

Saints' Day Celebrations (Ruga) in Banat – Community Participation, Dance, Music, and Good Times¹

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Abstract: The celebration of the day of patron saint of the local church is a custom that is widespread among Christians in various parts of the world. In the plain and mountain areas of the Romanian Banat region, this day is referred to as *ruga* (pl. *ruge*), which literally means “pray.” These customary events are local community participatory festivals in the sense that they include both active and passive participants, the former joining in the dancing, the latter sitting and watching whilst socialising with relatives and friends. Although these events are primarily held on fixed calendrical days according to the patron saint of a specific church, they are in most cases attended by representatives of the many ethnicities and religious confessions that live together in the Banat region.

This paper examines saint's day celebrations in Banat as one of the prime community events where music and dancing take place. It draws on the authors' fieldwork undertaken at saint's day celebrations in the Romanian Banat where they observed the similarities and differences in these events. Their research is supplemented by drawing on reports from local media on *ruge*, historical accounts, and conversations with locals. Their conclusion is that over time the concept of the celebration of *ruge* has been maintained though the precise details of the events have changed over time as these celebrations have been adapted to meet the needs of present-day communities while retaining their function as participatory community celebrations.

Keywords: Romania, Banat, ruga, dance, community, festivals

WHAT IS *RUGA* IN BANAT?

The celebration of the day of the patron saint of the local church is a custom that is widespread among Christians in various parts of the world. In the plain and mountain areas of the Romanian Banat region, this day is referred to as *ruga* (pl. *ruge*), which literally means “pray.” In the mountains of Banat (and also elsewhere in Romania), this day is also known as *nedeia* (spelt in various ways), although *nedeia* can also refer to other holidays

¹ All translations from Romanian texts are done by the authors of this paper.

not connected to the local church (see GROZA 2018). The term *hram* (pl. *hramuri*), which derives from the Old Church Slavonic *храмъ/храмъ*, is also used in the Romanian language but has three meanings; the church service, the patron saint of the church, or the parish fair held either on the anniversary of the church's dedication or the day of its patron saint.

In Banat, the term *ruga* is a multi-confessional, multi-ethnic term used for saint's day celebrations by the majority of the co-located ethnicities and religious confessions, including Romanians, Serbians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Slovaks, and Ukrainians, hence there are *ruga satului* (*ruga* of the village), *ruga ortodoxă*, or *ruga catolică*, as well as *ruga românească*, *ruga sârbească*, *ruga ungurească*, *ruga bulgărească*, *ruga slovacă* and *ruga ucrainean*.² More recently in some places in the Banat region, the *ruga* is also known as the days (*zilele*) of the village or town, but in other locations the village day(s) are a separate, more secular event. The one exception in the usage of the term *ruga* is among the Germans of Banat, who call their saint's day celebrations *Kirchweih* (as elsewhere in Germany), and it is documented that they brought this custom with them when they moved to Banat in the 18th century (GEHL 2014).³ In fact, the only confessional grouping that does not appear to use this term is the neo-protestants/non-conformists.

Ruge in Banat villages and towns take place mainly from the spring until mid-autumn, starting from the second day of Easter and continuing until the saint's day of the archangels Mihail and Gavril on 8th November. The most common dates are Russali (Pentecost 50 days after Easter), 15 August (the Ascension of the Virgin Mary), and 8 September (the nativity of the Virgin Mary). The exact date on which a church celebrates its consecration and/or patron saint is determined by the calendar it follows. The dates listed above are those observed by followers of the new calendar, including Romanian Orthodox, Catholic, and Greek Catholic believers, whereas for Serbian Orthodox believers, their celebrations are held in accordance with the old calendar, so, for example, the date for celebrating the Ascension of the Virgin Mary is observed on 28 August instead of 15 August.

