

## Communication in Crises and Media: Press Coverage on Landmine Accidents

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### SUMMARY

*The pervasiveness of landmines in Croatia is a crisis of drastic proportions and demands more effective communication from the media to the public. Due to human and economic losses in many dramatic incidents before and after the Croatian War of Independence, mine accidents are, according to the theory of communication in crises (Banks, 2005), taking dimensions of a social and economic catastrophe. Informing the public about mine accidents is an extremely important ethical, moral and social problem from the aspect of both journalists and those who organize mine policy action. Public Relations (PR) services have an extremely important role in the process; however, in order for the media to effectively perform their social responsibility, the PR services must work diligently before, during, and after the crises (Novak, 2001). This paper presents a quantitative analysis of the articles (total number, n=85) on mine accidents published in daily newspapers for the period 2007 through 2008. The analysis categorizes newspapers according to national (altogether 4 newspapers) and regional reach (6). The aim of the research was to collect information on how the mine problem in Croatia is being monitored based on several different parameters: the continuity of interest in the topic, the amount of detail provided in each article, the use of sources, and the disclosure of victims' identities. The purpose of this study intends to contribute to the creation of a more rapid response PR service that could communicate more effectively with*

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*the media in crises situations related to mine accidents. The results of the analysis indicate that informing the public about mine accidents is insufficient. Too often the media focus on a particular incident rather than the problem at large. News coverage lasts only a day or two before interest subsides. More than half of the press titles cite anonymous sources. Graphics used in the articles are modest and unattractive and mostly limited to photographs of the place where the mine accident occurred. The identity of the mine victim is, in most cases, revealed. Based on the research we conclude that the collaboration between the mine action profession and the media must be better organized and more professional in order to ensure that the range of mine-related topics covered is broadened and that the information provided is both robust and disseminated rapidly. Not only would this end the practice of providing abbreviated, routine reports, but would also have a positive effect on the communicational contribution of the press in promoting safe behavior in mine-affected areas.*

Key words: communication in crises, the landmine problem, media, landmine accidents, sources of information, PR services

## **1. Introduction**

During the Croatian War of Independence<sup>1</sup> the number of mine-affected areas multiplied rapidly presenting a serious threat to the local population. During the war, individual mines were widely used as traps and often not in accordance with the rules of war. The Yugoslavian People's Army mined strategic areas targeted by Croatian forces, as well as civilian settlements, with the intent to obstruct the advancement of enemy positions. Mine accidents<sup>2</sup> and the unsettling dangers posed by the continued existence of mine fields underscores the need for more pragmatic and consistent education on the dangers posed by mines. Moreover, the media must be better engaged so that it sufficiently warns the public on the mine problem. Large swaths of agricultural lands, infrastructure, forest areas and riverbeds are still unavailable today due to the presence or suspicion of mines. Yet in spite of this fact, many locals continue to behave irresponsibly. Though some simply ignore the dangers, and others neglect to take caution for themselves and their property, the biggest problem is that many are unaware of the fatal dangers posed by landmines.<sup>3</sup> The international community has invested heavily in restricting the use of such war equipment that poses imminent danger for civilians. Over the last thirty years two conventions were issued to decrease suffering and the number of

civilian casualties caused by mines: the 1980 *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons* and the 1997 *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction*. The latter established the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), an organization designed to foster and support mine action policy processes. Around this time, Croatia established the Croatian Center for Demining, a national body for mine action policy. Until 2004, its chief mission was to define the proportions of the mine problem. At that point, having formulated the aims and strategy of mine action policy, the *National Program for Mine Action Policy* was issued in 2005 (through 2009) and was responsible for creating a safe environment that fostered social and economic development for communities in danger.

The Croatian Center for Demining is in charge of marking suspicious mine areas in order to prevent injuries and deaths of local citizens.<sup>4</sup> The center utilizes paper-based informative materials (brochures, leaflets), as well as the internet to transmit information to the public and authorities. Prompt information on all mine fields in Croatia is regularly delivered to the National Administration for Protection and Salvation, police authorities, fire departments, tourist communities, hunting associations, and the Administrations of National Parks, as well as many others.<sup>5</sup> The Croatian Center for Demining is also partnered with the media, who produce various educational and preventive messages.

The mine problem, an important issue for both Croatia and the international community, can only be combated with the combined efforts of professional demining services, ordinary citizens and the media.

### **1.1. Mine accidents in Croatia and the problem of press coverage**

Over the last ten years, the total number of mine accidents has decreased. According to data provided by the Croatian Center for Demining, during the years 2007 and 2008 thirteen mine accidents occurred, killing five (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1 shows that during 2007 more civilians (5) were injured than professionals (3). Two civilians and one pyrotechnician were killed.

