

OIKONYMS IN THE CURVATURE CARPATHIAN RURAL AREA. POPULATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES. ARGUMENTATION

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Abstract. The Curvature Carpathians represent an important historical and geographical area, continuously populated since times immemorial. Humanisation of the area has been an ongoing process, as proven also by the horizontal and vertical expansion of settlements. The region has a remarkable demographic potential, its 840,000 inhabitants being disseminated in 271 villages grouped by 90 communes, as well as in 19 cities and towns. This mountainous zone is dominated by the village, a permanent settlement both in terms of number, distribution in the territory and economic activities (mainly agro-pastoral). Arguments in this respect are sustained by the wealth of settlements and the linguistic origin of most words. Inside the Curvature Carpathian area, toponymy stands proof, alongside other ancient Dacian and Daco-Roman names, also of many Slavic-rooted ones. The fact that few place-names are of Hungarian origin suggests the continuous habitation by Romanians of the area's settlements, even after the Szechlers had arrived. Oikonyms reflect the local relief, waters, vegetal cover, as well as the community's social and historical life.

1. THE CURVATURE CARPATHIANS – A REGION INTENSELY INHABITED SINCE ANCIENT TIMES

The name of any region is kind of a “spiritual cover” of both man's relation with nature and his social and economic activities. Of higher altitude than other landforms, the Romanian Carpathians, although apparently less populated than the other geographical regions (tablelands and lowlands), are dotted with numerous permanent and temporary settlements. A fragmented relief (valleys, corridors and depressions) and a variety of natural conditions have allowed the settlement of people from oldest times. The ancient writer Florus (A.D. 2nd cent.) used to write that “Daci montibus inhaerant” – The Dacians are stuck in the mountains.

Archaeological researches have shown that the oldest elements of human habitat in the Curvature Carpathians date back to the Palaeolithic Times and the Neolithic-Musterian period of transition (Fig. 1).

A defining trait of the Romanian people, transmitted from one generation to the next, both by word-stock and culture (material and spiritual) is the close link with his birth-place, that is with the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space.

The Carpathians have played a huge role in the history and life of the Romanian people. The mountains were a secure place of defence in times of adversity and, most importantly, a vital source of water, wood, animals, salt and metal (also gold).

The Curvature Carpathians cover over 10,000 km² (*Geografia României, III, Carpații Românești și Depresiunea Transilvaniei*, 1987, p. 173) and are heavily populated (about 840,000 inhab. in 2011, average density 78 inhab. / km²); there are 271 villages, grouped by 90 communes, and 19 urban centres (cities and towns) (Fig. 2); 59% of the population live in town, 41% in the countryside. The

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¹ **Oikonyms** designate **human settlements**: from simple forms of habitat (shelters, tourist chalets, forestry and hunting huts, stables, etc. ~ provided they have proper names) to villages, towns, cities, urban agglomerations, conurbations, megapolises, bodies, hamlets, as well as the names of settlements that no longer exist.

spatial-temporal analysis of the national population structure shows that the Romanian ethnical bloc has been in the majority all along the time; according to people's declarations of ethnicity (made by ca. 800,000 persons) 74.5% are Romanians, 22.3% Hungarians, 12.8% Gypsies, 0.4% other nationals (2011).

In the Curvature Carpathians, the village is the dominant form of **permanent settlement**, both in regard of number, territorial distribution and economic impact in the mountain zone. The village is the expression of the Romanian population's sedentary life. It is a historical and ethnographic reality of the Romanian landscape, like "... the link of a chair that comes from the past ..."

(Conea, 1939, p. 54). Humanisation of the region was a progressive process, as revealed by the horizontal and vertical expansion of settlements; the number and territorial distribution of settlers would steadily grow in the 8th – 18th centuries. New villages kept emerging and characteristic feudal social-political formations would come into being.

From the 17th-to-mid – 20th cc, the settlement network of the Curvature Carpathians underwent two main stages of evolution, connected with the development economic activities, namely, the expansion of agricultural lands and the beginning of subsoil exploitations (salt, coal, oil, etc.).