This paper examines saint's day celebrations in the Romanian plain and mountain zones of Banat, and in particular the music and dance that take place during these events.⁴ It draws on the authors' long term ethnographic project that commenced in 2007. Over the last five years, they have attended around eighty saint's day celebrations in the Romanian Banat, observing the similarities and differences in the music, dance, and context of these events. They supplement their ethnographic research by drawing on reports from local media and historical accounts, as well as conversations with locals. The many videos of *ruge* on YouTube and Facebook have also provided valuable comparative material, and for the historical context in particular, published monographs about villages in Banat mostly include some mention of the village *ruga*, sometimes only the date, or the patron saint of the church, while others include more information about the details of the event and its history.

² The Serbians also use the term *zavetina* for the church or village saint's day, or the term *slava*, although *slava* is more often used to refer to the celebrations of household and family saints.

³ Other terms for saints' days linked to *Kirchweih* include *Kirchtag*, *Kirchmass*, *Kermesse*, *Kermis*, *Kirmis*, or *Kermošius*, a Lithuanian word for a fair following the mass in the church. The first recorded mention of the term *Kermesse* was in connection with an annual parade to mark the events of the Brussels massacre of 1370.

⁴ This does not attempt to present a detailed coverage of the religious service and customs connected to *ruga*.

SAINT'S DAY CELEBRATIONS AS PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY FESTIVALS

The celebrations of the church's saint's day (or the church's consecration, as this usually takes place on the church's saint's day) follow a broadly similar pattern throughout the Christian parts of the world. It is one of the most important calendrical events in the year when the entire community takes part and is the time when relatives who have moved away return to the village for the holiday. The celebrations can last from one to three days and are often associated with a local market, fair, and funfair. Falassi, who discusses the etymology of the term festival, links this to the Italian term *feria*, meaning "abstinence from work in honour of a saint," and the Spanish *ferias*, "day of rest in honour of a saint" (FALASSI 1987:2). He also explains that "over time *feria* (English 'fair') came to be used to refer to a market with the sale of commercial goods."

These customary events are local community participatory festivals. They are participatory in the sense that they include both active and passive participants, the former joining in the dancing, the latter sitting and watching whilst socialising with relatives and friends. They are what Falassi refers to as a "time out of time," a special temporal dimension which is devoted to certain activities (FALASSI 1987:4). These are social events for members of the local community and those associated with it through genealogy or friendship that have not developed over time into events that attract tourists in which case the needs of the local community are overtaken (see GUSS 2000:162). The focus of these events is participatory music and dance which, as Turino suggests in his seminal work, has special qualities and characteristics for creating solid feelings of community and identity, renewing bonds and reinforcing the spirit of community among community members who are now widely scattered (TURINO 2008:157,122; see also GEHL 2014). The social function of these events reflects Cohen's definition of community as "the arena in which one learns and largely continues to practise being social" that "serves as a symbolic resource, repository and referent for a variety of identities" (COHEN 1985:20), and in the case of *ruga*, the variety of identities is reflected in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of these events in Banat.

SPECIFICALLY BANAT

The term *ruga* is used for village saint's day celebrations within the area of southwestern Romania that covers the counties of Timiș, Caraș-Severin, and southern Arad (mostly along the south side of the Mureș river and north of the town of Făget). There is no written record of the precise date these celebrations started, although it is known that church dedication feasts already took place during the eighteenth century when Romanian and Serbians were under the same religious administration (see HATEGAN In POPESCU 2016). Although many of the village churches were consecrated several centuries earlier, it is likely that some form of celebration was already taking place before the time indicated by the records. A monograph about the village of Vrani in Caraș-Severin county includes a photo of musicians at their *ruga* (locally called *nigee*) in 1899, and it also recounts that on the second day of the *ruga* in 1738 (at Russali), when the population of the village gathered at the '*joc*' (village dance event), Turkish tyrants rode horses through

the village, kidnapping the older girls and taking them to be servants in their camp (ION – TRAIAN 2014:166, 142). The first recorded *ruga* (*negee*) in the Almăj Valley in the Banat mountains took place in the village of Mocerîș in 1912 (NEGRU – BĂDIN 1912), and the Banat Plain village of Voiteg held its first *ruga* in 1923 (FOGAS 2015:15).

