

## CZECHS AND SLOVAKS IN TRANSYLVANIA AND THE BANAT BETWEEN THE 18TH AND 21ST CENTURIES: A SOCIO-ONOMASTIC PERSPECTIVE

Oliviu FELECAN<sup>1</sup>, Daiana FELECAN<sup>2</sup>, Alina BUGHEȘIU<sup>3</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** *Czechs and Slovaks in Transylvania and the Banat between the 18th and 21st Centuries: A Socio-Onomastic Perspective.* The paper proposes an analysis of the presence of the Czech and Slovak minorities in Transylvania and the Banat from the modern period until the present day, from the viewpoint of socio-onomastics. The authors specifically look at how micro-toponyms (names of streets and institutions) and macro-toponyms (settlement names) related to the Czechs and Slovaks play a twofold sociocultural role: 1) they confirm the importance of these communities in Romanian public space across the centuries; 2) they guarantee that the minorities are well-represented in Romania even after the emigration of certain members of the respective ethnic groups to their home countries (after WW2) or to Western Europe (beginning with 1990). The examples were collected from books/online sources documenting the history of Czechs and Slovaks in Romania and from Google Maps. Although the history of the contacts between the Czechs and Slovaks, on the one hand, and the Romanians, on the other, is centuries-long, the paper

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- <sup>1</sup> **Oliviu FELECAN** is Prof. Dr. Hab. at the Faculty of Letters, North University Centre of Baia Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. As of 2019 he is Editor-in-Chief of *Onoma*, the Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS). He has written widely on various topics in the field of onomastics. Email: olifelecan@yahoo.com
  - <sup>2</sup> **Daiana FELECAN** is Prof. Dr. Hab. at the Faculty of Letters, North University Centre of Baia Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Dr. Daiana Felecan has written extensively on topics in the fields of onomastics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, stylistics, and philosophy of language. Email: daiana18felecan@yahoo.com
  - <sup>3</sup> **Alina BUGHEȘIU** is Lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, North University Centre of Baia Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Dr. Bugheșiu has written studies on onomastics in commerce, music, jokes, virtual communication. Since 2019, she has been Editorial Secretary of *Onoma*, the Journal of the ICOS. Email: alina.bughesiu@gmail.com

focuses on the period spanning the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. At the 2021 census, less than 12,000 Czechs and Slovaks declared their belonging to these ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the legacy of the two ethnic minorities endures in names of settlements (*Bigăr, Gernik, Svatá Helena*), street names (*Bratislava Street, Jan Hus Street*) and names of institutions (*„Jozef Gregor Tajovsky” Theoretical High School*). These occur throughout Romania, even in parts of the country where Czechs and Slovaks did not establish significant communities. The presence of multi-ethnic names reveals the openness of the majority population and local authorities towards diversity, and their respect for cultural and scientific values, regardless of ethnic belonging.

**Keywords:** *socio-onomastics, ethnic minority, community, micro-toponym, macro-toponym*

**REZUMAT. Cehi și slovaci în Transilvania și Banat între veacul al XVIII-lea și secolul XXI: o perspectivă socioonomastică.** Lucrarea de față propune o analiză socioonomastică a prezenței, din perioada modernă până în contemporaneitate, a minorităților cehe și slovace în arealul transilvănean și bănățean. Concret, autorii urmăresc să evidențieze funcția socioculturală dublă îndeplinită de microtoponimele (nume de străzi și de instituții) și macrotoponimele (nume de localități) care au legătură cu minoritatea ceah și slovacă. Pe de o parte, numele analizate atestă importanța comunității cehe/slovace în spațiul public românesc de-a lungul secolelor. Pe de altă parte, acestea dovedesc faptul că minoritățile investigate continuă să fie bine reprezentate în peisajul românesc, în ciuda repatrierii unor etnici după Al Doilea Război Mondial sau a emigrării în Occident, după 1990. Exemplele au fost culese din cărți/surse online care documentează istoria cehilor și a slovacilor din România și din platforma Google Maps. Deși contactele dintre cehi/slovaci și români datează de mai multe veacuri, în lucrarea de față ne-am oprit doar asupra perioadei cuprinse între secolele al XVIII-lea și XXI. La recensământul din 2021, sub 12.000 de persoane și-au declarat apartenența la aceste etnii. Totuși, moștenirea celor două minorități se păstrează în nume de localități (*Bigăr, Gernik, Svatá Helena*), străzi (*Strada Bratislava, Strada Jan Hus*) și instituții (*Liceul Teoretic „Jozef Gregor Tajovsky”*), care apar pe tot teritoriul românesc, chiar și în regiuni unde nu au existat comunități semnificative de cehi și slovaci. Prezența numelor multietnice demonstrează deschiderea către diversitate a populației majoritare și a autorităților locale, dar și respectul acestora pentru valori științifice și culturale, indiferent de apartenența etnică.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *socioonomastică, minoritate etnică, comunitate, microtoponim, macrotoponim*

