

## FAERIES AND FAERY PEDAGOGY IN NEOPAGAN SPIRITUALITIES IN CROATIA

*(Translation)*

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*The focus of the paper is on faeries and faery pedagogy in the context of Croatian neopagan spiritualities. It aims to present the ways in which folk tales influence the creation of spiritualities in the modern everyday life. By researching individual practices the paper attempts to connect the alternative ways of living with the educational role of faeries. In most cases learning from faeries is based on questioning the dominant forms of (bio)power. In this respect faeries are opposed to capitalism, imperialism, and various other forms of oppression. The emphasis is mostly on ecology – i.e. on learning how to relate to land and nature in a different, less aggressive manner by using faerie cultures.*

**Keywords:** *faeries, faery pedagogy, neopagan spiritualities, nature*

Come away, O human child!  
To the woods and waters wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.  
(W.B. Yeats, *The Stolen Child*, 1974)

### INTRODUCTION

Fantastical stories and tales about faeries, magical otherworldly beings, have certainly been capturing the human imagination for centuries (looking at various Croatian folk tales and the truthful imperative that is often present therein, we could say that they were a part of human reality and everyday life). Although many ethnologists and cultural anthropologists today rightly say that writing about faeries and folk tales about them is *passé* in connection with the fact that many had decided to write about faeries and human understanding and experience of these beings in the history of

Croatian ethnology before, I shall have to touch upon some fundamental traditional perceptions of faeries.<sup>1</sup> However, I shall only be doing so in order to show that there is continuity<sup>2</sup> in believing in faeries, i.e. in supernatural entities, which has persisted until today.

In researching faery pedagogy the paper focuses exclusively on neopagan<sup>3</sup> communities in Croatia (Croatian Native Faith community and Pagan Federation International – Croatia [PFI], both are active in the Zagreb area) as one of the branches of an exceptionally broad and varied *new age*<sup>4</sup> movement because faery experiences are often recorded

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is based on the diploma thesis *Faeries and Faery Pedagogy in Neopagan Spiritualities in Croatia*, written under the mentorship of Marijana Belaj, Assoc. Prof., which was defended in September 2014 at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in Zagreb Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> This can perhaps refer to a kind of ‘continuity transformation’ when it comes to believing in faeries. I primarily refer to believing in faeries as fantastical, mythical beings or manifestations of energies of nature, which has persisted until today. Unlike beliefs that occurred in the 19th and 20th century folk imagery these beliefs were changed to an extent, i.e. they went through particular transformations during their existence – either under the influence of globalist and capitalist commercialism, i.e. consumerism; or due to a different (contemporary) worldview that we live in line with. Based on what was said, today fairies can be observed as part and parcel of the popular culture.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to mention that members of neopagan spiritualities do not use the term *pogan* to refer to themselves, but rather the term *pagan*. Both *pogan* and *pagan* (from *lat. paganus* = peasant; *pagus* = village) denote atheism, i.e. paganism in terminology. However, *pagan* has both the connotation of *village* or *peasant*, a person cultivating the land, and the connotation of polytheism while *pogan* denotes something evil, rotten, disgraceful and dirty ([http, hjp-novi-liber](http://hjp-novi-liber)). In order to avoid misunderstanding and wrong interpretations in the usage of the above mentioned terms, I shall be using the term (*neo*) *paganism* in this paper as is customary in the scientific context which by no means devalues its stakeholders.

<sup>4</sup> Neopaganism as a subculture within the *new age* movement which saw a sudden rise in popularity during the past several decades, spread impressively. Although neopaganism is one of the main branches of the *new age* movement and has many common characteristics with it (focus on spiritual environmentalism, eclecticism, worshipping nature as sacred, with the emphasis on old pagan religions; there are no figures of authority nor hierarchy, distancing themselves from the oppressive capitalist social systems, etc.) it also differs from it. Many (neo)pagans refuse to classify themselves as belonging to the *new age* movement.

in the context of pagan spirituality. Therefore, I shall attempt to establish a connection between the spiritual, magical and everyday life practices of the Croatian neopagan communities' members and certain aspects of faery pedagogy. Putting faery pedagogy in the context of neopaganism will show that faery pedagogy as a practice cannot be applied to Croatian neopagan communities fully.

In defining the key term of *faery pedagogy*, I relied upon the only text published on the subject in Croatian, namely the translation of the paper published in *Mitski zbornik* (Myth Almanac) – *Exopedagogies and the Utopian Imagination: A Case Study in Faery Subculture* (Lewis and Kahn 2010). The paper draws attention away from the commercial version of faeries and to faeries as supernatural phenomena connected with spiritual entities and magical experiences of being (ibid. 555). This is in turn connected with the way in which fairies are understood in this region. It is evident that in the Croatian research community, i.e. ethnology and cultural anthropology, faery pedagogy was not considered a topic in itself until now, which makes this paper the initial piece of research in this field.

I conducted field research on several occasions in the period from August 2013 to September 2014 by using direct group and individual interviews and questionnaires. Out of the total number of contributions to this version of the paper, I included the accounts of three members of the Croatian Native Faith community and five members of PFI together with the accounts of an independent practitioner of an eclectic form of the Wiccan tradition. By means of questionnaires, group and individual interviews with the members of the above mentioned communities, I attempted to get as detailed an insight as possible into the individual spiritual and everyday practices of my interlocutors in order to explore whether there were any common features in the Croatian neopagan practices and aspects of faery pedagogy based on the given accounts. The accounts are listed in the last

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As part of the *new age* movement neopaganism represents spirituality connected with the ideas on social transformation, together with eco-feminism, neo-shamanism, eco-spirituality, etc. Therefore, based on the terminology determinant it suggests equally something old and something new. More on the *new age* movement and neopaganism: Beyer P. (2006), Dragun M. (2012), Hunt (2004).

chapter and are structured so that each interlocutor is given particular attention and their experiences, beliefs, spiritual and everyday practices are elaborated. The results and interpretations of possible common features are discussed throughout the paper and summarized in its conclusion.

