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Local Religion and Strategies for Identity Development: Greek Catholics from the Region of Žumberak, Croatia

Abstract: The article attempts to present the state of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak, Republic of Croatia, as well as its development over a rough decade – between 2001 and 2012. The focus is on the problem of the community's identity construction. This issue is viewed in the light of the local religiosity by tracing out the basic strategies for identity development on different levels (local, national, and confessional) and the role played by the elements of the local religious culture in this process.

Key words: Greek Catholics, local religiosity, identity

UDK: 27(495)(497.5)

Lokalna vera in strategije razvoja identitete: grški katoličani na območju Žumberka na Hrvaškem

Izveček: Članek predstavi grško katoliško skupnost v Žumberku v Republiki Hrvaški in njen razvoj v obdobju približno desetih let (2001–2012). Osredotoči se na problematiko konstrukcije identitete v tej skupnosti. Problem obravnava skozi prizmo lokalne vernosti in oriše osnovne strategije razvoja identitete na različnih

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ravneh (lokalni, nacionalni, verski) ter vloga lokalne verske kulture v tem procesu.

Ključne besede: grški katoličani, lokalna vernost, identiteta



In today's globalizing world the topic of boundary and identity is becoming increasingly important. This applies particularly to the Balkans where, in historical aspect, identity has often been a target of speculations and propaganda, and of more or less forcible substitution, while the boundaries have reshaped the territory of the peninsula more than once. In this paper, we shall look at the problem of boundary and identity in the light of the popular religiosity. Religiosity is here understood as what Bourdieu defines as a field of doctrines and ideas, behavioural complexes and stereotypes, specific practices and institutions that regulate them which, at different historical stages, combine in a different way.² Or, according to Galya Valchinova, popular religiosity includes religion in its institutional form and organization as well as various and unregulated reflections of the religious in everyday life.³ Put simply, this amounts to religion as practiced and understood by the people. The aim of this study is to trace out the role of popular religiosity in identity and symbolic boundaries development in Greek Catholics from the region of Žumberak, Republic of Croatia, bordered by Slovenia. Focusing on elements of the popular religiosity and their integrative function we shall study the state of the community, the

² Bourdieu, 1971.

³ Вълчинова, 1999.

processes that run within it and the strategies of self-identification on different levels by comparing two periods some ten years apart (the years 2001 and 2012). The study is based on two field-work researches conducted by the authors in the region of Žumberak in the Republic of Croatia; the first one is conducted in the winter of 2001 by Petko Hristov and the second one – in the spring of 2012 by Violeta Periklieva.

Žumberak is located in the Northwestern hilly part of the Republic of Croatia. By the 12th century the whole region already belonged to Croatia and its population, which professed the Roman Catholic faith, was under the jurisdiction of the Bishopric of Zagreb. In the 13th century, the fiefs in Žumberak gradually fell into the hands of German counts and princes. With the Ottoman Empire gradually conquering the Balkans, the Turkish attacks in the region became more frequent and by the middle of the 15th century the population started to migrate as a result of which Žumberak remained almost deserted. In consequence, in 16-17th century in the border regions of the Habsburg Empire by location of population with variegated ethnical structure that had run away from the devastations of the Ottoman invaders the so called “*Military Frontier*” (*Vojna krajina*) was formed, part of which was today’s Northwestern Croatia. The district of Žumberak was one of the first regions of the Military Frontier settled in several waves between 1530 and 1617 with population with nomadic-military way of life⁴ called in the Austrian sources “Valachi”, “Valachi Uzkoky”, “Rasciani Voskoky”, “Pribegi”, “Vsskhokhen”, that is to say *vlasi* and *uskoci*.⁵ The settlers are considered to be from Bosnia, Serbia, Rascia and from Southern Croatia (Lika and Primorje). For the most part this was Wallachian (Roman-

⁴ Štambuk, 1996, 7.

⁵ Kaser, 1997/I/55.

speaking) Orthodox population but there were also Catholic Croats (*bunjevci*) and Orthodox Serbs (not many in number⁶).

At the end of the 16th century and the beginning of 17th century, under the constant and immediate pressure of the Catholic Church⁷ supported by the Habsburg Crown the Orthodox population settled in the Military Frontier was forced to adopt the Catholic version of Christianity or the Greek Catholicism (*unijatstvo*) although somewhere – as it is in Vojvodina – the Serbian settlers were the predominant majority and they preserved their Orthodox faith. In the remaining regions of the “frontier” the Greek Catholicism (that began as a missionary movement of Jesuits as early as 1673) did not succeed to take deep root but in Žumberak the major part of the population joined the union with the Pope. Thus in 1820 there were 3879 registered Uniates (*grkokatolici*) in 5 parishes.⁸ With the passing of time the ethnical self-consciousness of the settled population in Žumberak also changed and by the 1830s they began to declare themselves Croatian.

