limited number of classification themes. In a study of twelve street classification systems in nine European Union countries, for example, it was found that, from a range of 39 potential classification themes, only six were used systematically in practice, on which hierarchies were effectively organised. Of those six classification themes, five are nominally functional, and the sixth administrative. But all are effectively capable of being allocated by designation (Table 3.4).<sup>15</sup>

Classification by designation is convenient for a variety of practical reasons. First, as alluded to earlier, changes of designation can be unrelated to circumstances on the ground. This somewhat detached relationship could be interpreted as a form of inflexibility, since the status of a street may stay the same long after its form or use has changed. Alternatively, this could be interpreted as a form of flexibility, precisely because the label can cover a variety of forms or uses as they change over time, without requiring continual updating. This means that classification by designation finds favour as a practical method for roads authority use.

This flexibility means that a hierarchy can be laid out in advance, and is not intrinsically subject to too much fluctuation. Unlike physical width,

Table 3.4 Themes used systematically in a study of twelve classification systems in nine European countries

Classification theme	Interpretation
1. Traffic speed (designation)	Road sections are designated an intended speed
2. Trip length	Designated, based on assumed origin and destination distance
3. Destination status	Designated, based on assumed origin and destination status (city size for strategic road; size of development served for a local road)
4. Strategic role	Street types assigned as forming part of strategic network or local network
5. Circulation versus access	Designated function to cater for through traffic or local access
6. Administration	Designated legal responsibility for management or ownership