

## FM Radio's Response to a Dual Crisis Situation in the Republic of Croatia: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2020 Zagreb Earthquake

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*The paper examines the programming and organisational responses of FM radio to a dual crisis situation in the Republic of Croatia. At the very beginning of the national COVID-19 lockdown, on 22 March 2020, the capital city of Zagreb was struck by the strongest earthquake in the last 140 years. With the purpose of 're-cording' the situation at the time when the disaster was actually occurring, the research aims to question how the radio stations in the area acted under such unprecedented crisis circumstances. Methodologically, it is a qualitative and descriptive research based on the analysis of questionnaire answers. Open-ended questions are grouped into three main topics: organization and programme changes, sources of information and the role of digital platforms. The results reveal that radio stations tended to retain their formatted programme content regardless of the dual crisis. This finding indicates the necessity to re-examine the overall role of FM radio in a modern democratic society.*

**Key words:** COVID-19, crisis situation, earthquake, FM radio, radio programme.

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global COVID-19 pandemic as the coronavirus-caused infectious disease spread across the world.<sup>2</sup> Strict epidemiological measures were introduced in Croatia in a similar fashion as in the rest of Europe and the world. The lockdown resulted in a ban on people's staying on the streets and other public places, a ban on social gatherings, cancellation of all public events, a ban on leaving the place of residence, suspension of classes in schools and universities, etc.<sup>3</sup> Daily records indicated a steady growth of infected, hospitalized and deceased people.

In a tense atmosphere of marked social isolation and 'putting a halt' to a usual way of life, on the morning of 22 March (06:24), Zagreb was hit by the strongest earthquake in the last 140 years of the city's existence. It was a M 5.5 earthquake according to the Richter scale, whose intensity at the epicentre ranged between levels VII and VIII of the MMI scale. A somewhat weaker blow (M 5.0) followed 37 minutes later.

Confused and frightened citizens left their homes in great numbers, although the situation on the city streets was full of dangers due to the continuous collapse of roofs, walls and facades. The traumatic experience of fear for life thus met with an already tense situation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a collapse of a roof in the city centre, a 15-year-old girl got injured and subsequently died of her injuries in hospital, whereas other 26 people in the city centre were slightly injured.

The Croatian Centre for Earthquake Engineering<sup>4</sup> reported damage to almost 26,000 residential buildings and houses, out of which almost 7,000 were no longer safe for residential use. The earthquake also caused numerous breakdowns in energy networks, which resulted in the interruption of electricity and heat supply as well as irregular water supply.

In the course of the twentieth century, yet before digitisation, of all the media, it was radio to have proved to be the optimal medium for crisis reporting.<sup>5</sup> This paper therefore investigates whether FM radio fared well and how it per-

<sup>1</sup> Into English translated by Saša Bjelobaba.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. World Health Organization (WHO), *Timeline COVID-19* (27.04.2020), <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>, (12.06.2020).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, *Odluke Stožera civilne zaštite RH za sprečavanje širenja zaraze koronavirusom*, [Decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia for the prevention of the spread of coronavirus infection], <https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/odluke-stozera-civilne-zastite-rh-za-sprecavanje-sirenja-zaraze-koronavirusom/2304>, (06.08.2020).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Croatian Centre for Earthquake Engineering (HCPI), *Pregled zgrada*, [Overview of buildings], <https://www.hcpi.hr/rezultati-procjena-ostecenja-gradevina-nakon-potresa-31>, (21.06.2020).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Loretta HIEBER, *Lifeline Media: Reaching populations in crisis*, Geneva, Media Action International, 2001, 50-58; Marina MUČALO, *Radio medij 20. stoljeća*, [Radio 20<sup>th</sup> century medium], Zagreb, Algoritam, 2010, 226-240, 303-314.

formed in the 'Zagreb case of a dual crisis situation'? The selection of the time frame for conducting the research (from 26 March to 26 April 2020) was made intentionally, with the aim of 'recording' the events at the time in which they were actually taking place.

