



ORIGINAL PAPER

Media and Culture in Croatia in the Post-War Period (1945–1946)

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Abstract

The media play a significant role in shaping public perception and preserving the cultural identity of every country. The period following the Second World War was turbulent, marked by profound changes in the political, cultural, and economic context. During the wartime destruction, the city of Zadar in Croatia suffered extensive damage, both in terms of its population and infrastructure. In such circumstances, the printed newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* played a key role in promoting and documenting cultural events, thus becoming an important messenger of the city's cultural life. The subject of this study is the media representation of cultural events in Zadar during the period from 1945 to 1946, examined through the example of the newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* within the context of post-war Croatia. The aim of the research is to examine the extent and manner in which cultural content was presented in the post-war press and to determine its social role in the process of rebuilding the local community. The research period covers the publication of the local newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* in Zadar from 1 January 1945 to 31 December 1946. The units of analysis are newspaper articles dealing with cultural events, including reports on cultural manifestations, theatre performances, musical events, exhibitions, and the activities of city libraries, museums, and galleries. The research sample comprises 65 issues of the newspaper. The study applies a descriptive method as well as quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The results indicate a pronounced presence of cultural topics in the media space, despite the complex socio-political circumstances of the post-war period. Furthermore, the findings show that the printed medium *Slobodna Dalmacija* played an important role in promoting cultural activities, strengthening social cohesion, and preserving the cultural identity of Zadar and its surrounding area.

Keywords: *media, culture, post-war period, Croatia, content analysis.*

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Introduction

The immediate post-war period in Croatia was marked by intense political, social, and cultural transformation. In the context of post-war reconstruction, culture assumed an important role in restoring social life, shaping collective identity, and promoting new ideological values. Cultural institutions, including theatres, libraries, and music societies, began to gradually re-emerge, serving as centers for both education and communal engagement. The media, particularly the press, functioned as a central mechanism through which these cultural activities were communicated, interpreted, and symbolically framed for the public, often linking artistic expression to broader social and political goals.

This paper examines the media portrayal of cultural events in the city of Zadar and its surrounding area during 1945 and 1946, as presented in the daily newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija*. As one of the most influential post-war newspapers in Dalmatia, *Slobodna Dalmacija* played a significant role not only in reporting on cultural life but also in actively constructing narratives about culture aligned with the dominant socio-political context. Cultural events, theatre performances, concerts, and literary evenings represented not only symbols of recovery but also instruments for strengthening social cohesion in the challenging post-war circumstances. In this context, the media—particularly printed newspapers—served both as a platform for public information and as a tool for promoting ideological and cultural agendas, helping to shape the public's understanding of what constituted legitimate cultural life in the immediate post-war years.

The research problem addressed in this study concerns the ways in which cultural events were represented in the press and the functions such representations fulfilled in the early post-war period. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between culture, media discourse, and ideology, as cultural reporting frequently extended beyond mere information to include normative and value-laden interpretations. Through detailed analysis, the study investigates not only which types of events were reported but also how language, imagery, and editorial framing contributed to creating a shared vision of cultural and social reconstruction.

The aim of this research is to analyse both the quantitative presence and qualitative characteristics of articles on cultural events published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 1945 and 1946. By identifying dominant themes, types of cultural activities, and discursive patterns, the study seeks to clarify how cultural life in Zadar was framed and communicated through the press. Additionally, it considers the broader role of newspapers in legitimizing post-war cultural policy and shaping collective memory, highlighting how media representations reinforced or contested social and political norms.

The relevance of this paper lies in its contribution to media and cultural studies by demonstrating the role of newspapers as both historical sources and active agents in the shaping of post-war cultural reality. By examining the interplay of reporting, ideology, and cultural practice, the study provides insights into how media not only documented but also influenced the reconstruction of community identity and the re-establishment of cultural life in a society recovering from war.