## 1. Introduction and methodology

Transylvania and the Banat are multi-ethnic areas where the long-standing co-existence of diverse ethnic groups and the local majority is mirrored by all the dimensions of human identity, language included. Since names are language elements that function as indices of personal and social identity, they can be considered to reflect the connections between different ethnicities by drawing attention to various cultural, religious, political, and economic values that are treasured by the members of the respective ethnic minorities and promoted by the majority as a token of the latter's respect and appreciation of the former. Thus, the study of the vast array of names related to ethnic minorities in Transylvania and the Banat provides further insight into the dynamic of minority-majority relations in the regions under investigation.

The analysis of ethnic minorities in Romania, in general, and in Transylvania, the Banat and Maramureş, in particular, from the viewpoint of onomastics has been a frequent concern in the specialised bibliography published in the country and abroad over the last 16 years. Previous research endeavours have focused on aspects regarding the first/family names of members of various ethnic minorities (see Felecan 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014, 2025 and Felecan and Mihali 2023 for explorations of Hungarian, Rroma, Ukrainian, and Italian anthroponyms; Ruff 2013 on Zipser Germans' family names) and names of streets and institutions related to those minorities (for an overview of ethnic identities reflected in Transylvanian hodonymy, see Felecan 2013, whereas for a religious approach to Hungarian names of settlements in Transylvania see Bárh 2017; see also Felecan 2024 on hodonyms and chrematonyms linked to the Polish minority). However, the connections between the Czech and Slovak minorities and the Romanians, as reflected in onomastics, have not been approached yet. This article aims to fill this gap by looking at how macro-toponymy (names of settlements) and micro-toponymy (names of streets and institutions) play a twofold sociocultural role in relation to the Czech and Slovak minorities in Romania: 1) they confirm the importance of the two minorities in Romanian public space across the centuries; 2) they guarantee that the minorities are well-represented in Romania even after the return of certain members of the minority communities to their countries of origin (sometimes fuelled by a longing for the ancestral homelands) or their migration to Western European countries in search of better lives.

From the centuries-old contacts between the Czechs/Slovaks and the Romanians (see Dan 1944, 11–13), this paper focuses on the period spanning the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. The aim is to illustrate the changes recorded on the level of macro- and micro-toponymy once the relations between the two minorities and the local population became more stable, as a

result of the settlements established by the minorities or their integration in the local communities. Despite growing smaller over the centuries, the Czech and Slovak minorities are still salient in the present-day public space in Transylvania and the Banat. To support these arguments, the research makes use of onomastic data collected from printed and online sources documenting the history of Czechs and Slovaks in Romania and from Google Maps (to help visualise the multi-ethnic configuration of contemporary urban linguistic landscape in the areas under investigation). The examples are analysed within the theoretical framework provided by socio-onomastics. This approach is supported by the fact that the paper provides a qualitative insight into the presence of Czech and Slovak names in the areas investigated, instead of a quantitatively exhaustive presentation of their distribution.

## **2. Czechs and Slovaks in the Romanian territories: A historical overview**

Czechs, Slovaks, and Romanians have been in contact since the Middle Ages (and even earlier – see Dan 1944, 13; Kamusella 2009, 64), but their first interactions were intermittent and occurred especially in the context of conflicts in Central and Southeastern Europe between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries. As Mihail P. Dan (1944, 227–46) has shown, the Czechs and Slovaks fought alongside the Romanians against the Turks, under the leading command of John Hunyadi and Stephen the Great. The Czechs and Slovaks also joined Matthias I Corvinus against the Moldavians, who were led by Stephen the Great and Petru Rareș. Their alliance was determined, in the former case, by the Turks’ plans to expand their dominance in Europe and, in the latter, by the interests of the Hungarian monarchs.

At the same time, historical documents note the presence of Transylvanian students at the Universities of Olomouc and Trnava. Worth mentioning in this respect is Nicolaus Olahus, the renowned Romanian-born humanist, historian, and Catholic prelate, who is considered a “precursor of Slovakian higher education” (Dan 1944, 266).

As regards religion, Dan (1944, 275–83) reviews numerous historical sources and points out that there are records of Hussites in Moldavia, “almost all of Hungarian ethnicity” (Dan 1944, 283), who reconverted to Catholicism and returned to their countries of origin during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, interactions of this kind are not comparable to the systematic migration of the nineteenth century. In the following sections, our attention focuses on the latter period.

