

**RURAL MORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURES WITHIN THE  
BĂILEȘTI PLAIN**  
**MORFOSTRUCTURI RURALE ÎN CÂMPIA BĂILEȘTIULUI**

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**Abstract:** The rural settlements within the Băilești Plain highlights in the geographical landscape by specific features which give its individuality. The characteristics of its natural background (the high rate of the smooth surfaces, low relief intensity, biological-pedological-climatic conditions etc.), social-historical conditions and human-induced activities gave the villages certain morphological-structural features, which harmonize with the general features of rural settlements within plains. The morphological structure of the villages within the analyzed area is *gathered*, with households concentrated within the well outlined and clearly delimited boundaries of the heartlands from the economic territory (the estate). We can emphasize the following subtypes: agglomerated, concentrated or compact villages. From the point of view of the physiognomy of the heartland, the villages possess a regular-polygonal form (44.6%), an irregular-polygonal one (41.4%) and an elongated-polygonal form (14.2%). Concerning the disposing of the street network, the villages with regular, irregular and mixed texture are characteristic for plainlands.

**Key words:** village, morphological structure, texture, geographical landscape, the Băilești Plain  
**Cuvinte cheie:** sat, structură morfologică, textură, peisaj geografic, Câmpia Băileștiului

Lying in the South-Western part of Romania, on the left bank of the Danube and at the border with Bulgaria, the geographical region we approach ranges among the distinct physical-geographical subunits within the Oltenia Plain, a component part, in its turn, of the great geographical unit represented by the Romanian Plain (Fig. 1).

Being a characteristic region within the entire Oltenia Plain and even the Romanian Plain, the Băilești Plain constitutes a landform created exclusively by the Danube. The predominant morphological character is represented in this area by the fluvial terraces and the meadow, to which the specific relief of dunes is added. Ninety percent of the relief within this sector of the plain is represented by widespread tops of terraces, having different altitudes and by the meadows of main rivers that are traversing it. The relief characteristics represented by loess deposits, dunes, deepened meanders of the Danube, the change of waterways' initial direction are elements which round the relief of this unit.

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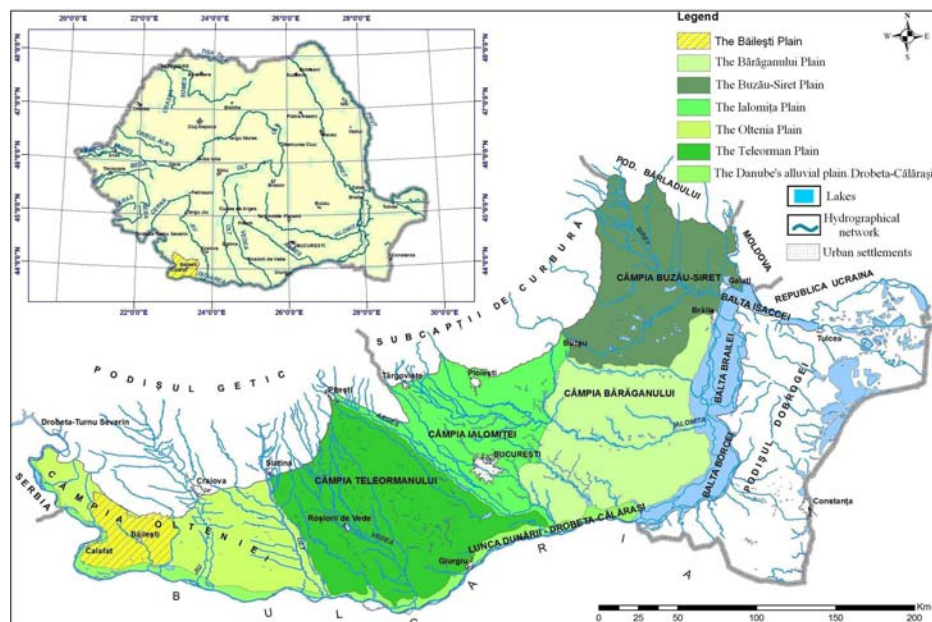


Fig.1: The geographical position of the Băilești Plain within the Romanian Plain

From ancient times, the geographical position and varied geographical environment gave the Băilești Plain a great economical attractiveness and diversity of the natural background favoured its early human capitalization and the development of a complex economy. Although each component of the geosystem offered extensive spaces favourable for living and an easier agricultural use for the human factor, there have always been natural constraints whose frequency and intensity augmented during modern times. In this respect, it is important to mention the incidence of climatic risk phenomena: the alternation of flood and drought, the contrast between excessive moisture of the lower parts with the drought from the higher parts of the plain etc. Human impact itself has diminished the natural potential of the plain along the centuries by extending the agricultural lands hence disfavoured natural vegetation or irrational use of the land. The valleys constituted genuine human couloirs of intense communication between mountains and plains, but also spaces affected by human impact.

