MOBILE LIBRARIES NETWORK IN CROATIA

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Summary

Mobile libraries are an essential component in the network of public libraries in Croatia. The specificity of the mobile library is the ability to provide quality and professional library services to citizens in the area where they operate. The libraries aim to promote the culture of reading and access to information; therefore, mobile libraries are increasing the level of cultural life by their presence in the most remote and isolated areas providing equal opportunities for learning and education. A significant part of the mobile library work is cooperation at the international level with mobile libraries in neighboring countries, which is conducted by participating in professional meetings and continuous exchange of information with examples of good practice. The paper will present the mobile library network in Croatia, the scope of its work, and the services they provide to the users.

Key words: mobile libraries network, services, advocacy, international cooperation

Introduction

The beginning of the 20th century is the beginning of mobile libraries in Croatia. These were mobile collections, which were parked in certain places and replaced after a certain period. This work spread after the Second World War, when librarians transported books in suitcases and wooden boxes in carriages and other vehicles throughout Croatia. In the early 1960s, there was a growing awareness of the need to introduce a more modern form of the mobile library - the bookmobile - and libraries purchased the first specially equipped vehicles. Thus, on June 9, 1969, the bookmobile of the Rijeka City Library was officially opened. It was a bus converted for library services and the first mobile library of this kind in the former Yugoslavia. In the mid-1980s, bookmobile services in Croatia reached the peak of their development. By the end of 1985, there were 16 services with 17 vehicles in Croatia. Then the number of bookmobile services and vehicles started to decrease. Mainly because of the war conditions in the 1990s, the age of the vehicles, and the lack of financial resources for the work. Therefore, by the end of the 1990s, there were only six bookmobile services with seven vehicles. In the first decade of the 21st century, new momentum came to the development of mobile libraries in Croatia. The Croatian Library Association established a Commission for Mobile Libraries in 2001, and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia began co-financing the purchase of bookmobiles in 2002. From 2002 to 2014, four new library bus services were established, and public libraries purchased 12 vehicles. After that, when the global crisis came, the fleet of bookmobiles was not renewed, and the vehicles aged and broke down more often. One service stops operating because the vehicle is worn out, and it is not financially possible to buy a new one. The Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia has issued a call for project proposals from Reading to an inclusive society, funded by the European Social Fund, Operational Program Effective Human Potential 2014-2020. The specific objective of the fight against poverty and social exclusion is to promote integration into the labor market, social inclusion of vulnerable groups, and the fight against all forms of discrimination. The call aimed to improve the social inclusion of vulnerable groups (children and young people up to 25 years of age, people over 54 years of age, the unemployed, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, and members of the Roma and other national minorities) by promoting literacy. All libraries that provide bookmobile services, but also some that do not, have submitted their project proposals,

through which it is possible to purchase a new vehicle for the bibliobus. However, not all libraries have had their projects approved. The vast majority of existing Bookmobile services that are approved for the project will receive new vehicles through these projects, which the European Social Fund will fund. The new vehicles will replace worn-out, old bookmobiles. Libraries that have never established bookmobile services and whose projects have been approved will designate new additional bookmobile services in the Republic of Croatia. These are libraries in Gospić, Hrvatska Kostajnica, Lekenik, Novi Marof, Poreč, Split, Virovitica and Vrpolje. The projects are in the implementation phase. The project is expected to be completed in the second half of 2023. Then the network of Croatian bookmobile services, of which there are currently nine, will be expanded and strengthened by eight new bookmobile services. In 1999, the Commission for Mobile Libraries of the Croatian Library Association began organizing thematic expert meetings on mobile libraries. The Commission for Mobile Libraries continued the practice of regularly holding round tables, of which 15 were held from 1999 to 2021, and since 2005, and bibliobus festivals:

2000 in Karlovac - Bookmobile - mobile library YES or NO?

2001 in Čakovec - Who needs a bookmobile?

