



---

# The Organization of the Rural Space in Banat According to the Complex of Natural Factors

Constantin VERT  
*West University, Timișoara, Romania*

---



The rural space is the expression of man's activity to value the components of the natural frame and of the resources of which it disposes. The structure and the characteristics of these components will impose different ways of organizing the rural space from one geographical region to another. The variety, complexity and disposal of the components of the natural frame in Banat are organized on three morphologic levels: mountain, hill, plain and a specific planning of the rural space.

*The rural mountain space.* Because of the natural conditions and of the specific way of valuing the economic potential of the mountain area, the rural settlements contain two forms of organization of the place and constructions destined to the residential space, respectively to the feature of accommodation and resting of the population: the *seasonal* settlements and the *permanent* settlements – the villages.

*The seasonal settlements*, specific types of temporary living, are known as *hoods* and have been created by man from immemorial times, for the valuing of the resources of the high and fragmented territory. They are spread even today all around the mountain and Piemontan Area, with a higher frequency in the Ezeriș Depression and in the northern part of the Almăj Depression.

The hoods in Banat have an aspect of real wealthy houses, often being confused with the outskirts of villages. In some areas where the raising of cattle is highly developed, the hoods tend to become permanent settlements, like the ones belonging to Teregova, Mehadica, Bozovici, Moceriș, Borlovenii Vechi. In this case, the hoods have two or three rooms and chambers for animals and stored hay.

*The permanent settlements* reflect the household spirit and the cultural horizon of the settlers in the mountain areas which have lasted everywhere (depressions and valleys), wealthy villages, worthy of the beauty and richness of the surrounding landscapes.

The oldness and experience of the population in organizing the core of the settlement and of the social production have impressed the traveler Iohann Friedel (1769) who, in describing the Danube Defile, presents the Romanian village in the Banat Mountains as an organism created from “houses built in the middle of gardens, far situated one from another”, but whose interior reflects “activeness, moderation, a creative natural industry, content souls...men....and women”, for whom, “the combination of ideas is remarkable”.

According to the balance of specialization in production, in the mountain region, the village has an agriculture dominated by cattle breeding and fruit growing.

A substantial number of people from the mountain villages work in industry, such as car construction (Topleț), processing of wood (Margina), mining (Ruschița, Sasca Montană). As a consequence of their geographical position in the mountain landscapes, close to lakes or on mountain corridors, with unique beauty, many villages get, besides their traditional economic attribute of cattle raising and fruit production, climactic and tourism functions, which underline the beauty and charm of the mountain area (Poiana Mărului, Gărbăna, Brebu Nou, Văliug).

*The position and localization of villages* has been mostly visible in the corridors between mountains, like the ones along the Danube, the Timiș and Bistra rivers, and for depressions, such as Almăj, Ezeriș, with traces of material culture dated from prehistory. The valleys with terraces and sides are typical in all the mountain area.

The numerous advantages, the water from the rivers, the accessibility to the economic flows, goods, ideas and culture exchange, justify the preferences of the population for the organization of rural cores in such geographical frames.

*The morphological characteristics*, structure, texture, shape, as well as the size of the villages range according to the nature and the potential of the field on which the core was established, but most of all with the character of the economy, in continuous diversification, to which nature has adapted continuously in time and space. Due to a higher economic potential, some villages have over 3.000 inhabitants (Dognecea), but also the cities with an agricultural-zoo-cultural character (Bozovici, Teregova), or with a waterside feature (Moldova Veche). They possess extended inner-city territories, compact structures, solid constructions (brick, tile) and with a high level of comfort.

Another category is represented by the villages which have between 2.000 and 3.000 inhabitants, of which some contain in the core industrial factories of republican interest (Topleț), others are important centres for animal breeding, but participate with a large number of the population to the industrial activity from Resița-Bocșa (Berzovia, Carașova, Târnova, Zorlențu Mare).

Like the villages mentioned earlier, these one benefit from a developed economic basis, to which it corresponds a strongly built territorial organization of the cores, characterized by larger densities of homes and annexes, placed along more or less structured roads, but with technological infrastructure as in the cities. The big majority of the mountain villages are situated under these values of demographic size. Approximately 22% have between 1.000 and 2.000 inhabitants and 72% have fewer than 1.000 inhabitants. Among the first, there are villages with compact densities in the core, with an agro-zoo-technical profile (Liubcova, Domașnea, Ezeriș), with wealthy households and rationally organized in space.