## 2.1. *Waves of Czech migration*

The constant presence of Czechs in Romanian space is recorded particularly after the Austrian empire occupied Bohemia in the year 1804 and began applying the *migratio colonorum* policy. This implied that inhabitants from overpopulated areas were displaced to sparsely populated territories to work in forestry and agriculture, and to guard the borders (see Gecse and Gecse 2018, 42). By virtue of the enforcement of the aforementioned policy, Czechs were relocated to the Banat in three main waves: 1823, 1827, and 1862. The first settlements that they founded were called *Svatá Alžbeta* (*Elisabethfeld* ‘Elizabeth’s field’, 1823; it was abandoned by 1847 due to lack of drinking water) and *Svatá Helena* (*Sânta Elena* ‘Saint Helena’, 1824). The two oikonyms are religiously and politically relevant: they are indicative of the religion of the settlers coming from Klatovy and Plzeň, and of the Habsburg policy of strengthening the Catholic presence in the lands under the empire’s rule. It is worth mentioning that it was common practice for the Catholic Church to use saints’ names in all the areas that it ruled over and especially in all the lands that it colonised. The distinctiveness of oikonyms was derived from hagianyms: “in Transylvania and the Banat, where Catholicism (also through the Greek Catholic Church) is followed more closely, these oikonyms are far more numerous” (Felecan and Felecan 2013, 90–91) than in Muntenia and Moldova.

The second wave of Czech settlers (1827–1828) was more organised. It resulted in the establishment of seven villages: Bígr (Bigăr, in Berzasca commune<sup>4</sup>, Caraş-Severin county), Rovensko (Ravensca, Şopotu Nou commune, Caraş-Severin county), Šumice (Şumiţa, Lăpuşnicel commune, Caraş-Severin county), Gernik (Gârnic, Caraş-Severin county), Schontal (Poneasca, Bozovici commune, Caraş-Severin county), Elibenthal (Mehedinţi county) and Frauenwiese (Frauvîzn – Ogradena; the settlement no longer exists, but the name is still used to designate a neighbourhood in the village of Eşelniţa, near Orşova, Mehedinţi county). Some of the immigrants settled in multi-ethnic towns like Moldova Nouă, Orşova, Arad, and Timişoara, alongside Romanians, Germans, Serbians, and Hungarians. The names of the founded villages reflect the co-existence of several ethnic groups, which was a common occurrence in the Austrian Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. Not only Czech families were colonised from Bohemia, but also families of German origin.

Between 1846 and 1858, the authorities brought groups of settlers from Bohemia and Slovakia for the mining projects carried out at Anina-Steindorf (Gecse and Gecse 2018, 46). Two of the new settlements were named *Böhmische*

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<sup>4</sup> The names of the communes correspond to the present-day local administrative organisation of the Romanian territory.

*Kolonie* ('the Bohemian colony'). Some immigrants returned to their home country within a short time span, after their contracts ended, but most of them stayed, as they enjoyed numerous advantages. In connection with the German oikonym (which highlights the inhabitants' ethnicity by means of the German ethnonymic adjective *Böhmische* 'Bohemian'), the dwellers were called *pemi* < *boemi* 'Bohemians', from German *Böhmen*, a name used by the Germans in the Banat to refer to all the people from Bohemia (Gecse and Gecse 2018, 48). Following the same ethnic principle, the Slovaks were called *tăuți* < Hungarian *Tóth* (or one of the variants *Tót, Tot, Toth*), "derived from the Hungarian ethnonym *tót* meaning 'a Slavic person living in Hungary, mainly Slavonic, Slovene, Slovak' (old spelling) and refers to a similarity or a connection (descendance or other) with the people or the area they inhabit" (DFNVC 2024, s.v. *Tóth*).

The third wave of the Czech migration to the Banat took place between 1862 and 1863. It was less significant than then other stages. About 450 Czechs were colonised in the Banat plain, particularly in the Romanian settlements Clopodia (Klopotin, Timiș county) and Peregul Mare (Velký Pereg, Arad county). Their occupations were mainly related to agriculture and farming.

## **2.2. The Slovaks' settlements in the Romanian lands**

There are numerous reasons underlying the Slovaks' migration. Among these, one can mention economic insecurity (tax increases), ongoing external conflicts (with the Ottomans) and internal struggles (numerous uprisings), epidemics, obligations towards the Habsburg and Hungarian authorities, and the reconversion of Protestants to Catholicism (see Kukucska 2018a, 13–19; 2018b, 43). Initially, most Slovaks were Evangelical, while Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic families arrived later on, from eastern Slovakia (see Colta 2018, 278–84). They were "poor inhabitants from rural areas, [who] were given property rights" (Gecse and Gecse 2018, 45, orig. Romanian) and migrated of their own free will, with the state or the landed gentry sometimes acting as mediators. Also subjected to displacement were skilled workers in various fields: glassmakers, steelworkers, charcoal burners, woodcutters, cart makers, and miners (Kukucska 2018c, 64). The authorities did not object to the workers' relocation but supported it to capitalise on the property that they owned in the deserted or uninhabited areas in the lowlands.

