

# The most borrowed books by Croatian authors in the public libraries of Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Pula

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Libellarium, XI, 1 (2018): 1-22.

UDK: 027.082(497.5)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15291/libellarium.v11i1.312>

Kategorizacija rada: Izvorni znanstveni rad

## Abstract

The aim of this paper was to explore the issue of library borrowing of books written by Croatian authors. The focus was on the most borrowed books. In the first part of the paper there is a literature review related to the topic, such as readers' preferences and the importance of culturally diverse materials. Following the presentation of theoretical background, the second part of the paper presents the research findings. The research goals were as follows: 1) to explore how often the users of Croatian public libraries have borrowed books written by authors from Croatia in comparison to books by non-Croatian authors; 2) to explore the characteristics of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors (when they were published; the gender of the authors; if they are fiction, non-fiction or picture books; what their genres are). The public libraries in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Pula were included in the research. The findings indicate that there are about 10% of books by Croatian authors among the 2,000 most borrowed books in the listed libraries. The majority of the books are fiction books published for the first time after the year 2000.

**Keywords:** most borrowed books, Croatian public libraries, cultural diversity

## 1. Introduction

Book borrowings of a considerable number of library users in Croatia are aimed primarily at world bestsellers. This has been confirmed by the research findings. According to a research from 2016, among 600 most borrowed books in four large Croatian public libraries (in the cities of Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Pula), the most borrowed are books by non-Croatian authors, primarily books by authors

from the USA (about 41% of the most borrowed books), followed by books by authors from the UK (about 19%), Sweden (about 11%) and Norway (about 7%). The books by authors from Croatia are only in the fifth place of the most borrowed books - 19 books or a humble 3.2% (Juric and Duić 2016). The data were also analyzed from the perspective of larger geographical regions. Western Europe is a region with the greatest share of authors which are mostly borrowed in Croatian libraries: 48.3%. North America is in the second place: 43% (almost all of these books are written by authors from the USA, only a minor share is written by Canadian authors). The total share of the most borrowed books from these two regions is 91.3%. This finding is another confirmation of a highly western-centric book borrowing pattern of many Croatian library users. It is also important to note that very similar patterns are found in all four libraries. The findings indicate that, in Croatian public libraries, there are not many books by authors from Croatia, among the most borrowed books. The findings also suggest that there is a huge imbalance in the structure of the most borrowed books. It is evident that most borrowed books are from the USA, and some Western European countries, those that have the biggest and most influential book publishers in the world. Another finding from this research is that in all the four Croatian libraries the most borrowed books are almost exclusively novels (Ibid). For example, in Pula Library<sup>1</sup> only one of the 150 most borrowed books is not a novel, and in Zagreb City Libraries<sup>2</sup>, only six of the 150 most borrowed books are not a novel. In the same study it was also established when the most borrowed books were published for the first time. The great majority of these books were published in the last 25 years. Only 2.2% of the books were first published before the year 1990. Therefore, it could be concluded that library users mostly borrow recently published books or books that were published in the last two or three decades. Considering the findings of this recent study, it would be worthwhile to explore in more detail the borrowing of books by authors from Croatia in Croatian public libraries. This is precisely the research goal of this study, which is the extension of the study by Juric and Duić.

## 2. Theoretical background

In his paper *On libraries and the public sphere*, Buschman stated that librarianship has the principle of critical and rational argumentation. This principle is realized through the creation and preservation of balanced collections, as well as extension of inclusion through activities that are aimed at creating collections which reflect historical and current intellectual diversity. Buschman claimed that libraries are primarily educational institutions, and that education is their main mission and merit. He compared libraries to universities and schools, since all those institutions have an identical mission: education. Nevertheless, he warned

1 City Library and Reading Room Pula - Gradska knjižnica i čitaonica Pula

2 Zagreb City Libraries - Knjižnice grada Zagreba.

that libraries, as well as other educational institutions such as universities and schools, are threatened by the interests of organizations focused on acquiring profit (Buschman 2005, 3). M. K. Buckland notices that there is a continuous consolidation of media publishing houses in few huge corporations. Therefore, he thinks that one of the main challenges of library research is exploring the question of preserving library neutrality. Libraries need to be neutral, so that they can provide diverse, rich collections to their users. Buckland thinks that no matter how much we want library services to be neutral, we need to strive to understand which levels of neutrality are achieved in relation to the access to written knowledge (Buckland 2003, 682).

In a dissertation focusing on the publishing of foreign children's literature in the USA, Goldsmith advocates the need to publish culturally conscious books, which provide the authentic feeling of a certain culture from the perspective of the 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). However, if the majority of books or films in the library collection is from a single country, there is a deficit of culturally conscious books or films in that collection. For example, if the majority of books or animated films in a library is created by Hollywood studios, there is a lack of authentic representation of diverse cultures in other countries. According to their mission and core values, libraries should strive to be neutral and provide works which reflect the diversity of global society. Therefore, culturally conscious books or animated films are very important and necessary in libraries for the children to learn and extend their understanding about various cultures in the world and in their country.

