

Death, Funerals and Mourning on the Croatian Islands during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Islands as quarantine



Islands of Mrkan and Bobara
(Dubrovnik archipelago)



Island of Ošljak – Lazaret
(Zadar archipelago)



Island of Galešnik
(in front of the town of Hvar, island
of Hvar)

Cholera on the central Dalmatian islands (19th century)

Hvar (town of Hvar)	<i>It was brought for the second time by Marin Barbarić known as Kamerlengo. He was supervising Mrtva Luka in Sokolica (today's Vira Bay on the island of Hvar) and it was there that he came in contact with the vessel on which there was a cholera victim. After coming back to Hvar, he fell ill, as well as his entire family and all his relatives. Thus cholera was spread through the neighbourhood of St Nikola, and later throughout the entire town. (Cerineo 1856: 32)</i>
Brač	<i>On the island of Brač, cholera appeared at first in Sutivan, in the house of the Bertrands. Thanks to Dr Vicko Definis, the disease did not spread. (...) Due to insufficient precautionary measures, Postira suffered the most. Cholera was brought by the sailor Ivan Kalinić from Trieste. (Cerineo 1856: 38)</i>

November 17, 2019

First Covid-19 case

February 25, 2020

First case in the Republic of Croatia

March 11, 2020

WHO: Covid-19 pandemic

March 20, 2020

Lockdown - First epidemiological restrictions concerning burials

May 22, 2020

End of the 1st pandemic wave and lockdown

August 2020

2nd wave

December 16, 2020

Peak of the **2nd wave**
(daily deaths: 92)

March - May , 2021

3rd wave

June, 2021

Relaxation of measurements

August, 2021

4th wave

January, 2022

5th wave

Covid-19 Timeline (Croatia)

Croatia



Cases

1.138.278



Recovered

1.120.673



Died

16.004



Last updated: 07.06.2022, Source: Hrvatski zavod za javno zdravstvo

Epidemiological measures for events related to death, burial and funeral during epidemic waves



	1 st wave (20/03/2020)*	2 nd wave (25/10/2020)*	2 nd to 5 th wave (20/11/2020)*	5 th wave (17/03/2022)*
Funeral, burial	5 family members and representative of the religious community	30	25	no COVID-19 restrictions
Obituary	no date, time and location of burial	allowed	allowed	
Music	not allowed	allowed	allowed	
Flowers, candles	not allowed	allowed	allowed	
Mourners	no expression of condolence	no expression of condolence	no expression of condolence	

* the first day of the introduction of the new measures

Islands of Murter and Brač



25th March 2020 (quarantine)



8th May 2020 (quarantine)

Death, death-related rituals and mourning during COVID-19 pandemic

- qualitative methodology and approach
- semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews
- anonymity of interviewees and confidentiality – pseudonyms
- Ethics Committee of the Institute for Anthropological Research in Zagreb approved the study protocol
- interviewees from islands (Krk, Hvar, Korčula, Lastovo)
- deathcare workers and religious leaders
- thematic analysis of the transcribed content



Social distance and negative emotions toward foreigners

Lucija (Hvar, around 40): *...we used to attentively look at those catamarans, ferries, the travellers on them... The fear was enormous. There were even people who were writing, 'Report it, report it, it is a moral act'.* (mother died in March 2021)

Jure (Hvar, around 40): *She was studying abroad and she came to Hvar even a few days before the lockdown, she was reported to the police three times, anonymously. That she came over to Hvar; that she was freely strolling around... That is horrendous, makes you understand certain things from the history when you experience something like this...* (several relatives died in 2021)

Health, Cultural, and Biological Determinants of Longevity: Anthropological Perspective on Survival in Very Old Age (HECUBA), HRZZ IP-01-2018-2497; 2018 – 2022 (PI: Dr. T. Škarić-Jurić)

Satisfaction with present life	N	%
Not satisfied	71	21.2%
Moderately satisfied	125	37.3%
Satisfied	139	41.5%

The relation with inmates	N	%
Good	284	92.5%
Bad	6	2.0%
Not contacting	17	5.5%
The relation with children	N	%
Good	238	90.2%
Bad	3	1.1%
Not contacting	23	8.7%
The relation with grandchildren	N	%
Good	226	91.9%
Bad	6	2.4%
Not contacting	14	5.7%





Vulnerable groups (older persons)

Stanko (Krk, around 50): *There were again these restrictions in the retirement home, you know, so it all depended on what kind of period it was, if one could even enter it. For a very long time, you couldn't even enter it... (father died in July 2021)*

Josipa (Korčula, 50): *He had his group of eighty-year-old friends in a cafe with whom he was drinking coffee every day and he missed it so much. He kept talking to them on the phone, with those friends, I hope that this type of conversation have compensated him for all this together. (father died in April 2021)*

Ivana (Lastovo, around 50): *I was in panic when it started, so much panic that I forbid my mother and father to visit us altogether. Yes, that first Easter, I mean that was the first Easter in our lives that we didn't have lunch together... I was afraid for them. (several relatives died in 2021)*

Vulnerable groups (patients)

Lucija (Hvar, around 40): *I know a woman who had breast cancer... Thank God, that's all OK now, but she used to go into radiation and therapies during the most severe quarantine. So, the catamaran and ferry lines were reduced and mostly served for daily supply: newspapers, groceries and such. The wretched woman had to go to Split for therapy travelling all the way via Sućuraj (*cca 180 kilometres Hvar-Sućuraj-Drvenik-Split by car and ferry).*



"Behind the rope" – funerals and memorial services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Stanko (Krk, around 50): ... *a rope was set very low so as to make a sort of a barrier, so that it could be seen, not to approach... Then people were just getting in, because the coffin was set, but there was no contact, so nobody was coming to us, just a glance, so to speak, and this... basically without approaching.* (father died in July 2021)



Pandemic funerals

Gravedigger (island of Hvar): *Without a single family member ... me, the priest and this person from the funeral company. The three of us... and the priest lent a hand, because no one else would, which is when someone hears it's due to Corona, no one wants to turn up, everybody is scared ... it's a bit harsh, really, and so the three of us did the burial.*

Priest (island of Hvar): *It's the whole impression... when you see this spacesuit the gravedigger is wearing, it creates negative emotions. When you see such a small number of people you don't have an impression that this is a funeral.*



Funeral traditions and practices

Josipa (Korčula, around 50) ...*my dad wanted his funeral to be held in Korčula where he had lived for 40 years, and since his family tomb was in Blato, for the burial to be held in Blato (...) And so we couldn't arrange a funeral in Korčula because they said that they didn't arrange funerals. It was only us from the family who came to collect the coffin and take the hearse and then went to Blato, and it was so strict and weird there that we were shocked, completely shocked.* (father died in April 2021)

Feelings of insecurity and guilt

Lucija (Hvar, around 40): *... a few of the singers from our choir died; these were the people who had dedicated decades of their lives to the choir... and yet singing was not allowed at their gravesites, or at the memorial service. (...) Now, the families probably still live with this kind of sense of guilt and unfulfillment and sadness because those people did not have a decent funeral, like the one they really deserved. (mother died in March 2021)*

Josipa (Korčula, around 50): *Mum was very, very upset because of it. She kept on saying: "Why? Did he really deserve this?" ...I felt bad because of her, mostly because of her. (father died in April 2021)*

Ivana (Lastovo, around 50): *I keep saying that you can't, you can't describe that feeling at all. You know, you're accompanying your mother at her funeral and there is no one else at the graveyard... (several relatives died in 2021)*



Thank you for your attention!

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