

Cultural Landscapes of Banat: Experimenting and Understanding the Territory

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Introduction

The concept of cultural landscape is relatively new in cultural heritage management and spatial planning in Romania. However, at the international and European levels, this concept holds significant importance in preserving the identity, characteristics, and integrity of a territory. It is widely used as one of the most crucial tools in safeguarding cultural heritage, not only at the individual level or for objects with architectural value, but also at the contextual level.

A cultural landscape can be defined in various ways, but generally, it is identified as a distinct geographic area that is modified by human activity. These landscapes can facilitate a deeper understanding of a place, whether it is a small area, a medium-sized territory, or an extended one. Cultural landscapes are the result of human involvement, affecting, influencing, or shaping them. Collectively, they are considered narratives of culture, and expressions of regional identity.¹

The World Heritage Convention (1972) is the first document to recognize the term *cultural landscape*, defining it as an interaction between human activity and nature. Cultural landscapes are illustrative of the evolution of societies and settlements over time, under physical constraints and/or opportunities arising from the natural context, as well as from social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, both internally and externally. They are considered cultural properties and represent the interaction between nature and humans.²

Additionally, in the European Landscape Convention (2000),³ a fundamental international document informing this research, outlines the following: landscapes constitute an important resource for promoting economic activity, and their protection, management, and planning can lead to an improvement in the quality of life for the communities involved, and beyond. In Romania, the World Heritage Convention, encompassing both cultural and natural heritage, was recognized in 1990 through Official Journal no. 46 dated March 31st.⁴ The Law of Historical Monuments no. 422 from 2001 contains a subtle reference to this term, somewhat assimilating

1 "Cultural landscapes," UNESCO, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape>.

2 Gabriela Domokos-Paşcu, "Peisaje culturale (în Banat): identificare, un proiect cultural la început" [Cultural Landscapes (in Banat): Identification, a project at its beginning], *Patrimonium Banaticum* IX (2019), 213.

3 "Convenția europeană a peisajului" [European Landscape Convention], Council of Europe, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802f3fb8>.

4 "Convenția din 16 noiembrie 1972 privind protecția patrimoniului mondial, cultural și natural" [The Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted on Nov. 16, 1972], *Monitorul Oficial* 46 (March 31, 1990), accessed April 11, 2024, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/50265>.

it with a site. References to the concept of cultural landscape also appear in the Preliminary Theses of Heritage, where it is likened to a possible urban planning instrument - the Local Landscape Plan (PLP). Furthermore, the proposal for the Land Use Planning, Urbanism and Construction Code explicitly specifies that there will be two types of landscape protection, analogous to the historical monuments protection system: locally protected cultural landscapes and nationally protected cultural landscapes. Additionally, Article 179 states that authorization for construction works in cultural landscape areas is subject to certain restrictions, with the depreciation of the landscape assessed in relation to the urban planning regulations outlined in the applicable plans for the cultural landscape area.⁵

However, proposed or existing legislation regarding cultural landscapes, monuments, archaeology, natural sites, and similar domains often results in fragmented protection measures. These either duplicate certain provisions or leave valuable areas vulnerable to overly broad interpretation.

Simultaneously, beyond the scope of legislation, territories are experiencing significant and visible impacts. These include the expansion of large and medium-sized urban areas through sprawl-type developments, the abandonment of traditional and historic residential areas in rural environments, and the construction of new, often incompatible 'neighborhoods.' Such changes contribute to the erosion of the natural landscape and the eventual destruction of natural ecosystems, architectural values, urban and rural silhouettes, and other cultural values over time.

In this context, conducting research on this concept and its practical applications was deemed essential. The initial phase of the research was undertaken in the Romanian Banat area, an area with a rich multi-ethnic history, diverse geographical features, and community-shaping activities such as agriculture, steel production, and mining. Located in the western part of Romania, the Banat Region comprises the following counties: Timiș, Caraș-Severin, partially Arad, partially Hunedoara and partially Mehedinți.

The article is structured into six chapters. The first three chapters, including the introduction, provide a geographical and historical overview of the Banat region, with a focus on its urban evolution. The third and the fourth chapters examine how the project was conceived and detail the methods used to explore the territory with the aim of deepening its understanding. The final chapter presents the conclusions, which are considered fundamental to this analytical and practical process.

The Geography of Banat: Influences on Landscape, Urbanism, and Architecture

Physical-geographical factors play an essential role in structuring of the geographical space of the Banat region and shaping its cultural landscapes, which emerge from the collective human transformation of nature.⁶ These factors include topography and natural resources shaped by geological and pedological diversity, as well as climatic and hydrographic features, land cover and land use. Together, they influence the way people live, the spatial distribution, structure and texture of human settlements, their economic functionality, and their specific architecture.

The Banat region is morphologically characterized by its diverse terrain, which descends in a series of steps from east to west. These steps are arranged in a semicircular pattern,⁷ with mountains corresponding to the Western Carpathians (Poiana Ruscă, Semenice, Almăj, Aninei, Locvei, Dognecei Mountains) on the outer edge, and partially to the Southern Carpathians (Țarcu,

5 Secretariatul General al Guvernului. "Codul amenajării teritoriului, urbanismului și construcțiilor" [Land Use Planning, Urbanism and Construction Code], art. 179, accessed April 10, 2024, https://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2022/11/_0n1p98wvfxmskrt375c.pdf.

6 Sorina Voiculescu and Remus Crețan, *Geografie culturală: teme, evoluții și perspective* [Cultural geography: themes, developments and perspectives] (Timișoara: Eurostampa, 2005).

7 Raularian Rusu, *Organizarea spațiului geografic în Banat* [The organization of geographical space in Banat Region] (Timișoara: Mirton, 2007).