H. Schiller, a theoretician of communication who investigates the dissolution of the public sphere, describes the current communication environment with the following words:

„A world without barriers, a free flow of information, free speech everywhere and unimpeded traffic of cultural products - these are longstanding and cherished objectives. The current global condition makes their genuine realization remote.“ (Schiller 1990-1991, 20)

Schiller draws attention to the structural features of media, the features that condition the production of media messages. For example, the structural features of media are connected to the following issues: who the owners of media are, and what influence on media their advertisement revenues have. These structural elements greatly reduce the diversity of cultural works; for example, books and films. (Webster 2006, 126). Schiller thinks that a huge amount of media content is created for the purpose of helping the promotion of products made in the USA (Ibid, 131). According to Schiller, a considerable problem is the fact that only rich capitalist societies from the West have enough financial power for global promotion campaigns (Ibid, 133). Therefore, the public sphere in various countries is progressively impoverished and this impoverishment will have serious

consequences for future generations and access to information (Ibid, 142). In order to protect the production and promotion of diverse cultural works, and not just the most popular and most profitable works, the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* was adopted at UNESCO conference in 2005. The main goal of this *Convention* is respecting the twofold nature of works of cultural expression: those works are intended for the market, but they also have a cultural value. The *Convention* emphasizes sovereign government rights of the countries to formulate and implement cultural policies and measures for the protection and promotion of cultural expressions (Graber 2006, 553).

In the document *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, which was adopted by UNESCO in 2001, the importance of cultural diversity is explained in the first paragraph:

„Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.“ (UNESCO 2001)

Culturally diverse books are a very good way to advance the understanding and development of cultural diversity. They bring insight into lives, practices and views coming from different cultures. However, apart from the urgent need to provide culturally diverse books and other cultural works, another very important factor is the level of people's interest in culturally diverse works. The interest to read culturally diverse books has a considerable impact on the patterns of book borrowing in libraries, so we shall present some studies about these interests. The results of various research projects related to the exploration of reading interests in Croatia indicate that many Croatian readers are primarily interested in the books by non-Croatian authors. In a research conducted in ten libraries in the Counties of Istria and Primorje-Gorski Kotar, the survey was filled by 219 respondents at the age of 14 to 28 (Plavšić and Ljubešić 2009, 126-127). It was established that these respondents prefer books which are present in the media (Ibid, 125). However, a good thing is that the young people who participated in this study, borrow books in libraries very frequently. The majority of respondents reads popular fiction literature (34.2%) and fiction literature for children and youth (31.3%), while the so called "high fiction literature" is read by 25.8% of the respondents. Professional literature is read by 8.7% of the respondents (Ibid, 131). The youngest respondents do not mention almost any Croatian writer as their favorite writer. The older respondents list some Croatian writers as their favorites (Ibid, 134). Novaković and Medić have surveyed students of the third grade of XII Gymnasium in Zagreb and they have established that about 84% of the students have greater interest in world literature books than Croatian

literature (Novaković and Medić 2011, 86). It is interesting that, in their survey answers, the students mention various favorite world literature works and authors, but they do not mention Croatian authors, not even the modern ones. As a partial explanation Novaković and Medić indicate that in the current high school curriculum, there is no mention of any modern Croatian author renowned after 1980s (Ibid, 86). Novaković and Medić also indicate other research projects the findings of which have confirmed a low interest of high school students in books by authors from Croatia: Lazzarich, 2001; Grakalić-Plenković, 2002 (Ibid, 80). Regarding personal and free reading interests which are not related to required reading, the study has established that students could be categorized into three reader types: about 68% of the students read mainly entertaining novels; about 22% of them read only newspapers, journals and articles on the Internet; about 10% of the students do not read at all. The first group is the most numerous one and the students from this group read "modern literature by foreign writers" and their favorite genres are: horror, crime novel, love novel, SF, adventure novel and biography (Ibid, 85). In the *Exploration of the book market in Croatia*, conducted in 2016, it was established that only about half of Croats had read at least one book in the previous year. Among those who read at least one book, fiction books are the most popular type of reading material (29%), followed by professional literature (25%), handbooks (25%), encyclopedias and atlases (12%), children and picture books (9%). The books by authors from Croatia are mostly read by 15% of the respondents, books by non-Croatian authors are mostly read by 35% of the respondents, and there are 48% of the respondents who read equally Croatian and non-Croatian authors (Kraus 2016). The findings presented in this research paper are not related to bestsellers, but they are relevant for the main research topic of the paper: an exploration of the aspects of cultural diversity of Croatian books which are mostly borrowed in libraries, and the exploration of the frequency of borrowing Croatian books in relation to the frequency of borrowing foreign books.

The findings of this research paper and other papers presented in this chapter indicate that Croatian readers are more interested in books by non-Croatian authors. The findings are based on reader surveys, and they are based on their expressed opinions. Furthermore, the findings could be an indicator that the readers in Croatia are interested in culturally diverse books written by authors from around the world. However, it needs to be said that even when the readers in Croatia were to express a considerable interest in books written by Croatian authors, that could also be an indication of their interest in culturally diverse books. Namely, cultural diversity does not exclude the need to learn about one's own culture, especially if that culture includes a great variety of culturally diverse works. Croatia is a country with a rich history of the interweaving of various cultures; therefore, there are many culturally diverse books written by authors from Croatia.

In the introduction, we presented some worrying results about library borrowing of foreign and Croatian books from the study by Juric and Duić (2016). However,

except for that study, no other research has yet been done in which the borrowing of books in libraries was analyzed to precisely establish how many fiction and non-fiction books by authors from Croatia are borrowed by users in contrast to the most frequently borrowed books by non-Croatian authors, and what the characteristics of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors are. The goal of this research is to explore that aspect of reading in Croatia in more detail.