The stage of rural expansion (17th – 18th cc) relates to the agro-pastoral activity, the region's main economic sector. According to historical documents it was pastoral swarming and transhumance that contributed to the emergence of new villages in the Curvature area. Some shepherds from over the mountains (Covasna and Bârsa Land), who had crossed the region along the old transhumance routes, would settle down in the already existing settlements, or would found new villages or hamlets at the southern foot of the Outer Carpathian Curvature (at the contact between the Teleajen, Buzău and Vrancea mountains with the Subcarpathians).

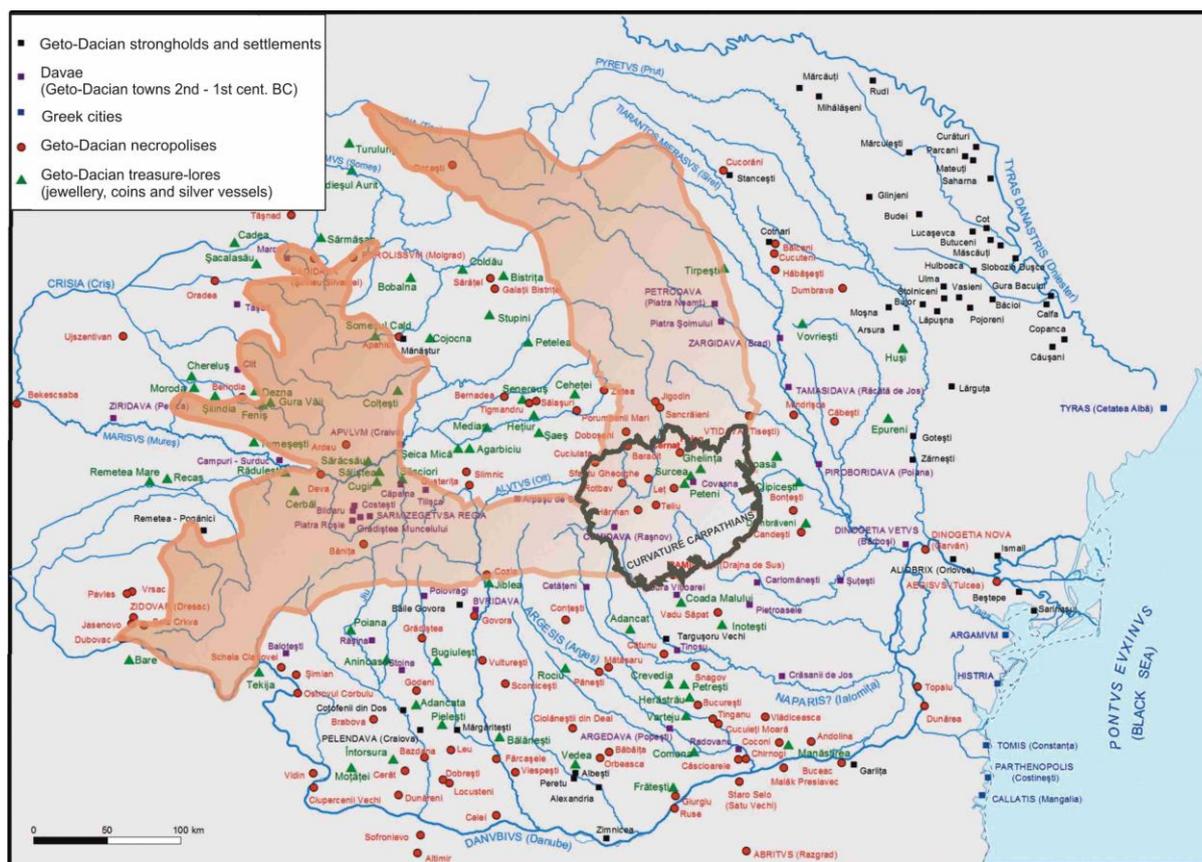


Fig. 1 – Archaeological attestations of ancient habitation (4th cent. BC – 1st cent. AD) (processed after the Historical-Geographical Atlas, plate 9, 2007).