From the ‘inside’, locals see *ruga* as specific to Banat (GROZA 2018) and claim that there are certain differences from similar feasts observed in other localities, and because of this, it has been suggested that *ruga* should be included on the ICH list for Romania (POPESCU 2016). The differences highlighted by Otilia Hedeșan in the same article include: participation in a religious service; honouring the remembrance of the dead; offerings (*pomana*) given to the dead, especially in the Banat mountain region, where women go to the cemetery on the day of the *ruga*, taking offerings of food for their deceased; the reunion of the whole family, including relatives who have moved away; the *ruga* feast with a table piled high with food; and participation in the community dance (although the authors’ research has indicated that several of these criteria also exist in saint’s day celebrations elsewhere). Several authors mention that specific moments of the *ruga* are celebrated differently from one community to another, with each village having its own customs, but the overall structure of the *ruga* is more or less the same (POPESCU 2016; GROZA 2018). For example, in the Banat mountains, it was traditional to whitewash every house prior to the date of the village *ruga* (see BUDESCU 2007:360), whereas in the Făget zone, an auction was held for the bride of the *ruga*, with the money raised being used to fund the *ruga* (CALIMAN 2012).

The multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character of *ruga* in Banat is closely linked to the history of the region. Many Banat villages, especially on the Banat plain, have up to four churches, representing the various confessions and/or ethnicities that settled in the village, although some are unused now. Within this area, “celebrations played a special part in interethnic relations in Banat. They were, at the same time, a way of maintaining ethnic identity, but also a way of establishing interethnic relations” (ADAM 2008:116).⁵ Although a *ruga* may be organised by a specific ethnicity or confession that lives in the village, in practice they are open to all who wish to attend, and it is common for locals to attend events organised by any of the ethnicities that live in their village or the adjacent villages (BURULEANU – PAUN 2011:147–8). As prominent choreographer Miroslav Tatarici recounted, “during my childhood in the Banat Plain village of Dejan, (...) the young people went to dance at the village balls organised by all the various ethnicities, Romanian, Serbian, German, Hungarian” (TOMOIAGĂ 2018). In our previous work, we identified three contexts in Banat in which dancing might be considered a reflection of a group’s ethnicity or identity (MELLISH – GREEN Forthcoming).⁶ At saint’s day events conscious portrayals of the dances of a specific identity take place only during presentational performances that sometimes take place at the start of the event. During the social dancing all join in, although on closer observation specific identifiers for certain ethnicities can be detected, as discussed below.

⁵ For more details, see the Banat oral history archive at <http://www.memoriabanatului.ro/> (accessed November 3, 2019).

⁶ The three contexts in Banat where dancing might be considered a reflection of a group’s ethnicity or identity are: firstly, social participatory dance events such as *ruge*; secondly, local presentational dancing at festivals, including competitive festivals; and lastly, national and international festivals.

PREPARATION FOR THE *RUGA*

The preparations for the *ruga* begin months, if not a year, in advance. Each *ruga* has a 'nas' (godfather), appointed by the local parish council, usually a wealthy person who donates a significant sum of money to the organisation (GROZA 2018) or the local church, in which case his donation is recorded in the church register (ION – TRAIAN 2014:156). More recently the celebrations are organised by the village mayor with an organising committee who secure bookings with their preferred local singers and musicians and ensure that a sum of money is allocated from the village budget. In the past, the *ruga* was organised by the village church and young people collected the money from every household to pay the musicians who play at the *ruga*, either a fixed amount was decided, or everyone paid what they could afford – and to quote from the monograph on the village of Vrani, "as the Banat man is a 'proud' man, he does not allow some to pay less than the others" (ION – TRAIAN 2014:156).

The news about the *ruga* is spread through various channels. For locals, this is mostly by word of mouth or by convention – they know the *ruga* will take place on a certain date. Posters are often put up in selected locations in the village, such as on the door of the village hall or in village shops. Nowadays social media provides opportunities to advertise the event to a wider potential audience, especially if the more popular singers and musicians have been booked for the occasion. Even then, the information provided is aimed predominantly at locals in that the location of the event within the village is seldom stated, as this is obvious to locals; the start time may be listed, but this usually refers to the opening performance, which may be several hours before the main event gets going, and although the names of the main singers are listed (and in some cases the musicians), other, less well-known singers may also be singing earlier in the evening.