The settled population of the Military Frontier (the so called *uskoci*) received within the Empire specific frontier guard statute and important defensive functions. This continued until the demilitarization of the region in 1871. In 1881 Žumberak joined the regime of the rest of Croatia. A second binding of the peasants to the soil (the so called “*sekundarno kmetstvo*”) and forms of “state feudalism”

⁶ The population of some of the Greek Catholic villages in the neighboring Republic of Slovenia retained its “Serbian” self-consciousness and in the villages of Bojanci, Marindol, Milići and Paunovići their Orthodox denomination as well (Petrović, 2004, 217). The residents of the Greek Catholic villages in Croatian Žumberak firmly identify them-selves as Greek Catholic Croats (*Hrvati-grkokatolici*) though.

⁷ Kaser, 1997/II/192.

⁸ Kaser, 1997/II/186.

followed.⁹ Despite this the regions of the Military Frontier until the beginning of the 20th century possessed all characteristics of the agrarian society constituted by free peasants¹⁰ and with the Law of the statute of the population from 1807 the Habsburg authority stimulated the formation and the preservation of already existing patriarchal communities (*zadruga*) which became a prevalent process (side by side with their secret division though) in the family structure not only of the Croats but of the Austrians, Germans and Czechs settled in *Vojna krajina*.¹¹ Nevertheless the process of disintegration of the joint family households was apparent as early as the end of 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century the historical and demographic researches show a definite predomination of the nuclear families in entire Croatia.¹² Thus the natural growth in population which followed the demilitarization as well as the partition of the land related to the disintegration of the joint family households led to insufficiency of agricultural land and pasture-grounds. This resulted in disturbance of the economic stability of the region. The mountainous terrain did not allow wide development of agriculture and the parcellation of the areas under cultivation enabled the families in the region to develop only agriculture and stock-breeding that satisfies their own needs. Thus as early as 1880 the population gradually began to migrate, moving to the bigger cities in the country and latter even abroad (mostly in USA and Germany).

The Greek Catholic communities in Žumberak in 2001

In the second half of the 20th century the Greek Catholic community of Žumberak faces another threat, coming after World War II

⁹ Cf. Pavličević, 1984.

¹⁰ Kaser, 1997/I/18.

¹¹ Kaser, 1997/II/131-182.

¹² Čapo Žmegač, 1998, 254.

from the communists and their party functionaries, who try to hinder the free practicing of faith. Churches indeed continue to function, but their traditional religious ritualism begins to fade. In some cases this is caused by the influence of male communists in the family, while in other cases by the fear and the unpleasant feeling of being stalked at any visit to church. This circumstance, together with the economic decay and gradual depopulation of the region, adds to the new problems of the community, arising from the disintegration of former Yugoslavia and Croatia's declaration of independence in 1991. The Greek Catholicism and practice of Eastern rite of the population are viewed by the remaining Croats as a sign of descendance from Orthodox *vlas*, *uskoci* and even Serbs. This is particularly evident in the context of the ongoing nationalistic processes in the country, a major factor for national identity in which is attributed to Roman Catholic faith. According to informers from the Greek Catholic community, the express declaration of people as Greek Catholics is intimidated. Many of these people, especially those in big cities, begin to mimic, others deliberately depart from their faith and community and are subsequently assimilated. At the same time, the isolated location of Žumberak and the majority of people, having Greek Catholic faith, helps for the freer and unimpeded expression of different religious association. The inhabitants, spending most of their lives within their own community do not or only faintly feel the negative attitude as a result of classing Greek Catholics as descendants of Orthodox population, identified with enemies during the war of independence.

In the beginning of the new millennium the consequences of the processes of disintegration of the joint family household, of economical decay and of migration which began already with the demilitarization of Žumberak are evident in the state of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak. For instance, if in 1820 there

were 3879 registered Uniates, the census of 2001 shows that the total number of the Uniates and the Roman Catholics in the region is already 1185. The depopulation of the area goes hand-in-hand with another process – aging of the remaining local population. The lack of subsistence forces the young active population to look for alternative in the big cities in the country or abroad.

All these processes and their consequences reflect upon religiousness and the ritual process of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak, as well as upon its identity. Generally, the traditional festal calendar of the community continues to function, however there are processes observed of dropping out of elements from ritual complexes and gradual neglect of some ritual practices. This holds especially for people migrated into big cities. The striving for integration into the urban environment, the feeling of discomfort, or even fear, from the different confessional association are the reasons why many Greek Catholics abandon their typical religious ritualism. Mixed marriages with Roman Catholics, the need to attest to a Croatian-nation membership or simply the impossibility to access easily and regularly Greek Catholic religious practices leads to their gradual replacement by Roman Catholic ones.