There are there are 2 urban settlements and 56 rural settlements within the Băilești Plain (not taking into account the villages administratively included within the urban settlements), having various demographic and territorial size, which vary from less than 500 inhabitants and some households (Brândușa, Cetățuia, Mărăcinele) to more than 5,000 inhabitants and a great number of households (Cetate, Moțăței) or up to 10,000 inhabitants (Poiana Mare). In the course of time, new settlements have been founded and there have been mutations of some heartlands, but there were also disappearances of settlements, either because of natural or historical causes (floods, wars, robberies) or administrative ones (being included within other larger regions).

As main components of the geographical landscape, the rural settlements within the analyzed area outline by their considerable number and density, relatively homogenous repartition within the territory and various morphological structure. In the forms they possess in the present, they are the result of the reciprocal interaction of a multitude of factors (geographical, historical, social-economic, political-administrative ones), in different levels of organisation.

From earliest times, the complex and unitary character of the studied region represented a favourable background for settlements, communication routes and economic activities. More specifically, the natural background represented the main element (a support basis) for the geographical position of settlements. The alternance of interfluves and larger or narrower valleys, marked by multiple communication possibilities, favoured the establishment and continuity of some productive human activities. In their continuous struggle to conquer and populate the geographical space, people have chosen only those natural areas that were favourable for their settlements or activities. Generally, valleys or areas of direct contact were preferred, where interaction between the physical-geographical and the social-historical factors created propitious conditions for living. Valleys represented undeniable support areas for the localization and evolution of settlements, as mentioned by I. Băcănaru: „Valleys represent even today, just as in the past, the domain of territorial expansion and economic asset for most part of the rural settlements” (I. Băcănaru, 1971).

In the initial settlement of heartlands, but also in their subsequent evolution, the definite climatic conditions of that specific place and time had an important role, considered by N. A. Popp (1928) among the factors that definitely determine the character of settlements and influence the mental and physical vitality of inhabitants, with implications on the character of their occupation. There has been a continuous preoccupation of people to choose spaces less exposed to natural risks, that would insure protection against winds and floods. Moreover, climatic conditions influenced the way and technique of building houses, through the nature of the construction materials, the form and functionality of the rooms, the form of the roof etc. In this respect, a significant example is represented by the mudhut – a type of house which is half or entirely excavated into the ground – specific to the Danubian Plain until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considered as an adaptation to the pedological-climatic conditions of the steppe (insuring refuge and protection against frosts or powerful winds during winter or sultry temperatures during summer).

Still, the morphology of rural settlements is not only the result of people's adapting to geographical environment conditions, but also the proof of environment's conquering and transformation by human activities, in order to fulfil current basic needs. So, we can say that human settlements evolved in connection with the type of economy, being the spatial projection of the way people turned to account soil and subsoil resources.

The historical and social influences are not less important. In this respect, Gheorghe Iordache considers that the spatial configuration of the settlements had

an important role in the evolution of the community, but also in its organization pattern, type of property and social structure (Gh. Iordache, 1974). Hence, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the extensive economy based on breeding favoured the settlement and spread of dispersed villages within plainlands, where dependent communities predominated and the main occupation was breeding. As historical documents referring to Dolj county confirm, "the spatial spread of the villages' inhabitants reached such an extent, that not even ten rooms were gathered in one compact place within the amount of one hundred houses of a village, but they were spread in valleys and hills, depending on the circumstances" (I. Corfus, 1969). The cartographic documents are also very important and especially Specht's map (1791), where permanent settlements are rendered in their spatial configuration so that we can easily establish their form, structure and texture, proving the spread of hilly scattered villages.

It was only after the Organic Regulations, that the passing towards a predominantly agricultural economy based on cereals had some implications on the subsequent evolution of settlements' type. The corvees' settlements and especially the ones within plainlands, suffered a gathering and alignment of the houses to a fixed line in order to enhance the feudal reserves; this would contribute to the passing of scattered settlements to more arranged ones, most of the times disposed along communication ways. Both the natural increase of the population, but especially the migratory one contributed to this phenomenon, particularly that of a population descending from the mountains towards the plainlands or that of Bulgarian colonists coming from the Southern banks of the Danube.

