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# THE VILLAGE IN TRANSITION – PEOPLE AND PLACES

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LAGE: MEMORY, IDENTITY, INHERITANCE”

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The book is dedicated to a highly debated problem of modern times, born by the dynamic and complex changes in the Bulgarian villages. In the last thirty years, those places have become social and cultural space where contradictory states can be observed, caused by the discrepancies between life experience and the quickly shifting objective structures. They could be outlined as the parallel development of two opposite trends: on the one hand “fading” (disappearance, depopulation, drastic demographic aging), and on the other – “renewal” (return to the village, populating with young people, entrepreneurial spirit and initiatives). Such a situation needs to be documented, analyzed and explained not only to comprehend the ongoing processes but also to establish how the people who provoke or endure the changes sustain the vitality of the communities and the sustainability of the territories which they inhabit.

Such were the views of our interdisciplinary team when we started work on the project *Life Transitions in the (Self-) Transforming Village: Memory, Identity, Inheritance*<sup>1</sup> and the conducted field research based on modern methods in the humanities and social sciences. The data collected contains narratives, biographies, stories and images which could serve as a nucleus for describing and analyzing the views and practices of local communities and their members. They provide us with the opportunity to focus on the general sense and meanings locked in them, in order to comprehend the modern processes developing in the Bulgarian village. Another essential view is that life transformations affect not only the individual, but also the whole community, which undergoes the economic, political and cultural transitions that mark the history of the villages and fit into the wider Bulgarian context.

The hypotheses, observations and analyzes of the materials collected during the nearly two-year period of work were laid out at the conference in the town of Hisarya held at the end of January 2022. The

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<sup>1</sup> “Life Transitions in the (Self-) Transforming Village: Memory, Identity, Inheritance” from the National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science, contract No: KII 06 – H40/5.

seminar review of our first results was very fruitful, not only from the point of view of presentation and interpretation of the case studies, but also as an area of exchange which generated new ideas, the fruit of collective efforts supporting our individual work, both in terms of comprehending of what has been achieved, and for taking the next steps in our scientific directions.

The topics which stood out revealed not only the various aspects of the transitions but also the various collective and personal positions and strategies which contribute to the overcoming of the consequences of the state policies which were imposed for more than half a century in the country and led to the rupture of the relationship between the land and the villagers. The attempt to understand the role of the people as social actors who hold the past and the future in their hands, and every day recreate the village as a community and contribute to its sustainability, was an essential task for us.

Wider or narrower concepts, united by internal connections and meanings, emerged at this conference, becoming the reason we called this collection *Fragments from the Village in Transition – People and Places*. Although it contains a few answers, it raises ever more questions, and most importantly, it sets a direction.

By the editors

**LIFE TRANSITIONS:  
INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY**





# CONTRADICTIONS OF HERITAGE – THE LIVING STORIES OF AND ABOUT THE TRANSITION

*Stoyka Penkova*

**Summary:** The presented analysis is an attempt to outline the contradictions of inheritance in a Bulgarian village through the **living stories of and about the transition**, which we find in “the BOOK of impressions written by hand by the visitors to the co-op. farm *G. Dimitrov*, the village of Razhevo Konare, Plovdiv region” (1948 – 1971), in which the guests write their impressions and messages. The thesis claims that the Book is a discursive heterotopia in which the heterochronies of the (self) transformation of the socialist cooperative village unfold. It retains the identity of both the agents who are external to this specific distinctive place and of those who are inside it and who fill it with life through their routine practices.

**Key words:** contradictions of heritage, socioanalysis, discursive heterotopia, “model village”, distinctiveness.

The current study is an attempt to outline the contradictions of inheritance in a Bulgarian village through the **living stories of and about the transition**, which we find in “the BOOK of impressions written by hand by visitors to the co-op. farm *G. Dimitrov*, village of Razhevo Konare, Plovdiv region”, kept from 1948 to 1971 with fluctuating consistency and intensity. In the Book, the visitors of the co-op. farm in the village enter their impressions and – above all, enthusiastic about what they saw – their messages. The thesis claims that it is a discursive heterotopia in which the heterochronies of the (self) transformation of the socialist cooperative village unfold. It preserves the identity of both the agents who are external to this specific distinctive place and those who are inside it and who fill it with life through their routine practices.

Such a statement requires a focus on several key research highlights:

1) explication of the *forms of contradictory inheritances*, about which the *Book* narrates, as well as the whole *Archive of the Co-op.*, and comprehension of the way in which the actual “*sociogenesis*” of the process of inheritance is carried out. Subject to a special “duality”

(both at the level of “the constitutive dispositions of the habitus” and at the level of the objective structures, including the way in which the social order is im-printed in the bodies), the inheritance mechanisms require explication of the ways, according to which the “adjustment” between the two levels takes place as a condition for the possibility of “ontological coparticipation” between biographical and social *illusio*, i.e. the answer to the question of how this *illusio* being “the thing worth dying for” is determined from within and pushes the agent to invest in various objects, but is also externally determined through the whole universe of objects which are socially predisposed to invest in them;

2) analysis of the specific *discursive practice from the early years of socialism*, in which we can find a representation of the coming transformations in the village of Razhevo Konare. Hereby it is important to discern how the *Book* can be seen not only as a discursive machine aimed at producing discursive practices which tell “about” and represent the vitality of the so-called *model village*, but also as a symbolic form filled with temporality and preserving the historical time; the recorded impressions are something like “exhibits” (and symbols) through which the past is accessible to us<sup>2</sup>. Simultaneously, we must outline that in the *Book* the practical formulation of what is a “model cooperative farm” acquires reality as an ideological construction which is designed to retain both the identity of the particular author and of those who fill it with content through their daily practices. This means that the form *model village* does not exist in itself, but only when we talk about it, i.e. the discourse *for* the transformation of the ordinary village into a “model” one and its transformation into a special and Other (and distinctive) place makes sense primarily as an action, as a gesture<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, we will see that the potential of the discourse for the “model cooperative farm” is extremely rich: on the one hand, because it attributes identities – both the essentially affirmative distinctive identities

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<sup>2</sup> Here the analytical attention is drawn by the way they are “mirrors” in which “I” (as Foucault would tell us) “see myself where I am not”, but from which my gaze to the mirror returns to “Me” “where I am” and seems to say to me “You are who you are!” Hence the possibilities for a (self) socioanalysis (see Deyanov 2015), which examines the contradictions of inheritance of this “revived” past.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. for ex. “*How much I want all Thomas the Unbelievers to come here to your farm – to see and be convinced that labor really becomes a song and that collective labor brings prosperity and happiness to farmers in our country*”, August 13, 1948, signed Major Petko Nikolov.”

of the super-gifted and enlightened by it<sup>4</sup>, and the essentially negative identities of those who are super-deprived of this enlightenment<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, the **socio-analytical stratification** of the mechanisms of **inheritance** in the distinctive socialist village requires: 1) highlighting the ways in which the heritage is “retained” at the level of the objective structures, i.e. *institutionally*; such an analysis will make it possible to “**understand**” the official discourses and discursive practices of their narrators, outlining the discourse on heritage at institutional level and will explain their ideology and performative activity; 2) highlighting the way in which the inheritance is transmitted/accepted at the level of *the agent and daily practices*, i.e. *habitually*; through parallel socio-analytical stratification of the autobiographical discursive practices of the agents participating as producers and/or consumers in the process of social production and the use of the discourse. The analysis will allow to understand the very contradiction of the distinctive participants in the process of transformation of the village.

Hence, the analytical range of problems related to the *praxeological understanding* of the process of acceptance/ transmission of “heritage” in the situation of socialist transformations in the village, which turn it into “another place” (in Foucault's sense) and require comprehension of the many points of view and perspectives in the living stories of the agents in focus:

1) the way the heirs are attributed a certain social essence and they “become what they are”<sup>6</sup> – a very important aspect in view of the fact that the attribution of a social essence implies the institutionalizing of identity, i.e. imposing a **name**, and the naming as an act of institutionalizing means giving social definition, or *denoting* someone as “what” he/she is<sup>7</sup> and “how” *he/she should behave as a result*<sup>8</sup>;

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<sup>4</sup> Eg. “*The pioneer cooperators of the “First Labor Cooperative Agricultural Farm in our country”, i.e. the heroes of socialist labor, the leaders of the “units of communist labor,” the bearers of gold, silver, and bronze medals.*”

<sup>5</sup> As the “bad comrade” who “works poorly”, “does not respect the statute”, “did not attend meetings and during work took the wood of M.D. thereby violating party discipline”, “does not possess the qualities of a communist”, or the debunked “active fighter” who “puts a bad name on the party”.

<sup>6</sup> “Become what you are” is “the formula which extends under the performative magic of all acts of institutionalization” (Bourdieu 2005: 118).

<sup>7</sup> Namely, “hero of labor”, “bearer of medals”, “participant in the socialist competition”, “member of the Communist Party”.

<sup>8</sup> Namely, to “work tirelessly”, to “give his/her best in the socialist competition”, to “see his/her mistakes”, etc.

2) the way the social entities given through the mechanisms of institutionalizing and inheritance “enclose those who they distinguish, within the *limits* set for them and which they themselves insist on being recognized” (Bourdieu 2005: 118, own italics) – an important emphasis in the socioanalytic problematization of the **distinctiveness** of the socialist village and its inhabitants. The sanctification of distinctiveness – the very distinctiveness as a form of inheritance – turns it into a “permanent difference”, which is loaded with social meaning, i.e. recognized and accepted as such by the other participants in this discursive field. In this way the difference becomes a *social* difference, the distinctiveness acquires the semblance of a “real” (naturally) given such, and the institutionalized person (“the authorized person”) dresses in the symbolic efficacy of his/her *institutionalized identity*. Thus, the cooperative farm itself creates the right conditions for its transformation into a **distinctive place**, in which the eyes of both the the new power seeking its assertion and those involved in this process of unparalleled transformations and who suffer the effects of this power. Above all, the distinctiveness of this place is associated with the emergence of **energy**, which – almost like religious “faith” – drives the communist discourse, which is fighting for a monopoly on the legitimate ideological production; on the other hand – the level of no less magnificent work on ideological colonization of the inner life of the individual, carried out by “imposing (masked and therefore unrecognized as imposing) classification systems and mental structures objectively corresponding to social structures” (comp. Bourdieu 2001).

The process of transformation of the village and its turning into a “model village” is fueled by similar ontological “energization” and “self-energization” (a magical action, Bourdieu would say), at which *Georgi Dimitrov Co-op.* becomes a “**pure heterotopia**” (comp. Bundzhulov 2011), performing ideological and utopian functions – a distinctive place, which is a heterotopia for the external observers and a “successfully realized utopia” for the internal participants in the building of the “wonderful new world”, through which their identity is preserved and the normativeness of “what they should be” is set (ideologically)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> And they must be “*worthy pioneers of this great national cause*” (from the telegram of Georgi Dimitrov), “*in the first place and a real example for all others Co-ops. and hence the establishment of new ones*”, and hence – it is enthymematically ordered to “become such” (“*The deeds of the first creators of this work deserves admiration. Their example should be exchanged with other cooperatives to teach everyone.*” – from the Book)

Hence my other thesis is that this distinctive place was not just a space for constructing socialist “who- identities” through the energy which flowed from the inside out<sup>10</sup> and which propelled the reverse energizing from the outside in<sup>11</sup>, but there is more to it: what happens here-and-now in it is present as “future-oriented, which, as Benjamin (comp. Benjamin 1998) says,” by some mysterious heliotropic effect is directed to that sun which rises in the sky of history. “A future exposed by the present.” (Bundzhulov 1995: 146).

The problem is that the performed archeology of the discourses and discursive practices related to the transformation of the village into a distinctive place inevitably encounters their “dilution” (in the sense of Foucault) around and after the 60's and shows how the pure energy which sprouts of these, gradually fades into normalization. Although it is nowhere explicitly stated, the implicit suggestion of the depletion of the symbolic charge emitted by the distinctive place is gradually beginning to be enforced as an increasingly possible assumption for the future development of the model village. Hence the need for a careful socioanalytic examination of the “then” and “there” of the distinctive heroes of labor with the “here” and “now” of their successors.

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<sup>10</sup> I mean the enthusiasm and heart of the cooperators

<sup>11</sup> Through directives, theses, meetings with leaders, announcing competitions, etc., but also the “winged words” from the telegram of Georgi Dimitrov sent from Moscow on the occasion of the establishment of the cooperative department, which has become an emblem of the Co-ops., etc...

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# RETURN TO THE NATIVE VILLAGE – LIFE TRANSITIONS AND MIGRATIONS

*Meglana Zlatkova*

**Summary:** This article outlines a specific form of migration – the “return” to the native village, by problematizing this migration as a life transition of active people of retirement age from the so-called generation of the “children of socialism”. The field observations are from the village of Spahievo, Haskovo region. The text also outlines a broader picture of the types of migrations and major transitions in the lifespan of this generation as coping strategies in different political, economic and cultural contexts in Bulgaria in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Key words:** urban-rural migration, generation of the “children of socialism”, transformations in the village.