2002 in Bjelovar - Mobile libraries in Croatia today

2003. Osijek - New technologies and services in mobile libraries

2004. Karlovac – New bookmobiles in Croatia

2005. Rijeka - Models of organization and financing of mobile libraries; the 1st bookmobile festival was held

2008. Zadar - With a book in every corner, the 2nd bookmobile festival was held

2009. Vinkovci - From idea to satisfied user; the 3rd bookmobile festival was held

2011. Karlovac – From a carriage to a modern bookmobile, the 4th bookmobile festival was held

2013. Koprivnica - We have a bookmobile! And you?; the 5th bookmobile festival was held

2015 Bjelovar – Bookmobile is coming! Mobile libraries as part of the library network; the 6th bookmobile festival was held

2017. Pula - Let's start the bookmobile! How to create and maintain a service?; the 7th bookmobile festival was held

2019. Rijeka – Bookmobile, what? Culture in motion; the 8th bookmobile festival was held

2021. Vinkovci - Mobile libraries - before, during (and after) the coronavirus pandemic; the 9th bookmobile festival was held.

Professional meetings are an excellent opportunity to present and get to know the work and domestic and foreign bookmobile services, their funding opportunities, cultural and animation programs in bookmobiles, but also in the libraries themselves. It is an opportunity to exchange experiences and collect new ideas, to improve the business of the bookmobile services and their home libraries. Establishing connections with librarians from several European countries is a reasonable basis for a possible continuation of professional cooperation through various European projects in the future. The intention to organize specialized professional meetings on mobile libraries contributes to this regularly. Today in Croatia, library bus services operate in eight counties, and in the city of Zagreb, a total of nine library bus services. In 12 Croatian counties there are no organized mobile library services yet. However, in each of them, library services do not cover some areas. The ability of bookmobile to provide services in multiple locations with the same resources and staff represents the great potential of mobile libraries. This can be their invaluable advantage over stationary forms of public libraries. Nowadays, the need to organize special library services through mobile libraries is becoming more and more common. Not only in institutions where certain groups of residents are housed or temporarily gathered, such as kindergartens, schools, nursing homes, hospitals and prisons, but also for other users with various special needs, such as people who cannot read standard print. In addition to purchasing vehicles for new mobile library services, one must also consider the regular need to replace existing vehicles with new ones. Apart from the fact that vehicles wear out through use, they also become obsolete more quickly due to their technical equipment. In order for mobile library services to adapt to the specific needs of their

users as quickly and successfully as possible, their vehicles should also be adapted to their content and equipment.

Library bus services and vehicles

The Republic of Croatia has nine library bus services with thirteen library bus vehicles. The library busses operate in eight counties and in the city of Zagreb. The services operate in the superior libraries, with the exception of one service that is organized with the City Library and has no superior function - the Križevci bookmobile service, which operates as part of the "Franjo Marković“ City Library in Križevci. In the Republic of Croatia there are bookmobile services in Bjelovar (Bjelovar-Bilogora County), Čakovec (Međimurje County), Karlovac - 2 bookmobiles (Karlovac County), Koprivnica and Križevci (Koprivnica-Križevci County), Rijeka - 2 bookmobiles (Primorje-Gorski County), Vinkovci (Vukovar-Srijem County), Zadar - 2 bookmobiles (Zadar County) and Zagreb - 2 bookmobiles (Zagreb County and City of Zagreb). In the areas they cover with their service, mobile libraries are often the first and only form of library available to the population in their places of residence. Most Croatian bookmobiles are built on truck or bus chassis, ten in total. Three bookmobile are housed in vans. The Croatian bookmobiles, with the exception of one from Karlovac and one from Rijeka and the bookmobile from Koprivnica, do not have garages. Due to high installation costs, most Croatian bookmobiles, with the exception of the Čakovec bookmobile and one bookmobile from Zadar, do not have built-in ramps for the disabled. Since its establishment in 2001, the Commission for Mobile Libraries of the Croatian Library Association has regularly studied, collected and analyzed the status and trends in the work of all mobile library services in the Republic of Croatia through unique annual statistical questionnaires. The analysis of the questionnaire for 2021 follows below.

