

Jurjevanje Festival from Ritual to Festival

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Abstract

The article seeks to provide insight into the process of establishing Slovenia's oldest folklore festival named *Jurjevanje* in the town of Črnomelj through a discursive approach. Focused on the *Želeni Jurij* (Green George) ritual as the basis of the festival, the article captures the local discourse and explores the festival's historical development and its connection to broader folklore festivalisation in Slovenia. Key events in the 1930s related to various folklore events and festivals at that time within the region and outside it played pivotal roles. After the Second World War, Črnomelj attempted to revive regional folklore by hosting folk dance group displays, resulting in the emergence in 1964 of the Jurjevanje festival, which blended socialist ideology with heritage preservation. Today, it embodies heritage, identity, and development goals, showcasing the marketability of regional traditions globally.

Keywords

Green George, St. John's bonfire, folklorisation, Bela Krajina, folklore performance, folklore ensemble, heritagisation

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Introduction

Jurjevanje v Beli krajini festival in Črnomelj is a festival that advertises itself as the oldest folklore festival in Slovenia.¹ In contrast to the broader English meaning, in the Slovenian context a festival is a designation for an organisationally and financially structured public event. More spontaneous performances and other traditional celebrations are called events, celebrations, days, etc. Although the term festival was often used in the media coverage of it from the very beginnings of Črnomelj's Jurjevanje, it only became the official name in the first decade of the new millennium during the process of joining the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF).² As with many other festivals of various kinds, it shapes not only Slovenia's geographical landscape but it is also deeply involved in wider heritage making processes, as is the case with festivals in other countries (Poljak 2005; Smith – Akagawa 2009; Hafstein 2012; Logan – Kockel – Craith 2015; Testa 2016; Kockel et al. 2020a).

Folklore festivals are part of the “heritage boom” that has raised awareness of the importance of cultural resources since the 1980s, although it has often built on the premises of “salvage ethnology” and been “concerned solely with the preservation of heritage items” (Kockel 2002; after Kockel et al. 2020b: 2). As in other festivals, there is a central ritual dimension and the festival itself can be considered a public ritual (see also Testa 2023: 22) that is very present in Slovenian mediascape.

The *Zeleni Jurij* ritual (hereafter Green George) celebrates a mythological son of the highest Slavic god Perun, who protects livestock and horses, brings fertility and defeats the enemy. In later versions, it refers to St. George, a 4th century soldier, saint and martyr who defeated a dragon as a symbol of evil and took over the role of a mythological hero in Christianity. Slovenian folk customs reveal a folk belief that on St. George's Day

1 <https://jurjevanje.si/>, accessed 1. 7. 2023.

2 Over time, not only the conceptualisation of the event has changed but also the name. The event was advertised in different ways: until 2005, the media mostly wrote about the “event”, the “folklore dance group review”, the “folklore display” etc. In 2006 it started to be advertised as a “festival”, and since 2009 it has been described as “the oldest folklore festival in Slovenia”. In 2008 it was named “Festival of Folklore, Gastronomy and Handicrafts” (Matkovič 2018: 220). The actual name of the event has also been changing and the festival has taken place under the following names: Jurjevanje, Kresovanje in Jurjevanje, Jurjevanje v Črnomlju, and Jurjevanje v Beli krajini (Blažič 2013).

(April 23 or 24)³ Green George awakens the spring (Kropej 2012: 45), which places it among the fertility rituals. The aim of St. George's rounds from house to house on the eve of his feast day, which according to the folk calendar marks the beginning of spring, was to bring blessings to the houses and fields by singing ritual songs and collecting offerings. The St. Georges's rounds ritual is known throughout the Slovenian territory. However, the notion of "*jurjevanje*" commonly refers to the modalities of "*jurjevo*" celebration in Bela Krajina, which features a boy dressed in greenery due to numerous folkloric depictions that have also entered the school curricula and the eponymous folklore festival.

