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A Village for a Day: Annual Meetings of Relocated and Flooded Villages in Bulgaria[1]

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Abstract: The text attempts to explain the need for annual meetings of village communities after the village has been relocated due to the construction of a reservoir. The object of research are meetings in Popovo (Vitoshko), a village that was flooded by the waters of the Studena reservoir, and in Zhrebchevo, submerged later in the Zhrebchevo reservoir. The study applies the theories of collective trauma, collective memory, and cultural memory. Through analysis of interviews, archives, and literature, the study examines the motives of the former village communities to gather each year and the reasons that their leaders organise these meetings. The text attempts to answer the following questions: how do these meetings manage to revitalise the village for one day, what rituals do they include, how is generational dialogue brought to realisation, what is the meaning of memory for the submerged villages, and finally, what are the perspectives for continuing such meetings?

Keywords: village community, memory, collective trauma, flooded village, relocated people, countrymen meeting

The great hydroelectric power, irrigation and water supply projects in socialist Bulgaria included the construction of several major reservoirs. Their construction necessitated the demolition of almost seventy villages in the valleys that had to be flooded, which caused the relocation of the displaced population, mainly to nearby cities. On its own, this process is not phenomenal since it is widespread across the world and a great number of political systems are known to have obligated such measurements throughout history. What is striking about the socialist period in Bulgaria is that it is characterised by intense construction of reservoirs for the needs of industrialisation (Brunbauer 2010). This process has resulted in flooding of numerous villages, as well as in controlled internal emigration. Therefore, the migration type could be perceived as forced, for it takes place within certain time

limits through government decisions and does not give the affected villagers the opportunity to make this a personal choice. The severely affected people choose only the destination of their future resettlement. Such migration includes all generations from the respective village, ending with its administrative erasure, and is directed primarily towards the city (See e.g. Atanasov 1990: 17–29; Bokova 2000: 49; Dichev 2003; Brunbauer 2010: 184; Raeva 2011: 89–96; Raeva 2017: 79–110). State policies achieve two strategic goals simultaneously through the construction of reservoirs: the dams serve industry (along with water supply and irrigated agriculture), while the displaced population becomes the working class (so necessary for the socialist ideology and economy), which is also engaged in industry. On the one hand, the city is attractive with its expectation of better-paid or more "prestigious" work and a new, urban way of life, while on the other hand, separation from the native settlement becomes a lifelong traumatic experience (Alexander 2004: 1–30; Borisova 2021b: 162–177). Kinship ties are broken, the farmer's connection to the land is irrevocably obliterated. The closed village community (Bogdanov 1991: 13) loses its connection after relocation and is transformed into a community of common local origin and (imagined) memory (Gergova 2021: 155).

The community strategy for preserving the memory of the flooded village leads to the creation of diverse cultural practices: organising annual meetings of the former community and its descendants (on the shore of the reservoir near the flooded settlement or in the city), publishing photo albums and village history stories, arranging photo exhibitions, creating narratives about the submerged place of origin, etc.

This study analyses the annual meetings of the former village community on the shore of the reservoir as a new form of community – Village for a Day – using the example of the two flooded settlements. The Village for a Day concept, created by the author, is a metaphor for the reconstruction of the village community, of collective identity through the rituals of the holiday, albeit within the framework of one single day.

The object of the current research is meeting of fellow countrymen[2], and in essence their structure and functions. It will also explore the memories that relocated populations have of the native village, resettlement, life in the receiving places, and the motives for organising these annual gatherings.

Theoretical framework

A possible approach to interpreting the annual meetings of former village communities on the shores of the reservoir is through the theories of collective trauma and collective and cultural memory.

According to Jeffrey Alexander "[c]ultural trauma occurs when members of collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks up on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2004: 1). Human beings need security, order, love, and *connection*, and the sharp undermining any of these conditions leads to the traumatisation of people or communities (ibid.: 3). American sociologist Kai Erikson distinguishes between an individual and a collective trauma and points out that collective trauma is a "blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson 1976: 153). The restoration of psychological health requires the lifting of societal repression and substantially restoration of memory (Alexander 2004: 7).

