

UNIVERSITY "UNION - NIKOLA TESLA"



*Nikola Tesla*

**THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGIES**

# PROCEEDINGS



**22-23 SEPTEMBER 2023  
CARA DUŠANA 62-64, BELGRADE, SERBIA**

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## CONTENT:

### Plenary lectures:

<b>Josep Muntañola Thornberg</b> ARCHITECTURE AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR BETWEEN TECHNICS AND CIVILIZATION:ONE INTRODUCTION .....	11
<b>Suzana Brown</b> BUILDING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY USING OSTROM FRAMEWORK: TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED GLOCAL APPROACH .....	17
<b>Mirjana Vojinović Miloradov, Miljan Šunjević</b> SORPTION AND TRANSPORT PHENOMENA OF HAZARDOUS CHEMICAL ENTITIES ON SUSPENDED PARTICLES .....	33
<b>Nebojša Zakić</b> DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ECO-INNOVATIONS .....	41

### Lectures:

<b>Ilić Predrag, Nešković Markić Dragana, Stojanović Bjelić Ljiljana, Sanja Mrazovac Kurilić, Zia Ur Rahman Farooqi, Muhammad Yousuf Jat Baloch, Mohamed Hassan Mohamed, Ahmed Mohamed Ali</b> POLYCHLORINATED BIPHENYLS CONTAMINATION HOTSPOT: A REVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AT THE INDUSTRIAL SITE .....	61
<b>Miljan Šunjević, Mirjana Vojinović Miloradov, Maja Sremački, Dejana Nedučin</b> ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS AS A PART OF URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS AND MIGRATIONS AFTER COVID EPIDEMIC .....	71
<b>Nataša Sarap, Marija Janković, Jelena Krneta Nikolić, Milica Rajačić, Ivana Vukanac, Marija Šljivić-Ivanović, Ivana Jelić, Hadi Waisi</b> SEASONAL VARIATIONS OF <sup>3</sup> H IN SAVA RIVER .....	81

<b>Mimica Milošević, Dušan Milošević, Ana Stanojević</b> SELECTION OF SOIL REMEDIATION TECHNIQUE USING AHP METHOD .....	89
<b>Stoimenov Suzana, Gračanac Aleksandar, Kajtez Ilija</b> ETHICAL PRINCIPLE DURING GREEN PROCUREMENT IN SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS .....	99
<b>Aleksandra Ivanov, Željko Stanković, Jasmina Perišić</b> DIGITAL COMPETENCES OF TEACHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL .....	107
<b>Olja Krčadinac, Saša Ljubojević and Branko Latinović</b> ANALYSIS OF DATA ON FORESTS COLLECTED THROUGH REMOTE DETECTION AT THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA .....	117
<b>Ana Rajković, Dragana Vasilski</b> POSSIBILITIES OF APPLICATION OF INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGIES USING THE ASPECT OF HOUSING COMFORT IN RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN BELGRADE BUILT DURING THE 1970s .....	123
<b>Tatjana Ilić-Kosanović, Damir Ilić</b> BUSINESS MODELS IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC .....	133
<b>Tatjana Ilić-Kosanović, Isidora Milošević, Damir Ilić</b> METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCHING SMART CITIES AND SMART PEOPLE – A REVIEW .....	141
<b>Dušan Aničić, Vuk Miletić, Olgica Nestorović, Milenko Čeha</b> CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF SHADOW ECONOMY IN SERBIA .	149
<b>Jugoslav Aničić, Ana Anufrijević, Marijana Milunović</b> ECONOMIC SYSTEMS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY .....	159
<b>Miloš V. Simičić, Ljiljana Nikolić-Bujanović</b> ELECTROCHEMICAL ENERGY STORAGE IN SUSTAINABLE MODERN SOCIETY ...	169
<b>Ljiljana Gulan, Marija Mitrović, Lazar Živković, Aleksandra Grujić</b> CONTRIBUTION OF BUILDING MATERIALS TO GAMMA DOSE RATES IN AIR .....	179