The first ethnographic studies and attempts to revive the disappeared ritual were made as early as in the late 1830s (Kapelle 1839). The process of the folklorisation of the ritual was deeply entangled with the flourishing of folklore dance groups in the region. Later, the revived tradition performed by folklore dance groups became a defining and presentational feature of the town of Črnomelj, together with the white birches of the wider Bela Krajina (White Carniola) region. With the establishment of the folkloric event and later the Jurjevanje in Bela Krajina festival, which was made possible by the long-standing folklore dance activity in the region, it has acquired a tourist- and identity-making significance. On the basis of a long history of folkloristic staging, it was deeply integrated into the process of festivalisation, in which all that is culturally recognised manifests itself as a festival (Kozorog 2011: 61). The process of organising festivals in small towns and villages to attract tourists and the interested public from elsewhere (known as festivalisation, for more, see Kozorog 2011) swept across Slovenia in the latter decades of the 20th century and has intensified in the new millennium. This festivalisation fed into the "socially transversal renewed interest in the past and for local traditions, and for new modes of social memory construction and expression, in connection with interwoven phenomena of ritualisation, re-enchantment and musealisation" (Testa 2017: 79).

Folklore festivals, as activities in which people engage with producing culture on the basis of their past and transforming their localities (Harrison 2013: 245), have successfully instrumentalized selected practices, rituals and identities to produce sentiments of locality, authenticity, cultural community, and belonging among participants (Testa 2023: 45). Moreover, they are marketed to potential visitors (Hafstein 2020) and have become important

3 The feast of St. George was celebrated on 23 April in places north of the Drava river (under the Archdiocese of Salzburg) and on 24 April in places south of the Drava (under the Patriarchate of Aquileia), to which the town of Črnomelj belonged.

drivers of regional development and place branding strategies, as well as key tourist products (Getz – Page 2016; Mair – Weber 2019, after Šepetavc – Majsova 2024)⁴ as envisaged also by UNESCO and other institutions.

This article thus contributes to the issue of festivalisation by capturing the local discourse in the midst of debates on a broader international scale. The source material, grey and specialist literature, captures the local and national discourse and provides the starting point for an analytical perspective. The article attempts to provide an insight into the process of festivalisation of Jurjevanje through a discursive approach that focuses on how the ritual was a productive source for the establishment of a folklore festival, as well as on the changes in the ritual itself in the processes of folklorisation and heritagisation. Particular attention will be paid to its ideators, the role of local folklore dance groups and the changes in the evolution of the concept of heritage community in the case of the Green George ritual.

First records of the Green George ritual: a historical perspective

From around the middle of the 19th century, the well-known folklore collectors of Bela Krajina included the ritual of Green George in their collecting activities. Although they often concentrated on the lyrics of folk songs and later published them in the collection *Slovenske narodne pesmi* (Slovene Folk Songs II, III, 1904–1905), they also recorded certain fragments of the ritual. Other folklore collectors also published individual descriptions in various popular Slovene magazines of the time (for details, see Marolt 1936: 5–22). As Marjetka Balkovec Debevec writes, “the oldest record of the Green George ritual in Črnomelj was published in 1839 by Johan Kapelle in *Carniola*, in which he states that the George ritual had ceased to be performed by the middle of the first half of the 19th century” (2008: 200). Records of 19th-century collectors and oral sources served as the basis for the revival of this custom in the years before the Second World War, particularly with the engagement of (but not only) the folklorist France Marolt in the 1930s.

The performance of the Green George ritual as strongly rooted in the perception of “otherness” of time and space and was already an “ethnographic-touristic export” of the people of Bela Krajina among Slovenians and wider at the beginning of the 20th century. On 12 June 1908, when the 60th anniversary of the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria was celebrated in Vienna, the Duchy of Carniola was among other duchies

4 For a concise overview of a broad scholarly literature on the festivals, see Testa 2023.

presented in a festive parade (see Kranjec 2001: 15–20). In the section of the parade representing Carniolians, the participants also included locals from the Bela Krajina region. In addition to participating in other parts of the Carniolian group in the parade, they presented two so-called ethnographic pictures: the wedding and the Green George. The organisation and preparation of the Carniolan group of the parade was entrusted to the Slovenian art club “Sava”, and the various parts within it to individual artists. The painter Rihard Jakopič⁵ was responsible for two regions – Dolenjska and Bela Krajina.

Slovenian newspapers of the time expressed the hope that the Carniolan group, with the help of skilled local artists, would create an original and picturesque image that would attract the attention of Austrian and foreign spectators and thus promote the country and its tourism (Poziv 1908: 1). We do not know much more about Green George from the available newspaper sources, but the earliest photograph of Green George is connected with the parade in Vienna (see Fig. 1).⁶ The photograph was taken on that occasion and published in the same year in the periodical *Dom in svet* (Home and World) (1908) and reprinted a year later in a book by Ivan Šašelj (1909),



Figure 1 Zeleni Jurij, photographer unknown. Source: *Dom in svet* 1908, 21, 8: 384.

