

## Visitors' Interests for the Croatian Natural History Museum Publications

### — Analysis of Visitors' Attitudes on Museum Publications

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**Abstract:** Museums, among others, are known for its publishing content. Croatian Natural History Museum has diverse publishing activities, but the interest in it is poor. Although intended for pupils, students and the general public, it is interesting that these categories show the slightest interest for it.

Today, museums are trying to keep visitors longer in their location by offering them new contents, such as special areas where they can see, read and buy museum publications, or book-promotions, meetings with authors, presentations, organization of attractive sales points, sales action, etc. All these activities are characterized by a high level of organization and involvement of visitors in the museum events, which represents a novelty in the standard museum offer.

The aim of research is to find out about the visitor's views on the museum's publications. This research was conducted and based on a survey of the museum visitors, during weekends and in the course of two months. The results provide basic indicators in line what the visitors think of these publications and is shown the need for a more comprehensive research project on this topic.

**Key words:** museum, museum publishing, museum visitors, survey

### 1. Introduction

The topic of the paper is to examine the attitudes of museum visitors regarding their interest in the offered topics of the publishing editions of the Croatian Museum of Natural History (HPM), or basically their usefulness. The current social topic<sup>1</sup> is the lack of interest of a larger part of the public for reading and for purchasing books in general, which is also reflected in the purchase of museum publications. The attitudes of an individual or group are formed during the socialization process, through direct or indirect experience, by learning from the environment and the associated social environment. Attitudes can be directed towards individuals, groups or ideas.

Therefore, precisely this topic of researching museum visitor attitudes towards publishing museum editions deserves a more detailed analysis of the apparent poor interest in purchasing natural science publications as well as museum publications in general. The basic task of a research (Šola, 2001, p. 141) is that “someone is positioned on the market”, and the goal of the research is to find out, to detect weaknesses and develop a new strategy. For the museum, it is important through research (surveys are the most preferred), to find the reasons of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tportal.hr/kultura/clanak/zasto-51-posto-gradana-bas-nista-ne-moze-uvjeriti-da-kupuju-knjige-20160422>.

weaknesses, which in this case are the poor sales of museum editions, as it can only develop and improve services that would in the future contribute to the better use of museum publications. The survey was conducted on weekends for two months, from 1 March 2017 to 25 May 2017, when the museum usually has more individual visitors (parents with children, tourists) and less organized school groups.

The paper deals with museum visitors and their interest in museum publishing activities. It also provides an analysis of visitor attitudes on the museum's natural history publications along with a discussion of the research results and the conclusion.

## **2. Publishing under A Museum**

The museums, Šola believes (2001, p. 64), are designed to meet human needs, the needs of the society and the needs of communities in which they operate. That is why it is important to explore why museum visitors, in spite of their interest in the topic of the exhibition, are not interested to buy the offered prints related to the theme of the exhibition. The contemporary museum, apart from storing and exhibiting the fundus, also has the function of recognizing different groups of users and their needs and designing more targeted and efficient communication with them. The museum can communicate with users at different levels and through different media. The central and most important form of museum communication is definitely an exhibition. Other ways of museums communicating with users include: workshops, lectures, internet, social networks, but also publications, newspapers and posters. In addition to researches and exhibitions, an important segment of every museum are its publishing activities, whose goal is distributing both professional and scientific information, information on the educational activities and work of museum, and the popularization of museum material and cultural heritage as well (Grdenić, 1966).

One of the main functions of museum publications are the realization of a kind of museum communication with the public (including education, offering information, etc.) and the promotion of museum's activities and mission, the presentation of museum objects, and also creating interest for its visitors. Eventually, if the marketing of the museum is successful, this communication is then achieved and there are exchanges between the museum and the user and profits are made by their sales. The following publications are specific for Croatian museum publishing (Radovanlija Mileusnić, 2001, p. 16): informative museum flyers, brochures and museum guides, catalogues of permanent exhibitions and catalogues of occasional exhibitions.