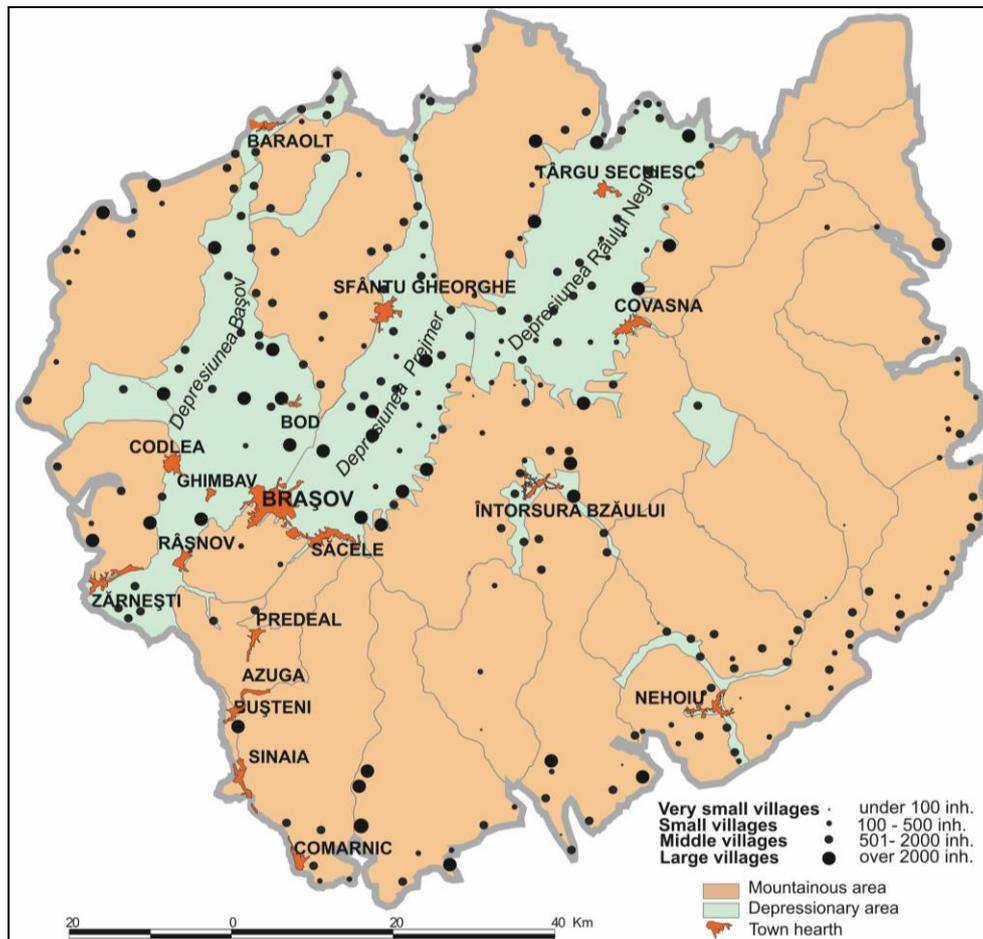


Fig. 2 – The village territorial spread by demographic magnitude (2011).

A sedentary pastoral activity contributed to the formation of permanent settlements, particularly of villages originating in temporary places of habitation (sheepfolds – Rom. *stâne*; cattle or sheep farms – Rom. *odăi*; sheep enclosure – Rom. *târle*). Wherever temporary settlements were in place, this process went hand in hand with the expansion of arable lands instead of pastureland, as confirmed by toponyms (e.g. village named like Poienițele (Chiojdu commune), Odăile (Odăile commune), Târlești (Posești commune), etc.

The stage of concluding the settlement network and the penetration of industrial activities. In the first half of the 19th century, village hearths would develop in terms of the local economy, the second half being marked by the numerical increase of settlements and their growing space expansion. Beginning with 20th century, small villages and hamlets kept “maturing”, subsequently acceding to the village-type category. The hearths of most old villages used to extend, englobing many neighbouring hamlets, or small villages even. The first forms of industrial activity in the Curvature Carpathians would develop in the latter half of the 19th century (extractive industry), the beginnings of the processing sector dating to the early 20th century.

With the expansion and intensification of industrial activities, a part of the Carpathian rural settlements, especially those located in the intramontane depressions, would gradually change their economic function, also improving urbanistic endowments, and becoming more viable demographically, some of them meeting the conditions for acceding to an urban settlement status. In effect, the current stage of permanent settlements is the last link in a long chain of transformations.

Temporary dwelling-places and rural households in the Curvature Carpathians had emerged centuries ago, in the time of cohabitation between the Daco-Roman autochthonous population and the Petcheneg-Cuman elements (11–12 cc BC), a reality confirmed by the toponyms “odaie”, as an old element in Romanian (Giurescu, 1957, pp. 149–150).