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- 5 Rihard Jakopič (1869–1943), born in Ljubljana, was a pioneer and leading Slovenian impressionist painter, theoretician and art patron, as well as co-founder of the art club “Sava”.
- 6 Although it is not explicitly stated that this photograph is related to the representative event in Vienna, it is proven by the fact that in the same year of the *Dom in svet* magazine there are also photographs of other participants from the Bela Krajina region who took part in Vienna, all taken against the same background.

another member of the Carniolian preparation committee. The newspaper's sources also reveal initiatives and desires to use the preparations for the Vienna event and the associated field research by the members of the preparation committee to document and produce ethnographic material (Kranjska 1908: 4).

Later, especially in the 1930s, when various major folklore festivals were organised in different towns of Drava Banovina, one of the nine administrative units of the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the inhabitants of Bela Krajina often took part. Although Green George is not explicitly mentioned in the programme of the Festival of Slavic Music and Slavic Folk Dances that was held in Ljubljana in September 1934, photographic material from the *Belokranjski dan* (Bela Krajina Day) held in Ljubljana in September 1936 shows that Green George was included in the programme performed by the inhabitants of Črnomelj at this event. On this occasion, the book *Tri obredja iz Bele Krajine* (Three Rituals from Bela Krajina) by France Marolt (1936) was published, in which the first of the three studies is dedicated to the ritual of Green George. In the third study, which is dedicated to the *kolo* and Bridge Dance in Črnomelj, the author points out at the beginning that it is usually performed on Easter Monday, White Sunday and St. Flo-



Figure 2 A photograph from a rehearsal at a stadium, showing both female *kolo* dancers and boys performing the ritual. The individual in the circle is the folklorist France Marolt, who organised the Ljubljana events. ©ZRC SAZU, Institute of Ethnomusicology; photo by Jože Šmuc, 1936.

rian's Day. However, it is confusing to note that on the occasion of Beno Gregorič's Bela Krajina photographic excursion of 1933 (see below) at the end of the Bridge Dance, instead of the capture of a prominent townsman, who is then ransomed for payment to the performers, Green George and his entourage were captured (Marolt 1936: 66, 16).

In this case, we already observe the contamination of two spring rituals that do not coincide in time and are now often combined into one to represent the folklore of the people of Črnomelj. A careful examination of the photographic material also reveals a difference in the visual appearance of the performers in the 1930s: The women performing the Črnomelj kolo were dressed in the black garment, while the boys performing the ritual of Green George wore the white costume, which was presumably of older origin.

The Maribor Folklore Festival in August 1939 was the most important and certainly the largest of the festivals held in the Drava Banovina before the Second World War in terms of the number of participants (an estimated 200 performers). One of the nine performing groups in the festival was a group of 32 locals from Črnomelj who performed the Green George and the Bridge Dance.

In addition to festivals outside the region, there were some pre-war events in Bela Krajina that influenced the Jurjevanje festival after the Second World War. In this context, there were three notable occasions. The first was in 1933 when Beno Gregorič, a Ljubljana-based photographic material dealer and druggist, organised an amateur photographic excursion to Bela Krajina in cooperation with the Bela Krajina Association, which was founded by former residents of Bela Krajina living in the capital Ljubljana to help the peripheral region from which they came. The photographic-cum-tourist excursion took place on 7 May 1933 with the participation of 700 tourists, who arrived from Ljubljana by train and bus (Vsa radostna 1933). The visits to various places in the region ended with an event in Črnomelj called "*Jurjevanje*", although the film footage shows that not only the Green George ritual was performed on the square in Črnomelj that day, but also displays of dance-music folklore from other places in the region.

According to the archival film documentation, in addition to the people of Črnomelj, at least two other local groups from the region took part in the event. This excursion was also attended by three amateur filmmakers and one professional, Metod Badjura, who titled his film *Jurjevanje v Beli krajini*. This quartet of filmmakers thus provided the first documentary footage from the region with a strong ethnographic flavour, which included scenes of Green George in the films of Božidar Jakac and Metod Badjura (Muhič 2011: 4–5).



