

PREMISES ON THE LOCAL INFORMATION

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Abstract

Numerous researches prove that though people - mainly in big cities - spend greater part of their days at work, the many-sided impacts and specific interest structure of their residence become more and more determinant. This fact is shown not only by the elections and referendums, but by the increasing demands on local papers or special cable TV-channels, too.

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1. On Several Problems of the Methodology of Local Communications in Hungary

A citizen is not only an employee, but a dweller as well. Numerous researches prove that though people — mainly in big cities — spend greater part of their days at work, the many-sided impacts and specific interest structure of their residence become more and more determinant. This fact is shown not only by the elections and referendums, but by the increasing demands on local papers or special cable TV-channels, too. In Hungary, approximately 120 applications for permit of local TV and radio have recently been registered, and more than 100 cable TV-companies are operating.

One of the most important tasks of the public administration is to provide the residents with information and to maintain a continuous dialogue with them. Direction of a society is unimaginable without communication, but this communication cannot substitute the material-type relations of power. If a power tries to replace this kind of relations with communication, it has to face great difficulties. One basic point of democratizing and decentralizing of the society is having the possibility for the residential areas to create and even to realize the channels of manifestation and enforcement of their interests.

2. A Brief Description of Concrete Situation in Hungary

I. The residents increasingly demand that they can decide on their own life. They have not only their own specific interests, but need more and more information.

II. A new phenomenon is observable. Many of spontaneous, self-motivated groups and clubs have been established. At the beginning the basic motivation was mainly of technical character — e.g. mending cars, do-it-yourself things, etc. The reason probably can be found in the poor quality and high prices of services. Ceasing of these motivating factors can only be a distant goal. Though the 'do-it-yourself-type' organizations are wide spread in Hungary, a well operating local communication system can accelerate the ceasing process.

The establishing local TV-companies constitute a special field of the local communication. Several researches have proved that there is an increasing residential demand on these services because they can provide smaller dwelling areas with information in order to keep the local community up-to-date and well informed. For realization of this purpose — besides decentralization of other political goals and the media — a few conditions are necessary:

- a) a local system of information must be set up;
- b) the local organizations of public administration must participate in providing the residents with information;
- c) useful, up-to-date and quick information can be obtained by the residents in all matters affecting them and their surroundings;
- d) enabling residential participation in preparing and realizing the local decisions.

Nevertheless, all parts and problems of the local communication cannot be solved by technical means alone. The democratism and width of consumption of information are non-parallel to the modernity of the means. However, close you bring the information to the residents, they use them in different ways. Therefore the allocation of the information can be democratic, even the availability can be general, its consumption and use depend on structural factors. Consequently, the local communication systems can only help in:

- turning the demands to direct channels,
- providing bi- and multilateral communication.

Thus, the above mentioned systems must meet requirements which include:

- fast and responsible forwarding the existent services to the residents;
- providing information on the life and specific tasks of the residential area;

- keeping the residents well informed on the plans and activity of the local public administration;
- creating new organizational frame and essence, specific residential relations, etc.

Since this type of residential system of communication operates only on local level, it does not cut the role of the mass media, which attract more people. The local communication system realizes the 'different means for different purposes' principle.

3. The Means

The local cable TV-companies and other media can meet the requirements only with limits. These media can provide accidental communication, can meet broader communal demands (local paper) or can serve limited community (phone, CB radio, etc.) Besides these media — but not replacing only supplementing them —, a special system is necessary which:

- makes possible a quick data collection;
- can use all the advantages of the above mentioned means.

These requirements can be met by residents owning PC-s. I have only estimated numbers, but in Hungary there are at least several hundred thousand personal computers. The residential communication system — considering its organizational and technical form — is a part of the system of informatics of the public administration, so it is based on existing data bases, which can be used — as an output — by the residents according to their needs any time. These conditions satisfy not only political aims, but contribute to creating the residential 'identity'. The residential communication system — whatever techniques it is based on — must be full-scale, and ensure the coordination and the centralized direction in its information content. However, the citizen must have the possibility to decide whether he needs the information, and in which scale. Moreover, he can choose the preferable channel.

4. The Essence of the Information

Whereas the above mentioned matters of the residential communication seem to be evident — besides being aims of research — the matters of the essence are only suppositions. We suppose e.g. what kind of information the residents need, what kind of demands the information meet, etc. The exact examination of these questions is very difficult since the needs and demands change from day to day, so very mobile categories must be exam-

ined considering relatively stable conditions. Another essential matter is the allocation of the information. The practical experience is inconsistent with the theory: use of the same techniques does not mean the same level of being informed. Therefore you can only take aim with information at all social strata, the demand and the use are probably not proportional to it. A very important question is that 'cuius regio, eius religio', i.e. the problem of possession of the information.

5. Function of the Information

The functions of the local communication systems do not really diverge from the traditional 'big' ones, only their contents are different.

Consequently, the local systems have:

- informing,
- motivating,
- debating and on-line,
- integrating,
- entertaining and
- communal functions.

It is very hard to give a full-scale description of the concrete content of these functions. A few examples:

- information on every day life (market prices, weather report, traffic, etc.)
- special services (finding employment, home education, medical advices, etc.)

The facilities are unlimited, e.g. electronic POB, with which you can forward letters from home to home, or you can connect it with the telecommunications or other audio-visual techniques. These activities only comprise a part of what has already operated in a local communication system of a town in Hungary.