Legend:

meters

- < 200
- 201 - 400
- 401 - 600
- 6001 - 800
- 801 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 1,200
- 1,201 - 1,400
- 1,401 - 1,600
- 1,601 - 1,800
- 1,801 - 2,000
- 2,001 - 2,200
- > 2,201

Banat Plain

Banat Hills

Western Carpathians

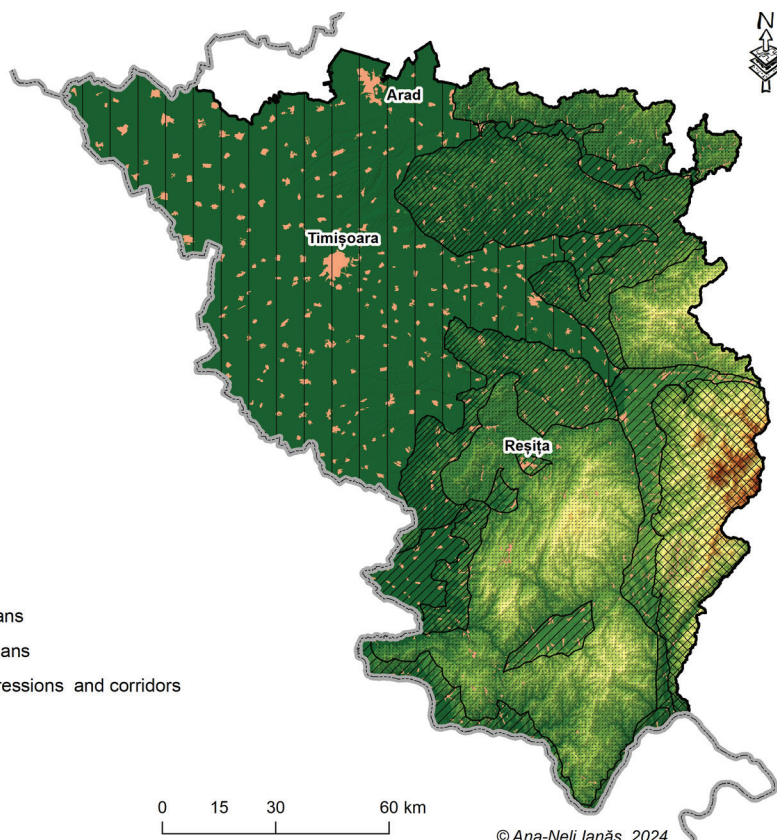
Southern Carpathians

Intramontane depressions and corridors

settlements

Banat Region

National border



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Fig. 1: Distribution of human settlements according to terrain features in the Banat region

Godeanu, Muntele Mic, Cernei Mountains and partially, Mehedinți Mountains). The Western Hills subunit follows to the west, then the High Plains and in the center, the Timiș Low Plain. (Fig. 1) The terrain influences settlement patterns, economic activities, and the formation of cultural landscape types, as defined by the morphometric parameters: hypsometry, geodeclivity, aspect, depth and fragmentation density. Considering these factors, the western part of Banat (Lowland Banat) is more favorable for the development of human settlements and agricultural activities, as the terrain's energy and fragmentation are reduced. On the other hand, the eastern and southern parts of the region (Mountainous Banat) are characterized by fragmented terrain, high altitudes, unstable geological foundations and numerous active geomorphological processes (erosion, landslides, etc.). However, the valley corridors and depressions (Almăjului Depression, Făgetului Depression, Timiș-Cerna Corridor, Bistrei Corridor, etc.), which are densely populated areas within the mountains, should also be noted.

Mountains have always represented not just a restrictive factor, but also a favorable one for the population concentration and the development of specific human settlements. On one hand they provided shelter, and on the other, they offered socio-economic potential that allowed the development of both the depressions and of the surrounding mountain areas.⁸ Essentially, the primary role we can attribute to the territory (the foundational element of the cultural landscape), and mainly to the mountain subsystem, is that of providing a "safe shelter" for the populations

8 Ana-Neli Ianăș, *Țara Almăjului. Studiu de geografie regională* [The Land of Almăj. A Study of Regional Geography] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2011).

settled here, serving as a “place of conservation and permanence in the process of ethnogenesis” and acting as a “space of resistance to major invasions.”⁹ Moreover, the mountain space is also an “ethos-generating space,”¹⁰ where the preservation of ethnocultural diversity is reflected in two aspects: the ethno-spiritual character (manifested through customs traditions, and folk costumes) and the ethno-productive character (preserved through traditional crafts and occupations).¹¹

The mountain area is also characterized by a high geological diversity, reflected in the wealth of underground resources (coal, iron ore, rare metals, building rocks), which has attracted people in search of a higher living standard. In addition to all this, the colonizations carried out by foreign rulers laid the foundation for the emergence of settlements at high altitudes (900–1000 meters), thus diversifying the cultural landscape of Banat. In the mountainous area of the Banat region, the most representative community is the Czechs (63% of the Czechs in Romania live in the Almăjului and Locvei Mountains),¹² where they founded villages such as: Gârnic, Sfânta Elena, Ravensca, Șumița, Bigăr, Eibenthal, Baia Nouă. Here, architectural peculiarities and the ethno-spiritual character are key in shaping a cultural landscape distinct from that of the Romanian population. When defining a cultural landscape, a set of criteria that integrate both tangible and intangible aspects of the local culture are considered. Some of these criteria include the *local architectural typology*, which encompasses architectural style, building materials, spatial layout of houses, and their integration into the natural landscape. *Cultural and historical influences* are also important, reflecting local traditions, crafts, and cultural exchanges, including influences from other ethnic groups evident in construction and landscaping. *The spiritual and symbolic function of places* plays a role, particularly in the presence of sacred sites, religious customs and rituals, and decorative elements or symbols that reflect the spirituality of the community. *Social and community aspects* are another key factor, including the organization of local communities according to traditional or family hierarchies and traditional housing patterns, such as enclosed households with courtyards. Additionally, the *preservation and protection of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage*¹³ is vital. Lastly, the *connection with the natural environment* is also crucial, especially in terms of harmonizing architecture with landforms, adapting to local weather conditions — such as sloping roofs in mountainous areas — and maintaining agricultural practices.¹⁴

The Banat Hills (Hills of Lipovei, Lugoșului, Pogănișului, Dognecei) have altitudes ranging between from 200–400 meters and are located at the contact point with the mountainous area. These hills are intensely fragmented by valleys in the upper basins. Along with the mountainous areas, the hills were primarily inhabited by the Romanian population, who were forced to leave the lowland area with fertile soils due to the arrival of Hungarian, German, and Bulgarian colonizers.¹⁵ The settlements in the hills adapted to all types of favorable locations, resulting in a diverse settlement pattern that includes valley villages, hillside villages or interfluvial villages.¹⁶

9 George Coandă, *Carpații – spațiu de conservare și continuitate a vetrei etnice românești* [The Carpathians - an area of preservation and continuity of the Romanian ethnic heritage] (Târgoviște: Bibliotheca, 2003).

