

RUSALLIAS – A BASIS FOR PROMOTING ETHNO-TOURISM IN EASTERN SERBIA*

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Summary: *As a distinct type of cultural tourism, ethno-tourism represents a possible and sustainable business activity that may be beneficial to the growth and recovery of underdeveloped areas in Eastern Serbia. This primarily relates to areas where the tourism industry has not picked up yet, but which do have a local cultural potential that may be used to give a shape to a cultural and artistic experience intended not only for tourists, but also for the local community. The aim of this paper is to present the Rusallia ritual as a possible form of ethno-tourism. This ritual, in which women, known as Rusallias, fall into a trance, is typical of the Vlachs native to Eastern Serbia and takes place on the Day of Pentecost. The purpose of fostering this form of ethno-tourism would be to protect and preserve intangible cultural heritage in that region. With regard to this, the paper will analyse contemporary ethnographic research on this custom as well as anthropogeographic research on the Balkan Peninsula carried out by Jovan Cvijic.*

Keywords: *Ethno-tourism, Rusallias, Vlachs, Eastern Serbia, Balkan Peninsula.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Eastern Serbia is distinguished by a rich ethnic and sociocultural heritage passed down from great many nations that live in the area. Regarding multicultural aspects of the region and its ethnic heritage, it is worth noting that in addition to Serbs, who are the most numerous nation living in the region, there are also a number of ethnic groups that have developed their own culture, languages and customs since their inhabitation of the area. With the aim of increasing destination attractiveness of this region, tourism may lead to interethnic cooperation by employing the entire cultural heritage. It can also contribute to creating a forum for an intercultural dialogue and may be conducive to increasing the level of understanding between people belonging to different nations and cultures [1]. What tourists usually find interesting are various elements of an authentic culture characteristic of a region and the diversity of cultural expressions of various ethnic groups [25]. “A growing diversity of ethnic groups in Europe has also created a need for preserving the identity of minority communities and festivals can play an important role in that respect” [23, pp 144]. For that reason, this paper presents a custom known as the Rusallia ritual (Serbian: *rusalje*), in which women fall into a trance during the feast of Pentecost (Whitsun) typical of the Vlach population living in Eastern Serbia, as a potential ethnographic event. Ethnographic events are representations of national customs, beliefs, rituals, how people used to do their jobs in the old days and naturally, of the oldest elements of tourism and providing hospitality [7]. Ethnographic events cater to tourists’ needs in terms of their desire to meet new cultures, civilizations and regions, and pursue leisure activities, pastime and hobbies [6].

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2. GEOGRAPHY OF EASTERN SERBIA

When writing about Eastern Serbia in his study *The Balkan Peninsula* and describing its borders, elements and natural characteristics, Jovan Cvijic states, “Routes lead from various directions from the Morava Valley towards the Timok River Basin in Eastern Serbia. A gorge located near Vratarnica separates it into an upper basin, where Knjazevac lies, and a lower, more extensive basin of Crna Reka, where Zajecar is positioned. Both basins feature very diverse forms of lake deposits, with sediments and terraces related to those found in the Romanian-Pontic Basin. Both of them also form mining areas with a number of coal mines dating back to the Cretaceous and Jurassic periods; (...) the northern part of the Crna Reka Structural Basin is rich in copper ore deposits, such as those located in the vicinity of Bor and rather poor deposits of gold can also be found there, in particular lying around the village of Glogovice; gold can be found in the Timok River sand and it has been panned in the area for centuries. There is a lot of difference between mountains towering to the East and those rising to the west of the Timok. The former mountain range, called the Balkan Mountains, form part of the Western Balkans and are composed of different types of rock, with not very much limestone; this region abounds in livestock, in particular the villages of Zaglavak and Korenatac. On the other hand, the limestone mountains lying to the west of the Timok, namely Tresibaba, Ozren and Devica, Rtanj and Kucaj, have the morphology of limestone plateaus. Their topography is characterized by karst formations and features, such as subterranean rivers, sinkholes and scores of caves; more than ten ice caves can also be found in the area. (...) Despite the centralizing effect of the Crna Reka Structural Basic, a number of fertile plains have stood out to some extent, for instance those located in the Danube River Basin, such as the Negotin Plain and Kljuc, a region in Kladovo, which together with Deli Jovan, Veliki Greben and Miroc forms Negotinska Krajina, a prosperous region with thriving agriculture, vine production and animal husbandry. The Porecka River valley, which is relatively small in extent and whose center is in Donji Milanovac on the Danube, also stands out in some respects. The mountain region lying between the Porecka River and Negotinska Krajina used to be covered in forest and sparsely populated before the second half of the 19th century.” [24, pp 59-61].

Today, Eastern Serbia is a region situated along Serbia’s borders with Romania and Bulgaria, covering an area of 13,607 square kilometers. It lies to the south of the Iron Gates and extends to the basin of the River Vlasina and drainage divides running to the Great and South Morava Rivers.

3. ETHNOGENESIS OF THE POPULATION OF EASTERN SERBIA

The Triballi and the Moesi used to inhabit Eastern Serbia before the Common Era. Somewhat later, the region came under the Celtic influence since the Scordisci had settled in this part of the Danube River Basin. The Romans formed one of their provinces in the region called Moesia and built a number of forts and castra along the Danubian Limes. Under the rule of Emperor Trajan, the cultures of indigenous peoples underwent Romanization. During the Migration Period, the Roman Limes had collapsed and fortifications belonging to the system had been ravaged first by the Huns and then by the Goths. In the mid-seventh century AD, Slavic tribes, in particular the Timochani settled in this region of present-day Serbia and left their permanent mark here, despite the influences of the Bulgarians, the Byzantine Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Ottomans. “The Slavs, *i.e.* present-day South Slavs, spread across the Peninsula, mainly by infiltrating gradually and almost undetectably or by invading the area. They assimilated and

drove out the autochthonous population, specifically numerous Thracian tribes on the east, as well as Illyrian and surely the remaining Celtic tribes in the west and central part of the Peninsula. They had managed to penetrate all the way to the Peloponnese and a considerable part of present-day Albania had also been overrun with the Slavs. Since the seventh century AD, the central part of the Peninsula had begun to be referred to as *Sclavenia*, *Sclavonia* or *Sclavenica*. More authentic Greek population had held out only on the Aegean islands and to a certain degree along the littoral as well as in the area surrounding Constantinople in Thrace. The ethnic composition of the Balkan Peninsula had therefore changed fundamentally.” [24, pp 107].