More than 40,000 Slovak families (about 200,000 people) settled in the Romanian Lowlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Slovaks first got to the Banat in 1747, when they settled in Mocrea (Apatelek) and subsequently in the German Stamura (1783), Nădlac (1803), Butin (1813), Vucova and Brestovăț (1827), Peregul Mare (1853), and Țipari (1883). Slovaks also settled in Partium (present-day Bihor and Sălaj counties), between 1830

and 1918, and in Bukovina, near Cernăuți, between 1799 and 1803. They came from the counties of Orava (Árva) and Trenčín (Kukucska 2018c, 68). Among the newly founded settlements one can mention Valea Ungurului (Gemelčíčka<sup>5</sup>, Mureș county), Valea Târnei (Židáreň, Bihor county), Șinteu (Nová Huta, Bihor county), Huta Voivozi (Stará Huta, Bihor county), and Socet (Sočet, Hunedoara county). The Slovaks also settled in neighbouring villages with Romanian or Hungarian majorities: e.g., Peștiș (Bihor county). The naturalisation of the Slovaks may be considered complete once they begin building churches and schools, which conveyed their desire to stay indefinitely.

### *2.3. Demographic records*

The number of Czech and Slovak immigrants in Romania has varied over time. Some members of these ethnic groups did not dwell long because they could not adjust to the climate, the poor living conditions (lack of access to drinking water), and the authorities' wavering support. Nevertheless, most settlers became rooted and developed compact Czech and Slovak communities, or they integrated into multi-ethnic settlements. After the creation of the Romanian unitary state in 1918, official records indicate the steady decrease of the Czech and Slovak communities. Various reasons can be pointed out: the world wars, the immigrants' repatriation after WW2 at the call of Czechoslovak authorities, the emigration to more favourable places in Romania or abroad, the abandonment of ethnically compact villages (especially due to the rise in the water level of the Danube after the Iron Gates Dam was built), and the identity loss resulting from mixed marriages.

As Table 1 shows, the most significant decrease in the overall population occurred after the Revolution of 1989, when freedom was obtained and many Romanians emigrated in search of a better life. Members of minority groups behaved similarly and, by comparison with the Romanian majority, left the country in larger numbers. The effect was dramatic. Villages suffered from massive depopulation (some settlements disappeared: e.g., Lindenfeld, Caraș-Severin county), and the population aged. A similar situation can be noticed with other ethnic groups, such as the Poles (see Felecan 2024, 247–64).

According to the data of the latest population census (carried out in 2021), the most numerous Slovak communities are in the counties of Bihor (4,860 people), Arad (3,310 people), and Sălaj (760 people). Most Czechs are located in the southwestern part of Romania, in the counties of Caraș-Severin (909 people), Mehedinți (303 people), and Timiș (141 people) (see INS 2021).

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<sup>5</sup> According to Pavel Štěpán (2018, 114), the suffix *-ka* "is mostly used for creation of names of residences, yards or farms, including vineyards".

**Table 1.** Evolution of the number of Czechs and Slovaks relative to the overall population of Romania

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population of Romania</b>	<b>Czech</b>	<b>Slovaks</b>
1930 <sup>6</sup>	14,280,729	50,772	
1956	17,489,450	11,821	23,331
1966	19,103,163	9,978	22,221
1977	21,559,910	7,683	21,286
1992	22,810,035	5,797	19,594
2002	21,680,974	3,941	17,226
2011	20,121,641	2,477	13,654
2021	19,053,815	1,576	10,232

### 3. Political, educational, and cultural aspects

Although the population decreased steadily after 1989, ethnic minorities won the right to establish organisations and to become active in Romanian public space. The Czechs and the Slovaks gained full recognition in March 1990, when the Democratic Union of the Slovaks and Czechs in Romania (Demokratický Zváz Slovákov a Čechov v Rumunsku/Demokratický Svaz Slováků a Čechů v Rumunsku, DUSCR) was founded. According to the Union's Charter, the organisation "represents the national interests of the Romanian citizens of Slovak and Czech nationalities, irrespective of political affiliation and religious beliefs" (ISPMN 2025a, orig. Romanian). The main objective is to ensure full cultural, educational, and political rights for the members of the Slovak and Czech communities. A significant accomplishment was recorded in 2014, when the Romanian Parliament voted that Slovak Language Day would be celebrated on May 25 and Czech Language Day on September 28, to promote the cultural values and representative figures of the two ethnic groups (ISPMN 2025d).