10 Elena Matei, *Ecosistemele umane. O abordare din perspectivă geografică* [Human ecosystems. An approach from a geographical perspective] (Bucharest: Editura Universitară, 2007).

11 Ana-Neli Ianăș, “Rolul terenului în conturarea Țării Almăjului” [The role of terrain in the shaping of the Almăj Land], *Comunicări de Geografie XII* (2008): 65–70.

12 Grigor P. Pop, *Carpații și Subcarpații României* [Carpathians and Subcarpathians of Romania] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006).

13 Sînziana Preda, *Istorie și memorie în comunitățile cehilor din Clisura Dunării* [History and Memory in the Czech Communities in the Danube Cluster] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2010).

14 Marc Antrop and Veerle Van Eetvelde, *Landscape Perspectives. The Holistic Nature of Landscape* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017).

15 Remus Crețan, *Etnie, confesiune și comportament electoral în Banat: studiu geografic (sfârșitul sec. al XIX-lea și sec. al XX-lea)* [Ethnicity, Confession and Electoral Behavior in Banat: A Geographical Study (late 19th and 20th Century)] (Timișoara: Tipografia Universității de Vest, 1999).

16 Cătălina Ancuța, *Studiul geografic al disparităților teritoriale în Banatul românesc* [Geographical Study of Territorial Disparities in the Romanian Banat] (Timișoara: Mirton, 2008).

Legend:

-  Broad-leaved forest
-  Discontinuous urban fabric
-  Industrial or commercial units
-  Inland marshes
-  Mineral extraction sites
-  Non-irrigated arable land
-  Pastures
-  Sparsely vegetated areas
-  Sport and leisure facilities
-  Transitional woodland-shrub
-  Vineyards
-  Water courses
-  Land principally occupied by agriculture, with significant areas of natural vegetation
-  Banat Plain
-  Banat Hills
-  Intramontane depressions and corridors
-  Western Carpathians
-  Southern Carpathians
-  Banat Region
-  National border

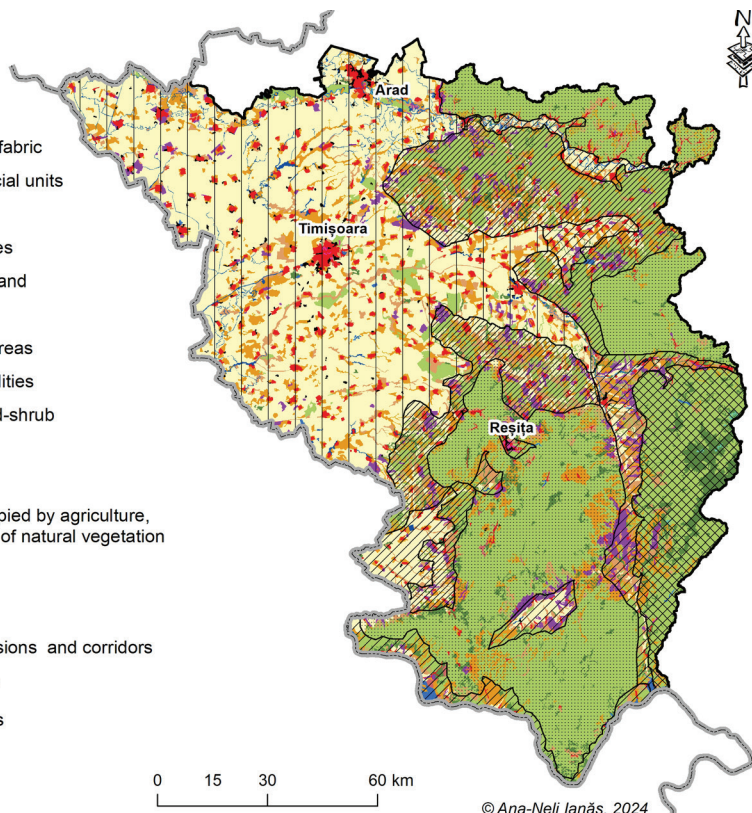


Fig. 2: Land Cover and Land Use in Banat Region (according to CORINE Land Cover Database, 2018)

The Banat Plain comprises two subunits:¹⁷ the low plains (80–120 meters, such as the Timiș, Lugoj, Aranca, Jimbolia Plains), characterized by swampiness and soil impoverishment but which have undergone improvement works to expand the agricultural land; and the high plains (120–200 meters, such as Arad, Vinga, Gâtaia Plains), with wide valleys that are favorable for agriculture, as well as terraces ideal for the development of human settlements.

The flowing waters were another significant factor in attracting the Romanian population, as Romanian settlements were more commonly located at the mouths of rivers. Similarly, the colonization of other ethnic groups in Banat (e.g. Hungarians) followed the course of the main rivers (Bega, Timiș, Mureș) as part of an effort to separate the compact Romanian population in the region and advance towards eastern Transylvania.¹⁸

The semicircular terrain pattern allowed the Mediterranean climatic influences with warm air masses and rainfall-rich Oceanic influences. The Banat has a moderate climate with warm summers and relatively mild winters, making it attractive for habitation. This climate also contributes to the region's natural landscape diversity with many endemic species and unique ecosystems, thereby enhancing biodiversity¹⁹ and emphasizing the importance of species protection and conservation. In fact, Banat is home to a wide variety of protected natural areas, ranging from national parks to nature reserves and Natura 2000 sites.²⁰

17 Grigore Posea, *Câmpia de vest a României (Câmpia Banato-Crișană)* [Western Plain of Romania (Banat-Crișana Plain)] (Bucharest: Editura Fundației "România de Măine", 1997).