Area of activity

Croatian bookmobiles tour the areas of 9 counties, i.e., 149 local self-government units, namely 124 municipalities, and 25 cities, with 519 stops. In 2021, bookmobiles traveled a total of 197,306 km. The furthest stop is 160 km from the headquarters, while the

distance to the stop is, on average, about 50 km. The average annual mileage per vehicle is 15,177 km. The long distance to the stop shows that in larger counties, it would be good to have more vehicles located near more extensive city libraries and make it easier to go around the area that gravitates to those cities. Because in each county, there are larger or smaller areas that are not covered by library services and where mobile libraries could, as a rule, be the only available way to achieve this. The primary goal is to continue establishing mobile libraries in counties that do not yet have such a service.

Employees and working hours

A total of 34 employees are in the library services. Of these, 13 employees are in Zagreb. On average, one bookmobile service, if we exclude Zagreb, has two employees, which is insufficient for most services. The average number of working days for users is 4.7. The main reason other bookmobile do not work in two shifts is the lack of financial resources.

Users and use

In 2021, Croatian bookmobiles had 19,014 registered users, of which 11,701 were children or 62%, and 7,313 were adults or 38%. Users visited bookmobiles a total of 126,425 times and borrowed 299,904 items of material. Experience from practice should emphasize here, which shows that there are many more actual users of the bookmobile because materials for several family members are often borrowed on one card in the bookmobile. Most vehicles work only in one shift, and the stops are often quite far from each other, which is why most bookmobiles operate according to a biweekly schedule and are at the stop for a short time, some only 30 minutes, rarely an hour or more. We can assume that the number of visits and borrowed materials would be even higher if the bookmobiles could stay at the bus stops longer and come more often.

The library collection of bookmobiles

In total, bookmobiles have 199,332 units of material in their holdings. The annual purchase in 2021 totaled 11,348 units of library materials. The structure of library materials has been changing in recent years, and more and more other types of materials besides books are included in the holdings. However, these changes are still occurring quite slowly, primarily because this generation of Croatian bookmobiles are still mostly not adapted to the new needs of the interior and existing equipment.

Computer business and equipment

In bookmobiles, as well as in Croatian libraries, there is no uniform program for library operations. Bookmobiles use three different programs: CROLIST, MetelWin, and ZaKi, depending on which program their home library use. Internet in vehicles is mostly not yet available to users, and in some cases, not even to employees. One of the main reasons for this is the still insufficiently developed infrastructure of Internet service providers and related technologies in certain areas and the expensive use of such services for libraries. An additional reason is a previously mentioned inadequacy of the interior and equipment in existing vehicles, which should be modernized and adapted to new needs for this purpose.

Funding of library services

The financing of the regular activity of bookmobile services differs from county to county. The Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia co-finances the annual purchase of library materials in bookmobiles. For this purpose, the counties also set aside dedicated funds in some areas but, unfortunately, still not. The cities, as the founders of the libraries within which the mobile services operate, also provide funds for construction, salaries for employees, and other costs. More and more libraries settle the costs of maintaining services by negotiating and concluding co-financing agreements with municipalities and cities - users of the service, and counties as the

majority financiers of mobile libraries in increasing environments. The total financing of the regular activities of the bookmobile services of the Republic of Croatia in 2021 amounted to HRK 5,427,958.48.

Programs and user visits

In 2021, a total of 426 programs (369 for children and 57 for adults) were held in library buses or within the organization of mobile services, attended by 9,461 visitors. The programs are intended for different user groups:

Children and adults,

Residents of small and remote towns,

Residents of retirement homes,

Patients of exceptional hospitals and residents of institutions for people with disabilities,

Prisoners,

Homeless people,

National minorities,

Students in schools and kindergarten students.

The most significant number of users in bookmobile are children aged up to 15, and the most important number of programs were for them. The most common events are user education for the library, events, actions to encourage reading, story rooms, game rooms, and solving information requests. From time to time, literary meetings, quizzes, competitions, theater programs, film screenings, and exhibitions are organized. In the following, we will present some programs from individual bookmobile services.