Similar to the results from 2007, Table 2 shows that in 2008 more civilians (4) than pyrotechnicians (3) sustained injuries from mines. Based on these results, one may conclude that awareness of the magnitude of the problem, knowledge, and education are crucial for protecting citizens from mine injuries. Because of the lack of education in the field of mine expertise, the most important educational entity is the media. The tables show that mine accidents in Croatia occur most often in rural areas; however, they also present a problem for tourists.

Table 1: Overview of mine accidents in 2007\*

Date	Municipal/City	Profile of the victim		Status of injuries
		civilian	pyrotechnician	
04.03.2007.	Benkovac	x		death
09.03.2007.	Lastovo		x	death
27.03.2007.	Promina		x	severe injuries
04.05.2007.	Vodice	x		death
28.06.2007.	Markušica	x		severe injuries
30.07.2007.	Gospić		x	minor injuries
13.10.2007.	Vinkovci	x		severe injuries
13.10.2007.	Vinkovci	x		severe injuries
<i>Total</i>		<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	

\* The table is based on data provided by the mine-information system of the Croatian Center for Demining

Table 2: An overview mine accidents in 2008\*

Date	Municipal/City	Profile of the victim		Status of injuries
		civilian	pyrotechnician	
22.02.2008.	Valpovo	x		death
22.02.2008.	Valpovo	x		severe injuries
03.03.2008.	Karlovac		x	severe injuries
03.06.2008.	Osijek	x		severe injuries
03.09.2008.	Vinkovci		x	death
08.10.2008.	Bogdanovci	x		minor injuries
12.12.2008.	Nuštar		x	severe injuries
<i>Total</i>		<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	

\* The table is based on data provided by the mine-information system of the Croatian Center for Demining

The Croatian Center for Demining has carried out many activities to educate and inform the public on mine action policy and the existence of mines in certain communities. And although there is direct communication via the media, it is our opinion that the creation of a specialized PR service would be a more efficient conduit for information.

Clearly, reports on mine accidents are a very important and socially responsible media assignment, both for journalists and those than organize mine action policy. The primary reason for this is that the reporting on mine accidents is not the same as reporting on other accidents, such as natural catastrophes or car accidents. Not

only do mine accident reports inform the public of an event, they also educate citizens on ways to prevent further accidents. In short, they have an ethical responsibility. Unfortunately, Croatian media reports have long been characterized as incomplete, insufficient and consequently, not preventative enough.

In order to sufficiently diagnose the persistent problems related to media coverage, we sought to find out how often and in how much detail mine accidents were covered in the press, as well as the time frames of reporting and the degree of consequences involved. Further, we researched the types of media sources and whether certain articles used proper graphics that would contribute to public interest and the degree of informational value. We also sought to determine how ethically the media treated victims and explored this through the category of mine victims' identification.

Our hypothesis is that not only is there not enough media coverage of mine accidents, but when there is, it is not respectful towards victims, nor sufficiently covered in regional periodicals where the mines exist. Moreover, media reports far too often report the factual information of a given accident, rather than provide preventative information that would diminish future accidents. In this respect, the content of graphics used in the article is researched because of its importance in informing the public of not only the accident itself, but also about the civil rights attached to the mine problem. Finally, because media sources often lack crucial information, the complexity of the mine issue, and the above mentioned theory of communication in crisis, it cannot be expected that print or news media fulfill their social responsibility of effective monitoring of mine accidents without the aid of a specialized public relations services that would act before, during and after a crisis (Novak, 2001).

## **1.2. The social responsibility of media**

The media have an important social role because, "they constitute the principal means through which people worldwide are informed and entertained, and develop an understanding of their local, national and global social and cultural environments" (Flew, 2007: 1). In the process, the content of media reports are often influenced and manipulated by those who own and control a newspaper or television station. "Sometimes the control and monitoring is conducted by the public (public media), sometimes the state or the regime (state media), and sometimes the interest groups on commercial basis (commercial media). Besides those, in certain cases the control can be kept by certain interested groups of the community (community media)" (Zgrabljic Rotar, 2007: 24). "Modern journalism has a challenge of finding a way to overcome mostly confronted professional, commercial

and ethical standpoint regarding detection and presentation of news, while in the same time adopting the perception of journalism as a profession with a distinct social role” (Sheridan Burns, 2009: 8). The public media are expected to serve the interests of different parts of society, to be a public service of socially important information. Journalists act as representatives of the public, which means that they are primarily “responsible to the public” (Poler, 1998: 38). “Responsible journalism is trying to abstract facts from fiction, to differ experience from assumptions, to present a ‘balanced’ range of proof to be used in order to confirm their own vision of reality. Where it is not responsible, journalism is creating false visions of reality” (Starkey, 2006: 9). “It is a reference point for the profession as a whole and a sounding board on which to test options for action,” (Bivins, 2004: 67). During a recent conference, the General Assembly of the European Press Federation warned about these and other problems on the European media stage.<sup>6</sup> The public has a right to substantial and trustworthy information. In addition to news that satisfies natural curiosities, citizens need information to help them participate in their local community.