### **GODDESSES, *VILENICE*\*, THE FATES (MOIRAI)**

Before looking into the theme of possible concurrences between some segments of faery pedagogy and spiritual or magical and everyday Croatian neopagan practices, it is necessary to point out certain aspects of *faery* goddesses that overlap with the Great Goddess cult (mother Goddess, Mother Earth or *Tellus Mater*). In this context, the reference is made to Mokosh<sup>5</sup>, the supreme goddess of South Slavic mythology and her divine consort, Perun, the god of thunder. The above mentioned overlaps can be

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\* *Vilenica* is a name for a woman healer taught by faeries, bearer of a popular pre-Christian faery cult.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the fact that all supernatural beings are presented with having ambivalent character in their relationship with humans, it is important to further explain the above mentioned connection with the supreme goddess Mokosh – South Slavic Mother Earth – as she is defined by Vitomir Belaj (2000:122). Namely, Mokosh also demonstrates dual, ambivalent character, on the one hand thunderous, destructive and dry, and moist and fruitful on the other. V. Belaj (2000:125) underlines an especially interesting connection between the faeries and the Great Goddess, which was originally observed by Katičić in a Montenegrin poem about a *Fairy* as Perun's wife. Next, Belaj emphasises that in "more and more poems in which a fairy is mentioned, it becomes clear that they are in fact referring to Perun's wife. One gets the impression that the work *fairy* has in some places become synonymous with the proper name of the supreme goddess." (ibid.). Suzana Marjanić (2002:193), builds on Belaj's possible concept on a singular fairy who can represent Perun's wife (i.e. Mokosh) based on the Nodilo's concept of a dyadic goddess *Vida-Živa*, initiating a possible "concept of a *South Slavic* goddess in a dyadic *fairy* – *crone* connection, i.e. connecting the aspect of a *young* and of course *beautiful* goddess (as can be seen from an idiomatic expression *beautiful as a fairy* that is still in use) as well as the feminine (*vilenice*) devoted to healing, white magic with the aspect of an *old* goddess (*crone*) who is given negative valorisation of the feminine and the practice of black magic in folk beliefs (hag, witch, fortune teller, Russian *Baba Yaga*, *Baba Ruga*, *babaroga*, midwives as birthing demons)."

seen in particular faery characteristics and roles, such as: a) *ambivalent faery character*, in that they represent both a link to the Great Goddess cult, and a link to the witches/the fates – moirai (i.e. Christian demonization of negatively valorized faery antipodes); b) *the fates' role*; c) *vilenice's role*; d) *animal faery attribute of a woman with goat legs* and e) *understanding faeries as manifestations of nature, female elements in nature and energies immanent in nature*, which is closely linked to how particular deities are viewed in Croatian neopagan communities. In order to explain the perception of faeries in the current neopagan practices and spiritualities in Croatia and thematize faeries within faery pedagogy, I shall direct my attention here to the role of *vilenica* and the perception of faeries as manifestations of nature, female elements in nature and energies immanent in nature.

It is important to mention at the beginning that in the Croatian science of ethnology and cultural anthropology many authors have written about fairies. *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena (The Repertory for folk life and customs of the South Slavic peoples)* has greatly contributed to the topic due to its detailed descriptions of faery creatures that were present in folk imagery. Namely, in the context of faeries' ambivalent character, the Repertory contained examples of a name for faeries – *Nedobrice (Doers of no good)* because they were all evil to humans (Filakovac 1905:144). On the other hand, their relationship with humans had been determined by their mood in the moment and acceptance of human character. In Poljice (Ivanišević 1905:255) faeries are good, but turn nasty if anyone opposes them. Ardalić (1917:305) wrote about Bukovice in Dalmatia: "Faeries can do as much good as evil in the world." Nevertheless, in writing about Istria, Mikac pointed out the ultimate faerie kindness because "their only purpose is to help folk", and they had never done any harm to humans (1934:196). These and many other citations are discussed by Tihomir Đorđević (1953:57–58), who emphasises that faeries are "a kind of supernatural female beings largely resembling the Nereids from modern Greek folklore." There were numerous encounters with such faeries at the crossroads between *this* world and *the other* world, which were recorded in old legends from folk imagery. Chosen individuals (*vilenice* and *vilenjaci\**) communicated

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\**Vilenjak* is the male form for *vilenica*.

with faeries who taught them about herbs medicinal properties and healing practices – *vidanje* – knowledge that they later used to heal their fellow villagers. It is therefore no surprise that faeries chose persons with whom they shared their knowledge, not least because they were known as “keepers of the herbs – herblore masters” (Marjanić 2004:233).

The first document on *vilenice* dates from 1660 and it mentions *janjinska vilenica* (vilenica of Janjina) from the area of the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) who was summoned for questioning by ship commander Ivan Gučetić. A young woman (25–30 years of age) confirmed that she was a *vilenica* and went on to explain how she could heal and was taught to her aunt Vila (faery) who comes to her dressed in white, taking the shape of a nun. Vilenica could communicate with aunt Faery whenever she wanted to, and she invoked her by using an *oman* herb (c.f. Čiča 2002:69–70). In 1634 Komiža chaplain accused two women of using herbs in healing and keeping company with faeries who taught them about medicinal properties of herbs in front of a visitor. These seven-hundred-year old records from southern Dalmatia point to the *vilenica cult* as:

“The cult of female beings with supernatural qualities, who share knowledge and abundance and with whom it is possible to have close, even sexual relations (in case of male favourites). They demonstrate ambivalent nature when hurt by humans, but it is possible to reconcile with them. They have some animal physical characteristics, which does not diminish their beauty and who meet together for amusement and pleasure.” (Čiča 2002:81–82)

“17<sup>th</sup> century records corroborate and document the existence of such persons in Dalmatia who are fully and actively aware of their identity” (Čiča 2002:90–91). Furthermore, Čiča (2002:84) associates *vilenica* and *vilenjak* practices with kindred beings in the broader European context, especially with women who have connections with ‘kind’ nocturnal deities, which hints at the cult of ecstatic nature as established by Carlo Ginzburg (1992:122) and which Zovko (1901:147) discusses in the specific context of becoming a *vilenica* on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Becoming a *vilenica* denotes a complex initiation into the faerie knowledge, and only those who worthy of the initiation could participate.

Although seventeen-century long anti-witch church paradigm, which equates *vilenice* with witches, has demonized *vilenica* practices as a part of folk culture in order to ensure its primacy and monopoly (Čiča 2002:108) by pushing it to the margins of society, nevertheless pagan faery and witch healers' practices can be observed in part even today in particular neopagan spiritual practices. In this context, I would especially like to emphasise the Croatian Native Faith community and the members of the Pagan Federation International – Croatia (whom I shall discuss in detail in the second part of the paper) – and their aspirations towards a more benign relationship with nature; their inclination to grow their own plants and organic foods. In this we can perceive the questioning of the dominant forms of power; their awareness of the necessity of environmental protection; their knowledge about alternative methods of healing, i.e. using plants to heal certain diseases. In such a worldview it is possible to notice the connection with specific faery pedagogy ways of re-examining the existent relationships of power, efforts to establish a more agile environmental activism, re-examining relationships between humans and animals with the help of spiritual and philosophical practices. However, in explicating neopagan spiritual and everyday practices in Croatia, it must be mentioned that these practices do not necessarily derive from a faery source of knowledge but are shaped by individual spiritualities which can, but do not need to, be under the direct influence of contacts with faeries (or indeed any other otherworldly entities) either on the experiential or energy level.