The “return to the village” is one of the figures in public rhetoric and in private conversations which, after 2010, began to increasingly “oppose” the “depopulation of villages”. For many people heading back to the village is also a life transition, a transformation not only on the level of personal choices or family decisions, but also on the level of the local rural community. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the connection with the village was perceived by the “returnees” more as a connection with nature and a healthy lifestyle than as a return to community and locality. A global pandemic such as Covid-19 has accelerated the decision-making processes of many people to exchange their urban homes for rural ones, adding another meaning to the notion of “healthy living”, namely “freedom”, in the sense of weaker epidemic restrictions. The transition from city to village in Bulgaria is a heterogeneous process, and the social actors in it are very different – young people<sup>12</sup>, middle-aged people pensioners, but there are also seasonal migrations such as “vacational grandparents and grandchildren”, “pandemic migrants”, etc.

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<sup>12</sup> In recent years, many studies have been published, including doctoral dissertations on urban-rural migration of young people, among which are the works of Atanaska Stancheva (Stancheva 2016) and Petya Dimitrova (Dimitrova 2022).

In this text I will make a few propositions on the topic of the “return” to the (native) village of a specific group called in our research project *Life transitions in the transforming village* “young pensioners” and “the generation of the children of socialism”, the active transformers in the so-called “villages with fading functions”, whose demographic is dominated by people of the “third age”, with almost no middle-aged or young people.

Why “young pensioners”? At the time of our research, the average retirement age in Bulgaria is above 60 years, with a tendency to go up. According to the latest National Statistics Institute census in 2021, 26%, or 1 838 441 people of the population live in villages. Of these, one third (621 465 people) are over 60 (Census 2021). There is substantial variation in the age structure of the villages and the different regions of Bulgaria, and in a lot of them this ratio is over 50% in favour of the group of this study.

This text argues that there is a typological similarity in the transformations of the villages in the last 32 years of the recent history of Bulgaria, designated as a period of “transition”, and the transformations in the life trajectories of the people of the generation of the “children of socialism”<sup>13</sup>, who moved to the countryside after retirement, a meaningful personal transition to the next stage in life<sup>14</sup>. These people have changed the villages they moved to and have given them a “new life” by also taking an activist position, connecting the past with the future not in the “traditional” manner of agrarian communities, but as people who have repositioned themselves in the local village communities.

This hypothesis here is based on our long-term fieldwork and remote Internet observations in the village of Spahievo, Haskovo region,

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<sup>13</sup> The topic of the various generations is very much debated in the social sciences and is worth discussing in a separate publication. In her monographic study *Ethnological Aspects of Old Age and Aging in Bulgarian Society*, Ivelina Eftimova offers a comprehensive overview of the scholarly trends and proposes a model for the study of the generation defined by the institutions as “pensioners”, as a heterogeneous group passing through the same layers of historical time, adding that the experience of each generation is the result of the historical and cultural conditions in which they live (Eftimova 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Old age and aging from an ethnological point of view, along with the socializing cultural and social mechanisms in Bulgarian society at different stages of its historical development, have been analysed in detail by Ivelina Eftimova (Eftimova 2022).



in which we worked together with Dobrinka Parusheva<sup>15</sup> (Zlatkova, Parusheva 2019). In the village, out of a total of 144 residents, 77 are over 60 years old, of which the largest group are the so-called “young pensioners” aged between 60 and 75 (44 people), which is the generation born after 1944 or what we call the “children of socialism”. Many of the current permanent residents have “returned” after having “left the village” in connection with the modernization and urbanization processes in Bulgaria after 1949 and especially after the creation of the cooperatives and intensive industrialization in the area of Haskovo, Kardzhali and Dimitrovgrad.

The representatives of the generation born after 1944–50 in the villages, which today house a dominant elderly population, show similarities in their biographical strategies from the point of view of migrations and share the same historical, social and political layers. Their childhood coincides with the first, revolutionary period of socialism, when the new identities are construed and all the socializing practices associated with school and the pioneer organization (an organization of pupils operated by the Communist Party) are established. The significant deep transformation is the collectivization of land and means of production. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century this is the first disruption of people’s ties with the village and the land, and their link with their heritage. To a large extent, until then “village” meant a connection to the land. Now, as the children of “former” owners, they head to the larger cities and subsequently stay there for high school or professional education. The other biographical line traces those who suspend their studies after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and start work, most often in the cooperative unions, and “become” agricultural workers. In a more general historical plan, this vital transition from childhood and youth to early adulthood coincides with the urbanization of the country and the forced internal migration within the country. Initiation or taking on the status of “adult” for many of the representatives of that generation is tied to migration, usually to a town or city. In the collective biography of the villages of the 1950s and

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<sup>15</sup> We published part of our research results in a joint study (Zlatkova, Parusheva 2019). Some of the observations are also included in this text in a summarized version with the permission of my co-author. The research in the village of Spahievo has been conducted since 2018 (after 2020 – remotely, via the Internet). Some of the profiles of the social actors, connected in one way or another with the visible transformations in the village, can be distinguished as “returning locals”, “young pensioners”, “the strangers”, “the grafts”, etc.

1960s, the more significant depopulation and change of the demographic situation and migration of entire families happens alongside the closing of schools.

The rural-urban migration and life transition of that generation is also controlled by the socialist state through the “citizenship” system, according to which those nationals of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria<sup>16</sup> born in the villages must meet certain conditions in order to stay, work and obtain residency in the city. This transition is also related to change of status, entry into social networks, favour exchanges within the networks, pulling strings, political positioning, marital strategies, starting a family and professional development, strategies for “acquiring” urban accommodation, etc.

We can distinguish between two waves of retirees returning to the villages. The first one takes place in the 1990s, when the comeback to the village is part of a strategy for survival in the context of an economic crisis; the second one is in the new millennium – the return of active people from the cities or from abroad, who have chosen migration to the countryside as a strategy for a “peaceful” but also “dignified” old-age retreat, or even as an aspiration for a higher quality of life.

The life transition defined hereby as “returning to the native village” carries the contradiction and at the same time the ambivalence of the choice between going back to one's roots and taking a step to the next phase in life. In many of the observed cases in various regions of Southern Bulgaria<sup>17</sup>, it is precisely these returnees who form the active group in the village which makes the changes. Most of them are still active citizens with experience and rich social capital in the country and/or abroad, which gives them more chances to adapt to future changes – pandemics, economic crisis, even war, and to change their environment. With this type of migration, there is another type of “return” that has been observed since the year 2000, and that is of people who have lived abroad and choose to “return” not only to Bulgaria, but also to the village after their retirement. They introduce another type of change because they use their

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<sup>16</sup> Ivaylo Dichev describes the results of these policies as “the settling of nomadic socialism” (Dichev 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Within the framework of the project, there were also observations in the villages of Ivaylovgrad, the village of Staro Zhelezare, the village of Yavrovo, etc., and some colleagues shared information from their field research in other villages, the results of which are included in this collection.

experience of living in other societies and cultures. They often receive “foreign pensions”, which sets them apart from their fellow villagers, and very often the latter position them as the “rich” in the community of the “former equals” “children of socialism”. These relations are quite intriguing because these are the first “returnees” who bring the experience of the transformations after 1989. The retired “Bulgarians from abroad” will become more and more active in the life of the rural communities and will probably be among the instigators of change.

The “young pensioners”, although with widely varying life stories, have the biographical similarities of belonging to the generation, and in their life experiences they stand out or come close to one another when it comes to the attempts to cope with the economic, political and social changes after 1989. Although the nationalized property has been restituted and/or privatized, their status of the “former owners” cannot be restored to them because 45 years later the “children of socialism” have already gone through their life transitions of youth and adulthood.

In the village of Spahievo, as in many other villages in Bulgaria with a predominantly retired population, the instigators of change and the active generation are engaged in restoring the church, the community center, in modifying the public spaces, placing monuments, and are also involved in the local folk group. They come from the same generation who were young in the post-war years and the beginning of the socialist period. In the group there are both locals and newcomers “grafted into the village”<sup>18</sup> – daughters-in-law or people who have bought property and live permanently there, as well as those who have returned from abroad.

The generation of these active residents of Spahievo participates in the organization of the entire festive life and in some of the everyday situations – to aid people in need. They also assist the deputy mayor. The “outsiders” to the village are also included in the theater activities, and their participation in the “authentic folklore” group is a kind of initiation in their transformation to “locals”, makes them legitimate, since they also become bearers and guardians of memory and remembrance. The majority of them actively participate in the important village holidays, such as the Holy Sunday Fair, the anniversaries of Hristo Botev and Vasil Levski, and 2<sup>nd</sup> June<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> As one of our interlocutors defined herself.

<sup>19</sup> The community center in the village bears the name of Hristo Botev, and thanks to the secretary of the community center and with the support of sponsors, a monument

The pensioners who have “returned”, through their participation in the folklore group, as well as in the festive and everyday life, “find” and gain their place in the village by “entering” into inheritance, i.e. the “citizens” become “villagers” again, remembering and changing/adapting” tradition (Antonov 2022) <sup>20</sup>.

By participating in cultural events and holidays, organized predominantly in the community center, the “returnees” of retirement age position themselves again in the local community. The generation which socialist modernization and urbanization “uprooted” from their birthplaces, from their kinship and family communities through a biographical reconfiguration of their life paths and their participation in different (from the settlement-community) networks, has accumulated social capital that can easily be transformed into symbolic capital; they can become heirs. On the other hand, it is this generation who are the legitimate “carriers”<sup>21</sup> of the cultural heritage which they can demonstrate to others and pass it on to the younger, because now they are the “older generation”, the grandparents who help their children and grandchildren and who welcome the heirs in the country houses, giving their grandchildren a reason “to go to the village”.

The life transitions associated with the migrations of the generation of the “children of socialism”, who are now in their retirement age, show numerous micro-transitions of the Bulgarian society from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which are individual and collective life projections of a broader picture of political, social and economic changes. Although at the beginning of socialism they were still children, and now they are no longer professionally active, it is these people who close the circle of transmission of legacies to the next generations. In many of the villages they are the younger of the “older generations”, i.e. they fill the “empty space” of the middle generation, which must bring change and sustain the community, and in their own way “bring change” and deal with the risks of the future.

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with Vasil Levski and Hristo Botev was erected in front of it, which became a place of commemorative secular rituals related to official and national holidays.

<sup>20</sup> Stoyan Antonov describes similar mechanisms of construction of holidays in modern times, calling this process “updating the tradition” (Antonov 2022).

<sup>21</sup> I.e. recognized and acknowledged. For legitimacy and symbolic capital and succession, see Bourdieu 1997, 2005, 2008.

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# LIFE TRANSITIONS AND PERSONAL IDENTITY: AN EMPIRICAL CASE

*Milena Tasheva*

**Summary:** The paper meets the theoretical context of the socio-analysis of the self-inheritance with the empirical context of the Bulgarian village through an analysis of the life transitions and biographical strategies in a specific empirical case. Initially, the theoretical framework of post-Bourdieu socio-analysis is referenced and the applied methodological techniques are introduced. The socio-analytical perspective on the biographical trajectory and the life transitions of a specific personal identity allowed the delineation of a characteristic strategy of the studied person – that of “the practical sense”. It unfolds through a recurring investment structure which funds multiple statements and functions as a symbolic nerve. It is that which, permeating the very different biographical episodes, in fact binds them in the unity of a seemingly diverse, but actually internally consistent life trajectory.

**Key words:** socio-analysis, Bulgarian village, life transitions, biographical strategies

The research conducted within the project “Life Transitions in the Transforming Village: Memory, Identity, Inheritance” meets the empirical context of the Bulgarian village with the theoretical context of the socio-analysis of self-inheritance (comp. Deyanov et al. 2013; 2015). Precisely such analysis can outline the broad theoretical framework of the study, insofar as – by asking the question “How is the successful self-inheritance possible?” – it gives a chance for the subject-centered diagnosis of the personal identity. Reaching beyond the socio-analysis of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Wakan 1993: 31–51) and entering into a critical dialogue with the phenomenological psychopathology of Giovanni Stanghellini (Stanghellini 2014; Stangelini 2018), the socio-analysis of the self-inheritance places a strong analytical emphasis on “the effort of the agent on investing in a future identity [...]” through which he/she [...] to become “who he/she is” as opposed to “what he/she is” (comp. Deyanov et al. 2015).

The study identifies local residents as bearers of transformations in a Bulgarian village – Razhevo Konare. To the extent that the objective history of the place and the subjective history of human life are dialectically related, the transformations are examined through the ways in which locals unfold their biographical trajectories, composed of life transitions which have more or less essential functions of events in their personal biographies. Undertaken with determination or imposed by external necessity, the life transitions are developed by the “practical sense” of the correctness of the particular agent (comp. Bourdieu, Wakan 1993: 75). Therefore, it is in them that the personal *habitus* of the agent permeated by the biographical *illuso*<sup>1</sup> can be captured in its action, as well as the specificity of the biographical *illuso* itself, founding the “Who-identity”<sup>2</sup> of the personality.