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### 3. Research questions

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

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### 4. Methodology

The goal of this research is to explore how often the users of Croatian public libraries are borrowing books written by authors from Croatia in comparison to non-Croatian authors. Also, the goal is to explore the characteristics of the books by authors from Croatia which were most frequently borrowed last year in the public libraries of the following cities: Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Pula. These libraries were chosen because they are in big cities located in different parts of Croatia. Also, they have catalogs from which it is possible to find out the number of book borrowings. The names of the libraries are: *Knjižnice grada Zagreba* (Zagreb City Libraries), *Gradska knjižnica Rijeka* (Rijeka City Library), *Gradska knjižnica Marka Marulića Split* (City Library Marko Marulić Split), *Gradska knjižnica i čitaonica Pula* (City Library and Reading Room Pula). In the following sections we will use the abbreviated names: Zagreb Library, Rijeka Library, Split Library and Pula Library. It is important to note that the data on the borrowing of books in these libraries refers to the main library in each city, but also to its branches.

The method used in the research was a comparative analysis of library catalog records. In each library catalog, 75 most borrowed books by authors from Croatia were determined. Therefore, the total research sample was 300 most borrowed books by authors from Croatia and they were analyzed with regard to the book type (fiction, non-fiction, picture books), the gender of the author, the period of first publishing and the genre. The data were determined by using the data from the library catalogs and web portals: Goodreads and *Moderna vremena*.

These are the definitions of the three types of books which were analyzed: fiction, non-fiction, picture books. Fiction books could be defined as 'literature

in the form of prose, especially novels, that describes imaginary events and people' (Oxford Dictionaries).<sup>3</sup> Non-fiction books are 'the type of book or other writing that deals with facts about real people or events, not imaginary stories' (Cambridge Dictionary).<sup>4</sup> Picture books are books with a 'particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words, to convey meaning' (Salisbury and Styles 2012, 7). In a picture book, 'the meaning emerges through the interplay of word and image, neither of which would make sense when experienced independently of the other' (Ibid, 7). Picture books can be fiction, but could also be non-fiction. However, it was decided to add picture books as a separate category to analyze because they differ from other books the meaning of which is primarily derived from text.

The sample of the borrowed books by authors from Croatia is a purposive sample, not random, because it represents the most borrowed books. It is important to note that a certain book from the same author and with the same title could be present more than once in the sample, because the same book can be among the 75 most borrowed books in different libraries. These 300 books by authors from Croatia were most borrowed in the period of one year, ending with the dates on which the examination of library catalogs was made (Zagreb Library April 19, 2018; Rijeka Library: May 3, 2018; Split Library: May 10, 2018; Pula Library: May 18, 2018).

Until now there has not been a similar analysis of the most borrowed Croatian books in Croatian public libraries. Therefore, this research provides first insights into this important aspect of reader practice.

When researching the most borrowed books by Croatian authors, it is important to bear in mind that, among the most borrowed books in libraries, there are also books by Croatian authors which are on the required reading lists in primary and high schools. Therefore, students are required to read them and these books are often the most borrowed books not just in school libraries but also in public libraries. In this research, these required reading books were not included in the sample.

## 5. Expected Research Results

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

3 Oxford Dictionaries: Definition of fiction. Accessed May 4, 2019. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fiction>

4 Cambridge Dictionary: Definition of fiction nonfiction. Accessed May 4, 2019. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nonfiction>

## 6. Research results

In the catalog of each library, 75 most borrowed books by authors from Croatia were determined. Therefore, the total research sample comprised 300 books. Each of the 300 most borrowed books was borrowed 220.1 times on average. However, if we look at the findings for each library separately, then it can be noticed that there are important differences between the libraries. In Table 1 we can see that in Zagreb Library, each of 75 most borrowed books by Croatian authors was borrowed 586 times on average, while in other libraries, each of the most borrowed books was borrowed considerably less often on average. There is an explanation for such a large average number of borrowings in Zagreb Library. Namely, this library has a considerably higher number of library branches in comparison to the other three libraries, so that fact certainly contributes to such a large average number of borrowings. In Table 1 we can also see that Split Library is in the second place in terms of the average number of borrowings of 75 most borrowed books by Croatian authors - 132.5 borrowings on average. It is followed by Rijeka Library - 106.9 borrowings on average; and Pula Library - 55.2 borrowings on average.

Table 1. Average number of borrowings of each of the 300 most borrowed books by Croatian authors

	<b>Split</b>	<b>Pula</b>	<b>Rijeka</b>	<b>Zagreb</b>
<b>Average</b>	132.5	55.2	106.9	586

A very important finding from this research is the finding about the ranking of these 300 most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to the ranking of the most borrowed books by foreign authors. In Figure 1 we can see the data summed up for all four libraries. We can see that the range from 1 to 4,000 most borrowed books in these libraries is divided into nine categories. For example, the first category "1-99" comprises 99 most borrowed books in four libraries (books by Croatian and foreign authors), the second category "100-399" comprises most borrowed books from position 100 to 399 (i.e., from the 100<sup>th</sup> to the 399<sup>th</sup> most borrowed book by Croatian and foreign authors), the third category "400-599" comprises the most borrowed books from position 400 to 599, etc. Finally, the ninth category "3,500-4,000" comprises the most borrowed books from position 3,500 to 4,000. In Figure 1, there are columns related to each of these nine categories, and these columns indicate the number of Croatian authors' books among the total number of the most borrowed books in a certain category. The remaining books in a certain category are primarily books by foreign authors and a few books by Croatian authors which are on the required reading lists for schools.