The bearers of memory require its essential nature to identify themselves. Maurice Halbwachs considers memory a social phenomenon (1996) and distinguishes between individual and collective memory. Collective memory is possible within a "social framework" that constructs and organises memories related to the group and spatiotemporal relevance to the reality shared by participants in the community. According to Halbwachs, only feelings are individual, memories are influenced by different social groups – i.e., the individual remembers within the framework of the community. Later, Jan Assmann (2001) further developed the idea of collective memory and divided it into the subgroups of communicative and cultural memory. According to Assmann's theory, communicative memory encompasses the memories that an individual shares with his or her contemporaries and lasts for a generation. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is tied to the past and uses symbolic forms that are transmitted between generations, preserving the memory and giving the past a sacred character. Cultural memory gives meaning to the remembered, not to factual history. Paul Ricoeur (2006) created the intermediate concept of shared memory, which softens the opposition between collective and individual memory.

As already suggested, memory is a key concept in the present work, since collective memory participates in the construction of community identity. The collective memory (Halbwachs 1996), the cultural memory (Assman 2001), and the shared memory (Rikoeur 2006) of the relocated people all reflect the sociocultural effect the construction of the dam had. This event is a turning point in the shared experience of the resettlers and divides their lives into before and after. The community's memory (Znepolski 2001; Ljubenova 2015; Ljubenova 2017; Borisova 2021a) of the flooded village is kept alive in cultural practices such as community gatherings, oral narratives, and local history studies. The study aims to reveal how annual meetings in proximity to the place of origin function as a compensatory mecha-

nism to preserve the memory of the submerged village and ensure continuity with descendants, thus maintaining collective identity.

The study uses such methods as semi-structured interview, biographical narrative, including observation[3], and analysis of archives and publications. The text is based on the author's field research in the lands of the former villages of Popovo and Zhrebchevo[4], attendance at annual meetings of the resettled people[5], interviews with residents of the former villages in their new habitats[6], work in archives[7], and exploration of local history stories[8].

The flooded villages

The Studena dam was built on the river Struma in western Bulgaria in 1953 to supply water to the city of Pernik and its surrounding villages, as well as to produce hydroelectric power. During the construction of the dam, the inhabitants of the villages of Popovo (between 1949 and its demolition in 1953 renamed to Vitoshko) and Krapets were relocated and settled in the present-day districts of Iztok and Tsarkva in the city of Pernik. The reservoir basin includes the land and some of the houses from Popovo village, which by that time had already received electricity. The relocated people of the village remember significant places, calendar events, and institutions from Popovo, for example the Sts. Cyril and Methodius primary school, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary church[9], the masquerade games on St. Basil's Day[10], the pubs, the mills, the brandy distillery, the library, the carpentry workshop and the Wild Rooster gaming club[11]. The cooperative building (the only large building that has survived to date) housed a general store, a pastry shop, the school, and a concert hall. The population was engaged in agriculture and livestock farming. During the relocation, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary church was blown up and covered with earth. Some residents of Popovo village brought their ancestors gravestones from the cemetery to the city[12]. The village of Popovo was removed from the records through Decree 408 of the Praesidium of the National Assembly of 9th October 1953. One thousand one hundred and twenty seven inhabitants were relocated and consequently compensated for their houses and property. The residents of the village of Popovo, who settled in hastily built residential blocks of poor quality in district Iztok[13] in Pernik city, carry lasting memories of their painful adaptation to the new place. Their village homes had not yet received electricity or running water. The respondents express a nostalgia for their native village, revealing the trauma of parting with their homes and of changed livelihood. Although the village of Popovo is not in the reservoir basin, its proximity to it and the use of the reservoir for drinking water resulted in the prohibition of access to the remains of the village until 1989. Another reason for this ban during the socialist period was the hunting area and residence built nearby for

then party leaders. The Initiative Committee of relocated people was established in the 1990s to return property to farmers from Popovo. Although their houses had been destroyed before the dam was built, locals later recognised their properties because of the fruit trees persisting there, and once more put fences around them.