The last category is also the largest, though the economic activity (mining, forest exploitation) has exerted an action of concentration on the population, they do not exceed 500 inhabitants in the core.

The explanation resides in the fact that in many cases, the mountain relief, not so accessible and with less favourable conditions to human life, has contributed to the dispersion of the population in small and very small settlements.

The commune of Cornereva is composed of 40 villages, half of which have fewer than 100 inhabitants and the other half over 100. In a similar situation is also the commune of Sichevita, with 19 villages and a high level of dispersion of the inhabitants, 14 villages having under 100 inhabitants.

The same thing happens in the Almăj Depression, where 19 villages out of the existent 34 have between 50 and 150 inhabitants. To all, the agricultural field is found between the households which communicate one to each other only through passes, which drive their way through numerous hoods with which they look similar as architecture and way of space positioning are concerned.

This geographical reality raises complicated systematization problems, because the same economic valuing with a pastoral character of the fields that has created, calls for its conservation, but in a way that would permit the rational animal husbandry and modern organization of the settlements.

*The rural hill space.* The hills of Banat comprise a network of well-structured settlements, of almost 200 villages (which confers them a pronounced rural character) and only one city (Oravița).

The rural settlements include the two own forms of organization: the "seasonal" settlements known as "hoods" and more frequently met in the mountain area and the "permanent" settlements – the villages. Like in the mountain area, in the hill one the village has shown an evident preference in choosing the position for the more evolved valleys (Bega, Beregsău, Miniș, Pogăniș etc.), for the hill-waterside, hill-field.

From the point of view of the geographical position, the most frequent are the types of valley with their various origins (Buzad, Comeat, in the Hills of Lipova), of bottom valley with opening to the side mountains (Ohaba Română, Ohaba Lungă), from the confluence (Stanciova, Cuveidia, Nadăș etc.), of waterside with opening to the side (Birchiș, Spata, Crivobara, in Dealurile Lipovei, Fârdea, Surducu Mic, in Dealurile Lugojului, Dragomirești, Zorlencior in Dealurile Pogănișului etc.).

The demographic size and the morphostructure of the villages vary according to the nature and the potential of habitat of the field where the core has been organized, but mostly with the economic profile, which is found in a continuous diversification.

Thus, the average size of the rural settlements in the hill area is of 600 inhabitants. Due to the more complex economic basis, there are also villages which have over 2.000 inhabitants (Zăbrani, Coșteiu). These possess vast inner-city territories, tight-compact structures and new constructions with a high level of comfort.

The most numerous are the small villages, of up to 500 inhabitants (Secaş, Checheş, Crivobara, Vizma, Hodoş, Lucareţ, Teş and others from the Hills of Lipova; Lăpugiu de Jos, Baştea, Coseşti, Grind from the Hills of Lăpugiu etc.), which have a much greater extent in the hills from the northern part of Timiş. The relief being fragmented, less accessible and with less favourable conditions to the development of economic activities it has contributed to the dispersion of the population in small and very small settlements.

There are some villages in the Depression of Făget with over average values (Mănăştur, Margina, Curtea), the Depression of Caraş (Ticvanu Mare, Vărădia), the Depression of Brebu (Zorlenţu Mare, Brebu), which are more and more imposing in the process of complex valorisation of the economic potential of the region.

Regarding the *morphostructure of the cores*, there are two distinct types: villages with an *irregular polygonal* shape, especially in the central part of the Hills of Lipova (Dubeşti, Ierşnic, Hodoş, Coşarii), in the Hills of Bulza (Făgetel, Mihăieşti, Baştea, Lăpugiu de Jos, Fintoag, Grindu) and in the Hills of Lugoj and Lăpugiu, with the largest proportion and *regular polygonal* villages, which are far less in number (Bethausen, Brestovăţ, Remetea-Luncă, Balinţ, Mănăştiur, Ştiuca, Pădureni).

*Gathered type* village cores can be found North of the Timiş River and along Pogăniş, Bârzava and Caraş rivers (most of them being systematized in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), *spread and mixed type* (gathered and spread) in the Hills of Pogăniş (Zorlencior, Zorile), and the Hills of Oraviţa (Jitin, Ildia, Socolari, Potoc).

*The texture* of the cores presents, also, territorial differences, according to which there can be distinguished between *ordered texture* villages (the ones mentioned with a regular form), with *unordered texture* (majority), *monostreet texture* etc.