Theoretical background

Culture in the social sciences is most commonly defined as a complex system of learned behaviors, values, beliefs, norms, and symbolic practices shared by members of a given society (Tylor, 1:1871). Such an understanding of culture goes beyond reducing

it to artistic or aesthetic forms and encompasses broader patterns of meaning and social relations. From an interpretative perspective, culture represents a framework of meaning through which individuals interpret reality and shape collective identity (Geertz, 5:1973). It is historically and socially conditioned and subject to continuous change under the influence of political, economic, and ideological circumstances (Denby, 55-76:2005). Cultural patterns can also be examined through dimensions that reflect broader societal values and power structures (Hofstede, 4:2004).

Cultural events constitute visible manifestations of culture in the public sphere and include various forms of artistic, educational, and social activity (Antolović, 30-60:2010). Their function extends beyond aesthetic expression to include the transmission of knowledge, values, and social norms, as well as the strengthening of a sense of community and belonging. In periods of intense social change, particularly in the immediate post-war years, cultural activities often acquire an additional political and ideological dimension, functioning as instruments of socialization and the reconstruction of social life (Brennan, 15-30:2010). At the same time, they may serve to legitimize a new social order (Southwood, 19:2010). In such circumstances, culture becomes a space of symbolic struggles and the redefinition of collective identity (Wieviorka, 190:2008).

The media play a crucial role in mediating culture, as they participate in the processes of selection, interpretation, and evaluation of cultural events (Gavranović, 119-134:2007). Media representations are not neutral reflections of reality but constructed discourses shaped by editorial practices, institutional interests, and dominant ideological frameworks. The press, as a traditional mass medium, holds particular significance in shaping public discourse, as it determines which cultural events gain visibility and how their social significance is presented.

In the socialist post-war context, the media often had a normative and educational function (Zgrabljic Rotar, 9-43:2005). Culture was presented as a means of social progress and collective education. Reporting on cultural events emphasized their social usefulness, ideological conformity, and the moral values considered desirable. In this way, media cultural discourse contributed to the formation and consolidation of dominant norms and values.

Norms and values represent fundamental elements of culture, as they regulate social behavior and express shared conceptions of what is desirable and acceptable (Bicchieri, 8-30:2011). Values can also be understood as universal motivational categories that structure social relations and individual choices (Schwartz, 420-445:2012). Through repeated media representation of cultural practices, certain values become naturalized and internalized, making the media important actors in the process of symbolic integration of society. Cultural diversity is manifested through the coexistence of different identities and practices within the same social space (Vertovec, 12:2009). It implies the recognition and preservation of diverse cultural expressions as an integral part of social dynamics (Wessendorf, 5-25:2009). Furthermore, cultural diversity is recognized as a value that contributes to social cohesion and intercultural dialogue (Stenou, 9-15:2004).

Newspapers, as historical sources, provide insight into everyday cultural life and the dominant discourses of a particular period (Morović, 5-23:1980). However, their content requires critical analysis, taking into account the political and ideological context in which it was produced. In this study, *Slobodna Dalmacija* is viewed not only as a document of its time but also as an active participant in shaping post-war cultural reality

through its selective presentation of cultural events in Zadar and its surroundings, thereby contributing to the construction of a desirable cultural and social order.

It is emphasized that before the bombings of the Second World War, Zadar was known as a “prosperous city with a favourable strategic position.” Precisely because of this position, various administrations changed throughout its history. The period “from November 1943 to October 1944” is particularly highlighted as one of the most difficult in the city’s history. Although the exact number of civilian casualties has never been fully determined, it is estimated that “around one thousand citizens” were killed during the bombings. After the destruction, only “four thousand people” remained in the city, while a large part of the population sought refuge in nearby settlements, on the islands, and on the outskirts (Vidaković, 50:2002). As a consequence of these circumstances, all cultural events and manifestations that had taken place and developed in Zadar in the pre-war period were interrupted.

The cultural life of Zadar has historically been closely connected with education and the work of societies such as the Croatian Reading Room and the Croatian Sokol, which played an important role in preserving national identity and promoting education. During the post-war period of 1944–1945, the city experienced an intensive revival of cultural institutions – schools in the mother tongue, the National Theatre, the City Library, museums, and galleries were established, reaffirming Zadar as a cultural center of Dalmatia (Ravlić, 74:1964).