### *1. Radio in crisis situations*

Although research on radio in crisis situations has been conducted since 1941 at the international level<sup>6</sup>, this paper is one of the first studies devoted to this topic in Croatian scientific production.

In terms of the types of crises at hand (health, political or natural, terrorism; violence; problems in transport), radio is mostly used in cases of natural crises (albeit somewhat more news in this regard is followed on television and on news websites).<sup>7</sup>

A recent research study was based on the analysis of scientific papers published in the period from 2004 to 2018 that addressed the issue of the role of radio in natural crises in the world.<sup>8</sup> Its results indicate that radio is the key medium for obtaining information and that it enjoys a high degree of trust of its listeners (they feel closeness towards this medium, it is on the spot, it provides specific and fast information). The expression »radio in a suitcase« emphasizes the fact that the whole of necessary broadcasting equipment fits in only one suitcase which, as the expression itself suggests, is intended for easy transport, especially in circumstances when there is no electricity and mobile phones, while television and other media are not available. Earthquakes are the most devastating among natural disasters. They have claimed 2.3 million lives since the beginning of the 20th century (40% of all victims of natural disasters).<sup>9</sup>

This research<sup>10</sup> which was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, showed that radio was ranked sixth among all the media that people had opted for as sources of information in cases of previous national or regional health

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Herta HERZOG, On Borrowed Experience, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, 9 (1941) 1, 65-95.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sejin PARK, Elizabeth JOHNSON AVERY, Effects of Media Channel, Crisis Type and Demographics on Audience Intent to Follow Instructing Information During Crisis, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 26 (2018) 3, 69-78, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-5973.12137>, (12.06.2021).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Karin HUGELIUS, Mike ADAMS, Eila ROMO-MURPHY, The Power of Radio to Promote Health and Resilience in Natural Disasters: A Review, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16 (2019) 4, 1-11, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. James DANIEL, *Natural Disasters since 1900: Over 8 Million Deaths and 7 Trillion US Dollars damage*, (18.04.2016), [https://www.kit.edu/kit/english/pi\\_2016\\_058\\_natural-disasters-since-1900-over-8-million-deaths-and-7-trillion-us-dollars-damage.php](https://www.kit.edu/kit/english/pi_2016_058_natural-disasters-since-1900-over-8-million-deaths-and-7-trillion-us-dollars-damage.php), (11.06.2021).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Park, Avery, *Effects of Media Channel...*

crises (after television, news websites, friends/family, social networks and the press).

Below is an overview of recent foreign studies that put under scrutiny radio and its informative role in cases of earthquakes (natural crises) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (a health crisis).

### *1.1. Recent Research on the Role of Radio in Earthquakes*

Recent research on the role of radio in earthquake circumstances refers to three specific events of the last decade: the earthquake in Haiti<sup>11</sup>, two earthquakes in Nepal<sup>12</sup> and two earthquakes in New Zealand.<sup>13</sup> These scientists<sup>14</sup> agree that radio is the most efficient, fastest and most practical medium for transmitting relevant information in post-earthquake crises. The authors confirm the prominent role of radio in the following three aspects: information, psychological support and assistance in post-disaster recovery. The most commonly used methods are focus groups and interviews (online or live) with listeners, earthquake witnesses<sup>15</sup> and interviews with radio employees.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, there are a remarkably small number of researchers<sup>17</sup> who investigate the circumstances at the radio station itself (including the way a radio station works, employees' behaviour and programme changes) and address the issue of programme content in particular.