In the hill area, productive type occupations have been practiced since the old age, their permanence and continuity being stimulated by the favourable geographical conditions, by the variety of the soil and subsoil resources from the hills or from close regions.

This is reflected in the functions of the rural settlements that include the following types: fruit-growing/animal husbandry, with the highest proportion; fruit-growing/ animal husbandry and wood industry activities (more frequent towards the mountain limit in the Hills of Lugoj, Lăpugiu, Oraviţa and in the West-central part of the Hills of Lipova); industrial-agricultural (only a few cities: Margina, Mănăştiur, Tomeşti).

The annual structure of the network of rural settlements from the hill area includes some cities with a high human and economic potential (Margina, Mănăştiur) and with possibilities of becoming centres of polarization and of local influence, with urban characteristics in the future. As for the very small villages and without any access to the main communication routes, these have to be more and more involved in the process of valorising the local resources.

*The rural plain space.* Permanently and intensely populated, the Plain of Banat presents numerous traces of life dating from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, especially close to water flows (Giulvaz, Parta, Periam). The existence of swamps in the divagation plain has made that the population settle, from prehistoric times, on grinds, isles and humps.

Starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the construction of dams and swamp drying, the number of settlements in the spaces between rivers has increased steadily. An important role on the demographic phenomena has been that of the colonisations in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially with the Germanic population (A.Tinta, 1972).

In comparison to the two past units (mountains and hills), the Plain of Banat is characterized by a relatively uniform repartition of the rural settlements, generated by the socio-historical conditions typical of this area, where the print of the physico-geographical factors is less evident, an important role belonging to the measures of arrangement of the territory, colonization, means of communication etc.