Publishing is the activity of publishing and distributing printed, audiovisual and electronic material intended for the public. It includes the acquisition and selection of manuscripts, editing, graphic art formatting, printing or other forms of production, promotion and distribution<sup>2</sup>. The modern era in which the internet offers great opportunities for getting to know the world and researching various topics and content does not benefit publishing museum activity. The greatest and most important value of the museum is intelligibility. That is what attracts visitors to the museum. Understanding and accessibility of museum contents is an important factor in creating interest for other museum contents as well. The museums publish their publications primarily for the promotion of knowledge, but in recent years also for the purpose of obtaining financial profit because museum publications are sold, and museums use the money to print additional publications or to promote other programs.

According to Šola (2002) museum publications are divided into two categories:

(1) Publishing as a part of a complex museum product (catalogue of permanent exhibitions which without it

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<sup>2</sup> Note of the Publisher, Proleksis encyclopedia; <http://proleksis.lzmk.hr/58192>.

is difficult to follow the exhibition).

(2) Publishing where the goal is to present the product of the museum, popularize it, make it attractive or to follow it up for better understanding or income (museum newspapers, leaflets, posters and other publications where the goal is to inform the public of the existence of exhibitions).

“The boundaries between these groups are not always clear, as there is no catalogue that is not a museum advertisement, and there is no promotional material that is not part of the museum substance” (Šola, 2002, p. 63).

The goals of museum publishing and the role of museum publications can be understood within the following museum activities (Standards and norms for museum activity, 1990):

- (1) publishing results of professional and scientific work on the museum building
- (2) publishing data and information about museum documentation
- (3) museum publishing as a segment of museum market business.

Organized museum shops offer museum publications with replicas of sculptures or museum items, toys or jewellery made in original design as well as original works of art. Postcards, reproductions, posters, and posters with museum motifs are favourites if they are well-chosen and whose original can be seen in the exhibition. In recent years, the museum offer has been complemented by museum editions for children and youth. With its editions, museums are trying to get closer to more ingenious publications — picture books, workbooks and notebooks, colouring books, models, as well as a variety of souvenir offerings such as jigsaws<sup>3</sup>, mosaic pads or page markers. McManus believes (1994, p. 70) that museum staff caring for program activities, public relations and propaganda have additional needs for visitor information, their habits, interest, and needs.

### **3. Croatian Natural History Museum**

#### **3.1 Publishing of CNHM**

The Croatian Natural History Museum (hereinafter: CNHM), by its fundus, is one of the largest Croatian museums, and is the largest natural science museum in the Republic of Croatia. At 750 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space there is a zoological permanent exhibition, a mineralogical-petrography permanent exhibition and a thematic exhibition. Although it is a spatial museum (spread over 3 floors), there is no museum shop in the museum where museum publications and souvenirs could be displayed. For now they are in the showcase next to the ticket sales spot. The selection of publications in the museum is large and thematically diverse, and a wide range of museum themes are presented in various publishing formats, from classical publications, computer laser prints to exhibition catalogues to monograph encyclopaedia type editions or contemporary electronic publications. Everything presented, from scientific publications to depliants, as well as the entire small print assortment (the museum prints large amounts of such small prints for the purpose of museum promotion (such as bookmarks, calendars, schedules, magnets, etc.). In addition, the museum has various accompanying, promotional prints marking museum anniversaries, points of some significant museum projects, and alike.

#### **3.2 Visitors to the Museum**

Due to visibility of the analysis regarding the perception and purchase of museum publications, one should first consider who are the visitors of the Croatian Natural History Museum. According to data, the museum had

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<sup>3</sup> Example: The Museum of the City of Kaštel printed in 2007 a museum publication in the form of a puzzle *Educational map — model of the Vitturi Castle in Kaštel Lukšić*, author, Maria Klaića, available online at: <http://www.muzej-grada-kastela.hr/pedMapa.html>.

23,143 visitors in 2015<sup>4</sup>, of which 20% were preschool children, 45% were schoolchildren (high school students make up only ten percent within the category), while adults account for 35% of the total number of visitors<sup>5</sup>. Out of this reason, it is evident that this museum is mostly visited by primary school pupils and parents with children. In accordance with this knowledge, most of the museum publications are intended and adapted to the interest of children and school curricula in order to use them as a supplements (or clarification) for the knowledge gained at school. Contrary to the high numerical potential of visitors<sup>6</sup>, there is little interest in the offered museum publications. Is that just an assumption? Do museum visitors find the publications useful for their education or maybe hobbies? Are offered publications written in a too professional manner rather than customized, fashionable and with interesting topics for them? Why would the publications be interesting to them? Responses to these questions are being researched.