18 Crețan, *Etnie, confesiune și comportament electoral în Banat*, 14.

19 Richard T.T. Forman and Michel Godron, *Landscape Ecology* (Wiley, 1991).

20 Andreea Mihaela Băltărețu, *Arii protejate. Ecoturism. Dezvoltare durabilă* [Protected Areas. Ecotourism. Sustainable Development] (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2011).

Lastly, the terrain, with its unique characteristics, defines the boundaries of economic use of the land, alongside the climatic, hydrological and pedological factors it directly influences. Certain landforms are better suited for specific economic activities. For example, mountains are favorable for pastoralism and tourism, while plains may be more suitable for extensive (in moderately populated areas) and intensive (in densely populated areas) agriculture. As a result, the plain is dominated by agricultural and artificial land, with predominantly agricultural (based on crop cultivation) and industrial economic activities. Within the agricultural land, the largest area is occupied by arable land, interspersed with various agricultural zones. The hills and corridors have the greatest diversity of land cover, as well as the highest degree of landscape fragmentation. Here heterogeneous agricultural areas dominate, with grassland and permanent crops interspersed with non-agricultural, predominantly forested areas. Agricultural activities are the main economic function, focusing mainly on animal husbandry and less on plant cultivation. The mountainous areas are characterized by industrial activities related to timber exploitation, supported by the extensive forested regions, especially broad-leaved forests.²¹ (Fig. 2 - CORINE Land Cover Database, 2018)

Taking all these aspects into account, the habitat of the Banat region includes: towns that appeared in the medieval period, characterized by fortified structures such as defensive walls, bastions, and watchtowers (like the municipality of Timișoara, the polarizing center of the Banat region); traditional agricultural villages, large and compact, with houses and households arranged around a common center, surrounded by agricultural fields, vineyards and orchards (typical of lowland and hill areas); mining and industrial settlements (predominantly in the lower mountainous area) with workers' houses, abandoned industrial buildings, and infrastructure related to mining and industrial activities; scattered, small settlements (in the mountainous areas of the Cerna, Poiana Ruscă and Banat Mountains), with disorganized structures and large distances between dwellings; and linear settlements, developed along valleys or roads.²²

The types of settlements found in the Banat region are influenced by geographic factors, but they have also been shaped throughout history, organized and reorganized in response to the administrative needs of legislators and the cultural characteristics of the populations that inhabited them.

The Historical Evolution of Banat and Its Settlements

The Banat region, from the perspective of its territorial system of settlements, is the result of the consolidation of various interests from different ethnic groups over the last two millennia. It has been particularly shaped by the events and political circumstances of the last three centuries, which have led to the reshaping of boundaries, population structure, and the current settlement system, both in terms of layout and architectural specificity. Territorial descriptions were largely adapted to the region's unique geographical context and terrain features. Due to its location at the meeting point between the Carpathian arc and the Danube, Banat naturally became a strategic access point from the south (southeast) to the north (northwest). Over time, it has been continuously shaped as a region of strategic importance,²³ particularly valued for its wealth of natural resources, such as minerals and timber, as well as its agricultural potential.

Although the territory was inhabited by significant local cultures before the Roman conquest, the earliest documented structures that had a lasting impact on the evolution of settlements and the territorial network are from the Roman period.

21 Ana-Neli Ianăș and Ramona Ivan, "Post-communist Land Cover and Use Changes in Romanian Banat, based on Corine Land Cover Data," *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics* XVII, no. 33-34 (2022): 155-74.

22 Constantin Vert, *Tipuri de peisaje rurale din Banat* [Types of Rural Landscapes in Banat] (Timișoara: Mirton, 2001); Elena Bogan, Tamara Simon and Melinda Căndea, *Așezările umane. Organizarea și amenajarea spațiului geografic* [Human Settlements. Organization and Planning of Geographical Space] (Bucharest: Editura Universitară, 2023).

23 Ioan Hațegan and Lucia Savulov, "Banatul Medieval," *Analele Banatului* V (1997): 191.

Following Banat's incorporation into Roman Dacia in 101 AD, a significant border was established along the Mureș River, aligned with the border along the Danube. The Romans introduced their own administrative structures, accompanied by the construction of fortified settlements, correlated with specific Roman property administration structures, such as rural villas (*villae rusticae*). Those structures coexisted with preexisting rural settlements with distinct organization. The settlement structure was linked within the territory by a system of main roads with a strategic military role, as well as a secondary road network in connection with the Banat Montan region, related to the mining operations consolidated by the Romans.²⁴ This road network would continue to play a strategic role well into the Middle Ages.

After the Roman retreat, the Banat region became accessible to populations from the borderlands of the former empire, some of whom settling here until the 8th century. The initial administrative structure of the territory was based on village organizations (*obști satești*) a system inherited from the Romans. During the Middle Ages, these village structures consolidated into rural communities (*uniuni de obști*) and later evolved into valley cnezates and voievodates (8th - 10th centuries).²⁵ Archaeological research reveals that, before the 8th century, settlements were similar to contemporary Dacian-Roman settlements in Transylvania, Oltenia and Muntenia. These settlements comprised both surface dwellings and partially sunken dwellings (the *bordei* type). The households exhibited a high degree of complexity and were organized within settlements with relatively rigorous structures. Between the 8th and 10th centuries, the same dwelling typologies continued to appear, often grouped with annexes such as small workshops or other structures linked to household activities. Grouped housing structures were also discovered, and fortified settlements can be identified in relation to the early development of feudal-type relationships. For the first time, the phenomenon of "swarming" settlements is documented, characterized by the detachment of settlements from the mother settlement and the location of the new settlement either along valleys or in the vicinity of the original settlement.²⁶

Profound changes took place during the 10th–11th centuries, as the previous political and administrative structures were coagulated into a voivodship-type organization, under Byzantine and Bulgarian influences. Simultaneously, the Hungarians settled in the Pannonian Plain, expanding and occupying the neighboring territories to the east; evidence of Turkish populations emerges in the 10th–11th centuries. A network of fortifications was created along key invasion routes, some located over former Roman-Byzantine or even Geto-Dacian fortresses or settlements. Following the defeat of King Ahtum at the beginning of the 11th century, political and administrative control was transferred to the Hungarian Kingdom. The Church, in its early form, oriented itself towards Rome.²⁷

