

**From the Region**

**Croatian Women's Press:  
Women Between the Kitchen and the Beauty Parlor**

By: Gordana Vilovic

Croatia is a small country, with 4.2 million population, but in spite of the difficult economic situation, one gets an impression that investing into new weeklies and monthlies is still a profitable business. Of course, the market inevitability shows that newspapers are commodities just like any other, and that it has proven after several months already that newspapers sell on the market. Over the past ten or so years of full market liberalization, of some three hundred most varied press issues, some have survived, and a portion of magazines lasted for one or two issues. Specialized magazines did of course issue even before 1990, but over the past decade they have experienced a real boom: for various interest spheres, magazines have sprung up like mushrooms. For instance, today in Croatia there are several magazines dedicated exclusively to cell-phones, more than dozen are intended for internet fans and computers, and all the lovers of various forms of fishing have come into their own as well.

Women's papers and reviews are not typical specialized papers such as the above mentioned, but nevertheless they target a certain reader group – the women, and hence this conditional specialization. Namely, even members of the opposite sex can sometimes read a couple of lines in these magazines, although there are few of those who will admit such a sin in the open. The recent surveys of the newspaper market have proven that women are a thankful, loyal and massive-scale audience. This may also be the reason why they are often targeted by publishers who bomb them with various types of reviews and magazines. Even within the Yugoslav market, the Croatian press used to have a rather strong tradition of creating women's papers, and in the recent years kiosks sell even up to ten or more magazines bought by women.

If we wish to make a selection of those most important women's magazines in Croatia today, then we can say that the most important magazines, weeklies, bi-weeklies and monthlies are the following: 'Gloria', 'Mila', 'Regina', 'Svijet', 'Tara', 'Tena' and 'Zaposlena (The Employed Woman)'. In addition to these, there are also other "reviews for modern

women”, such as 'Moje tajne (My Secret)', 'Moje sudbine (My Destiny)', 'Istinite sudbine (True Stories)'. New titles are born overnight, but they also die at the same quick rate.

### **'Gloria': the Bright Side of Jet-Set**

'Gloria' is the most famous women's magazine, and also the best selling weekly in Croatia. The exact circulation is not known, but there is information that the New Year's issue of Gloria was pressed in 160,000 copies. The average circulation is estimated to exceed 120,000 copies. 'Gloria' has been holding this lead for several years already. 'Gloria's success story formula is very simple: it records all the events in the world jet-set, but it is also trying to also keep abreast with and cover all the important developments within the Croatian community where the local high society is gathering (the *Metropolis* column). These are most often theater or movies premieres, receptions at foreign embassies, celebrations of national holidays, and the like. The majority of the people photographed are posing and are very aware that they will show up in the weekly issue of the magazine. The editorial team makes it very sure that the photographs be decent and appropriate, and scandals are completely avoided. Such an approach is welcome with the audience, and characters from some of the columns respond to cooperation with the 'Gloria' team and they let in journalists to their interestingly arranged homes (the *My Home* column) – not even avoiding the view of their own bedrooms. The privacy of public personae always attracts public attention, particularly when it is known in advance that there will be no dirty laundry and that everything is just like in a fairy tale. Because, 'Gloria' is not the classical tabloid type. Inside it, everything is “polished”, everything is shiny and printed on shiny paper, there is no poverty, no ugliness or social injustice. Not at least when things involve people from Croatia who are members of the society's elite or jet-set. Evidently, celebrities (singers, actors, journalists) are glad to invite or let in 'Gloria' journalists to their own weddings, baptismal fetes of their own just born children, or to their newly decorated homes. The readers who are mere mortals like to see and read such things, because 'Gloria' sells well on the market. True, 'Gloria' has also covered some less glorious events from the lives of celebrities, such as family tragedies, funerals or divorces, but even then, care is applied in order to make sure that the text content offends nobody.

One more secret to 'Gloria's success lies in covering soap operas. Given that South American tele-novels are popular, 'Gloria' has been regular in publishing exclusive interviews with the main characters on their private lives. How much cost-effective and marketable this is, is proven by the information that in the summer of 2001 'Gloria' has published a separate

issue on the destinies of main characters from tele-novels who have attracted the attention of female and male readers on the various televisions in Croatia over the past several years.

Of course, just like all women's magazines, 'Gloria' has permanent columns on beauty, fashion trends, recipes, horoscopes, crosswords, sex and romance permanent column, intimate women's topics column, new perfumes, a full love story, and the like.