## **4. Material and Methods**

### **4.1. Survey Research**

The research was conducted by a survey method. This is a process that researches and collects data, information, attitudes and opinions about the subject of the survey based on the survey questionnaire. As Zelenika states (2000, p. 368), with the help of a survey, data and information about the experience can be found and more information can be obtained in a short matter of time, which would reduce costs and therefore make the survey more economical. The value of the survey is limited because the information it can give us depends on the honesty of the questioned person and their capability to answer the given questions. The reliability of this method is as great as the reliability of the information gathered with this method, and it is used in cases when it is not possible to collect certain data and information in another way (Zelenika, 2000, p. 366). Good and detailed preparation and defining the purposes and goals of the research is necessary for a scientific method of surveying. This research used the written survey, which, according to Zelenika (2000, p. 371) has certain advantages in regards to an oral survey because the responses are anonymous, there is no influence from the surveyor, less time and effort is needed and the costs of the survey are minimal. The survey was filled out by the visitors. The time necessary for filling out the survey was not limited, but the responders needed 10–15 minutes. The survey used questions of a closed type (Vujević, 1988. p. 96) or questions with offered answers and questions with offered answers of intensity. So the survey would not only be a questionnaire but also an introduction and instructions (Zelenika, 2000 p. 373), the respondents were given an explanation of the problems and the goal of the research which motivated them to answer the questions consciously and honestly. The survey questionnaire was put in an approachable place for the visitors at the entrance to the museum so that oral instructions for the survey could be given as well. The survey was conducted individually and in groups when opportunity was given.

This research was conducted in the museum area during the period from 1 March 2017 to 25 May 2017 on a sample of 328 visitors who wanted to participate in the survey<sup>7</sup>. The data was collected personally by the author. The survey research was conducted due to a number of advantages of such a research: simple organization, price

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<sup>4</sup> Official information for 2016 are not yet published, so here as an example is the information for the year 2015, <http://www.mdc.hr/UserFiles/Image/izdavastvo/izvjesca/2013/zg/Hrvatski%20prirodoslovni%20muzej%202013.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Internal information of the museum obtained according to categories of the sold tickets.

<sup>6</sup> 2015. Croatian Museum of Natural History was visited by 23.143 people, available online at: [http://www.mdc.hr/files/file/muzeji/statistika/Posjet-hrvatskim-muzejima---statistika-broja-posjeta-\(2014.-g.\).pdf](http://www.mdc.hr/files/file/muzeji/statistika/Posjet-hrvatskim-muzejima---statistika-broja-posjeta-(2014.-g.).pdf).

<sup>7</sup> According to internal information, for the period when the survey was conducted, the total registered number of visitors was 732.

(not expensive), ability to obtain more information at once, obtaining current information, and alike. The problem that had occurred in the research was the difficulty of choosing questions, their quantity, fear of respondents refusing to participate and that, given the different age of respondents, some answers would be unusable. As mentioned earlier, research will show whether there is a need for a more comprehensive exploration of this issue.

The age structure of visitors participating in the survey was satisfactory and as expected; the museum was visited by several adults ( $n = 252$ ) in comparison to children and higher grade students ( $n = 103$ ), a total of 328 visitors. This was expected because parents and children, young people and tourists are the most frequent visitors on weekends. For the purpose of this research, a survey questionnaire was used containing socio-demographic questions (age, gender) and questions related to the attitudes of permanent museum exhibitions and occasional exhibitions and museum publications. The questions that were asked were clear, unambiguous and usable. The research was conducted after visitors visited the museum and were informed that some of the offered publications could be purchased at the ticket desk of the museum. The survey was filled only by visitors who wanted to fill it out and there was no need for it to be filled out by all museum visitors during that period. The surveys were filled out anonymously and without time constraints. After completion, the surveys were submitted to the author personally or they are put in the provided survey box. The survey was a one-time survey. The research used a non-experimental method, meaning a survey where the basic source of data was personal testimony of opinions, beliefs, attitudes (Milas, 2009, p. 395).