During the high Middle Ages, several evolutionary stages can be distinguished. Between the 11th and 13th centuries, the Catholic Church established its presence, a new form of organization through counties was defined, and a military frontier entity, the Banat of Severin, was created between 1218 and 1241. The *cnezates* system was partially replaced by a centralized feudal system, although it continued to coexist as an indigenous form of organization in areas with a majority Romanian population. The Orthodox Church was tolerated, as it represented the religion of the majority. A centralized land system is organized. During this period, several populations settled in the area (Cumans, Pechenegs), while the presence of Ruthenian (Mureș-Tiș area), Slovak (south of Mureș), Catholic Hungarian (parts of Banat and north of Mureș) and Germanic groups is also documented, along with multiple contacts with the Slavic popu-

24 Teodor O. Gheorghiu, *Locuirea tradițională rurală din zona Banat-Crișana. Elemente de istorie și morfologie, protecție și integrare* [Traditional Rural Living in the Banat-Crișana area. Elements of History and Morphology, Protection and Integration] (Timișoara: Eurobit, 2008), 22-23.

25 Hațegan and Savulov, "Banatul Medieval," 188-89.

26 Gheorghiu, *Locuirea tradițională rurală*, 23-24.

27 Ibid., 25; Alexandru Madgearu, "Contribuții privind datarea conflictului dintre ducele bănățean Ahtum și regele Ștefan I al Ungariei" [Contributions regarding the dating of the conflict between Duke Ahtum of Banat and King Stephen I of Hungary] *Banatica* 12, II (1993): 6.

lations along the Danube, especially Serbs and Bulgarians.²⁸ The specificity of the settlements of this period is predominantly that of unfortified structures. In terms of location, settlements either “swarmed” or maintained their previous locations, displaying a certain dynamism in terms of their appearance, evolution, and eventual disappearance. The typology of dwellings is maintained, with either borough or surface dwellings, and the plan configuration is typically oval or relatively rectangular. From an ethnic variability perspective, the material characteristics of the settlements exhibit similarities and uniformity across the territory.²⁹

The late Middle Ages were marked by the gradual occupation of Banat by the Ottoman Empire in the mid-16th century, although looting raids began in the late 14th century. This period was also defined by the Christian offensive supported by the Habsburg Empire in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, which reinstated Christianity. While the initial stages of the Ottoman attacks led to the destruction of some settlements or the displacement of their population, the process of establishing new settlements continued during the occupation.³⁰ In terms of structure and morphology, three distinct models appear in the late medieval period, each associated with different ethnic groups. For the Romanians, the village served as the basic unit, with each young couple breaking away from their parents’ household to build a new house, which could also become the foundation of a new settlement, a phenomenon known as “swarming.” Most of these settlements were scattered, with irregular household organizations. In contrast, Slavic settlements were more compact, with the family forming the core of the settlement, and several generations often living within the same building. German and Hungarian settlements, on the other hand, employed denser organizational structures typical of settler communities, using the Franconian model for structuring agricultural territories as well as the village hearth. All these organizational systems underwent alterations based on mutual influences, both morphologically and constructively.³¹

The colonization and systematization processes initiated by the Habsburg Empire in the 18th century in Banat represent a paradigm shift in settlement morphology, carried out in four distinct stages.³² The first stage (1718-1740) implied the colonization of about 15,000 – 40,000 Catholic settlers, the majority being Swabian (originally from southwest Germany). In terms of spatial organization, this stage involved both the foundation of new settlements and the restructuring of existing ones. Variable systematization tactics were applied, primarily to scattered and irregular settlements. These included the use of geometric patterns to group several settlements into one, regularizing and compacting lots by aligning them along a central axis, or regrouping lots within an irregular structure, especially where terrain conditions required adaptations. When new settlements were founded, their structure followed pre-established geometries, especially rectangular ones, though hybrid typologies were applied. The second phase of systematization (1744-1782) saw the highest influx of colonists, focusing mainly on the reorganization of towns and fortifications, but also extending to the systematization of settlements, within a more efficient process controlled by the state. Several imperial instructions were issued concerning the precise morphology of the settlements, the conditions of land occupation, and specific construction methods of dwellings, all following the Franconian model. The dominant layout for new settlements was a Cartesian rectangular plan, with identically sized lots and households following a predetermined layout. However, this model of systematization within the territory was not uniformly applied across the territory and was only partially implemented. Specific cases for the application of Cartesian layouts are illustrated by perfectly square layouts and even a circular layout (Charlottenburg). The third stage, following the accession of Joseph II to the throne (1782-1787), involved the addition of settlers in newly built settlements located on the border of pre-existing ones. The new dwellings, however, were often precarious due to construction rationalization policies. A final stage of colonization took place until 1823-1828,

28 Gheorghiu, *Locuirea tradițională rurală*, 26-27.

29 Ibid. 27.

30 Ibid., 28-29; Hațegan and Savulov, “Banatul Medieval,” 192-97.

31 Gheorghiu, *Locuirea tradițională rurală*, 29-33.

32 Ibid., 36.

as a combination of state colonization and private colonization, carried out especially in the mountainous area of Banat. The structure of the settlements continued to adopt geometric plans, which became the predominant typologies in plain areas and connection corridors, but structures adapted to the terrain were also adopted in remoter areas (like Gârâna and Ravensca in the Banat Mountains), while at the same time Cartesian structures were applied to a steep terrain (also in the Banat Mountains, Brebu Nou).³³ The Austro-Hungarian colonization process generated a particularly coherent and unitary anthropic and cultural landscape, despite taking place in phases of uneven intensity and over the span of about a century.