'Gloria' has its readers even beyond Croatia. A portion of 'Gloria's' circulation is sold in Bosnia and Herzegovina. How significant this portion is corroborated by the fact that the editorial team is taking some serious thought to publish a mutant edition for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Interestingly, when you ask public personae or highly educated normal people whether or not they read 'Gloria', the majority of them replies that they only "skim" or "regularly browse" it, but practically nobody replies that they do read this paper. Whether they only browse or read it after all, 'Gloria' is ultimately a very successful and profitable product of the Europapress Holding, the largest private press house in Croatia. All other papers of its kind significantly lag behind in ratings and popularity.

### **'Mila': Something for Simple Mortals**

'Mila' is a weekly intended for women, issuing for almost thirteen years in Croatia. When 'Mila' started issuing, there was only one paper for women in Croatia - 'Svijet'. At the time, appearance of one more specialized paper for a specific reader group was a sheer revolution. And it was a fundamental question of the publisher whether and how the market would contain two papers. This immediately proved to be a good business move. 'Mila' had a conception totally different from that of 'Svijet' and from all those other women's magazines at the time published in former Yugoslavia, although the content was the same: fashion, fashion trends, tips, sex, make-up, recipes, diets, consumer guides, short love stories, etc. The decisive thing was in the presentation of those contents: conciseness, brief texts and clear language, and a bunch of small color photographs scattered over the pages of 'Mila'. Graphic-wise, 'Mila' has retained the same layout until the present day, while the contents have changed and adjusted to the needs of the loyal readers. Now too it is a weekly full of brief texts, tips and small format photographs-illustrations – depending on the season of the year coming. In comparison with the tips earlier, 'Mila' of today gives more room to its female readers, paying them fees for their stories on successful diets, their love affairs and photographs of their children. In those terms, 'Mila' is more directed towards the so-called

ordinary woman or whatever this may understand, than towards the jet-set. This editorial policy ensures loyal readership, albeit much smaller in number than that of 'Gloria'.

Interestingly, both 'Mila' and 'Gloria' are published by the Europapress Holding publishing company, thus covering a very broad range of interests with women's audience, involving a hefty portion of the market cake.

### **'Regina': for the New Generation**

'Regina' is the youngest women's bi-weekly in Croatia. The editors say that this is "the first Croatian women's tabloid". 'Regina' brings news on the latest jet-set events in the world and in Croatia on a smaller number of pages, but it does not shrink from publishing celebrity photographs made by paparazzi. This is by all means a novelty in the world of Croatian women's magazines.

What makes 'Regina' a truly women's magazine are various tips, fashion trends, interviews with famous Croat women who boldly answer even the questions related to sex, marriage, perception of men, and the like. You could say that 'Regina' is getting prepared for the new generation of self-reliant young women, those who have practically grown up on 'Cosmopolitan' and who find nothing female-related strange.

'Regina' is issued by the private publisher Bifora d.o.o. from Rijeka. It is hard to determine the circulation, but given that it can be found at the kiosks, it means that it is still issuing and finding its circle of readers.

### **2.4. 'Svijet': Tradition at Its Last Gasp**

'Svijet' is the oldest Croatian magazine for women. The paper started issuing as early as before the Second World War, and in a revised edition it appeared back in 1953. It lived its golden moments back in mid-seventies, when it was the only magazine intended for female readers in Croatia. At the time, it also sold very well in the former Yugoslavia as well. In addition to promoting fashion trends, the paper was constantly developing columns and responding the needs of the contemporary moment. Then it was a socially engaged paper with a number of good reportages. Such a paper had an educative function first of all, and it was only then that it was entertaining. In early nineties, the magazine stopped issuing to reappear in mid-nineties as a private edition under the same title. Since then, however, under the changed social circumstances, when the market was reduced down to Croatia only, and in competition with several more magazines for women, 'Svijet' has been fighting to survive. In a flood of various papers for women, 'Svijet' has continued the tradition of the "old", bringing

interesting reportages and travelogues, interviews with Croatian writers, and providing portraits of some prominent names from the movies, arts and theatre, in addition to the normal contents of women's magazines. The circulation of 'Svijet' is not known, but it is evidently not that large to impose any serious threats on 'Gloria' or 'Mila'.

In spite of 'Svijet' being a monthly maintaining high standards in specialized women's paper, the magazine has lost the role it had some twenty years ago, because it has not adjusted its contents to the needs of its target audience.