The following main problems were formulated according to the goal of the research:

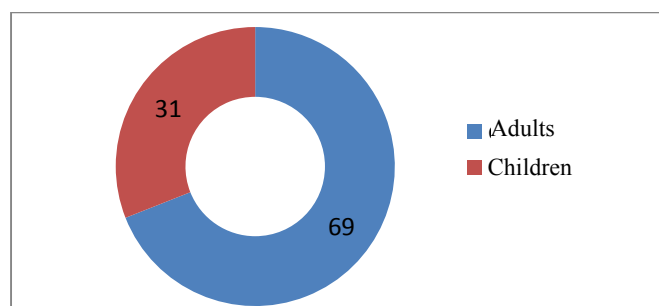
- To test the general attitude of visitors according to the interest of the exhibition of the Croatian Natural History Museum and interest for natural history.
- To test their book reading and purchasing habits.
- To test the attitude of the visitors regarding museum publications and souvenirs.
- To test the reasons why they purchase or do not purchase museum publications.

## **5. Results and Discussions**

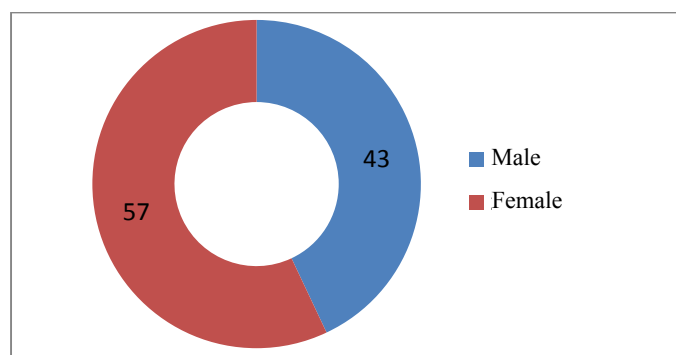
After processing the survey, results were obtained whose interpretation was descriptive and graphical. The questions in the survey related to gender, age, interest in natural history, motivation for coming to the museum, attitudes about the museum's exhibitions, do they have habits of reading and buying books, is there is interest in the offered publications and their reasons for buying or not buying museum publications. In total 328 visitors of different ages were surveyed. The research was mostly carried out by adults (225 persons). Of the surveyed respondents, 225 (69%) were adults, and 103 (31%) were children, students of higher grades (Figure 1). More women (202) compared to men (126) participated, which was expected because mothers come with children to the museum more frequently (Figure 2). When asked if they are interested in natural sciences, Figure 3 shows that adult visitors are interested in natural sciences (54%), while children are interested in natural science at a very high percentage (82%), and only a small percentage of children of are not interested in natural sciences and they are there "because they have to". Participants in the questionnaire survey were asked whether the museum exhibitions were interesting. Figure 4 shows that surveyed visitors mostly indicated that the museum's exhibitions were very interesting for them, especially for children. An almost negligible percentage considers the museum not interesting and even boring. When asked about their reading habits, whether they read and purchase books, Figure 5 shows, which is completely expected, that most of the adult museum visitors are likely to read and purchase

books (85%), while students in the highest percentage respond that they do not like to read (68%), which is quite disconcerting. When asked what they think about museum publications, several answers were offered. Figure 6 shows that 55% of visitors believe that the museum has a satisfactory offer of publications, 20% think the publications are unattractive, and only 15% stated they did not know. When asked whether they purchase museum publications or the reason for their purchase (Figure 7), 55% purchase it because of the need (because of schoolwork, papers, etc.), while only 23% of visitors purchase publications because they are interested in a particular natural science theme, and 23% does not buy anything.

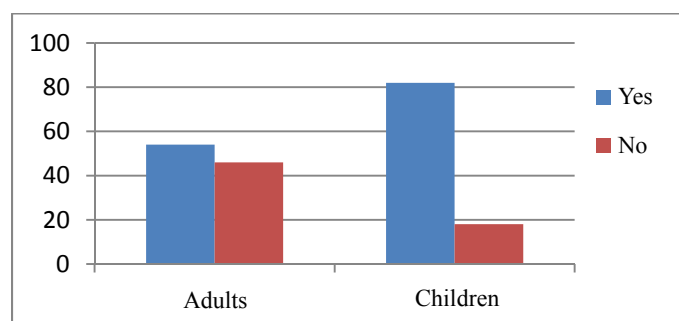
Are publications of geological or biological topics more interesting? A slightly higher percentage (48%) opted for biological topics, 33% would buy a publication of geological themes, and 29% do not know (Figure 8). Figure 9 shows that 29% of visitors believe that publications are expensive. According to the types of publications, visitors mostly buy catalogues along with exhibitions or museum guides (38%), publication for children purchase 64% of visitors and the smallest interest in monograph editions (8%), which is understandable because it is a specialized, expensive publication (Figure 10).