Let us look at the perception of faeries as manifestations of nature. In this context, we can discuss experiences and encounters with faeries, which are present in some form to this day, notably in the communities that were studied. Firstly, it is important to look at the perception of faeries as female energies immanent in nature, faeries as powerful manifestations of nature and expressions of Mother Earth, i.e. the Great Goddess or the Mother Goddess – which is present in both studied communities. This way of defining faeries and faery identity is closely linked to understanding deities, particularly in the Native Faith community. The above mentioned perception of faeries among the Croatian Native Faith community members is partly taken from the worldview of the old Slavic peoples (discussed in scholarly and popular papers) who, according to narrator Sonja, used to live

with their gods. On the other hand, this way of perceiving faeries partly comes from the *new age* movement practices and the need to experience natural energies through meditation, different ways of using and directing energy, and the feeling of nostalgia for the lost connection with the natural environment as conditioned by the modern way of living<sup>6</sup>.

With regard to the eclectic and particularly individual creation of spiritual views, some members of the Croatian Native Faith community do not have the need to name the energy manifestations of nature and natural energies as faery phenomena. On the other hand, some of them express a strong belief in faeries as “the remnants of collective energy in the environment, in natural places.”<sup>7</sup> Apart from this, when I talked with some of the Native Faith community members they emphasised experiences that they had with faeries, which I will discuss.

There are similar perceptions of faeries among members of the Pagan Federation International – Croatia. Our interview partner Tena (age 21) perceives faeries as a kind of help on the etherial level, namely when she works with plants and especially with crystals which contain special energy or behave as guardians of particular areas in life:

“I don’t consider faeries to be something we should see necessarily, like beings with tiny wings, little dresses and caps, but rather as something connected with the forces in nature that boosts your yield; more as a manifestation of your positive energy that you instil in everything that lives.”

Furthermore, my interlocutor Lidija, 47, describes the presence of faeries in her life through imaginary connections with natural elements and nature itself in a clearly positive tone:

“They are connected to water, forests, air, rain, sea, plants, rocks, they exist as forms of deities or manifestations of universal forces that bring peaceful, unperturbed sleep and help falling asleep; they are connected with a particular Catholic holiday (the night before

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<sup>6</sup> As told by Sonja on 1 August 2013.

<sup>7</sup> As told by Sonja on 1 August 2013.

Palm Sunday, they dance at a ball of flowers, on Christmas Eve they dance around the candles on the Christmas tree, etc.). They always bring something positive (as does everything in nature – I was brought up to believe that we must respect nature and give something in return because it gives us food, clothes, healing and allows us to enjoy her beauties. If you look attentively, and if nature loves you because you did her no harm, you are certainly going to see faeries).”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, faeries behave as a specific group of beings whose mission it is to “demonstrate the natural forces, they uphold natural processes.”<sup>9</sup> The world of faeries is connected with nature, “faeries are messengers of nature, entities closely connected to the Earth, forests, and natural phenomena” as Lucija accounts and adds:

“They are beings who perhaps have considerable communication ability, that is why I like to perceive them as messengers – something that manages to penetrate our consciousness in one way or another – whether visually or by communicating through messages, through an energy channel, and they actually represent something that brings the message of a river to me, which I perhaps could not interpret by myself just by looking at it.”

Perception of faeries as spirits or entities that inhabit the natural world, as manifestations of natural determinants (trees, mountains, water, rocks, etc.) is denoted by Andy Letcher (2001:156) as the animist worldview in which nature is filled with “spirit ecology” (to use Terrence Mc Kenneae’s expression) – ecology that is under threat due to human activity. Faeries are considered benign forces of nature and are thus disparate to humanity as malign, corrupt, and separate from its natural environment.

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<sup>8</sup> As told by Lidija, 47, on 29 May 2014.

<sup>9</sup> As told by Maja, 42, (who was using a pseudonym for the purpose of this paper) on 8 April 2014.

## WHAT IS FAERY PEDAGOGY?

The essence of exploring faery pedagogy and its main focus is on what is here and now. Discussing faeries within the context of faery pedagogy does not encompass only believing in faeries who reside in Croatian oral legends. Naturally, they are pointed to and in focus, but they are mentioned in the context of influence and presence of such beings/entities (in whatever aspect they manifest on the individual level) and legends in today's modern (*neopagan*) spiritualities in the context of re-examining societal dominance, raising environmental awareness, having a more benign relationship to nature, re-examining (non)human – animal relationships, etc. Therefore, I will be focusing on the spiritual and magical as well as everyday practices of some of the Croatian neopagan communities.

Nevertheless, in discussing the aspects of faery teachings, comparable to our new spiritualities and the faery pedagogy I will be using the term *faery*<sup>10</sup> to refer to Croatian psycho-spiritual reality, i.e. the entities that are described in many oral legends in folk imagery, and have kept their place in different forms of spirituality until modern times. The faery thus re-examines the societal dominance and oppression and is opposite to the destructive goals of global imperialism and cultural industry. As a practice, faery pedagogy gives the opportunity for rethinking the (non)human – animal relationships at the time of a global empire (according to Lewis and Kahn 2010:555–556):

“Linking spirituality and philosophical thinking to the land through faery cultures is for Stewart [recognized researcher of faeries, author's comment] ‘one method of restoring the land to health’ and thereby it may provide for the re-energization of compelling forms of ecological activism.” (ibid. 558)

For him faery pedagogy is not a form of escapism, but a political and environmental mind/body practice which warns of the dangers that threaten

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis and Kahn (2010:555) differentiate between *fairy*, as in fairy tales and are connected with fairy themed commercial products, and *faery*, a “paranormal, supernatural phenomena associated with spirits and magical experiences of being (*creatureliness*)”.

if we abandon our ancient roots in places where we live. Stewart suggest repeatedly in his writings that learning from faeries is ultimately learning how to relate to the land and to nature in a different, less aggressive and less exploitive manner (Lewis and Kahn 2010:558).

Furthermore, faery pedagogy can be observed as a form of Biopolitics in opposition to the dominant appearances of biopower that was discussed by Foucault at one time (1990). Also, as Stewart claims (according to Lewis and Kahn 2010:558–559) the tradition of Enlightenment has, just like capitalist globalism,

“transformed nature into mere raw material and submitted it to a means-end paradigm of utility that destroys imaginative links that otherwise serve to bind humans to the land through ethical practices of respect and admiration, but also fear.”

