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## QUARANTINE TIME IN ROMANIA. PARTICIPANTS' VISUAL PERSPECTIVE ABOUT BEING ISOLATED DURING COVID-19

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**Abstract:** *THE PANDEMIC GENERATED BY THE COVID-19 VIRUS CAUSED SIGNIFICANT ALTERATIONS OF SOCIAL LIFE. MOST STATES OF THE WORLD TOOK QUARANTINE, LOCKDOWN AND RESTRAINT MEASURES IN WHICH PEOPLE SPENT WEEKS OR EVEN MONTHS AT HOME IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. SEVERAL VISUAL ESSAYS PUBLISHED DURING THIS PERIOD REFLECT CHANGES IN THE HUMAN ACTIVITIES, AS WELL AS THE PANDEMIC IMPACT ON PUBLIC SPACES. DURING THE STATE OF EMERGENCY IN ROMANIA, BETWEEN MARCH AND MAY 2020, WE COLLECTED VISUAL DATA IN THE FORM OF PHOTOGRAPHIC DIARIES, IN ORDER TO DISCOVER HOW PEOPLE'S LIVES TOOK PLACE IN THEIR PRIVATE ENVIRONMENT, AT HOME, AND HOW THEY ADAPTED TO THE SOCIAL ISOLATION IMPOSED BY THE PANDEMIC. THE VISUAL ESSAY WE BUILT USING THE IMAGES COLLECTED BY THE PHOTOVOICE TECHNIQUE HIGHLIGHTS THE UNUSUAL THINGS THAT THE PARTICIPANTS IN OUR RESEARCH DID OR FELT DURING THE ISOLATION PERIOD.*

**Keywords:** *PHOTOGRAPHIC DIARY, PHOTOVOICE, PANDEMIC*

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The visual essays made during the pandemic, which we consulted, are journalistic products built on the basis of carefully selected photo collections, they have strong messages and they are



representative of their authors' field of interest. These essays document the change and bring to the public's attention new topics, unimaginable two years ago.

For example, in a visual essay suggestively entitled “The Pause”, Pope (2020) shows how, due to the imposition of the rules of physical distance, people's interaction with the geographical environment has changed dramatically. Photographs taken in Canada illustrate urban spaces either empty or visited by wild animals, people seen at the window, isolated in their homes, as well as numerous social signs and activities associated with distancing and avoiding direct human encounter: arrows indicating the direction of travel, circles drawn on the turf of a stadium, visors and screens imposed in places or institutions whose function is the human meeting itself (church, barber, officiating a marriage or shopping).

Another photo essay entitled “We're all in this together”, created by the Department of Global Communications (DGC, 2020) of the United Nations focuses on the human interactions associated with hope, altruism and resilience. Images from several countries of the world are presented, showing the changes produced by the pandemic, the new objects needed in daily life and the various activities or defining gestures for the quarantine and isolation periods. The images document volunteer actions, new hygiene rules and preventive behaviours, as well as tele-schooling or work from home. The essay seems a journey through all stages of life: from a baby born in a pandemic and children learning new rules of hygiene, through adults involved in professional or volunteer activities, to an elderly, refugee artist who brings hope by means of his creations.

An essay in which most of the images are in black and white contains photographs taken by students during the health crisis in New York (Sutton, 2020). Empty streets, very few people outside or on public transportation, makeshift tent hospitals, and a rat in an empty subway station in the American metropolis are illustrative and moving images of the pandemic's isolation and health crisis.

With the main theme of the search for normalcy during the pandemic, an essay published by The New York Times (Kask, 2020) contains photos of people doing normal activities in the new conditions: walking, playing sports, going to restaurants, shopping or hairdressing, but the social signs of the pandemic are also visible: mask, physical distance and the use of disinfectants. In the same journal, the changes generated by the pandemic are illustrated in another visual essay (Nierenberg, 2020) by the children's drawings and diary pages. The main themes are here as well empty streets, soap and disinfectants, isolated people in homes, stocks of purchases made by families, as well as home schooling.