When dealing with the mine problem, both the international community and Croatian professionals depend on media as the primary connection between public policy and the public. The media’s duty is to inform the public in a timely, accurate manner, and to provide details about all topics, especially those considered highly important. The public media have a special role in this process. Croatian Radio-Television and the Croatian Informative Newspaper Agency (HINA) are the main distributors of information and consequently have the biggest responsibility for informing citizens about topics with public importance. Private newspapers, on the other hand, are not obligated to gather and distribute information considered to be publically important; however, from a professional standpoint, newspaper reports must be consistent with ethical and professional standards. First and foremost, these newspapers must ascertain the level of credibility for sources providing information on who, what, when, where, and why. “The aim of writing the news is to publish crucial facts about certain circumstances in an easily understandable way” (Sheridan Burns, (2009), during which process the journalist is constantly shaping the news with regard to the public for which the text is intended. The journalist cannot be guided by speculation and assumption. He or she must simply present or relay facts and information from official sources.

### 1.3. Official sources of information

Many consider that informative reporting based entirely on information gathered from official sources tends to be “authoritative discourse” (Deacon, 2009: 112). In the event of a crisis, however, timely information provided by official sources allows the media to be at its most efficient. These institutional sources have great advantages at their disposal when relaying messages to the media (Anderson, 2009: 122). These sources are in the position “to proclaim social events, govern physical resources, and besides that are authoritative in defining events worthy of becoming news” (Cottle, 2009: 12). In spite of this, however, journalists should avoid excessive leaning on official sources, as the discourse often becomes monotonous. Furthermore, past academic studies of sources reveal problems concerning a lack of transparency regarding information (Black and Bryant, 1995; Drame, 1995; Bivins, 2004). As an answer to the problem, PR services were born. Their role in society derives from the need to organize relations between the political, economical and cultural elite on one side and the media on the other. “The expansion is mostly noticed in the world of business” Davis (2006: 28), but it is difficult to imagine successful communication with the media in fields like culture, working class rights, the non-governmental sector or ecological activism. On the other hand, most economic, governmental, and public institutions have a need to communicate with large groups of people in order to better sell their products (Davis, 2006). Regarding the mine problem, which is also an ecological problem, it is not a question of selling a product. Rather the PR services should act as an educational service, one that promotes the international community’s efforts to protect citizens and their rights to life and property. Public relations of different social discourse are at stake. The Institute for Public Relations of the United Kingdom defines them, “Public relations are a system of reputation – the result of what you are doing, saying and of what other say about you” (Theaker, 2004: 6). When establishing a system of communication with the public, a public relations firm can help shape opinion in places that otherwise would not have an opinion and repair the picture of state institutions’ work. The press uses the PR services as a “legitimate source” of information (Black i Bryant, 1995: 481) giving it the potential to become the “primary daily news providers,” turning the media into “secondary providers” (Williams, 2003: 115). PR services supply journalists and editors with “complete information such as public releases, information packages, finished interviews, privately financed research studies and many other sources of information, images and interpretations” (Hansen i Paul, 2004: 51). With this setup, the PR services’ employees are only middlemen between the decision makers and journalists; however, their work enhances the outflow of information be-

tween one and the other (Verčić and other (2004: 87)). “The only doubtless conclusion is that the public relation and the production of news is in many things depended on each other” (Davis, 2009: 33) and that it is the best way towards effective communication. Despite this fact, some research suggests the privileging is still a “real” official source of information – carriers of social, economic and political power – and in those circumstances providing information becomes the privilege of the elites which have access to media. This de-facto situation is, according to Laban (2005), harmful to journalism as a profession as well as to society in general.