One of the deadliest earthquakes (M 7.0) with more than 300,000 dead people and extreme material damage, occurred in Haiti in 2010. »Although much of the attention has been paid to new media technologies, radio was the most effective tool for serving the needs of the public« and it was the most

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Anne NELSON, Ivan SIGAL, Dean ZAMBRANO, *Media, Information Systems and Communities: Lessons from Haiti – executive summary*, (2011) 1-26, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/media-information-systems-and-communities-lessons-haiti>, (21.06.2020).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Theodora HANNIDES, *Humanitarian Broadcasting in Emergencies: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings*, 1-68; (10.2015), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/research/reports/Humanitarian-broadcasting-in-emergencies-synthesis-report-2015>, (23.06.2020).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ruth ZANKER, Heroic radio: A study of radio responses in the immediate aftermath of the September 2010 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, *Mediantz*, 14 (2014) 1, 5-19; Zita JOYCE, RadioQuake: Getting back 'on air' after the Christchurch earthquakes, *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media*, 13 (2015) 1, 57-73; Zita JOYCE, Thank goodness for our little radio: Researching post-quake radio audience, *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 13 (2016) 2, 86-108.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Nelson, Sigal, Zambrano, *Media, Information Systems and Communities...*; Joyce, *RadioQuake: Getting back...*; Joyce, *Thank goodness for our little radio...*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hannides, *Humanitarian Broadcasting in Emergencies...*; Joyce, *Thank goodness for our little radio...*

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hannides, *Humanitarian Broadcasting in Emergencies...*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Nelson, Sigal, Zambrano, *Media, Information Systems...*; Zanker, *Heroic radio...*

efficient way of circulating information on hygiene, shelter and safety between government, the church and the widest range of citizens after the earthquake.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of a series of earthquakes in Nepal in 2015 (M 7.8 and 7.3), approximately 9,000 people were killed and about 3 million people needed help. According to Hannides<sup>19</sup>, listeners wanted only news programme immediately after the earthquake, while the recovery phase was characterized by »fatigue from earthquake information« and a desire for an entertainment-music programme. There was a tendency to obtain two-way radio communication in which listeners shared their stories and experiences under the motto »Working together, united through the crises«.<sup>20</sup>

In Christchurch, New Zealand's largest city in the South Island, a total of 185 people were killed, and tourists from more than twenty countries were among the victims in the earthquakes of September 2020 (M 7.1) and February 2011 (M 6.3). Zanker considers the key elements to be »accuracy of information, speed of information transfer, empathy and openness«, as well as direct leadership engagement (live) and spontaneous communication with listeners.<sup>21</sup> The main finding of the research amounts to the fact that in the first hours after the earthquake, all digital radio platforms functioned together, as a «node» of communication channels, filled with all kinds of information from numerous sources with the ability of radio to «deliver continual reports, messages and information, including advice where help was available».<sup>22</sup>

The challenges to the functioning of local radio stations and their role after earthquakes in Christchurch were also explored by Joyce<sup>23</sup>. Typical characteristics of radio were: long periods of reporting and long periods of listening by listeners – the programme is like a marathon in which it is made possible for listeners to understand the disaster and gain insight into what is happening outside their homes.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.2. Recent Research on the Role of Radio in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Research by foreign scientists on the topic of media consumption during the COVID-19 health crisis so far has focused on social networks.<sup>25</sup> Traditional

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, Sigal, Zambrano, *Media, Information Systems...*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hannides, *Humanitarian Broadcasting in Emergencies...*, 40-47.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Zanker, *Heroic radio...*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Joyce, *RadioQuake: Getting back...*; Joyce, *Thank goodness for our little radio...*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid*, 90.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Albert CHAN, Anna LEE, Gavin JOYNT, Social media for rapid knowledge dissemination: early experience from the COVID-19 pandemic, *Anaesthesia*, 75 (2020) 12, 1579-1582; Wajahat HUSSAIN, Role of Social Media in COVID-19 Pandemic, *The International Journal of Frontier Sciences*, 4 (2020) 2, 59-60; Aengus BRIDGMAN, Eric MERKLEY, Peter LOEWEN, The causes and consequences of COVID-19 misperceptions: Understanding the role of news and social

media are mainly dealt with by world-renowned research companies and some state media regulators.