The Zhrebchevo reservoir was constructed on the river Tundzha in wastern eastern Bulgaria in 1965 for the purpose of hydropower and irrigation. Its name comes from the flooded village of Zhrebchevo (which was called Atlare[14] until 1906), and was located next to the wall of the present-day dam. The reservoir basin also includes the villages of Zapalnya and parts of Dolno Panicherevo. Interlocutors there also remember important buildings and institutions in the village of Zhrebchevo, such as the primary school and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary church[15]. The population, too, was engaged with agriculture and livestock farming. After the relocation, the residents were compensated and settled in the cities of Stara Zagora, Sliven, Nova Zagora, Tvarditsa and in the villages of Korten, Asenovets, Bryastovo, and Karanovo (Kuzmanov 1998: 61). The village of Zhrebchevo was erased from the administrative country map by Decree 57 of the Praesidium of the National Assembly of 28th January 1965. Before the displacement, the population there consisted of 532 people. Today, the village of Zhrebchevo is completely underwater. It was a poor village, and some of its residents willingly accepted the construction of the dam and relocation to the city, where there was proper medical care and plenty of guaranteed work in state-owned enterprises. The feeling of nostalgia appeared at a later point[16].

The annual countrymen's meetings

Village for a Day is a new form of community for the former villagers and their descendants. It is a form of festivity that contains certain folkloric and religious rituals. Symbolic in focus and function, these rituals serve as a means of communication, carrying meaning for the community and thus reinforcing the sense of connectedness (Elchinova 2008: 46). The relocated people organise annual countrymen's meetings on the shore of the reservoir and so bring together for a day members of the former community, who now live compactly (in the case of Popovo) or in different parts of the region (as in the case of Zhrebchevo).

Since only part of the village of Popovo falls into the basin of the Studena reservoir, and today a large amount of its land is at a distance from the shores of the lake, many former residents returned to their properties after the restoration of private ownership. As they were not allowed to build massive buildings in the water supply area, people decided instead to cultivate their gardens, put up caravans, grow fruit and vegetables and raise domestic animals for their personal use, etc.

The patron saint's day of the destroyed church in Popovo is the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (28th August according to the Julian calendar, i.e. before 1968), which was also a village feast (the so-called *sabor*) before the displacement. The church in Iztok district in the city of Pernik (where the residents of Popovo were resettled) has the same name as a form of continuity[17], and its holiday is celebrated on the same date, which is now 15th August, according to the Gregorian calendar (approved by the Bulgarian Orthodox church in 1968).

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary (28th August) was the biggest holiday in the village of Popovo. It included a festive liturgy, a *kurban*, and entertainment. The notion of *kurban* denotes both a ritual sacrifice traditional to the Balkan Peninsula and the resulting ritual food prepared in honour of the patron saint. The festive liturgy in the church was followed by a procession to the centre of the village, where the *kurban* was consecrated (see Ljubenova 2017: 62–63). After the distribution of the *kurban*, a celebration with music and folk dances began in the village meadows, which also welcomed relatives and friends from neighbouring villages. Petko Hristov and Tsvetana Manova emphasize the social function of the village-wide *kurban*, which was the ritual sacrifice to strengthen ties within the village community, as well as the community's ties with their patron saint. Ethnologists have studied the *kurban* in the lands of the former village of Popovo (Hristov, Manova 2007: 15–21), tracing its manifestations back in time to the period before internal emigration. Six farmers provided sacrificial animals for the *kurban* feast in Popovo, and the subsequent shared meal took place under the branches of a centuries-old oak in an area above the village. The ritual food included *kurban*, ritual bread (*pogacha*) and boiled wheat (ibid.: 18). In addition to the *kurban* for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the village community organised three more *kurbans*: on the feasts of St. George, St. Trinity and St. Pantaleon. After the resettlement, former residents of Popovo resumed their ritual practices and their holiday cycle in the city. When the new Assumption of the Virgin Mary church was built in Iztok district, Pernik, the relocated people tried to restore the *kurban* feast there, but the communist authorities' banning of religious celebrations prevented this. A couple of further attempts were made shortly afterwards in a nearby area called Zhivkovi Livadi, but they too were soon banned. Thus, the practice of sacrificial offerings was discontinued, although the feast with entertainment in the meadows continued throughout the socialist period (Ljubenova 2017: 65). The administrative authorities in Pernik tried to establish a holiday in Iztok district based on a socialist model in the late 1980s, but the residents did not accept such an imposed festivity (Hristov, Manova 2007: 19).