The biopolitical concept that is the starting point in the paper relies in part on Agamben (2006:7) and the claim that the main object of biopower is not the human body, which is subject to management, regulation and homogenization, but the prohibition of *zoe* “which expresses a simple fact of life that all living beings have in common [animals, human beings or gods]”. Agamben (ibid. 12) stresses that by putting biological life (*zoe*) in the centre of its calculations, the modern state is connecting power with bare living, but also politicizing it through alienating man from nature and ultimately controlling life of the society from the inside (Hardt and Negri 2000:24). The question is how to discover what having control over ourselves and autonomous living means. We could probably position the answer within the reality of student, worker, feminist, environmental, and another type of activism, where the practice of faery pedagogy could have a particular role within the context of eco-spirituality. Of course, its goal is to imaginatively and radically reconstruct the indestructible force of natural life (or *zoe*) in which the faery plays the role of an intermediary. In this regard, faeries should not be understood exclusively as subjective products of imagination:

“Rather, the faery is more properly conceived as that which contains and gives shape to the forces of nature – forces that are themselves agents in the imaginative schematization process. For example, Stewart’s

concept of the “underworld” is a presentation of the “unknowable” that lies “beyond expression” yet nevertheless finds expression through our reconstruction of ancient faery myths in light of pressing, very real ecological problems.” (Lewis and Kahn 2010:560)

I mentioned faery subcultures previously – the term denotes “practitioners” or participants of the faery pedagogy practice. When discussing faery subcultures, it is important to mention where they are located – gatherings, conferences and environmental protests have found fertile ground in the United Kingdom (somewhat less in some other parts of Europe) and the USA. That is to say, there are whole organizations, such as *Fairy Congress*, that hold annual meetings to which they invite international representatives of both worlds, human and faery:

“Indeed, *Fairy congress* founded its statute on the mission to educate on establishing dialogue that connects faeries and humans so that they can learn from each other and foster better relationships between the two worlds.” (Lewis and Kahn 2010:557)

At these and similar gatherings many faery workshops are held which use different traditional themes, images and techniques in order to enable a change of consciousness in individuals and groups upon which they can enter the faery kingdom and encounter faery beings. On a more advanced level, the dialogue between humans and faeries develops, during which the above mentioned participants act as allies.

“Combining meditation, narrations of stories, and working with dreams, Stewart presumes that a human student can enter the changed state in which new alliances between humans, faeries, and other non-human beings can join forces against environmental degradation.” (Lewis and Kahn 2010:558)

In Europe (especially in the United Kingdom) and North America there are numerous annual neopagan assemblies that serve as a kind of faery gatherings/festivals of the *new age* movement. Some of their aspects are considerably commercialized and reintegrated in the capitalist system. I shall mention only a few examples: annual neopagan gathering in the open

or ELFest which can be referred to as a faery festival. It was initiated by *Elf Lore Family* (ELF) organization, which was later renamed Elvin H.O.M.E. (*Holy Order of Mother Earth*).

Apart from neopagan faery festivals, the eco-pagan protest spiritual movement can also be observed within the context of faery pedagogy. Protests of this kind mainly comprise of those opposing road construction on certain routes that threaten faery habitats. Their participants in the USA come from the radical environmentalist tradition: *Earth First!*, a radical environmental group established in 1979 and *Green Anarchy* – a group having post-left anarchist environmentalist orientation, and militant groups such as *Environmental Life Force* and ELF (*Earth Liberation Front*). In the United Kingdom demonstrations against extending M3, M11, A30, and *Newbury Pass* were held by eco-pagans who were organized by Anti-Roads movement, probably the most powerful rudimentary political movements in the world in the 1990s.

As regards spiritualities of these movements, Andy Letcher (2001:147) explicates that faeries/faery mythology inspired such counter-cultural movements, faeries with which movement participants very often identified themselves through creativity, primarily poetry and songs<sup>11</sup>.

Consequently, it is important to say that neither protests nor festivals, such as those mentioned in the Croatian neopagan communities, have become a practice (yet). In the context of the British and American eco/spiritual movements that were mentioned, faery pedagogy cannot be correlated to newly created spiritualities in Croatia simply because they have not become practices yet and neopaganism does not enjoy great popularity in Croatia.

We can conclude that faery pedagogy is not a practice which is connected exclusively to one form of (neo/eco) pagan spirituality within the spiritual practices of the *new age* movement, but can be a part of numerous spiritual practices and movements, even individual preferences. In view of the fact that we are observing faery pedagogy as a practice and not as a form

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<sup>11</sup> *Pixie People* (1999) by Space Goats was one of the songs performed at protest camps whose lyrics ask a problem question: *Who are the Pixie people, are you one of the fairy folk? Do you like this planet, or do you want to see it go up in smoke?*) (according to Letcher 2001:150).

of spirituality, some of its segments can be applied to numerous systematic (neo)pagan spiritualities including some Croatian groups.

## NEOPAGANISM IN CROATIA

If we disregard the broad spectre of spiritualities in the *new age* movement and focus on (neo)pagan religious practices in Croatia, it is evident that the distribution of neopagan communities is fairly low. In fact, only Croatian Native Faith community, Pagan Federation International – Croatia (PFI), and Pagan Circle of Croatia (PKH) stand out as active communities with certain level of organization. I emphasise two communities which were studied – Native Faith community and Pagan Federation International – Croatia. Both communities (explored in the paper) are rather young and, apart from individual research papers, have not been systematically researched in the context of spiritual and religious communities and movements in Croatia. Given that the paper focuses on the faery pedagogy practices and their possible presence in Croatian neopaganism, the Native Faith community and the Pagan Federation International – Croatia will be explored and shown within this context exclusively.

**Croatian Native Faith community** has a relatively strong structure and organization. In this regard, Native Faith of course refers to Slavic Native Faith or native faith which implies a form of living in line with the Old Slavic and Croatian faith, with the fully expressed consciousness of modern times. Therefore, in discussing Native Faith spirituality it is important to say that it is not a pre-Christian fertility cult but a form of post-Christian spirituality. We should bear in mind that it does not involve the direct experience of what once was, but of what came after<sup>12</sup>. Native Faith is

“(…) a continuously developing and evolving form of belief and spiritual and magical practices that can change and adapt to the needs of modern man, and which ‘is returning to its sources after a long period of forced alienation from nature and indoctrinated fear from

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<sup>12</sup> As told by Deniver on 1 August 2013.

it'. It involves conscious choice and personal reasons for the practice as a spiritual and magical concept which draws on the source of pre-Christian forms of belief of the Slavic spiritual world. It is not just a folklore attempt at reconstructing past beliefs and practices, but a way of living that follows the adapted foundations of the old Slavic belief with the full consciousness of modern times." ("Rodnovjerje")

Moreover, Native Faith also includes the ancestor worship cult and old Slavic deities that personify and anthropomorphize the creative and destructive energies of nature according to the Slavic cultural traditions.