If we look at the first category "1-99" which comprises 99 most borrowed books, we can see that there are only three books by Croatian authors among them. The remaining 96 books are primarily books by foreign authors. In the second category "100-399", there are only 13 books by Croatian authors, and the remaining 286 books are primarily books by foreign authors. The number of books with Croatian authors is growing in the next three categories ("400-999"; "1,000-1,499"; "1,500-1,999"), although the books by foreign authors are predominant here as well. In category "400-999" there are 54 books by Croatian authors, and the remaining 545 books are primarily books by foreign authors. In category "1,000-1,499" there are 58 books by Croatian authors, and the remaining 441 books are primarily books by foreign authors. In category "1,500-1,999" there are 75 books by Croatian authors, and the remaining 424 books are primarily books by foreign authors. In the last four categories ("2,000-2,499"; "2,500-2,999"; "3,000-3,499"; "3,500-4,000") the number of Croatian books is decreasing for about two times and it is in the range from minimum 21 (category "3,000-3,499") to maximum 33 (category "2,000-2,499"). The number of Croatian books decreases for the reason that in these categories we did not include the most borrowed books by Croatian authors from all four libraries. Namely, in Split Library, the 75<sup>th</sup> most borrowed book by Croatian author was in the 1887<sup>th</sup> position of the most borrowed books list in that library. With that 75<sup>th</sup> book we completed the (sub)sample of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in Split Library so that we did not need to explore the presence of additional most borrowed books by Croatian authors in that library. Therefore, when we look, for example, at category "2,000-2,499" in Figure 1, we have to be aware that it does not comprise the books by Croatian authors from Split Library.

In any case, we can conclude from the findings presented in Figure 1 that the books by authors from Croatia comprise a very small share of the whole list of the most borrowed books in the four public libraries. For example, there are only 203 books by Croatian authors among the 1,999 most borrowed books in these libraries. It is especially surprising (and worrying) that among the 99 most borrowed books there are only three books by Croatian authors. Not even among the 399 most borrowed books are there many books by Croatian authors: only 16 books. These findings strongly indicate that the most borrowed books by Croatian authors are not very often borrowed by many users of Croatian libraries, in comparison to the most borrowed books by foreign authors.

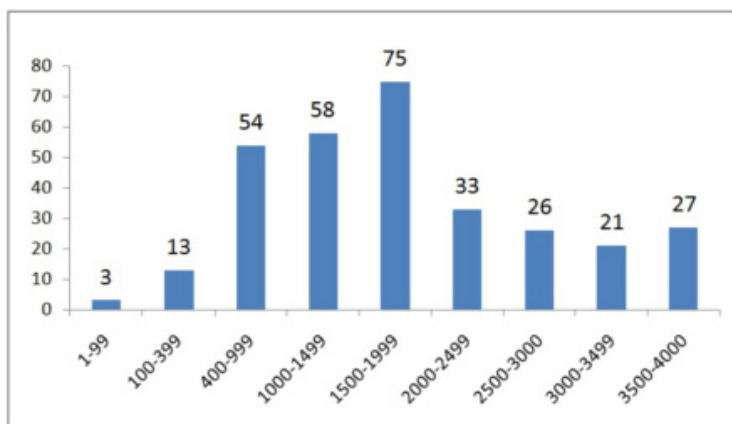


Figure 1. Positions of 300 books by Croatian authors on the list of most borrowed books (the data is summed for all libraries)

In Table 2 we can see how many books by Croatian authors are present among the 999 most borrowed books. These findings are presented separately for each library. In Table 2 we can see that in all four libraries there are not many books by Croatian authors among the 999 most borrowed books. However, in Zagreb Library the number is considerably smaller than in the other three libraries. In Zagreb Library there are only two books by Croatian authors among the 999 most borrowed books, while Split Library has the highest number of books by Croatian authors among the 999 most borrowed books - 36. Split Library even has one book by a Croatian author which is positioned in the 15<sup>th</sup> place among all most borrowed books. It is a book with the title: “*Ciganin, ali najljepši*” by Kristian Novak. It is interesting that Split Library also has the second and third most borrowed books by Croatian authors (“*Črna mati zemla*” by Kristian Novak - 51<sup>st</sup> position; “*Susjed*” by Marina Vujčić - 81<sup>st</sup> position).

Table 2. Ranking of books by Croatian authors on the list of most borrowed books

	Split	Pula	Rijeka	Zagreb
<b>1-9</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>10-24</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>25-49</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>50-74</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>74-99</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>100-199</b>	4	1	0	0
<b>200-399</b>	6	0	2	0
<b>400-599</b>	11	7	2	1
<b>600-799</b>	9	8	8	0
<b>800-999</b>	3	2	2	1

After we presented the findings that indicate low levels of borrowing of books by Croatian authors compared to the books by foreign authors, we will present in more the detail various aspects of the 300 books by Croatian authors included in the sample, the books that were the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in the four libraries included in the research.

In Table 3 we can see three different types of literature to which these 300 books belong. We can see that the considerably highest number of these books are fiction books. After that, the most popular type of literature are non-fiction books. Among the 300 books from the sample, the picture books are the least numerable. There are some minor differences among the libraries in relation to the number of books of a certain type. For example, Split Library has 62 fiction books and Rijeka Library has 52; Zagreb Library has 8 non-fiction books and Rijeka Library has 18; Split Library has only 2, while Zagreb Library has 6 picture books on the list of 75 most borrowed books by Croatian authors.

Table 3. Number of borrowings of each of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to the type of literature

	<b>Split</b>	<b>Pula</b>	<b>Rijeka</b>	<b>Zagreb</b>
<b>fiction</b>	62	59	52	61
<b>non-fiction</b>	11	12	18	8
<b>picture books</b>	2	4	5	6

In Figure 2 we can also see the findings about the types of literature to which these 300 books belong. The findings are summed up for all the four libraries. There are 234 fiction books, 49 non-fiction books and only 17 picture books.