Socio-analytical conversation was preferred as a method of collecting empirical data. Its specificity is that it happens only insofar as it constitutes that emerging dialogic gap, called by Bourdieu a space of “*non-violent communication*”, based on the “forgetting oneself” on behalf of the interviewer. This allows “to make your own” the problems of the Other, “to embrace one and understand one as he/she is in one’s single need” (Bourdieu 2010: 43, 48), giving one the opportunity to become “a true hermeneutist of his/her experience” (Deyanov et al. 2015). Holding together with Bourdieu the fact that the socio-analytical conversation “nevertheless remains, whatever we do, a social relation which has an impact [...] on the results obtained” and in order to minimize “the actions on the construction and the effects they also inevitably produce” (Bourdieu 2010: 42), the technical strategy for performing the interview was to leave the respondent free to choose the way to present himself and the topics to be discussed, sharing the life transitions which make up his biographical trajectory.

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<sup>1</sup> “[...]”Biographical *illuso*” (as opposed to the various forms of *illuso* in the fields in which the agent is the acting agent) is “*illuso* not of the agent but of the individual” (cf. Deyanov et al. 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Unlike Bourdieu, the socio-analysis of self-inheritance distinguishes Who- from What-identity, based on the distinction between personal *habitus* and the *habitus* of the agents which the personality is in different fields (cf. Deyanov et al. 2013). This distinction has become a key methodological postulate, in relation to which the project of Deyanov, Svetlana Sabeva and Todor Petkov enters into a critical dialogue with the phenomenological psychopathology of Giovanni Stanghellini (Stanghellini 2014) and Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1997: 155).



*"I considered that in my life's journey, at about every 7–8 to 10 years, I have made a turn" [...]. I.e. every 7–8 years I change my role in life. Even when I was in the army, I moved in two radically different areas – in the army. I.e., I was in .... on a very high position in Sofia ... for two years, then I went to construction, then I became ... an engineer in electronics. [...] It's a little difficult to combine such things – construction, electronics... and then an administrator... And then already ... when I retired from the army then I entered a science – Metrology. [...] I spent 9 years in metrology and then I decided to radically change .... position and run for mayor (laughs). Because I was already living here ... by the way. During that time I also changed my social status – I became from a citizen... I became a peasant."*

This strategy allows reflexive activation of the practical sense of correctness of the respondent regarding the choices made in the conversation, too. For the analytical look they reveal the key problematic contexts, burdened with meaning and significance by the interlocutor, as well as the constellation in which they are objectively and affectively bound by and for him. The large volume of the transcribed text was differentiated by a technique which, together with Deyan Deyanov, we can call "score reading". The focus of the present exposition is that particular score of discursive fragments, marked by the pulsations of the permanence of the biographical illu<sup>s</sup>io of the respondent. This reading of the story of life, together with the attention to the attitudes towards life transitions, demonstrated in the conversation itself, highlighted the socio-analytical profile of the personal identity. It presented itself not as a static structure, but in a special mode of movement-from-and-to-itself. This movement unfolds in and through the action of a distinct investment structure of the practical sense of correctness:

*"The very fact that I have served... the state all my life, no matter how cliché it may sound. I ..., my conscious life... I have served the state all my life. I have always been a civil servant. I have never been involved in a private activity [...]. I have always been subject to order, to the law, to the norms. And since the most ... the place in the village that is closest to these concepts in the village is the mayor's – it is a continuation of this stereotype of behavior. Otherwise, I had to deal with... growing vegetables – it's not my thing."*

And more:

*“I’ve always had a lot of work and I’ve always done my job... And wherever I finished, I left a trained deputy! And I’m proud of that! There is no place I left without providing a trained deputy! And now, when I end this term, I said that I will choose someone to train him, but whether they will choose him...”*

It is in this way that the past and the present are united in the single flow of an internally integrated life trajectory, consisting of many transitions, many displacements and translocations-experiencing of the successively occupied positions in different fields. Seen from this perspective, they are already presented as “differences in the homogeneity” (Bourdieu) of the “who-identity”, insofar as it itself non-thematically refers to the current position from the perspective of its own “truthfulness”.

The empirical case gives us grounds to assume that the “biographical illusio” as a “symbolic nerve” of the habitus of the personal identity (comp. Deyanov et al. 2013) should not be thought, as suggested by Deyanov, Sabeva and Petkov – in *contraposition* to the various forms of the illusio of the fields in which the agent is an acting agent, and on the contrary, the modes in which the *dialectical relationship between them* is removed should be explained. It is in the establishment of a dialectical relationship between the what- and the who-identity, that the who-identity invents and transfers a new and different vision of the what-identity, i.e. of the position held, and from there it influences and transforms the field itself – the location. Yet, also the very person suffers the opposite influence of the changed position.

This reflexivity and mutual influence between who- and what-identities is the essential specificity of the analyzed empirical case. It has the functions of a symbolic nerve, which, permeating the numerous generational, professional and other transitions of the personality, constituting very different biographical episodes, actually connects them in the unity of a kaleidoscopic and seemingly diverse, but in fact internally consistent life trajectory.

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**CELEBRATIONS AND FESTIVALS –  
TREKKING AND LOCAL IDENTITY**



# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND DEFINITION OF LOCALITY. NEOLOCALISM

*Elitsa Stoilova*

**Summary:** The current paper introduces food festivals as a new type of collective celebration through which a certain culinary heritage is declared and which helps to construct a kind of culinary locality. The social construction of locality is analyzed in the context of festivalization and the festival type of celebration of local traditions, culinary technologies and gastronomic products. The reasons for the imposition of the festival form are sought, on the one hand, in the processes of globalization, and, on the other hand – in the trends and activities aiming at deindustrialization. Food festivals are associated not only with the group's self-identification with a product, agricultural tradition, recipe or technology, but also with mythologies which reveal the unity between food (tradition) – population – territory. The renewed interest in preserving and promoting certain aspects of the culture and identity of a community is being analyzed as part of the neolocal policies.

**Key words:** food festivals and celebrations, festivalization, neolocalism, food anthropology, festivity

The emphasis on local, urban or regional culinary heritage as a marker of both community and territory is linked to processes which researchers associate with neolocalism (Flack 1997; Shortridge and Shortridge 1998). These neolocal practices are fueled by local traditions and their rethinking by the community or the administration. They are indicative of the decentralization of the state policies and the replacement of the national markers for (self) identification with local ones. The presentation will focus on the construction of locality during the food festivals, which in the last two decades have become a popular form, not only of collective celebration, but also of claiming a certain culinary heritage. In this regard, the social constituting of locality will be seen as interconnected with the processes of festivalization.

For Bulgaria, the festival form of presenting food and beverages as specific, typical or authentic for a locality is a phenomenon of the 21st century (Petrov 2010; Troeva 2018; Gavrilova 2020; Stoilova 2021).

The naming many of those events as festivals also raises the necessity for a more deliberate analysis of this phenomenon, not only as a new denomination of the village celebrations, but also as a global process which has its manifestations in Bulgaria, too.

The festival type of celebration of local traditions, culinary technologies and gastronomic products is gaining more and more popularity in the country and the number of villages which choose this modern form of public and collective celebration is growing with each following year<sup>1</sup>. There are similarities in the programs, the embedded contexts and the way in which the culinary heritage is founded and applied. In my opinion, this is due to the process of festivalization, with which the appearance of these celebrations is associated.

According to the Polish researcher Waldemar Cudny the imposition of the festivals, on the one hand, is led by the processes of globalization and the emergence of innovative technologies, and, on the other hand, by the views and actions in the direction of deindustrialization. He accepts that the new socio-economic period is associated with three transformations. One is a departure from the mass-producing economy; the other – the growing employment in modern social industries, and the third – the crisis of the welfare state (Cudny 2016: 29).

The festival researcher Luke Sala also highlights the economic context of festivalization, looking for links to another contemporary phenomenon, the so-called *eventification*<sup>2</sup>. The eventification reveals social changes in modern times, which Sala understands as both related to commercialization and consumerism, but also carrying higher moral values. According to him, festivals usually can be studied as one of the effects of mass culture and global cultural forms. Nevertheless, they are not unified in their essence and diversity. Sala highlights *alternative* forms in which not the commercial effect is important, but the messages and the embedded contexts (Sala 2015). Food festivals operate precisely in this paradigm of public engagement, which goes beyond live

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<sup>1</sup> According to own observations, by 2021 more than 140 towns and villages have organized their own holidays or festivals dedicated to local culinary products or food.

<sup>2</sup> I deliberately do not translate the term in Bulgarian, but adapt it. This decision is due to the growing use of the English word “event”, used to refer to any type of event. Its applications are typical for both the media and everyday life. For me, this is part of the process of eventification, which involves both a replacement in the way events are named and a complete change in how they are perceived.



entertainment and is commensurate with the collective celebration (both by the insiders and those external to the group) of a certain regional symbol (traditional, invented or brought). Participation in the celebration not only validates and promotes the messages of the festival, but also provides the opportunity to communicate, to be included in the celebration, to consume food and experiences. Food festivals are associated with the group's self-identification with a product, agricultural tradition, recipe, technology, but also with mythologies which reveal the unity between food (tradition) – population – territory.

As Frost and Sala emphasize, festivalization is not a phenomenon limited to a particular culture or region, but something which acquires a global character. Therefore, the culinary festivals in Bulgaria can be considered as part of the global processes of festivalization. They are a form of public celebration, but also of identification with a certain locality, a specific product and culinary traditions. The specifics of the festivals as community identification and their role in defining locality will be presented below. The celebrated foods and food technologies not only represent a region and certain local traditions, but also enable them to become recognizable (by guests and insiders to the group). On the other hand, the presentation of culinary traditions reconsiders the culinary heritage and also defines local markers which to summon the pride of the locals in the region. Local pride, combined with the possibility of a livelihood based on the culinary traditions, the unique food product or technology, are also factors which can influence migration processes, keeping the rural population in their native places. Other, less explicit goals are the inclusion of a region in the routes for rural, eco, culinary and festival tourism.

In order for a festival to take place in a given place, a process of argumentation of three correlations is needed to trace the connection between the particular territory, the traditions declared and the people who occupy this land. This usually happens by explaining the connection of the residents with this particular settlement (with this territory), most often through mythologisations and historical reconstructions. This connection is sought as far back in time as possible. The link with the territory declared by its inhabitants is also combined with another parallel analysis of the people living on this territory as bearers of a special tradition, which is particular for this settlement. Natural (territory), social (community) and cultural (culinary knowledge, practices

and technologies) shape what can be defined as eco-socio-cultural constructed locality.

With the purpose of establishing and accepting the regional differentiation and cultural specifics as legitimate such, focused actions are needed to comprehend what distinguishes these ones from other localities and traditions. The English specialist in the Economics of Culture Andy Pratt presents a comprehensive paper which traces the processes of construction of localities. In his study *Discourses of Locality*, he concludes that locality is socially constructed, and this understanding must also apply to the meanings given to a particular space (Pratt 1991: 259). In the context set by Pratt, I would problematize the places where festivals take place, as constructed localities which are modeled through festivalization. This happens through the connection between geographical and cultural space, traditional knowledge and historical memory in the arguments why the population of a given territory chooses a particular product as characteristic of the local culinary culture. This intertwining between culture, history, nature and traditions is the basis of the justification of the “appropriation” of a culinary product as specific to a particular group living in a certain geographical area or settlement structure. The arguments for this “appropriation” are promoted through festivals dedicated to local culinary symbols.

The emphasis on the renewed interest in preserving and promoting aspects of the culture and identity of a community, on what makes it unique, imposes the term *neolocalism*. The term was introduced in 1997 at the analysis of the microbrewery phenomenon in the United States by Wes Flack, a social and cultural geographer. Neolocalism is a response to the growing unification of tastes and cultures; of the increasing loss of identity as a result of globalization and the world economy. For Flack, businesses based on neolocalist ideas turn back to tradition, often considering what is specific – what the region was known for in previous periods in order to represent this “heritage” to the next generations. As examples of neolocalism, the author points to the growing interest in folklore traditions, crafts, pre-industrial agriculture and animal husbandry (Flack 1997: 38). The connection between festivalization and neolocalism is expressed through the growing interest towards local resources and their use. Foods which are the subject of a celebration or festival are sought after in past, existing or “invented” traditions (comp. Hobsbawm 1983). Those are presented as related to pre-industrial knowledge and

skills, although they are often of much later origin. Neolocal processes are associated with a rethinking of local history, traditions, crafts, knowledge and experience. As a feature of the Bulgarian neolocalism I would point out the re-valorization of the pre-industrial cultural heritage or the manual and homemade produced foods.

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# THE UPDATED TRADITION IN THE TRANSFORMING VILLAGE: THE CASE OF GRANDFATHER'S DAY IN THE VILLAGE OF CHERESHOVO

*Stoyan Antonov*

**Summary:** The text presents an example of overlapping life transitions, modifications in the ritual system of the community and social transformations, comprehended through the concept of the updated tradition. *Dyadovden* (Grandfather's Day) in the village of Chereshevo, District of Ruse, emerged in the late 1960s as the men's response to *Babinden* (Grandmother's Day), but during the years of the Transition (to democracy) due to local initiative and interest on behalf of the administration it was renewed through rituals and folklore images. At the individual level, the celebration can be interpreted as valuation of aging, and at the community level it is an essential element of the local identity based on distinctiveness.