#### **1.4. Communication in crises and the danger of mines**

The large number of mine casualties and the constant danger for local civilians after the war in which anti-personnel weapons, mostly mines, were used indicate that the public must constantly be warned. Mass media has the most important role in this process. “The pictures in our heads are pictures for the most part put there by the media; and our attitudes towards those pictures, our definition of their meaning – our recognition of their reality – owes much to what the media have selected, omitted, shaped and interpreted” (Watson, 2008: 6). The media report on different events, some dramatic and others that make our daily lives more difficult. “The dramatic incidents, like those just highlighted, are the ones that stick in our memory, but most risk situations people face are mundane” (Frame, 2003: 2). With respect to our research, we will focus on catastrophe as the most dramatic crisis situation. Catastrophe can be defined as an accident of large scale or sequence of dramatic events which have the potential for creating human and/or financial losses. “Though a catastrophe is traditionally viewed as a single large event that causes sudden change – such as an earthquake or terrorist attack – we can expand the definition to include instances where a gradual accumulation of many small incidents, perhaps precipitated by the same catalyst, leads to the same scale of damage/losses; such events may not actually be recognized as catastrophes until a long period of time has passed and many losses have accumulated” (Banks, 2005: 5).

According to this definition, the mine problem in Croatia has the proportions of a catastrophe due to human and economic losses which have accumulated over the past two decades and are still occurring. The mine problem, as well, is an environmental crisis. The pollution accompanied by mines was deliberately made, and the polluted areas are within close range to people so the accidents can happen abruptly. When a mine accident occurs, crises management is necessary, and the information received by citizens via mass media are a “primary source of infor-



mation in crises – in the phase of pre-alert as well as in the phase of answer” (Bjornlund, 2006: 10).

PR services are mostly connected to the term “promotion” because the ultimate aim of their work is usually to create a preferable image in society. Yet what is the role of the PR service in a time of crisis? When a mine accident occurs, the crises management team should control and distribute information for the media. According to Novak (2001: 133) the process of work for those in charge of crises management can be divided on three time periods: (1) the period before the crises (the state of constant alert of the crises management); (2) the crises itself (i.e., the chaotic period) and (3) the phase after the crises (the return to normalcy). Before any potential crises, there must be a calculation of risks which an organization can analyze and delegate responsibilities to a crisis management team, who in turn can prepare “in case of emergency” plans to the public. “Perception has a multiple return effect on the risk: it can be an obstacle to the desired changes in the risk behavior, it affects the definition of borders of plausibility of risk and it affects the image the endangered groups and communities have regarding the priorities in risk” (Lisica, 2006: 34). Communication in communities at risk of mines accidents should be twofold. First, it must aim to promote safe behavior in the areas suspected of mines. Second, it must be able to systematically warn about the risks of irresponsible behavior when discovering mines and other explosive remains. At the beginning of a crises situation, the content of information does not have to be complete; however, it is important that the communication in crisis starts immediately from the top of the organization. When the crisis occurs, the media are usually interested in answering three main questions: What happened? Why did it happen? What will be done about it? The media expects that the organizations in charge will provide complete and timely information. Ignoring the media when a problem occurs is always an incorrect and potentially fatal decision made by crisis management teams. The media may turn “hostile” when they believe that the organization in charge of the crises is slow in providing information or withholding information altogether. “In a situation like this the media will descend on the site of the accident like a plague of locusts which needs to be fed. If it isn’t fed by the organization which finds itself, however inadvertently, at the centre of the crisis, it will feed from the hands of others. And become deeply suspicious of the hand which obviously isn’t feeding it” (Regester i Larkin, 2005: 173). It is completely unacceptable to withhold information purposely because in all likelihood, this information will reveal itself eventually and dismantle the credibility of those in charge for attempting to cover it up.

## 2. Methodology

This paper examines with the way the daily press reports on mine accidents during the years 2007 and 2008.

Our method analyzes the content according to Splihal (1990). “[It] enables an objective and systematic identification, analysis and measuring of linguistic skills of textual characteristics, so that we could more easily deduct the characteristics out of nonlinguistic areas” (Splihal, 1990: 26).

The quantitative analyses spans 85 articles (n=85) published during the period 2007 through 2008. We have divided newspapers into two groups according to their reach: a) those with national reach: *Večernji list*, *Jutarnji list*, *Vjesnik and 24 sata* and b) those with regional reach: *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Glas Slavonije*, *Glas Istre*, *Novi list*, *Zadarski list* and *Karlovački list*. Articles found in weekly political magazines and other periodicals are not included in the sample. The research covers the 72 hour period from which the mine accident occurred.<sup>7</sup> The analysis encompasses the following categories: the total number of published articles, the duration of the daily press’s interest in the mine accident, the sources of information, the chosen graphics used in the article, and the naming of the victims of mine accidents. Method is carried out by a coding and frequencies calculation. The time frame variable categorizes articles based on the amount of time elapsed (no more than three days) since the accident occurred. This variable shows the promptness of the press coverage on mine accidents. The sources variable depicts whether a source is official or unofficial. Official sources include the police, investigators, emergency healthcare workers, and representatives of demining companies, etc. Unofficial sources are generally citizens, witnesses, and victims’ family members. The graphic variable article categorizes articles based on the inclusion of photographs and maps and considers those that are more appealing to the readers. Based on the above mentioned categories, we intend to explore whether the creation of a quality PR service responsible for mine accidents could improve the quality of reporting on mine accidents, especially with regard to education and socially responsible behavior.