<b>Boris Latinović, Bojana Ostojić, Olja Krčadinac and Željko Stanković</b> SOCIO-MARKETING ASPECTS OF THE APPLICATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION .....	185
<b>Gorica Ljubenov</b> FORMS OF THE PRESERVATION OF MARITIME HERITAGE: THE HOTEL AND PASSENGER SHIP “SVETI STEFAN” .....	201
<b>Ružica Micić, Jovana Acković</b> DETERMINATION OF TRACES OF PSEUDO-CONTENT OF THORIUM, URANIUM AND THALLIUM IN SOIL BY ICP-MS METHOD .....	211
<b>Dušan Milošević, Mimica Milošević-Dragan Stević</b> ESTIMATION OF THE FOREST VEGETATION REFLECTANCE BASED ON SPECTRAL MEASUREMENTS .....	217
<b>Marina Milovanović; Jasmina Perišić; Ivana Petrović; Maja Vrbanac; Dragana Božilović-Đokić</b> USEFULNESS OF SPSS SUPPORT IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING .....	227
<b>Vesna Mišković-Stanković, Katarina Nešović, Ana Janković, Tamara Radetić, Aleksandra Perić-Grujić, Maja Vukašinović-Sekulić, Vesna Kojić, Kyong Yop Rhee</b> BIOCOMPATIBLE ANTIBACTERIAL HYDROGELS FOR MEDICAL APPLICATIONS .....	233
<b>Lazar Milivojević, Sanja Mrazovac Kurilić, Zvonimir Božilović, Predrag Ilić, Heidi Huntreiser and Goran Gašparac</b> ANN MODEL OF AIR QUALITY ON THE CONSTRUCTION SITE .....	241
<b>Violeta Nikolić and Nataša Džunuzović</b> IMPROVED PROPERTIES OF ALTERNATIVE BINDERS AND THEIR POTENTIAL APPLICATION FOR SOIL STABILIZATION .....	253
<b>Jasmina Perišić, Marina Milovanović, Maja Vrbanac, Ivana Petrović, Dragana Božilović-Đokić</b> IMPLEMENTATION OF SEMANTIC MAPPING OF RELATIONAL DATABASES .....	261
<b>Rista Popović, Dragana Vasilski</b> RESIDENTAL CONSTRUCTION OF ENERGOPROJEKT FORM THE VIEW OF SUISTAINABILITY AND ENERGY EFFICEINCY .....	273

<b>Tatjana Kosić, Suzana Koprivica, Ivana Stošić</b> BIOPHILIA - NATURAL LAYERS IN INTERIOR DESIGN .....	283
<b>Bojan Vapa, Jelena Vapa Tankosić</b> EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK IN THE POST COVID GREEN TRANSITION .....	291
<b>Lejla Vujičić, Irena Parović</b> RETHINKING ARCHITECTURAL OBJECT: THOUGHTS ON ADAPTIVE REUSE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE .....	301
<b>Marija Janković, Nataša Sarap, Hadi Waisi, Jelena Krneta Nikolić, Milica Rajačić, Ivana Vukanac, Filip Veljković, Bojan Janković</b> GROSS ALPHA AND GROSS BETA ACTIVITY IN LEAVES (FIG, APRICOT AND VINE) .....	309