Since its establishment, the DUSCR has been involved in all local elections, and its members have been in office as mayors and local councillors in the settlements and counties in which the Czech and Slovak minorities are more numerous. Thus, educational initiatives that were to the benefit of the minorities received much needed support. Despite the waves of emigration and the decline and aging of the population after 1990, Czech- and Slovak-language schools continued to exist, albeit markedly fewer. The year 2005 may be considered a milestone in this respect. At that point, there were "17 Slovak-language educational institutions, which encompassed 11 kindergartens, 15 primary schools, 5 secondary

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1930 census, the Czechs were recorded as Slovaks.

schools, and two high schools. In total, there were 1,026 students and 118 teachers. There were 7 Czech-language institutions, with 118 students and 36 teachers in total” (ISPMN 2025c, orig. Romanian).

The names of the teaching institutions testify to their connection with the corresponding minorities. For instance, *Liceul Teoretic Jozef Kozaček* (‘Jozef Kozaček Theoretical High School’) in Budoii, Bihor county, bears the name of a bishop, “one of the first presidents of the ‘Matica Slovenska’ Society” (ISPMN 2025b, orig. Romanian). The first Slovak-language school was founded in Nădlac in 1945: *Gimnaziul cehoslovac de stat din România (Ștătne českoslovenké gymnázium v Rumunsku, ‘Czechoslovak State Secondary School of Romania’)*. Over the years, the institution bore different names: *Școala pedagogică slovacă (Slovenská pedagogická škola ‘Slovak Pedagogical School’)* – 1948, *Școala medie nr. 2 din Nădlac* (‘Middle School No. 2 of Nădlac’) – 1960. By the Revolution of 1989, the educational institution was called *Liceul „George Coșbuc” Nădlac* (‘George Coșbuc High School of Nădlac’). Following the terminology used by Pedersen (2017, 55), who cites Greenwald (2005, 26) and Helander (2009), this can be qualified as an instance of *micro-toponymic silence*: under communism, the ethnically motivated micro-toponym is removed “to create a new understanding in the population with regard to the cultural situation in the area” (Pedersen 2017, 55). After the Revolution of 1989, when freedom was regained, the name was changed to *Liceul Teoretic „Jozef Gregor Tajovský”* (‘Jozef Gregor Tajovský Theoretical High School’), a designation that is reminiscent of the Slovak writer, teacher, and politician who lived between 1874 and 1940. The motivation behind the name choice lies in the fact that in 1907, in Nădlac (Nagytlak), Tajovský married Hana Lilgová (1885–1958), known by her literary pseudonym, *Hana Gregorová*.

The cultural life of Czechs and Slovaks developed steadily after 1990. Ivan Krasko Publishing House, founded in Nădlac, published the newspapers *Naše snahy*, *Rovnoběžné zrkadlá*, the journal *Dolnozemskej Slovak* (co-edited with Slovaks from Serbia and Hungary), and the children’s magazines *Gernický zvonček*, *Helenské sluníčko*, and *Prameň* (see Kukucska 2018d, 133–4). Moreover, the publisher ensured the printing of literature written by Czech and Slovak authors<sup>7</sup>, as well as non-literary works on various topics about the two minorities: e.g., *Aspectele lingvistice ale folclorului slovacilor bihoreni/Jazykovedecké aspekty folklóru bihorských Slovákov* (‘Linguistic aspects of the folklore of the Slovaks in Bihor county’) by Benedek Morong, *Evoluția demografică a slovacilor din România/Demografický vývoj Slovákov v Rumunsku* (‘Demographic evolution of

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<sup>7</sup> Several Slovak writers became members of the Writers’ Union of Romania, among whom one can mention Ivan Miroslav Ambruš, Dagmar Mária Anoca, Adam Suchanský, and Štefan Dovál (ISPMN 2025a).

Slovaks in Romania') by Pavel Hlásnik, and *Retrospectiva slovacilor din Poiana Micului/Retrospektíva Slovákov z Poiana Micului* ('Retrospective of Slovaks in Poiana Micului') by Jozef Jurašek.

There are cultural centres in most villages with Czech and Slovak residents. The names of these institutions are straightforward, as they serve a practical purpose. Thus, the chrematonyms consist of the Romanian definite appellative phrase *Centrul cultural* ('the cultural centre') and an oikonym (the name of the village/town where the centre is found): *Aleșd, Borumlaca, Budoii, Butin, Derna, Eibenthal, Fegernic, Gârnici, Liubcova, Mădăras, Nădlac, Oradea, Ravensca, Sfânta Elena, Șinteu, Șumița, Vărzari, Zăuan-Băi*.