Theatre and musical life remained key for expressing artistic, social, and political identity, while amateur drama and cultural colonies in rural areas strengthened local cultural activity (Hrvatsko narodno kazalište Zadar, 2024).

Despite wartime destruction and a reduced population, Zadar demonstrated resilience and adaptability. Through the restoration and development of cultural institutions, the city succeeded in preserving and promoting education, art, and cultural identity, making the post-war period a crucial moment in the strengthening of its cultural scene (Bratanić & Ražnjević, 383–437:2016).

Metodology

In the theoretical part of the study, a descriptive method was applied to present the political and socio-economic situation in Zadar during the period 1945–1946, with a particular emphasis on the cultural scene and its role in the social life of the city. In the empirical part of the research, quantitative and qualitative content analysis was used to examine newspaper articles about cultural events in Zadar and its surroundings, published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* during the same period. The analyzed corpus included a total of 65 newspaper issues from January 1, 1945, to December 31, 1946.

The subject of the research consists of the newspaper issues of *Slobodna Dalmacija* and all articles related to cultural events in Zadar and its surroundings, collected from the holdings of the Zadar Scientific Library, the digital archive of *Slobodna Dalmacija*, and the HR-DAZD-386 collection of the State Archive in Zadar.

The aim of this study is to investigate and analyze newspaper articles on cultural events in the city of Zadar and its surroundings, published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* during 1945 and 1946.

The following research questions were defined:

What is the overall share of newspaper articles on cultural events in Zadar and its surroundings during the studied period (1945 and 1946) in *Slobodna Dalmacija*?

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What is the overall share of newspaper articles on cultural events in Zadar and its surroundings during the studied period (1945 and 1946) published on the front page of the newspaper?

To what extent did cultural events take place in the city of Zadar and its surroundings in the period after the end of the Second World War?

Which media genres are most represented in the analyzed corpus?

Quantitative content analysis was used to systematically examine the frequency, type, and representation of articles across the entire newspaper, while qualitative analysis focused on front-page articles to understand their context, narrative strategies, and the way cultural events were presented in the media. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for a comprehensive insight into the media representation of cultural activities, including the frequency, structure, and thematic focus of the articles, and provided a basis for a detailed interpretation of the significance of cultural events in the post-war context.

Qualitative content analysis was conducted on selected articles, with an emphasis on context, tone, and narrative strategies in media coverage of cultural events. Special attention was given to key events, such as the opening of the National Theatre or concerts by prominent artists. The analysis included an interpretation of the symbolic meaning of events within the broader political and social context of post-war Dalmatia, as well as the identification of dominant media genres, including reports, interviews, features, and commentaries, which allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the way cultural activities were covered in the media.

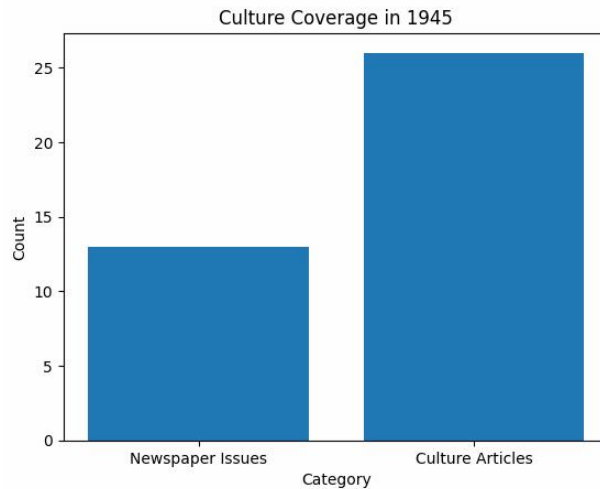
Result of research

Quantitative analysis

A quantitative and qualitative analysis of articles published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 1945 and 1946 demonstrates that cultural topics occupied a visible and sustained position within the newspaper's content during the immediate post-war period. The consistent presence of cultural reporting reflects broader societal efforts aimed at the normalization of public life and the reconstruction of social and cultural institutions following the end of the Second World War. This coverage not only informed the public about ongoing cultural events but also contributed to shaping collective understanding of the city's cultural revival and the symbolic importance of arts in rebuilding community life.