This process can be observed in Žumberak too, but to a lesser degree. Here the still living representatives of the generation from the first half of the 20th century act as guardians of the religious inheritance. In the beginning of the 21st century it was still possible to register vital ritual practices, characteristic for the local religiousness of the community. These were, however, singular cases, speaking more of efforts on the part of the older generation to preserve a tradition rather than of its vitality. Social factors undoubtedly have their impact on religious life of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak and the process of decline of the ritual system and the dying out of ritual practices are present.

The decay of the joint family household and the depopulation of villages in the region reflect in the nature of the ritual process of family communities. In comparison with the remaining regions of the Republic of Croatia, where the functions of the most important family feast for the household are taken by Christmas (*Božić*)¹³ and name-day (*Imendan*), devoted to the personal patron saint of the head of the household, in the local festive ritual process in Žumberak this function falls on the family feast of the patron saint of the family group (*Krsna slava/Krsno ime*). In Žumberak there is no unified established name for the feast of the patron saint of the family and household. In the villages one can hear both *Krsno ime* and *Krsna slava*. Where the family *Krsna slava* coincides with the feast of the village church, the patron saint and protector of the parish (patron of the parochial temple) is honoured also as the patron of all family communities in the village. If the one-day feast was previously characterized by several stable ritual moments, at the beginning of the 21st century they are but a memory. There are only few families observing the full set of ritual practices. Where *Krsna slava/Krsno ime* is still kept, the rituality is dropped out or at least strongly reduced; thus usually a more festive midday meal is prepared for the household, while relatives from other villages are rarely visiting. On St. John's Day in January 2001 we were present at such a ritual midday meal in the house of the Dijanović family in the village of Visočje, for which family *Krsna slava* coincided with the patron saint's day of the local church and the village feast *Proštenje*.

The feast of the patron saint of the family group is gradually replaced by Christmas (*Božić*), which, similarly to the Roman Catholic tradition, becomes the most important family feast. It is one of the basic reasons for gathering of the family and for return of the mi-

¹³ Rihtman-Auguštin, 1997, 25.

grated relatives. One of the basic ritual elements in celebrating *Krsna slava/Krsno ime* is connected predominantly with *Božić* and this is the triple toast “*Napijanje u Slavu Božju*”. Thus, the ritual which traditionally has the function of actualizing the interrelations and interactions between the representatives of a family group, as well as of the territorial and parochial community, inasmuch as most village families celebrate one and the same patron saint of the family group, is dying out. Christmas taking over this function is not just a result of assimilation processes of Greek Catholic by Roman Catholic communities, but an additional trigger of these processes. Where the ritual practice of “*Napijane u Slavu Božju*” is preserved as part of the celebration of *Božić*, it is a distinction from the Roman Catholic celebration form and is reminiscent of their “own” religious identity.

The family basis of the annual ritual process is reflected also in the practice of building and ritual worship on agnatic kinship principle of family consecrated (*zavjetna*) grounds (*kapelica*). *Kapelica* (chapel) is a small quadratic building, on a small altar of whose shelf there stands a statuette (*kip*) of the patron saint. These “*zavjetne kapelice*” are built within the bounds of the village (most commonly at cross-roads) or in the family house yard usually by the male head of the household or his brothers and in personal gratitude for curing from sickness or bad fortune after a vow (*zavjet*). Despite their personal origin, these *kapelice* are worshiped on a family principle – the next generation male lineals takes over the ritual continuation. They are referred to as a part of the family inheritance and are part of the symbolic capital of the patrilineal kinship group. The obligation for maintaining the service on the patron saint’s day falls on the son who has inherited the land and/or his father’s house, or alternatively the son who remains in the village. In the new millennium however it is not infrequent that this obligation fall on the

remaining living women of the family, like for instance the family *kapelica* of Stipanovići in the village of Visoče, devoted to St. Nikolas. Our respondent M.S. (b. 1930) told us that the *kapelica* is built by her father-in-law after World War I (1935), ordered by his two brothers after their successful voyage through the Atlantic. They emigrated in America and after earning some money they sent a sum to their brother in Visoče asking him to build this *kapelica* as a sign of gratitude to St. Nikolas “the patron of the sea-farers” for their successful arrival in the New World. The family as well as all others in the village worship as *Krsna slava* St. John the Baptist but still honours also the *kapelica* of St. Nikolas: “*To je kuća djelala*”¹⁴ and is “*naše posebno, naša kapelica*”¹⁵, “*To mi održavamo!*”¹⁶.

