

UNCERTAIN GEOGRAPHY OF THE LOCAL NEWS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN NEW MEDIA ERA

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ABSTRACT:

New technologies give local journalists the opportunity to extend their agenda, adding the international context; however, for community participation it is crucial to be informed about the closest environment. Several Ukrainian local news sites in the situation of political instability and military conflict increase the number of news items about international/national issues, whereas a majority of others covers predominantly city/regional events. On the basis of content analysis, news geography of two leading news sites of two Ukrainian cities Lviv and Odesa are studied and two types of local sites are discovered: local (with a high priority given to the local news) and non-local (with a priority placed on the international and national news). A clear correlation between the number of texts and exclusivity of news sources can be seen. Exclusivity is higher on the sites which see the local news items as their priority; however, quality of news remains problematic for both types. Readers are provided with a lot of unchecked and unbalanced content. As a result, functions of community integration and participation cannot be fulfilled properly by the local media, and defining other additional tools for civic engagement becomes a significant task.

KEY WORDS:

civic participation, democracy, globalisation, the Internet, journalism, local news media, news flow, Ukraine

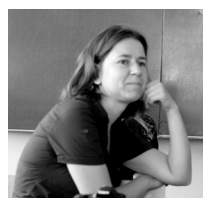
Introduction

The Internet seems to be indispensable for all types of democratic processes and civic engagement; its role was crucial in the times of Arab Spring, Euromaidan and other movements supporting the human rights and social changes. Communication trends related to blogging and social networks challenge both offline and online media. Readers trust bloggers more than journalists,¹ social networks are faster in news generation and transmission and in some cases citizen journalists can replace professionals.² However, blogs and social networks cannot fulfil all mass media functions,³ as well as “*corporate colonization of the Internet*” questions the

1 JOHNSON, T. J. et al.: Every Blog Has Its Day: Politically-interested Internet Users' Perceptions of Blog Credibility. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 109.

2 BRUNO, N.: *Tweet First, Verify Later? How Real-time Information Is Changing the Coverage of Worldwide Crisis Events*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, 2011, p. 65.

3 *Meeting the News Needs of Local Communities*. London: Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre, 2010. [online]. [2017-03-18]. Available at: <<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/leverhulme-media-research/Meeting-News-Needs-PDF.pdf>>.



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alternative essence of these media and their possibility to destroy access hierarchy.⁴ In their struggle for survival, journalists and editors have changed some traditional ways of their work: they aim to reduce their staffs, increase the rate of the office activity instead of information gathering at the scene,⁵ and prioritize consumers' interests, not citizens'.⁶

Local news media in such a situation become much more vulnerable: *"The business models that local newspapers have been based on are under tremendous pressure today as readership is eroding, advertising declining, and overall revenues plummeting."*⁷ These media seek new audiences, and the most common decision they make is adopting the tabloid format, whereas some of them choose another way: globalisation on the one hand and digitalisation on the other provide them with an opportunity to change the news geography. Some local media are not just local anymore. Reprinting press releases, posts on social networks and other media products, local media can afford to cover national or even international issues. However, what does it mean for local communities? And if the local news is the material for democracy,⁸ what does it mean for the civic society?

The study deals with the transformations related to gathering and creating news that take place in Ukrainian local news media available on the Internet. The quality of journalistic content, large percentage of the so-called 'copy-paste' (unchanged reprints from different sources), professional standards violations and as a result – a steady decline of audience's trust and weak participation in democracy-building processes – these are the basic characteristics of Ukrainian local press.⁹

Meanwhile, the context of political instability, post-Soviet tradition, hybrid warfare as well as the military conflict in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea are significant factors we need to consider while evaluating the role of local mass media. However, according to international research, the situation in Ukrainian local media is not unique. Local media can be perceived as a threat to the democracy;¹⁰ they demonstrate loyalty to the authorities,¹¹ depend on press releases of the government¹² and cannot *"bring back a sense of community"*.¹³ In Ukrainian professional and scientific circles pessimistic voices can be heard, the local press is called a 'black hole',¹⁴ second-rate,¹⁵ a maid.¹⁶ Such perception raises a question: is its existence still important? So nowadays, it is crucial to understand what kinds of influence regional media still have, what functions these media can fulfil and what will replace them if the media fail to deal with the challenging circumstances of the new media era.