Figure 3 Folklore event on the square in Črnomelj, Green George in the middle. 7 May 1933. ©ZRC SAZU, Institute of Ethnomusicology; photo by Janko Hafner, 1933.

Remarkably, it was the folkloric celebrations of spring with Green George that later inspired Metod Badjura's most successful film *Pomlad v Beli krajini* (Spring in Bela Krajina, 1952), in which he poetically documented the traditions of the region and for which he received Slovenia's highest artistic award, the Prešeren Prize, in 1953.

The 1939 festival in Črnomelj is another important precursor of the post-war development of Jurjevanje festival in Bela Krajina. On 18 June 1939, the Putnik tourist agency, together with the Bela Krajina Association, organised a tourist trip to Bela Krajina. Putnik provided a special train that left Ljubljana that day for Črnomelj and Metlika, the major towns in the region, and returned in the evening. For the passengers of the special train, five different excursions to the surroundings of Črnomelj and Metlika were organised in the morning, and a festival was held in Črnomelj in the afternoon. In addition to the festival and excursions, a cherry fair completed the varied tourist offer. An estimated 500 tourists from Ljubljana attended the festival, who were joined by others on the way, and the event was also watched by many locals, and therefore more than 1,000 people were present at the festival.

A large number of groups from Bela Krajina took part in this event. There were performances by locals from Črnomelj, Metlika, Vinica, Adlešiči, Dragatuš and Predgrad. Most of the groups presented living traditions, while only the group from Črnomelj presented a reconstruction of the Green George, which was announced and highlighted several times in the daily newspapers prior to the festival. In the report on the festival, on the first page of the *Jutro* newspaper of 19 June 1939, we read (in a somewhat exaggerated account) that they witnessed a ritual that the predecessors of the inhabitants of Črnomelj had last seen in the 1830s.

The following year, there was a similar festival, this time called the 2nd Bela Krajina Festival, which was held for two days in September 1940 in Metlika, the other major town in the region. Once again, it was organised by Putnik tourist agency together with the Bela Krajina Association. On the first evening a bonfire was lit according to “old customs”, on the next morning four excursions were organised to different parts of the Bela Krajina region, and in the afternoon, in Metlika, a display of “Bela Krajina folk scenes” was performed by local groups from nine places, who presented their own dance traditions. The people of Črnomelj demonstrated the Green George ritual and some dances.

Similar to the 1933 event, the 1940 festival was also captured on camera (Kunej 2004: 187), this time as the film *Bela krajina: festival narodnih plesov in kresovanje v Metliki* (Bela krajina: Festival of Folk Dances and Bonfire in Metlika) by Božidar Jakec, who also made the film *Bela krajina: Zeleni Jurij v Črnomlju* (Bela Krajina: Green George in Črnomelj) that same summer of 1940 (Muhič 2011: 7). With over 2,000 spectators reportedly in attendance, the festival in Metlika was another successful tourist-folklore event that laid the foundations for the development of the Jurjevanje festival after the Second World War.

The first film recordings in Bela Krajina are thus closely linked to the folklore festivals before the Second World War and reveal the tourists’ enthusiasm for the traditions of the region, which is interwoven with the locals’ enthusiasm for the novelty of film (Muhič 2011: 7). In this way, the visitors from Ljubljana added value and new meanings to local traditions. In preserving these early films, they left behind important documents of the folklorisation and festivalisation of regional rituals and dances.

Some of the present day folklore dance groups in Bela Krajina refer to and link the beginning of their organised activity to the events and festivals described above. Less often they cite 1908 as the beginning of their activity and more often refer to representations of rituals and dances in the 1930s. However, it was only after the Second World War, under socialism, that folklore dance groups were organised in the framework of educational-

cultural associations and in the context of institutionally organised amateur cultural activities. In this respect, the Jurjevanje event in Črnomelj after the Second World War was an important venue for the presentation of their activities, which also served as a motivational tool and sometimes sparked new creativity.