According to Karic, during their settlement of the Balkan Peninsula, the Serbs referred to the people they had come across in the area surrounded by the Morava, the Danube, the Timok and Rtnaj as the Vlachs. Those people were actually the Latins who inhabited the province and the Latinized indigenous population of cattle breeders, specifically the Illyrians and the Trachians [14]. Vlahovic shares a similar view. He emphasizes that Slavs used to refer to all Romance peoples as the Vlachs and that this name was given to them by the Slavs [9]. However, as Karic and Cvijic state, Serbs resettled on the left bank of the Danube in 1481 due to the inroad of the Ottomans. According to the census taken in 1455, a large population of Vlachs had settled in the area between Vidin and Golubac during the Ottoman rule and were given certain privileges. Greater numbers of Vlachs started to colonize the area following the Ottoman-Habsburg war fought in 1593-1606 and the famine that struck thereafter. They came predominantly from Banat and the South of Russia. Previously, Serbs used to inhabit the area since all old toponyms were Serbian, even in areas inhabited by the Vlachs at the moment. The majority of the Vlach population came from Almas, Banat and Transylvania after the settlement of people from Kosovo. These settlers were called the Ungureani, while the settlers from Romania were referred to as the Tsarani. The Ungureani settled in an area to the west of Kucaj and Porecka River, whereas the Tsarani settled to the east, throughout Timocka Krajina. However, as a result of subsequent intermingling and resettlement of the region, they have become considerably intermixed [24], [14]. This means that the Vlachs from Eastern Serbia are not identical with the Vlachs the Slavs encountered on the Balkan Peninsula (known as the Vlachs, the Aromanians, the Tsintsars and the Tsrnovuntsi), i.e. they do not belong to the Romanized tribes native to the Balkans who share similarities with the Romanians in terms of the language they speak [18].

In addition to their mental predispositions and frame of mind, the most important factor in the ethnogenesis of Vlachs had been their pursuit of traditional husbandry (nomadic pastoralism). Since ancient history, geographic and historic circumstances of the Balkan Peninsula and the way in which they interacted with each other had created a need for constant and seasonal movement in order to find mountain regions rich in pastures. These circumstances brought about a distinctive type of people known as the Vlach type that represented a product of the “Paleo-Mediterranean and Indo-European symbiosis”. Due to their specific way of nomadic herding, spiritual culture and elements absorbed from various ethnic groups with whom they came into contact, this type was unique in many respects. This group of people spanned across the territory lying between the Pindus and Thessaly on the south and the Carpathians and Bessarabia on the north and between the Adriatic and the Black Sea [2], [18]. In his book, *The Balkan Peninsula*, Cvijic states that the type of people, to whom he refers as the Aromanians or the Armanians, “by the language they speak, [they] belong to the Romanian people living on the left bank of the Danube; unlike these or the Daco-Romanians, they are every now and then collectively called by the exonym Macedo-Romanians. We refer to their various groups as the Tsrnovuntsi, the Vlachs, the Kutsovlachs, the Tsintsari and the Karaguni. Those living in Istria are called Istrio-Romanians (Cici and Ciribiri). In former times, the Vlachs who continued living in the Dinaric Alps above the Adriatic Sea were known as the Maurovlachs or the

Morlachs. (...) they are genuine nomadic cattle breeders and they mainly rear sheep; they spend summers in temporary shepherd's dwellings known as kalive (...) During summer, they can be encountered scattered across all the tallest mountains (...) Most of them have been or are being assimilated into Greeks, Serbs or Bulgarians." [24, pp 190]. Today, Vlachs living in Eastern Serbia speak both Serbian and Vlach and declare themselves as Serbs. They live together with settlers from Kosovo, Lika, the Uzice region, Macedonia, as well as from Romania, Hungary, Czech and Bavaria [18].

According to the results of a census carried out in Eastern Serbia in the late 16th century, the region's population included the Turks and the Roma. A strong inflow of Montenegrin settlers from the karst region of Montenegro penetrated into the territory of Dunavski Ključ in the 19th century. Unable to get accustomed to the new climate, land cultivation and occurrence of malaria in areas around the Danube, they retreated to Miroc Plateau, where they founded Petrovo Selo. The residents of this dispersed settlement practiced animal husbandry and produced lime. Only later did they start to cultivate the land. Despite being surrounded by Vlachs, the highlanders from Montenegro successfully resisted assimilation into the native population [24]. They have managed to keep alive their customs, dialect, speech and national dress until today. The practice of pursuing a vendetta had survived among them until the end of the 20th century.

Even though environmental conditions prevailing in Eastern Serbia should result in higher population concentration, this thinly populated region has been affected by a population decline for years. Rural population has been decreasing year after year, whereas the low birth rate in towns has been compensated by a mechanical increase in the number of inhabitants resettling there from other regions. Family planning methods are heavily employed (pursuing the one-child policy) because of the tendency towards estate planning to preserve it undivided, whereas mortality rates have been rising on account of an unfavorable age structure of the population. Circumstances are not so favorable health-wise either because of the endemic diseases inherited from the past. The percentage of active population in villages has been constantly decreasing, which has resulted in fallow farmland and abandoned, uncultivated land. The number of older people's households without a jobholder has also been increasing. Most families do not have any children or their progeny has migrated to other Serbian regions or abroad [16].