By the end of the 19th century, the settlements in Banat could be classified into three categories: those prior to the Austrian systematization, those that resulted from this process, and mixed settlements where different stages and conformation models coexist. Additionally, traditional households built during this period reflect a combination of mediaeval organizational patterns and those imposed by the Austrian administration. This resulted in a compact household typology with housing and annexes either wholly or partially organized around a courtyard. The settlements tend to exhibit a hybrid form, blending earlier morphologies with those introduced by the Austrian systematization, while the dwellings a greater typological influence from the Austrian model of configuration.³⁴

During the second half of the 20th century, following the policies of the Romanian state regarding urban planning, mass housing, collectivization, and industrialization, as well as the excessive control over the building processes, traditional building models were abandoned. The controlled migration from rural to urban settlements, as well as changes in property ownership and ethnic mutations, led to a shift in the attitudes toward the rural landscape as a whole. In the final decades of the 20th century, even the most prosperous rural settlements in Banat would be gradually abandoned by younger generations, while the systematization strategies of the former regime aimed at decommissioning rural settlements, considering them “unfit” and decrepit.³⁵

These aspects of the urban and rural development, adapted variably to the geographic layout of the territory and its architectural and social characteristics, can be best studied through the concept of cultural landscape. This approach brings together and adapts crucial information, such as that outlined above. Without understanding cultural landscape, a local landscape plan – proposed as an integrative tool proposed by the Preliminary Theses of the Heritage Code – lacks value.

In this regard, the following chapter highlights the ways in which experimentation with the territory has been envisioned and implemented to date within the *Cultural Landscapes in Banat* project, whose primary aim is the practical applicability of the cultural landscape concept.

Experimenting Cultural Landscape and Heritage

In Romania, there are currently smaller-scale projects or studies that have addressed tangentially the subject of cultural landscape, such as the Architecture Guides for fitting into the local specifics of rural areas (issued by the Order of Architects of Romania). However, their direct impact is not easily identifiable. Such resources are used as bibliographic and practical references in faculties of architecture and urbanism, regional commissions for historical monuments, but their impact on the general public is difficult to estimate.

There are also valuable bibliographic resources, some of which have been mentioned above, that, like legislation, sequentially address various domains related to landscapes. These include works on the natural and geographic framework, ethnography, urban and architectural characteristics, among others. Such resources offer in-depth insights into specific aspects of the

33 Ibid., 33-36.; Swantje Volkmann, “Die Architektur des 18. Jahrhunderts im Temescher Banat” (PhD diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2001).

34 Gheorghiu, *Locuirea tradițională rurală*, 37-38.

35 Ibid., 38-39.

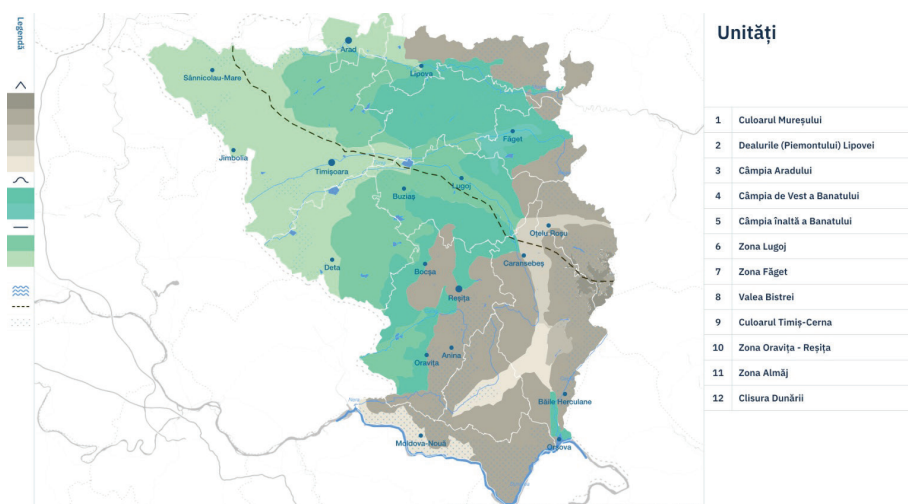


Fig.3: Map of landscape units and subunits, generated in the first sub-phase of the project (Cultural Landscapes in Banat: Identification, 2020 - 2021) and final designed in the second phase of the project (Online Platform with Database - Cultural Landscapes in Banat, 2021)

landscape, providing valuable knowledge for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike.³⁶ While these excellent initiatives have been theoretical and accumulative – resulting in the formation of databases – sometimes their reach has remained private in nature.

Based on the context outlined above, which includes geographic characteristics, urban and rural development, and architectural features, the Cultural Landscapes in Banat: Identification project was initiated in 2020 within the framework of the Association for Active Heritage (PACT). Initially conceived as an experimental project, it employed an interdisciplinary approach to cultural landscapes and brought together a multidisciplinary team. The project aimed to be both experimental and practically implement the concept of cultural landscape, which was further broken down into landscape units and subunits. To achieve this, the project unfolded in three main stages:

The first phase, *Identification*, focused on developing the methodology for inventorying and identifying cultural landscapes; only the visible, material component of the territory was studied (built environment, natural environment, anthropogenic environment, networks, all major elements that are shaping the landscape); an initial map was created showing the distribution of cultural landscapes in Banat (units and subunits).

The second phase, *Identity*, investigated the territory from the perspective of its intangible values – lifestyle, traditions, and customs – by involving sociological, anthropological, and ethnographic components. This would complement the first phase and facilitate the transfer of the gathered information to communities and local administrations.

Finally, the third phase, *Implementation*, was dedicated to the transfer of information and tools to communities living within and in the vicinity of a cultural landscape; it involved direct discussions with the local communities, administrators and specialists.

Phase 1 has been partially implemented and aimed to: inventory the material components, establish the scale of landscapes, the permeable limits and overlaps, analyze geographical and natural

³⁶ Gheorghiu, *Locuirea tradițională rurală*; Valer Butura, *Etnografia poporului român. Cultura materială*. [The Ethnography of the Romanian People: Material Culture] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1978); Nicolae Săcară, *Valori ale arhitecturii populare românești* [Values of Romanian Folk Architecture] (Timișoara: Editura Facla, 1987) etc.