Rural settlements, considered by M. Cădea to be those forms of living spaces that „synthesize the fundamental traits of geographical landscape” (M. Cădea and co., 2006) outline within the Băilești Plain by traits that give them originality and specificity. The natural background (the predominance of plainlands, the harmonious combination between erosional and accumulative forms, the low relief intensity, the pedological-biological conditions), the historical-social characteristics and human-induced activities gave certain morphological-structural characteristics to villages, being part of the general traits of rural settlements within plainlands (Fig. 2). The geographical environment has played an important role not only in the geographical position and evolution of human settlements, but also in the general development of society, because, as Dragoș Bugă says, "the history of nature and society have always been and will be closely connected to each other" (Dragoș Bugă, 2005).

While the physico-geographical background had an important role in conditioning the localization of villages' heartlands, instead, people, by their activities, constituted a decisive factor regarding their structure and texture. The natural background continued to have its importance, but, on the impact of technology, it suffered a ceaseless transformation that made it a modified element.

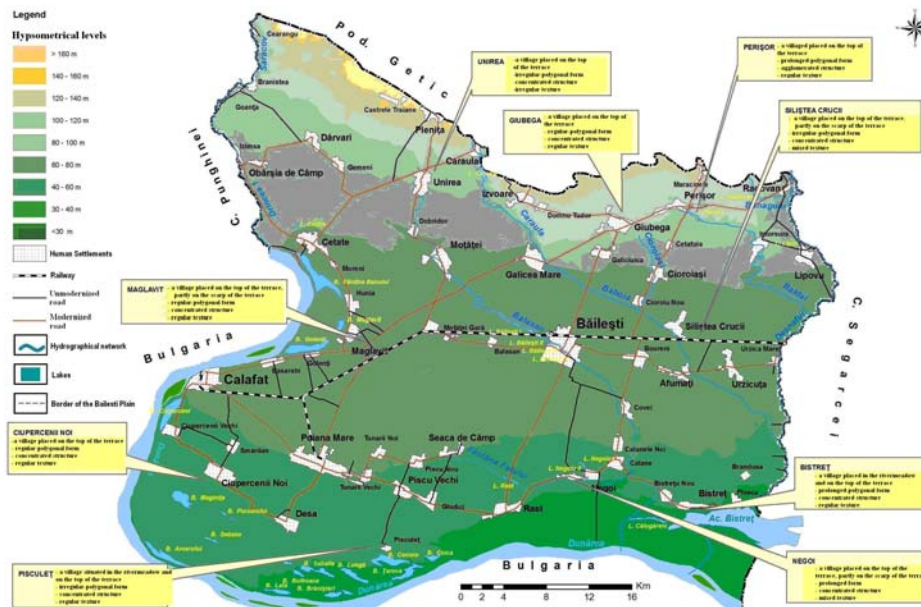


Fig. 2 The Băilești Plain – Rural morphological structures

*The structure and placement of households within the heartland* reflect the interaction of many factors: the geomorphological characteristics (altitudes below 200 metres, low relief intensity), land use and the impact of administrative measures (colonization, systematization, allotment). The morphological structure of the villages within the Băilești Plain is *gathered*, with households concentrated within the limits of heartlands and clearly differentiated from the economic territory (the estate). Just as in the cases of scattered and dispersed villages, this type of settlement represents a typically, naturally formed Romanian village, among which there can be established a sequence of form and structure (Gh. Iordache, 1974).

The tendency of grouped households, agglomerating in the heartland is typical for settlements within plainlands, with intensive agricultural economy and low relief intensity, but also, for the lowest parts of depressions within mountainous, piedmont or hilly areas. The phenomenon of households agglomerating in the heartland is the result of complex historical, economic, social and demographical factors (the concentration of population as the result of natural increase of the population) which is doubled by other natural factors, especially the capitalization of water resources along valleys. The latter aspect is outlined by V. Cucu in a Romania's human and economic geographical study, as it follows: "an easier water supply system along the valleys with large river meadows from steppe lands...led to the concentration of individual households on valleys and the extension of estate borders on many kilometres, from the heartlands towards the interior parts of the plain" (V. Cucu, 1998).

In the Băilești Plain, the gathering of households within heartlands produced either spontaneously or as a cause of needing to save agricultural space, but also in a planned manner, by populating the drained areas or the landlords' and monasteries' properties. The great property (landlord, manorial, monastery) existent in our country in the past owned several villages (dependent villages). This imposed the clear delimitation of agricultural lands from the heartland of the village.