The total number of articles addressing cultural events indicates that cultural life was systematically documented throughout both years under consideration. A comparative overview reveals a higher frequency of cultural articles in 1946 than in 1945, suggesting a gradual intensification of cultural activity as post-war conditions stabilized. Moreover, the diversity of topics—including theatre performances, musical concerts, literary gatherings, and educational initiatives—highlights the multifaceted nature of cultural reconstruction and demonstrates the role of the press in promoting both artistic expression and civic engagement during this critical period.

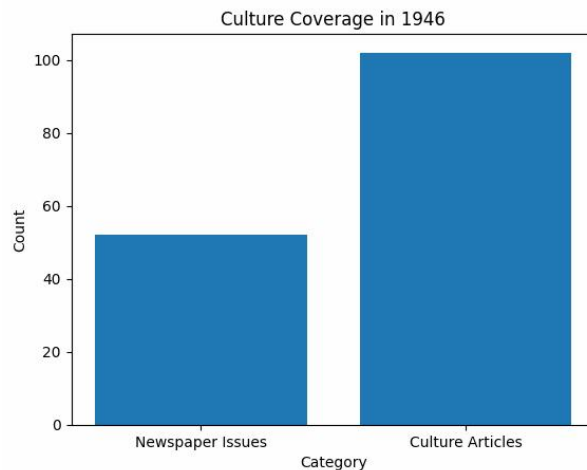
Image 1: Relationship between total newspaper issues and article coverage in 1945.



Source: According to: Vrsaljko 2025.

The presented graph highlights the relationship between the analyzed newspaper issues and the articles in which themes related to cultural events in the city of Zadar and its surrounding area appear. It should also be emphasized that in the post-war devastated city, the population was significantly reduced, material damage to cultural institutions was enormous, and there were few or no adequate venues in which cultural events could be held. Despite these significant challenges, cultural life gradually began to recover, as the community sought to restore social cohesion, maintain local traditions, and provide opportunities for public engagement through arts and education. The analysis of the newspaper articles illustrates how media coverage not only documented these efforts but also played an active role in encouraging participation and promoting a sense of collective resilience during the early post-war period.

Image 2: Relationship between total newspaper issues and article coverage in 1946.



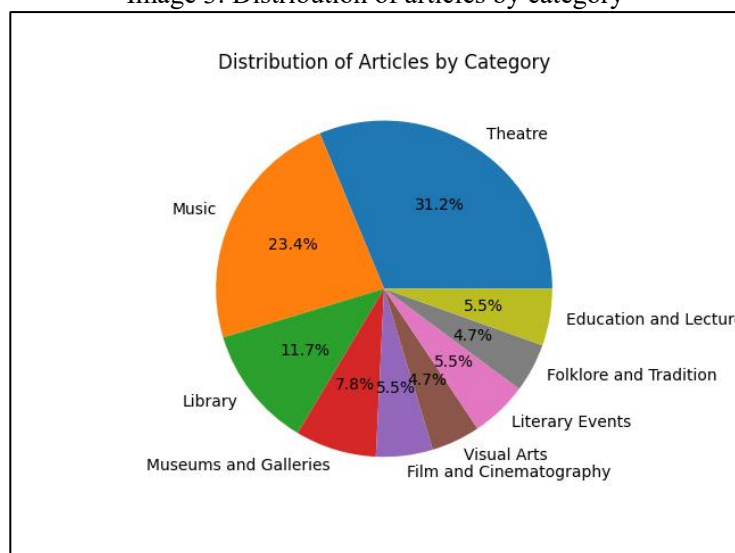
Source: According to: Vrsaljko 2025.