## 3. Results and discussion

Table 3 shows the total number of published articles in Croatian national and regional newspapers that deal specifically with mine accidents for the period 2007 through 2008.

Table 3: Overview of the number of analyzed newspaper articles according to type of paper and year of publication

Type of newspaper according to reach		Year 2007.	Year 2008.	Total
National reach	<i>Večernji list</i>	9	7	16
	<i>Vjesnik</i>	5	3	8
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	7	6	13
	<i>24 sata</i>	5	3	8
Regional reach	<i>Glas Slavonije</i>	6	4	10
	<i>Glas Istre</i>	4	3	7
	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	8	1	9
	<i>Novi list</i>	5	5	10
	<i>Zadarski list</i>	4	-	4
	<i>Karlovački list</i>	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>		<b>53</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>85</b>

As mentioned above, the total number of articles is 85. Out of this total, 45 were found in national newspapers and 40 were found in regional presses. The amount of national coverage suggests that mine accidents are perceived as a common, national problem. This figure also shows a surprising lack of interest by regional newspapers. Mine fields are primarily a regional problem, and if these issues were covered more in the local press, the local population (and readers of regional newspapers) could benefit the most in terms of education and prevention of accidents.

The results also show that reporting on the mine problem depends on when accidents occur. On average, for every mine accident, five to seven articles are published in Croatian daily press for both 2007 and 2008. During 2007, newspapers with national reach published an almost equal number of newspaper articles (26) as newspapers with regional reach (27). During 2008, however, the national press covered mine accidents more frequently (19) compared to regional newspapers (13). With respect to the ten analyzed newspapers, we can conclude that not all mine accidents were recorded in all of the newspapers. For example, there was not one newspaper article published about the mine accident that occurred on 12 December 2008.<sup>8</sup>

During these two years, *Večernji list* contributed the most units of analysis (16) out of the total number of analyzed newspaper articles. Of the newspapers that published articles, the least were found in *Zadarski list* (4), while *Karlovački list* did not publish any articles on mine accidents in analyzed period. This number is

unusual given the fact that this newspaper is located in an area heavily exposed to the dangers of mines.

Table 4 shows the results of the numbers of newspaper articles published in relation to the time an accident occurred. As expected, most articles in all of the daily newspapers were published on the first day following the mine accident (57). Newspapers reported about the accident roughly half as much on the second day following the mine accident. For national newspapers, including *Večernji list*, *Vjesnik* and *24 sata*, the disparity between first day and second day reporting is staggering. One national newspaper, however, bucked the trend. *Jutarnji list* displayed an equal interest for accidents on both the first and second day. According to the writings in the other three national daily newspapers, however, one can conclude that interest substantially declines on the second day. On the third day, there is virtually no interest from national newspapers for mine accidents, apart from *Večernji list* which published two articles. Regional newspapers, compared to their national peers, show considerably less interest for mine accidents on the first day. On the second day, the same number of articles was published (12). On the third day, only *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Novi list* published an article during the two years in question.

Table 4: The manifestation of articles in relation to time distance from a mine accident

Type of newspaper according to reach		First day	Second day	Third day
National reach	<i>Večernji list</i>	11	3	2
	<i>Vjesnik</i>	7	1	-
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	6	7	-
	<i>24 sata</i>	7	1	-
Regional reach	<i>Glas Slavonije</i>	7	3	-
	<i>Glas Istre</i>	5	2	-
	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	5	3	1
	<i>Novi list</i>	6	3	1
	<i>Zadarski list</i>	3	1	-
<i>Total</i>		<b>57</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>