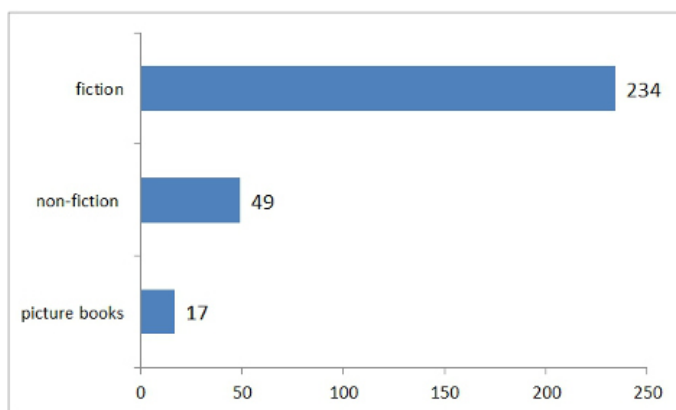


Figure 2. Types of literature of the 300 most borrowed books by Croatian authors (the data is summed for all libraries)

In Table 4 we can see the findings on the average borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to the type of literature. The findings are presented separately for each of the four libraries. In Zagreb and Rijeka libraries we found smaller differences between the average number of borrowings of various types of literature, while in Split and Rijeka libraries these differences are greater. In Zagreb Library, each of the most borrowed fiction books by Croatian authors was borrowed 602.7 times on average. Non-fiction and picture books have less borrowings on average (non-fiction: 502.4; picture books: 527.7), but the difference is not as large as in some other libraries, such as Split Library. In Split Library, each of the most borrowed fiction books by Croatian authors was borrowed 140.4 times on average; each of the most borrowed non-fiction books was borrowed 99.2 times on average; each of the most borrowed picture books was borrowed 68.5 times on average. Therefore, while in Zagreb Library fiction books were borrowed 1.2 times more frequently than non-fiction books, in Split Library fiction books were borrowed 1.4 times more frequent than non-fiction books. While in Zagreb Library, fiction books were borrowed 1.14 times more frequently than picture books, in Split Library, fiction books were borrowed 2.1 times more frequently than picture books.

Table 4. Average number of borrowings of each of the most borrowed book by Croatian author in relation to the type of literature

	<b>Split</b>	<b>Pula</b>	<b>Rijeka</b>	<b>Zagreb</b>
<b>fiction</b>	140,4	56,9	116,8	602,7
<b>non-fiction</b>	99,2	50	87,8	502,4
<b>picture books</b>	68,5	46,5	73,4	527,7

In Table 5 we can see the findings about the average borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to their types of literature. However, this time the findings are presented jointly for all the four libraries. It is visible from the table that the most borrowed are fiction books (234.6 borrowings on average), followed by picture books (226.8) and non-fiction books (148.8). The summary data are showing a somewhat deformed image of the borrowings because the total number of borrowings for Zagreb Library is considerably higher than in the other three libraries. Namely, in Zagreb Library, picture books are more borrowed than non-fiction books, and this fact is disproportionately affecting the average numbers of borrowings for all four libraries. Therefore, there could be a false perception that in all the four libraries picture books are the most borrowed type of books after fiction. However, if we look again at Table 4, we can see that this is not the case. It is visible that picture books are in the second place of average borrowings only in Zagreb Library, while in all other libraries the picture books are in the third place.

Table 5. Average number of borrowings of each of the most borrowed book by Croatian author in relation to the type of literature (summed data for all four libraries)

	<b>fiction</b>	<b>non-fiction</b>	<b>picture books</b>
<b>Average</b>	234,6	148,8	226,8

Interesting findings are presented in Figure 3 in which we can see the genres of the majority of the books from the sample. The findings are presented jointly for all the four libraries. It needs to be emphasized that for some books the genre could not be identified. Also, for some books, more than one genre was identified. Finally, in Figure 3, some of the identified genres were not included because only one or two books belong to the genres (newspaper columns, novel about growing up, young adult novel, archeology, cook book, travel poetry / "putopoezija", adventure novel, art, psychology, philosophy, spirituality, political novel). It is important to note that these genres are determined based on the names of the genres found in the library catalogs and the Goodreads portal. Therefore, there are some inconsistencies regarding the genres that were identified in this study and regarding the definitions and typology of genres found in theoretical literature.

Therefore, in Figure 3, we only see the findings about the ten most popular genres of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors. It is visible that children books are the most numerous. Among 300 books from the sample, there are 67 children books. They are followed by: romance books (56), crime, thriller and mystery books (39; these books were designated as one genre because of their similarity); and health and self-help books (31). These four genres are the most popular. They comprise 193 books or 64.3% of the sample.

Somewhat less popular are the following six genres: history (23 books), (auto) biography genre which comprises autobiographical and biographical books (19), humor (17), drama (12), contemporary (10), and travel (8). Among these six genres, there are 89 books or 29.7% of the sample.