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This trend is clearly illustrated in the graphical representation of the ratio between the total number of newspaper issues and those containing cultural content. The observed increase may be interpreted as an indicator of improved organizational capacities, growing public interest, and expanding institutional support for cultural production. It also reflects a gradual stabilization of post-war conditions, allowing cultural activities to be planned, promoted, and executed more effectively.

An analysis of the distribution of articles according to types of cultural events shows that performative and collective forms of culture predominated. Theatre performances and musical events accounted for the largest share of cultural coverage, highlighting the central role of public gatherings and live performances in re-establishing social cohesion and communal identity. In contrast, exhibitions and other forms of visual arts activities were comparatively underrepresented, suggesting either limited availability of venues and resources or a stronger editorial focus on forms of culture with immediate social visibility. This structure of cultural content is clearly presented in the chart depicting the proportional distribution of articles by category, providing insight into both the priorities of cultural reporting and the broader dynamics of post-war cultural reconstruction in Zadar.

Image 3: Distribution of articles by category

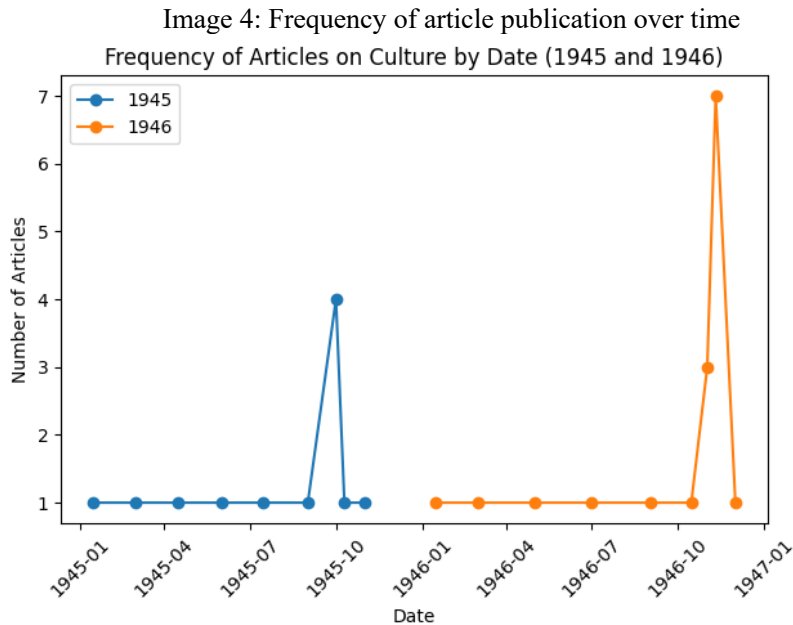


Source: According to: Vrsaljko 2025.

Such a pattern suggests an editorial preference for cultural forms that enabled mass participation and direct engagement with audiences, in line with the dominant cultural policy of the period. Theatre performances, concerts, and public gatherings were therefore prominently featured, reflecting both the newspaper's role in promoting accessible cultural experiences and the broader goal of fostering social cohesion and community identity in the aftermath of the war. This editorial approach highlights how media coverage could actively shape public perception of which cultural forms were most valuable and socially relevant at the time.

The temporal dynamics of cultural reporting further illustrate fluctuations in the intensity of cultural life in Zadar and its surrounding area. Cultural activities were not

evenly distributed throughout the year but exhibited variations associated with seasonal, organizational, and logistical factors. A line graph illustrating the frequency of article publication by date for each year indicates a higher concentration of cultural articles during the spring and summer months, which may be linked to increased institutional activity, better weather conditions for public events, and the planning of festivals, concerts, and outdoor performances. These patterns suggest that cultural life was responsive to both practical constraints and opportunities for wider public engagement, reflecting a gradual but deliberate process of revitalizing community cultural activity in the immediate post-war period.