The church in Banat villages is often located at the main crossroad in the village and this crossroad is most commonly the central location around which the *ruga* takes place. If the village has several churches then the event is located close to the church whose saint's day is being celebrated or at the village hall (*căminul cultural*) which is usually situated close to the church. In the majority of cases there is an outdoor space where activities can take place. This space can be a roadway, or a grassy area which may be covered in concrete to provide a floor that can be used for dancing, or occasionally the village park near the church. If the weather is unfavourable, the music and dancing are moved inside the village hall. Over last five years, many villages have made improvements to their designated open-air dance spaces: some villages have built a permanent covering over the area, either a large wooden structure or a substantial canvas canopy, and many others have installed some form of a permanent bandstand for the musicians on the perimeter of the dance space – in some cases just a raised concrete area with a temporary cover installed during events, in other cases a permanent wooden structure.

THE DAYS OF THE *RUGA*

In the days immediately preceding the *ruga*, the whole community is involved in the organisation of the event. In preparation for the visitors, houses are cleaned and food is cooked for the communal meal or for the celebratory family lunch. The church service



Figure 1. Outside the church at the Curtea Ruga, 29 June 2017. (Photo by Nick Green)

is held early in the morning on the first day of the *ruga* (or sometimes around mid-afternoon). As people leave the church, a packet of *pomana* (alms in memory of the deceased) may be given to each attendee, including ceremonial breads (*colaci*, *coliva*), fruit, and wine or plum brandy (ION – TRAIAN 2014), and if a local dance group is in attendance, they may make a guard of honour as the church-goers come out of the church. If the service is held earlier in the day, this may be followed by an organised meal for the local dignitaries and invited guests, whilst others return to their houses to share a meal with the family. When the service immediately precedes the late afternoon or evening dance, after a while of hanging around, the clergy, local mayor, and invited dignitaries and church attendees form a parade which is led by those carrying the banners of the church that progresses to the area set aside for the *ruga* (Fig. 1).

During the daytime, stalls selling a variety of plastic toys and trinkets are set up along the road, which is usually closed to traffic, and the local children enjoy the funfair rides and games, and nowadays a bouncy castle and often a merry-go-round or dodgem cars that are part of nearly all *ruge*. In general, the larger the village, the bigger the funfair, to the extent that in the major villages or small towns, such as Giarmata, Jebel, Șag and Gottlob, the fair dominates the event. In addition to the funfair and toy stalls, there are always stalls selling various food and drinks – BBQ meat, pancakes, roasted sweet corn, candyfloss, and sweets.⁷ Long wooden tables and benches are set up close to the BBQ stalls, either along the roadside or within the main area, where people can sit and eat while

⁷ Note that craft stalls are usually present at similar events in Bulgaria, but in Romania these are restricted to special events for crafts and local produce.



Figure 2. Dancing space and food stalls in front of the church at Zilele Șandra, 15 August 2018.
(Photo by Nick Green)

watching the entertainment. Also during the day, sports competitions are often organised for example, in the village of Padina Matei, every year there is a traditional football match between the young people from the village and the veterans (NEAGU 2019).

Usually around late afternoon, the booked musicians arrive and set up their amplification system. Nowadays wireless microphones allow the singers and musicians the flexibility of standing in the centre of the dance space, which provides a different dynamic compared to standing on the raised musicians bandstand that is separated from the participants. The main area for dancing is left clear of seating, often with seats arranged around the perimeter on three of the four sides, except for the side occupied by the musicians (Fig. 2). In certain cases, where the event has a greater focus on performative rather than participatory dance, music, or song in the earlier part of the evening, several parallel rows of seats are placed facing the performance area, although these may be moved once the participatory music and dance commences.