There are numerous folk ensembles affiliated with the aforementioned cultural centres, which promote the music, dances, and traditions of Czechs and Slovaks in Romania: *Ansamblul Folcloric "Cerovina" din Valea Cerului (Čerpotok), Ansamblul Folcloric "Ďatelinka" din Vărzari, Ansamblul Folcloric Mladost din Sacalasăul Nou (Šastelek), Ansamblul Folcloric "Lipka" din Budoii, Ansamblul Folcloric "Poleanka" Aleșd, Ansamblul Folcloric "Pramienok" Șinteu, Ansamblul Folcloric "Sálašan" Arad, Grupul Vocal "Fialka" Mădăras, Grupul Vocal "Srdiecko" Borumlaca, Grupul Vocal "Varadan" Oradea* (see Furicova 2018a, 119, 122; Gubani 2018, 205–9).

As the examples above show, the names of the groups (which may be considered instances of "social chrematonyms", according to Gałkowski 2022, 62) usually consist of three types of elements:

- 1) a Romanian definite appellative phrase, *ansamblul folcloric* ('the folk ensemble') or *grupul vocal* ('the vocal group');
- 2) the actual name of the group, whose onomastic function is highlighted by the presence of the quotation marks. This element may be derived from another proper name (e.g., a toponym – *Lipka*<sup>8</sup>, *Varadan*<sup>9</sup>) or from an appellative (e.g., *Cerovina* < *cerovina* 'oak grove'<sup>10</sup>, *Ďatelinka* < *d'atelinka*, a diminutive form of *d'atelina* 'clover'; *Fialka* < *fialka* 'violet'; *mladost* 'youth'; *Poleanka* < *polianka* 'meadow'; *Pramienok* < *pramienok* 'small stream', a diminutive form of *prameň*

<sup>8</sup> "*Lipka* translates as *Teiuș* [< Romanian *tei* 'lime tree' + diminutive suffix *-uș*], the name of a geographical area where many lime trees grow" (Furicova 2018a, 119, orig. Romanian).

<sup>9</sup> "The name of the vocal group is related to the Slovak name of the city of Oradea – *Veľký Varadín* (possibly *Varad* as well), and it means 'a man from Oradea/an inhabitant of Oradea' [Romanian *orădean*]" (Gubani 2018, 208, orig. Romanian).

<sup>10</sup> See *Slovníkový portál Jazykovedného ústavu Ľ. Štúra SAV* (2025, s.v. *cerovina*). The name of the folklore ensemble may also be related to the oikonym *Valea Cerului* (see Furicova 2018b, 138). The motivation for the onomastic choice lies in the geographical location of the settlement, which is surrounded by oak forests to the south and east. Romanian *cer* (see DELR 2021–, s.v. *cer*<sup>2</sup>) designates a certain variety of oak, commonly known in English as *Turkey oak* (see de Rigo et al. 2016, 148).

‘stream’; *Sálašan* < *sálašan* ‘landed peasant’ – see Kukucska 2018d, 95<sup>11</sup>; *Srdiečko* < *srdiečko* ‘little heart’, a diminutive form of *srdce* ‘heart’);

3) an oikonym (the name of the settlement – a village or a town – where the folk ensemble/vocal group is established or where it was founded), which may be linked to the other components by means of a preposition showing origin/belonging (*din* ‘from, of’).

The folk ensembles and vocal groups are involved in the organisation of festivals (Czech Folklore Festival, Slovak Folklore Festival, Romanian Festival of the Slovak Folk Song, Folk Festival for Children and Youth, Festival of the Ethnic Communities in the Banat), creative activities, and the Days of Slovak Culture.

The revitalisation of the isolated settlements of the Czechs in the Semenic Mountains – Gărâna (Wolfsberg), Brebu Nou (Weidenthal), Poiana Lupului (Wolfwise), Sadova Veche (Altsadowa) (see Both 2022) – has been achieved by means of sustainable activities, especially in the field of tourism<sup>12</sup>, to compensate for the lack of traditional workforce. As Both (2013, orig. Romanian) noted, “after 1990, the Czech lands in the Banat received significant support from the Czech government, by means of numerous economic, cultural, social, and educational community development programmes”. From a linguistic viewpoint, an old language was preserved in the Banat Highlands, albeit extinct in Czechia. This situation is fittingly described by Coulmas’s (2005, 6) claim that “When a substantial body of population moves out of one territory and into another, [...] it will take its language with it, but after some time this language ceases to be the same as that spoken in its original territory”.

The sociocultural dimension of the Czechs’ presence in Romanian public space is reinforced by means of Czech brands. The most famous example in this respect is the car brand Škoda. Especially after the merger with the German automobile manufacturer Volkswagen in 1991, Škoda benefited from major investments and promotion. Nowadays, more than a million Škoda vehicles (representing various models made in Europe and Asia) are exported to over 100 countries worldwide (see Škoda 2025). In Romania, Škoda sold 10,612 cars in 2024, coming in third place after Dacia (44,430) and Toyota (12,818) in the top 10 best-selling automobiles in the country, while Škoda Octavia was the foreign car model which was the most appreciated by the Romanian customers, with 4,225 units sold (see Cebia 2025).