Jurjevanje in Bela Krajina after the Second World War

After the Second World War, in the spirit of post-war reconstruction and the building of a new social order in Yugoslavia, politically connoted manifestations prevailed. In the creation of a new socialist society, the working class was at the forefront, superseding the “backward” legacies of the rural farm and the “bourgeois” urban population. After the first periods of socialist renewal, the leading members of the Local Council Svoboda Association and other associations of Črnomelj, “strengthened by an awareness of the value and importance of heritage” (Kramarič 2003: 4), attempted to promote their idea of a central folklore event in Črnomelj several times between 1959 and 1964. Their goal was to revive traditional rituals in a place where folklore dance groups were already the main bearers of traditions, and therefore they strived to motivate the groups to achieve a higher quality of performance and make a significant contribution to the development of tourism in the region. However, the local political officials of the time were not receptive to the idea. They rejected it with the argument that “Now that we are lifting the Bela Krajina out of backwardness, why should our people dance in underpants?” (Kramarič 2003: 4)

When a new mayor took office in Črnomelj, a consensus was reached on the creation of the festival as a display and celebration of folk costumes and a presentation of the ritual that had already disappeared in everyday life but was known from the pre-war staged displays. Subsequently, the organisers had to overcome many obstacles to establish the festival. There was a shortage of folk costumes and instruments, so all the groups had to be re-equipped, and the tambura ensembles were favoured and equipped with some new instruments. After obtaining the funds from the mayor of Črnomelj, the organisers had to search for home-made linen for the costumes in nearby Croatian villages, because it was no longer available in Bela Krajina. A municipal car was at their disposal to search Croatian villages for the necessary linen and other supplies and transport them to Bela Krajina, where new folk costumes were sewn for more than one hundred and twenty members of folklore dance groups (Kramarič 2008). This political engagement with the musical and visual image of the tradition, which was reinforced in the following years by the Jurjevanje, maintained the stereotypical image of

the Bela Krajina dance tradition. Although the tradition does not consist solely of a tambura ensemble, the *kolo* circle dance and white linen costumes, these were the identifiers that were emphasised during the socialist era and presented a link to the wider Yugoslav space at the time.

On 6 and 7 June 1964 a special committee with the participation of the Association of Cultural and Educational Organisations, the Tourist Association and the Dolenjska Tourist Association organised the first post-Second World War Jurjevanje. The invitations read: “Bela Krajina invites you – come to the bonfire on Saturday evening and to the Green George ritual in Črnomelj on Sunday morning.” (Bela Krajina 1964) Despite the fact that the name Jurjevanje refers to the Green George ritual, it combined two rituals from the first edition of the event: the Midsummer bonfire (on the eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist), and the Green George spring ritual. On the eve of the first Jurjevanje, there was a bonfire with the singing of *kresnice*.⁷

The first post-war folklore festival of national costumes and traditions of Bela Krajina (Jurjevanje 1964: 9) was opened by the folklore dance group of Črnomelj performing the Green George ritual on Sunday morning. To a large extent the group followed the pre-war presentations of the Green George ritual of the town of Črnomelj described by France Marolt, whose writings were taken as a guarantee of authenticity by the local folklore dance groups.⁸ This performance was followed by folklore dance groups from

7 Traditionally, girls named *kresnice* sang and danced in a circle around the bonfire. Then, usually accompanied by a boy who played the flute (or some other instrument), the group went singing in the fields and vineyards and around the village in front of every house. Usually, four girls walked together dressed in white costumes with their scarves pulled low over their faces, as this was thought to give them magical powers. Their special singing was not to be interrupted until they had gone around all the houses, otherwise a misfortune would occur. The mistress of the house gave them offerings of eggs, flour, lard, or whatever she had.

8 Unlike the ritual in villages, where on 24 April groups of boys gathered to dress one of them in greenery, Green George, and walked with him around the village from house to house, singing a special song requesting offerings, France Marolt described the ritual in Črnomelj as follows: “First came the pipers and trumpeters, followed by the decorated tree, the maypole, and then a boy veiled in greenery and finally the women’s choir. On arriving in the town and at the height of the celebrations, the decorated tree was torn down by the girls, who picked up the decorations, handkerchiefs and tassels, and broke the branches, which marked the end of the celebration. Then the people took George in his greenery to the bridge and threw him into the Dobljiča River. The whole ceremony was performed by young adults, and the feast was celebrated by all the townspeople.” (Marolt 1936: 21–22)

other Bela Krajina villages, which performed various traditional dances and games. Not only at the time but even a decade later, organisers claimed that “the songs, dances and customs will be presented by folklore dance performers in an almost unchanged form, as they were known in ancient times” (Bačer 1972: 6). The rhetoric of authenticity, which was central in the initial period of the development of folklore studies, had by this time passed from folklore scholarship into public discourse. This authenticity was undefined in time: it referred mostly to the descriptions of the ritual by the first ethnographers of Bela Krajina, and even more to the ethnographic and ethnochoreographic works of France Marolt, which, in certain aspects, might not be completely reliable.