The music and dancing continue late into the night, until the last of the villagers and their guests leave for their houses. Many *ruga* continue into the following day, when there may be a second church service. In some villages, there is a procession to the cemetery, where the locals leave *pomana* for their departed and the priest blesses the graves. This is followed by lunch with the guests, then a second evening of music and dancing until the guests depart for their homes (CALIMAN 2012:7; ION – TRAIAN 2014:157).

MUSIC AND DANCE AT CONTEMPORARY *RUGA*

The main participatory music and dance event – the *ruga*, *bal*, *joc*, or *hora* – takes place from the late afternoon and continues into the early morning hours. Once they have finished their meal, all the villagers and their relatives, invited guests, and friends go to the centre of the village to the location where the dancing will take place (GROZA 2018). The event is opened with the *Hora rugilor*,⁸ a chain dance in an open circle for all attendees, led by the village priest or the godparents (*nași*) of the *ruga*. This dance is considered the most important moment of the *ruga*. It mostly takes place upon arrival at the dance space, but in some cases, it is danced in front of the church.

The formal opening of the *ruga* is often preceded by a short dance performance by the village (or *comuna*⁹) children's dance group, who perform a short suite of local dances. Until around forty years ago, the *ruga* was opened by the village *călușeri*¹⁰ group (LARIONESCU 2002:23).¹¹ In the last few years, it has become more common for several groups, most often those from the co-located ethnicities, to be invited to present their dances, and in 2019, several larger villages also invited a visiting dance group from another region of Romania. This short presentational performance takes place in the communal dance space with the audience sitting or standing around this area and usually lasts less than an hour before the main event with participatory music and dance begins. It is very rare for this to take place on a raised “stage” which separates the performative and participatory dancers and with seating arranged for a sedentary audience.

The event nowadays focuses on the booked singers, and it is these names that draw people to the event. Some events have a number of well-known singers that take turns to sing for each dance cycle, other events have local or young singers who sing mainly in the earlier parts of the evening, and some events hire one of the best known singers with their selected musicians at great expense, who sing and play for the entire event's duration, from early evening until long after midnight. In most locations, there are only a few locals dancing during the early evening, but after around 9 p.m., or when darkness falls, depending on the time of year, the number of dancers increases. Some locations have very little dance participation each year, even though the surrounding BBQ stalls and funfair are well attended. This may be due to the locality lacking a core of people with dance knowledge, or the event not being popular with the locals, or those who travel to attend the *ruga* for dancing.

⁸ The *horă* is the basic Romanian community chain dance; in Banat, this is in a relaxed tempo, see for example <https://youtu.be/TKtH93zQ9Zo> (accessed November 21, 2019).

⁹ *Comuna* is an administrative unit of one or more villages that is run by a mayor.

¹⁰ *Călușeri* is a Transylvanian Romanian men's dance tradition. The group of men often form a society called *Juni*. The dancers are generally positioned in a circle without being connected to their neighbours, and the dances have a number of figures that are performed in unison as directed by the leader. This is somewhat similar in concept to the *călușari* of southern Romania; however, there is no healing ritual associated in the Transylvanian tradition, and the dances are totally different.

¹¹ In Banat, the Romanian *căluș* dance is considered to have historically taken place at Russali and included a ritual healing similar to the *căluș* found in southern Romania. Larionescu comments that the principal factor that brought about the deritualisation of the *căluș* dance in Banat was its move from Russali to the *ruga* (LARIONESCU 2002:23); however, other authors also attribute this deritualisation to the influence of the mid-19th-century political use of the Transylvanian *călușeri* dances as an identity marker for Romanians.

The level of attendance of people with dance knowledge can be affected by the local support for a children's dance group which provides a training in basic local dance skills,¹² and more recently, groups of recreational dancers attend nearby *ruge* where they consider the singers and musicians will be playing the best music for dancing. Recently it has become common for these recreational dancers to initiate the dancing, an action that is sometimes needed before locals will join.