The Reuters survey<sup>26</sup> conducted in six countries on three continents (Argentina, the USA, South Korea, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain) showed that radio was the fourth choice when people want to get the latest news about the coronavirus: after news websites, television and social networks. It is used the most in European countries (Germany and the United Kingdom).

According to the study conducted by the European Broadcasting Association<sup>27</sup>, which included 28 European Union countries, only 14% of citizens used radio to get information about the pandemic. However, what distinguishes radio from other media is the highest level of trust in items of information obtained through this very medium.

Ever since the pandemic broke out, Ofcom, the UK's main media regulator, has been conducting weekly and monthly online surveys<sup>28</sup> to monitor what percentage of people get regularly informed about the latest COVID-19 news and what media they use to get this kind of information. In the first week of the survey, about 93% of the population over the age of 18 used traditional media (radio, TV and the press) as the main sources of information. In the 59<sup>th</sup> week of the pandemic (May 2021), frequency of media use (81%) and the habit of using traditional media (83%) did not significantly decrease.

A comprehensive analysis of radio listenership in the USA showed that one third of adult citizens listened to the radio more than usual during the lockdown in order to obtain new information on coronavirus and information on working hours of certain services, which confirms the informative role of radio in this crisis. Furthermore, radio contributed to reducing certain negative feelings, such as panic and loneliness.<sup>29</sup>

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media, *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 1 (2020), *Special Issue on COVID-19 and Misinformation Attribution 4.0 International*, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/5QS2XP>.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Reuters, *Navigating the 'infodemic': how people in six countries access and rate news and information about coronavirus*, (2020), <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/Navigating%20the%20Coronavirus%20Infodemic%20FINAL.pdf>, (11.06.2021).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. European Broadcasting Union (EBU), *Trust in Media*, (2020), [https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/MIS/login\\_only/market\\_insights/EBU-MIS-Trust\\_in\\_Media\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/MIS/login_only/market_insights/EBU-MIS-Trust_in_Media_2020.pdf), (11.06.2021).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ofcom, *Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes*, (2020), <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/news-media/coronavirus-news-consumption-attitudes-behaviour>, (11.06.2021).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Nielsen, *Radio is 'comfort food' as media consumption rises amid covid-19 pandemic*, (2020), <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2020/radio-is-comfort-food-as-media-consumption-rises-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>, (12.06.2021).

## 2. Research and methodology

Croatian radio broadcasting has a long tradition (since 1926) and is markedly well developed. According to the data released by the Agency for Electronic Media<sup>30</sup>, nowadays, 161 radio stations of all programme directions (public, commercial and non-profit programmes) broadcast in analogue technology (FM). Analogue transmission in the terrestrial network relies on 77 transmitting locations. It is via these transmitters that 99% of the population of the Republic of Croatia are covered by the FM radio signal<sup>31</sup> For this kind of broadcasting, the band in the frequency range from 87.5 MHz to 108 MHz is used, and the coverage area can be at the national, regional, county and local levels.<sup>32</sup> The first group of radio channels is *Hrvatski radio* [Croatian Radio], the only public radio service in Croatia with three national and eight regional channels. The second group of radio channels consists of non-profit (8) and commercial (141) radio broadcasters that have the right to use a certain frequency, in a certain area and in a certain period of time.

The dominant category in this realm is privately owned commercial channels that have undergone a formatting process in the early twenty-first century. Music is the dominant programme content, while news content is mostly taken over from public radio (*Croatian Radio*) or purchased from specialized agencies (Media servis and HINA).<sup>33</sup> Radio hosts focus on creative and entertaining content in short forms in their programmes, while talkback programmes (with listeners and experts) have been abolished altogether on most radios.<sup>34</sup>