This data suggests that reporting on mine accidents is mostly in the form of news and broadened news focused at the event. The news is short and simply details information about the event. In turn, the news reporting lacks an exploration of the background events and causes. More importantly, this data suggests that the media

showed little if any interest in detailing preventative measures. Of course, this is in accordance with the function and role of the daily press, which is characterized by prompt rather than analytical informing. There are some positive examples, including the informative-educational article printed in *Večernji listi* on 16 October 2007. This article, published on the third day, detailed the aftermath of a mine accident near Vinkovci, where peasants were harmed while plugging the field. Under the title “Shepherd guards the sheep in the mine field”, the article describes the incident and explains that it was a consequence of unconscionable peasants that steal the boards used to design designating mine fields and make doghouses out of them. The article is accompanied by a photograph and has highlighted parts that contain alerting subject matter. Unfortunately, the vast majority of newspapers lack this type of after-the-accident reporting. The task of maintaining an interest for the mine problem, however, should be left to public relation services. In that way, the media’s interest could perhaps become constant and serve to educate the public, rather than simply report the basic facts of an accident.<sup>9</sup>

Table 5 shows that official sources were important for the media (22), yet in more cases the sources of information were not provided (33). Of all the newspapers in the sample, *Jutarnji list* and *24 sata* included the least number of sources. As well, these papers included the least number of official sources. The regional newspapers *Glas Slavonije*, *Glas Istre*, *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Novi list* either sparingly identify the source or provide it as anonymous.

Considering the credibility of media announcements, we can say that they are of lesser quality because they lack transparency regarding the origin of information, and according to research “[the] *transparency of news sources is one of the key criteria of quality of a journalistic text*” (Erjavec, 1999; Fröhlich, 1992; Schröter, 1992; Mencher, 1992, according to Poler Kovačić and Laban, 2006: 50).

Considering the complexity of the mine problem and the sensitivity of the subject in both a social and private since, this kind of practice is very harmful and does not contribute to the quality of reporting on the subject.

Official sources of informing are the most frequent source represented (22). Perhaps because of its national clout, *Večernji list* included the highest number of official sources (7), out of national daily papers. In terms of regional newspapers there are an equal number of official sources found (3), except in *Zadarski list* (2). *Jutarnji list* addresses official sources more rarely than it publishes titles “without providing the source”.

The credibility of newspapers’ text increases by using agencies as sources of informing. The regional media is more dependent upon them, as evidenced by results of this research. “It is the local media that depend upon the agency dispatches the most, as they cannot attend many events because of a small staff, a lack of

technical devices and limited financial resources” (Poler Kovačić and Laban, 2006: 47).<sup>10</sup> This research shows that, among national newspapers, agency information was most frequently used by *Vjesnik* (4), followed by *Večernji list* (1) and never by *Jutarnji list* and *24 sata*. For the regional newspapers, agency information was most rarely used by *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Zadarski list*, which not once cited these services during the two years examined. In the category “other”, which refers to a “citizen and anonymous source witness of a mine accident”, *Jutarnji list* included it four times and *Večernji list* three times, which makes it a relatively non-transparent source. We can therefore conclude that at least half of all the articles dealing with mine accidents could be accused of lacking in quality and unreliable from the standpoint of the public.. Out of the 85 total articles, only 36 used a transparent source, or in other words, reliable information. Others relied on unnamed, anonymous sources or citizens, which is potentially an unreliable category.

Table 5: Overview of sources of information in newspaper articles

Type of newspaper according to reach		Type of source					other
		official	agency	citizens	anonymous	without source	
National reach	<i>Večernji list</i>	7	1	-	-	5	3
	<i>Vjesnik</i>	3	4	-	-	1	-
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	1	-	-	-	8	4
	<i>24 sata</i>	-	-	1	-	6	1
Regional reach	<i>Glas Slavonije</i>	3	3	-	-	3	1
	<i>Glas Istre</i>	-	3	-	-	3	1
	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	3	1	-	-	3	2
	<i>Novi list</i>	3	2	-	1	3	1
	<i>Zadarski list</i>	2	-	-	-	1	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>14</b>

\* The category *other* includes newspaper articles that rely on more sources: official and citizen witnesses (11) and citizen and anonymous source (3).

Table 6 shows the results for the number of graphic materials provided in newspaper articles. A total of 70 different types of photography were used and only one map was recorded. The category that dominated this analysis was “*photography from the site of accident*” (42), which is considered the least informative and completely impersonal. In a similar category, eleven photographs titled “other” were used. These include the house in which the victim of mine accident resided

before the accident, a panoramic picture of a hunting-ground, an archived picture of a settlement in the vicinity of a mine accident, picture of an eye-witness, and others.