The gathered type settlements have always had a well defined centre of the heartland, an often regular texture of the streets, most of the times a geometrical or mixed texture, often lacking interior vegetation, with a relatively large number of inhabitants and often, a cereal profile or a cereal-zootechnical one. Many subtypes can be outlined within this category:

- *Agglomerated villages*, with households delimited by large yards; there are also spaces destined to cultures or tree plantations in their heartlands. The heartland presents a regular texture of the street (ordered), linear or bilinear, with households on one side and the other of the road, irregular and in some cases a mixed one. As a demographical proportion, most villages have a population under 1,000 inhabitants (Lipovu). The place in this category is due to a more fragmented relief, specific for the Northern part of the plain. This type of structure is typical for 11 settlements (19.6% of the total) – fig. 3, fig. 4: Brândușa, Cetățuia, Cioroiu Nou, Goanța, Întorsura, Lipovu, Radovan, Mărăcinele, Moțăței-Gară, Smârdan, Perișor.

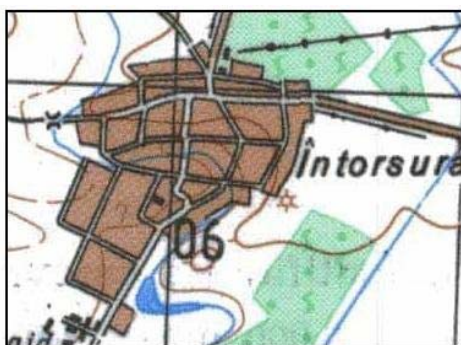


Fig. 3 Întorsura, agglomerated village, regular-polygonal form, mixed texture



Fig. 4 Radovan– agglomerated village, regular-polygonal form, mixed texture

- *Concentrated villages*, with houses separated by narrow yards and a strictly delimited street network. Households have a very clear border, with a predominantly regular street network. As a demographical proportion, it is very heterogeneous, from villages under 500 inhabitants to big villages, having a population between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants. Thirty-four settlements (60.7%) present a concentrated structure: Afumați, Bistreț, Braniștea, Caraula, Catane, Cioroiași, Ciupercenii Noi, Cearângu, Covei, Dârvari, Dobridor, Galicea Mare, Gemeni, Ghidici, Giubega, Hunia, Izimșa, Izvoare, Maglavit, Moreni, Moțăței,

Negoi, Piscu Nou, Piscu Vechi, Pisculeț, Seaca de Câmp, Siliștea Crucii, Tunarii Vechi, Unirea, Urzica Mare, Urzicuța, Desa, Rast, Plosca.

• *Compact villages*, with a great agglomeration of households within a large heartland. Generally, these villages are made up of many parallel lines, on which, usually narrow households are perpendicular. Yards are clearly aligned and symmetrical. The street texture is ordered and, sometimes, mixed. As a demographical proportion, this group is also heterogeneous, from villages under 500 inhabitants to villages over 10,000 inhabitants. 11 villages belong to this type of structure (19.6%) – fig. 5, fig. 6: Bistrețu Nou, Boureni, Castele Traiane, Catanele Noi, Cetate, Domnu Tudor, Galiciuica, Obârșia de Câmp, Plenița, Poiana Mare, Tunarii Noi.



Fig. 5: Dârvari – concentrated village, regular-polygonal form, mixed texture

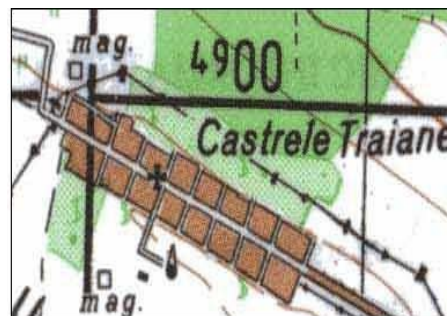


Fig. 6: Castele Traiane – compact village, regular-polygonal form, regular texture

***The household physiognomy.*** The household, one of the three components of settlements, represents the area in which households of the population are concentrated. Its form can have different aspects depending on the connections or the effects of the bounds between natural factors (especially the morphology of the territory) and the social-economic ones (the existence of a circulation way, the planned settlements or administrative measures followed in order to organize and plan the territory etc.) in different periods of their existence.