The location in the natural amphitheatre surrounded by white birch trees close to the railway station and the new town centre, which was later named “Jurjevanjska draga” after the festival venue, was fixed from the earliest beginnings of the festival. Although this was not the only venue, as performances and other events have taken place in many venues around the town, it was the symbolic place of the *jurjevanje* ritual. The Green George ritual itself, performed by Črnomelj’s folklore dance group, has often taken place in the town centre. On the other hand, the timing of the festival has fluctuated. One of the two milestones of the *kresovanje* (lighting of bonfires) season was not chosen for the event, because the weather is usually too cold and unstable for large events celebrating the feast of St. George, and at the summer solstice it was expected to be too hot. Therefore, the beginning of June was chosen. Subsequently, the event moved later into June and now takes place around the summer solstice and Slovenia’s Independence Day (25 June).⁹ For years many experts, as well as the general public have criticised the festival precisely because of the incongruity of its name and the time in which it takes place (Matkovič 2018: 212), given the fact that Green George has always been a distinct fertility ritual of spring. Even in a recent public lecture,¹⁰ a prominent historian posed the question of why the town administration was giving greater prominence to *jurjevanje* while overlooking the church and city feast of St. Peter, which has been celebrated since the 13th century.

As the performance of a single ritual for a full-day event or two rituals for a multi-day tourist event does not provide an adequate programme, folklore dance groups from other municipalities of Bela Krajina have

9 In 2000, it was even held at the end of July.

10 <https://www.facebook.com/events/ulica-mirana-jarca-3-8340-%C4%8Drnomelj-slovenija/neobi%C4%8Dajna-v%C3%A9denja-i-petrovo-starodavni-praznik-mesta-%C4%8Drnomelj/3683366951980283/>, accessed 1.7.2024.

been invited to perform their own programmes. At the beginning it was only the folklore dance group from Dragatuš, which performed not only folk dances from its local area but others from the Bela Krajina region. However, it did have an excellent tambura group and singers of local folk songs and therefore they performed an accompanying bonfire programme (Kramarič 2008: 20–21). At first, the revitalisation of vanished local traditions provided a forum for the presentation of the distinct characteristics of different villages in Bela Krajina. In following decades, it was often a venue for an annual review of pre-selected (best) folklore dance groups in Slovenia that fell into the category of original groups,¹¹ organised by the national institution that supervised amateur cultural activity in Slovenia. Folklore dance groups from other Slovenian regions were also invited to perform, followed by folklore dance groups from neighbouring countries and elsewhere in Europe. In 2012, the first folklore group from another continent performed at the festival (Blažič 2013).

Festivalisation of the traditional festivities

Although not officially titled a festival at the time, the Jurjevanje folklore dance group display in 1964 is nowadays perceived as the first post-Second World War folklore festival in Slovenia. In its early days, the event was one of the biggest in the region and in less than ten years, Jurjevanje “earned a place in the Slovenian calendar of major tourist events” (Bačer 1972: 6). According to Frank E. Manning, who was among the first to focus on festivals, the success of this contemporary festival can be understood simply as an expression of modernisation, i.e., an increase in leisure time and disposable income (1983: 4–6). Jeremy Boissevain, on the other hand, focused on festivals of this kind as invented traditions, i.e., those that were conceived by the performers as traditional (Boissevain 1992: 8–9).

In addition to the political, cultural and tourist purposes of the festival, in the early days it was also an important meeting place and an annual social event, where locals could meet almost all acquaintances, relatives and friends from the region. It was a time when many people who had migrated from the region would visit. It was pointed out that in the early days, when there was no sound system used at the Jurjevanje (unplugged), it was first and foremost a social gathering and not just a tourist-economic product:

11 In the second half of the 20th century, there was a division of folklore dance groups into two categories, namely the so-called original (*izvirne*), and reproductive (*poustvarjalne*) folklore groups. The first category included groups that presented their local (living or almost forgotten) dance tradition on stage, while reproductive groups revived dances drawing on primarily written sources.