Croatian Native Faith members are under the influence of global knowledge and they base their religious but also scientific learning and positions to a large extent on the ethnology and cultural anthropology, and philology books by Croatian scholars Vitomir Belaj (*The Walk within a Year*, 1998 and 2007) and Radoslav Katičić (*Divine Battle: tracing the sacred songs of our Slavic pre-Christian antiquity*, 2008; *Green Grove*, 2010 and *Landlady at the Door*, 2011).

In view of the organizational structure of the Native Faith community, the Croatian Native Faith Federation (CNFF) represents the umbrella organization of Native Faith associations in Croatia and unites Native Faith communities from all over Croatia. CNFF was established in September 2013 on the occasion of signing the *Žumberak Agreement on the Croatian Native Faith Federation* by the representatives of two Native Faith communities – Perunica (Zagreb) and Perun (Učka). In 2011 a non-profit association *Perunova svetinja* (Perun's Shrine) was established and registered in Lovran.

The important days in the Slavic calendar, as well as in the Croatian Native Faith practices, are connected with the Sun's journey through the year, i.e. winter solstice, summer solstice and spring and autumn equinoxes. Ritual practices and festival celebrations of the Croatian Rodnoveris are evident in their ritual gatherings/bonfires (Croatian: krijes) that take place in the natural environment.

**Pagan Federation International - Croatia** or just **Pagan Federation Croatia** is a branch of the Pagan Federation International (PFI), a registered, non-profit and non-government organization established in 1971 in the UK.

As its members state, PFI is not a religious or spiritual organization, but an organization that deals with the protection of human rights, working for greater visibility and legal recognition of *pagans* in Croatia. PFI's goals are "to educate about paganism and promote it in the wider community by continuously bringing pagans closer together through web sites and internationally and locally organized events (...)" ("cro.paganfederation", http). Furthermore, PFI follows three principles in their goals, namely: 1. Love and cooperation with nature. Respect for the energy of life with its eternal renewal of life and death cycles; 2. Positive morality in which every person is responsible for discovering and developing their own nature of working in harmony with the external world and the community. This is encapsulated in the principle – "Do what you want as long as you do not hurt anybody"; 3. Awareness of the Divine that is beyond gender and acknowledging both female and male aspects of the Divine.

PFI started working in November 2011; it has got six active members, who are the organizers of gatherings and rituals. Also, there are 35 other PFI members who are more or less passive. Members meet once a week at the so-called "moots", i.e. *pagan meetings* where association activities and organizational matters are discussed.

As an association which, apart from protecting human rights, also performs rituals and organizes spiritual activities, PFI is especially eclectic in choosing their religious and spiritual positions. PFI members celebrate eight big annual solar festivals, which coincide with the basic Wiccan festivals. In celebrating the above mentioned festivals, old magic rituals that are based on working with the four elements and four directions are used. Apart from solar festivals, lunar forces are also celebrated, albeit on a smaller scale during the full Moon – *esbats*.

#### FAERY PEDAGOGY IN THE CROATIAN NEOPAGAN COMMUNITIES' PRACTICES

Based on what has already been stated, it is clear on which basis it is possible to observe similarities between the spiritual and magical practices of the Croatian neopagan communities and some aspects of faery pedagogy. In gathering narrations for the paper there was a symptomatic moment in the overall attempt to find connections between some aspects of faery pedagogy and the spiritual and magical, i.e. living practices of the Croatian neopagans.

Namely, believing in faeries could be observed in most interview partners, however those beliefs frequently lacked the crucial or direct influence on their religious and everyday practices within the educational context that is evident in the faery pedagogy in the UK or the USA as its essential aspect. In this respect, we cannot discuss Croatian neopagans' spiritual and everyday practices as being identical with the faery pedagogy practices because their activist, social and spiritual worldviews are not *directly* but indirectly motivated by the experience of having contacts with faeries, believing in them or in the myths and legends about them. That is to say, believing in the existence of faeries as natural energies and their manifestations is a part of the overall neopagan spirituality and the way of life that accompanies it.

Therefore, it is possible to consider the correlations and overlapping of the spiritual and magical, and everyday neopagan practices with those of faery pedagogy within the complex worldviews held by Croatian neopagans. Nevertheless, many segments of the faery pedagogy in the broad sense, can be observed in many aspects of the Croatian neopagan spiritualities, although they are not identical. In this context, I would like to underline that the experiential or imaginary relationship with faery entities is not necessarily the basis for discussing faery pedagogy aspects in this paper. Instead, I would like to draw the attention to the social and transformational practices of the interviewees. In view of the fact that both studied communities are exceptionally eclectic, as was already mentioned, it is not possible to look for a single pattern of belief.

In this regard, based on the interviewees' accounts, within the complex of their spirituality and everyday practices that are related to it, I shall try to compare faery, i.e. the spiritual sources of knowledge, with the religious and everyday practices and knowledge of the interview partners.

#### FAERY SPHERE OF CROATIAN NATIVE FAITH COMMUNITY

Croatian Native Faith is exceptionally compatible with some aspects of faery pedagogy. Although, some interviewees, when asked how they personally perceived faeries, explained that they did not have the need to call certain natural forces or manifestations faery, others mentioned that they believed in faeries as the remnants of collective consciousness and energy while pointing out their personal experiences and encounters with faery entities. How and why do the encounters with faeries and other energy entities occur? Sonja, a

member of the Native Faith community explained the difference between how faeries are perceived today and how they were seen by our ancestors:

“If you see them, you don’t; if they catch you looking at them, you don’t talk about them, young people today have the need to see them. Our ancestors feared seeing them or coming upon a faery ring, even if there were no faeries but only markings of a faery ring. Today’s generations mostly really want to have some kind of contact with faeries and woodland entities. (...) This means that the fear, which was present in old legends, has disappeared in pagan communities today, and was replaced by *curiosity* – What are faeries? What do they look like? There is a different way of perceiving these energies, a different system of using energy – directing energy – *new age* has stirred up folklore curiosity, not only in merely studying it but also in attempting to experience it.”