**Figure 1 Age of Visitors (%)**

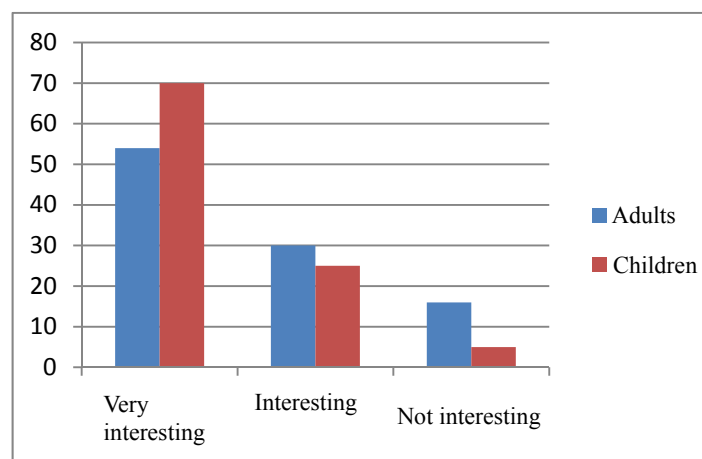


**Figure 2 Sex (%)**

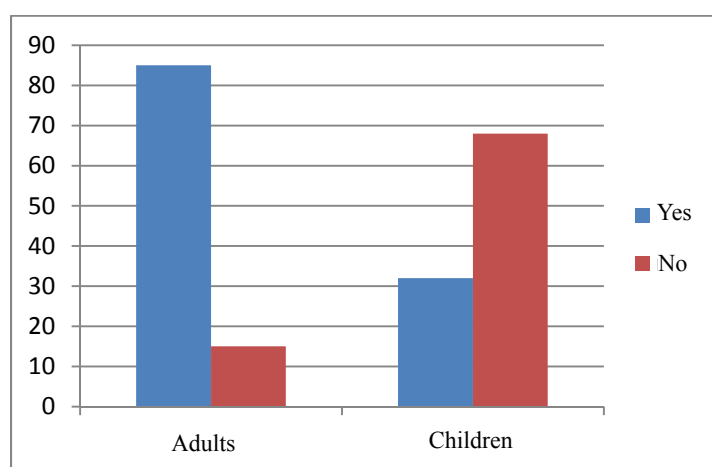


**Figure 3 Interest for Natural Sciences (%)**

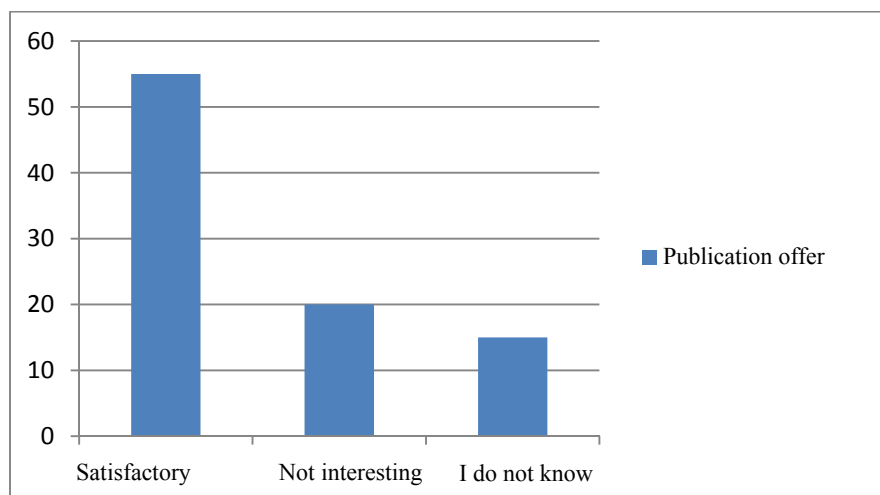
**Visitors' Interests for the Croatian Natural History Museum Publications**  
**— Analysis of Visitors' Attitudes on Museum Publications**