With the constant development of technological possibilities and the Internet, and the habits of new generations of potential listeners, radio stations began to develop their digital versions in the 1990s (websites and social network profiles and music platforms). The ultimate goal is to provide users with ongoing multimedia content on demand.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Agency for Electronic Media (AEM), *Radijski nakladnici*, [Radio publishers], (07.2020), <https://www.aem.hr/radijski-nakladnici/>, (08.07.2020).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Transmitters and communications, *Zemaljsko i satelitsko odašiljanje*, [Terrestrial and satellite broadcasting], (2020), <https://oiv.hr/hr/infrastruktura/zemaljsko-i-satelitsko-odasiljanje/>, (10.06.2021).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hrvoje DOMITROVIĆ, Kristian JAMBROŠIĆ, Antonio PETOŠIĆ, *Prijenos zvuka*, [Sound transmission], Zagreb, Fakultet elektrotehnike, 2018, 211-212.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Agency for Electronic Media (AEM), *Analiza radijskog tržišta*, [Radio market analysis], (2015), <https://www.aem.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Analiza-radijskog-tr%C5%BEi%C5%A1ta.pdf>, (12.07.2020).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Marina MUČALO, *Novinari na radijskim postajama*, [Journalists on radio stations], *Politička misao*, 35 (1998) 2, 222-234.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Viktorija CAR, Ivona ANDRIJAŠEVIĆ, *Mapping Digital Media: Croatia*, (2012), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/mapping-digital-media-croatia>, (13.06.2021).

Nevertheless, the habits of listeners in the Republic of Croatia, as in the rest of the world<sup>36</sup>, are still based on listening to traditional FM channels, in most cases, from one's car and at home.<sup>37</sup> Also, since the earthquake affected Zagreb and the wider Zagreb area, all FM radios based in Zagreb and the surrounding area were included in this research.

The sample thus consists of 22 radio stations, which are, due to their diversity in terms of broadcasting power (level of audibility) and programme orientation (commercial or non-profit), a rather exemplary small-scale of Croatian radio broadcasting.

The aim of the research is to determine organization, programme and communication changes in the broadcasting of radio programme under the specific circumstances of the Zagreb earthquake.

Methodologically, it is a qualitative and descriptive research based on the analysis of the content of questionnaire answers.

In accordance with the main research question »How did FM radios cover the local dual crisis in terms of programming, and how did they do it on their digital platforms?«, the questionnaire consisted of fifteen open-ended questions grouped according to the three main topics: (1) organization and programme changes, (2) sources of information and (3) the role of radio stations' digital platforms with an emphasis on websites. These topics were selected on the basis of foreign researchers' experience in this regard, that is, by using previous research as a model.<sup>38</sup>

Only four days after the earthquake (26 March 2020), it was sent by e-mail to editors-in-chief, whose responsibility includes »effective control« over programme selection and programme schedule.<sup>39</sup>

Some editors responded quickly (n = 13), some refused to participate with an apology (n = 2), and some promised they would respond, yet without fulfilling the promise (n = 7). The survey was concluded on 23 April 2020, a month after the earthquake. At that time, and due to the improvement of the epidemiological situation in the country, the national crisis headquarters announced the imminent mitigation of epidemiological measures imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twelve editors-in-chief at commercial radio stations and one editor of a non-profit radio *Radio Student* responded to the survey. These are two radios with a

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Edison Media Research, *Share of Ear*, (2019), <https://www.edisonresearch.com/am-fm-radio-still-dominant-audio-in-car/>, (12.06.2021); Rajar, *Dana Release Infographic Q42019*, (2019), [https://www.rajar.co.uk/docs/news/RAJAR\\_DataRelease\\_InfographicQ42019.pdf](https://www.rajar.co.uk/docs/news/RAJAR_DataRelease_InfographicQ42019.pdf), (13.06.2021).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Agency for Electronic Media (AEM), *Analiza radijskog tržišta...*

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Zanker, *Heroic radio...*; Joyce, *RadioQuake: Getting back...*; Joyce, *Thank goodness for our little radio...*