At the biggest *ruge*, where several singers and groups of musician have been booked, these may play back-to-back with no breaks in the live music. However, it is more common that each cycle is followed by a break for the musicians, during which recorded music – a mix of current pop music, easy listening, or local music – is usually played. Each cycle (a sequence of music and dances that fits local expectations) lasts anywhere from 40 minutes to an hour. Most events, but not all, keep to some version of the local Banat dance cycle. In general, the cycle starts with the slowest dances or a listening item (usually a *doina*) and ends with the fastest dance.

In the Banat plain area, a generation ago the Romanian dances would be local variants of couple dances, often danced in a column, including the slow, syncopated *Ardeleana*, now mostly known as *Soroc*, the binary rhythm *Pe loc*, and the faster *De doi* (MARCUS et al. 1964).¹³ Our informants say these were the norm in their youth, and each village had distinguishable ways of dancing these. We have seen these danced in the recent past at weddings; however, these are rarely played or sung at *ruge* now, and when they are played, there are few people who participate in these dances. As with all active cultural life, the fashions change in music and dancing. Nowadays the most common dance at *ruge* and other social events is the simple, binary rhythm *Ardeleana*, danced in circles without any variations or figures.¹⁴ This is often preceded by a slow song for listening (traditionally, this would have been a specific Banat *doina*), but very often it is a slow song from a more recent song genre; and in the past ten years, a bidirectional, gentle walking dance in a circle (without any name attributed to it locally) has become popular for any slow song that has no dance attributed to it. This started with the youth from the Timișoara dance ensembles, spread to other dance ensembles, and it is now generally accepted by a wide range of dancers. In other locations on the Banat plain, the chain dance from the mountain region, *Brâul bătrân*,¹⁵ is now common as the first dance item, although many locals just dance *Ardeleana* to these melodies. However, over the past

¹² Most children's groups learn the basics of the local chain dance (*Hora*), the local couple dance (*Ardeleana*), and the men's chain dance (*Brâul*), and the instruction is primarily in the rhythmical timing of the step patterns. It should be noted that the mountain versions of these dances are now very popular in the Banat plain region following migrations from the mountain villages, so displacing the previous versions.

¹³ The Banat plain region slow couple dance *Ardeleana* or *Soroc*, is a syncopated turning dance to an asymmetric rhythm, similar and possibly linked to the Transylvanian *Învârtita*. Although songs for this are very popular, it is rarely danced at community events. The local couple dances in the Banat Plain and Banat hills used to be *Pe loc* and *De doi*, but these have now faded from the current dance culture.

¹⁴ The simple, binary rhythm *Ardeleana* (see <https://youtu.be/452uhBjg4Lo>) (accessed November 21, 2019) can be danced in many formations – as a closed circle, a column of couples in an arc progressing around the dance space, or as single couples who can add additional 'figures.'

¹⁵ The mountain region dances are now popular at all community events. The first dance, the men's chain dance *Brâul bătrân* (see https://youtu.be/EmXaUEa_vV4) (accessed November 21, 2019), is now commonly a mixed-gender dance.

10 years *Brâul bătrân* has become known by both local dance groups and recreational dancers, which leads to a wider participation beyond just the Timișoara-based ensemble dancers. The final dance of the Banat Plain dance cycle, *De doi*,¹⁶ is often replaced with an Oltenian *Sârba* aimed at those who have moved from the southern Romanian region of Oltenia into villages and towns on the Banat plain, or by a musical item of the fast and furious mountain region *De doi*, which is often only danced by a few dancers, mainly from the local dance ensembles.

The mountain villages in Caraș-Severin county still maintain the traditional Banat mountain dance cycle of *Brâul* (*Brâul bătrân*), and the couple dances *Ardeleana* and *De doi*, with the possible inclusion of *Horă* or *Sârbă*, and the traditional rules of participation continue to be followed as described by Uica Mihai from Reșița in the following quote:

“*Brâul* is started by the leading men of the village, the godfather of the *ruga*, the common leaders and elders. They dance joined by the shoulders, proud and full of the spirit of the *ruga*, while the bottle of *răchia* (plum brandy) is passed from one to the other. After a while their wives join in between the men (...). In addition to the (big) *brâul mare*, children who grow up with music in their ears and *ruga* in their blood join in a small *brâul* (*brăuleț*) at the side and dance very seriously, thinking that not too far in the future they will be able to join in with the *brâul mare* as well (...). Some time passes, and more and more of the villagers join in the *horă*, and the saxophones and the *taragot* begin to whirr/buzz and the *brâul* warms up, and the whole village is like a huge oven in which the bread of the *ruga* is being baked.” (GROZA 2018)

The band formation and music continues to change, the older styles of violin and double bass are no longer seen nowadays, having been replaced some time ago by *taragot*, saxophone, accordion, and maybe one violin. Currently, the most common combination is that of soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, and keyboard. In recent years, this has been supplemented by an electric violin or an accordion (often a Roland electronic accordion) that can be played in a more Serbian style, and most recently also a drum set or electronic drum pads.

Romanian *ruga* are based mostly on the local Romanian Banat music repertoire; however, the Oltenian *Sârba* is also common, and the dance *Shota* has become popular in recent years with the younger dancers, resulting in some bands now being able to play this different genre of music. One can observe certain ethnic or regional interpretations in the dancing to the Banat music: there are often one or two Roma couples dancing in their particular way with small, quick steps,¹⁷ and immigrants from Moldavia dancing their form of polka, whilst those from Transylvania dance their *învârtita* turning dance.

In addition to variations in ways of dancing, there are certain differences between saint's day celebrations organised by the various ethnicities and confessions that live in Romanian Banat. *Ruga sârbească* (the Serbian Orthodox saint's day celebration)

¹⁶ The mountain version of *De doi* is similar to the plain version, but the music is now played at a much higher tempo. In some places, dancing *De doi* is popular (see <https://youtu.be/wkPkmAgYt-A>) (accessed November 21, 2019), while in others it is more of an instrumentalist's finale to the music set.

¹⁷ The Roma who dance *Ardeleana* tend to prefer the more upbeat melodies, dancing in couples, holding hands, but using a different step pattern (see <https://youtu.be/sDsVk4ZNNQkg>) (accessed November 21, 2019).



Figure 3. Ruga Sârbească in front of the church at Foeni, 28 August 2015. (Photo by Nick Green)

generally has a similar format to the Romanian Orthodox *ruga*, as the Romanian Orthodox church only became a separate entity in 1865. The church service is followed by a communal meal, often an organised performance by Serbian dance groups, then participatory social dancing to music played by Serbian musicians (currently the most popular dances in the Plain region are *Kolo*, *Moravac*, and *Shota*).¹⁸ (Fig. 3)

The 18th and 19th century Catholic immigrants who moved into the Romanian Banat brought with them their ways of celebrating their church's patron saint's day. These Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic saint's day celebrations often start with a procession of young people dressed in costume proceeding through the village to the Catholic church. This is followed by a celebratory mass. After the service, there is a short, organised dance performance outside the church which the rest of the congregation can watch, followed by social dancing for a while. After this, people disperse to their homes for the celebratory meal and reconvene later in the day for a *bal* that is usually held indoors. The Hungarian *ruga* in the village of Dumbravița on the outskirts of Timișoara follows this format (see MONITORUL 2009), as does the *Kirchweih* celebration of the Swabian Germans who moved to Banat. The *Kirchweih* was observed among the German minority from their arrival in Banat in the eighteenth century until the mid-1980s, when many Germans left

¹⁸ For a more detailed account of a recent Serbian saint's day celebration in the village of Macești on the Danube gorge that was attended by the authors of this paper (see HARABAGIU 2019).

for Germany.¹⁹ Recently, this custom has been revived by the active German cultural associations. In 2019, *Kirchweih* were held in the villages of Sandra, Steierdorf, Deta, Jimbolia, Nichidorf, Valiug, and Garâna. *Kirchweih* festivities have their own traditions separate from those of the *ruga*: the Swabians proceed to the Roman Catholic church along the main road, dressed in Swabian traditional costume, the girls wearing brightly coloured dresses with aprons and fringed scarves and carrying an apple with a twig in it in their hands, and the men wearing black trousers and buttoned waistcoats, white shirts, and hats decorated with ribbons, and they are accompanied by the German brass band. The parade is led by two young people carrying a bouquet of rosemary which is auctioned to raise money for the poor families of the locality. The cultural programme starts late afternoon and is held inside the cultural centre, and the event closes with the traditional *Kirchweih* ball that starts at 21:00 (CHWOIKA 2019; OPINIA TIMIȘOAREI 2019).