From an anthropological perspective, a study of photographs published during the pandemic (Sonnevend, 2020) highlights three main categories of images. A first category contains the artistic and abstract representations of the Covid-19 virus, along with visual data related to human actions and the evolution of the pandemic, such as the “fattening curve” graphics and illustrations (p. 452). A second image is focused on the heroes of the pandemic, the frontline workers, but also on “villains, disrupters and contrarians” (p. 458), present especially in the photos that circulated on social media. The third category includes images of public or private spaces, such as hospitals, empty public areas, but also crowded domestic spaces or images seen from the window.

We also tried during the emergency period established in Romania to see how people live in isolation. We collected photographic diaries; we asked our participants to take photos illustrating what it means for them to be isolated, how they live this novelty in their lives. We also asked them to write a short text or a suggestive title next to the pictures to help us better understand what they wanted to convey to us (see the photovoice). 30 people participated in our study (women and men aged between 19 and 71 years, who live in the urban or rural area of Brașov County in Romania). They sent us by e-mail or WhatsApp 380 photos that we coded thematically (Braun & Clark, 2012).

In Romania, the state of emergency lasted two months, from March 16<sup>th</sup> to May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. During this period, the movement of citizens in public spaces was restricted, as it could take place only based on a statement and with a well-specified purpose, predefined by the state authorities. Educational institutions and other institutions or services considered non-essential, such as restaurants, hotels, bars, etc., were closed, and much of the professional activity moved to the online environment. Thus, for two months, the social life took place mostly at home, the outings in the public space being rare and limited to the area around the house.

We discovered from the photos sent by the participants in our study that during the isolation period, people tried to go out as little as possible and to keep their distance from each other. They did ordinary things and made time for activities which they had kept postponing. That's why there were many images that captured the way they worked online, cleaned the house, gardened, cooked, painted, tinkered, played or did lessons with the children, etc.

Most of the photos taken by our subjects were with and about what made it easier for them to get over the period of isolation. We received a lot of pictures with their loved ones – especially the minor children whom they had permanently around, and a lot of photos capturing nature, the city and their pets.

In addition, the participants in our project revealed to us in images concerns, habits, feelings that we would have expected less. With the latter we built the visual essay below.

### **Unusual things that we did or felt in Romania during the period of isolation imposed by the pandemic**

In Romania, bread is a staple food, it is eaten fresh and bought, normally, almost daily. In order not to go shopping so often, we made bread at home. Some of us learned how to do it during this time, others remembered how to do it in the past.



*I experienced obtaining homemade leaven (water + flour). After almost two weeks I managed to get a ripe leaven that I use to cook bread. Besides, I'm experimenting with all sorts of recipes that I'm kind of inventing. (AA, woman, 32 years old, 27<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*

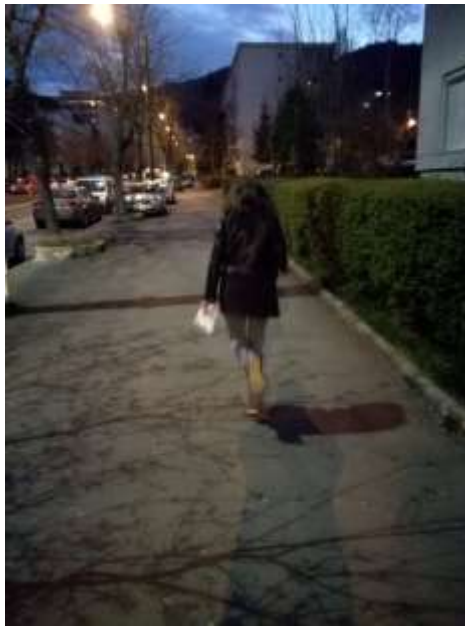


*Return to childhood habits: I make bread at home and we like it very much.  
(VP, woman, 71 years old, 13<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*

Nostalgia is, in fact, a feeling that we have experienced quite often in isolation. Therefore, we looked at old photo albums; but most of all we rediscovered the joy of playing.