Fig. 4: First Pit Anina, Database project Cultural Landscapes in Banat, 2023

characteristics, examine the development of settlements, architectural features, and produce a preliminary map of landscape units. These initiatives unfolded over a period of three years and were divided into three sub-phases of the project: I. Cultural Landscapes in Banat: Identification (2020 - 2021),³⁷ II. Online Platform with Database - Cultural Landscapes in Banat (2021),³⁸ III. Cultural Landscapes in Banat. Case Study: Anina and Țara Almăjului (2021 - 2023).³⁹

Each subphase of the project had its own objectives aimed at completing Phase I, but the process was largely organic and experimental, adapting to the field conditions and evolving during a period marked by the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Phase I proposed a thematic and interdisciplinary approach to cultural landscapes, a concept not yet undertaken at the national level in Romania, with the potential for broader application across the country. The main objective was to create a new working tool — one that could bring together a holistic form of protection of cultural landscapes. As mentioned in the introduction, while there are generally numerous types of specific protection, no existing tool overlaps them or facilitates communication between them, often leading to conflicts. To address this, a land analysis methodology was developed, incorporating geographical, functional, hydrographic, accessibility, urbanistic, and architectural characteristics. By filtering and overlaying these factors with climatic and ethnographic data, an initial map of 12 landscape units was generated: 1. Mureș River Basin, 2. Lipovei (Piedmont) Hills, 3. Arad Plain, 4. Western Banat Plain, 5. High Plain of Banat, 6. Lugoj Area, 7. Făget Area, 8. Bistra Valley, 9. Timiș - Cerna Corridor, 10. Oravița - Reșița Area, 11. Almăj Area, 12. Danube Gorge) and approximately 63 subunits. (Fig. 3)

37 Initiator and coordinator: arch. G. Domokos-Pășcu; Project assistants: arch. T.O. Gheorghiu, arch. A. Todirică, arch. M. Danciu; Project team: geographer A-N. Ianăș, arch. D. Belci, arch. O. Micșa, land. arch. R. Rusu, land. arch. A. Ciobotă.

38 Initiator and coordinator: arch. G. Domokos-Pășcu; Project assistant: arch. A. Todirică; Project team: geographer A-N. Ianăș, arch. T.O. Gheorghiu, designer A. Iliescu.

39 Initiator and coordinator: arch. G. Domokos-Pășcu; Project assistant: arch. A. Todirică, geographer A-N. Ianăș; Project team: arch. M. Bâldea, arch. O. Micșa, heritage pres. M. Moldovan, R. Todirică, arch. A. Domokos, arch. T.O. Gheorghiu. For the last two project phases, the design and IT components were carried out by A. Iliescu, A. Drăcea, C. Bleotu.



Fig. 5: Borlovenii Noi, Almaj Valley, 2008

It is unfortunate that the objectives have only been partially achieved so far, with the map generated but without the proposal for a holistic protection system. Such an endeavor requires more time and a smaller geographic focus than the entire Romanian Banat region. This realization underscores the complexity and scale of the project, highlighting the need for additional resources, time, and possibly a more focused approach to achieve the desired outcomes.

This sub-stage led to the generation of Phase III, which focuses on two more restricted territories within Unit 10 (Oravița - Reșița Area) and Unit 11 (Almăj Area), important to individualize concerning to the urban and historical evolution of Banat as a whole (a more detailed presentation being provided in the previous chapter). The aim was to achieve a much more detailed understanding of the territory, to validate and supplement the initial methodology developed, and to engage more closely with the territory and communities by exposing the project team for a longer period.

The two areas were selected due to their very specific characteristics. The Anina area is nationally recognized for its qualities of both mining industrial landscape and natural environment, which together form a complete industrial system (mining shafts, galleries, workers' colonies, buildings related to the industrial process). (Fig. 4) This demonstrates how a natural territory has been transformed throughout history due to the resources of the subsoil and soil, evolving into a hybrid character.

The Almăj Country (Fig. 5) is a purely rural regional system, a territorial entity that has maintained its identity for centuries, centered around a mental polarization nucleus with Bozovici at its core. Several aspects have contributed to defining its past and present uniqueness: the region's isolation, which has influenced the community's individuality through mentality and material values (traditional rural houses and households, architectural and folk technical monuments, traditional economic activities, etc.), as well as spiritual values (traditions, customs, etc.). Due to these characteristics, the terms of territory exploration, the approach was different, slower and with a much more detailed photographic inventory of the areas.

Phase II documented the two stages and aimed to develop an online database platform,⁴⁰ considered essential for transmitting the data obtained during the research. This platform currently represents a condensed version of its intended scope for the coming years. It includes the map of landscape units and subunits, brief descriptions of the indicators outlining their characteristics, subdivision into subunits, and representative photographs for each. However, to date, it contains only a moderate amount of information compared to what has been collected from the field.

Based on this research, it was possible to identify the dominant typologies of cultural landscapes found in the Romanian Banat area. This stands as an important outcome of the research, reflecting the interaction between humans and the natural-geographical framework, which has shaped urban or rural structures with distinctive characteristics.

40 "Cultural Landscapes in Banat," Asociația pentru Patrimoniul Activ, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://peisaje-culturale.ro/en/>.



Common Typologies of Cultural Landscape in Banat

The generation of cultural landscapes is inherently linked to human presence, which entails the development of diverse settlements determined by geographical characteristics and historical stages. As demonstrated in the first two chapters of this work, the Romanian Banat is a dynamically changing territory marked by a rich variety of settlement systems.

As noted in the first chapter, the Lowland Banat area (West) has historically been more favorable for human settlements and agricultural development, whereas in the southern and eastern mountainous Banat area (south and east), with their higher altitudes and rugged terrain have favored the development of sparser and more organically developed settlements. Exceptions to this pattern can be found in the settlements that underwent colonization throughout history, as highlighted in the second chapter, largely due to the area's available resources, both underground and aboveground.

In this context, based on the literature review and field study, four types of cultural landscapes have been identified, layered over the current territorial structure: 1. urban landscape, 2. vernacular and rural landscape, 3. industrial landscape, and 4. designed landscape. Their presence and development of these landscapes reflect centuries of evolution and an interdependent relationship between humans and their environment.

The urban cultural landscape is characterized by higher density, increased participation in its definition of the built environment, a numerous and very dynamic population, and an infrastructure that enhances urban life and economic activities.⁴¹ Medium to large-sized urban centers are common throughout the Banat region, shaped over the course of their historical evolution by the various stages of administration they have undergone. Typically situated in plains or valleys, these centers have led to the formation of very specific landscapes, highlighting layers of urban development, architectural characteristics, dominant functions, political relationships, and interactions with the natural environment. Examples of these types of landscapes include Timișoara, Arad, Lugoj, Caransebeș, etc., each of which requires a detailed study in terms of cultural landscape to generate a Local Landscape Plan (according to the Preliminary Landscape Theses).