4 WATSON, B. R.: Is Twitter an Alternative Medium? Comparing Gulf Coast Twitter and Newspaper Coverage of the 2010 BP Oil Spill. In *Communication Research*, 2016, Vol. 43, No. 5, p. 651.

5 For more information, see: DAVIES, N.: *Novyny plaskoi zemli*. Kyiv: Tempora, 2011.

6 See: IGGERS, J.: *Good News, Bad News. Journalism, Ethics and the Public Interest*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999.

7 NIELSEN, R. K.: Introduction: The Uncertain Future of Local Press. In *Local Journalism, the Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media*. London, New York: University of Oxford, 2015, p. 3.

8 PARK, R. E.: The Natural History of the Newspaper. In *American Journal of Sociology*, 1923, Vol. 29, No. 29, p. 274.

9 *Media Sustainability Index. The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Ukraine*. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.iirex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2016-ukraine.pdf>>.

10 NIELSEN, R. K.: Introduction: The Uncertain Future of Local Press. In *Local Journalism, the Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media*. London, New York: University of Oxford, 2015, p. 3.

11 BARRETT, A. W., PEAKE, J. S.: When the President Comes to Town – Examining Local Newspaper Coverage of Domestic Presidential Travel. In *American Politics Research*, 2007, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 21.

12 LEE, S. T., BASNYAT, I.: From Press Release to News: Mapping the Framing of the 2009 H1N1 A Influenza Pandemic. In *Health Communication*, 2013, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 122.

13 *Meeting the News Needs of Local Communities*. London: Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre, 2010. [online]. [2017-03-18]. Available at: <<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/leverhulme-media-research/Meeting-News-Needs-PDF.pdf>>.

14 DRESHPAK, V.: *Chomu mistseva presa peretvoruetsia na chornu diru?* [online]. [2017-09-28]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/chomu_mistseva_presa_peretvoruetsia_na_chornu_diru_ rezultati_monitoringu_dniprovs'kikh_zmi/>.

15 DOVZENKO, O., DOVZENKO, M.: *Konflikt u regionalnykh onlain-media: Igru z vognem na porokhovij diztsi*. [online]. [2017-12-18]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/konflikt_u_regionalnikh_onlaynmedia_igri_z_vognem_na_porokhoviy_diztsi/>.

16 KHOMAIKO, Y.: *Media Harkova obsluhovuvaty svoih haziiv*. [online]. [2017-11-10]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/media_kharkova_obslyugovuvali_svoikh_khazyaiiv/>.

Who Does Create Map of the Modern World: Geographers or Journalists?

Locality has been an important news feature since the emergence of journalism; information about the place of origin is published at the beginning of every news text.¹⁷ This information increases the text's objectivity, sometimes it is a confirmation of journalists' presence at the scene. Listing the main questions that should be answered in every news text, Rantanen notices that scientists explained the meaning of 'what', but ignored other questions, including 'where'.¹⁸ According to journalistic practice, a good journalistic text is associated with events that are close to the reader. However, what does this 'closeness' mean nowadays, or rather where does the border between the 'closeness' and 'distance' lie?

Journalists are often accused of slanted coverage of certain issues; this is related to spatial dimension as well. The amount of attention media pay to different countries is disproportionate – journalists spread prejudices about certain places,¹⁹ *"present a warped worldview"*,²⁰ constrict world's representation,²¹ cannot overcome colonial approach, writing about the developing countries,²² etc. Such accusations are the evidence of journalists' participation in the process of creating an imaginary world map and the most interesting thing about that is that journalists' version of the map can influence the readers' perception of the real one. However, space journalists operate within seems to be rather symbolic than factual. For instance, geographic proximity can be ignored in the coverage of foreign news²³ and local news alike.²⁴ Howe uses the term "spatial bias" to underline this.²⁵ The reasons for such ignorance are: ethnic issues,²⁶ national interests,²⁷ and even readers' incomes.²⁸

Describing different places, journalists should not deal with geography, but with the *"relationship between people and places"*.²⁹ They should try to understand cultural background.³⁰ Here, Lippmann's theory of public opinion formation can be mentioned: the symbolic space is constructed between the real place (country, city, district, etc.) and the news audience, and the audience's reaction to the reality is influenced by this symbolic space.

News Values and New Media

It is obvious that the Internet has changed some traditional values; however, is this statement also true for standards associated with mass media? *BBC* and other leading international news media still use guidelines in order to remain objective, balanced, accurate, etc. As Solík,

17 RANTANEN, T.: The New Sense of Place in 19th Century News. In *Media Culture & Society*, 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 435.