Public Library "Petar Preradović" Bjelovar, Bjelovar-Bilogor County

The Bjelovar bookmobile visits the Bjelovar Prison. Since 2004, cooperation with the prison administration in Bjelovar has been initiated to facilitate the socialization of prisoners and their reintegration into everyday life after leaving prison. Bjelovar's bookmobile is the only one in Europe that enters the prison yard so convicted and detained persons can choose their books. Borrowing books occurs in a cultured manner concerning the protocol on the movement of persons within the prison. Only positive experiences were recorded: "When you are lonely, alienated and condemned, the only friend who will certainly not turn your back is a book" - a quote from a female prisoner.

"Nikola Zrinski" Library Čakovec, Međimurje County

The Međimurje County bookmobile implements a program under Storytellers Bag to encourage reading at its stops next to kindergartens. The Storytellers Bag is presented to children, kindergarten teachers, and the children's parents. The Storyteller Bag contains 4 picture books for children and two readers for parents on the topic of parenting and raising children. In Storytellers Bag is also a brochure with information about the program and recommended content related to reading and parenting.

The Committee recommended picture books and books for Library Services for Children and Youth of the Croatian Library Association. In Storytellers Bag, there is also a booklet of impressions in which parents and children record their reading impressions, which a drawing or a photo can accompany. Every two weeks, Storytellers Bag travels to a new family to read together, and the reader's impressions of parents and children give feedback on their experiences related to spending time with a book. The program dramatically supports the development of pre-reading skills for the Roma national minority preschool children.

City Library "Ivan Goran Kovačić" Karlovac, Karlovac County

The mobile Library brings books to the users twice a week with appointments in the morning and afternoon. The service has two vehicles, a bibliobus, and a bibliobus van. Bibliobus van has been successfully organizing an event called *Library on the beach* for several years during the summer. During July and August, the bibliobus van visits a stop at Fogin's beach in Karlovac on the Korana river.

Fran Galović Library Koprivnica, Koprivnica-Križevci County

The Koprivnica bookmobile is successfully implementing a project to encourage early literacy in the rural areas of Koprivnica-Križevci County under the name "Growing reading project." The project is intended for preschoolers of Croatian and Roma nationality. The Growing Reading project was the winner of the 2016 award for innovation by the Greek organization Future Library as part of the INELI Balkans project - an international network of perspective librarians and innovators from the Balkans.

City Library "Franjo Marković" Križevci, Koprivnica-Križevci County

The youngest mobile library in the Republic of Croatia covers the rural, hilly and mountainous area of Kalnica Prigorje in Koprivnica-Križevci County. The Bookmobile stops most often near elementary and district schools, old people's homes and kindergartens. The bookmobile reaches the front doors of people with disabilities, less mobile, sick and elderly people. It brings audiobooks to blind and visually impaired people who live in small towns and do not have the means or opportunity to travel on their own to larger cities to receive cultural and educational content that facilitates and improves their lives and daily routines. This bookmobile service is an essential and indispensable part of daily life in an area that is isolated in terms of transportation and is predominantly agricultural.

Rijeka City Library, Primorje-Gorski Kotar County

Rijeka City Library mobile service has two vehicles, the county bookmobile and the city bookmobile van. On the route of the county bookmobile , the Biblioclub was founded - the *Goran Reading Club* in elementary and district schools, which gathers younger teenagers for reading sessions through which they learn to love reading and have a good time. Since 2017, on the initiative of teachers, a Biblioclub was founded that gathers adult readers.

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Vinkovci City Library, Vukovar-Srijem County

The Bookmobile service of Vukovar-Srijem County organizes every year, on the occasion of its birthday, various competitions for elementary school students in the places where the bookmobile stops:

- 2007. Promotion and celebration on the occasion of the first birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2008 Contest for the most beautiful drawing of Bookmobile on the occasion of the second birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2009. Contest for the most beautiful model of Bookmobile on the occasion of the third birthday of; Bookmobile
- 2010 Contest for the most beautiful bookmark on the occasion of the fourth birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2011 Contest "Tourist poster of my place" on the occasion of the fifth birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2012. Round table: Why is Bookmobile important? On the occasion of the sixth birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2013. The contest for the best drawn comic on the theme of Bookmobile on the occasion of the seventh birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2014. The contest for the best letter on the occasion of the eighth birthday of ibliobus;

- 2015. Competition for the best-designed advertisement on the theme of a Bookmobile and its services on the occasion of the ninth birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2016. Tribune: Do traveling libraries have a future? on the occasion of the tenth birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2017. Contest for the most creative selfie on the theme of Bookmobile, books, and reading on the occasion of the eleventh birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2018. Contest for the best illustration of a story or short story on the occasion of the twelfth birthday of Bookmobile;
- 2019. Competition for the best *Bećarac* (traditional Slavonian song) on the theme of Bookmobile, books, reading, and learning;
- 2020. Contest for the best Bibliorap on the theme of Bookmobile, books, friendship;
- 2021. Competition for the best Act on Reading.