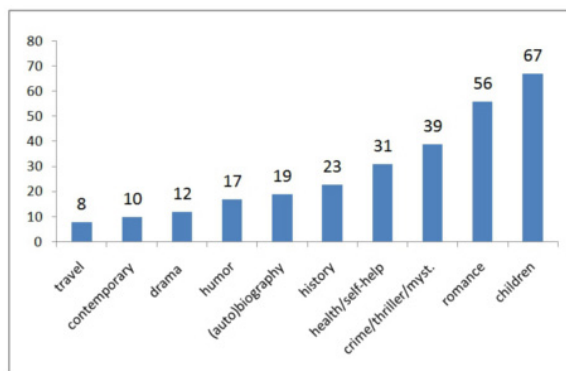


Figure 3. Number of borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to their genres (the data is summed for all libraries)

In Table 6 we can also see the genres of the majority of the books from the sample. However, these findings are now presented separately for each library. As previously mentioned, the total research sample was 300 most borrowed books by authors from Croatia. This sample was created by aggregating 75 most borrowed books by authors from Croatia, from each of the four libraries. Therefore, it will be interesting to explore the characteristics of the most borrowed books in individual libraries. It is visible from Table 6 that the majority of the genres are equally distributed in different libraries, although there are some differences. For example, children books are almost equally distributed in all libraries, except in Zagreb Library where there is a proportionally higher number of children books than in other libraries (in Zagreb Library there are 26 children books and there are only 12 children books in Rijeka Library). Similar imbalance is visible in the case of humor books. While Split and Zagreb Library have seven humor books each, Pula Library does not have any and Rijeka Library has only three humor books among the most borrowed 75 books by Croatian authors.

Table 6. Number of borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to ten most popular genres

	Split	Pula	Rijeka	Zagreb
<b>romance</b>	16	14	14	12
<b>children</b>	16	13	12	26
<b>crime/thriller/myst.</b>	7	10	12	10
<b>history</b>	5	7	5	6
<b>humor</b>	7	0	3	7
<b>health/self-help</b>	7	8	10	6
<b>(auto)biography</b>	5	6	6	2
<b>drama</b>	6	4	1	1
<b>travel</b>	2	3	2	1
<b>contemporary</b>	3	1	4	2

In Figure 4, we can see in which time periods the books from the sample were published for the first time. The findings are presented jointly for all the four libraries. Almost all the books were published for the first time after the year 2000. The books which were published from 2015 to 2017 are the most frequent among the most borrowed books by Croatian authors. There are 194 books published in this time period or 64.7% of the sample. In the time period from 2010 to 2015 there are 67 books or 22.3% of the sample, and in the time period from 1920 to 2009 there are only 39 books or 13% of the sample. For this last time period the starting year is 1920 because, in that year, the oldest book from the sample was published for the first time: "*Grička vještica*" by Marija Jurić Zagorka. Also, in this time period there are 28 books which were published for the first time between 2000 and 2009, and there are only nine books published between 1920 and 1990.

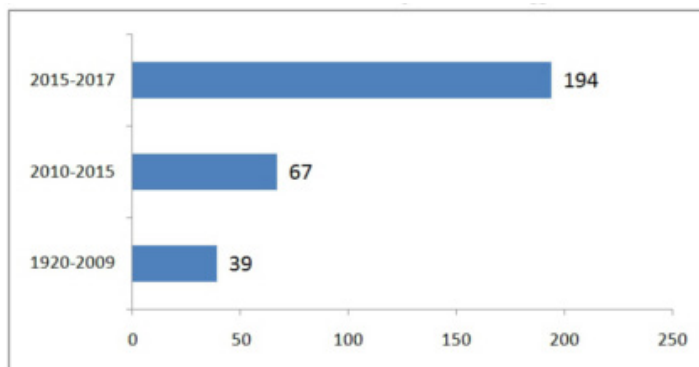


Figure 4. Number of borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to time periods in which they were published for the first time (the data is summed for all libraries)

In Table 7 we can also see in which time periods the books from the sample were published for the first time. However, these findings are now presented separately for all the four libraries. It is visible that in all libraries there is a similar distribution of most borrowed books. Namely, if the books have been published more recently, they are borrowed more frequently. The reasons for this borrowing pattern could be various: the majority of books in library collections have been published recently; the majority of books promoted by libraries or available on library shelves that are accessible to users have been published recently; the users have a preference for recently published books, etc. Probably, some combination of these and other reasons has an impact on the borrowing pattern.

It was also established that there are some minor differences related to the publishing period of most borrowed books by Croatian authors. For example, Zagreb Library has the largest number of books which were published for the first time from 1920 to 1990 (15 books), while Split Library has the smallest number of books published during the same time period (five books).

Table 7. Number of borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to time periods in which they were published for the first time

	Split	Pula	Rijeka	Zagreb
<b>2015-2017</b>	51	52	48	43
<b>2010-2015</b>	19	16	15	17
<b>1920-2009</b>	5	7	12	15

In Figure 5 we can see that there are more women among the authors of the most borrowed Croatian books, - 168 or 55.3% of the total number of authors. There are 136 male authors or 44.7%. Some books have more than one author so the total number of authors is 304.

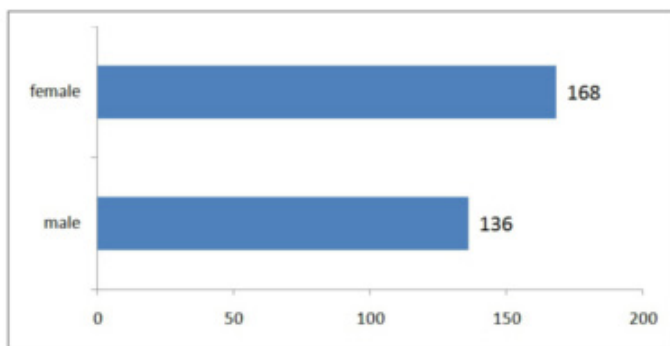


Figure 5. Number of borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to the gender of their authors (the data is summed for all libraries)

Table 8 presents the findings on the gender of the authors of the most borrowed books from the sample. However, these findings are now presented separately for all the four libraries. Male authors are more numerous only in one library. It is Rijeka Library, where there are 36 female and 40 male authors. In both Split and Zagreb libraries there is a greater number of female authors (45) compared to male authors (31).