*I took the picture box out of the closet. What a joy! I haven't looked at them in 4 years.  
(CC, woman, 46 years old, 19<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*



*My 21-year-old daughter jumping on an imaginary hopscotch about 10 years after she last did it.  
(FN, man, 50 years old, 29<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*



*We started playing together again, after almost a decade: mother, 46 years old, and son, 19 years old.  
(CC, woman, 46 years old, 13<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*

Moreover, in order not to go out often, we made warehouses for food, toilet paper, cleaning products, etc. We woke up experiencing some unexpected feelings – for example, the care not to waste, or the care for companies economically affected by the pandemic.





*I usually only buy one package, but now I did the same as the others!*  
(CC, woman, 46 years old, 3<sup>rd</sup> day of isolation)



*I store everything that doesn't fit in the house.* (DD, man, 44 years old, 27<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).



*We try not to waste anything. I took out absolutely everything I found in the pickle barrel.*  
(FSD, woman, 43 years old, day 25 of isolation).



*My boy (adult) asked me to buy Corona beer because he wants to support the company that has huge financial losses due to its name. (CC, woman, 46 years old, 13<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*

We did not let our elderly and sick parents leave the house at all during the isolation period. We left their purchases at the door, once a week, and we took their household garbage from the door, also once a week (in Romania most of those who live in the block have to go down many floors and walk a few tens of meters to the garbage dumps). Because of this, isolated parents had to resort to all sorts of oddities.



*Our children won't even let us take out the trash. Until they come to pick it up, I made an innovation. (MS, woman, 67 years old, 21<sup>st</sup> day of isolation).*

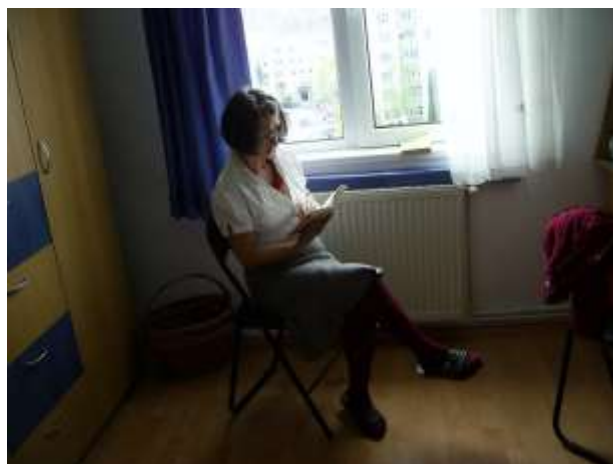


*Everything that could smell over time (vegetable peels for example) is stored in glass. If it starts to ferment, we add salt!  
(MS, woman, 67 years, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of isolation).*

It was very difficult for us to stay away from close relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues. And the holidays, the anniversaries spent away from each other were the most torturous days.



*A short walk for fresh air. We met our neighbours and friends, but we talked only over the ditch.  
(CC, woman, 46 years old, 32<sup>nd</sup> day of isolation).*



*During the holidays, it's the saddest; time passes very slow without our children and grandchildren.  
(MS, woman, 67 years old, 37<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*





*I opened, on Palm Sunday, in honour of our daughter, a bottle of liqueur that I had kept for many years. We couldn't clink glasses, but I sent her a little as well. (VS, man, 68 years old, 32<sup>nd</sup> day of isolation).*



*I'm improvising a feast for my baby. He says it's also good without gifts and without guests. (FSD, 43 years old, 11<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*

In this context, depressions, exasperations, dark thoughts could not be missing.



*I'm less alone and motionless if I look at the people outside. (VS, man, 68 years old, 32<sup>nd</sup> day of isolation).*



*I can't stand staying in the house anymore! (SS, man, 19<sup>th</sup> years old, 58<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*



*Without people and noise, the city seems more present, but also more abstract and sinister in its silence.  
(CR, woman, 40 years old, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of isolation).*



*We are waiting for our turn ... to illness, maybe even death. (FSD, woman, 43 years old, 28<sup>th</sup> day of isolation).*



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