18 RANTANEN, T.: The New Sense of Place in 19th Century News. In *Media Culture & Society*, 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 435.

19 BAILEY, K. et al.: Negotiating "New" Narratives: Rio de Janeiro and the "Media Geography" of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. In *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 72.

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21 HANUSH, F.: The Geography of Travel Journalism: Mapping the Flow of Travel Stories about Foreign Countries. In *International Communication Gazette*, 2014, Vol. 76, No. 1, p. 48.

22 KELLY, C.: Neocolonialism and the Global Prison in National Geographic's Locked Up Abroad. In *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2012, Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 336.

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24 HOWE, P. D.: Newsworthy Spaces: The Semantic Geographies of Local News. In *Aether the Journal of Media Geography*, 2009, Vol. 4, p. 58.

25 HOWE, P. D.: Newsworthy Spaces: The Semantic Geographies of Local News. In *Aether the Journal of Media Geography*, 2009, Vol. 4, p. 57.

26 GRIMM, J., ANDSAGER, J. L.: Framing Immigration: Geo-ethnic Context in California Newspapers. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2011, Vol. 88, No. 4, p. 778.

27 SUCHACEK, J. et al.: From Regional to National Clouds: TV Coverage in the Czech Republic. In *Plos One*, 2016, Vol. 11, No. 11, p. 2.

28 HOWE, P. D.: Newsworthy Spaces: The Semantic Geographies of Local News. In *Aether the Journal of Media Geography*, 2009, Vol. 4, p. 57.

29 RANTANEN, T.: The New Sense of Place in 19th Century News. In *Media Culture & Society*, 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 437.

30 GUTSCHE, R. E.: News Place-making: Applying 'Mental Mapping' to Explore the Journalistic Interpretive Community. In *Visual Communication*, 2014, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 490.

Višňovský and Lалуhová mention: “Media practice shows that the values are distributed, but they are not always accepted by the urban audience.”³¹ American researchers have found out that only one-third of mainstream media products had been considered to be important by the audience.³² To gain larger audiences, journalists and editors try to combine news which is important for the society (so-called “hard news”) with entertaining contents³³ or experiment with new digital formats.³⁴

However, both these approaches do not solve the problem of public awareness and community engagement. In the digital era, societies are fragmented. Social consensus becomes fragile because of a new individualism.³⁵ And therefore another problem appears: “disempowerment” of many social groups is quite obvious in such a fragmented society, and this process could harm even some “upscale democracies”.³⁶

Timeliness as a news value should also be mentioned. Both the production and consumption of news are faster than ever, and velocity is crucial for any ‘clickable’ text. However, accuracy, balance and background could be neglected by some journalists and, as a result, such privileges as “speed, efficiency, saving time and energy head to the depersonalisation of humans and weakening of social ties”.³⁷

To sum up, content (noteworthiness) and time (timeliness) are among those new values that nowadays face significant transformations. However, spatial criteria in news gathering are also changing and it is not clear “what are the purposes and true potential of local and regional media whose agenda essentially differs from the goals and ambitions of media contents produced by multi-national or worldwide conglomerates which operate on the global media markets”.³⁸

Does Geography Journalists Create Matter in the Times of New Media?

Nowadays, when the general interest in international news increases, media have become “producers of geographic knowledge”,³⁹ constructors of “imaginative geographies”⁴⁰ and even cyberspace “which blurs the traditional notions of time and space and the links between them”;⁴¹ that is why journalists remain important in defining certain places and people. And here a concern of the Spanish daily newspaper *El País*’s readers who asked “whether they could even travel to the States”, mentioned by the elite daily *New York Times*,⁴² can be used as an appropriate example.

New media, e.g. social networks were expected to undermine the culture of gatekeepers who usually select and thus limit information for their audiences.⁴³ Moreover, the positive impact of social networks use on civic activity of youth was discovered.⁴⁴ So is it possible for the audience of digital media to avoid the influence of slanted journalists’ geography?