Table 8. Number of borrowings of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in relation to the gender of their authors

	Split	Pula	Rijeka	Zagreb
<b>female</b>	45	42	36	45
<b>male</b>	31	34	40	31

## 7. Discussion

An important finding of this research is that in all the four analyzed public libraries, there is a very small number of books by Croatian authors compared to the books by foreign authors among the most borrowed books. Although there is a considerable number of fiction, non-fiction and picture books by Croatian authors published yearly, according to the findings of this research, the majority of library users borrow books by foreign authors. There could be different reasons for the emergence and maintenance of this borrowing pattern. For example, only a small number of books in library collections is written by Croatian authors; the majority of books promoted by libraries or available on library shelves that are accessible to users are written by non-Croatian authors; library users have a preference for books written by non-Croatian authors. Probably a combination of these and other reasons has an impact on the borrowing pattern. Based on the studies of reading preferences presented in this paper which indicate that



the readers in Croatia have a preference for books by non-Croatian authors, we can assume that this preference also has a considerable impact on the borrowing patterns in libraries.

Among the organizations with the strongest influences on people's cultural preferences are probably educational and media organizations. In this discussion, the focus will be on media organizations (including publishers) and their influence. The focus will not be on library development policy and library offer because large libraries that were included in this research have library policies, and large enough budgets, to buy many new books by Croatian authors each year. And each year there are many such books in the Croatian publishing market. One important reason for this is that the Croatian Ministry of Culture has financially supported the publishing of Croatian books for years and it has also financially supported the purchase of these books by public libraries (Ministry of Culture: Financing of book and publishing programs 2019). Therefore, it is not very probable that library policy and unavailability of books by Croatian authors in libraries (especially in the largest libraries such as those included in this research) could be the reasons why these books are not very frequent among the most borrowed books.

Therefore, in this discussion, we have chosen to focus on the influence of media organizations on people's book preferences, which we think is a very important factor for explaining the popularity of non-Croatian literature among library users.

The popularity of foreign books is very strongly developed, nurtured or supported through global promotional campaigns in various media. These books are often published by big, international publishers or media conglomerates which have more than enough financial power for global production, promotion and distribution. On the opposite side, Croatian publishers, even the largest among them, do not have sufficient budgets for the promotion of books written by Croatian authors. These budgets are inadequate for the competition with international publishers. This uneven starting position in the possibilities of production, promotion and distribution of books is a crucial factor that has an impact on the creation and maintenance of strong interest of readers in Croatia in books by foreign authors compared to the books by Croatian authors. This huge difference in book preference is especially pronounced in the most lucrative, highest positions on the borrowing lists. In this research, this circumstance was fully confirmed because, among the 99 most borrowed books in the four libraries, there are only three books by Croatian authors. Except for a few books required for reading in schools, all the other books are written by foreign authors.<sup>5</sup> The situation is equally unfavorable for books by Croatian authors when we take into consideration the longer list of the most borrowed books, i.e. the

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5 Among the books which are required for reading in schools there are Croatian and foreign books.

list with 399 most borrowed library books. This list is almost without books by Croatian authors. Reader preferences develop for years, so it could be surmised that for many, maybe even the huge majority of library users, strong preference for reading books by foreign authors have existed for years and that it will continue to exist for years. Even if some organizations in Croatia (such as the Ministry of Culture) start to create and implement smart and effective strategies for the promotion of reading books by Croatian authors, at least a few years will need to pass before some of the goals of these strategies have been reached. Namely, they are valuable, but not enough to create, promote and distribute books by Croatian authors. The most important thing is to gradually expand and complement readers' preferences so that they become more interested in books by Croatian authors. This goal is quite a challenge because, same as many other human personality characteristics, reading preferences are very hard to change and expand. Another closely related challenge is that today we are often in the situation that media, such as television, printed newspapers, magazines and internet portals, are saturated with content created outside Croatia, and that content is very often more preferred by Croatian users than the content created in Croatia, about Croatia. These are huge challenges not only for librarians, but also for all other people and members of the professions interested in education, learning and expanding the intellectual horizons of people. It is important to note that there is a lot of quality content created outside Croatia, but if it is not balanced with quality content created by Croatian authors, then Croatian readers are not in an adequate position to inform and educate themselves about important parts of reality that surrounds them.

Finally, regarding the focus of this research, the interesting question is about the possibilities for Croatian librarians to support the growth of interest of a large number of library users and wider community in quality books by Croatian authors. There are various well-known methods or activities that are already used (or could be used) by librarians to support increased interest in the books by Croatian authors. However, it needs to be said that the goal should not be just to promote books by Croatian authors. Primarily, the quality books need to be promoted. This opens the intricate question of defining and evaluating quality. If the answer to the question were formed by librarians who like to read a lot, who are adequately educated and who are intrinsically motivated to create, promote and distribute all types of information and knowledge, then we would have the most important condition for getting the most appropriate answers to the questions about content quality.