“Jurevanje was for people to socialise. It was about getting together, that’s what it was to a large extent, and about showing folklore.” (J. K., 29. 5. 2024)

The first post-Second World War Jurjevanje was a successful local grassroots initiative, which received the endorsement of folklore experts at the first event and further guidance subsequently. The efforts of the organisers and the persistent and eager leaders of the folklore dance groups were also publicly honoured with written recognitions by the then Association of Cultural and Educational Organisations of Slovenia (Kramarič 2008: 21). While Jurjevanje was not only a folklore event but also a tourist event, the organisers strove for years to find the right balance between professional ethnological requirements and broadly tourist-oriented goals, with varying degrees of success (Balkovec Debevec 1995: 6). The development of the Jurjevanje folklore display with strong tourist and development accentuations led some ethnologists in later years to perceive it as an invented tradition “which resembles the former Green George ritual only in the name and the content of the theatrical display” (Bogataj 2011: 119–120).

Nowadays the Jurjevanje festival mobilises notions of heritage for the (re)constructions and framing of identity, place, a sense of belonging and history. It is also one of the modalities central to the implementation of UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Festivals are both a form of safeguarding intangible heritage (Hafstein 2019: 205) and are important heritage tourism stakeholders. These properties make it all the more interesting that the organisers of the Jurjevanje festival failed to secure its entry in the Register of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the event (Matkovič 2018: 220). Due to the incorrect timing of the festival and its primary focus on tourism, the application for inclusion in the Register was not accepted. However, the St. George’s rounds in the Sevnica area were listed in the register in 2023. This raised the broader question of whether the Jurjevanje festival has anything to do with the original spring ritual, apart from the name (Matkovič 2018: 212).

Contrary to ethnologists focusing primarily on assessing the “appropriateness” of the content of festivals (regarding the correctness of the performance, the temporal and spatial placement, the traditional bearers etc.) today’s research is oriented towards the exploration of the reasons why people participate in such events (cf. Kozorog 2013) and how they use them for their present and future needs. Kockel et al perceive (heritage) festivals as memory agents, “sites for the reframing of collective memory” (2020b: 1) as well as sites of notions of what constitutes the agreed heritage of a community (Šepetavc – Majsova 2024). Heritage as discursively implicated in the legitimation and management of historical and cultural narratives and

the preservation of their values (Smith 2011: 141) has been understood as a development opportunity for the local community of Črnomelj from the very beginning. Used by various stakeholders, such as the local folklore groups, Črnomelj municipality, and its tourist and development agencies, as a strategy of “rediscovering the local” in the wake of economic and cultural globalisation, the *jurjevanje* ritual became a marketable cultural and economic resource used in tourism and placemaking strategies (Brandelero – Janssen 2014: 226 after Šepetavc – Majsova 2024; Kozorog 2013).

Jasmina Šepetavc and Natalija Majsova (2024) have summarised the goals of the festivals as follows: a) to revitalise local rural communities facing different social issues (Mair – Duffy 2018); b) to safeguard local tradition and heritage (Gligorijevic 2014); and c) to be utilised to rebrand a city, its image and history (Shin 2004). The Jurjevanje festival falls into all three of the above categories. It fosters a sense of belonging in a rural border region that often feels neglected by the national centre. It is built on the traditions that were recognised as unique and distinctive as early as in the 19th century and operates as a powerful tool to place the town on the map of Slovenia and beyond, and it also enhances tourism as an economic product. In a globalised world, regional specificities with “authentic” traditions such as the Green George ritual have become very desirable in identity-building processes and in tourism offers. In this type of tourism, “heritage is literally transformed from symbolic to economic capital, and therefore also acts as a development category” (Muršič 2018: 32), particularly in remote regions, as is the case of the municipality of Črnomelj. Therefore, it is not surprising that already back in 1985 the organisers complained that the visitors were mainly locals, since they had not succeeded in attracting tourists from elsewhere, and therefore they were not selling enough authentic local souvenirs. In addition to its placement on the tourist map, Green George performances also became a distinctive form of self-presentation, as folklore dance groups from the region started to be invited to various places in Slovenia and abroad. This has given them new motivation to improve their quality of performances and also by performing abroad they strive to present not only the heritage of Bela Krajina but also its development potential (Kramarič 2003: 6).