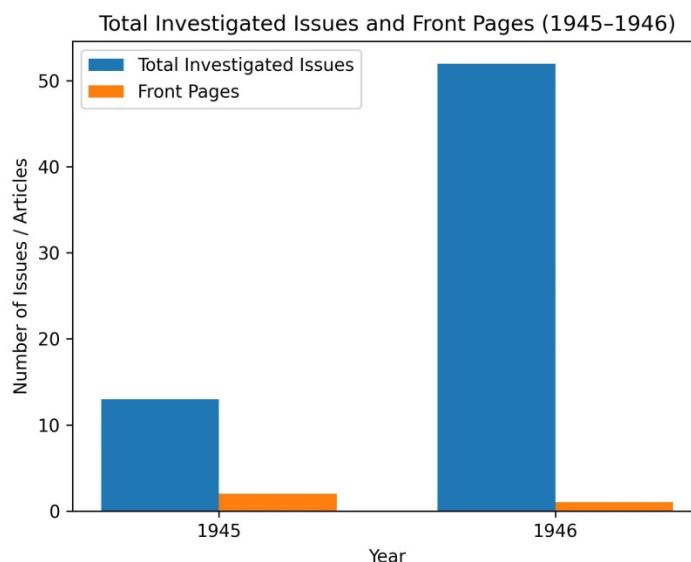
Source: According to: Vrsaljko 2025.

The role of institutions in shaping post-war cultural life was particularly pronounced. The majority of cultural events were organized by formal institutions, such as theatres, cultural associations, and educational establishments, while individual initiatives remained considerably less visible. This pattern, derived from both quantitative data and qualitative content analysis, points to a centralized and institutionally mediated model of cultural production characteristic of the socialist post-war context.

When comparing 1945 and 1946, an overall increase in the number of published articles is observed. In 1946, there was a marked rise in output, with 76 more articles published compared to the previous year. The graph below illustrates that cultural topics occupied two front-page positions in thirteen issues, whereas in 1946 only a single front page dedicated to cultural themes was identified. It should be emphasized, however, that despite the reduced prominence of cultural content on front pages, there is a discernible increase in the coverage of cultural topics within other sections and reporting categories.

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Image 5: Total investigated issues and front pages



Source: According to: Vrsaljko 2025.

The graphical representations further corroborate these findings. Figure 1 and figure 2 confirms an overall increase in the number of articles devoted to cultural events from 1945 to 1946, while Figure 3 highlights the dominance of theatre and music within the overall structure of cultural content. Taken together, these visual data indicate the selective visibility of specific cultural practices within the media landscape.

Qualitative analysis

This section presents a qualitative analysis of the research and interpretation of the study. Qualitative research is recognized as a distinct field with its own methodology and legitimacy, often integrating interconnected and gendered concepts. It has a long history in applied social and humanistic sciences.

The analysis focuses on newspaper coverage related to the culture and cultural life of Zadar, examining topics in individual articles. Research was conducted using the Zadarski oglasi catalog from 1944–1945 and printed materials from the State Archive in Zadar, including announcements, invitations, and posters. Only materials from 1945–1946 were analyzed for this study.

In 1945, cultural life in Zadar was intensively revived, with a focus on the restoration of theatres, performances, and educational programs. By 1946, there was a move toward standardizing the cultural offerings— theatrical performances dominated, and the music program became richer. Political influence on cultural events became evident through ceremonial academies and themed performances with ideological messages. Dance and entertainment programs in the second half of 1946 indicate that cultural life was gradually returning to its social function, not just serving education and propaganda. Cultural and social events in 1945 and 1946 reflect the transition from wartime to post-war conditions, emphasizing the restoration of institutions, education, and political integration. Theatre remained a key platform for expressing artistic, social,

and political ideas, while music and literature continued to strengthen cultural identity. At the same time, political influence on programs increased, demonstrating the close connection between culture and ideology.

Summary of findings:

A total of 48 cultural advertisements were identified, ranging from theater and musical performances to literary evenings.

Theater dominated cultural life, featuring comedies and serious works, while music programs included concerts by prominent artists. Literary events highlighted authors such as Vladimir Nazor and Ivan Goran Kovačić.

Cultural events often had a political dimension, with ceremonies for the October Revolution, Komsomol Day, and the new Yugoslav Republic. Some performances carried political satire or propaganda.