The vernacular / rural cultural landscape is dominant in Romania and covers a large proportion of the human settlements within the Banat region. Unlike the urban landscape, which is often determined by the presence of a single settlement, this typology can gather multiple settlements and is developed based on common features. This type of landscapes better reflects the direct relationship between humans and the environment through lifestyle, household organization, building materials, activities, ethnographic and linguistic characteristics. These rural landscapes exhibit a cohesive blend of traditional architectural styles, agricultural practices, community organization, and cultural traditions. Specifically, vernacular architecture and the organization of villages in Banat is the result of ethnic diversity, and a consequence of the colonization of the

41 Ibid.

region under the Habsburg Empire. German houses, which are predominantly typical of hilly and lowland areas, are built of brick, with high roofs and courtyards organized in the shape of an L; Serbian and Croatian houses in Southern Banat have compact structures, large courtyards and rich gardens, while Romanian houses have rectangular floor plans and are specific to hilly and mountainous areas.⁴² Under the Habsburg influence, many villages were reorganized according to rigorous, geometrized grid plans. Therefore, the general characteristic of Banat villages is their agricultural function and linear structure, with houses symmetrically arranged along a main street and closed households, reflecting the protection of family life and subsistence farming. Examples of these kinds of cultural landscapes can be seen through Almăjului Valley, Timiș Valley or part of the Mureș River corridor.

The industrial cultural landscape is a distinct case, characterized by its dynamic and rapid evolution. This type of landscape has been shaped by the industrial activity developed by the communities within the territory. An industrial landscape extends beyond the boundaries of a single site to include mining or processing locations, worker colonies, related functions, artefacts, and infrastructure facilities. Numerous examples of such settlements and cultural landscapes exist in the Banat region, both in the mountainous and plain areas, with industry being one of the major generators of landscape in the territory throughout the decades. This is also reflected by the list of historical monuments in Romania, where the largest proportion of classified industrial-specific monuments are in Caraș-Severin County. Maybe the most significant examples are: Reșița, Anina, Orșova, Moldova Nouă, Bocșa.

The designed cultural landscape refers to landscapes that are intentionally planned or crafted by professionals, such as architects, landscape architects, master gardeners, or horticulturists, following specific design principles. It can also include amateur gardeners following recognized styles or traditions. These landscapes may be linked to historical events, activities, or individuals. The historical evolution of Banat and the various forms of governance it has undergone have left behind visible reference points, axes, or silhouettes closely related to the administrative and political organization of the territory. Some of the most significant examples are the manors, castles and the parks that once surrounded them: Banloc Manor (Banloc), Jimbolia Castle, Csekonics Palace (Jimbolia) etc.

By identifying the four dominant landscape typologies, it becomes evident that the rural landscape serves as the foundational typology, with urban, industrial, or designed landscapes grafted onto it. Some of these landscapes display unique characteristics at the national level.

Conclusions

This article aims to provide an example of how an extensive territory can be understood and experienced through research and fieldwork. The term “cultural landscape” is not easily defined or applied, as “... it is often used as a catch-all concept, justifying arguments and theories that no longer fully hold.”⁴³ To avoid such ambiguity, the article proposes a two-phases approach: a broad exploration at the scale of the entire Banat region, generating both the map and the methodology, followed by a more focused investigation at the smaller scale of landscape units or subunits for a more applied study. This approach enables an understanding of the two main components: the objective, physical aspect (geographic substrate, hydrographic characteristics, urban-architectural developments, etc.) and the subjective aspect (metaphorical construction)⁴⁴ determined by the interpretation of the territory by the internal community and the external observers.

42 Walther Konschitzky, *Arhitectura populară din Banat* [Popular Architecture in Banat] (Timișoara: Fundația Interart TRIADE, 2006).

43 Angelica Stan, *Devenirea peisajului* [The Transfiguration of Landscape] (Bucharest: Editura Universitară “Ion Mincu,” 2012), 7.

44 Stan, *Devenirea peisajului*, 21.

Bibliographic research, summarized in the first two chapters of the article, preceded the two stages of exploring the territory. Without this research, the exploration would have been significantly more challenging. At the same time, the multidisciplinary of the project team and previous interactions with the context were important in the initial phase and continue to be important.

Based on these research methods and approach, a preliminary map of landscape units and subunits of Banat was created, drawing on the physical-geographical factors outlined in the first chapter and the historical evolution of the region. They have been the basis for the delimitation of landscapes and the delineation of the geodemographic and habitat features, important aspects in the analysis of cultural landscapes. As noted, "A landscape extends in any direction until the recurring cluster of ecosystems or site types significantly changes."⁴⁵ For instance, in mountainous regions, landscape mosaics are typically smaller, whereas in the lowland areas, where natural geomorphic and disturbance processes predominate in flatter terrain, landscapes boundaries tend to be more distinct. However, in regions where human activities and land uses are less dependent on natural resources distribution, these boundaries are often less clear.⁴⁶ Familiar examples are the boundary between suburban areas and forests, agricultural zones, or dry land. In some areas, houses and residential developments are primarily shaped by economic, social and political criteria, with minimal consideration of natural boundaries.

Another important outcome was the creation of a database which, due to the high observed dynamics in the territory, is and promises to be an important source of documentation. The need for a national level protection system for cultural landscapes must be further emphasized through the publication of an inventory methodology and the inclusion of a dedicated sector for cultural landscapes in the list of historical monuments. Without the implementation of such a system, addressing only isolated buildings or sites results in incomplete and decontextualized information.

To summarize, the research conducted through the project thus far represents only a small part of what the full applicability of the term *cultural landscape* entails. Therefore, in the coming periods, the research will continue through field expeditions aimed at to further identifying cultural landscapes more clearly and adding more layers of investigation. Additionally, in the medium and long term, there are plans to expand this project to encompass the historic Banat region or even extend it to the national level.

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