The ritual connected with *kapelici* requires that the family order a service (*misa*) in the day of the saint, by paying the priest. Their obligation is also the festive midday meal at home for the priest after the service. In the *kapelica* itself there is no joint meal but the whole village attends the service despite the expressed family obligation (*zavjet*). The participation of all fellow villagers in the service at the day of the patron saint of the *kapelica* speaks for the specific function of this type of sacred place and the ritual as re-confirmation of both the family and the territorial community. In Žumberak, based on a kinship principle, there are also placed (as *zavjet*) at cross-roads crucifix crosses, which is a common Catholic tradition. The care for them is a family obligation, resulting from inheritance of land by male lineals.

In the beginning of the 21st century some of the *kapelici* and crucifix crosses are still cared for by the respective family, but not

¹⁴ “It’s made by the household.”

¹⁵ “Our own possession, our own chapel.”

¹⁶ “We take care of it.”

infrequently the ritual at the day of the patron saint has dropped out. The damages from the processes of village depopulation and atheistic policy during the socialist period have affected this aspect of local religious practice. Many of the crucifix crosses and *kapelici* are destroyed, burnt down or plundered during World War II or by communist activists. Some of the *zavjetne kapelice* become desolate, since there are no remaining heirs to run them, owing to the migration processes. So yet another mechanism of cohesion and re-confirmation of family and territorial community identity as well as of actualizing of interrelations decays.

The collective festal ritual, devoted to the patron saints of the village parochial community (*Proštenje*) has an integrative function and meaning of a group/community marker. It is in this sense that Dušan Bandić speaks of the principle of common “participation” (i.e. “co-participation”) in the ritual of all households and villagers as a condition for “tightening of collective consciousness for membership in the community, alongside with tightening of its internal cohesion”.¹⁷

In many of the villages of Žumberak the feast for the patron saint’s day of the village church coincides with *Krsna slava*. In these cases *Proštenje* is marked with a solemn service (*misa*), after which each family celebrates *Krsna slava* at home. At the festal liturgy people from the near villages are present, some of which (only if invited) stay for a visit at their relatives. At the beginning of the 21st century, when *Krsna slava* has almost dropped out from family rituality, it is the feast of the patron saint’s day of the village church that gathers relatives and friends, as well as guests from other villages from the region. Gradually its integrative function begins to expand, constructing a community based on regional and confes-

¹⁷ Бандић, 1978, 112; 117.

sional principle rather than on all-village principle. The important role of *Proštenje* as a mechanism of sustaining community on family, territorial and confessional level is observed both in its superiority over the family *Krsna slava* and the more frequent practice of shifting the feast to closest Saturdays and Sundays. The goal is to make possible the presence of more people, especially those living in big cities.

This brief review of the state of basic religious practices of the local religiosity of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak in 2001, which are from a functional point of view mechanisms for strengthening the community-consciousness gives an idea of the state of the community itself at the beginning of the 21st century. Several basic tendencies can be observed. The depopulation of the villages of Žumberak and the migration in the big towns in the Republic of Croatia and abroad gives an increasingly disperse form of the community. The declining ritual practices, actualizing the interrelations and interactions between the representatives of the family and territorial group risk falling into oblivion or remain to exist only as a part of the people's religious memory. The fresh recollections of the war during 1991-1995 as well as the negative attitude of most Croats, inspired by the current nationalistic processes in the country, on the one hand spread some fear in the Greek Catholics regarding the practicing of their "own" religion and on the other engender a wish to attest to Croatian nationality.¹⁸ An interesting case in point is the celebration of the feast of the patron saint of the church (*Proštenje*) in the village of Budinjak. The church is devoted to St. Paraskeva (*Sveta Petka*) but the feast is secondarily connected with the saints Peter and Paul and is celebrated in their honour. This

¹⁸ "We all celebrate [Proštenje] in a Croatian manner, as it is by virtue of the law!" – M. S., village of Visoč. The materials from the fieldwork in Žumberak are stored in the Archive of IEFSEM in Sofia.

change, strange on the surface, is the result from the efforts of the priest Stjepan Ivanušić – a controversial figure in the newer history of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak¹⁹ – to build a “positive image” of the Greek Catholics in Žumberak. In order to sever the discourse about eventual “Serbian” ethnicity of the Greek Catholics, in which as a “proof” given for Orthodox faith (synonym of Serbian ethnicity) St. Petka is also pointed out, priest Ivanušić offers a new interpretation. He equates St. Paraskeva (*Sveta Petka*) with St. Petronila, believed to be the daughter of St. Peter. Thus, on the basis of an ascribed kinship relationship and the similarity in the names of the two saints the patron saint’s day of the church of Budinjak is shifted from the “controversial” St. Paraskeva’s Day to the Catholically “more correct” Saint Peter’s Day.