Educational initiatives included language courses and lectures on theater and criticism, showing an emphasis on public education alongside entertainment.

In 1945, the focus was on postwar rebuilding and restoration of cultural institutions. By 1946, programming became more standardized, with richer musical offerings and a mix of political and social-cultural events.

Overall, cultural life in Zadar during 1945–1946 reflects the transition from wartime to postwar society, balancing artistic, educational, and political functions. Theater remained central, while music, literature, and educational programs reinforced cultural identity and social cohesion.

Qualitative analysis of the texts reveals a predominantly affirmative tone in reporting on cultural events. Most articles were promotional or informational in nature, emphasizing the social and educational value of cultural activities. Explicit critical evaluation was rare, suggesting that cultural reporting primarily served to encourage participation rather than to assess artistic quality. Cultural events were frequently presented as accessible to all citizens, thereby reinforcing the notion of culture as a public good and a collective responsibility.

An examination of the presence of cultural articles on the front page of *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 1945 and 1946 shows that cultural topics were only marginally represented in this prominent editorial space, despite a noticeable increase in the overall number of cultural articles during the observed period. In 1945, only two issues featured cultural content on the front page, while in 1946 a single front-page article was recorded, reporting on the visit of violinist Zlatko Baloković to Zadar.

These findings suggest that, although cultural themes were regularly included in the newspaper's internal pages, they were not considered an editorial priority for front-page placement. During the period under review, front pages were predominantly reserved for political, social, and ideologically salient topics, whereas culture appeared only exceptionally and selectively, primarily in cases of events with broader symbolic or representative significance. This pattern indicates that cultural reporting functioned primarily as an informational and educational component of the public sphere, rather than as a central element in shaping the newspaper's headline discourse. Cultural coverage thus operated as part of a broader project of social reconstruction and normalization, albeit without strong symbolic visibility in the most prominent media space. This confirms the thesis of the secondary media position of culture in the post-war newspaper discourse of *Slobodna Dalmacija*.

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Image 6: Distribution of media genres by section

Genres	Percentage
Reports	40%
Feature Articles	25%
Commentaries	15%
Announcements and Advertisements	10%
Interviews	10%

Source: According to: Vrsaljko 2025.

With regard to media genres, the most prevalent forms were reports on cultural events, feature articles, as well as announcements and advertisements for upcoming cultural activities.

Overall, the findings suggest that *Slobodna Dalmacija* functioned not merely as an informational medium, but also as an active agent in the construction of post-war cultural reality. Through selective coverage, an affirmative reporting tone, and a pronounced emphasis on institutional and collective forms of culture, the newspaper contributed to shaping a narrative of cultural reconstruction and social cohesion. Cultural reporting thus played a significant role in promoting values associated with post-war recovery and ideological consolidation in Zadar and its surrounding region during 1945 and 1946.

Conclusion:

The media presentation of cultural events in Zadar during the 1945–1946 period, using the print medium *Slobodna Dalmacija* as a case study, demonstrated that the postwar press played several key roles: informational, integrationist, legitimizing, and ideological. Based on the research corpus of 65 newspaper issues, it was established that cultural themes held great significance and occupied a major portion of the newspaper space. The study showed that the social circumstances of the time influenced the increase in published articles in 1946 compared to 1945, resulting in a more intense production of culture-related articles. Quantitative content analysis confirmed the dominance of theatrical and literary events, while art exhibitions were less represented. This indicates a tendency of the contemporary cultural policy toward mass participation, aiming to promote culture as a vital segment of social life. Qualitative content analysis revealed that the discourse on culture was predominantly affirmative and promotional. Cultural events were presented as a tool for rebuilding society and the community in the aftermath of the war. The research findings showed that newspapers in Croatia, as exemplified by *Slobodna Dalmacija*, were active participants in shaping social reality. The presented themes influenced the development of Zadar's cultural life in accordance with the socio-

political situation of the era. The media did not merely serve a presentation role for cultural events, but also actively participated in shaping the city's cultural identity. This work contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between media and culture in the postwar period, opening up possibilities for further research in other contexts.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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