

CHILDHOOD RETURNS TO THE ETHNOLOGICAL FIELD OF INTEREST

- DEÁKY, Z. (2015). *Gyermek es serdülő munkája Magyarországon a 19 századtól a második világháborúig*. Budapest: Gondolat. 422 pages. [The work of children and adolescents in Hungary from the 19th century until the Second World War].
- POSPÍŠILOVÁ, J. (ed.) – Altman, K. (ed.) – Demetz, P. – Navrátilová, A – Nosková, J. – Toncrová, M. – Zobačová, A. (2015). *Děti v Brně. Kapitoly o dětství ve městě pod Špilberkem*. Brno : Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v. v. i., Prague- Brno section, 2015. 175 pages [Children in Brno. Chapters on childhood in the city under Špilberk hill].

After the monothematic issue of Slovak Ethnology in 2011, the topic of childhood seems to have become “saturated” in ethnological research and is now outside the focus of interest. We have brought up the topic again by reviewing publications from neighbouring countries, and today we are looking once more at a culturally cognate region in order to highlight the importance of childhood in the context of cultural history and ethnology. The two publications despite representing differing views and coming, partially, from different methodological backgrounds, they cover the area of cultural socialisation, a topic that cannot be overlooked, as well as studies and output for the public, whose subject matter belongs to the period of childhood and to the ethnological field of interest.

In her new book, the author Zita Deáky follows on from the cultural and historical study of childhood which she began “At the beginning of all things” (Deáky – Krász 2005), before dealing with “Good boys and girls” (Deáky 2011). In her latest publication, she takes us into a new environment, no longer the comforting nurseries in the homes of bourgeois families or the costumed beauty of the wealthy peasantry. Here, we find ourselves face to face with the grim reality of children’s work in the fields, on building sites and in factories. As in

the publication mentioned later, the author chose a timeframe from the turn of the twentieth century until around the 1950s. This is no coincidence, but is linked to the knowledge tools of ethnological work, primary and secondary sources available in the relevant languages, as well as to the memory of our witnesses and photographic documentation. After an introductory chapter intended as a general survey, Deáky follows thoroughly and historically the variety of children's work and the development of institutions, which oversaw the rules, associated with the latter. Society-wide institutions such as schools, orphanages or protection associations, as well as those, which were normative within the village community – youth associations –, defined and regulated children's involvement in work. An overview can be obtained by following individual areas of activity: how children's work was specified within agricultural activities, shepherding and cattle breeding, household service, building roads, industry, mining, home-based manufacture or in various errand-running forms of employment in the urban environment. A look at the state of health of the children and other statistical evidence adds to the substance of the publication. The book is valuable also thanks to its visual sources – just under 400 photographs and other illustrations. It is the result of systematic study by the author, who is not afraid to analyse traditional topics from the point of view of her new area of interest, a new vantage point, and she thus obtains new material as well as often presenting already known material in new contexts.

The publication "Children in Brno", as its title indicates, also concerns an environment until recently more frequently researched using culturological and historical methods. The work reviewed here is also the result of an already existing programme of urban-ethnological studies, as well as the long-term focus of interest of certain colleagues among the contributors in the ethnology of childhood. The structure of urban life is more complicated than life in a farming environment. However, despite the fact that Brno has been moving towards the status of a metropolitan settlement in terms of size, population composition and numbers, or perhaps for this very reason, the town has incorporated many rural locations in the course of its growth. The population of these now urban areas remained for some time in a dual cultural framework. The description of this duality of the suburbs, alongside many ethnic, socio-professional and other characteristics, can also be considered as preservation research, despite the fact that we are aware of a current of socio-cultural changes and their inevitability.

The book consists of seven chapters whose authors are employees of the Brno section of the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Each chapter maps out the period from the turn of the 20th century, until approximately the 1950s. In terms of subject matter, they focus on the status and role of children within the family, holidays, work and leisure

time from many angles and viewpoints. Starting from clothing, food, education and other phenomena of everyday life (Alexandra Navrátilová), children's games and singing (Marta Toncrová), the development of Czech schooling (Karel Altman and Jana Pospíšilová), the relations between Czechs and Germans (Karel Altman), and children in photographs (Andrea Zobačová). One chapter is devoted exclusively to German children (Jana Nosková); the others concentrate primarily on Czech children. An essay by the literary theorist and translator Petr Demetz, a native of Prague who spent his childhood in Brno, also forms part of the book.

The selection of period photographs (Jiřina Kosíková) makes up a significant element of the book and provides a visual representation of many of the topics with which it deals. The justification of the use of photographs from social events, as opposed to family photographs, is interesting, as confirmation of the authenticity of the time and place, as well as the veracity of the story behind the picture. This is presumably the reason why the whole publication appears trustworthy. However, we are also aware of the fact that in certain topics (for example, the exchange of children for the purposes of language learning), comparative material from Slovakia (Méryová 1990) would have given the findings a wider, Czechoslovak, context.

The editors and authors of the publication "Children in Brno" have succeeded in producing precious, complex, attractively written material dealing with a complex image of childhood, a time looking to the future, as well as in retrospect a time for memories full of positive emotions.

When presenting complex publications, we must not forget to mention lesser-known studies, which concern the sadder side of childhood. In her work devoted to care for handicapped people in Slovakia (Falisová 2014), the historian of healthcare Anna Falisová analyses in breadth care for children with various forms of handicap, as they are found in Slovak historical sources from the same period as that researched in the previously mentioned publications.

The study of a Moravian environment (Zobačová 2012) has a similar thematic framework. Both studies remind us how the most varied vicissitudes in life affect children and how society, as well as the family and extended family, come to terms with this.

Our image of children and childhood conjures up visions of joy and play. Katarína Mosnáková Bagľašová, (Mosnáková Bagľašová 2016), who collected material from children's magazines, textbooks, books and calendars, combining them with her own field notes, recently published a folklore collection, concerning the area of Hungary settled by Slovaks. This publication is aimed at the public and is one of the current approaches to the ethnological study of childhood.

Translated by Stephanie Staffen

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Marta Botiková