All these circumstances alongside with the assimilation processes among the migrated representatives of the community place the Greek Catholics in Žumberak under the threat of depersonalization. The community has no active strategies for constructing or preserving identity and there are no explicit initiatives either at the level of group spontaneity or institutionally. The church has problems in uniting the flock scattered in the big cities and the existing at the time Cultural Artistic Society “Žumberak” (*Kulturno-umjetničko društvo “Žumberak”*) is not in a position to activate the potential mechanisms of the community for its own symbolic construction.

¹⁹ According to local villagers priest Stjepan Ivanušić is born in a Roman Catholic family. He has been prepared for a Roman Catholic priest but a while before ordination he falls in love. This leads to a scandal in Roman Catholic clergy, which is obliged to stick to celibacy. Ultimately priest Ivanušić converts to Greek Catholic faith and is appointed vicar in the parish of Mrzlo polje, Žumberak. At the same time, however, he takes in charge also the Roman Catholic parish of Kalje, Žumberak.

Greek Catholics in Žumberak in 2012

Ten years later we face a very different picture of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak, which however is causally connected with the processes we registered in the previous period. First, the migration and the ensuing depopulation continue to be the major factor influencing the condition of the community. If according to a census from 2001 the population of Žumberak numbers 1185 people, then this number in 2011 is already 872. As a result of the internal migratory processes the Greek Catholic community once concentrated in Žumberak is now concentrated mainly in three Croatian towns: Zagreb, Samobor and Jastrebarsko.

The fieldwork in the spring of 2012 revealed a tendency to “virtualizing” of the Žumberak community. We call this “virtualizing” or creation of “virtual” Žumberak community because such a community almost does not really exist in the region of Žumberak. The Žumberak people live dispersed in towns outside of Žumberak, but they have (or better are beginning to construct) local community consciousness without actually having a common locality. As a whole, the identity at a confessional level overlaps with this at a local level, i.e. for the members of the community to be a Greek Catholic means to be from Žumberak (*Žumberčanin*). This to some extent is a consequence of the fact that Žumberak has always been the place with the greatest concentration of Greek Catholics in the Republic of Croatia and the specific history of the region forms a more explicit identity. A “*Žumberčanin*” today is understood as a Greek Catholic originating from Žumberak. It must be emphasized that at present there does not exist an articulated consciousness among Žumberak population for local community at the level of settlement. This is probably to a great extent due to the nature of the processes of developing and preserving identity going on at the moment. We speak of developing identity because in the part of the role of internal mi-

grants, facing the necessity to live in an alien environment (this holds for first-generation migrants) and among a Roman Catholic majority, the Greek Catholics of Žumberak face exactly the necessity of self-identification. Collective identity is a variable cultural construction. The mechanism of self-identification, i.e. the forming of an idea of own community, according to Jasna Čapo Žmegač, is not due to invariable features of the community. At the basis of the creation of this idea lies the relation to other community/ies. Therefore the defining of own community is interactive and reflexive. The idea of own community is a reflection of the idea for other communities with which it interacts and is compared.²⁰ Or, as Fredrik Barth puts it, cultural differences among communities are not the result of their local or social isolation, but rather of their interaction.²¹ It is precisely the break of the isolation in the community of Žumberak and the establishment of constant contact with other communities that triggers the process of self-identification. This process is characterized with two levels of initiation. The first is the level of the people themselves, i.e. the spontaneous one, while the second is the institutional level in the person of the Greek Catholic Church and various non-government bodies. If our field work in 2001 showed that the community has one cultural society, then ten years later the recognized need for self-identification gives rise to a number of other societies.²²

²⁰ Čapo Žmegač, 2002, 20–21.

²¹ Barth, 1969.

²² Here we shall mention only some of them: Društvo žumberčana “Tadija Smičiklas”; Kulturno-umjetničko društvo “Marko Vukasović”; Udruga “Uskok - Sošice”; Udruga “Žumberačke vile Sošice”. The shared goals of the newly founded associations are the efforts for preserving, popularization and acceptance by the Croatian history of the historical, religious and cultural values of the *uskoci* from Žumberak. Nevertheless there are common clashes and disagreements over some questions, but this is outside the scope of the present study.