In his work *Descriptio Moldaviae*, the great Romanian scholar Dimitrie Cantemir (1716) tells us that the Vrancea mountainous landscape shows scattered “*odăi*” considered to be *reliable households of the then Vrancea population*.

In terms of location, physiognomy, economic and social importance, it is mainly *the more numerous sheepfolds* at over 900–1,000 m alt. and next the “*odăi*” that discharge the functions of temporary dwellings and households in the Curvature Carpathians.

At present, “*odăile*” are only temporary dwelling annexes of the permanent valley household, their number and spread over the past few decades having significantly decreased. The “*Odăi*”, locally named also “*târle*”, have all but disappeared from the hillsides, yet still surviving in a few small areas of the upper Șușița Basin, towards the contact with the mountain, being often located near the villages. A few “*odăi*” have still remained along the Slănic Valley at the foot of the Buzău Mts., most such structures having grown into permanent households, first into hamlets, then turned into villages (Târlești, Odăile, etc.). However, the temporary form of habitation continues to exist at the contact between the mountain and the Prahova Subcarpathians in the valleys of the Ialomița, Prahova and Teleajen rivers.

Oikonyms (Greek oikos = house, dwelling), standing for human settlements, could be assigned to the broader class of **Toponyms**, the latter designating names of mountains and waters.

Oikonyms contain a series of particularities relating to the historical and social conditions specific to the respective territory. For example, somewhere in time, a conquering population would settle alongside the native one, hence the names of some localities originating from the language of the conquerors to sanction their conquered territory, while geographical names throughout each locality estate are derived from the language of the conquered / native population (Meyer-Lübke, 1901, p. 209).

Toponymy inside the Curvature Carpathians are of Slavic origin. Since many locality names are not of Hungarian extraction indicates that the Romanians continued to live there even after the Szecklers had arrived. It is the case of *Covasna*, *Ghelința*, *Zăbala*, *Pava*, *Ojdula*, *Baraolt*, and *Cernat*.

Two waternames in this area are known to be of Dacian origin (the *Buzău* and the *Olt* rivers), preserved as such for over two thousand years, while the Dacian oikonym *Cumidava* has been replaced by the Slavic *Râșnov* (first mention *Rosnou* in 1331, later *Roșnow*); *Angustia*, a Roman military stronghold and (“narrow”) mountain pass was associated with the Slavic *Brețcu*, mentioned for the first time in a papal document (1332) as *Bzevilla*, later forms being *Beebcuk* and *Bereckfalva* standing for a settlement intended to secure the protection of the land.

Also of Slavic origin in the Curvature Carpathian area are *Baraolt* (swamp), *Căpeni* – Kopec (elevation), *Boroșneu Mare*, *Boroșneu Mic* (birch groove), *Lemnia*, through Hungarian route *Lehmény* (*Lemnia*), *Ojdula* (from *Oszdola* – turnip-rooted cabbage place), *Moacșa* (*moksha* –spiritual freedom, unchained) (see Drăganu, 1933 and Iordan, 1963).

The grouping or classifications of oikonyms in terms of the significations of the origin of their names is due to geographers (Conea, 1960), language specialists (Iordan, 1963) and to sociologists in particular (Craiu, 2012). In the present study on the Curvature Carpathian oikonyms we used Conea’s classification (p. 171), the founder of the Romanian geographical toponymy, who established a total of six categories of oikonyms, some structured by sub-categories: **1.** Oikonyms of *landform* and of some *relief particularities*; **2.** Oikonyms of *running or stagnant waters* close to which they were formed; **3.** Oikonyms designating *vegetation*; **4.** Oikonyms referring to *faunistic elements*; **5.** Oikonyms recalling *historical or social life testimonies*; **6.** Oikonyms rooted in *anthroponyms* and originating in the name of a former owner, or of a whole village community.

Another name is “**luncă**” (river meadow, floodplain): *Lunca Călnicului* (Braşov County), *Lunca Jariştei*, *Lunca Priporului* and *Luncile* (Buzău County), *Lunca Mărcuşului* and *Lunca Ozunului* (Covasna County).