**Key words:** tradition, ritualisation, folklorisation, locality, identity.

**Introduction:** What characterises the life transition in the field of a transforming village? How do *memory, identity and inheritance* determine the relationship between the individual and the community? These are some of the fundamental questions within the current research project. My thesis holds that while the transitions in the life of the individual are marked by rituals, the transformations in the community become visible and socially sanctioned through chronopolitics and acts of rethinking the past and *updating* the tradition. Since the activism of memory in the above-mentioned village has already been the subject of research (Antonov 2019), the aim of this paper is to present an example of an updated tradition as a result of and a marker for transformation, and to interpret its possible connection with life transitions, hidden not only in its name but also in the rituals performed<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Given the limitations of the text, a detailed picture of the case and a more in-depth discussion will be the subject of the next publication on the project.

**Methodology:** Data on the organisation of the festive day are filtered from conversations and personal memories, but mostly – from media publications<sup>2</sup>. The sorting of the field information is guided by the anthropological approach to ritual and rituality: from the formulations of the rites of passage by Arnold van Gennep (van Gennep 1960), through the “sociological approach” of Emil Durkheim and “socio-psychological” of Bronislaw Malinowski, as they were formulated by Clifford Geertz (1957: 32). The main concept in the text is the *updated tradition*. It is still at the stage of a draft concept, which I view as the restoration, supplementation, reinterpretation of an inherited set of practices and rituals in a new social context.

**Presentation of the case:** The beginning of the *original Dyadovden* (Grandfather’s Day) was put in 1968 or 1969 as a humorous response to *Babinden* (Grandmother’s Day) by Damyan Damyanov (1908-1993) and Milcho Stanchev (1918-2002). The initial idea was for the men to have a drink in the village inn after *Babinden*, i.e. – on January 22. The main figure of the event was the *Bash Dyado* (Chief Grandfather) – the oldest attendee. Most probably the “men’s treat” was accompanied by some practices and rites, but in the 1990s, without being completely cancelled, the course of Grandfather’s Day was reduced to a gathering of men “in a small circle”.

In 1998, on the initiative of the local agricultural tenant Tatiana Haralambieva, Grandfather’s Day was “restored”. Subsequently, the municipal government of Slivo Pole intervened as the main organizer of the “cultural program”, with the support of the district administration in Ruse. In that case, the recovery was related to changing the original concept of a men's feast day by allowing women<sup>3</sup> and maintaining a

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<sup>2</sup> As part of this project, I had planned ethnographic observation in the field, but measures against the spread of Covid-19 led to the cancellation of the “cultural program” in both 2021 and 2022, which thwarted my intentions.

<sup>3</sup> ‘It was 1998 when the women joined for the first time. At other times, several men gathered every year. An occasion to have a drink’ (T.H.); ‘Until the beginning of democracy, in the 1990s, only grandfathers celebrated. Since the 1990s we have invited the grandmothers, and they are present, for a better mood at the feast itself’ (Sider Zlatev, Deputy Mayor), The village of Chereshovo, Ruse District, celebrated *Dyadovden*, <https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/v-rusenskoto-selo-chereshovo-otbelyazakha-dyadovden> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

relatively stable scenario. The *Dyado* (Grandfather) is chosen, not necessarily being the oldest man: in 2013, the required qualities are ‘to be cheerful and good-natured and to tease the grandmothers’<sup>4</sup>; in 2014, in addition, ‘and must have grandchildren’<sup>5</sup>, and in 2017, to be a native<sup>6</sup>. He must accept the nomination and prepare for the event by changing into a traditional cap, embroidered shirt and other elements of the “folklore costume”, and arranging for treats and drinks to be available at home for guests. The men of the village set off “with music” and with a decorated cart pulled by a donkey from the centre of the village to the house of the chosen one. There, the hosts set the table, and the guests express their best wishes, including jokes, and toasts are raised. After a short treat, two men take the Grandfather in their arms and put him in the cart. The procession goes to the village fountain, where a representative of the local or central government (the deputy mayor, the mayor of the municipality or the district governor – depending on who is present) “washes” Grandfather’s face and gives him a gift (a towel and a soap). They carry him to the cart again and head for the square. The procession carries the national flag (and in 2013 – the European one)<sup>7</sup> and some posters (as the permanent one is “What grandfather knows, grandmother doesn’t”<sup>8</sup>). On the square the procession is greeted with bread and salt by the women and a *horo* dance is performed. Afterwards, the celebration is transferred to the hall of the *Chitalishte* (Community Cultural Centre), where, if representatives of the authorities are present,

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<sup>4</sup> Chereshovo sends the unique *Dyadovden* to Brussels, <https://faktor.bg/bg/articles/kultura/art-faktor/chereshovo-prashta-unikalniya-dyadovden-v-bryuksel-5724> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

<sup>5</sup> *Dyadovden* was celebrated in the village of Chereshovo, Ruse District, <https://epicenter.bg/article/archive/33315/11/0> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

<sup>6</sup> *Dyadovden* is celebrated in the village of Chereshovo, <https://bnr.bg/shumen/post/100786603/dadovden-praznuvat-v-schereshovo> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

<sup>7</sup> *Dyadovden* is moving from the Ruse District village of Chereshovo to Brussels, <https://utroruse.com/article/3647/> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

<sup>8</sup> In the village of Chereshovo, Ruse District, they celebrated *Dyadovden*, <https://bnt.bg/bg/a/v-rusenskoto-selo-chereshovo-otbelyazakha-dyadovden> (Accessed 1.02.2022). In 2013 another slogan was raised “In 2014 *Dyadovden* – in Brussels” – Chereshovo sends the unique *Dyadovden* to Brussels, <https://faktor.bg/bg/articles/kultura/art-faktor/chereshovo-prashta-unikalniya-dyadovden-v-bryuksel-5724> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

speeches are given or congratulatory addresses are announced followed by a treat, music program, dancing and more entertainment. On the last Grandfather's Day in 2020, Marin Nikolov, elected *Grandfather* for the tenth time in a row, was awarded a diploma "for his contribution to the preservation of Bulgarian traditions" on behalf of the district governor<sup>9</sup>. An element which is consistently present among the practices and narratives of the celebration is the alcohol endurance test – if the person says a tongue twister three times: "*Suho shishe se sushi na shose*" (Dry bottle is being dried on a road), then he is not yet intoxicated. This day is an object of visual documentation and of journalistic interest, too, and enters the reports of national and regional media. An important point in these reports is the emphasis that the custom is unique for Bulgaria.

**Analysis:** Specific personalities (the two creators and the Grandfathers) are involved in the memory of the celebration. The fact that they are at the centre of a collectively celebrated event and that the concept of the feast is built around them provides the cross-section of the biographies of the community and the individual. In other words, the event is included in the annual ritual cycle, but also reflects and sanctions, burdening the individual with symbolic power and prestige in his life trajectory. Along with the name of the Grandfather, the narrative takes into account the successive years he performs his ritual role, and sometimes – which number he is in the order of years. In addition, the chosen one is not only a grandfather for his grandchildren – he is a "Grandfather" for the whole community. Overlaps of life transitions and transformations in the tradition (and hence in the community) can be noticed in key moments of the timeline of the feast through the years. For example, the transition from the original to the "restored" Grandfather's Day was marked by a crisis which reduced it to a 'drink for the men in a small circle'. It coincides with the great social and economic transformations of the early 1990s, but is likely to have been influenced by the demise of one of the festival's founders, the Chief Grandfather, a nominee for several years in a row.

Remembering the time of its founding and quoting the names of the authors of the celebration shows that it does not claim to be a "century-old" tradition – it has a date of birth – and even has its creators known,

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<sup>9</sup> Residents of the Ruse District village of Chereshovo celebrated *Dyadovden*, <http://www.bta.bg/bg/c/BO/id/2139328> (Accessed 1.02.2022).



unlike the anonymity of folklore. In addition, they are defined as “wise-crackers”, which means that the custom is based on fun and funny relationships. On the other hand, in a humorous way, a stable core of orgiastic elements has been inherited, explicitly expressed by the test of “endurance drinking” and the motto of the event: ‘What grandfather knows, grandmother doesn’t’. They are provoked by Grandmother’s Day practices and rituals by symbolically aligning both customs (‘if there is *Babinden*, there must be *Dyadovden*, too!’) so that they represent a life transition to a social maturity enveloped by a halo of specific knowledge about life.

After the renewal of Grandfather’s Day in the late 1990s, important transformations stand out. First of all, the celebration is already organised by local private businesses and administration (probably as a manifestation of responsibility of the new social actors to their community) and over time has been the subject of strong interest from political officials (possibly due to the potential of the event as a social mobilising factor filled with positive perceptions, its significance as a local heritage and its media popularity). In the end, the main organiser of the last celebrations became the municipality of Slivo Pole with the active participation of the district administration. In other words, there is an alternation in the initiative, from *bottom-up* to *top-down*.

The updated version, although retaining the fun and humorous nature of the feast, is abundant in ritual actions, and some of the participants change into “traditional costumes”. Thus, in recent years, the custom has been recognised as part of the “Bulgarian tradition” and is “inventoried” in several platforms for local festivals, thus recognised as a *folklore festival*<sup>10</sup>.

Those modifications and the administrative attention given to it by the municipal and district authorities, together with the interest of guests and reporters, take the event out of the local framework of a “men’s drunken evening” and evaluate it as a local heritage (not only of the village but also of the municipality and the district) and as a Bulgarian tradition.

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<sup>10</sup> *Dyadovden*, the village of Chereshovo, District of Ruse, <https://fest-bg.com/event/дядовден-село-черешово/>; *Dyadovden custom*, the village of Chereshovo, [https://www.sabori.bg/folk\\_fest\\_sub/view.html?oid=60748](https://www.sabori.bg/folk_fest_sub/view.html?oid=60748); *Dyadovden*, Chereshovo, <https://фестивалитевбългария.com/дядовден-в-черешово/> (Accessed 1.02.2022).

At the same time, changes take place with regard to the main ritual personage – the Grandfather. He is no longer the oldest of the participants (i.e. due to natural circumstances) but must meet certain criteria, which are also gradually being supplemented (i.e. based on social characteristics). To the original ‘cheerful, good-natured and teasing the grandmothers’ (or to have certain skills in social communication), it is added to have grandchildren (to be actually a grandfather) and to be a local. The latter condition may suggest both a disguised internal division along the newcomers-locals axis and the emphasis on local origin as a value.

Participants are also changing. In fact, the inclusion of women marks the core difference between the previous and the restored Grandfather's Day. Moreover, when the deputy mayor explained the transition from the old to the new schema of the custom, he paralleled it with the transition to democracy. The event already unites the whole community by balancing the female and male positions (and thus eliminates the Grandmother's Day-Grandfather's Day opposition): ‘men admit that they can't do without their beloved’ but maintains the “traditional” gender division by giving a ritual role to the women as well. Thus, once again, life transitions, changes in the ritual system of the community and major socio-political transformations are accumulated.

Finally, the collective memory of creating the celebration and updating it as a tradition with the constant reminder that this is a unique custom for Bulgaria (and respectively – for Europe) feeds the villagers a sense of distinctiveness. That is, *Dyadovden* has become a mark of local identity.

**Conclusion and discussion:** Although invented in modern times, *Dyadovden* exists in other parts of the country as a traditional feast – a correlate of *Babinden*. It ritually marks a life transition to a special social maturity, burdened with knowledge (Radoynova 2015: 311), and the delegated symbolic power of the Grandfather can be interpreted as valuation of aging.

The two distinct periods in the Grandfather's Day festivities: 1968–1998 and 1998–2020, lie in the context of two different frameworks of attitudes towards ritual, tradition and folklore. Grandfather's Day remains unaffected by folklorisation, which was part of the homogenising policies of state ideology through the institutionalisation of traditional

practices leading to the creation of a folkloric object and folkloric identity during socialism (Kaneff 2004: 132–152).

During the next period, with the “restoration” of Grandfather's Day, the role of the state was taken over by local activists with the leading role of the entrepreneur. Gradually, the custom came to the attention of the administration (at municipal and district level) and outlined a phenomenon which can be called an updated tradition. It contains elements of ritualisation (through reconsidering and renewal of practices) and folklorisation (with an emphasis on the visual and the ostentatious) and ultimately marks local identity (based on distinctiveness) and thus homogenizes the local social fabric. With the above characteristics, the phenomenon draws references to the recently commented in its Bulgarian context festivalisation and neo-localism (Stoilova 2021: 65–89).

