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Studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Jakab Albert Zsolt – Vajda András (ed.): *Járvány-lét-helyzetek. A Covid19-világjárvány hatása a mindennapokra és a társadalomkutatásra.* [Epidemic-life-situations. The impact of the COVID-19 world pandemic on everyday life and social sciences.] Kolozsvár–Budapest: KJNT – Néprajzi Múzeum, 2022.

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1. A promising volume of studies has been published jointly by the Kriza János Ethnographic Society (Cluj-Napoca) and the Museum of Ethnography (Budapest). The book seeks to understand the narrative of quarantine culture and pandemic in the context of museums and cultural institutions. The volume is part of the Kriza Book series: a rich and important volume, which may be of particular interest to cultural studies professionals, including those working in the field of museology and communication studies.
2. The Kriza János Ethnographic Society held a conference in 2022 entitled *Museum – Heritage – Communication*. The conference took place on 14 October 2022 in the premises of the Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography in Cluj-Napoca. The volume continued to expand on the themes of this conference, with case studies and academic research, and an exchange of experiences between practitioners and academics. The conference covered a wide range of methodological and theoretical questions, and the presentations provided an opportunity to broaden the professional discourse on various topics, for example among researchers, academics and anthropologists. The conference programme included topics on (1) *The impact of COVID-19 on museum practice*, (2) *The impact of the pandemic on body image and body techniques*, (3) *The role of the internet in times of quarantine*.
3. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease has undoubtedly challenged the cultural institutions. Although the epidemic is a collective experience for humanity, the negative changes have affected whom may vary not only from individual to individual, from urban to rural dweller, even from country to country, and people had to adapt to measures of varying severity. One of the most significant features of the book is a more precise description of the concepts of quarantine culture and epidemic status. The fundamental thesis of the editors is that quarantine is a temporary state that brings about a significant change in everyday practices and creates a cultural pattern of behaviour, while, on the other hand, the epidemic status is “*a prolonged state, continuing for a long time and even determining the future*” (7). The volume aims to explore the theoretical framework and concepts of the topic.
4. The publication is divided into three major sections. A call to action in the book’s blurb indicates that the pandemic as a social phenomenon is foregrounded in each of the major chapters: “The COVID-19 pandemic is a social phenomenon, its exist-

ence depends on the subjects, the individuals, the communities and the groups who imagine, describe and create its rules.” Published under the subtitle *Perspectives and Reflections*, Szabó Á. Töhötöm’s study investigates the various aspects of the pandemic. He also deals with the aspects of the caring and suspicion-generating state as well as the questions of responsibility and blame. The author has sought to explore the factors that made it difficult to accept restrictions. In the discourses of the restrictions and the pandemic, the foregrounding of the body could be identified. Otilia Ármeán’s paper points out that the spacing instructions have resulted in a greater degree of body awareness and intensive observation of the movements of others, a more thorough scanning of space.

5. In a promising section entitled *The Evolution of Folk Traditions during the Pandemic*, the reader is immediately confronted with a description of Ferenc Pozsony’s fieldwork report in which he describes a thoroughly pandemic-affected parade on 14 February 2021. His work shows that European customary studies have paid little attention to the specific customs of various crisis situations, and Pozsony indicates that in Transylvanian Hungarian culture, specific preventive or even averting practices had been primarily associated with droughts and epidemics. Pozsony’s work is descriptive and representative of the ways in which a folk tradition or an event can adapt to an epidemic situation: “The locals clearly testified that the 2021 parade in Csíkcsobotfalva had been organised specifically to oppose the severe restrictions that were trying the people, and to represent the protests of the locals through ritual means.” (96) Judit Balatonyi’s article on weddings and marriage ceremonies shows that at the domestic level, due to the social discourses redefining marriage, the reorganization and the rearrangement of weddings, and holding small weddings was common during this period, and many people arranged larger celebrations at a later date.
6. However, the pandemic period affected not only the customs, individual and community life, and marriages, but also the operation of museums. And although the digital museum practice as a methodological alternative is not a new phenomenon, the period of mass, forced closures challenged museums and cultural institutions in Hungary and beyond. The third major unit of the volume deals specifically with museums in the context of the pandemic. Marianna Berényi explores the concept of post-digital museums and the impact of the pandemic on the online spaces of museums. The paper deals with both the domestic and international impacts, demonstrating the consequences of museum closures through figures, while also presenting the author’s own questionnaire research and its results, which focus on the activities and working conditions of museum staff specifically during the pandemic period. The digital communication aspect is addressed by Erika Gyöngyvér Tőkés’s research material, which presents, among others, the results of the investigation of the website and social media communication of five museums of Hungarian interest in Transylvania.
7. From the themes mentioned above, one can see the different emphases within each chapter as two cardinal approaches emerge: the study of digital museum practice and communication practice in the digital space. András Vajda’s paper is linked to the latter: he writes interestingly about the role of the internet in the preservation of the material world of folk culture, and also addresses the challenges of virtualisation and the limitations of this new space. Orsolya Dimény-

Haszmann's study analyses the changes in the life of the Haszmann Pál Museum in Csernáton and introduces specific museum practices.

8.

I have only highlighted a few studies from the repertoire of the volume, in order to illustrate how different themes could be used to examine the cultural sector, and museums in particular, in the context and through the terms of quarantine culture and epidemics. This is a fresh and critically important theme, which the book seeks to address through case studies, and sharing practices and experiences to initiate a dialogue. In addition to the questions and thoughts raised by the topics, the volume can be seen as a kind of cordial document, which can become a significant corpus of resources for future research and professional communities.