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *The Electronic Media Act* (ZEM), 2009: Art. 2, para. 7, <https://www.zakon.hr/z/196/Zakon-o-elektroni%C4%8Dkim-medijima>, (08.07.2020).



national concession (*Narodni radio* and *Otvoreni radio*), three regional stations (*Antena Zagreb*, *Radio 101*, *Radio Kaj*), two county radio stations (*Yammat FM* and *Extra FM*), four city radio stations (*City Radio*, *Gold FM*, *Radio Zelina* and *Radio Samobor*) and two with concessions for parts of the city of Zagreb (*Enter Zagreb* and *Radio Student*). For the purpose of this research, all radios that participated in the survey were anonymized and marked as R1, R2, R3, etc. up to the final mark R13.

### 3. Results

#### (1) Organization and programme changes

Within the first research topic, there were nine open-ended questions aimed at finding out about the functioning of radio (the state of the studio after the earthquake, the circumstances of broadcasting and the problem of staff availability), programme changes (the start of live broadcasts, the changes in music, the items of information the reporting was focused on, the way of communication about the earthquake, the agreement on the atmosphere/mood that was to be transmitted to listeners) in the first hours after the earthquake and after a certain period of time. Specifically, an additional goal was to find out whether the focus of reporting was still on the earthquake or whether the earthquake had been suppressed by the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the exception of one city radio (R11) and one radio with a concession for a part of the city of Zagreb (R13), all other radio studios and newsrooms (n = 11) were undamaged in the earthquake and were able to continue broadcasting normally after the earthquake. R11 had difficulty broadcasting for the first part of the day due to problems with internet access, and R13, due to a power outage, stopped broadcasting its programme from the studio and managed to secure broadcasting in the following few hours from the makeshift premises, located in the home of one of its employees.

On the day of the earthquake, almost all radios (n = 12), except for R12 (the only one that reported a general shortage of staff), worked with the same number of staff members as it had been pre-arranged in accordance with the National Civil Protection Directorate recommendations. The most common option was to work in teams of two or three people, with one team working from home and another team in the newsroom changing on a weekly basis.

With the imperative of as few people on the radio as possible, at the time of the first earthquake, that is, in the early hours of Sunday morning, only one regional radio (R4) had a live programme with the host present. The three radios (national R2, regional R5 and city R10) are specific in that they started broad-

casting live (programmes with hosts) earlier than usual. The editor-in-chief of the city radio (R10) entered the studio fifteen minutes after the earthquake and addressed the listeners with the first available information, while the editor of the regional radio (R5) managed to reach the studio less than an hour after the earthquake and start the live programme despite aggravating conditions (the studio was located in an old building in the very city centre and the streets were congested with traffic and fallen bricks). Six radio stations (national R1, regional R3 and four city R7, R8, R9 and R11) initiated their programme at the usual time, starting in the time interval between 7:00 and 10:00. Due to organization changes as a result of the pandemic and measures imposed by the National Civil Protection Directorate, two radios (R6 and R12) did not have a live programme on weekends (since 15 March 2020) and, despite the earthquake, they did not activate it on that Sunday either. The radio that had a problem with electricity availability (R13) broadcast »pre-prepared music lists and loaded shows prepared from home, but the main part of the programme was taken by music«.

Most editors-in-chief (n =11) decided to dedicate their all-day programme to the topic of earthquakes. The programme perspective addressed three key segments: (1) conveying up-to-date and verified earthquake information, (2) supporting humanitarian actions and (3) calming the panic of the audience through the composure and a soothing tone of the radio host. Nevertheless, only two radios (R3 and R5) based their programme on two-way communication, calls and messages from citizens.

Five radios intervened in their music programme to a minimal extent, mainly in two ways: either (1) by moving songs with inappropriate words (R2 and R5) or (2) by including a greater number Croatian (Zagreb) performers and Zagreb songs (R10, R11 and R13).

In the following period, after the most critical week, only four radio stations (R3, R4, R8 and R10) continued to report intensively on the earthquake, while all others returned to the topic of COVID-19 (health, insulation measures).