Careful observers of their living environment, our forefathers used to name many settlements after **landforms**, e.g. the villages of *Colţii de Jos*, *Colţu Pietrii* and *Curmătura* (Buzău County); *Gresia*, *Lutu Roşu*, *Pietricea*, *Podurile* and *Podu Lung* (Prahova County); *Lutoasa* and *Pietriceni* (Covasna County) and *Podu Oltului* (Braşov County).

The close connection between the settlement and a water source also reflects in the name assigned to communes and villages e.g. the communes of *Izvoarele* (the Springs), Prahova County; *Pârâu* (Brook), Braşov County; the villages of *Gura Teghii* (the Teghii Mouth), *Vadu Oii* (Sheep Ford); *Gura Siriului* (the Siriu Mouth), Buzău County; *Lacurile* (the Lakes) in Bisoca Commune, Buzău County. Often enough, village names derive directly from the name of the valley they are lying in, of the brook or river crossing them: *Bâsca Rozilei* and *Bâsca Chiojdu* (in the Bâsca Chiojdu Valley); *Buzăiel* village (in the Buzăiel Brook Valley, a tributary of the Buzău River); *Vama Buzăului* Commune (in the Buzău Valley); *Dobârlău* in the Dobârlău Valley – a tributary of the Râul Negru River; *Măieruş* (in the Măieruş Brook, a tributary of the Olt River); *Zizin* (in the Zizin Valley, a tributary of the Târlung River) and examples are numerous.

2.1. Vegetation-related oikonyms

The vegetal cover, represented largely by forestland, has been gradually replaced by pastures and small arable areas, a reality reflected in the Curvature Carpathian region by the name of some localities – oikonyms – recalling various plant species, e.g.: *Aluniş* (Harzel Wood), *Brăduţ*, *Brădet* (Fir Wood), *Valea Brădetului* (Fir Wood Valley), *Arini* (Alder Trees), *Nucu* (Nut Tree), *Plaiu Nucului* (Flat Mountain Nut Realm), *Merişor* (Cowberry), *Nucşoara de Sus* (The Upper Nutmeg), *Paltin* (Sycamore Maple), *Păltiniş*, *Păltineni* (Maple Grove), *Cireşu* (Cherry-Tree) (Fig. 4).

A significant number of village names contain the word “**poiană**” (glade), e.g.: *Poiana*, *Poiana Mare* (Large Glade) and *Poiana Țapului* (Billy Goat Glade) in Prahova County; *Poiana Mărului* (Apple Glade) in Braşov County.

2.2 Fauna-related oikonyms

There are fewer villages bearing the region’s **fauna** names, e.g. *Valea Lupului* (Wolf’s Valley), *Vadu Oii* (Sheep’s Ford) and *Poiana Țapului* (Billy Goat Glade).

2.3. Social life-related oikonyms and oikonyms originating in anthroponyms.

Oikonyms which have preserved in time aspects of a **community’s social and historical life** represent some 40% of the settlement names, most of them deriving from individuals names.

Anthroponyms seldom remain unchanged. As a rule, a village name derives from that of a common ancestor plus the suffix *-eşti* and *-eni / ani*, the plural of *-escu* and *(e) anu* intended to designate the inhabitants’ personal origin, basically of descendants of the village founder, or of its owner in a certain period of time. Both suffixes indicate the origin of people in a given village: the former refers to the place one comes from, the latter to one’s ancestor.

It is from that ancestor’s name that the village name is formed: 1) suffix *-eşti* to indicate the followers of the village ruler (or founder) and 2) suffix *-ani (-eni)* to designate the inhabitants that originate from the village with a common ancestor.

In the Curvature Carpathians, most village names contain the suffix *-ești* (*Brătilești, Chirilești, Mânzălești, Furtunești, Posești, Păulești, Nistorești, Romanești, Ștefești*); suffix *-eni* (*Olteni, Ungureni, Ilieni, Vlădeni, Cozmeni, Mărtineni, Petriceni*), only a few have the suffix *-ani* (*Perșani, Chiricani*) (Fig. 5).