Table 6: Content of graphics found in newspaper articles

Type of newspaper according to reach		Photography					map	no photography
		victim	expert	site of accident	board	other		
National reach	<i>Večernji list</i>	-	3	8	1	2	-	4
	<i>Vjesnik</i>	-	1	1	2	1	-	3
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	-	-	9	-	-	-	5
	<i>24 sata</i>	-	-	4	2	-	-	2
Regional reach	<i>Glas Slavonije</i>	1	1	8	2	-	-	1
	<i>Glas Istre</i>	-	-	3	-	-	-	4
	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	1	-	2	1	6	1	3
	<i>Novi list</i>	-	2	4	-	1	-	4
	<i>Zadarski list</i>	-	-	3	-	1	-	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>

Articles rarely contain photography of the members of an injured person's family (3) or a picture of the person that was killed (2). Frequently used is an archived picture of the signs that warns about the mine field (8). Experts, i.e. official sources, were photographed in 7 cases, most frequently in *Večernji list* (3) and in *Novi list* (2) and once in *Glas Slavonije* (1). These newspapers, perhaps not coincidentally were the ones that used the highest number of official sources in articles concerning mine accidents.

Out of the 85 newspaper articles examined, 27 did not include any graphics concerning the events, which leads to the conclusion that they were either agency news or short news about a particular mine accident. These included articles like "Lastovo: Mine from 2nd world war kills pyrotechnic," published on 10.3.2007 in *Jutarnji list*; "Mine injures pyrotechnic" published on 28.3.2007 in *Novi list*, *Glas Slavonije*, *Zadarski list* and *Glas Istre*; "Died when stepping on mine in the garden" published on 5.5.2007 in *Vjesnik*; "Took a walk by Drava with a friend and died from a mine" published on 23.2.2008 in *24 sata*.

Table 7 shows the results of newspaper articles with respect to the identification of mine victims. The full first and last name of the victim of mine accident was provided in 61 newspaper articles, while 16 of them provided initials. Eight articles do not identify the mine victims at all. During the investigation, officials and

medical personnel did not reveal the identity of the mine accident victim, nor did HINA, the main Croatian newspaper agency, which relies on official sources.

Table 7: Overview of identification of mine victims in newspaper articles

Type of newspaper according to reach		Initials	First and last name	Without identification
National reach	<i>Večernji list</i>	2	13	1
	<i>Vjesnik</i>	3	4	1
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	4	9	-
	<i>24 sata</i>	2	4	2
Regional reach	<i>Glas Slavonije</i>	1	8	1
	<i>Glas Istre</i>	2	4	1
	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	1	8	-
	<i>Novi list</i>	1	7	2
	<i>Zadarski list</i>	-	4	-
<i>Total</i>		<b>16</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8</b>

The identity of mine accident victims is not provided in newspaper articles when given by unofficial information, i.e. information unconfirmed by official sources.

#### 4. Conclusion

The level of interest from national and regional newspapers on the mine problem is not sufficient. Given that mines in Croatia represent great danger for the life of its citizens and property, the presses' insufficient interest shows a lack of socially responsible journalism. Interest for this subject is waning. Mine problems are occasionally covered in the immediate aftermath of an accident; however, their wider social problems and the actions associated with prevention are very rarely discussed. This is also confirmed by the fact that interest in mine accidents and the mine problem in general is proportional to the distance from which an incident occurred, especially in the national press, where they are treated like any other daily news event. The vast majority of reports from the sample either used unreliable sources or neglected to use one entirely. Quite simply this is unacceptable in terms of journalistic quality and integrity. It can be assumed that official public relations services could not only contribute to the quality of communication with the media, but also enhance the media's interest in the subject. Services should act before, during and after the accident, better inform the citizens of potential dangers, encourage both citizens and the media to take preventive action in the event of an



accident, and at the very least be a reliable source of information for the media. These steps would likely reduce the number of accidents and encourage more analytical studies as to why accidents happen. Moreover, this would open up dialogue between all of the parties involved, from the mine companies to the media and citizens, to act more appropriately and socially responsible.

We can conclude that the media's social responsibility must be based on common civic values. The relationship between the media and the public is interactive. It demands both the poignant literacy from those who use the media and in return, it requires the ethical behavior of the media that protects one's civic interest and needs (Zgrabljic Rotar, 2008). In other words, the ethical behavior of those who use the media must coincide with better organization and enhancement of institutions, public relations services, and media ethics. This includes all citizens with their justified demands for quality and responsibility of the mass media (Bauer, 2005; Hamelink 1998: 51). A critical attitude towards the media, complimented by good cooperation between all invested parties, will provide the media with reliable and timely information, and subsequently towards increased plurality, better quality and a palpable social responsibility of the media in crisis communication.