### **'Tara': Lack of Distinctiveness**

In following the needs of the market, probably arising from the need to issue a magazine that would be more successful on the market, the 'Svijet' editorial team started issuing 'Tara'. The magazine 'Tara' differs significantly from 'Svijet'. The very title of the magazine says that this is “the magazine for beauty, fashion and healthy living”. Graphic-wise, 'Tara' looks alike 'Mila' or 'Tena', with abundance of brief information, summarized texts and tips for general life improvement (“Fight Tiredness”, “Learn to Meditate”, “Good Plan – Good Sex”). 'Tara' contains all the elements of the classical women's magazine: ranging from fashion trends to horoscopes and unavoidable recipes for good cuisine. What new and undiscovered contents this women's magazine offers, it is hard to tell. There is also an outstanding question as to the market ratings of the paper and how long it will last, given that it has not yet managed to secure a profile of its distinction and recognizability – and this is most often the recipe for a market failure or at least for a doubtful success.

### **'Tena': A Little Bit of Everything**

As its title says “the review for the modern woman”, 'Tena' weekly could briefly be commented as treading the path of its elder sister 'Mila'. Since the weekly is starting its third year of issuing, it has evidently found its place under the sun, in spite of the strong competition among women's magazines in Croatia. Fashion and make-up, healthy living, celebrities, various diets, tips, cuisine and recipes, all of these are topics that are inevitably included in this “review for the modern woman” as well. The texts are brief and concise, and the photographs are smaller in format, mainly functioning as illustrations for the texts and tips.

### **'Zaposlena (The Career Woman)': Woman as an (after all) Political Being**

In the shop window containing a large number of reviews, magazines and papers for women, ultimately we have to mention an untypical “magazine for the successful woman” - 'Zaposlena (The Career Woman)'. The magazine started issuing in early nineties and as a very modern review, of a little bit of elitist contents, addresses a narrow group of female readers. The cover page is always clear, always equally designed from the very beginning of its issuing. This is regularly the portrait of a successful woman: a scientist, a politician or an artist, as an overture to a big interview with her in that issue. Each issue is thematically specific: one current topic is shed light on from all aspects. The magazine does not have a high circulation (we estimate it at some 6,000 copies) and this is mainly in subscription. Graphic-wise, the magazine is arranged carefully, the undersigners of texts and columns are women – public workers, writers or reputable public personae. This elitist approach has contributed to that 'Zaposlena' has never acquired a profile of a populist paper, and that it has retained the image created in the very beginning of issuing. What is worthy mentioning is that 'Zaposlena' has always been an engaged women's magazine and has always had a critical approach towards social phenomena produced by the rule of the HDZ Croat Democratic Community. We had only just thought that the woman is a being residing only in the kitchen and in beauty parlors...

### **By Way of Conclusion**

Following this brief description of a wealth of papers and magazines for women in Croatia, a conclusion can be drawn that newspaper publishers can be satisfied at how their 'Tena's, 'Tara's, 'Regina's, 'Gloria's and others sell. There are mainly no exact figures available, but the magazines are still issuing.

Although everything seems to be already read, editors always make efforts anew to teach the female readers how women can be beautiful on the vacation and which 20 new hairstyles are trendy, or how to lose five kilograms in two weeks. Recipes, and particularly the sex dossier have always been attractive topics of all women's reviews, even though there may be some nebulous titles or psycho tests on “planning a successful partner relationship”.

Critical cuts in any magazine selling and successfully surviving on the market – are not popular. As long as the magazine has its audience and as long as it sells well, it means that there is a significant number of readers buying that paper, even if it may be on the brink of petty bourgeois manners. This is humane, too. Or womanly, otherwise... Successful editors

are those who know how to resell the millionth time chewed topic of 'depilation for eternity'. And they do it successfully each June in the topic "prepare yourself for the summer". Anything beyond this framework will not sell even some ten thousands of papers. The question is whether it is up to the press or up to the women.

And finally, a confession to make: the author of this text herself sometimes "browses" through some of these magazines, let us not say reads a saucy detail on relationships of Julia Roberts here and there or takes a careful look at the photographs of the Croatian jet-set gathered at the recent premiere of "King Lear" in Brijuni. Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa...

---

Gordana Vilovic manages the 'Freedom Forum' center at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the Zagreb University (Croatia). Translated by: B.R. ©Media Online 2001. All rights reserved.