## *(2) Sources of information*

Within another research topic, three open-ended questions were asked to find out which type of earthquake information source was used, whether they were official (the Seismological Service, city authorities, emergency services...) or unofficial (listeners, earthquake victims...) and whether the radios had their own journalists in the field on the day of the earthquake or after a certain period of time (reporting from the field, the problem of old buildings in the centre of Zagreb, the demolition of the cathedral tower...).

Six radios used a combination of official and unofficial sources of information when reporting (R2, R3, R5, R8, R10 and R12). Four radios relied exclu-

sively on official sources (R1, R4, R6 and R11), while three radios (R7, R9 and R13) did not answer this question. No radio station based its programme solely on stories from unofficial sources. Among the official sources, the interviewees most commonly mention *Media Servis*, a specialized agency from which radios buy ready-made news programmes (n = 6), as well as communication and telephone statements released by on-duty services, such as firefighters and the police (n = 3). Two radios (R6 and R11) intensively used the latest information published on news portals. All radios that used unofficial sources (n = 6) mentioned personal testimonies of listeners and radio employees.

The greatest number of identical answers regarded the question about the individual radio's own journalists reporting from the field. Only one radio (regional R4) sent its journalists to conferences of the competent services and dispatched them around Zagreb so they could report from the field. The others (n = 12) justify the fact that they did not act in this fashion by the epidemiological situation and team organization of their work, the shortage of employees-reporters in everyday practice, and the fact that they broadcast formatted programme and do not employ journalists on a permanent basis. The situation did not change even in the period of immediate post-earthquake recovery.

### *(3) The role of radio stations' digital platforms with an emphasis on the website*

The third research topic referred to the use and role of digital platforms of radio stations in publishing earthquake information. It consisted of three open-ended questions. The aim was to find out how many radios published the first information about the earthquake on one of their digital platforms (a website, a profile on a social network) and whether the website was important to the radios and to what extent (whether, what and how often they published information about the earthquake on their websites). During previous crises, such as the earthquakes in New Zealand, the radio's website had usually served as a platform for basic and necessary instructions for the safety of citizens (contact numbers of emergency services, information on energy networks, advice and instructions for evacuation...).<sup>40</sup> Hosts would very often remind their listeners during their programme that they could find a kind of 'first aid manual' on the front page of the radio's website.

When asked where they published the first information about the earthquake, most radios (n = 6) answered that it was a live programme on the air (R1, R3, R4, R5, R7 and R10), while almost the same number of radios (n = 5) published the first information, as fast as possible, on their digital platforms,

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ruth ZANKER, Heroic radio: A study of radio responses digitalisation immediate aftermath of the September 2010 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, *Mediantz*, 14 (2014) 1, 5-19.

specifically their profiles on the social networks *Facebook* and *Instagram* (R2, R6, R8, R11 and R12). Two radios (R9 and R13) did not answer the question. Although no radio station chose its website as the first information channel, three radio stations (R4, R10 and R12) published an item of information about the earthquake on their websites in the early hours of Sunday morning.

When asked about the role of the website in overall reporting, two radios (R1 and R9) did not respond, while R11 explained that their webpage was in the process of being developed. Of the remaining radio stations ( $n = 10$ ), two radio stations stated that their websites were not intended as information pages and, for this reason, they did not publish anything concerning the earthquake (R6 and R8). More than half of the radio stations ( $n = 8$ ) used their websites to inform the public about the earthquake in the subsequent days, yet a significant oscillation is noticeable in terms of the frequency of publications and the perspective of the articles. In total, more than five articles on the earthquake were published by four radio stations (R3, R4, R5 and R10), while the remaining four radio stations remained on one or, at most, two articles (R2, R7, R12 and R13). The content of the posts can be grouped into five sub-topics: (a) the latest information, (b) contacts for help, (c) motivational articles, (d) broadcasting news from the airwaves and (e) a musical perspective.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the dual crisis situation in which obviously health measures completely suppressed the earthquake emergency, there were no special changes or adjustments in the programme with regard to the consequences of the earthquake. This research showed FM radio stations in the area of Zagreb and its surroundings did not take on the role of informing, helping and calming their listeners. A short-term focus on the news programme (which, except for one radio, had been purchased from a news agency) and then a return to daily music playlists (with no significant changes) and entertainment coincides with the results of recent research<sup>41</sup>, according to which listeners want information only in the first stressful phase, and already in the recovery phase seek entertainment as a distraction.