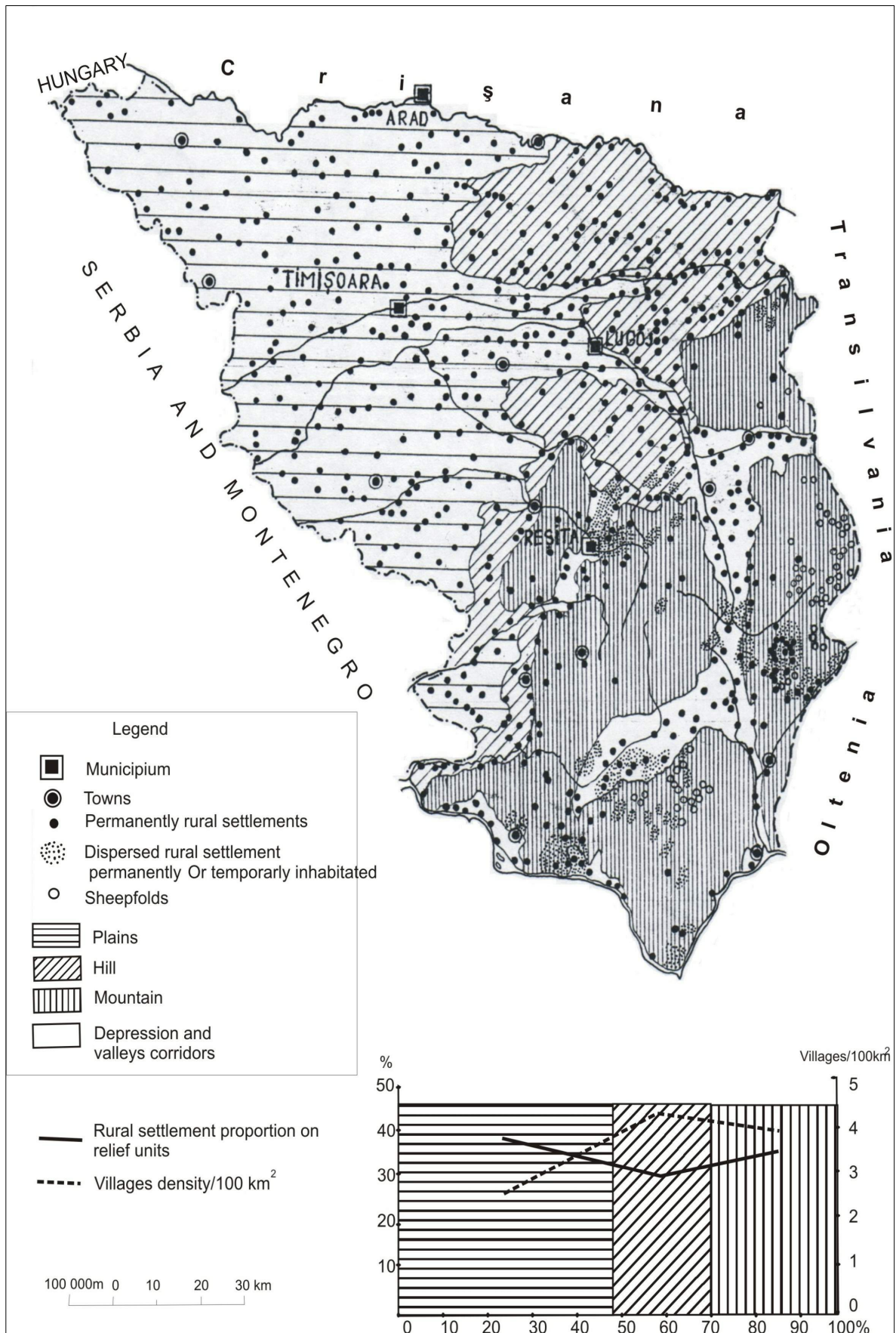


Figure 1. The distribution of the rural settlements in Banat.



The temporary settlements (hoods, chambers), so frequent in various areas of the plain in the past (St. Manciualea, 1939), start to reappear in some areas after a rather long absence from during the period of agricultural cooperatives.

The network of rural settlements from the plain includes 251 villages, representing 39% of the number of the entire historical province. Their density is on an average of 2,5/100 sq kilometres, with some differences between subunits (The Plains of Vinga and Gătaia - approx. 4 settlements/100 sq kilometres).

The dominant feature of the rural settlements from the Plain of Banat is given by the high average size (1.111 inhabitants), by their gathered and compact type, the regular polygonal form, as well as by the geometry of the street's texture.

The Plain of Banat is individualised as a unit with a complex intensely used economic potential. This is reflected in the diversity of the economic functions that the rural settlements have, many of them holding mixed functions. A number of rural settlements from the Central part (Călacea, Satchinez, Șandra, Variaș) and from the Western part (Teremia Mare, Cherestur, Cheglevici) have extractive functions (oil).

The geothermic potential, revealed by the value of the gradient ( $5,55^{\circ}\text{C}/\text{m} \times 10^2$ ) is mainly used in agriculture (warming the greenhouses at Tomnatic, Lovrin and the zoo-technical complexes at Beregsău Mare), in heating the houses (Lovrin), in industry and balneotherapy (Calacea, Lovrin).

Due to the favourable pedoclimatic conditions, the fields' usage is dominated by the agricultural crops. The agricultural surface holds 85% of the total, and the arable 90% of this one. The general profile of the plain is cereal-based (cereals occupy 67,5% of the arable fields), but an important place belongs to the plants for industrialization (15%), plants for feeding (9%) and vegetables (6%).

The plants for food and cereal cultures for this destination and the permanent growth of the urban request became determinant factors in the development of animal breeding. The structure of the live stock is relatively balanced, with a more pregnant share in favour of porcine. Their density exceeds 100 heads/ha of arable field, the following cities being mostly representative: Sânandrei, Variaș, Lovrin, Beregsău Mare, Vinga, Birda, Gătaia, Voiteni.

The vegetal agricultural production and the animal one have stimulated the birth of industrial centres or the consolidation of branches of production like textile, leather and shoe, food in cities such as: Grabăț, Periam, Ciacova, Recaș and others.

Characteristic for the rural settlements from the Plain of Banat with an surplus of labour force is the setting up of branches of the big factories from cities to settlements such as: Lovrin, Jebel, Recaș, Gătaia, Teremia Mare etc.

The network of communication means from this geographical unit is complex (rail, road, fluvial, aerial), representing the highest density of railroads from the country (over 90 km/1000sq. Km) and the first internal fluvial channel (Bega).

So, the rural settlements, due to the way of combination of the morpho-hydrographical elements, of adaptation of the human activity and use of space, form a special self featured landscape that we could name as the „Banat” type of rural landscape.

## Bibliography

**Băcănar, I.** (1969), *Considerații geografice asupra criteriilor privind tipologia așezărilor rurale din România*. În: Comunicări de geografie, VIII, p. 201-208.

**Surd, V., Bold, I., Zotic, V., Chira, Carmen** (2005), *Amenajarea teritoriului și infrastructuri tehnice*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.

**Vert, C.** (2002), *Tipuri de peisaje rurale în Banat*, Editura Mirton, Timișoara.