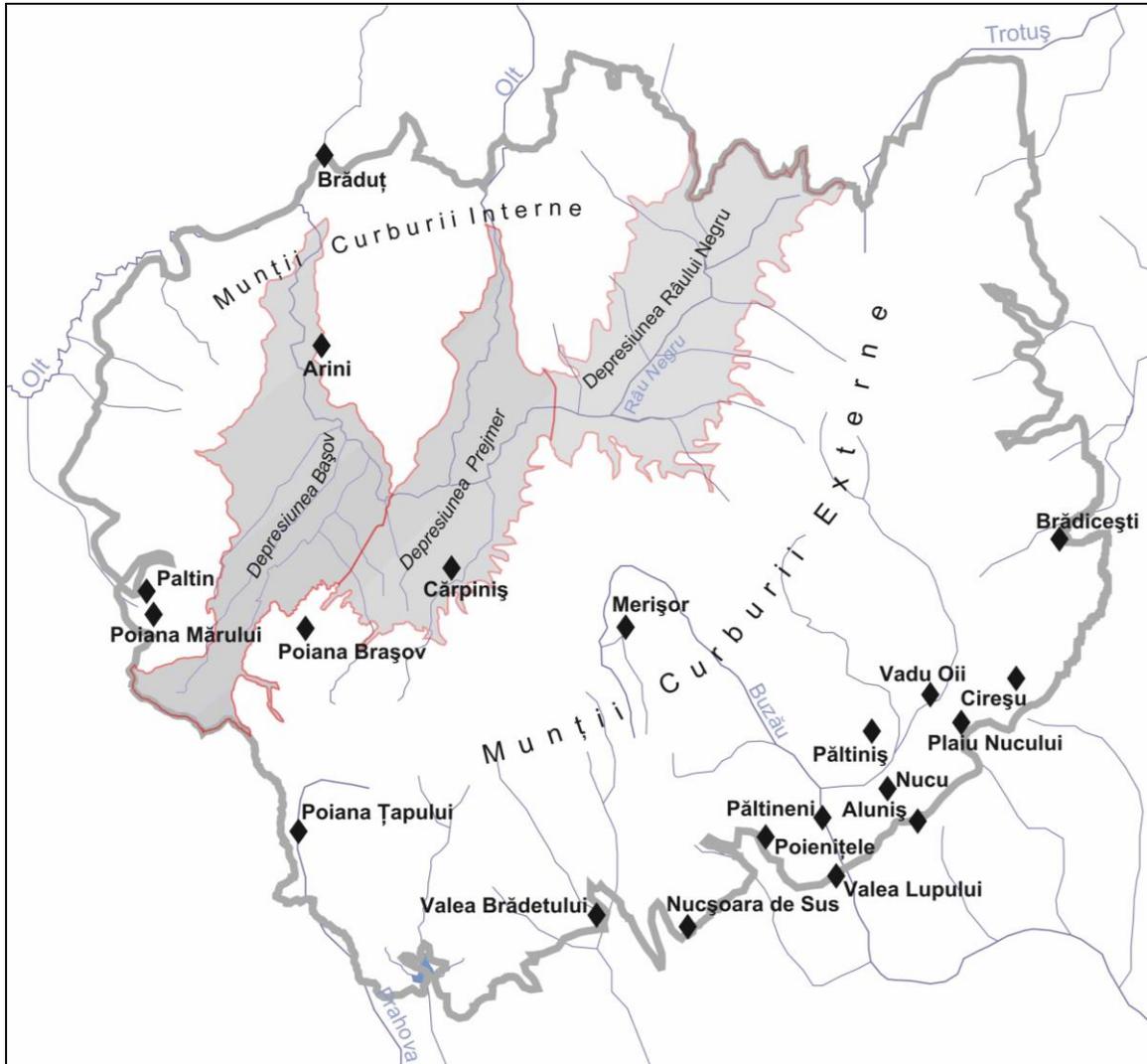


Fig. 4 – Territorial distribution of phyto- and zoo- toponymic origin.

It is also customary for a village to be given an anthroponymic name, without any ultimate modifications. This procedure is meant to honour a family member, who under certain circumstances, proved to be a valliant man, or was a thrifty man and good manager; the name may also commemorate a historical event, or an important character, e.g. *Angheluș, Augustin, Herculian* and *Sânpetru*. There are situations when several villages bear the same name, and in this case an adjective is attached lest they be confused. This happens when a village estate had innitially only one master, but would, in time, become the property of several owners. The original village acquires the attribute “Mare” (Large, Big) or “Vechi” (Old), the newly-formed ones being “Nou” (New), or “Mic” (Small): *Boroșneu Mare* –

Boroşneu Mic, Valea Mare – Valea Mică, Aita Mare – Aita Medie, Satu Nou, Şinca Nouă, Tohanu Nou, Caşinu Nou; other villages have religious denominations, e.g. Mănăstirea Caşin, Mănăstirea Suzana, Sânpetru, Sânmartin.