## GROSS ALPHA AND GROSS BETA ACTIVITY IN LEAVES (FIG, APRICOT AND VINE)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results for gross alpha and gross beta activity in leaves samples: Fig (*Ficus carica*), Vine (*Vitis vinifera* L.), and Apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*). Samples were collected in Iraq (Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan region), and in the Serbia (Belgrade), in the summer 2018. The analysis was done in dried and milled samples as well as in the annealed samples, using gas flow proportional counter. Determination of gross alpha and gross beta activity presents rapid method, essential for the analysis of radioactivity in environmental samples. The gross alpha activity is defines as the total activity of alpha emitters, and originates from the decay chains of <sup>238</sup>U and <sup>232</sup>Th, which quantity depends on the geological and geographical formation of natural radionuclides. The main contributor to the gross beta activity is natural long-lived isotope <sup>40</sup>K, as well as <sup>210</sup>Pb, <sup>228</sup>Ra. The gross beta measurements also include a contribution from anthropogenic radionuclides <sup>137</sup>Cs and <sup>90</sup>Sr. Radionuclides that emitting low-energy beta radiation (<sup>3</sup>H and gaseous or volatile radionuclide such as iodine) cannot be detected by gross beta activity measurements.

**Keywords:** radioactivity, gross alpha and gross beta activity, fruit leaves

## INTRODUCTION

Natural radioactivity in environment originates mainly from the primordial radionuclides, such as  $^{40}\text{K}$ , and the radionuclides from the  $^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$  and their decay products. Radionuclides from the  $^{232}\text{Th}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  series are responsible for the largest contribution to the gross alpha activity while activity of  $^{40}\text{K}$  comprises about 89 % of the gross beta activity, while the remainder arises from  $^{90}\text{Sr}$ ,  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ ,  $^{210}\text{Pb}$ , and  $^{228}\text{Ra}$  [1-3]. During the nuclear weapons testing in the 1960s and after nuclear accidents in Chernobyl and Fukushima, artificial radionuclides  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  and  $^{90}\text{Sr}$  were released in the atmosphere from where they were deposited on the soil surface by fallout. Based on their long half-life these radionuclides can still be found in the environment [3,4]. From that reason monitoring of radioactivity in environment is of great importance. In order to assess concentration of radionuclides in plants it is necessary to know that the accumulation of radionuclides by plants may occur by two ways: absorption by the leaves and shoot of the plant from the air and precipitation (direct method), or by root uptake from the soil (indirect method). The first way is dominant at the moment and immediately after nuclear and other accidents that lead to an increase of concentration of anthropogenic radionuclides in the atmosphere, while the second way is dominant when the concentration of radionuclides decreases [5].

Soil-root uptake is conditioned primarily by soil chemical and physical factors which may selectively retain a radionuclide, such as  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ . The uptake of radionuclides by plants is a process based on five main factors: the amount of organic matter or clays; the pH of the soil; the chemical composition of the soil; the chemical species of the radionuclides; the presence of fungi and bacteria.  $\text{UO}_2^{2+}$  is a chemical form that is taken up by plants in the pH range 5.0–5.5. In the case that U forms hydroxide, phosphate, or carbonate complexes, its bioavailability is reduced. Ra and Pb are mainly associated with organic matter, and their transfer to plants is therefore via this pathway. The presence of organic matter, inorganic colloids (clay), and competing elements will strongly affect the uptake of  $^{90}\text{Sr}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  by plants from the soil. [5,6]

The transport of radionuclides across the epidermis of plant leaves is determined in part by the anatomy of the leaf, and by physiological factors. Artificial radionuclides  $^{90}\text{Sr}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , which enter to the gross beta activity, are readily taken up by the leaf.  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  undergoes more translocation into fruit and seeds than  $^{90}\text{Sr}$  which tends to remain in the plant part in which it was initially absorbed [5]. The plants (vegetables and fruits) may cause accumulation of radionuclides in their organs, and that may be multiplied risk to human population via food chain.