The research has also established that the most borrowed books by Croatian authors belong to the following three types of literature: the significantly most numerous are fiction books, followed by nonfiction and picture books. The most popular genres are children books, romance books, crime/thriller/mystery books, health and self-help books. Somewhat less popular are history books, (auto) biography, humor, drama, contemporary and travel. The findings on the most popular types and genres of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors could

be used in various ways. They could be helpful for the creation of better, more relevant and effective promotional activities for books by Croatian authors. For example, a library could focus its promotional activities on the books from the above genres and types of literature preferred by the users. In that way, it could be easier to attract users' attention and build their more permanent interest in books by Croatian authors.

Another finding from the research is that, although in all the four libraries there are not many books by Croatian authors among the most borrowed books, in Zagreb Library the number is considerably smaller than in the remaining three libraries. In additional studies, the factors that are supporting this difference and their effect could be explored. For example, factors such as the characteristics of library users or library activities, as well as the characteristics of their collections.

Finally, another important finding is that library users are mostly borrowing books by Croatian authors which have been published recently. For example, the books published from 2015 to 2017 are the most often borrowed. There are very few books among the most borrowed Croatian books that were published before the year 2000. Such user preferences could also be affected by the strong media promotion of recently published books. There is very few information in media about books that have not been published recently. Library collections are rich treasuries of many books published in various years, decades and centuries. If library users mostly borrow books published in the last few years, then we have a situation that the full potential of library collections is ignored. This is another motivation for librarians and other educational professionals and interested people to think about the ways in which to focus the attention of users on these equally valuable parts of library collections, which were accumulated through long periods, and which are, therefore, at least equally valuable as the newly acquired, recently published books.

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## 8. Conclusion

Hopefully, this study has helped to illuminate some important aspects of the most borrowed books by Croatian authors in four large Croatian libraries. Through the research conducted in this study, various insights were acquired that indicate different characteristics of the most borrowed books. It was established that users mostly borrow books by foreign authors. It was also established that when they borrow books by Croatian authors, they prefer fiction books, specific genres (children books, romance, thriller/crime/mystery, health and self-help books...) and books that were published for the first time in the last few years. Such a constellation of reading preferences of a considerable number of library users could be perceived as normal, unproblematic, maybe even desirable. But the same constellation of reading preferences could also be perceived as somewhat problematic, as a constellation that needs to be at least partially reshaped. If we abide by the principles and values that define the mission and

goals of librarianship and education, for example, that the goal of libraries is to entertain, educate and inform their users, then the second, more proactive perception about the need to change and expand the constellation of reading preferences, is more adequate.

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## Sažetak

### **Najposuđivanije knjige hrvatskih autora u narodnim knjižnicama u Zagrebu, Splitu, Rijeci i Puli**

U radu je istražena tema knjižnične posudbe knjiga hrvatskih autora u narodnim knjižnicama. Fokus istraživanja bio je na najposuđivanijim knjigama. U prvome dijelu rada pružen je pregled literature povezane s temom, npr. literature o čitateljskim interesima i važnosti kulturno raznolikih knjiga. U drugome dijelu rada predstavljeni su rezultati istraživanja. Ciljevi istraživanja bili su: 1) istražiti koliko često korisnici hrvatskih narodnih knjižnica posuđuju knjige autora iz Hrvatske, u odnosu na posudbu knjiga autora izvan Hrvatske, tj. stranih autora; 2) istražiti karakteristike najposuđivanijih knjiga hrvatskih autora (kada su prvi put objavljene; je li riječ o knjigama fikcije, nefikcionalnim knjigama ili slikovnicama; kojih su žanrova). Istražena je posudba knjiga u narodnim knjižnicama koje se nalaze u Zagrebu, Rijeci, Splitu i Puli. Glavni uzorak sastojao se od 300 najposuđivanijih knjiga hrvatskih autora. U svakoj od četiri knjižnice uzorak je bio 75 najposuđivanijih knjiga hrvatskih autora, stoga je ukupni uzorak bio 300 knjiga najposuđivanijih knjiga u tim četirima knjižnicama. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da među najposuđivanijim knjigama u četirima istraženim knjižnicama nema mnogo knjiga hrvatskih autora. Na primjer, među prvih 99 najposuđivanijih knjiga u tim knjižnicama nalaze se samo tri knjige hrvatskih autora, a među prvih 399 najposuđivanijih knjiga nalazi se samo 16 knjiga hrvatskih autora. Također, među prvih 1999 najposuđivanijih knjiga nalaze se tek 203 knjige hrvatskih autora. Važno je napomenuti da je riječ o knjigama hrvatskih autora koje nisu na listama lektire za osnovne i srednje škole. Još je jedan važan rezultat istraživanja da velika većina najposuđivanijih knjiga hrvatskih autora pripada u sljedeći tip literature: fikcija. Ujedno je utvrđeno da među najposuđivanijim knjigama hrvatskih autora najviše njih pripada sljedećim žanrovima i to ovim redoslijedom popularnosti, tj. posuđivanosti: dječje knjige, ljubavni romani, kriminalistički romani, trileri i romani misterije, knjige o zdravlju i samopomoći, povijesne knjige, biografije i autobiografije, humoristične knjige, drame, suvremene teme, putovanja. Gotovo su sve najposuđivanije knjige hrvatskih autora prvi put objavljene nakon 2000. godine, a uvjerljivo najčešće u periodu od 2015. do 2017. godine. Među 300 analiziranih najposuđivanijih knjiga hrvatskih autora, nalazi se tek nekoliko knjiga objavljenih prije 1990. godine. Među autorima je najposuđivanijih knjiga hrvatskih autora oko 10 % više žena nego muškaraca.

**Cljučne riječi:** najposuđivanije knjige, hrvatske narodne knjižnice, kulturna raznovrsnost