The results of the 2011 Census showed that, with the population of 35,330, Vlachs accounted for number eight ethnic community in Serbia in terms of the population size. Since a major demographic characteristic of the Vlach population is that they are predominantly concentrated in Eastern Serbia, this ethnic group represents one of the fundamental characteristics of the region in terms of its cultural heritage and *mentality*. The size of the Vlach population had been directly monitored in all population censuses taken in Serbia after the Second World War, specifically from 1948 to 2011.

Results of the last census have shown exceptionally high concentration of the Vlach population in Bor, Branicevo and Zajecar regions. The largest proportion of Vlachs live in the municipalities of Bor, Kucevo, Negotin and Boljevac, whereas somewhat lesser percentages were recorded in the municipalities of Zajecar, Zagubica and Majdanpek. These numbers fall in the peripheral municipalities of Eastern Serbia and range between 280 and 475 in the municipalities such as Svilajnac, Veliko Gradiste, Golubac and Malo Crnice. Spatial distribution of the Vlach population indicates that their greatest concentration is in the central areas of Eastern Serbia. In those municipalities, Vlachs are not the predominant ethnic community, but they do come in second, right after Serbs. In that regard, the largest proportion of Vlachs in the total population count

can be found in the municipalities of Boljevac, Kucevo and Zagubica, where they account for approximately 25% of the total population. On the other hand, the municipalities of Veliko Gradiste, Svilajnac, Cuprija and Despotovac have a relatively small proportion of Vlachs in their total population count. The Vlach population lives predominantly in villages, whereas Bor is the town with the largest number of Vlachs in Serbia, not only in its eastern region, with 1,636 Vlach residents [19].

Municipality	Vlach Population Count	Proportion in total percentage of the Vlach population in Serbia
Negotin	3,382	9.6
Bor	6,701	19.0
Majdanpek	2,442	6.9
Kladovo	788	2.2
Kucevo	3,927	11.1
Zagubica	2,811	8.0
Golubac	424	1.2
Malo Crnice	475	1.3
Veliko Gradiste	382	1.1
Zabari	433	1.2
Zajecar	2,856	8.1
Boljevac	3,356	9.5
Cuprija	782	2.2
Despotovac	687	1.9
Svilajnac	280	0.8
Serbia	35,330	100

Table 1: Municipalities with the largest percentage of Vlach population in Eastern Serbia and their share in the total Vlach population in Serbia according to the 2011 Census

4. RUSALLIAS

Folk beliefs held by people in Eastern Serbia are something of an idiosyncrasy given that Vlachs and Serbs who live on both banks of the Danube share identical beliefs. Inhabitants of this region are usually associated with beliefs in mythical creatures and immediately thereafter with their distinctive mythology arising from nature worship full of myths about animals, plants and natural phenomena. Beliefs in mythical creatures have a number of different origins and are entirely pre-Christian in character [12, 17]. Demons believed by some to exist can be classified as demons originating from living individuals, nature demons, then demons affecting human fates and finally all other mythical creatures whose origin and character is difficult to uncover for the time being [12, 17]. The so-called Todortsi and Rusallias, as well as some others belong to the fourth class of demons [12].

The term “Rusallias” (Serbian: *Rusalje*, *Rusalije*) has several meanings. It is used to denote Pentecost (Whitsuntide), one of the most important Christian holidays. Then, it can be used to refer to women who fall into a trance on the Day of Pentecost as well as the very state or act of the trance ritual. In Balkan nations, specifically Aromanian cattle breeders, Rusallias are mythical creatures commonly living nearby springs and dancing the circle dance (Serbian: *kolo*) around them. It is believed that cattle breeders must not step on the place where Rusal-lias danced during Whitsuntide or they would go mad. These creatures appear to women in

their dreams causing them to go into a trance and the same happens to women who engage in handicraft during Whitsuntide. Shepherds are believed to be able to triumph over Rusallias and overpower them by playing the flute. Enchanted by the sound of the flute, they go into a trance, reveal their secrets, foretell the future and advise on how the evil can be beaten [12, 17]. These mythical beings come into contact with people only during Whitsuntide. The Vlachs imagine them as beautiful young girls with undone hair flowing down their back. They are dangerous during Whitsuntide and can cause harm to people, women in particular [12, 17]. Most importantly, these mythical creatures are believed to enter the bodies of trance dancers as spirits, take control of them and inspire them during the festival of Pentecost and the words spoken in trance are the words of Rusallia spirits [10]. "If a society collectively believes that a person can be possessed by Rusallias, a picture of such possession will manifest itself in a state of trance. Although very firm and strong, such faith is of course extremely archaic and out of agreement with the concepts and dogmas of absolute truths of the Christian faith. On the other hand, it is also sublimated and condensed and as such, it creates miracles and is capable of bringing about even more mystifying spiritual manifestations" [3].