An interviewee, who is using the name Filip for the purpose of the paper, ascribes his experience of faeries in part to his ex girlfriend. She is a Wiccan who sincerely believes in faeries and is raising her children to believe in them, too. Filip calls the experience, which he did not fully articulate or explain, his grave mistake. Although he did not want to describe it in detail, it is possible to discern from his account that he had experienced an encounter with faery entities that attracted him with their energy which had had an adverse effect on him. After the “unpleasant experience”, Filip explains his point of view:

“(...) I put a barrier between the energy world of entities and myself because I realized that I was too green for such a powerful sphere as they are. They are not [faeries, N/A] evil so much as curious. Hence, they do not feel love or hate. In order to get it, they draw us in and then what happens is the story about a peasant, who got tangled up with them in a ring and sang. (...) So, they are not bad so much as they simply do not understand that we cannot join them in the ring, because their energy charge and ours are like chalk and cheese. We are 12 volts to them, and they are a generator unit of 50 000 volts for us, we are too weak for them. And then, when a person inadvertently enters their ring, let’s call it a ring, they mostly lose because our bodies cannot take such a strong energy charge. After that weird experience, which was actually great, I got frightened. I know that I should continue one day, because I am a *Krijesnik*\* in the Native Faith group, I am in charge of fire, which I have not and will never invoke.”

Furthermore, Filip talks about experiences with faeries as household entities, and adds that it is a matter of exchange of things, a *swap* between two worlds. He goes on to explain that most people, in this regard, are not aware of the existence of faeries although we can encounter them in our own flats.

Finally, he remarks:

“And if one day you hear any neopagan or Native Faith person in Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia or wherever, tell you that they do not believe in faeries, as far as I am concerned they are not Native Faith folks, because it means you do not believe in the elements, which are of crucial importance if you claim to worship nature itself.”

#### RITUAL AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF THE CROATIAN NATIVE FAITH COMMUNITY

As I have previously stated, faery pedagogy is characterized by neopagan proclivity for collective gatherings. When we focus on the Native Faith community, we are talking about bonfires which are held exclusively in natural surroundings secluded from urban environment. This enables the participants to have a different feeling of place, space, time, but also identity. Most commonly the ritual of a bonfire is led by a *žrec* (supreme priest). Bonfires last for two to three days and have two aspects. One is general, educational, ethnological and traditional, which consists of workshops and lectures held in order to pass the traditional, historical, and ethnology knowledge to both new and old members so that the members know what it is that Native Faith community members do and why<sup>13</sup>. The other aspect of bonfires is the ritual/magical or spiritual one that relies on

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\* *Krijesnik* is a Sacred Flame keeper in the Native Faith group.

<sup>13</sup> In Native Faith community there is a noticeable identity framework based on spiritual commitment, which makes them members of the community. As Valdimar Tr. Halfstein (2000:88) puts it, this is about “the construction of otherness” (in relation to the mainstream, modern ways of living) and the ways that Native Faith spirituality is experienced in social interaction with other members, but also with people in general. Authentication within Native Faith community is based precisely on the collective identity which the community maintains through modifying Old Slavic myths and beliefs, with particular focus on anti-globalization, with developed consciousness that the Earth and its protection are essential, together with all its immanent beings, energies, etc.

traditional bonfires to a certain extent and involves ritual celebration, the lighting of fire and many magical acts such as the ritual of jumping over the fire, ritual baths or wreath weaving, etc. Since something is being taken from Nature, something needs to be given back to it in the form of gifts (sacrificial offerings in the past). When bonfires are lit, recitals are spoken, created by reconstructing and connecting folk songs and legends into an amalgamation of song and story.

When bonfires are organized, special attention is given to discouraging the use of anything made of plastic, i.e. plastic bags or bottles, and similar materials that pollute the environment. Bonfire organizers emphasise: “Let us respect nature, she is our Mother!” (“Jarilovo”, [http](http://)). Food and drinks are brought and eaten or drunk from metal, glass or wooden containers to the extent possible, which later end up as waste or in nature. Also, they insist on preparing and bringing home made foods and meals. A part of the prepared food is given as *gift* to the gods and nature.

Deniver explains that awareness of the need to preserve nature and of its overall endangered state is exceptionally present in the Native Faith community and gaining prominence:

“Our people started making their own wine and brandy, beer, honey. They make bread, cakes, and jams. In cooperation with nature an excellent exchange takes place without being necessarily taken out of the modern artificial world.”

We could say that *contemporary* tradition, both in the Native Faith community and Pagan Federation International (which will be shown later in the paper) denotes a metaphor for social change, as Halfstein pointed out (2000:96). That is to say, in constructing the contemporary living and spiritual practices various (faerie) myths and legends are used in order to compare the past with the present. Moreover, Halfstein continues, and uses the term *contemporary tradition* again, it contains the narrative framework for discussing the importance of social change and its influence on the cultural system of values and identity (ibid).

On the other hand, prominent spiritual and everyday practices of Native Faith members are a part of a worldview in which it is possible to observe characteristics of and similarities with faerie pedagogy practices.

Many members of the Native Faith group shape their personal lives based on the relationship with the Earth and nature that they worship. The reason why we cannot discuss faery pedagogy and Croatian Native Faith members' (and neopagans' in general) practices as being identical lies in the fact that environmental activism, collective gatherings with a crucial educational element to them, taking care of nature, alternative dietary choices and similar practices do not necessarily derive from the faery sources of knowledge. These practices are a result of a more general worldview, whose components, although different to faery pedagogy aspects, are very much intertwined and cannot be observed separately.

#### IMPACT OF FAERY PEDAGOGY ON THE SPIRITUAL AND LIVING PRACTICES OF THE PAGAN FEDERATION INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS

Using the information collected in individual and group interviews, I shall try to present the similarities between PFI members' practices and certain aspects of faerie pedagogy. Furthermore, there is a clear presence of eco-feminist spirituality in PFI members' practices. Namely, spiritualities are based on the concept of the immanent Goddess/spirituality, i.e. on the Earth that plays a crucial role in personal change which will subsequently influence social change (Geiger 2006:67). The essence of eco-feminist spirituality is seen as transcending the dualistic views of the Western world through a kind of *revival* and return to the woman- and Earth-centred cultures – under the slogan: Goddess is all (ibid. 99). It is a particular type of post-patriarchal religion and the essence of eco-feminist spirituality concept is that all spiritual postulates are applied in everyday life and work as immanent in us, which is evident in PFI members' practices.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Taking into account the complexity and a great number of possible linkages between PFI members' practices with eco-feminism, which could be discussed in a separate paper, I would like to refer to some of the authors in Croatia who dealt with eco-feminism and the issue of eco-feminist spiritualities in more detail – Geiger, Marija. 2002. *Spiritual aspects of eco-feminism*; Galić, Branka and Marija Geiger. 2007. *From the logics of dominance to the ethics of caring. Conceptual bases of eco-feminism*; Hrvoje Jurić. 2007. *Women and nature. Addenda to eco-feminism critique*, and others.

In line with this, my twenty-one-year-old interviewee Tena, who is both the youngest research participant and the most agile neopagan spirituality practitioner, declares herself to be a polytheistic *neopagan* and bases her spirituality on worshipping gods, i.e. “new ways of worshipping things from the past and returning to tradition”. This is suggestive of the warning from faery pedagogy that it is necessary to take care of our ancient roots in places where we live (c.f. Lewis and Kahn 2010:558). She works with crystals, herbs, and herbal preparations.