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# KALEKOVSKI DANCE – A REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY TRANSITIONS IN A VILLAGE

*Krassimira Krastanova*

**Summary:** Based on an ethnological case study, the current article examines the transitions in the life of the rural community, viewed through the formation and application of the cultural heritage. On the one hand, it is a specific cultural phenomenon which undergoes transformations from live dance practice (local Thracian *horo* dance) through author's music and dance work to become an intangible cultural heritage (*Kalekovski* dance), significant for local people and their identity. On the other hand, its history fits into the context of cultural policies which were applied during socialism in Bulgaria and in our time, so that they outline the line of change in the shape and meaning of the cultural practices. By including the dance in the local festivities, we are able to outline the processes of integration of *the newcomers* to the village and of the maintenance of a healthy social fabric of the community.

**Key words:** intangible cultural heritage, festivity, identity, social inclusion, transition and life transformations

The village of Kalekovets is part of the Maritsa Municipality, belonging to the Plovdiv region with its characteristics of the way of life, traditions and culture. Researchers note that in the period between the 19th-20th centuries a demographic dynamic develops there – the result of waves of migration, which brings various groups of people who join the local culture (Plovdiv Region 1986). Agriculture is steadily developing in the villages, being the basis of economic activities in the area for centuries. In the course of modernization and industrialization during the last century, the sharper cultural differences among different migrant groups begin to fade so mainly local specifics remain rooted in lifestyle and work, as well as traditions which form the basis of the local identity (Koleva 1986: 9-20). However, is it possible to understand how this process developed? It is not plausible to make broad generalizations in ethnology, but it is possible to study individual cultural phenomena which open the door to this knowledge.

I hereby present to your attention a case study – the history of a Thracian men's dance from the village of Kalekovets, through which we would try to perceive important transitions in the life of the community. On the one hand, it is a specific cultural phenomenon which undergoes transformations from live dance practice (local Thracian *horo* dance) through author's music and dance work to become an intangible cultural heritage (*Kalekovski* dance), significant for the local people and their identity. On the other hand, it fits into the context of cultural policies which were implemented during socialism in Bulgaria and in modern times so as they outline the line of change in the shape and meaning of the cultural practices. By including it in the local festivities, we are able to outline the processes of integration of *the newcomers* to the village and of the maintenance of a healthy social fabric of the community.

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*Awakening-1927* Community Cultural Centre, Kalekovets village, was founded in 1927 and since then it has been actively developing musical, theatrical and library activities. In 1956 the *Song and Dance Ensemble* was established, with Atanas Marinkev and Bogdan Balabanov becoming directors the following year. Their activity is extremely professional and attracts the interest of the young people from the village. Under their leadership, the ensemble achieves great success – at the *First Republican Festival*, held in Sofia in 1959, they receive a cash prize as well as a second prize – a silver medal (Vrachev 1979: 51–55). That is a period in which the development of amateur art is dictated by a new cultural policy, which is applied at state and local level (Elenkov 2008; Naidenova 2018) aiming at creating conditions for professional performance of folklore – song, dance, ritual, using the rich cultural heritage for repertoire building (Dzhidzhev 1972; Abrashev 1989). Despite the fact that for the most part folk dance art is developed as an amateur work by various cultural institutions (community centers, schools, production units, etc.), it draws experience from the professional ensembles which develop stage pieces based on Bulgarian folklore (Ivanova-Niberg 2011; Grigorov 2018; Petrov 2021) and become a model of work and interpretation for the leaders of amateur ensembles. The well-known choreographers create a norm for the transformation of a folk dance on stage. Local choreographers start applying this experience to create their own dances. In the period up to the 90s of the 20th century,

groups for original folklore and dance ensembles are established at the community centers, whose task is to use the local traditions and to develop them in a modern direction. That need is imposed by the overall modification in the way of life and economic activities in the villages, which leads to a change in the festivities system and the introduction of new cultural models.

Upon his very first visit to the ensemble, Bogdan Balabanov studies the local dance tradition in order to weave it into a stage dance with those accents that come from inherited musical and dance patterns and add *color* and individuality to the author's composition. They aim at a comprehensive and in-depth study of local traditional practices which are to be renewed, but so as to acquire new meaning and new existence – taken from the folk festivity and the performance of the *horo* dance at the village square in unison with the musical accompaniment, to become a performing art, understandable and perceived by people<sup>1</sup>. The Thracian folklore region has preserved ancient dance forms, which are most often associated with customs and rituals of the traditional calendar festivities. Although with already established musical and dance rhythms, tempo and steps, the *Thracian Men's Dance* still has its own local specifics in each village where it is performed<sup>2</sup>. Besides, yet another feature in this regard – the living tradition is unique because it is further transmitted by the people who acquire it directly in its live existence. Bogdan Balabanov created *Thracian Men's Kalekovets* Dance and dance *Kalekovtsi*, which keep the characteristics of the local folklore heritage, but acquire a new independent life. What the dancers present is not the usual dance, but a dance developed on its basis. It is an author's development which manipulates a specific detail from the *Kalekovets Horo* Dance and emphasizes it. This is the reason why people in the community accept it as their own. The dance begins to vibrate in its own life, becomes an intangible cultural heritage recognized by the local community and takes on new, still rich, symbolic meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> The information was obtained during the field research and conversations with Nikolinka Tosheva, secretary of the Cultural Centre, and Iliana Ilieva from the village of Kalekovets, as well as an interview with Prof. Daniela Dzheneva about the essence of the choreographer's work.

<sup>2</sup> The information was obtained during the field research and interviews with Prof. Daniela Dzheneva

This artistic practice reveals several essential characteristics of the intangible cultural heritage: 1. It is characteristic for a certain community and the small details constitute its uniqueness; 2. It is passed down from ancestors to heirs through *learning by doing*, in which not only the mastery of specific techniques through demonstration and performance but also the sensitivity play an important role, i.e. the body is perceived as a specific tool which is trained, and the sensations are those clues which lead to the perfect learning/ acceptance; 3. The connection between the intangible cultural heritage, in this case music and *horo* dance, with the territorial community, which recognizes it as its own and recognizes itself in it, i.e. it becomes an expression of the local identity.

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Greater internal migration of the population began in the 1950s, with those from mountainous areas moving to the Thracian plain and with *mixed* marriages with local young women becoming more frequent. In 1976 in the village of Kalekovets the informal society *Kash-tovnik* is established, which includes men who are from another place, but are married in the village and live in the house of (the parents of) the wife<sup>3</sup>. They create a Statute, according to which all young and new-come sons-in-law in the village of Kalekovets take the oath after being examined in respect to their role as sons-in-law, who possess countless qualities and skills, *including high dance achievements*. They demonstrate their dancing skills to all the residents at the *Day of the Sons-in-Law* organized by them.

It becomes part of the socialist festivity (comp. Tumangelov 1981: 260–266; Petrova 2003: 237–248), which meets the needs of young people to build social relations on the basis of interpersonal and neighborhood ties, avoiding ideological messages. At the same time, through the festive experiences, the feelings of reciprocity and belonging to the community are created, which unite all people equally. The involvement of the sons-in-law happens not only through participation in the work process, but also through the sharing of their leisure time. Everybody – locals and newcomers – participate in the learning of *Men's*

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<sup>3</sup> The information was obtained during the field research and conversations with Nikolinka Tosheva, secretary of the Cultural Centre, and Iliana Ilieva from the village of Kalekovets.



*Thracian Dance and Kalekovsko Horo Dance*, which are considered prestigious by the local community, already beginning to recognize itself in the dance. Thus, the *The Sons-in-Law Eve*, as part of the new festivity, can be considered as a rite of passage (copm. van Gennepe 1924), through which the *new-come outsiders* join the community of the village. The *Kalekovski Dance*, which has undergone choreographic processing and has become an art, takes on the role of that unique *Kalekovski Horo Dance*, which is a sign of local affiliation and is considered an intangible cultural heritage.

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**INHERITANCE AND TRANSFORMATIONS  
OF TERRITORIES – PEOPLE AND PLACES**



# TRANSFORMATION OF PEOPLE AND PLACES: THE VILLAGE AS AN ECOSYSTEM

*Valentina Ganeva-Raycheva*

**Summary:** The focus falls on the village as an ecosystem which includes certain biophysical properties, living organisms other than humans, altered or affected directly or indirectly by humans. The ecosystem contains various ecosystem services, among which special attention is paid to cultural ones, as local communities are not only their major users, but also their creators. Observations from Ivaylovgrad, Razlog and Petrich are presented. Transformations in the social and biological world are discussed through home gardens. Changes in the plant composition of the garden and in the knowledge about the cultivation and processing of plant products are monitored. Processes of evaluation of biocultural resources stand out. Entrepreneurial initiatives are presented. One of the possible directions in the study of the changes in the village is its conceptualization as a biocultural multifunctional landscape.

**Key words:** ecosystem, cultural ecosystem services, biocultural resources, valorization

The text focuses on the village as an ecosystem which includes certain biophysical properties, living organisms other than humans, altered or affected directly or indirectly by humans. It contains various ecosystem services, among which special attention is paid to cultural ones, as local communities are not only their major users, but also their creators (Hartel et al. 2014; Reyes-García et al. 2015).

The interpretation of the issue is based on internationally established theories and concepts of the characteristics and basic trends of modern society, which determine specific economic, social and cultural processes. Among them are works on post-productivism, environmentally sensitive production (Evans et al. 2002; Mather et al. 2006), ideas about green values and changed attitudes towards nature, trends in combining socio-economic, environmental and cultural functions of agriculture. (Young et al. 2010), for a new lifestyle of the rural communities influenced by consumer demand (Kozinets, Handelman 2004; Newholm,

Shaw 2007; Petrov, Petrova 2018)<sup>1</sup>. Theoretically, the research is grounded on the concepts of biocultural diversity (Maffi 2001; Maffi 2005) and ecosystem services (Wratten et al. 2013). Both are widely accepted in science<sup>2</sup> and in policies related to the conservation of natural and cultural diversity.

With the active support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Union of Forestry Organizations (IUFRO), approaches and measures are being developed for the joint conservation of biocultural assets. In opposition to the global trend of “biocultural homogenization” (according to Rozzi 2018), scientists and politicians are urged to pay attention to small farms in Europe, which after the industrialization of agriculture, are one of the few centers of biocultural diversity, a kind of “biocultural refugia” (according to Barthel et al. 2013), which store valuable genetic resources and knowledge of how to handle them.

Transformations in the social and biological world are discussed through home gardens. The highlighted processes are the result of long-term field research, some of which was carried out jointly with ethnobiologists<sup>3</sup>. The study presents observations from Ivaylovgrad, Razlog, Petrich. The main factors for the changes in the functions and the composition of the home garden in the course of time and its development as a multiplan structure are outlined. The reasons for the entry of field crops which are not available or difficult to find on the market, the translocation of wild plant species, the interest in new and exotic species and varieties and a more professional approach to cultivation are reviewed. The garden turns out to be a place for storing genetic resources which have proven their resilience despite climate change – old local or rare plant species, forms and varieties, and along with the genetic material, knowledge and skills for its maintenance are preserved. The search for

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<sup>1</sup> For general trends for post-productist transition in rural areas and multifunctionality in agriculture with a focus on Bulgaria, see Stancheva 2021 and the literature cited there.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example Agnoletti, Rotherham 2015; Agnoletti, Emanuelli 2016; Rotherham 2015; Crumley et al. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Under the project “The Garden: Site of Biocultural Diversity and Interdisciplinary Junction”, funded by the National Science Fund (DN10/ 1 of 2016), completed at the end of 2020. Results of the project see in the thematic issue “The Garden” of the journal “Bulgarian Folklore” (2018, № 3); Petrov, Ganeva-Raycheva 2021.



home-grown and clean food in recent years has led to the rediscovery of local plant forms as a source of income. Attention is paid to the development of knowledge about plants and changes in its transmission vertically and horizontally, to the influence of the media and to specialized and expert knowledge.

Problems of assessing biocultural resources and constructing local heritage are considered. Specific cases of entrepreneurial initiatives based on local biocultural assets are hereby analyzed, too.

Nowadays, reconsideration and valorization of biocultural resources for the development of local heritage is a visible process in response to the challenges of globalism and its neo-localist responses<sup>4</sup>. In this process, the recognition of cultural value is determined not by criteria of authenticity or antiquity. The reasons for choice of valuation lie in the sphere of everyday life. Agricultural traditions in the production and processing of certain products, specifics of local cuisine related to the preparation of daily and festive food, technology for food and beverage production, preserved urban architecture, revival of various topos from the cultural history of the village – all that offers opportunities to assess local resources (knowledge, skills, experience) and participate in the shaping of the rural agricultural landscape. The valorization of biocultural assets is a tool for new connections with settlements in the region or with a larger area (Belasitsa Nature Park, for example), a tool for conservation of biological diversity in its link with transferred knowledge, skills and experience. It is a possible resource for the development of the local economy and job creation, a resource for environmentally oriented and adaptive agriculture and healthy food production. And last but not least, it helps to increase the self-confidence of local communities.

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<sup>4</sup> For these processes on the example of food festivals such as valorization of local culinary heritage, see Stoilova 2021.