The Jurjevanje festival is nowadays organised by the Development and Information Centre Bela Krajina (RIC Bela krajina), founded by the municipality of Črnomelj and the municipality of Semič, whose mission is to develop, promote and foster tourism and entrepreneurship in Bela Krajina. The organisers want to follow modern currents, so they strive for the festival to become a tool for pursuing the sustainable development of Bela Krajina. Therefore, they have developed the festival in harmony with other folklore festivals in Europe that share the same objectives proposed

by international heritage organisations and European cultural policies. With Jurjevanje Črnomelj gained the prestigious title European Destination of Excellence 2010, awarded by the European Commission to tourism products from emerging destinations based on sustainable tourism. Only by following international cultural politics and trends can the Jurjevanje festival be recognised internationally as an important development element. Besides holding the European Destination of Excellence 2010 title and the Slovenia Green Destination certificate, Jurjevanje is set to become a “Zero Waste” event as promoted by the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts, of which it is a member.

Although the original purpose of the festival was to present a locally specific disappearing ritual within the performances of folklore dance groups from the region and presenting it to a wider audience, in its present form it aims to be primarily a complete tourist package with creative and art workshops, recreational sports events and gastronomic offerings. Visiting the festival is promoted as an inspiring family adventure. The transition from a strictly folklore event to an all-encompassing tourist event is also in line with the similar orientations of other festivals, which raises the question of what apart from the original ritual makes it distinctive from other festivals.

While the folklore festival has become a recognizable professionally organised event for the general public, affirming the position of the town of Črnomelj and the wider Bela Krajina region, the idea of celebrating the spring ritual within the local community itself has re-emerged. The first signs of the strictly local connection of the *jurjevanje* to the town itself can be seen in the fact that the Green George ritual has been carried out in the centre of the Črnomelj by the local folklore dance group from Črnomelj from the very beginning, while other rituals and dances were shown at the festival’s central venue in Jurjevanska draga. Although the whole folklore festival is named after the Green George ritual, for the last decade the spring ritual itself has been performed by local adult and children folklore dance groups in the centre of Črnomelj also on the feast of St. George itself under the name Green George’s Day Spring Festival. This festive occasion, aimed primarily at the local community and without the wider festival side events, is also supported by the local authorities. In his address, the mayor of the town mentioned the importance of the Green George’s Day Spring Festival for the revitalisation of the old town centre of Črnomelj. The duplication of the same ritual performance shows that members of folklore dance groups have become the bearers of a tradition that they want to perform within the envisaged time and space frame. At the same time they are being flexible enough to present it at the festival during the summer to brand the town and its history.

Instead of a conclusion

Črnomelj's Green George ritual has long been present in the history of Slovene ethnology and folklore studies because of the unique spectacle of a boy dressed in greenery bringing spring. This specificity and exoticism has contributed to a wider interest among researchers and has offered the possibility of using it for more than strictly folkloristic purposes. The prominent pre-Second World War folklorist France Marolt contributed greatly to the consolidation of the specificity of the ritual performance, and above all to the assertion of its representative function of marking the region of Bela Krajina. On the basis of the experts' interest, and because they, through their interest and discussions, attached special meaning to the ritual, the locals evaluated the ritual as important and ready for self-presentation and marketing. By organising a folklore dance group display and later a folklore festival, enthusiastic local individuals added value to existing cultural assets that have ceased to exist due to changed lifestyles in changed social and historical contexts (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 370).

In analysing the history of the development of the ritual through folklore dance group presentations into a professionally organised festival, we are able to trace a number of factors: from the importance of the first ethnographies of a vanishing tradition, to the influence of individual folklorists who disseminated expert knowledge to the wider masses and provided local people with material for identification and self-presentation. Then there is the important political asset that made the first post-war festival possible in the first place. The promotion of such ritual events and the accentuation of their pre-Christian roots within the socialist system, which banned and persecuted other religious rituals that were still alive among people, cannot be overlooked. The case of the Jurjevanje also follows developments in the formation of heritage communities. The transmission of the role of traditional bearers to the folklore dance groups has the potential to remain not only at the group level, but also to be internalised by individuals and to be perpetuated beyond the organisational framework, as demonstrated by the Green George's Spring Day Festival. The Jurjevanje Festival thus demonstrates the creative potential of heritage phenomena to be used for the present needs of the local community and as a tool for building its desirable future.

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