**Figure 4 Interesting Objects of the Museum and Exhibition (%)**



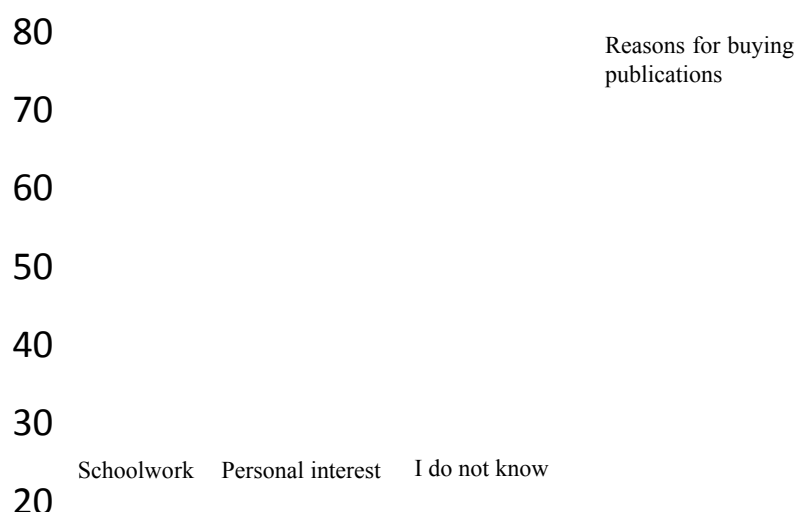
**Figure 5 Reading Habits (%)**



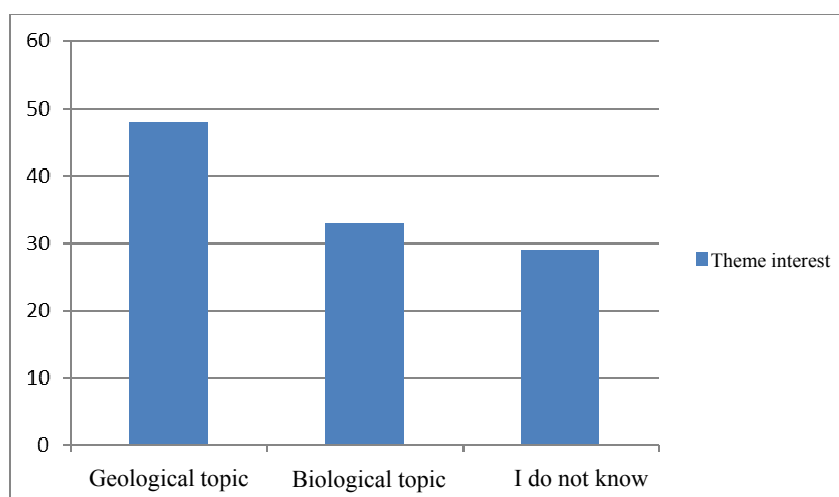
**Figure 6 Offer of Museum Publications (%)**

**Visitors' Interests for the Croatian Natural History Museum Publications**  
**— Analysis of Visitors' Attitudes on Museum Publications**

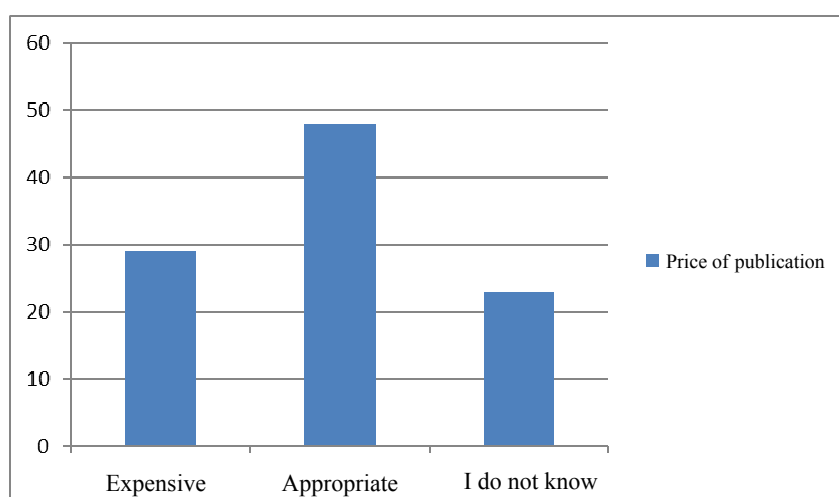
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**Figure 7 Reason for Buying Publications (%)**