The building of Croatian identity on the basis of Roman Catholic faith, the wide negative attitude towards Orthodoxy and particularly towards the Serbs, even the equation of Orthodox and Serb and the resultant “accusations” of Croatian Greek Catholics for being “Serbs”, places the Greek Catholic community of Žumberak before the conscious need to confirm their Croatian nationality. This process of identification at a national level has as its major goal the elimination of the symbolic bound, created by some of the Croatian Roman Catholics, and to prove before them that Greek Catholics belong to the Croatian nation.²³

The major model here is based on religiousness. The emphasis lies on the attestation of Greek Catholics for their belonging to the catholic world as a whole. On the one hand this is a policy of the Church, which uses different ways and occasions to impress this on the Croatian nation as well as on the Greek Catholic community itself. A case in point are the constantly organized pilgrim voyages to big Roman Catholic pilgrim centres in Croatia and abroad. Usually these organized pilgrimages are within the framework of larger ones organized by the Croatian Catholic Church or such in which participate also Roman Catholics. Their goal becomes clear in the words of the Bishop of Križevci Nikola Kekić directed to his flock:

²³ During the three-month stay in Croatia one of the authors, Violeta Periklieva, often had to explain in conversations with Croatian Roman Catholics the purposes of her visit to the country. When telling them that the aim of the visit is to conduct a fieldwork among the Greek Catholics in Žumberak the most common reply was: “Aren’t they Serbs” or “But they are Serbs”. Such statements were frequently followed by a negative characteristic of the Serbs and recollections of the “misfortunes” caused to Croatians by the Serbs. This opinion of some of the Croatian Roman Catholics was also confirmed in conversations with Greek Catholics from Žumberak during the fieldwork of the author. (Based on the author’s notes and impressions registered in her fieldwork diary)

„Let us show that the Greek Catholic Church is a part of the catholic world”. Another form of attestation for Croatian national identity of the Greek Catholics is the presence of the state coat of arms or the tricolour banner as an element from the ornaments of iconostases in some of the churches in Žumberak.

This model has its non-institutional form, which is characterized with the voluntary participation of Greek Catholics in Roman Catholic *Proštenja* (feasts for the patron saint’s day), with the visits to Roman Catholic churches wherever Greek Catholic ones are absent, with individual visits of Roman Catholic pilgrimage centres, as well as with cases of Greek Catholic priests servicing simultaneously local Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic churches²⁴, i.e. servicing following Western and Eastern rite. Not infrequently there are cases when in mixed marriages the Greek Catholic partner (usually the woman), practices both Greek and Roman version of Catholicism. This often applies to the children as well even though most commonly they choose one of the Catholic versions (this usually happens on the father’s side, but there are exceptions too).

The second process of constructing identity, which we registered among Greek Catholics in 2012, is at a local level. Among the Žumberak Greek Catholic community we described as “virtual” to a great extent the local identity, as already mentioned, overlaps with religious identity, i.e. to be a Greek Catholic means to be from Žumberak (*Žumberčanin*).²⁵

²⁴ A case in point is priest Stjepan Ivanušić we mentioned earlier.

²⁵ Although they know that Greek Catholic communities exist in other places in Croatia as well in conversations Greek Catholics from Žumberak use the terms “Greek Catholic” and “Žumberčanin” (someone from Žumberak), “žumberački” (something from Žumberak) as synonymous. At the same time the initiatives of the Greek Catholic community in Croatia most often come from Greek Catholics from Žumberak and are oriented towards the Greek Catholic community from Žumberak.

The first basic model or strategy of self-identification we call “returning”. Here the initiative arises to a considerable extent spontaneously, among the people themselves, and is characterized with their recurrent return to their birth place (Žumberak), which signals local consciousness and nostalgia on the one hand, and is a mechanism for preserving this consciousness on the other. “Returning” has different forms. A great part of the people return periodically while another part for good. The latter usually happens when people retire. Many of those returned, as well those intending to, share that this return has been their striving and necessity at the very outset of their migration to the cities (this applies to the first generation of migrants) or that these feelings are of long standing.

Periodical “returning” to Žumberak is very characteristic and is accomplished on different occasions. Returning for weekends is typical, but more important are those having to do with religiousness. Many people come back to their birth places in the Žumberak villages for religious feasts, patron saint’s days of the churches and chapels in the region (*Proštenja*), for weddings, christenings, etc. The integrative function of the village patron saint’s festival (*Proštenje*), which we noted in 2001, is increasingly expanding and becoming the basic mechanism for preserving local community identity, for activating the relations on a family, territorial (regional) and confessional basis. In this case this is not a mere performing of religious feasts, customs and rituals in the home village, but rather is an example of revitalization of the local religion uniting the community. According to W. Christian religion seeks an answer and solution to a given problem, the stress being on the collective and ritualized nature of worship of supernatural patrons. In the village there are situated all generally accepted places (sacred places) where contact is accomplished with

supernatural forces.²⁶ Accordingly, we may accept that the sacred places marked in one way or another (crosses, *kapelici*, churches, etc.) are the spatial and material signs of the local religion characterizing the community.