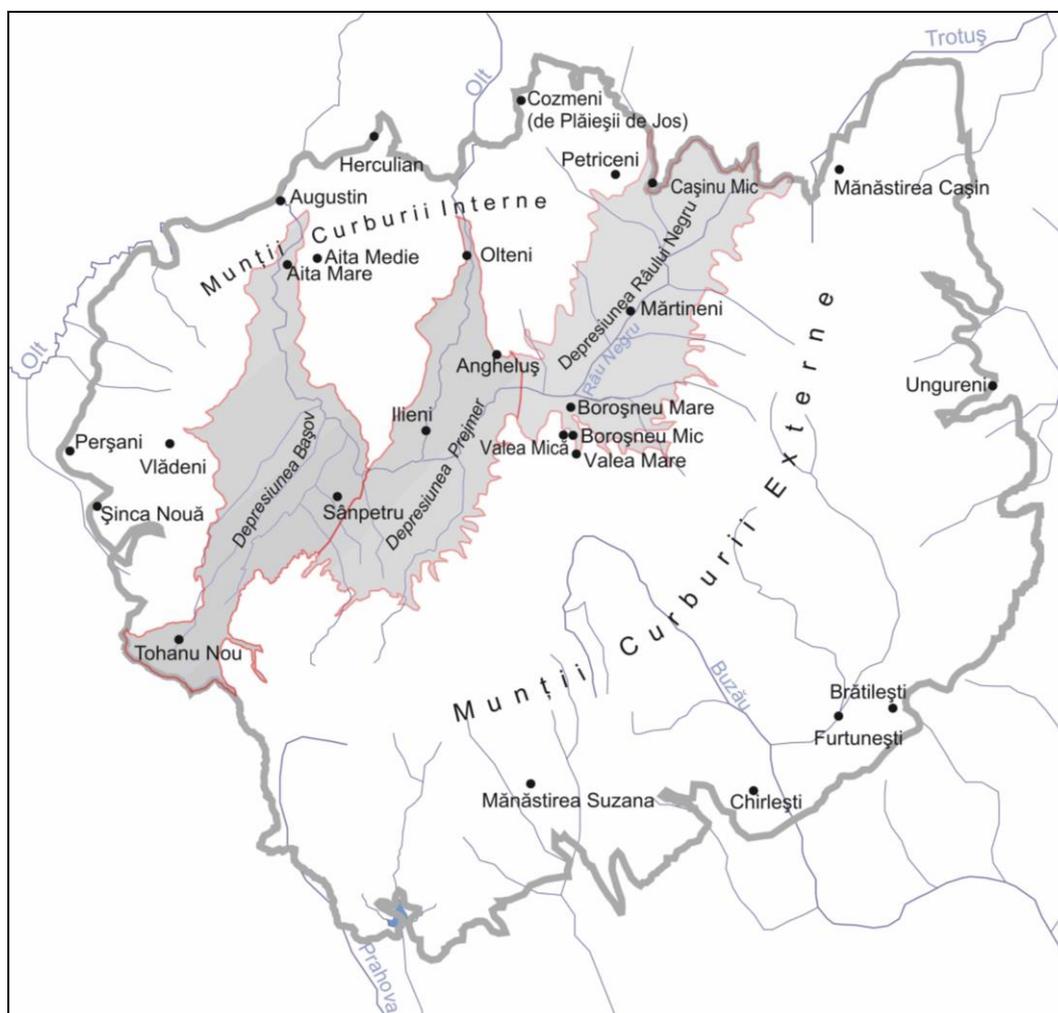


Fig. 5 – Territorial distribution of social life-related oikonyms and oikonyms originating in anthroponyms.

3. CONCLUSIONS

We consider that this brief analysis of settlement names in the Curvature Carpathians has succeeded in presenting, the wide range of categories they belong to, highlighting the natives' remarkable capacity of name assignment inspired from the environment, from historical facts and from the socio-economic reality; as well as the wealth of oikonyms and their linguistic diversity in this region, underlining the oldness and continuity of habitation.

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