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<sup>11</sup> *Sálašan* could also be derived from *Salašan* (masculine noun, a variant of *Novosalašan*), designating a man from/an inhabitant of Nový Salaš (a village in the Košice-okolie district, Košice Region, eastern Slovakia) (see *Slovníkový portál Jazykovedného ústavu L. Štúra SAV* 2025, s.v. *salašan*).

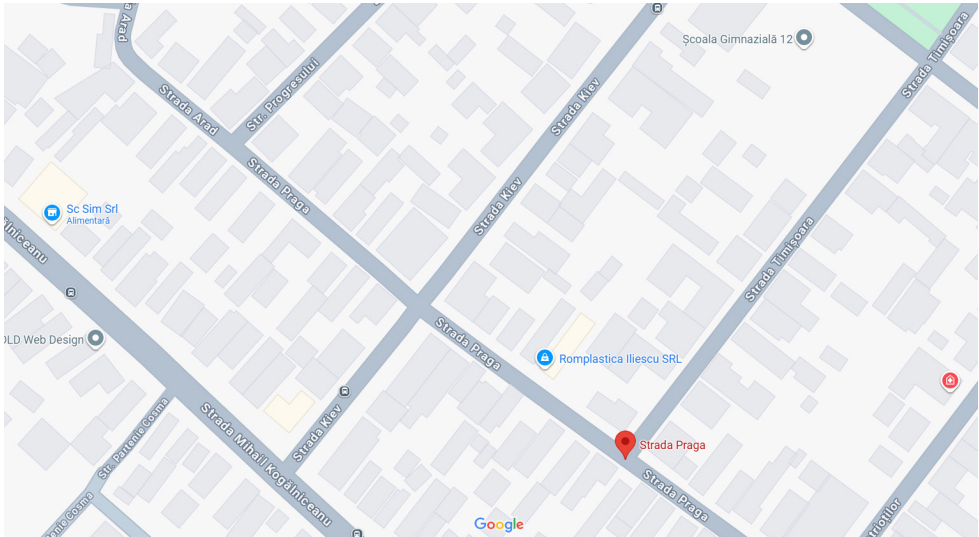
<sup>12</sup> “Every summer, in August, in Eibenthal and Gărnic, a great ‘open air’ festival is held, in which well-known bands from Czechia take part. The roads in the Banat are swarming with buses, vans, and cars whose licence plates read ‘CZ’” (Both 2013, orig. Romanian). One can also mention the music festivals held in Gărâna, Gărâna Jazz Festival and Gărâna Folk Festival.

#### 4. Socio-toponymic aspects

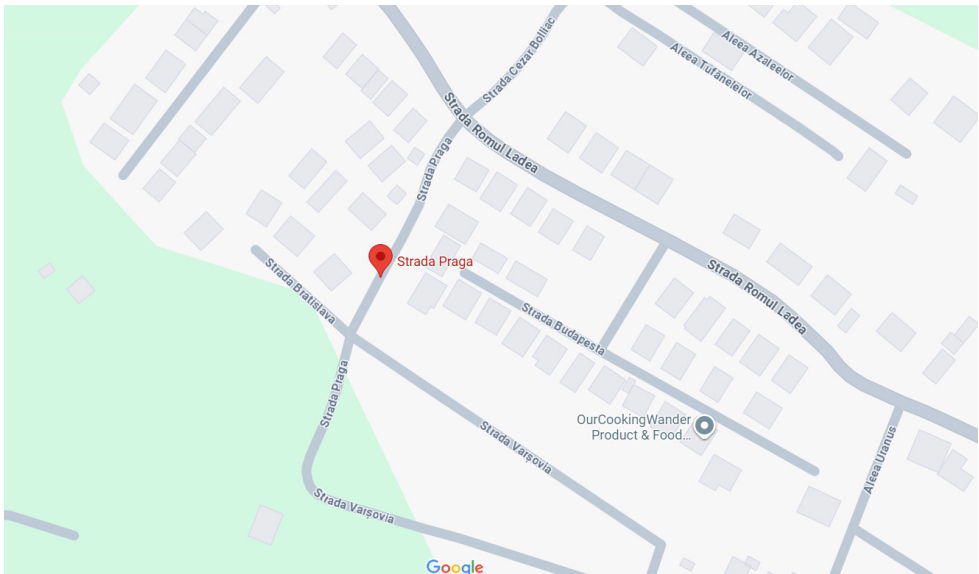
Names are “acts of identity in a multi-dimensional space” (Hudson 2001, 12). In relation to minorities, proper names (anthroponyms and toponyms alike) “can represent deeper kinds of identity, act as objects of attachment and dependence, and reflect community mores and social customs, while functioning as powerful determinants of inclusion and exclusion. [...] Names are not merely symbols of their referents but also manifestations of cultural, linguistic and social heritage in their own right” (Kostanski and Puzey 2016, xiii). Anthroponyms and toponyms are irrefutable indicators of the preservation of ethnic identity for minorities (see Pedersen 2017, 21) and serve as “active *identity* management employing the social *indexicality* associated with alternative language forms” (Schneider 2013, 399). They prove that “language both expresses and creates categories of thought that are shared by members of a social group and that language is, in part, responsible for the attitudes and beliefs that constitute what we call ‘culture’” (Kramsch 2004, 235). Thus, every name, as a part of language, “invariably carries social meaning. Every [name] choice has a motivation and hence can be explained” (Wardhaugh 1994, 109).