The Rusallia ritual is one of the most interesting rituals existing in the folk culture of Serbs and Vlachs. There are records of this ritual practice in Duboka, Neresnica, Voluja, Rakova Bara, Turija (Zvizzd), Ranovac (in the vicinity of Petrovac na Mlavi), Brnjica (near Golubac), Boljetin (near Donji Milanovac), Krepoljin and in a number of villages in the Boljevac county. Similar phenomena have also been noted in Bulgaria and Romania. „The Rusallia ritual is a phenomenon which represents (...) a unique and utterly „exotic“ instance of a ritual behavior in our traditional culture with its dramatically expressive elements, ritual practices and related beliefs. (...) This is the only developed cult of possession that has emerged in Serbian traditional culture" [20, pp 2, 273]. Both Serbian and international scientists and researchers (physicians, psychiatrists, ethnologists, folklorists, archaeologists, etc.) have studied the phenomenon of women falling into a trance in Eastern Serbia during the festival of Pentecost. In the opinion of Subotic, (a physician who studied the phenomenon in 1897 and 1898), the ritual is a manifestation of chronic hysteria, a severe mental disorder typical of the Vlach population living in the area [21]. Another physician by the name of Dragic was commissioned by the Central Sanitation Institution of Belgrade to investigate the ritual in the period 1935-1936. He presented his views on Rusallias at a congress of Slavic physicians held in Sofia in 1936. Dragic underscored that the behavior exhibited by Rusallias was a consequence of "a functional neurosis combined with hysterical manifestations grounded in an ancient religion and animistic beliefs". Suggestion and autosuggestion play a crucial role in the ritual as well as subconscious mental actions, which take on a character of collective ethics and a mental epidemic. Meisner argued that Rusallias represented remnants of an ancient ritual dedicated to the Phrygian mother goddess known as Cybele, whereas Vasic identified that the ritual was deeply rooted in the Dionysian cult practiced in the ancient Balkans [taken from 3]. Eliade, the greatest authority on shamanism in the world, maintained that the Rusallia ritual lacked all constitutive elements of a shamanistic ritual and thus could not be classified as such. Elements that are missing are the vocation, initiation and apprenticeship of shamans, their ritual costumes, guardian spirits, ability to induce and control trance at will, heal using special methods, psychosomatic function, etc. The Rusallia ritual could be defined as a para-ecstatic experience, a trance, brought about by liturgy and conditioned by culture since it can be practiced only within a time span of the three days Whitsuntide and solely by inhabitants of specific villages, who must be females previously prepared for it by centuries old traditions. Their "awakening" is also different from the awakening of shamans since it is brought about by dance and music. Rusallias experience a crisis of consciousness prepared by a traditional mythical and religious code and overcome it with the help of choreographic devices and music

[11]. Persons such as Rusallias, the Călușari and Anastenarias are highly appreciated by their society. As such, they may not be treated as if they were less worthy or suffering from an illness. Persons who fall into a ritual trance are held in high regard in all primitive animistic societies. These persons predict the future, cast spells, heal and help their community. Because of this, the phenomenon of Rusallias cannot be explained as being a product of degeneration due to congenital syphilis. Instead, it was a result of social cultivation and tolerance. Social structure created a need for mystical persons in a state of trance with specific roles in rituals and customs in the same manner as other communities value priests who perform other rites, observances and customs [3]. In respect of Rusallias, Sinani maintains that their state of trance was an expression of their dissatisfaction and frustration with their social and family status. Only in the public sphere was falling into a trance tolerated as a form of resistance to a patriarchal system [20].

On Biljani Petak, which was the Friday of wild herb-gathering before St. George's Day, people gathered at Dubocka Cave to dance, sing and rejoice. During the celebration, they crowned their Queens, who would awaken Rusallias from their trance during Whitsuntide. Without the Queen circle dance, Rusallias could not come out of the trance state. The Queens chanted the same song or an incantation over and over again to expel the evil spirit from the trance dancer [13], [22]. Their chanting had to be accompanied by instruments. When they came out of the trance, Rusallias danced together a circle dance which represented their victory (a means of catharsis), a relief from the pain and suffering of the Rusallia illness and the triumph of the benevolent spirit over the malevolent one. Herbs that have a rather strong taste and smell, such as garlic and wormwood, were used to expel demons from Rusallias [15], [3]. Music performed during the ritual could not be performed at any other time (it was tabooed) so that they would not slip into a trance before the due time. Such music caused sobbing, crying, flailing of arms and legs and strange facial expressions. Its ancient melody, simple, brief and constantly repetitious, pervaded and possessed the minds of Rusallias as well as spectators attending the ritual. Powerful as it was, it lingered on in their memory for a very long time. Around twenty women, ages fifteen to sixty, would go into a trance in only one day. Scores of people gathered at the place where Rusallias fell into a trance and so the entire feast had some characteristics of a fair. When Rusallias were in a state of trance, they had the power to come into the contact with the spirits (souls) of the dead. The ritual was therefore a type of spiritualist séance, in which the medium (the trance dancer in this case) mediated communication between spirits of the dead and living human beings. Apparently, it was induced by autosuggestion, involving a type of subconsciously triggered reactions attributed to conjuration (animistic cult of the dead). Rusallias also had an ability to predict the future. Not a single case of falling into a trance has been recorded in Eastern Serbia since 1985, which implies that this ritual has died out [3].

5. CRITERIA FOR CATEGORISATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF TOURIST EVENTS IN SERBIA

In order to become a successful tourist product, an event must be categorized and classified, which requires identification of main elements that enhance the product. These elements are as follows: attractiveness and specificity, subject matter, ranking, tradition, quality of organization and number of visitors (quantity), location and connection with natural and anthropogenic tourism resources typical of the destination and the duration of the event [7]. Events with relevance to tourism can be classified according to their origin, continuity at the location, character, programme, attendance rates, funding and tourist motives [8].