She points out that faeries are an essential part of her own practice, both in giving offerings (to gods and nature) and in her work with herbs. Moreover, she attributes her rich experiences with faeries to a faery, whom she says she has seen. It was during Litha festival or summer Solstice celebrations on 21 June. It is customary to light a bonfire during the festival:

“I lit a bonfire and it began to burn and crackle. I had my back towards the fire when I heard a crackling and saw a small ember get out of the fire at eye level, almost two meters above the ground. Then an orange flame appeared that was glowing unlike any other flame. It stayed for a few seconds at eye level and then disappeared. Afterwards, when I was meditating on that spot, I saw a tiny creature dancing in the fire. Of course, this can be a product of my imagination or my mind playing tricks. On the other hand, seeing that being could have been the message I had given myself.”

Tena’s activism is connected with spiritual and magical practices and beliefs – “owing to my relationship with the Goddess and faeries I find inspiration to act on the practical level”, these words echo the eco-activist attitude, which takes faery myths and contacts with the faery world as a starting point and is against the dominant forms of power as can be observed in faery pedagogy practices (Lewis and Kahn 2010:555–556).

My interviewee Maja declares herself a gnostic and belongs to a Thelemic mystical order *Ordo Templi Orientis* (O.T.O.). She is a naturalist by profession and she points out that she does not consider herself to be religious, therefore she does not believe in the supernatural but understands and feels Nature experientially. She views faery beings as a group of beings whose mission it is to demonstrate the force of nature; they are beings who support the processes of nature. Understanding faeries as manifestations

of the forces of nature is very similar to the way faery pedagogy explains faeries as forms of Biopolitics opposed to the dominant forms of biopower in which a faery represents “something that contains and gives shape to the forces of nature – forces that are themselves agents in the imaginative schematization process” (Lewis and Kahn 2010:560). Maja says that she is certain that faeries exist. They are very much present in her life.

She explains that she can feel faery presence in a very simple way namely as energy. Along these lines, she narrated an experience she had during a walk around the Jarun Lake in Zagreb when she was studying particular trees, i.e. the energy flow in places where the trees grow. She asked the faeries whether they were present, whereupon her “inner voice” took her to a tree that had a hole near its base, partially covered by mushrooms, which she associated with a “forest of mushrooms”.

She adds that in her communication with faeries, they (or “beings that are not visible to everyone in our space and time, because they don’t know how to ‘see’ them”) almost always give her specific messages. Messages are usually conveyed when she works with the energies of the Earth and nature:

“When we need an insight from their perspective, what needs to be done, what they need, how they can help us... they often give me images, symbols, practices. For example, not long ago I participated in a LifeNet gathering in Sweden where I was given a Gaia Touch movement to use during exchange of experiences with the world of faeries, it was conveyed to me through small plants that grew there. There was a symbol that repeatedly appeared for me in different natural formations such as trees, stones... I also received information in the form of cosmograms for each place. (...) Sometimes you receive signs through the movement itself, you have a feeling that something needs to be done in a certain place. Messages also come by way of gifts, which I like to leave for them [faeries and elementary spirits, N/A.]”

In nature preservation she also uses faery myths, that is to say she reconstructs and applies them in her own practice. This aspect is exceptionally analogous with faery pedagogy practices, based on the fact that reconstructed faery myths are used in nature preservation and environmental activism. Apart from being engaged in nature protection on

the material plane, she also participates in certain groups that work with energy points of the Earth and space. Faery beings, angels, elementary spirits, etc. have a prominent position in their work because they establish the Earth energy flows, and sometimes manifest themselves visually. She points out the School of Geomancy that she attended in Zagreb, led by Marko Pogačnik, Slovenian artist, environmentalist, and spiritual teacher (“markopogacnik.com”, [http](http://markopogacnik.com)).

Anita, 42, a member and PFI national coordinator and activist at the Animal Friends Croatia association, considers herself a witch, a *pagan*, a polytheist and a devotee of natural religion and magic. She points out that all the mentioned religious determinants are a part of her everyday life and practices. Anita explains that she lives and works according to the principle: “Guard our Mother Earth and nurture her”. This attitude influences her everyday and social life, the way she is bringing up children, and her vegan diet. She is an active member of the Animal Friends Croatia, where she hosts vegan and vegetarian cooking workshops, participates in the organization of many actions and protests and fights for the protection of animal rights internationally.

Anita’s spiritual practices are analogous with some aspects of faery pedagogy because her everyday life is based on these religious and spiritual principles. She is devoted to environmental activism, and clearly has a different attitude towards the oppressed groups of people and animals, which is at the same time an aspect of faery pedagogy that advocates rethinking human/non-human animal relations in the age of global Empire (Lewis and Kahn 2010:555–556). Anita did not mention experiences with faeries or other otherworldly beings, although she believes in them. This minimizes the possibility of learning and acquiring the above mentioned spiritual and practical knowledge based on the experiential meetings with faeries.

Furthermore, Lidija, 40, is a follower of eclectic Wicca, in that she respects the basic Wicca principles, but works “alone”; she does not belong to any covens nor does she wish to. She has never participated in any gatherings or rituals with others, but designs and performs rituals by herself. She says that faeries have been present in her life since childhood, through folk legends in which they were always connected with natural elements

and as imaginary links to nature with absolutely positive connotations. In Lidija's spirituality faeries are connected with water, trees, air, rain, sea, plants, and stones or take the *forms of divinity*, i. e. of universal forces that impart peaceful sleep.

As a parent and a school teacher, Lidija feels that she can use her spiritual practice and faeries as an excellent medium through which she can reach children and influence their awareness and consciousness about the proper attitude to nature:

“When I work with children, I start by describing a faery with them (different ways in which children perceive them in their mind). Most often they are gentle and delicate and as such, using a soft narrating voice and a soft touch if needed, so they gain a lot of children's trust. Elfs are more like little boys, rascals, and they are affable to children because they personify vivaciousness. Therefore, if you lose something, an elf will play with you first, but then he is certain to give it back. Thunder was made by an elf (actually an imitation of St. Elijah) who was angry because he ran out of juice. Faeries inhabit plants and trees, they lead us through the woods where we can have fun and not be afraid. The wind in the tree tops is a woodland faeries' song, the waves are sea faeries' song, etc. When she worked with children Lidija asked them to close their eyes and imagine a beautiful old tree with a faery castle in it. Then she asked them to imagine that somebody was felling this tree for no reason. In this way they understood that faeries were losing their home for no reason. I encouraged them to imagine THEIR faery with whom they could secretly talk about anything that was troubling them and they didn't want to tell anybody else. It was a kind of therapy.”