CHANGES OVER TIME

Over time, the concept of the *ruga* has continued to be celebrated in Banat, although with some modifications. Some elements have remained relatively unchanged, others have undergone changes in detail, while new elements have also been added. Generally speaking, it is noted that contemporary *ruga* has lost many of its religious aspects and has become a more secular holiday with the focus on the evening participatory dance where the locals can dance until daybreak and the preceding artistic programme (GRUIȚA – PEIA 2013(1999):161). The precise details of the music and dance have evolved with the times, so in general, the dance has become simpler and more homogeneous across the Banat region. The atmosphere of the event is largely determined by the specific musicians and singers that are booked to play, with certain locally well-known singers attracting a geographically wider audience. From year to year fashions change, and so the interpretation of local music has changed to reflect current popular trends; for example, it is currently common for Serbian musicians to be hired to play at Romanian saint's day festivities in the villages on the Banat Plain.

The events in smaller villages still remain closest to the longer-term 'model'. In other locations, the communal meal has largely been replaced by stalls selling BBQ, candy floss, donuts, and pancakes, and in the wealthier villages the funfair predominates the event. In the last two years, small towns have been increasingly including non-participatory performances as part of their *ruga* celebrations, often by well-known pop artists or noted Serbian musicians and singers. This situation is similar to many festivals in other locations in south-eastern Europe, where the balance of presentational and participatory performances is shifting towards the former, influenced by external factors such as local fashions, a desire to attract a bigger, non-local audience, funding, competition between organisers (in the case of *ruga*, the local mayors), and changes in performance aesthetic preferences by the organisers (see MELLISH – ÖZBILGIN 2018:20).

¹⁹ For example, the last one in Cenad was held in 1981 (HINKEL 2014), and in Satchinez in 1985 (<https://fototecabanatului.blogspot.com/2019/09/kirchweih-la-temeskenezkneessatchinez.html>) (accessed September 4, 2019).

CONCLUSION – CONTINUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The role of saint's day celebrations – known in Banat as *ruga* – as local community participatory festivals is continuing and even growing. The local community takes part in these events as both active and passive participants, the former joining in the dancing, the latter sitting and watching whilst socialising with relatives and friends. Drawing on Turino's seminal book, *Music as social life: the politics of participation*, the local dances in which the community members participate during *ruga* celebrations form a part of their 'broader community cultural formation' – the locals 'grow up with the music and dance styles, and the habits needed to perform them in culturally appropriate ways are formed at an early age' (TURINO 2008:160). The dances are only one aspect of their overall socialisation in their community setting. Within the Romanian Banat, in addition to *ruga*, local dancing also takes place at other community events, such as weddings, christenings, and seasonal *bals*. In all these instances, the tradition is the community event itself, although what actually takes place during the community event may change over time. Notwithstanding these changes, *ruga* events in Banat continue to attract a substantial audience of locals who participate in dancing, listening to music, and socialising.

During the ICTM ethnochoreology fieldwork sub-study group's visit to the village of Svinița in southern Banat in 2013, Anca Giurchescu was delighted that:

"Almost all young people (...) took part with great enthusiasm and an impressive energy at the village dance, demonstrating that the current dances of the traditional repertoire are still an integral part of the youth dance culture. The survival of dancing as a social practice is due to its capacity of transformation and adaptation to new and constant changeable circumstances" (GIURCHESCU 2015:29).

Thus, although the precise details of the participatory dancing and the music at *ruga* and other community events have changed over time as these celebrations have adapted to meet the needs of present-day communities, the concept of the celebration of *ruga* has been maintained, retaining its function as a participatory community celebration.

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