The group of geographic criteria includes subject matter, origin of visitors and participants by ranking, tradition, location, accessibility, time of the event, number of visitors and participants, artistic value of the event, number of accompanying events, visitor satisfaction and event organizers [7]. According to criteria from this group, an event may be graded on a scale from 1 to 5 points [7]. Certain events cover a large variety of subject matter. If an event does not feature more than one theme, it is usually accompanied by programmes covering a range of different subject matter, whereas the main theme of the event is presented in its main programme. The purpose of applying the criteria related to how many years an event has been taking place is to highlight its tradition or the continuity of the event. An event can be classified as traditional if it takes place at least five years in a row, with known date and location. Events are ranked with regard to tradition because the longer an event continues the more visitors it attracts from various geographical regions. Criteria applied in the process of events ranking are as follows: geographical origin and number of visitors, relevance, amount of funds allocated for its organization ranking, effects of the event, geographical origin of participants and event programme. An event attains a corresponding rank provided it meets at least two of the criteria mentioned above. Only under such circumstances does it become a tourism resource that can become part of tourism offer. The location of an event is a criterion that indicates how the event relates to anthropogenic, environmental and geographical tourism resources and is expressed as distance from tourist attractions. The time and duration of an event is a criterion that determines the relation of the event to visitors' free time (It is very important whether or not an event takes place during the tourist season, pre-season or holidays). Figures related to visitors and participants count are used as a criterion to indicate attendance rates and successfulness of the programme of tourism offer [7]. The number of accompanying events is a criterion indicative of versatility and attractiveness of event programme, which promotes its inclusion in the tourism offer of the region. Such accompanying events enhance the overall quality and value of the event programme. Event organizers are another criterion used to define the purpose of an event. In that respect, events may be organized by local governments, government agencies, NGOs, cultural institutions, sports organizations, tourism organizations, business entities, etc. Visitor satisfaction provides an insight into the successfulness of a tourism event. Key factors that influence visitor satisfaction are the setting, tourist activities in the region, quality of the tourism event product, interaction between visitors and the local community, safety aspect of the destination and social impact of the event. The artistic value of an event is determined by assessing the setting, factors relevant to designing a tourism product, event's cultural significance, robustness and quality of programme's subject matter (modified Hilary du Cros assessment model) [4], [8], [6], [5].

In 2010, Bjeljic used this model to develop the following indicators:

- Setting,
- Known outside the local area,
- Important national symbol,
- Can tell an interesting story,
- Has qualities that differentiate it from other anthropogenic resources,
- Attractive to special needs,
- The event is associated with culture,
- Number of attractive anthropogenic resources in close proximity,
- Educational value,
- Historical value,
- Social value,
- Scientific and research value,
- Rarity in the destination and the region,
- Potential for ongoing investments and consultations with key stakeholders.

If the sum of points awarded to an event is between 0 and 20, its tourism value is low. If that sum is between 21 and 40, the event's tourism value is medium. Finally, the sum of 41-60 indicates a high tourism value of an event.

The group of economic criteria includes as follows: impact of infrastructure projects, effects on the environment, economy, the media and politics, relations between stakeholders and assessment of cooperation with tourism organization. All these criteria should be analyzed both before and after an event, while the rating scale has between 0 and 4 points. The impact of infrastructure projects relates to the state of infrastructure and whether or not the existing facilities are adequate for organizing a specific tourism event. The environmental criterion is related to the level of environmental protection, meaning the proportion between event's beneficial and adverse effects on the environment in the region in which it takes place. The effect of the media and promotion is a criterion related to the coverage of an event by electronic and print mass media, promotional activities at trade shows and fairs with the aim of determining the impact of the media and promotion on the successfulness of the event. The social and political impact of an event relates to the political situation in the country where the event is staged. Events have increasingly been taking on a political aspect since there is a rising number of events presenting national and regional heritage. The economic criterion is used to assess direct and indirect revenue from the event. Relations between stakeholders stand for the impact of all those involved in organizing a tourism event, both during the planning stage and in the process of staging the event. They play a very important role in the development of tourism since cooperation between various institutions is a prerequisite for organizing tourism events [8], [6], [5], [4].

Based on the criteria mentioned above, we can identify three classes of events that are attractive to tourist:

- Class 1 – events that represent an independent tourism asset,
- Class 2 – events that constitute a significant element of tourism offer,
- Class 3 – other events, including those held in Serbia's underdeveloped regions that require special attention [8].

The sum of the highest values of all indicators from geographic and economic groups of criteria is 116. Thus, events scoring 97 and more points belong to Class 1, whereas those having between 73 and 96 points are placed in Class 2. Events having less than 72 points belong to Class 3.

6. ETHNOGRAPHIC EVENTS IN EASTERN SERBIA

Ethnographic events are an exposition of folk customs, beliefs, rituals and old trades and crafts. Their emergence is grounded in the memory of the ritual and people's need to remember and commemorate. Ethnographic events stand for the oldest elements in the development of tourism and are sufficient tourism assets for attracting visitors. These events have qualities that incite tourists to travel, motivated by the desire to meet new cultures and civilizations or only pursue pastime and leisure [8], [7], [4].

Folklore festivals and traditional folk music festivals started from the need for artistic expression based on language, song and dance. Their purpose is also related to sharing fellowship and experiencing history. In the mid-20th century, visitors from other regions began to express interest in attending these events, which made them tourist attractions. Traditional folk music festivals are usually music competitions accommodating traditional folk instrumentalists and folk

vocalists. In that regard, an event called “Preserving Bagpipes and Old Dances for Posterity” has potential for promoting tourism in Eastern Serbia. Folk artisanship festivals are events that foster and promote traditional folk artisanship of the population of a specific region. Such events are “Festival of Folk Artisanship and Crafts” held in Despotovac, “Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God” taking place in Jolovica Izvor, “Homolje Motifs” organized in Kucevo and “Crna Reka in Song and Dance” held in Boljevac. Haymaking and harvesting festivals and exhibitions of traditional artisanship are attractive and specific in their own way and are usually enriched with artistic programmes and connected with other social and geographical characteristics of an area. As such, they form an important element of tourism offer of the given destination. These festivals feature competitions in cutting hay by hand and traditional haymakers’ breakfast or lunch with cuisine characteristic of the population or the region in which the event takes place [8]. Exhibitions showing traditional artisanship dedicated to old crafts and folk artisanship are another form of ethnographic events. These events can also be staged independently. In Eastern Serbia, such ethnographic events are “Crna Reka in Song and Dance” taking place in Boljevac and “Homolje Motifs”, which is held in Kucevo.