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#### **ENDNOTES:**

- <sup>1</sup> The Croatian War of Independence is the name for the five year struggle against Serbian forces, beginning on 17 August 1990 (Čerina, 2008)..
- <sup>2</sup> In the period 1991 through June 2007, 1270 mine incidents occurred in which 1878 people were hurt. 474 people were killed, 1085 people were severely injured, 290 suffered minor injuries, and there is no reliable data for 29 people, [http://www.hcr.hr/pdf/Grafovi2\(1\).xls](http://www.hcr.hr/pdf/Grafovi2(1).xls) (15.12.2008.)
- <sup>3</sup> A Guide to Mine Action (GICHD, 2004: 86): "Risk-takers are broadly put into four categories: The *Unaware* (the person doesn't know about the danger of mines or UXO); The *Uninformed* (the person knows about mines but doesn't know about safe behavior); The *Reckless* (the person knows about mine-safe behavior but ignores it); and The *Intentional* (the person has little option but to intentionally adopt unsafe behavior)".
- <sup>4</sup> According to the 2005 Law on Humanitarian Demining, the Croatian Center for Demining among other things, has public authority to conduct coordination in educating the public on the dangers of mines.
- <sup>5</sup> Article 7 of the 2005 Law on Humanitarian Demining gives authority to the Croatian Center for Demining mark mine-infected areas.

- <sup>6</sup> General Assembly of the European Press Federation was held in Zagreb on 23 and 24 March 2007.
- <sup>7</sup> Articles on mine accidents are archived in the Croatian Centre for Demining in digital form (pdf) for the period 2007.-2008.
- <sup>8</sup> The mine accident occurred during the demining works in the municipal of Nuštar.
- <sup>9</sup> The article was written by a journalist Miroslav Flego.
- <sup>10</sup> The usage of agency information is also a question of finance, since the agencies charge for the information they provide.
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## **Krizno komuniciranje i mediji: izvještavanje tiska o minskim nesrećama**

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### **SAŽETAK**

Minski problem u Republici Hrvatskoj je kriza fizičke naravi koja zahtjeva komuniciranje prema različitim javnostima. Zbog ljudskih i gospodarskih gubitaka u mnogobrojnim dramatičnim incidentima nakon Domovinskoga rata, a i prije toga, minske nesreće, prema definicijama teorije kriznog komuniciranja (Banks, 2005) poprimaju razmjere društvene i gospodarske katastrofe. Kada se dogodi minska nesreća izvještavanje je izuzetno važan etički, moralni i društveni problem s aspekta struke koja organizira protuminsko djelovanje i s aspekta novinara. U tome

iznimno veliku ulogu imaju službe za odnose s javnošću, ali bi njihov rad, da bi mediji učinkovito obavljali svoju društvenu odgovornost morao biti kontinuiran kako za vrijeme krize, tako i prije i poslije (Novak, 2001). Ovaj rad donosi kvantitativnu analizu članaka o minskim nesrećama koji su objavljeni u dnevnim novinama u razdoblju od početka 2007. do kraja 2008. godine, njih n=85. Analizom su obuhvaćene novine prema nacionalnom i regionalnom doseg, ukupno 4 s nacionalnim i 6 s regionalnim. Cilj istraživanja je bio prikupiti podatke o načinu na koji se prati minski problem, a na temelju trajnosti zanimanja, za temu, opremljenosti članaka, korištenju izvora i navođenju imena žrtava. Svrha je da se time pridonese kreiranju službe za odnose s javnošću u komuniciranju s medijima u kriznim situacijama na primjeru minskih nesreća. Rezultati analize pokazali su da se izvještavanje o minskim nesrećama vezuje uz incident, traje jedna ili dva dana, a nakon toga zanimanje za događaj i minski problem opada. Oko polovica svih napisa ne navodi izvor informacija ili je izvor anonim. Grafička oprema je skromna i neatraktivna i uglavnom se odnosi na općenite fotografije s mjesta minske nesreće. Identitet minske žrtve se najčešće otkriva. Na temelju istraživanja se zaključuje da je potrebno organizirano i stručno jačanje suradnje između struke koja se bavi protuminskim djelovanjem i medija kako bi se omogućilo učinkovitije širenje i dostupnost različitih sadržaja, a ne samo rutinsko izvještavanje o nesreći. To bi se pozitivno odrazilo na komunikacijske vrijednosti tiska u promociji sigurnog ponašanja u okruženju zagađenom minama.

Ključne riječi: krizno komuniciranje, minski problem, mediji, minske nesreće, izvori informacija, službe za odnose s javnošću