If the ritual, according to Fredrik Barth, reflects the placing of symbolic limits of the community²⁷, i.e. through it the community wins recognition as such and presents its collective identity, then sacred places may be viewed not only as sign of local religion but also as signs of the collective identity of the community. The fact that the ritual life of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak is not solely connected with the sacred toposes for the own village, but with those in the whole region of Žumberak, means that the processes of building and establishing of collective local identity act on the level of the region, not of a particular village. There is another thing to emphasize. The collective local identity in this case is attested not only by the choice of place for the ritual but also by the ritual itself, which gathers at one place the otherwise “virtual” community. Durkheim writes that it is by the joint actions precisely that the community acquires self-consciousness and that there is no community which does not feel the need for periodic maintenance and strengthening of collective feelings and ideas, which constitute its unity and originality.²⁸ The ritual, as well as the idea of fellow feeling, sympathy (“*communio*” in the words of Max Weber²⁹) via collective joint meal, which usually is the tradition finish of both religious and other important events in Žumberak Greek Catholic community, supports the feeling of community and unity.

²⁶ Christian, 1989.

²⁷ Barth, 1969.

²⁸ Дюркем, 1998, 495; 504.

²⁹ Вебер, 1992.

The “return” of Žumberaks has not only a spontaneous nature, but is also institutionally organized and initiated. The basic role here is played by the Greek Catholic Church and the cultural societies which, by different channels³⁰, inform about forthcoming religious events and call for all-embracing participation in *Proštenja* as well as other religious events (e. g. All Souls’ Day, masses for the dead or *Zadušne subote*, prayers for health, important religious feasts, etc.). We should note that the tendency registered in 2001 of shifting patron saint’s days and other religious events to the closest Sunday after the exact day has turned into a rule. This compromise on the part of the Church aims to ensure the participation of as many members of the community as possible.

The Church and the cultural societies play a major role in the developing and sustaining of local (incl. religious) identity of the Žumberak Greek Catholics. This is by no means surprising having in mind that the basic figures in this initiative (the Bishop of Križevci Nikola Kekić, the vicars father Danijel Vranešić in Samobor and father Mile Vranešić in Stojdraga) have been born and have grown up in Žumberak and in the family of priests. The efforts of the Church in this direction have increased in the last few years, but this was more conspicuous in 2012, when 400 years anniversary of the foundation of the Bishopric of Križevci was celebrated.

Special efforts are invested on the part of the Church for the revival of died out or dying religious customs. The tendency of customs

³⁰ From several years there exists a web site (www.mojzumberak.com) and two groups in Facebook (“I Love Žumberak” and “Moj Žumberak”) devoted to Žumberak. They give not only information about the region and its history but also are a basic channel for “advertizing” religious and cultural initiatives and sharing all that is deemed important for the community. Through these the virtual space is transformed into a new form of common locality for the “virtual” Žumberak community.

specific to Žumberak to decline, registered in 2001, persists in the following decade. A sizable number of customs are not practiced today or are only practiced by old people. The memory for them, however, is still alive and as part of the passive cultural stock of the community they have their impact on the developing and sustaining of collective local identity, turning into part of communal history. In the words of A. Cohen, history is particularly malleable and its remembrance is based on interpretative reconstruction. The symbolic expression of community often appeals to a supposed and selective past or tradition. Sharing this past and recognizing yourself in it is one of the factors for building collective identity.³¹ The use of historical past, and the customs thereof, in representing oneself and the community in official or informal speech is one of the strategies for communal self-identification. It is precisely this passive stock that is used by the Church, and to a great extent by the cultural societies, in their attempts to revive local religious customs. These attempts come in the form of edifying speeches from the pulpit, personal meetings of priests with a representative of each family, issuing of different printed materials with information on forgotten rites, etc.

A typical example of such a process is the attempt to revive the family custom *Krsna slava*, we noted as dying out already in 2001. For this purpose the flock are given special leaflets describing how to perform the rite and what its meaning for the communal identity is. The vicar in Samobor (a big town with a large Greek Catholic emigrant community) keeps a special book with a file for each family, including also the day of the saint in which *Krsna slava* is celebrated by each concrete family. The head of each family which does not celebrate its *Krsna slava* is summoned by the priest for a personal conversation, aiming to revive the neglected custom. What

³¹ Cohen, 1985, 99–101.

the actual results of this Church initiative are will be seen in the future. It is clear however that the revival of the custom will shift the accent from its function to actualize the interrelations and interactions between the representatives of the family group to the function to mark local and confessional identity.