The aim of this work was to measure gross alpha and gross beta activity in leaves samples: Fig (*Ficus carica*), Vine (*Vitis vinifera* L.), and Apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*) collected in Iraq (Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan region), and in the Serbia (Belgrade).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Fruit plants are divided into three classes: woody trees, bushes and herbaceous plants, according to their gross morphology and physiology [7]. Leaves samples investigated in this work belong to woody trees. Sampling of leaves: Fig (*Ficus carica*), Vine (*Vitis vinifera* L.), and Apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*) were carried out in Iraq (Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan region), and in the Serbia (Belgrade), in the summer 2018. Samples were dried at room temperature and in the oven at the temperature of 105°C. After drying samples were ashed at 450 °C [8]. Analysis was done in ashed samples using the gas low-level proportional counter Thermo-Eberline FHT 770T. The counting gas is a mixture of 90 % Ar and 10 % methane. Efficiencies of detectors were determined using the certified radioactive calibration standards <sup>241</sup>Am and <sup>90</sup>Sr (9031-OL-334/11 and 9031-OL-335/11, respectively, Czech Metrology Institute), traceable to the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM). The counting efficiency was 26 % for alpha and 35% for beta radiation. Measurement time was 14400 s, by 4 independent detectors simultaneously. Measurement uncertainty was expressed as an expanded measurement uncertainty at the confidence level of 95% (k=2).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The obtained results for gross alpha and gross beta activity in investigated leaves samples are presented in Table 1. It can be observed that for all investigated samples activity is higher for samples collected in Iraq. In Apricot leaves and Vine leaves samples the difference between the values, for both gross alpha/beta activities, for samples from Iraq are almost twice as large. For Fig leaves samples the obtained results are similar.

Table 1 Gross alpha and gross beta activity (Bq/kg) in investigated samples

Sample	Gross alpha activity	Gross beta activity
Apricot leaves ( <i>Prunus armeniaca</i> ) Serbia	61 ± 11	518 ± 29
Apricot leaves ( <i>Prunus armeniaca</i> ) Iraq	108 ± 12	949 ± 39
Vine leaves ( <i>Vitis vinifera</i> L.) Serbia	33 ± 7	220 ± 16
Vine leaves ( <i>Vitis vinifera</i> L.) Iraq	56 ± 8	448 ± 23
Fig leaves ( <i>Ficus carica</i> ) Serbia	56 ± 12	400 ± 27
Fig leaves ( <i>Ficus carica</i> ) Iraq	69 ± 11	413 ± 27

In the literature there are no data about gross alpha and gross beta activity in similar samples. In order to determine specific activity of individual radionuclide, gamma spectrometric analysis and <sup>90</sup>Sr determination, by radiochemical procedure, must be performed.

The study [9] shows a comprehensive analysis of radionuclide concentration in soil, water and plants in Iraq using gamma spectrometry. Analyzes of radionuclide content are mostly done in the fruit sample (apricot) [10,11].

In Serbia, the monitoring of radioactivity is carried out in accordance with the Rulebook on the establishment of programs for systematic testing of radioactivity in the environment [12]. According to the environmental monitoring program continuous testing and measurements of radioactivity in different types of samples are performed, among other things it is also done in plants. The obtained concentrations of radionuclides in fruit samples (apricot, fig) can be seen in [13,14,15], but these results were obtained using gamma spectrometry.

The existence of the difference in the obtained values in this paper for Apricot leaves and Vine leaves can be explained by the fact that concentrations of naturally occurring radionuclides in fruit vary widely because of the differing background levels, climate, and agricultural conditions that prevail.

## CONCLUSION

Gross alpha and gross beta activity in fruit leaves samples (Apricot, Vine and Fig) were analyzed. Investigation was performed for samples taken in Iraq and Serbia. The obtained results show higher values for gross alpha and gross beta activity in Apricot leaves and Vine leaves for samples from Iraq. For Fig leaves the results are similar. In the absence of recent atmospheric releases of radionuclides, the use of plants as monitors of soil deposits or reservoirs of ra-

dionuclides should be used primarily when some information on the characteristics of the soil reservoir is known. In order to estimate which way is dominant for radionuclide absorption by the plant, further analysis is necessary, including gamma spectrometry analysis of radionuclides as well as  $^{90}\text{Sr}$  determination. It is also necessary to performed analysis of soil samples and estimate transfer factor of radionuclides.

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