According to data published by the National Tourism Organization of Serbia in its “Events Calendar 2018”, out of 850 tourism events planned for 2018, 134 belong to the category of ethnographic events. As regards the territory of Eastern Serbia, only 16 ethnographic events have been scheduled in municipalities with the prevailing Vlach population. That accounts for mere 11.9% of all ethnographic events scheduled in Serbia or 1.8% of all tourism events planned to be held in Serbia in 2018. In terms of municipalities, Majdanpek and Knjazevac have the lead with four and three ethnographic events, respectively. However, solely Kucevo’s “Homolje Motifs” and Golubac’s “The Danube Fair” are international tourism events.

<i>Date of tourism event</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Name of the event</i>	<i>Organizers</i>
March, April	Bor	Bor	Gathering of Villages	Municipality of Bor Cultural Centre
9 th April	Crnajka	Majdanpek	Folklore Easter Days	“Deli Jovan” Folk Ensemble
9 th -10 th April	Negotin	Negotin	Festival of Traditional Vlach Music “Gergina”	“Gergina” Association for Preservation of Tradition, Language, Culture, Customs and Identity of Vlachs
1 st May	Miroc	Majdanpek	The Lilac Festival	Miroc Cultural Centre
28 th May – 2 nd June	Kucevo	Kucevo	Homolje Motifs	“Veljko Dugosevic” Cultural Centre, Kucevo
7 th -10 th June	Boljevac	Boljevac	Crna Reka in Song and Dance	Cultural and educational center and Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Boljevac

29 th -30 th June	Zagubica	Zagubica	Homolje Springs	Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Zagubica
19 th July	Despotovac	Despotovac	Festival of Folk Artisananship and Crafts	Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Despotovac
27 th -29 th July	Golubac	Golubac	The Danube Fair	Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Golubac
July	Novo Korito	Knjaževac	International Gathering at Kadibogaz	“International Gathering at Kadibogaz” Association
4 th August	Jasikovo	Majdanpek	Summer Pastures of Jasikovo	Cultural Centre of Majdanpek Municipality
4 th August	Ilino	Boljevac	The Ilino Springs	Local community of Ilino
25 th August	Zaova	Malo Crnice	The Stig Assembly	Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Malo Crnice
27 th -28 th August	Jolovic Izvor	Knjazevac	Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God	Municipality of Knjazevac, Knjazevac Tourism Organization
18 th September	Rudna Glava	Majdanpek	Preserving Bagpipes and Old Dances for Posterity	Cultural Centre of Majdanpek Municipality
Beginning of December	Knjazevac	Knjazevac	Tradition Leads Us to the EU	“Izvor” Society for the Preservation of Tradition

Table 2: Ethnographic events in Eastern Serbia’s municipalities with the highest proportion of Vlachs according to the 2011 Census

7. TOURISM ASSESSMENT OF ETHNOGRAPHIC EVENTS IN EASTERN SERBIA

The tourism event called “Homolje Motifs”, which has been held in Kucevo for 51 years, stands out among other events taking place in Eastern Serbia owing to its long tradition. This event is also unique because of its ten accompanying events that complement the main theme of the event. In the overall ranking, the event takes the leading position in the entire tourism offer of Serbia because of its grading in respect of this criterion. These events usually take place at village and town or city squares, on streets, meadows, fields, in cultural centers, on open stages, at parks or nearby anthropogenic tourist attractions. They generally last one to two days, although “Gathering of Villages”, which is held in the Municipality of Bor, lasts more than a month. Such

events are organized by municipal tourism organizations, folklore ensembles, and municipal cultural centers, societies for preservation of tradition, local communities and municipal governments. According to the ranking of events identified by organizers, five international and two national events are held in Eastern Serbia. Other events are either regional or local in character. Events are also ranked based on the origin of visitors. In addition to visitors coming from various parts of Serbia, there are also visitors from countries that emerged after the breakup of former Yugoslavia, as well as from Romania and Bulgaria. The majority of participants come from the territory of the same municipality where the event takes place, then from neighbouring municipalities and from other parts of Serbia as well. Depending on the event's ranking, location and duration, the number of visitors ranges between several hundreds and several thousands, whereas the number of participants varies between eleven and one thousand plus. With more than 20,000 visitors, "Homolje Motifs" of Kucevo also stands out among other events and this applies as well to the number of participants, which exceeds 1,000. Other ethnographic events that stand out in terms of the number of participants are "The Danube Fair" of Golubac and "Gathering of Villages" of Bor. With regard to their artistic value, "Homolje Motifs" and "The Danube Fair" are once again ranked highest in this category, having medium artistic value of grade 4, whereas all other events are graded as 2 and 3 in the artistic value category. The fundamental shortcomings of ethnographic events held in Eastern Serbia are the fact that they resemble funfairs and lack parking space and toilet blocks.