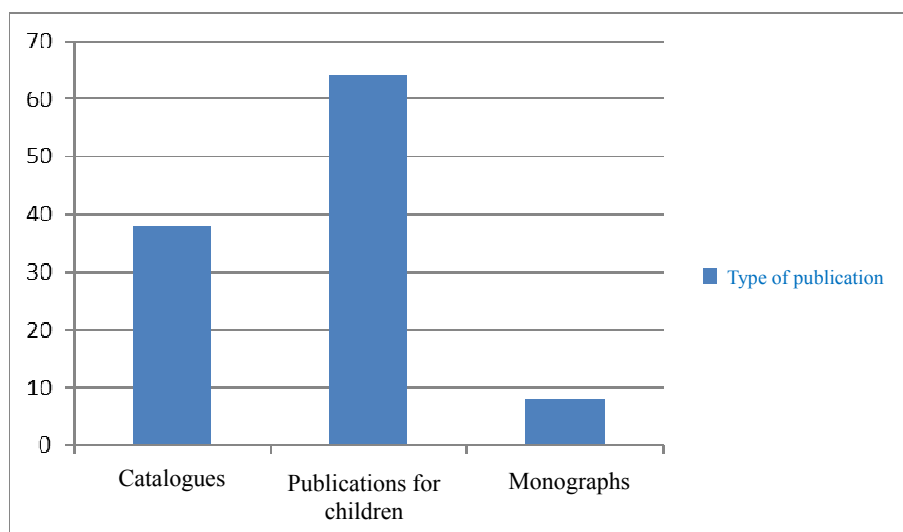
**Figure 8 Thematic Interest for Buying Publications (%)**



**Figure 9 Price of Publication (%)**



**Visitors' Interests for the Croatian Natural History Museum Publications**  
**— Analysis of Visitors' Attitudes on Museum Publications**



**Figure 10 What Type of Publication is Purchased Most Frequently (%)**

## 6. Conclusion

Today museums are trying to keep visitor in their areas with the goal of a more quality adoption of the offered content. Special programs are being designed, so even the Croatian Museum of Natural History follows the world practice and strives to offer museum visitors publications of interesting, current themes that are adapted to different ages — from preschool children to professionals of various profiles. Considering that the survey was conducted on weekends, more adult visitors were expected to attend, with fewer children (students), and more women than men. Furthermore, research has shown that the museum is visited more over the weekend because of parents with children, the student population and tourists. Some 50% come to the museum because they have to (“to entertain the children” or “because of school”). Surveys have shown that the general attitude towards the museum and its exhibition is positive, and adults and children consider it interesting. The survey shows that museum visitors like reading, they have reading habits, and they buy books. This is encouraging for selling museum publications as well. A large number of visitors consider that the museum has a good offer of publications, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and it is apparent that they are interested in publications and purchase them. However, the survey showed that publications were purchased because of school-related needs, and a very small, almost negligible percentage of visitors buy publications of their own interest. Visitors are more interested in publications of biological themes than geological. More than half of the respondents, 58%, believe that publications have an acceptable price. Research has shown that poor sales of publications are certainly not a result of high prices or lack of interest. Another reason for this is that children do not like reading and read less and less. Also, the poor interest in museum publications from visitors requires a deeper, more extensive analysis. A possible solution is to pay more attention to the advertising and marketing of the publishing itself.

The obtained results were satisfactory and somewhat expected. Although, according to the results of this research, there is interest in museum publications, and it has proved to be interesting to visitors with a good presentation of content, a variety of themes adapted to various age groups and interests, however, is not enough. In order to improve the situation, it is necessary to devise a marketing strategy. In the museum, part of the museum's activities will focus on even better visibility of these publications with visitors by applying new, interesting

programs such as promotions, mingling with curators — authors, travel agents, photographers, presentations, lectures etc. The most fundamental views on the interest of visitors to the Croatian Natural History Museum for the purchase of museum publications will only be obtained after a more extensive research involving more visitors to the museum for a longer period of time.

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