After democratic change in 1989, the relocated population had access to land at the village of Popovo and in 1993 the ruins of the church were cleaned[18] and the annual feast restored (Ljubenova 2015: 98). An important factor in maintaining the

community identity and collective memory of the village of Popovo has been the cult of the Holy Virgin, perceived as the patroness of the village (see Liubenova 2017: 61). Therefore, veneration of the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is enduring and restored annual meetings since 1993 have been organised in the same place and at the same time: near the ruins of the church at the end of August. At the beginning of the 21st century, an initiative was taken to restore the church, although this came to nothing. The celebration of the great Christian holiday Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the new (15th August) and old styles (28th August) respectively, in Iztok district in Pernik and in the former village of Popovo, provides a chance for participants to maintain the cult of the Virgin Mary. This allows them to celebrate both holidays, thus confirming their connection with the new habitat (the city of Pernik) and with the forcefully abandoned village of Popovo, declaring themselves part of the community of the district and the city, as well as part of the community of the village of Popovo.

As a member of the Emerging Heritage project I was presented with the opportunity to visit the annual meeting of the residents from the former village, held on 31th August 2019, the first day off after the day of the Assumption (Julian calendar). The gathering was organised in the square in front of the cooperative building of Popovo; the organiser of the event for multiple years was a relocated person from Popovo known as Grandpa Dancho[19]. Proactive and persistent, for years on end he has been responsible for communication with the municipality of Pernik, the finances, the hiring of the orchestra and the provision of the transport.



Fig. 1. The former village of Popovo. A priest from the city of Pernik consecrates the *kurban*. Countrymen's meeting. Photo: Mariyanka Borisova, 31st August 2019.
Photo Archive of NCICH at IEFSEM – BAS, FtAIF 1796, photo 22.

The celebration followed the established tradition and contained a solemn, and an entertaining, part. The solemn part encompassed the rituals of preparing the sacrificial animal, its consecration (Fig. 1) and sharing it with all those present; the entertaining part contained traditional folk dances in the square to the sounds of an orchestra. The solemn part can also include the rituals associated with visiting the (ruins of) the church, where some of the visitors could light candles and say prayers. The liturgy was discontinued after the destruction of the church, and so the restored holiday was moved to the square in front of the cooperative building. The *kurban* on land of the former village affirms the collective identity of the village community (see Hristov, Manova 2007: 11; Hristov 2009–2010). At the feast in 2019, a priest from Daskalovo district in Pernik city consecrated the *kurban*, which was distributed for the health of all present. After the shared meal, the celebration continued with folk music and dancing (Fig. 2) in the square. Nearby, merchants offered souvenirs and children's toys, which was a specific feature of rural holidays (*sabors*) during socialism. The annual meeting is an important marker in the collective memory of the resettled people from the former village of Popovo, also attracting relocated people from the former village of Krapec[20] (who share the same fate), descendants, and guests. The mayor of Pernik city also attended the event in 2019, which lent additional formality to the holiday.



Fig. 2. The former village of Popovo. Countrymen's meeting folk dancing.
Photo: Mariyanka Borisova, 31st August 2019.
Photo Archive of NCICH at IEFSEM – BAS, FtAIF 1796, photo 107.

The village-wide *kurban* is an essential element in the collective memory of former villagers of Popovo. Therefore, resettled people restore not only their properties (material restoration), but also their holiday with the *kurban* (social life), albeit within the framework of one day. The annual meeting of relocated people attempts to affirm the collective identity of the community. The restoration of the village holiday is indicative of the strong connection that people have with their birthplace, and the need for festivity and contact within the former village community, despite the 40 years since resettlement. Following this argument, the village feast could also be interpreted as a site of memory (by Pierre Nora 2004).

Collective memory returns the displaced people to Popovo village land during the week (in the summer, to cultivate their gardens) and during the feast (for the *kurban* and communal entertainment). After 2019, the holiday slowly faded away, the number of relocated people decreased, and the *kurban* was discontinued, although some families continue to gather at a table in their gardens for the feast of the Assumption. The relocated people and their descendants are waiting for a new leader to revitalise the village-wide holiday[21].