Lidija's spiritual practice, which is connected to Wicca, neopaganism, and faery omnipresence, is comparable to certain segments of faery pedagogy within the context of activist efforts in encouraging the desirable forms of environmental activism and awareness raising, i.e. increasing the collective consciousness about the necessity of behaving less aggressively towards the Earth (c.f. Lewis and Kahn 2010:558). Lidija uses faeries for the purpose of education in an attempt to inspire better attitude to nature and transfer knowledge about the damaging and destructive global politics goals. In this way, children are using their imagination to develop

their awareness of the proper attitude to nature. Lidija thinks similarly about naturism (she considers it a form of ritual in the broad sense, which environmental overtones) and advocates it.

Lidija connects her learning from faeries with the death of her grandfather, with whom she was very close. Soon after her grandfather's death, whenever she was in doubt, a butterfly would appear to her, which she described as the faery of her grandfather's soul. If she followed the butterfly-faery, a solution to the dilemma or a problem would soon present itself.

“I never expected or invoked the butterfly (faery of her grandfather's soul). Now I only register the moments when it appears (because a ‘connection’ has developed between us) – usually when I try to hide something from myself or when I carry a heavy burden inside and I don't want to admit it to myself, some insight that frightens me because I should change something, etc. Then I write about the appearance in my Faery Journal (which looks a bit like a Book of Shadows) so that I constantly follow my development through the story with my grandfather via butterfly-faery. Sometimes, I write about trivial matters (I discover that there are medicinal plants in my surroundings which I press and categorize, like a herbarium), at other times about important life matters (I discover that I have the ability to write children's poetry). Thus I keep in touch with my grandfather who is not dead but is in some other parallel reality. And that in itself is a significant insight, isn't it?”

#### RITUAL PRACTICES OF PFI MEMBERS

Collective festivities and rituals are one of the main traits of PFI members' spiritual practices. My interviewee Goran explains that their gatherings mark changes in the cycles of nature:

“There are different symbolic acts, which include many elements, whether archetypal or imaginary. A circle is an archetypal element, standing in a circle. What is outside of the circle is being connected with what is inside it, thus invoking a positive reaction. It is not about supernatural concepts, but about symbolic acts.”

Tena states that one typically finds that there is a balance between the educational and ritual/spiritual content in ritual gatherings. Before Tena

performed her initiatory ritual (Imbolc, February) in 2012, which brought together the interested persons at a public gathering for the first time in Croatia, and which Tena had designed and performed herself, rituals were mainly practiced independently.

In fact, collaboration with faeries is evident in Tena's ritual practices and her work with plants. She experiences them as some kind of helpers on the ethereal plane in that she worships them in order to have a better relationship with them as entities who help her during planting and boost the yield, or so that they are present at ritual performances. Nevertheless, Tena's knowledge on plants and on working with faeries as otherworldly entities is not the result of her communication with faeries, or their sharing knowledge with her in the sense that is characteristic of the seventeen-century-long faery practices, but of faeries manifesting themselves as protectors, spiritual helpers. It is evident that she is learning from faeries by studying manuals on faeries and doing magical rituals with them.

Furthermore, on the subject of ritual acts Maja adds:

“At gatherings we take special care of Nature because She is the one whose changes we celebrate. In some gatherings more than others, but it is always insisted that our stay in nature, even if it's in somebody's courtyard, remain as little invasive as possible and that we do not disturb the beings who live there – whether they be plants and animals or faery beings, etc.”

## CONCLUSION

After completing the research it has become evident that certain spheres of Croatian neopagans' spiritual and practical activities observed in the practices of studied communities can be connected with aspects of faery pedagogy. It has to be said that faery and neopagan practices that were compared in the paper cannot be considered identical because they are a part of a complex Croatian neopagans' worldview, which in many ways overlaps with aspects and forms of faery pedagogy.

In speaking about faeries in Croatian neopaganism, based on the interviewees' accounts, it can be observed that the faery sphere is set in a natural environment where faeries often represent energy manifestations

of nature, as the remnants of collective energy in the environment, i.e. in natural places.<sup>15</sup> In view of the above mentioned accounts, it is clear that we should consider faeries (in this paper at any rate) in a close connection to nature bearing in mind that they are not identical to nature but to the beings that are immanent in it.

In explicating the spiritual and everyday practices of neopagans in Croatia, it must be mentioned that these practices do not necessarily derive directly from faery sources of knowledge, such as the seventeen-century-long faery practices, but are indirectly shaped by the individual spiritualities which can, but do not need to, be under the influence of contacts with faeries. Insisting on faeries and other otherworldly entities derives from the fact that faery pedagogy does not insist on experiences only with faeries but includes experiences with other non-human beings or energies (thus pointing to different forms of faery pedagogy), in connection with communities devoted to ghosts and the undead.

An important piece of information gathered during the interviews with Croatian neopagans is the fact that spiritual and magical practices and rituals not only influence but also shape the everyday life of the studied communities' members (spiritual and everyday lives are intertwined and interconnected). That is why some interlocutors thought that by using reconstruction and faery myths they could bring about a change of awareness in their community. This, on the other hand, hints at the reformation potential of myths and legends in the spirituality of the studied communities' members. They represent identity frameworks which open the possibility of considering the necessity of social change, but also undoubtedly encourage activism.

Finally, faery pedagogy represents the *pedagogy of the oppressed* – those who are re-exercising their monopoly over the primordial right to alternative ways of living that involve a symbiotic relationship to the natural environment and require sustainability and caring for the Earth as our nurturing Mother. It is precisely these small spiritualities and practices of individuals that are slowly but surely changing the awareness of the

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<sup>15</sup> As told by Sonja on 1 August 2013.

necessity of environmental activism in their surroundings. They reflect a kind of biopolitics that is opposed to the dominant forms of biopower – especially those that have a direct impact on people’s bodies and influence their health.

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## INTERVIEW PARTNERS

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Sonja, Zagreb, interview on 1 August 2013

Filip (pseudonym), Zagreb, interview on 1 August 2013

Deniver, Zagreb, interview on 1 August 2013

Anita, Zagreb, 42 years old, interview on 22 February 2014

Tena, Zagreb/Županja, 21 years old, interviews on 22 February 2014, 23 March and 25 March 2014; 13 April 2014

Goran, Zagreb, interview on 22 February 2014

Maja (pseudonym), Zagreb, 42 years old, interview on 8 April 2014

Lucija, Zagreb, 33 years old, interview on 29 March 2014

Lidija, Zagreb, 47 years old, interview on 29 May 2014