Through the competitions, excellent cooperation with elementary schools, school librarians, and teachers is achieved, and the imagination and creativity of students are encouraged.

Zadar City Library, Zadar County

The mobile service of the Zadar City Library has two vehicles, two bookmobiles. As a carrier of mobile culture, the library service organizes various programs for the cultural development of society, which are more attended every year. The programs aim to promote reading from an early age, raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage at home and beyond, strengthen technological literacy and promote sustainable development. The workshops are often integrated into city, county and international events (Zadar Reads, Croatian Book Month, Europe Week, International Mother Language Day, World Storytelling Day). The first Bookmobile visits places in the hinterland of Zadar, the second visits islands (Dugi otok, Iž, Pašman and Ugljan), which makes it unique in the Republic of Croatia.

Zagreb City Library, Zagreb County and the City of Zagreb

The mobile service of the Zagreb City Library has two vehicles, two bookmobiles. Since October 2017, the library service of the Zagreb City Library has been promoting the 65 plus project, which aims at the social integration of people in the third age and their active participation in cultural and social events. The acquisition of multimedia materials has also been intensified, including adapted materials in DAISY book format intended for blind and visually impaired people. One of the interesting and numerous programs in the Croatian Book Month 2016 was a meeting with the owner of the publishing house Fibra and a discussion about the development of comics in Croatia and the world under the title *Ninth Art under High Fibra*.

Conclusion

Mobile libraries in Croatia are an irreplaceable part of the network of public libraries. They are of great importance for developing and expanding the library network and increasing the general quality of life of all residents. They can provide quality and professional library services to the population in the area where they operate. They should promote the culture of reading and provide access to information.

Mobile libraries in Croatia continue to raise the level of the culture of life because their presence in the most remote and isolated places in terms of transport provides equal opportunities for learning and education to all. With their comprehensive educational and cultural activities, mobile libraries contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of their users, especially in rural areas with a relatively small population. Therefore, there is a great need for their establishment in all Croatian counties. Mobile libraries are the most economical way to enable the realization of one of the

fundamental human rights to the availability of information, literature, and information technology necessary for information, education, lifelong learning, the use of cultural content, and the promotion of reading from an early age to the most significant possible number of inhabitants on an equal and long-term basis. Croatian mobile libraries successfully follow European and world trends in content, type, and quality of their services, both in offering library services and materials and addressing specific categories of users. Although the focus of mobile libraries has always been on providing services to people living in small settlements far from larger centers, today, mobile libraries around the world, including in our country, are increasingly specialized and target various narrower, vulnerable user categories: children, the elderly, less mobile people and people with disabilities, residents of nursing homes and hospitals, people in correctional institutions, thus providing them with essential social services in addition to library services.

It was noted that there are initiatives in the libraries of the County to establish new or expand the activities of existing bookmobile services in the Republic of Croatia. The most important complicating factor is unresolved, undetermined, and uncertain funding. The most important and necessary goal for developing and maintaining bookmobile services is to ensure regular financial resources for their regular work, especially for purchasing vehicles for new services and timely replacing worn-out bookmobiles with new vehicles. Significant opportunities for funding mobile libraries, particularly for the purchase of new and renovation of existing vehicles, are provided by EU funds and programs.

Commission for Mobile Libraries of the Croatian Library Association will support establishing mobile library services in all counties where there are none. As well as support for improving the work of existing services in cooperation with the Croatian Library Institute of National and University Library in Zagreb, the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, and all other relevant institutions that can contribute to the development of the Croatian mobile library system and thus the national library system in Croatia as a whole.