The resettled population from the village of Zhrebchevo and their descendants meet annually on 2nd May in the Komluka area[22] next to the Zhrebchevo reservoir, a tradition they have followed since 1976 (Fig. 3). The first meetings were well attended, with a well-organised program: music, songs and folk dances (Coneva, Conev 2019: 56). Annual meetings started after a certain time (15 years after the relocation), which caused nostalgia and the need for festivity and contact within the former village community. This ritual meeting is a consequence of displacement and did not appear in the village's festive calendar before the relocation. The date is not based on a specific occasion. According to our respondent, one of the reasons for the choice is that during the socialist period, 1st and 2nd May were not working days. On 1st May, as an official labour holiday, demonstrations were organised, and on 2nd May, the relocated people held an annual meeting at the dam. The date is also linked with the spring season, in which "nature blooms", "charging [us] with energy"[23].

The ossuary with the remains of the ancestors from the village of Zhrebchevo has been relocated to the Komluka area on the shore of the reservoir. The place was indicated by a memorial plaque. Another memorial plaque at the same place was a short lapidary chronicle of the village. These commemorative signs symbolise the connection with the ancestors and the succession of collective identity, but are also material traces of the submerged village of Zhrebchevo and so determine the location of the annual meetings. The residents of the former village and their descendants have organised fellow countrymen's meetings every year since 1976 near the two memorial plaques. In 2020, due to construction nearby, the ossuary was destroyed, and the memorial plaque for the village was moved to the nearby

village of Asenovets, which provoked a strong reaction from the descendants of Zhrebchevo villagers. After the political changes at the end of the 20th century, the date of the annual meetings moved to 1st May for practical reasons: it was a day off, and the mandatory demonstrations had already been cancelled.



Fig. 3. The Komluka area near the Zhrebchevo reservoir. Celebrating fifteen years since the displacement of people from Zhrebchevo village.
First annual meeting of the village community, 2nd May 1976. Source: (Kuzmanov 1998).

The organiser of the meetings there is Mimi Tsoneva, a descendant of a displaced family. As a community leader, she is so committed to the memory of the flooded village that she also initiated a number of related activities: a website for the flooded village of Zhrebchevo[24], and with the collaboration of her father Petar Tsonev a photo album in 2019 on the history of the village (Coneva, Conev 2019). Despite living abroad, she also organises the annual meetings of displaced people, and currently she is even preparing an extensive history of the village for publication. She was the first to raise the alarm about the removal of the two memorial plaques and the ploughing up of the Zhrebchevo ossuary.

The rituals accompanying the countrymen's meeting there include a group photo of all participants, shared food, and a walk to the reservoir. From the website of the demolished village of Zhrebchevo, we understand that the gathering in 2016 brought together about 100 to 130 participants: relatives, fellow villagers and friends.

An improvised exhibition by Petar Conev was presented at the meeting, exhibiting old photos of Zhrebchevo residents, descendants, and other photos from the annual meetings[25]. Each successive meeting activates the memory of the village, of neighbours and relatives, of important and everyday events from the village's past.



Fig. 4. Komluka area near Zhrebchevo reservoir. The annual group photo of participants in the countrymen's meeting. Photo: Mariyanka Borisova, 1st May 2019. Photo Archive of NCICH at IEFSEM – BAS, FtAIF 1776, photo 56.

The Emerged Heritage project team were guests at the countrymen's meeting of former Zhrebchevo village residents on 1st May 2019. The gathering included a group photo (Fig. 4), a shared meal where our team was welcomed, the recollection of numerous memories (which the relocated people willingly shared with the researchers), and a walk to the reservoir. The group photo visualises and fixes the village community, while it is impossible to visualise the submerged village. This tradition of annual meetings is an occasion for narratives, evoking a variety of memories and emotions. The function of the shared table is similar. The stories of the respondents, which our team recorded during the gathering, are also aimed at the descendants of villagers, who have a mediated memory of the former village. The walk to the shore of the dam, led by a resettled villager, was accompanied by stories related to different places above and below the water, with memories of childhood and youth. The meetings are an opportunity for the scattered residents of the former village of Zhrebchevo, their neighbours, relatives and descendants to

see each other, to bring the area to life for a day, to construct an imaginative collective identity through shared food, photos and stories about their common past. The organiser of the annual meeting in 2019 was again Mimi Coneva[26]. Gradually, she focused mainly on her historical book, and the organisation of the annual gatherings remained in the background. The meetings in the Komluka area continued into 2025, but not on such a scale as earlier events.