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# **BETWEEN “THE WILD” AND “THE COMFORT”: CONSTRUCTING THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT (BASED ON EXAMPLES FROM THE MUNICIPALITY OF IVAYLOVGRAD)**

*Aneliya Avdzhieva*

**Summary:** This contribution implies the first step in understanding the images of “the Wild” and “the Convenient/Comfort” as concepts which affect not only the transformations of space, seen as a natural and socio-cultural construct, but also affect the choices which provoke the transitions in the course of the human life in search of possible ways to cope with various crises, such as those of aging and inheritance. The images are bottom-up built by locals, the commuters, returnees and heirs in some border villages in the municipality of Ivaylovgrad, Bulgaria. “The Wild” is presented as the link with nature and geographical features, as well as living and inhabiting vast geographical areas; as a manifestation of the personal freedom and a desired way to cope with aging and the maintenance of social, cultural and labor commitment; as the lack of prospects to stay and develop, but also as a potential for sustainable development for the active local actors. “The Convenient/ Comfort” is revealed as an investment and transformation of the old house and yard; as sharing and mutual aid; as the prerequisite for welcoming heirs and guests; and through the public spaces of the village.

**Key words:** wild, convenient/ comfort, transitions, village, transformation

As a result of long years of observations, conversations and personal memories of them<sup>1</sup>, supplemented and verified by field work in the municipality of Ivaylovgrad in 2020, the images of “the Wild” and “the Convenient/ Comfort” as essential elements in the lives’ transitions of the (self-) transforming village were shaped. The two themes combine social, cultural and economic anthropology, human geography and

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<sup>1</sup> As a direct heir, with a certain family and community memory and embodied recollections, I realize and recognize my belonging to these communities and to these territories. This hides risks of subjectivity, which I intend to avoid through autoethnography, as well as critical remarks from the rest of the project team.

ecology. Apart from the municipality as a whole, the focus lies on two villages close to the municipal center – Pokrovan and Huhla, which can be considered as “satellite villages” to some extent (acc. to Bokova 2009) of the municipal center.

Ivaylovgrad Municipality is a border region in Southeastern Bulgaria, consisting of 51 settlements. They are a particular palette of ethnic, religious and cultural communities, a large part of them still keeping traumatic historical memory associated with refugee flows, forced evictions, mass killings, robberies and fires (Chankov 2001). Getting acquainted with the data on the population of the villages on the basis of the National Census in 2011<sup>2</sup>, as well as on the basis of the field visit in 2020, it impresses the author that their situation is important for their inhabiting – the closer they are to the border with Greece, the livelier they are<sup>3</sup>.

The village of Pokrovan is located northwest of Ivaylovgrad. It is the only Uniate<sup>4</sup> settlement in the region with a population of 101 people, with a predominance of people over 60. The village of Huhla lies to the north of Ivaylovgrad. The population numbers 33 people from different age groups, and a curious fact about it is that the deputy mayor in 2020 is the youngest among all deputy mayors in the municipality. Its inhabitants are Orthodox Christians. Population figures are likely to change in descending order by 2022.<sup>5</sup>

As for the returnees to the municipality of Ivaylovgrad, they are not many<sup>6</sup>, mostly people of retirement age – the area has difficulty accessing medical services and education, and there are not a lot of opportunities for employment. The locals rely heavily on cooperation with Greek employers in terms of seasonal agriculture or work in the field of nursing care – the main income for the households. The Greeks are welcome customers in the restaurants and hotels in the town, as well as in local shops and gas stations. For most of the villages in the municipality, time seems to have stopped during the years of their heyday in the

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<sup>2</sup> Data on the population by villages are derived from Population by place of residence, age and religion, National Census 2011, NSI <https://censusresults.nsi.bg/Census/Reports/2/2/R10.aspx> (last visited 20.01. 2022).

<sup>3</sup> What the reasons for this are, could be the subject of further research.

<sup>4</sup> The correct term is Catholics of the Eastern Rite. Uniate is slang but still a recognized name.

<sup>5</sup> The final data from the 2021 National Census are expected towards the end of 2022.

<sup>6</sup> There are no official statistics, this is according to local people and the local administration.

apogee of socialism and towards its end. Immediately after these periods, mass migration began<sup>7</sup> – internal and international, during which hundreds of families left their homes in search of better conditions and development. The continuous depopulation of the area was felt most strongly in the ‘80s and ‘90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Images of “the Wild”

“The Wild” in the meaning and context of wilderness<sup>8</sup> has been debated for decades in disciplines such as human geography, ecology and the environment. State jurisdictions offer their own definitions of which territories are considered wild – they are protected because of their status and related regulations and legal frameworks. Philip and April Vannini (Vannini, Vannini 2016) discuss these definitions in a new framework in the context of the social sciences and humanities related to human intervention and actions which affect the understandings and representations of “the Wild”. They “take an emic perspective” on the subject and “define the wilderness as *a place that is considered to be a wilderness and treated as such*” by leaving the locals living in these places “to be judges” (Vannini, Vannini 2016: 19). I will also follow this framework.

Based on stories collected by local people and their heirs, “the area is wild”, wilder than most other areas in the country<sup>9</sup>. What makes it “wild” is that 1) the population is not large and 2) there are no large-scale industrial productions which pollute water, soil or air<sup>10</sup> – human intervention is minimized. For the locals (those who have not left the area), the commuters, including newcomers (those who inhabit it seasonally or on weekdays and weekends), the returnees and heirs, “the wild” is: 1) a symbol of pride that the area has preserved its “authenticity” and uniqueness – mainly from the point of view of architecture and nature – as a connection with nature and

<sup>7</sup> Exceptions are several villages, among which is the village of Slaveevo, which for the period increased its population. For reference – National Register of Settlements, <https://www.nsi.bg/nrnm/show9.php?sid=3695&ezik=bul> (last visited 20.01.2022).

<sup>8</sup> I will also use “the wild” in the meaning and context of wilderness in the next pages.

<sup>9</sup> “The Wild” and wilderness are one of the main images when it comes to the so-called rural studies – the study of rural areas, comp. Vannini, Vannini 2016; Woods 2010. According to Michael Woods it is related to the fact that rural areas are shared with other living organisms – animals and plants, which also have their own ways of “inhabiting” the village, as they and the “rural” people learn to live together.

<sup>10</sup> There is no developed agriculture, apart from the one that feeds the small family business, and gardening, which is a common practice for the needs of the household.

geographical features, as well as living and residing in vast geographical areas; 2) manifestation of personal freedom and a sought-after way to cope with the aging and to maintain social, cultural and labor commitment, despite the stretching (in the sense of distancing) of relationships with heirs and friends; 3) lack of prospects for stay and development in terms of the commuters and heirs, but also a potential for sustainable development for the active local actors (mostly entrepreneurs and participants in local government). An example can be the *Huhla Mysteries Cultural Festival*, which local activists have managed to develop and which brings together visitors from different corners of Bulgaria and abroad.

The images of the “wild” rationalize life's transitions in several aspects – as a strategy for inheritance and preservation of identity – “the wild” “designs” and affirms, in terms of overcoming the crisis of the aging and of “doing” place [...] talking about or imagining the wilderness to a concern with material and embodied specificities and their multiple relations with one another in actually lived wild places” (Abram & Lien 2011, quoted in Vannini, Vannini 2016: 91), in other words, such as creating, modeling and using the space of the village and its surroundings – for example, the transformation of places in the surroundings of the village into a vegetable garden outside the private space of the home while preserving the “wild” image around it.

### **Images of “the Convenient/Comfort”**

“The Convenient/ Comfort” is viewed mainly in the field of care, health and social (comp. Kolcaba et al 2006; Boudiab, Kolcaba 2015), in marketing, economics and business (comp. Oka 2021). For the post-modern person, comfort is essential for the quality of life and is part of one’s life transitions, no matter what their nature is. In anthropological knowledge, it is almost absent, whether it will be considered as “phenomenon, behavior, heuristics, judgment, good, or service” (Oka 2021: 189). In architecture, it is a complex and dynamic combination of the state of mind of the user and the experience, related to space – there are clear sensory manifestations related to body, technology, environment, social and cultural expectations. There is not a unified definition about what comfort is (Rybczynski 1986, by Brager, De Dear 2003).

For the locals, it is primarily related to the home, which needs to have the necessary amenities for “normal” living. The transition of relocating to the village is associated with investment and transformation



of the old house and yard – repair and renovation, access to utilities and telecommunications (cable/ satellite TV or Internet), cultivation of land, construction of a shed or a shady corner for coffee drinking, for dining in the open air, if possible, with mountain views. This is the largest investment in terms of economic resources and time made by returnees, as well as by those who are constantly commuting from the city to the village and by those who have not left it.

In the second place, it is the comfort which provides sharing and mutual aid – to make contact with the neighbors – a woman from Pokrovan says that almost no one is left in her mahalla<sup>11</sup> – they have died. *“It’s good that her neighbors and friends from Stara Zagora often come and she goes from time to time to check their yard or when they can’t come to pick up the production from the garden, she helps in any way she can, but they also help her when they are there. You can hardly see a person alive on the streets – from time to time an animal, and there is no one to have a coffee with”*<sup>12</sup>.

Third is the comfort needed to welcome heirs and guests – it includes not only providing air conditioning, comfortable furniture, separate rooms, a “beautiful” garden, equipped kitchen, etc., but also affects the subjective needs determined by the social, cultural and economic status of hosts and guests.

Last but not least is the convenience provided by the public spaces of the village – streets and roads, squares and fountains, churches, schools, playgrounds, *chitalishta* (community centers) and libraries (wherever they remain), places for talks and meetings, the road to the cemetery and the accessibility in it – the lack of people is a prerequisite for its difficult accessibility, because there is no one to maintain it and reaching certain parts of it is almost impossible.

The images of “the Convenient/Comfort” in the life’s transitions to cope with the aging and inheritance tackle the connections between human – home, human – nature, human – human and human – space. The sustainability of these connections is crucial for the choice of the returning or the remaining one and the actions s/he plans and implements, which are aimed at ensuring ease, practicality, connection with nature

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<sup>11</sup> Mahalla originates from Turkish language. It is a widespread term in Bulgaria and it means a small neighborhood.

<sup>12</sup> Field diary of Aneliya Avdzhieva, 2020.

and social connection (in the terms of creating and maintaining social relations).

### **In conclusion**

Border territories possess several characteristics which affect the daily lives of their inhabitants – spatial remoteness from industrial centers, depopulation, socio-cultural diversity, liminality, which causes many crises, but at the same time may imply flexibility. This contribution is the first step to understanding the images of “the Wild” and “the Convenient/ Comfort” as concepts which affect not only the transformations of space, seen as a natural and socio-cultural construct, but also the choices which provoke transitions in life of the individual in search of possible ways to cope with various crises, such as those of aging and inheritance.

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# DIGITAL STORIES OF THE VILLAGE: TRANSITIONS, COMMUNITIES, PLACES

*Svetoslava Mancheva*

**Summary:** This text presents and analyzes digital stories of village life based on personal experience and digital technologies. The purpose is to research cases of transitions related to the village and the manner of constructing the place as a “territory of identity”. The methods of digital and visual anthropology were used with the perspective of expanding and unifying research methods. The cases of two vloggers sharing video narratives of transitions reveal the transformations of traditional village practices, identities and places. The process of presenting the images of the place builds a community which can be followed online in terms of shared interests and similar practices of rural life.

**Keywords:** digital stories, village life, life transformations, transitions, community, place

The changes in everyday practices, as a result of various social transitions, allow the advantages of conducting research both in and through a digital environment<sup>1</sup> to come to the fore. The digital terrain is also relevant in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, due to which processes of transformation in the way of life, behavior and attitudes of the individuals, communities and groups residing in villages, and also of society in a global plan<sup>2</sup>, still continue. The approaches of digital anthropology, visual anthropology and human geography were used. Digital anthropology becomes a new approach to the subject and allows for combination of various methods and tools. Visual anthropology is a major part of digital

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Pink shares in an interview the challenges of visual ethnography in emergency situations, pointing out that virtual conversations and interviews with interlocutors predispose to more sharing of footage from the space of the home and their personal lives, which compared to face-to-face communication would cause certain inhibitions and embarrassment. Interview with Sarah Pink from May 2020. “Doing Ethnography Remotely” [https://youtu.be/z\\_t7WkQ2c4](https://youtu.be/z_t7WkQ2c4) (visited 01.02.2022 г.)

<sup>2</sup> See Baeva, Ilieva 2021: 14.

content and serves to analyze field material<sup>3</sup> in depth. Visual methods help to describe social change and transitions in different contexts in terms of routine and the use of space<sup>4</sup>. I focused on visual representation of transformations of spaces and construction of digital images for the village through the transitions as a storytelling tool.

The process of presenting images of the place constructs a picture of village life and builds a community which can be followed online by sharing interests and similar practices in terms of agriculture, cooking, ecology, knowledge preservation, etc. Rural life is the subject of abundant digital content, which in recent years has gained a greater scale and presence in the national media as well. Residing outside the city is becoming an alternative way of life and an attractive idea for some people who wish to make a transformation in their routine. Digital forms of storytelling<sup>5</sup> can show cases of transformation and life transitions of people settled in the village, viewed through the scope of everyday life and spaces, their construction, the manner of sharing.