Given the circumstances, there can be identified several types of settlements within the studied area:

- *villages with regular-polygonal form* (rectangular, square, triangular) are rather common (25 villages): Bistrețu Nou, Boureni, Brândușa, Castele Traiane, Catanele Noi, Cearângu, Cetățuia, Cioroiși, Cioroiu Nou, Ciupercenii Noi, Desa, Domnul Tudor, Galiciuica, Giubega, Întorsura, Maglavit, Moțăței, Moțăței-Gară, Piscu Nou, Poiana Mare, Radovan, Rast, Smârdan, Tunarii Noi, Tunarii Vechi. Most of the settlements are placed on the top of the terraces and in some cases, partially on the scarp of the terraces.

- *villages with irregular-polygonal form* represent 41.1% of the settlements (23 villages): Braniștea, Caraula, Catane, Covei, Dârvari, Dobridor, Gemeni, Ghidici, Goanța, Izimșa, Izvoare, Lipovu, Mărăcinele, Moreni, Obârșia de Câmp, Piscu Vechi, Pisculeț, Plenița, Plosca, Seaca de Câmp, Siliștea Crucii, Unirea,

Urzica Mare. The villages are either older settlements which developed without a specific planning in the course of time (eg. Plenița), or settlements placed within more fragmented relief conditions (eg. Unirea), or settlements whose sides are marked by main or secondary waterways (eg. Braniștea, Gemeni, Izimșa), by important communication routes (Catane, Ghidici, Piscu Vechi). The villages are mostly placed on the scarp and top of the terraces or at the contact with the Getic Piedmont.

- 8 villages have a *prolonged polygonal form* (14.2% of the overall settlements). This type of villages have developed either along valleys, at the contact with superior terraces and the plain, or along communication routes, sometimes having rectangular forms. We can distinguish the following subtypes: *villages with unilinear development*, situated along rivers or main roads (Afumați, Perișor); *villages with plurilinear development*, developed along 2 or 3 very prolonged parallel streets, intersected by other secondary streets (Bistreț, Cetate, Hunia, Negoii); *villages with tentacle development* where households are disposed along the main penetration roads (Galicea Mare, Urzicuța).

Regarding the form of the heartland, we can observe that plain land villages generally have a *regular-polygonal form* (44.6%) and *irregular-polygonal* (41.1%), together with *prolonged polygonal villages* (with monilinear and plurilinear subtypes) in a lower percentage (14.2%).

**The texture of the street network.** The street network disposing way is an analysis criterion that completes the previously presented ones. The configuration of the terrain, the age of the settlement and the social-economic circumstances, but also the reorganizing measures of the territory influenced the grouping way of households and the organizing way of street textures. Given the circumstances and taking into consideration the disposition of street texture, villages are grouped as it follows:

- *villages with regular texture*, where the street network is geometrically disposed. Half of the settlements within the plain are part of this category (28 villages): Afumați, Bistreț, Bistrețu Nou, Brândușa, Castrele Traiane, Catanele Noi, Cetate, Cetățuia, Cioroiu Nou, Ciupercenii Noi, Desa, Domnul Tudor, Galiciuica, Giubega, Hunia, Maglavit, Moțăței, Moțăței-Gară, Perișor, Pisculeț, Piscu Nou, Piscu Vechi, Poiana Mare, Rast, Smârdan, Tunarii Noi, Tunarii Vechi, Urzica Mare;

- *villages with irregular texture*, in which the street network is disposed at random, having no planning. 12 villages are part of this category (21.4%): Braniștea, Covei, Dobridor, Gemeni, Ghidici, Goanța, Izvoare, Lipovu, Moreni, Plenița, Plosca, Unirea;

- *villages with mixed texture*, in which, besides an irregular texture, specific to the old nucleus of the settlement, there also appears a regular texture in the newest parts of the village, usually corresponding to the peripheric ones. This type of texture is characteristic for 16 settlements (28.5%): Boureni, Caraula, Catane, Cearângu, Cioroiși, Dârvari, Galicea Mare, Izimșa, Întorsura, Mărcinele, Negoii, Obârșia de Câmp, Radovan, Seaca de Câmp, Siliștea Crucii, Urzicuța.



## Conclusions

The diversity and favourability of the natural background within the studied geographical region have represented key elements for its early human valorification. Rural settlements, present here from Neolithic times, outline within the geographical landscape of the plain by their amount, varied morphological structure and unitary territorial distribution. Taking into consideration their morphological-structural characteristics, the villages in this region range among the general treats of plainland rural settlements: gathered structure, regular-polygonal or irregular form, predominantly regular texture.

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