The settlement names, names of institutions, cultural centres and cultural groups described above, as well as street names related to the Czech and Slovak minorities in Romania behave as “instruments of socialization” (Hudson 2001, 105). For instance, there are Czech and Slovak figures commemorated in Romanian toponymy, as a token of the respect and appreciation that they enjoy in Romanian space. The examples are numerous in the settlements with a significant number of Czechs and Slovaks, and as such, they “contribute to the feeling of belonging to a social group in a particular area” (Helleland 2009, 506). In Arad county (*orasul.biz* 2012–2025), one can find *Strada Jozef Gregor Tajovský* (‘Jozef Gregor Tajovský Street’, Slovak writer and politician who was married in Nădlac), *Strada Ivan Bujna*, and *Str. Ludovit Boor* (‘Ivan Bujna Street’, ‘Ludovit Boor Street’ – both were Evangelical priests in Nădlac). In the same town there is *Str. Martin Luther* (‘Martin Luther Street’). Although he is not related to the Slovak ethnicity, Martin Luther is the religious “patron” of the Slovaks in Nădlac. Thus, his presence in the toponymy of this settlement is not random. In Cluj-Napoca, a street bears the name of the Czech theologian and philosopher Jan Hus (1370–1415), the first Church reformer. As a key predecessor to Protestantism, Jan Hus also appears in the name of a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Huși, Iași county. It is not the ethnicity of the initial name bearer that is important, but his religious role as rector at Charles University in Prague between 1409 and 1410. As Jaroslav David (2011, 215) emphasised, “place names are not only linguistic signs; they also represent social and historical values” and aim at honouring or commemorating the legacy of figures from various fields.





**Figure 2.** Hodonymic configuration of Sibiu – Prague Street (source: Google Maps, <https://tinyurl.com/2kt8dr9t>)



**Figure 3.** Hodonymic configuration of Cluj-Napoca – Prague Street and Bratislava Street (source: Google Maps, <https://tinyurl.com/mwwyndc8>)

The use of Romanian and foreign oikonyms in Romanian hodonymy is a widespread practice. Local authorities that are legally entitled to name roads and squares are free to choose well- or lesser-known geographical landmarks. While national landmarks are motivated, foreign ones are underpinned by subjective reasons, such as the respect one has for a country, a people, the values promoted by that country/people, their glorious past, as well as their relationship with Romania, in general, and the settlement in which the hodonym is recorded, in particular. Most of the settlements that chose to have a *Prague Street* and a *Bratislava Street* do not have Czech and Slovak minorities who could advocate for the employment of such hodonyms. They “are not mere geographical labels, but carry an emotional load that evokes admiration” (Felecan 2024, 258–9). The presence of such urban names in Romanian hodonymic landscape can be interpreted symbolically as signs of solidarity stemming from sharing a similar destiny, which “implies crucial national, cultural, sentimental and historical ideological values” (Felecan 2022, 328).

## 5. Concluding remarks

The history of the Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks displays several common features, from the fate of the three peoples in the Habsburg Empire, subsequently the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to their trajectory in twentieth century, between the years 1918 and 1939, when the three nations shared a common border along the Tisza river, between Maramureş and Ruthenia. Following their migration to Romania, the Czech and Slovak minorities integrated well into the multicultural landscape of Transylvania and the Banat. The members of these communities contributed to the socio-economic and cultural development of the areas in which they settled. All the categories of place names that may be linked to the Czech and Slovak ethnic groups “[...] transform the sheer physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced. [...] In a fundamental way names create landscapes” (Tilley 1994, 18). From the perspective of socio-onomastics, the preservation of proper names testifies to the steadfastness of the respective minorities, on the one hand, and the tolerance of the Romanian majority, on the other. Names are symbolic witnesses of multi-ethnic communities. The adoption by the Romanian majority of oikonyms, hodonyms and other proper names representative of various minorities is indicative of a “social consensus” (Helleland 2009, 507) which proves that the minorities are accepted, respected and completely integrated into the landscape of Transylvania and the Banat.

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