Wherever the Church is not successful in reviving old customs among the people it recurs to other strategies. It introduces folk religious family customs within the temple of the church. Here again there come into use *Krsna slava* and its characteristic “*Napijane u Slavu Božiju*”. In patron saint’s days known to be patrons of Žumberak families bishop Kekić performs for the representatives of the respective family in the church “*Napijane u Slavu Božiju*”, typical for the ritual. In this case we can see an example of “inventing tradition” according to the Hobsbawm’s term³², meaning newly-emerged (or reconstructed) formalized ritual practices whose aim is to be introduced into the community by repetition. This is guaranteed by referring them to the past and by constructing continuity of the traditional models. A key process is the adaptation of old models to new condition and the use of familiar models for new purposes. The model of *Krsna slava* in this case is taken out of its family context and is inserted into the church one, where as an institutionalized collective ritual for the whole community it changes its function from a ritual aiming at sustaining unity at a family level into establishing local-consciousness. It remains to be seen whether this process of “inventing (and reconstruction) of tradition” will be led to a successful end.

Another characteristic process we observed in the community, which is again an initiative on the part of the Church, is the acquisition of visual symbols of local identity. These are an icon (so

³² Hobsbawm, 1983, 1-14.

called “*Žumberčka Bogorodica*” or Virgin Mary of Žumberak) and the embroidery typical for Žumberak.

It is believed that the Žumberak icon is brought by the *uskoci* in their migration. According to some information today it is kept “under lock and key” in the Greek Catholic Seminary in Zagreb and its replicas are placed in the majority of churches in Žumberak and the towns with migrant communities in the region. In the last few years the Church is trying to create a cult of Virgin Mary of Žumberak enforcing the idea of the exclusive icon’s value for the identity of Žumberak people, and at the same time turning it into an official symbol of local identity and including it as a basic element in the religious processions of organized pilgrimages. The participation of the Greek Catholic community in the common Catholic pilgrimages in Croatia not only confirms their Catholic faith membership and accordingly their Croatian national identity, but at the same time confirms and demonstrates their local identity via the icon of the Virgin Mary of Žumberak. In fact the icon has an ambiguous symbolic. On the one hand it functions as a symbol of local identity of Greek Catholics in Žumberak, and on the other, with the typically Catholic artistic imagery of Pietà it represents, symbolically attests the membership of the community in the Catholic faith as a whole. A story is current among Žumberak people about its symbolism making parallels between Virgin Mary’s pain for the Crucified Christ and the pain of Žumberak mothers during the Military Frontier who mourn over the dead husbands and sons. Probably this symbolism is part of the initiative of the Church because according to the people previously they did not talk so much about the icon and its value. Nevertheless the strategy of the Church to create a visual religious symbol begins to give fruit. In many Žumberak houses one can find reproductions of the icon, and there are cases in which migrant members of the community abroad carry with themselves the Virgin Mary of Žumberak.

Traditional Žumberak embroidery is also in a process of becoming a visual symbol of communal local identity. It can be found as an interior element in almost any Greek Catholic church in Žumberak and outside of the region. Not infrequently this embroidery is part of priests' cassocks or frames of icons. In this way the Greek Catholic identity is interweaved with the local identity, and the temple becomes a symbol of national (coat of arms, tricolour banners), local (embroidery and Virgin Mary of Žumberak) and religious identity.

Conclusions

The social, political and economic changes going on in the territory of contemporary Republic of Croatia from the end of the 19th century to present inevitably reflect upon the condition of the Greek Catholic community in Žumberak and trigger destructive processes. Threatened by depersonalization and assimilation, in 2001 the survival of the group was questionable. Žumberak is quickly depopulating and Žumberak people dispersed in big Croatian cities and abroad gradually lose their folk religious practices, traditionally functioning as markers of identity and helping the strengthening of collective consciousness for community membership. It is precisely this obliteration of symbolic bound that makes necessary the reconstruction of the community. Dispersed among a Roman Catholic majority, the Greek Catholics in Žumberak realize their "Otherness" and begin to search elements in their local culture which can be potential mechanisms for constructing identity, adequate to the social-political conditions in the country. Our study revealed that the basic source from which the community derives "symbols" for its identity is local religious culture. The strategies registered in 2012 are directed at different levels of self-identification of the community. A multi-layered identity is in the process of construction which must "prove" the Croatian mem-

bership of Greek Catholics and their sympathy to current nationalistic processes on the one hand, and to protect them as a specific religious and local community on the other. Our observations show that in this process the specific “Žumberak” version of Greek Catholic religiosity plays a key role.

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