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**Croatian bestsellers in public libraries: the most borrowed books study**

**Mirko Duić**, University of Zadar, Croatia, miduic@unizd.hr

**Laura Grzunov**, University of Zadar, Croatia, lgrzunov@student.unizd.hr

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# Introduction

Reading interests of a considerable number of library users in Croatia are directed primarily towards books which are world bestsellers. This is confirmed by research findings. According to the research from 2016, among 600 most borrowed books in four large Croatian public libraries, convincingly most borrowed are books by non-Croatian authors, primarily books by authors from USA (about 41% of the most borrowed books), next are books by authors from the UK (about 19%), Sweden (about 11%), Norway (about 7%). Books by authors from Croatia are only in the fifth place of the most borrowed books - 19 books or humble 3.2% (Duić and Juric 2016). It is important to note that there are few thousand Croatian books published each year (Obvezni primjerak, 2017). Many of them are acquired by these four libraries. Therefore, there are many Croatian books in these libraries. However, findings indicate that in these libraries there are not many Croatian books among the most borrowed books. These findings suggest that there is a huge imbalance in structure of reading interests of library users with regard to most borrowed books. It is evident that library users in Croatia are primarily interested in bestsellers from USA and some west European countries, the countries which have the biggest and most influential book publishers in the world. Considering these worrying findings, it would be worthwhile to additionally explore the borrowing of books by authors from Croatia in Croatian public libraries.

**Theoretical background**

J. Buschman claims that libraries are primarily educational institutions, that education is their main mission and merit. But he also warns that libraries, as well as other educational institutions such as universities and schools, are threatened by interests of organisations which are focused on acquiring of profit (Buschman 2005, 3). M. K. Buckland notices that there is a continuous consolidation of media publishing houses in a few huge corporations. Therefore, he thinks that one of the main challenges of library research is exploring a question of preserving library neutrality. Libraries need to be neutral so that they can provide diverse, rich collections to their users (Buckland 2003, 682). A. Y. Goldsmith advocates a need to publish culturally conscious books, which provide the authentic feeling of a certain culture from the perspective of members of that culture (Goldsmith 2008, 1). Culturally conscious books provide an authentic way in which children could connect, using imagination, with their real or fictional peers from other countries or cultures in the same country (Ibid., 2). In order to protect production and promotion of diverse cultural works, and not just the most popular and most profitable works, at UNESCO conference in 2005, the convention was adopted: *Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expression*s. The main goals of this *Convention* are respecting the twofold nature of works of cultural expression: those works are intended for market, but they are also works with cultural value. *Convention* emphasizes sovereign government rights of countries to formulate and implement cultural policies and measurement of protection and promotion of cultural expressions (Graber 2006, 553).

However, apart from the urgent need to provide culturallydiverse books and other cultural works, very important factor is also interest of people for culturally diverse works. Results of various research projects related to exploration of reading interests in Croatia, indicate that many Croatian readers are primarily interested in books of non-Croatian authors. In an *Exploration of the book market in Croatia,* conducted in 2016, it was established that only about half of Croatians have read at least one book in last year. Among those which have read at least one book, the fiction books are most popular type of reading material (29%), next follows professional literature (25%), handbooks (25%), encyclopedias and atlases (12%), children and picture books (9%). Books by authors from Croatia are mostly read by 15% of respondents, books of non-Croatian authors are mostly read by 35% of respondents, and there are 48% of respondents which read equally Croatian and non-Croatian authors (Kraus 2016). Within the project *Reading habits and information needs of Croatian citizens*, a large number of adult users of public libraries filled the survey during the year 2010 (Stričević and Jelušić 2011, 24-24). The findings from that research indicate that library users mostly borrowed fiction books (60%). There were also 21% of users, which mostly borrowed professional and scientific literature, and there were 12% of users, which mostly borrowed popular professional books (Jelušić and Juric, 2012). In a research conducted in ten libraries in area of Counties of Istria and Primorje-Gorski Kotar, the survey was filled by 219 respondents at the age of 14 to 28 years (Plavčić and Ljubešić 2009, 126-127). It was found that these respondents prefer books which are present in the media (Ibid., 125). The majority of respondents reads popular fiction literature (34.2%) and fiction literature for children and youth (31.3%), while so called “high fiction literature” is read by 25.8% of respondents. Professional literature is read by 8.7% of respondents (Ibid., 131).The youngest respondents doesn’t mention almost any Croatian writer as a favorite writer. The older respondents mention some Croatian writers as favorites (Ibid., 134). Novaković and Medić have surveyed pupils of third grade of XII. gymnasium in Zagreb and they have found out that about 84% of pupils have greater interest in books of world literature than for Croatian literature (Novaković and Medić 2011, 86). Novaković and Medić also indicate other research projects whose findings have confirmed a low interest of high school pupils in books by authors from Croatia: Lazzarich, 2001; Grakalić-Plenković, 2002 (Ibid., 80).

Findings from these research papers indicate that Croatian readers are considerably more interested for books of non-Croatian authors. However, these findings are based on surveys of readers, on their expressed opinions. In the introduction we presented some worrying results about library borrowing of foreign and Croatian books, from the study of Duić and Juric (2016). Except that study, no research has yet been done in which borrowing of books in libraries was analysed to precisely establish how many books by authors from Croatia are borrowed by users in relation to most borrowed books of non-Croatian authors, and what are the characteristics of the most borrowed books of Croatian authors. The goal of this research is to explore in more detail that aspect of reading in Croatia.

**Research questions**

* How often the users of Croatian public libraries have borrowed books of authors from Croatia in comparison to borrowing books of non-Croatian authors?
* What are the characteristics of the most borrowed books by authors from Croatia: when they were published for the first time; are they written by male of female authors; are they fiction, non-fiction or picture books; what ere their genres?

**Methodology**

The goal of this research is to explore how often users of Croatian public libraries are borrowing books of authors from Croatia in comparison to borrowing books of non-Croatian authors. Also, the goal is to explore the characteristics of books by authors from Croatia which were mostly borrowed in the last year in public libraries in following cities: Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Pula. Those libraries were chosen because they are in big cities which are located in different parts of Croatia. They have catalogs from which it is possible to find out the number of book borrowings. The research will be focused on books that are not on required-reading lists of schools.

The method used in the research will be a comparative analysis of library catalog records. In catalog of each library, 75 most borrowed books by authors from Croatia will be determined using the lists of most borrowed books that are available in library catalogs. The total research sample will be 300 books and they will be analysed with regard to book type (fiction, non-fiction, picture book), gender of author, period of first publishing, genre. These data will be determined using data from library catalogs and web portals: Goodreads, Moderna vremena. Sample of borrowed books by authors from Croatia is purposive sample, and not random, because it represents the most borrowed books. A certain book from the same author and with the same title could be present more than one time in the sample, because in different libraries the same book can be among 75 most borrowed books.

Until now there was not a similar analysis of Croatian books which were the most borrowed in Croatian public libraries. This research will provide first insights in this important aspect of reader interests and practice.

**Expected Research Results**

It is expected that insights obtained by this research will be valuable to better understand reading interests and practices of readers from Croatia. These insights could also serve as a foundation for further research, for example, to explore the following question: in which ways librarians could try to promote books by authors from Croatia.

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