The annual gatherings at the former villages of Popovo and Zhrebchevo are gradually waning and the reason for this is beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. Although there are still some proactive descendants at these gatherings, the former villagers, bearers of the memory of the flooded settlements, become fewer and fewer with the passage of time.

These annual meetings of displaced people have relevance beyond the immediate communities through their coverage in local media[27] and on the internet. This popularisation is a potential incentive for other communities from flooded villages to create or restore similar types of cultural practice.

Conclusion

Village for a Day as a form of community and a cultural practice combines traditional (Popovo) and new (Zhrebchevo) holidays and ritual practices, thus sacralising them. These community festivals are an important element of the festive calendar, resulting in what seems at first glance to be the paradoxical presence of a settlement's festive calendar in the absence of a settlement.

The village community is in a continuous relationship with the spatiotemporal dimensions. Places become arenas of interaction, symbols of identity for society, and sites of memory (Nora 2004). For the village of Popovo, such sites of memory are the annual meetings on the Assumption feast and the material traces of the village: ruins of the church of the Assumption, the intact cooperative building, the fenced gardens, etc. The countrymen's meeting, organised on the land of the former settlement at the end of August, annually reaffirms continuity in time and place: the cultural memory of the village, the connection within the its community, the transmission of knowledge to descendants.

Since the village of Zhrebchevo is completely under the waters of the reservoir, the shore near its (now erased) memorial signs, where the community gathers annually, was transformed into a site of memory. Although the Komluka area was not important before the relocation, it acquired special functions afterwards and became a substitute for the submerged village. Therefore, the place and time of the Zhrebchevo village countrymen's meetings are a result of an accidental but motivated choice.

Another particularity of these sites of memory is their one-day-per-year occurrence and its festive character. A specific feature of the countrymen's gatherings is that the village "comes to life" during the holiday, not during the weekdays, although the residents of the former village of Popovo are also present during the working week, cultivating their properties. The connection, the feeling of collective identity, is especially vigorous during the village holiday, when rituals, created before the resettlement (Popovo) or after it (Zhrebchevo), ensure a connection within the community.

The village "comes to life" for a day through the presence of the settlement community during the annual meetings. And the fact that the village of Zhrebchevo "comes to life" not on the site of the demolished village, but on the shore of the reservoir, does not change the picture. By repeating the same pattern within the framework of the ritual action, emigrants emphasize their belonging to the settlement community. The symbolic and communicative nature of the rituals during the annual meetings strengthens the connectedness of the community performing them. The *kurban* (in Popovo) and the group photograph (in Zhrebchevo) have identical functions: they affirm the social bonding of the resettled people, reproduce cultural identity, and stimulate the imagination of the settlement community. The annual meetings also have a therapeutic effect in that they stimulate the processing of the trauma of forcibly severed connections, thus satisfying persistent nostalgia. When people talk about the demolished village, when they celebrate in its land with their fellow countrymen, seeming to revive the place as if participating in the celebration of their native village.

The residents of the former villages acknowledge the need to remember and communicate the stories of their flooded places of origin. As a result of this narration, the memory of the destroyed settlement is passed on to the villagers' descendants. The countrymen's meetings, holidays, ritual practices (sanctification, *kurban*, shared food, the group photo, etc.) on the shore of the lake strengthen the fragile ties of the former village community and represent a symbolic restoration of the settlement, albeit for one day.

Notes

[1] The study was part of a project titled Submerged Heritage, A Village at the Bottom of a Reservoir: Migration, Memory, Cultural Practices under the aegis of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum (IEFSEM), Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). The project (2018–2023) was funded by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, National Science Fund. The project leader was Assistant Professor Dr. Lina Gergova; the participants were six scientists from IEFSEM (BAS), one scientist from Sofia's St. Kliment Ohridski University/Institute of Art Studies (BAS), and one scientist from the National

Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography (BAS). The diverse expertise of the team allowed the project to adopt interdisciplinary approach.