An explanation for this situation can be found in the characteristics of formatted radio programme in the last twenty years.<sup>42</sup> That this is not the case

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hannides, *Heroic radio...*, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Marina MUČALO, Komerčijalni FM radio u kontekstu hrvatske medijske politike, [Commercial FM radio in the context of Croatian media policy], *Medijske studije*, 11 (2020) 2, 87-102, 88.

only in Croatia is confirmed by the latest large research<sup>43</sup> which examines the importance of radio during natural disasters in South Asia in the last two decades and states that, unlike community radio, commercial radio deprived of their own journalists is solely profit-driven and therefore distances itself from civic responsibility in all kinds of crisis situations in the twenty-first century.

Yet, would something bad have happened if the commercial and formatted radio stations covered by this research had 'given up' their formats and restored live communication with their listeners on the air at least on the day of the earthquake? The bright examples of two editors-in-chief who arrived in their newsrooms shortly after the earthquake and managed to run their live programme, as well as two radio stations focusing exclusively on two-way communication for direct assistance, show that this kind of radio can still be a socially responsible and flexible medium.

Almost half of the radio stations started the first communication with their listeners after the earthquake via their social media profiles (focus on younger listeners). Nevertheless, the possibilities of the website were not used in this dual crisis situation in the same way it occurred in similar situations abroad.<sup>44</sup>

The Zagreb example of functioning of FM radio in a crisis situation actually points to the fact that the overall role of FM radio in a modern democratic society should be re-examined.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kanchan K. MALIK and Vinod PARAVALA (2020), Introduction: Community Radio in South Asia: A Roadmap for Media Democracy, in: K. K. MALIK and V. PARAVALA (eds.), *Community Radio in South Asia, Reclaiming the Airwaves*, Routledge India, 2020, 1-19.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Zanker, *Heroic radio...*; Joyce, *RadioQuake: Getting back...*; Joyce, *Thank goodness for our little radio...*

Anita Šulentić\*

*Odgovor FM radija na dvostruku kriznu situaciju u Republici Hrvatskoj:  
pandemija COVIDA-19 i potres u Zagrebu*

Sažetak

Rad proučava programske i organizacijske odgovore FM radija u dvostrukoj kriznoj situaciji u Republici Hrvatskoj. Na samom početku lockdowna uslijed epidemije kovid-19, u Zagrebu se 22. ožujka 2020. dogodio najjači potres u posljednjih 140 godina. Sa svrhom uvida u situaciju u vremenu u kojem se zaista i odvijala, istraživanje je imalo za cilj propitati kako su se radiji na tom području snažili u nezabilježnim kriznim okolnostima. Metodološki, riječ je o kvalitativnom i deskriptivnom istraživanju temeljenom na analizi odgovora iz upitnika. Pitanja otvorenog tipa grupirana su u tri glavne teme: organizacijske i programske promjene, izvori informiranja te uloga digitalnih platformi radija. Rezultati pokazuju sklonost zadržavanju formatiranih programskih sadržaja (dominacija glazbe, manjak novinara, prenošenje kupljenog informativnog sadržaja) bez obzira na dvostruku krizu te upućuju na preispitivanje ukupne uloge FM radija u modernom demokratskom društvu.

*Ključne riječi: COVID-19, FM radio, krizna situacija, potres, radijski program.*

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