The text introduces digital stories of village life constructed through personal experience and digital technologies. The purpose is to research cases of transitions related to the village and the ways of constructing the place as a “territory of identity”. I follow the sharing of digital content and the construction of images of country life on the video channel Boho Soulz. A series of digital narratives by village dwellers<sup>6</sup> who previously had no connection to that place traces the process of adapting experiences and skills gained elsewhere. Their physical and digital skills help them transform both the space and the ideas about it.

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<sup>3</sup> See Parusheva 2019; Pink 2006, Margolis, Pauwels 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See Pink 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The digital forms of storytelling which I use are video and photos with certain themes, including stories (text and audio), presented mainly in video channels on the YouTube platform.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term *village dwellers* to describe people who are part of different transformations of the village, have different perspectives on what it should look like and what should be changed or preserved to meet their needs and ideas.

### **The case “Life in the village”**

This case study follows the transition in the lives of two vloggers, known as Boho Soulz<sup>7</sup>, who settle in the countryside. In the series “Life in the Village” they openly share details about the change in their lives through the YouTube video channel of the same name. Their content also becomes the basis for building a community of like-minded people who communicate primarily online and interact through digital content communication.

The video stories from “Life in the Village” start from May 30, 2021, as of February 6, 2022, there are a total of 37 publications<sup>8</sup>. They are 30 minutes long on average and are published every Sunday. The initial titles are related to the presentation of the couple's main occupation of planning and carrying out renovations of the country house. As the warmer months advance, they start to introduce farming and gardening. Along with that, they reflect on their daily routines and share significant moments which represent a series of transitions: returning from abroad to the homeland; living in a new village; new everyday activities and work, gardening and food – own production<sup>9</sup>. The emphasis in the footage lies on the spaces and the alternations in the house, which presents a visual, symbolic and physical reconstruction of the image of/about the home. The content and information they share is meant to serve as an example and benefit their audience. A peculiarity is the fact that the series does not have a clear end, i.e. the experience and preparation of its presentation in digital form continue today. The

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<sup>7</sup> The main actors are Moni (Monica, 24) and Tsetso (Tsvetelin, 30). Their families immigrated to Canada when they were both 15 years old, and they met there, participating in the “Dimitrovche” ensemble. In 2021, they decide to return to Bulgaria and buy a house in a village in the Lovech region. The two continue to shoot videos and publicly show moments of their lives. They present in detail their work on the repair of the house and yard, reflecting on their everyday life and their ideas about village life.

<sup>8</sup> Over 25 hours of video footage has been reviewed. Boho Soulz video channel has about 18.9K followers as of 06/02/2022 and as of June 2022 they are around 24.4K. They have 6 video series: “THE OTHER BULGARIANS”, “THE SOUND OF THE BULGARIAN VILLAGE”, “VILLAGE LIFE”, “DIY VAN CONVERSION”, “VEGAN FOOD”, “VAN LIFE ADVENTURES”, as from April 1<sup>st</sup> they add a new one “IN THE GARDEN WITH MONI” <https://www.youtube.com/c/BohoSoulz/playlists> (last visit 20.05.2022 г.)

<sup>9</sup> Through food and the skills to prepare it, acquired elsewhere, the two are recognized as part of the village and symbolically become part of its culinary community through direct participation in a cooking event at the local community center.

time of creation and sharing is relatively close to the time of the occurrence of the stories. The sharing of knowledge and skills depends on the weather and seasons, i.e. in the conditions of the so-called slow living<sup>10</sup> which in turn determines the content of the videos.

### Analysis

The ways of constructing ideas about living and the spaces of a village as a territory of self-identification of the two vloggers are of great importance for the research. Boho Soulz create a video series which aims to interact with their audience, elicit reactions and communication, convey messages and images of the rural life as experienced and interpreted by the two settlers. On the one hand, the narratives are part of a strategy and serve the purposes of the vloggers. I will not dwell on that but only note it as a factor in the construction of the images for/of the village. On the other hand, the media content is a discursive field with actors and topics of conversation, significant for determining trends of discussing the images of the village in transition. From an anthropological perspective, the video narratives are a community-building tool which is sustained by interests in the practices and knowledge of village life. Without the presence of a narrative of rural life, the same community will not be created and maintained, i.e. the presence of a combination of digital narrative and village experiences characterize a certain type of communication and sharing of experience.

Reflections on the digital forms of telling of/about the village related to the general idea of a traditional village can also show another point of view towards the transforming place. The two vloggers' *large-scale digital story* of village routine outlines the transformation in their lifestyles. By going through multiple transitions before and during the village experience, they emphasize learning by doing and learning on the go. Part of the transitions which the vloggers experience symbolically, traced in the series of their digital narratives, are defined by the dichotomies: abroad – homeland, city – village, mobility – settledness. They mark various stages of their lives in different territorial contexts. The final transition that matters is a set of micro-transitions which shape a bigger picture of transformations and representations of the village, combining past and present, on a personal and societal/ national scale.

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<sup>10</sup> From the term in English 'slow living', there are equivalents, slow food, slow culture.

The general storyline reveals, on the one hand, transformations of the symbolic notion of home to a physical determination of place. On the other hand, residing in a village modifies practical knowledge and skills, social skills for living together in the village community, ways of mutual assistance among neighbors, sharing with others, dependence on time and space<sup>11</sup>. Digital narratives indicate that understanding and learning the peculiarities of daily routine in the countryside is a necessity for inhabiting the community together.

The digital stories can be considered as an example of a micro “virtual museum” of the personal experiences in the village<sup>12</sup>. The multitude of digital content builds a database for Boho Soulz, which is a kind of collection of elements of social and cultural significance to the lives of the couple. The characteristics and structure of the footage have the ability to impart knowledge, inform and motivate viewers who wish to live in the countryside<sup>13</sup>. Similar to a “virtual museum”, digital narratives have an informal educational character about the way of life in a village through personal trial and experience. The educational nature of the videos is one of the set goals of the content and represents a digital way of acquisition of the village culture. What is specific about the virtual micro “museum” is that there is no clear addressee of the knowledge, since sharing on social networks, both YouTube and, for example, Facebook, is not directly engaging and does not necessarily imply communication, but sharing videos builds new connections and communities<sup>14</sup>. Follower engagement is an important factor in building a virtual community and most often depends on the manner the story is told and the authenticity of the content shared.

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<sup>11</sup> Neighbors are this important connection for both of them, thanks to which they make their choice of the house. They get to know their closest neighbors online and upon their return to Bulgaria they meet in person and find out about the sale of the neighboring house. The rest of the villagers also become a part of their lives there, as they use certain services from the locals for cultivating the land, for repair work, etc.

<sup>12</sup> I use “virtual museum” according to the concept of Alain-Marc Rieu, who defines the Internet as a virtual museum with characteristics of: fascinating, informal, interactive, individualized, virtual (Rieu 2007:5).

<sup>13</sup> A main question to interlocutors of the vloggers in the videos from another series – “The Other Bulgarians” is “What would you say to the people who want, but hesitate to settle in the countryside?”. See the video series [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLuTLIP-O-A&list=PLthbpDSxkbzNBsfBf4Z\\_vNmaTO9Ua8DFJ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLuTLIP-O-A&list=PLthbpDSxkbzNBsfBf4Z_vNmaTO9Ua8DFJ) (last visited on 06.02.2022.)

<sup>14</sup> See Lange 2008: 367.



The Boho Soulz video series builds a community of like-minded people who support their village experience, knowledge and skills. The footage accompanies the experiences they share and show<sup>15</sup>. The time gap between the occurrence of the supposed past, which has social and cultural significance for the individual and/or the community, and its transmission to followers is shortened. Mutual assistance is observed, which, in addition to being virtual, in some cases passes into real meetings<sup>16</sup>. The virtual community of followers can be seen as a new type of heirs, and digital stories – as the new way of passing on a legacy – the (self) transformative knowledge of village life.

### Conclusion

The video series are a micro-space, a collection of “cultural material” from personal experience and part of a larger “virtual narrative”, which, collected and analyzed, can display an overall picture of the virtual community and village life currently. Digital narratives of country life demonstrate the role of knowledge and understanding of community ties and attitudes to the place. On the other hand, they outline the transitions from and to the place and the community through the transformations of the images of the village which turn it into a territorial identity. Living in a village reveals a transformation of inheritances, which, although sometimes “informal”, are the most important varieties of the ways of “constructing the place” (Givre, 2012: 48). The narrative of its inhabiting evokes public attention and builds dynamic images which are an important part of understanding it today.

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<sup>15</sup> The last months of 2021 have seen new ways of storytelling through live broadcasts where they share their experiences, provoked by direct questions from viewers.<sup>#</sup> The most common questions are summarized around the topics: how do they support themselves financially; how much it cost them to do repairs; how they procure the necessary products and materials, etc.

<sup>16</sup> The video series “The Other Bulgarians” is largely a consequence of online communication through the content in “Life in the Village”. The motivation for this comes after the appearance of the two on national air. See video “The Call of the Wild” (19.09.2021) <https://youtu.be/wRkWzzHZjv4> (Last visited on 01.02.2022 г.)

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**TRANSITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS  
INSTITUTIONS AND CULTURAL POLICIES**



# THE CHRONICLE BOOK OF *IVAN BUYUKLIEV* COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTER IN THE VILLAGE OF PCHELAROVO. MEMORY AND IDENTITY

*Mariya Kisikova*

**Summary:** The chronicle book of *Ivan Buyukliev* Community Center in the village of Pchelarovo occupies a significant place in the history of the local community as it presents the *true* story of its past. The current text develops the analysis based on several excerpts from the 80s of the twentieth century, which is a part of it and whose meaning unfolds against the background of broader socio-cultural processes of the period. The individual records act as arguments for the exclusivity of the village and the Community Center, charged with significance of varied nature – not only the Community Center as a cultural, youth center and *inventor* of traditions, but also the village as a source of *culture*, merit and national significance. Modern interpretations integrate these images of the village and the Community Center in an updated network of meanings in the perspective of the ongoing processes and transformations. The narrative of the past allows for the consolidation of the community memory and the establishment of identity.

**Key words:** chronicle book, community center, memory, images, village

*The miserable existence which many community centers in Bulgaria undergo today is due to unprepared community center staff, or partisan such. We must protect the Community Center in case of supposed danger and surrender not one corner to such evil. There will be times again when somebody will write on these pages about the life of the Center, but for now let's keep the good wishes and the desire for creative work in the Prosveta Community Center. (Chronicle book of Ivan Buyukliev Community Center, record 1 from March 27, 1927)*

The first entry in the Chronicle Book of *Ivan Buyukliev* Community Center (previous name *Prosveta*) cherishes the expectations that the life of the Center will receive a well-deserved and lasting presence in the documentary archives. The author of this prophecy – the first secretary of *Ivan Buyukliev* Community Center – dedicated many years to the

efforts to describe and arrange the personalities and events in this chronicle. However, even after his time, there are people who would support the initiative and contribute to preserving the memory of the community life within and beyond the community center.

The writing of a chronicle book is a voluntary endeavor, which corresponds to the basic principles of creation and functioning of a community center as an institution – initiative, self-organization, activism, volunteering<sup>1</sup>. The chronicle itself does not belong to the documents required by the regulations, which the institution should possess and keep, so its systematic recording depends on the initiative and perseverance of the individuals. The figure of the author of the book is also of special importance. On the one hand, he is not limited by the existing bureaucratic requirements for the text, which allows him to follow his own criteria for selecting and presenting the significant events from the past. On the other hand, access to the chronicle is institutionally limited and its contributors do not show much voluntarism in topics and ideas. The authors of the chronicle book take the position of a person-institution, a legitimate chronicler who has the right to tell about the community center and the obligation to preserve the memory of the past. The importance of the chronicle book is confirmed by its dual existence today – the original was deposited in the State Archives of Kardzhali in 1984, yet its manuscript copy is kept among the documents of the Community Center. The text of the chronicle is recognized as presenting its *true* account of the past, of the people and events to be remembered, and of the messages revealed to their successors today. As Alaida Assman points out, the archive forms the basis of what the future will say about the present when it becomes the past (Assman 2008: 102).

The content of the chronicle book reveals two periods in which the Center's activists completed it systematically and continuously. The first period (1927-1946) was associated with the name of Ivan Buyukliev, who consolidated the efforts to establish the institution and keep the annals. And the second one covers the period from 1978 to 1992, when the Center secretary Yordan Dimitrov was in charge of the regular recordings in the book. I will focus my research on the records from the second period of the chronicle, where 125 records reveal information about social relations in the community, comment on events,

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the institution of the Center, see the specialized issue of the magazine *Bulgarian Folklore*, 2019/1.

personalities and occasions. Images of the village are put together in them, the stratification and deconstruction of which allows a deep insight into the current processes, social interactions, positions, policies. The subsequent analyzes will highlight both the meanings which the authors have conferred to the Community Center and the village according to the specific context, and those which are created by the reactualization and reinterpretation of that archival data today.