[2] I use the terms 'annual meetings of the former village community' and 'fellow countrymen's meetings' in the text synonymously.

[3] During the annual meetings.

[4] Visit to and photo documentation of the Studena reservoir on 15th June 2019 – 44 pictures (Photo Archive of National Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage (NCICH) at IEFSEM (BAS), FtAIF 1792), on 14th November 2019 – 37 pictures (FtAIF 1832).

[5] The village of Popovo – 31st August 2019 (with Milena Ljubenova; 1 hour interview with 1 respondent – Phono Archive of NCICH, FnAIF 3048; 118 pictures – FtAIF 1796); the village of Zhrebchevo – 1st May 2019 (with the project team; 2-hour interviews with 4 respondents – FnAIF 3004; 171 pictures – FtAIF 1776).

[6] Three-hour interviews with 2 people from the village of Popovo, 15th June 2019, Pernik (FnAIF 3014).

[7] In the BAS Archive, Archive State Agency, Pernik Department, Central State Archive, IEFSEM Archive.

[8] Four local history stories are already published, two for the village of Zhrebchevo (Kuzmanov 1998; Coneva, Conev 2019) and two for the village of Popovo (Erulski 1999; Nikolova, Stoyanov-Georev 2003).

[9] The church was built in 1845 (see Ljubenova 2017: 62).

[10] On 14th of January (Julian calendar). See: https://balgarskaetnografia.com/praznici-i-obichai/kalendarni-praznici-i-obichai/yulianski-i-grigorianski-kalendar.html (accessed June 7, 2025).

[11] G. M., male, born in 1937 in Popovo village. Interviewer: Mariyanka Borisova, 15th June 2019, Pernik. Phono Archive NCICH at IEFSEM (BAS), FnAIF 3014, file 1–3.

[12] G. N., female, lives in the city of Pernik, a descendant of emigrants from the village of Popovo. Conversation on 29th October 2019, city of Pernik. Personal archive.

[13] At that time the name of the district was Lenin.

[14] https://www.atlare.com/jrebchevo/meet76 (accessed June 20, 2025).

[15] St. George's chapel was built in the village in 1868. It was burned by the Ottomans during the liberation of the village. The church was built in 1928 and was not consecrated until its destruction (Kuzmanov 1998: 48–49).

[16] P. B., male, born in 1941 in the village of Zhrebchevo. Interviewers: Lozanka Peycheva, Mariyanka Borisova, Grigor Grigorov, Valentin Voskresenski, 1st May 2019, Komluka area, near to Zhrebchevo reservoir. Phono Archive NCICH at IEFSEM (BAS), FnAIF 3004, file 2.

[17] The construction of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary church in the city of Pernik began in 1955 with the financial support of the relocated people.

[18] According to other sources, the ruins of the church were cleaned up in 2000 (Nikolova, Stoyanov-Georev 2003: 21).

[19] Unfortunately, grandpa Dancho passed away shortly after the annual meeting and was unable to talk to him.

[20] By analogy, the annual meetings of the resettled people from the village of Krapec are attended by resettled people from the village of Popovo.

[21] This perspective is realistic. A similar case is that of the nearby submerged village of Krapec, where after the annual meeting had stagnated for years an active descendant of one of the relocated villagers appeared, giving new impetus to the feast in 2022.

[22] P. B., male, born in 1941 in the village of Zhrebchevo. Interviewers: Lozanka Peycheva, Mariyanka Borisova, Grigor Grigorov, Valentin Voskresenski, 1st May 2019, Komluka area, near to Zhrebchevo reservoir. Phono Archive NCICH at IEFSEM (BAS), FnAIF 3004, file 2.

[23] Ibid.

[24] www.atlare.com (accessed June 18, 2025).

[25] https://www.atlare.com/jrebchevo/meet2016 (accessed June 20, 2025).

[26] In 2021, she scattered her late father's ashes in the reservoir.

[27] These events are sometimes also covered in the national media.

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