<i>Grading of ethnographic events by continuity</i>		
Continuity	Grading scale	Number of events
0-4	0	1
5-10	1	10
11-20	2	3
21-30	3	1
31-40	4	-
41+	5	1
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by number of accompanying events</i>		
Accompanying events	Grading scale	Number of events
0	0	7
1	1	2
2	2	1
3	3	2
4	4	1
5+	5	3
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by distance from tourist attractions in km</i>		
Distance	Grading scale	Number of events
Up to 1	5	2
2-10	4	2
11-20	3	1
21-30	2	2
31-40	1	5
More than 40	0	4
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by duration in days</i>		
Event duration in days	Grading scale	Number of events
1	0	8
2	1	3
3	2	2
4	3	1
5	4	1

More than 5	5	1
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by geographical origin of visitors</i>		
Visitor origin	Grading scale	Number of events
The same settlement and municipality	0	-
Neighbouring municipalities	1	2
Province and region	2	7
Serbia	3	2
Former Yugoslavia and other neighbouring countries	4	5
International visitors	5	-
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by geographical origin of participants</i>		
Participant origin	Grading scale	Number of events
The same settlement and municipality	0	1
Neighbouring municipalities	1	8
Province and region	2	3
Serbia	3	2
Former Yugoslavia and other neighbouring countries	4	2
International participants	5	-
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by number of visitors</i>		
Visitors	Grading scale	Number of events
Up to 500	0	-
501-1,000	1	13
1,001-5,000	2	2
5,001-10,000	3	-
10,001-20,000	4	1
20,000	5	1
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by number of participants</i>		
Participants	Grading scale	Number of events
Up to 10	0	-
11-50	1	-
51-100	2	-
101-500	3	6
501-1,000	4	7
More than 1,000	5	3
<i>Grading of ethnographic events by artistic value</i>		
Grading scale	Number of events	
0	-	
1	-	
2	3	
3	11	
4	2	
5	-	

Table 3: Tourism assessment of ethnographic events in Eastern Serbia by geographic criteria

Ethnographic events taking place in Eastern Serbia are held in very old buildings. The situation concerning the construction of buildings for these events is such that what is usually built are summer stages and more accommodation facilities are occasionally added. The audience capacity of event venues is also sometimes enlarged and their interior is decorated. The meet-

ing of this criterion borders on unsuccessful and marginal. The economic effect is marginal and satisfactory considering that these events are funded mainly from donations. “The Danube Fair” is an event that stands out in this regard, since in addition to being funded by donors, it has earnings from the sale of souvenirs, stalls renting and renting of accommodation units and bicycles. Cooperation between stakeholders is very good because tourism organizations, local governments, folk ensembles, cultural centers and traditions preservation societies cooperate closely, which is key to the successful development of tourism. As regards media coverage of ethnographic events in Eastern Serbia and activities aimed at their promotion, national and local television and radio broadcasters cover these events as well as the print media. Media coverage focuses on announcing events and reporting about them after their completion. All events have their web sites, which have an active role in their promotion. These tourism events are also promoted at travel and tourism shows, either independently or as part of their municipal tourism offer. The social and political situation is primarily determined by political stability in the region in which an event takes place. Ethno-tourism events held in Eastern Serbia, a home of many Vlachs, are graded according to this criterion as very good given the fact that they promote multiculturalism and interculturalism in the region. Effects on the environment are fair due to successful cooperation between organizers and public utilities owned by local governments of settlements where these events take place. In this respect, we would like to highlight the event “The Danube Fair”, which is held in Golubac. Cooperation with tourism organizations is also fair because they play the role of organizers or co-organizers of the majority of ethnographic events in Eastern Serbia. Visitors generally come to attend of their own initiative due to the fact that there is a lack of cooperation with tourist agents and local tourist agents unfortunately do not organize any excursions to nearby attractions during these events.

<i>Points</i>	<i>Unsuccessful (0)</i>	<i>Marginal (1)</i>	<i>Fair (2)</i>	<i>Very good (3)</i>	<i>Excellent (4)</i>
<i>Infrastructure project</i>					
<i>Before</i>	14	2	-	-	-
<i>After</i>	14	2	-	-	-
<i>Environmental criterion</i>					
<i>Before</i>	3	6	5	2	-
<i>After</i>	2	7	5	1	1
<i>Media promotion criterion</i>					
<i>Before</i>	-	3	11	2	-
<i>After</i>	-	3	8	3	2
<i>Social and political criterion</i>					
<i>Before</i>	-	-	-	14	2
<i>After</i>	-	-	-	14	2
<i>Economic criterion</i>					
<i>Before</i>	-	8	6	2	-
<i>After</i>	-	7	7	2	-
<i>Stakeholders' relations</i>					
<i>Before</i>	-	-	-	14	2
<i>After</i>	-	-	-	13	3
<i>Cooperation with tourism organizations</i>					
<i>Before</i>	-	9	-	2	5
<i>After</i>	-	8	-	2	6

Table 4: Economic criteria applied to tourism assessment of ethno-tourism events in Eastern Serbia

An analysis of the results of geographic and economic criteria applied in the tourism assessment of ethno-tourism events in Eastern Serbia points to the conclusion that all the events concerned belong to Class 3. The best-graded events are “Homolje Motifs” and “The Danube Fair” of Golubac with 60 and 59 points respectively.

8. POTENTIALS OF THE RUSALLIA RITUAL AS ETHNO-TOURISM EVENT

Precisely because of the former long tradition and specificities of the Rusallia ritual, we are of the opinion that this rite could be revived and as such, it could provide a basis for organizing ethno-tourism events in various parts of Eastern Serbia. This custom could be brought back to life, along with its central theme and patina dating back to the 19th and first half of the 20th century. With that aim in mind, this paper presents an analysis of the Rusallia ritual based on criteria for evaluating events from the perspective of tourism studies.