**The village – guardian of national memory and history.** *In the evening at 6 o'clock a fireworks rally was held in front of the monument in the village of Pchelarovo. Wreaths were laid by the student groups from the villages of Gabrovo, Komuniga, Minzuhar, Chernoochene and Pchelarovo. And from the organizations in the village of Pchelarovo. Hayri Sabriev and Mugalibov from Chernoochene and other guests were present. A report on the Balkan War was presented by the mayor of the village of Pchelarovo, Dimitar Yordanov. At the time of the account it started raining which complicated the matter* (October 16, 1982). The only monument commemorating the events of the Balkan War in the area is located in the village where the official celebrations are held annually<sup>2</sup>. They confirm the role of the settlement as a guardian of the national memory and highlight it on the local background. This *exclusivity* is also amplified by the fact that all the listed villages have a Turkish population<sup>3</sup>. Pchelarovo becomes a center for the implementation and enforcement of the state nationalist policies at local level.

**The village – center of/ for culture.** *Today, two groups of students from Chernoochene came to see the library and the museum collection* (1985). The Cultural Center Library and the Museum founded in 1984 give new cultural meanings not only to the institution, but also to the village. It becomes an important stop in the local cultural routes offered to various school and work groups. The very establishment of the Historical Museum confirms the importance of the village and its role in the implementation of the nationalist policies of the period.

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<sup>2</sup> In my conversation with the deputy mayor in 2017 (more than 30 years after the quoted entry in the Chronicle), she said that Pchelarovo is the only village in the region where important dates in national history could be celebrated.

<sup>3</sup> According to my interlocutors, Pchelarovo is the only *purely Bulgarian* village in the local context of Turkish villages. Field research and interviews were conducted in the period 2017–2021.

The proposed excerpts present the village of Pchelarovo as an important center of cultural life and festivity. This significance derives legitimacy both from the recognition in the local context and from the inclusion in the policies of the central government and the Great Historical Narrative of the nation.

Another group of records presents events and activities which directly affect the functioning of the cultural institution.

**The Community center as an *inventor* of traditions.** *Rehearsal with the women for the rituals Karalen and kichene na glaveniza. A rehearsal for these rituals was held again on April 27 and 28. Every night on May 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup>, the women held a rehearsal to study the rituals, preparing for the fair* (1986). According to the policies of the socialist state, the community centers create and maintain amateur groups: in Pchelarovo there is a vocal group, dance and theater groups of different ages<sup>4</sup>. They often participate in municipal, district or regional reviews of amateur art and are rewarded for their participation. In the 80s the Community Center begins to reconstruct rites, too. With the rites quoted in the excerpt, the Community Center group participates in the fair in Koprivshitsa and receives an award on either occasion. The record shows the process of *restoration* and *invention* of traditions (acc. Hobsbawm 1996), which is realized by/ in the local Community institutions.

**The Community center as a youth center.** *A New Year's party was held by the young people. Of course, it didn't go without trouble. There were also drunken acts, explosions in the small hall and the salon with hand-made bombs* (1983). At this time the Community Center is already a major spot for gatherings and social life in the village and the region. It is not only the center of events, activities, meetings, etc. of the various local institutions, but also provides an opportunity to gather the young people after work hours. The consequences of the youth gatherings are often the subject of comment and sanction by the writer.

The presented research is based on data from archival documents and builds its argumentative line in relation to the problems of remembrance – the preservation, transmission and inheritance of the memory of events and personalities, which carries important stakes in the identity of the local community. For the image of the village these are its functions of a

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<sup>4</sup> On cultural policies of the socialist state, see Elenkov 2008



guardian of national memory and history, a cultural center for the surrounding villages, and for the rural community center – the inventor of traditions and a youth center. The chronicle book is a document with a specific status, double archived. It is perceived as the *authentic* narrative about the Center, presented by the legitimate chronicler. Every social fact in the annals is a thread which knits the fabric of the community's cultural memory. At the same time, as annals, it provides an opportunity for the researcher to interpret, update and incorporate the meanings embedded in the chronicle by its authors into new semantic networks. The time perspective created by it allows to highlight more clearly the past processes, the participating social actors, the changes in social relations, and to draw conclusions about the processes of memory transmission and establishment of the community identity. The chronicle book is a key to the past which draws the lines of the future.

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# POLICIES FROM ABOVE – NEW WAYS TO INHABIT THE VILLAGES

*Mariya Slavcheva*

**Summary:** The paper introduces initial reflections on the rural policies of the state administration. As a result of these, new holidays and festivals related to the intangible cultural heritage are emerging. Organizing and holding such thematic events is part of the innovative ways of inhabiting the villages. Another result of these policies is the change in the perception of the villages by both the administration and the local people. Its dimensions can be observed and registered through the methods of visual anthropology.

**Key words:** policies, inhabiting, holidays and festivals, life transitions, transformations

This paper presents initial reflections on my fieldwork in the period 2020-2022. Since June 2020 I have been working in the municipality of Stara Zagora as a senior expert in the Department of Tourism and Youth Activities. This position gave me the opportunity to see the work of my department and that of the Culture Department in a completely different way. During the year in which the Covid-19 pandemic changed the majority of the ways in which celebrations are organized and held, a number of village policies also needed to shift. There are 51 villages in the municipality of Stara Zagora. In geographical terms, they possess multiple features: some are located in the field, where the harvest is abundant and provides the basic means of life; others are built in mountainous terrain. The varying landscape also determines the extent to which locals would wish to modify the environment in which they dwell. In many cases, locals become the engine of change and themselves generate ideas or actively participate in the implementation of various policies which not only change the landscape, but also add new benefits in social terms<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Management Program of the Municipality of Stara Zagora – <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/otcheti-na-kmeta>

## Policies from Above

The village and its development and modernization inspire a lot of social scientists. (Angelova, 2008; Bokova, 2009; Ganeva-Raycheva, 1999; Zhivkova, 1985; Krastanova, 2005) The issues of the village occupy a specific place in terms of policies aimed at developing the capacity of local communities and updating the environment. The village is becoming a place with high hopes for development, especially when viewed by local authorities. Institutions “*think*” in a specific way when it comes to deciding on actions related to the development of local communities and the problems of memory and inheritance. (Zhivkova, 1989; Koleva, 1999; Penkova, 2013; Douglas, 2004) It is not uncommon to encourage local leaders to propose initiatives such as organizing non-traditional celebrations and festivals to encourage local participation, but also to try to enhance (or change for a short time) the living conditions. For example, the municipality of Stara Zagora is one of those municipalities which pursue policies in line with the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2030<sup>2</sup>, according to which it is necessary to develop more tourism products related to *tourism experience*. Thus, it is possible to preserve the village as a tourist destination and in this sense to keep it alive. In 2019 was published the collection *Villages of the Municipality of Stara Zagora – from Arnautito to Yavorovo: 51 Sources of Bread, Faith and Culture*. There, all 51 villages are presented with the initiatives they consider most valuable for the development of the local community. In addition, the administration financed the creation of short films for all villages – part of the official channels on social networks of the Municipality of Stara Zagora. The cover and the musical background display a modern look and sound, tailored to the tastes of young people. In this way, the image, which is supported by the local government, speaks of the desire for the villages to be attractive, to be known and to become part of the tourist destinations in the municipality.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/uploads/strategy-policy/strategy\\_2014-2030\\_13\\_05\\_2014-sled\\_ms\\_26\\_05\\_2014.pdf](https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/uploads/strategy-policy/strategy_2014-2030_13_05_2014-sled_ms_26_05_2014.pdf)

### Themed Festivals

The organization and holding of food festivals is a trend which arouses research interest. (Stoilova, 2012) The public attention is attracted by the so-called “*themed festivals*”<sup>3</sup>, which are organized in some of the villages (*The Liutenitsa Festival*<sup>4</sup>, *The Potato Festival*<sup>5</sup>, *The Tomato Festival*<sup>6</sup>, *The Persimmon Festival*<sup>7</sup>, *The Mugwort Festival*<sup>8</sup>, *The Wheat Festival*<sup>9</sup>). In addition to the efforts to inhabit the villages, there is a desire to develop tourist destinations which to offer tourism experience. Perhaps this is the reason to invest in the development of these cultural products and practices. The funded activities are mainly in the sphere of cultural heritage, related to its preservation and presentation. Heritage policies are interesting to observe because they focus on only one element around which are organized different events. The Persimmon Festival is exactly such an event. In the cultural calendar of the municipality of Stara Zagora this festival has been present for almost 15 years and is undergoing great development. According to the stories of my interlocutors, in the beginning it was necessary to determine what was the most interesting and unique feature of the village, and then it took years to reach the perception of the persimmon as a cultural heritage. The festival already has a tradition in its organization and is being upgraded every year. My informants share that in recent

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<sup>3</sup> This is how the informants call my festivals which are dedicated to a certain topic (potato, persimmon, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> The first event of the *lutenitsa* and winter supplies in the village of Bogomilovo <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/kulturen-kalendar/septemvri/>

<sup>5</sup> Potato Festival in the village of Kaloyanovets <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/sabitiya/treti-praznik-na-kartofa-shte-se-provede-v-starozagorskoto-selo-kaloyanovets>

<sup>6</sup> The Tomato Festival *Don Domat – The Vegetable–Fruit* in Gorno Botevo village <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/sabitiya/praznik-don-domat-organizirat-v-starozagorskoto-selo-gorno-botevo>

<sup>7</sup> The Persimmon Festival in Hrishteni village <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/novini/zapetnadeseti-pat-organizirat-konkursa-rayskata-yabalka-bozhestveno-krasivo-i-vkusno-izkushenie-v-starozagorskoto-selo-hrishteni>

<sup>8</sup> The Mugwort Festival in Zmeevo village <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/novini/praznik-na-pelina-gotvyat-v-zmeyovo>

<sup>9</sup> The Wheat Festival – *The Route of the Bread* in Preslaven village <https://www.starazagora.bg/bg/sabitiya/osmi-folkloren-praznik-na-zhitoto-shte-se-provede-v-starozagorskoto-selo-preslaven>

years there has been a change in the overall visual identity of the festival: there is already a logo, selected colors, promotional materials. In 2021, this festival was held entirely online, due to the restrictions imposed by the epidemiological situation in the country.

The mentioned policies towards the villages are part of the change in the perception of the village, which could lead to a redefinition of the village. These transformations in the views of the institutions are at both political and economic levels. Moreover, institutions are increasingly beginning to “*think*” and be closer to local people and their desires.

### **New Ways to Inhabit the Villages**

One of the results which stand out in the implementation of the policies is the search for new ways of inhabiting the village. It is often expressed visually as a change in the landscape and can be understood in two different ways. The transformations in the rural landscape can be traced in renovations of the facades of the houses, construction of new and diverse fences, modifications in the gardens and their structure, change of the cultivated crops, etc. Secondly, the inhabiting of the villages can be traced by observing the life strategies of the people who have chosen to set their own home in the village. Usually, these decisions are related to a shift of workplace or retirement and / or a change in the outlook (closer to nature, a change in diet). A motive I often encountered on site was the idea of returning. Return as a process is the drawing of a village-oriented vector, and rarely can this vector change direction toward the city. In most of the cases I have observed, these life transitions are related to the return to the long-abandoned father's house. The last remark is important because the attitude that the new inhabitants of the village have towards it is built in connection with the past and the ancestors, and in this sense is a prerequisite to invest time, effort and resources in renovating the villages and life in them. Ideas taken from the urban way of life are often brought in the observed cases of life transitions in the villages. In some of the community centers yoga classes<sup>10</sup> are organized, and in others – classes of painting with wine<sup>11</sup>. Such new practices in the village are supported not only by and because

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<sup>10</sup> Yoga classes are held in the villages of Borilovo and Kazanka

<sup>11</sup> In the village of Borilovo wine painting is carried out in the renovated building of the community center

of the local community, but also by the local administrative structure – in this case – the municipality.

Inhabiting the villages is a process which can be traced visually and it “*speaks*” of the transforming village. In order to deliver a quality visual examination, it is necessary to set visual guidelines in advance, which to outline the life transitions. The two lines intertwine because many of those who choose to return to the countryside make changes which are caused by the urban way of life. Visual examination will not only reveal the images of transformation and life transition, but it can also contain explanations of the observed phenomenon. Repeated motives in the conversations in which I participated are related to the peace which one finds when returning to the countryside. In this regard, the rural residents are looking for, and in many cases – set aside special spaces for rest. They often take the shape of a green lawn with chairs and a table, and the addition of various garden swings and hammocks is not uncommon. Such spaces stand out in front of the houses and take the place of vegetable gardens. They are the spots where one will have a coffee, will set various facilities for the children to play, or will read a book and spend some free time. The creation of a space for rest, in my opinion, is the result of the search for peace by those who used to lead a busy city life.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The higher policies aim to make the villages better well-known, to distinguish them from each other by using themed events. In this way, one of the elements of the intangible cultural heritage stands out as unique for the place. As a result of the events, the local people are much more connected to each other and to the environment they live in. The changes which are observed can be the subject of an even more in-depth visual examination.

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