According to its programme, Rusallias would be organized as a ritual fest within a festival of folk customs aimed at preserving the folk tradition and bringing it to the attention of and presenting it to tourists interested in learning about it. Given that a lot of visitors used to attend the Rusallia ritual, which had a long-standing tradition until 1985, the ritual performance had a character of fair. In addition to the ritual, a separate programme could be organized around folklore dances and songs characteristic of the region. Exhibitions of folk artisanship, costumes and photography could be held as well, along with book promotions, screening of films, scientific and popular lectures and public narration of myths and legends. Finally, the programme could include presentation and consumption of traditional food and beverages. Eastern Serbia is full of great many natural and anthropogeographic sites which tourists find very attractive and the Rusallia ritual would only enhance and complete the tourism value of this destination. The event would take place on any of the three days of the Pentecost festival, *i.e.* Whitsuntide, which is usually celebrated in Eastern Serbia as the day of the village votive feast (Serbian: *zavetina*). As a matter of fact, the date of the holiday is movable and it can take place either in May or in June when weather conditions are usually favorable for travelling. This, as well as many other ancient customs typical of the region or even pantomimes featuring mythical creatures accompanied by instruments such as the *karabash* and violin, could be presented at cave entrance chambers or on open stages. Other rural settings could be considered as well. This tourist event could be organized by tourism organizations working in interested municipalities in cooperation with folk ensembles. At first, it would be staged as a local event. Depending on its ranking, venue and duration, the number of visitors would range from several hundreds to several thousands, and it would have between 11 and 50 participants. At the outset, visitors would come from all over Serbia and after some time, tourists from surrounding countries would attend. If the event takes hold, the elements that will be assessed are its artistic value, specifically its setting, factors relevant to designing a tourism product, as well as its cultural relevance, accommodation facilities, quality of programme and visitor and participant satisfaction.

Since the event would take place in Eastern Serbia, which is very attractive in terms of its geographical and anthropogeographical features, its setting is graded as very good. The Rusallia ritual is somewhat known outside the local community. Considering that it is primarily related to the Vlach population, the ritual is graded as very good because it is an important national symbol of this ethnic group. As shown in one of the previous chapters, a very interesting story can be recounted not only about this ritual, but also about popular beliefs in Rusallias and legends of these mythical creatures. As a result, the event was graded as excellent by this criterion.

Because of the fact that it would encompass a lot of accompanying events, the event devoted to the Rusallia ritual has been graded as excellent as it would be attractive for special needs. The event would be very closely associated with culture given the ethnographic value of the ritual. Since the remnants of an ancient imperial palace and memorial complex of Gamzigrad-Romuliana, Palace of Galerius (known as *Felix Romuliana*), which has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, are situated in Eastern Serbia, along with numerous immovable cultural heritage assets of exceptional importance, the event has been graded as excelled by the criterion concerning the number of attractive anthropogenic resources in the close proximity of the location of the event. The Rusallia ritual has very high educational, historical, social, scientific and research values and the event could attract a lot of young myth and legend enthusiasts from Serbia and abroad. They could learn a lot at the event, not only about ethnography, but also about history, culture and other aspects of the Vlach society and the region in general. In addition, the event could attract many researchers working in different disciplines, such as ethnologists, anthropologists, geographers and others. The event would promote the Rusallia ritual that is actually a ritual trance phenomenon found on the Balkan Peninsula only in Greeks (the Anastenaria) and Romanians (Călușari), which is why the event has been given an excellent grade for the indicator of rarity. Potential for ongoing investments and consultations with key stakeholders has also been graded as excellent. The potential event of Rusallia ritual has received 54 points in the process of assessing its artistic tourism value, which is regarded as high value and attractiveness according to the modified Hilary du Cros method.

Indicators	Grade
<i>Setting</i>	4
<i>Known outside the local area</i>	3
<i>Important national symbol</i>	4
<i>Can tell an interesting story</i>	5
<i>Has qualities that differentiate it from other anthropogenic resources</i>	5
<i>Attractive to special needs</i>	5
<i>The event is associated with culture</i>	5
<i>Number of attractive anthropogenic resources in close proximity</i>	5
<i>Educational value</i>	2
<i>Historical value</i>	2
<i>Social value</i>	2
<i>Scientific and research value</i>	2
<i>Rarity in the destination and the region</i>	5
<i>Potential for ongoing investments and consultations with key stakeholders</i>	5
Total	54

Table 5: Assessment of artistic value of the Rusallia ritual using the modified Hilary du Cros model

The event is not likely to affect adversely the implementation of capital projects related to infrastructure and civil engineering. Instead, its effects on the economy would be favorable. It could be funded from the budget of local governments, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Regional Development. Other sources of funding could be secured from donations and sponsorship as well as by selling tickets, souvenirs, traditional food and beverages. This would enhance cooperation between tourist organizations, tourist agencies and cultural institutions. Local and national media would provide media coverage and cover promotional activities and the event would be presented at travel and tourism trade shows. It would also have a positive influence on the political situation since international tourists would adopt a favorable attitude towards the

population of Serbia. In addition, it would enhance the mutual understanding between people from different regions of Serbia. The event would not have any adverse effects on the environment since it would raise the awareness among participants and tourists of protection of the environment. In addition, the event could take on an environmental aspect through promotion of healthy food. Tourism organizations should undoubtedly take part in organizing and promoting the event. They should as well organize trips to nearby tourist attractions to ensure positive effects on the economy of the destination.

9. CONCLUSION

Making the Rusallia ritual part of tourism offer in Eastern Serbia would connect various ethnic groups in their efforts to increase tourism and achieve overall economic growth. Reactivation and revival of this ancient ritual for the purpose of boosting tourism would ensure preservation of the cultural identity of the Vlach community. This would make Eastern Serbia a much more attractive destination for tourists. As an ethno-tourism event, the Rusallia ritual would make a significant addition to the tourism offer of this region, thus leading to stronger links between the private and public sector. The ritual could also be included in the programme of existing ethno-tourism events in Eastern Serbia as accompanying event. It would make them an important element of the overall tourism offer available in Serbia since they currently belong to Class 3 of tourism events. The Rusallia ritual could also be an important element in tourism product development in this Serbian region and an important factor in its placement on the international tourism market. Development of tourism would be conducive to the overall growth of the economy, which would have a beneficial effect on the overall situation of the population living in Eastern Serbia in terms of stopping the current population decline and improving the population structure.

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