Rantanen claims that innovations in the sphere of media have a potential to “change concepts of time and place”; however, people did not get lost in this new space but “acquired a new sense”.⁴⁵ In the times of globalisation and new technologies, news always mentions a certain place, making it more available for the audience than before and helping the reader to identify himself with that new place and his own.⁴⁶ Kitamura also writes about the possibility of effective local communication with the help of “global communication medium”.⁴⁷ Watson mentions interconnections between offline communities and online content creation.⁴⁸ Social networks users’ online and offline lists of contacts are usually the same.⁴⁹

That said, the notion of space in the times of new media is researchable; new technologies contain some special tools for this inquiry. And certain places can be personalised⁵⁰ or turned “into anthropocentric places where individuals can readily find stories, memories and communities: a sense of what lies beneath the surface”.⁵¹ People are able “to move inside news to different locations”⁵² and use new media as a special frame for the world observation.⁵³

Despite these new possibilities related to research on place, journalism that implements technological innovations remains questionable in terms of information selection. Van Dejk uses the term “screen culture”⁵⁴ to describe a decline in personal communication and an increasing number of cases when screens can replace eye-to-eye contacts. Solík, Višňovský and Lалуhová characterise the Internet era by saying that “the physical presence of the sender/receiver” is not obligatory.⁵⁵ This is true for modern journalism as well; a reporter at the scene is not necessary in the world of filled with smartphones, social media, blogs, etc.

Voices of common people usually remain unrecognised by journalists; “corporate colonization” of the Internet continues and “similarity between journalists’ and Twitter users’ attitudes” can be noticed in the coverage of certain issues.⁵⁶ Media do not use opportunities of the digital era to write about countries beyond the borders of the so-called ‘core countries’.⁵⁷ As a result, space perception in the era of new media is still slanted and needs special monitoring. According to Rantanen’s comment, “this flow of news from different places, published in random order, and separated only by the date, time and place, is worth closer examination”.⁵⁸

31 SOLÍK, M., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., LALUHOVÁ, J.: Media As a Tool for Fostering Values in the Contemporary Society. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 6, p. 74.

32 LEE, A. M., CHYI, I. H.: When Newsworthy Is Not Noteworthy. In *Journalism Studies*, 2013, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 813.

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46 RANTANEN, T.: The New Sense of Place in 19th Century News. In *Media Culture & Society*, 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 438.

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54 For more information, see: VAN DEJK, J. A. G. M.: *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media*. 2nd Edition. London: Thousand Oaks, 2006.

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Local News Media in the Global Era and the Problem of Community Engagement

Local news seems to be something old-fashioned in the 21st century; however, there is still a list of functions that should be fulfilled in order to support democratic processes. The first argument to be mentioned is the specifics of political participation that is being predominantly actualised on the local level. “*Community integration (...) mediated by communication*”⁵⁹ or “*local information environments*”⁶⁰ are the crucial components of civic engagement. And community ties depend on media use.⁶¹ In order to provide this integration, local journalists join citizens in the local “*forum of ideas*”, striving to achieve high level of participation, i.e. to create a “*sense of place*”,⁶² to “*speak to things that directly affected their [the local audience’s] lives and document people they know*”.⁶³ Nowadays, when local communities and big societies are fragmented,⁶⁴ common values and common knowledge can be provided by the local journalists who are the members of this particular community and act on behalf of it. Local media disseminate means of identification, present and integrate new members of the community.⁶⁵

So local news remains an important building material for democracy⁶⁶ and this news is not only checked for qualitative information, like geography in journalistic texts is not only based on distances or certain places, but also on people’s relations.⁶⁷

However, the position of the local press on the media market is not strong and the quality of discussions within the local “*forum of ideas*” local news media provide is being criticized. Journalists’ attention to “*local addresses decreased*”;⁶⁸ coverage of some local topics can be fragmented⁶⁹ and/or local journalists can be loyal to the local authorities and local businesses.⁷⁰

Moreover, local media markets are also very diverse, even within one country, so there is dependence between the local media activity, community integration/participation and media market structure, because “*local news consumption is embedded in locality*”.⁷¹ So there can be different “*regional news cultures*”⁷² with different styles of news consumption and production. As a result, these factors can create different levels of community integration and civic engagement.

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61 VISWANATH, K. et al.: Local Community Ties, Community-boundedness, and Local Public Affairs Knowledge Gaps. In *Communication Research*, 2000, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 44.

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63 *Meeting the News Needs of Local Communities*. London: Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre, 2010. [online]. [2017-03-18]. Available at: <<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/leverhulme-media-research/Meeting-News-Needs-PDF.pdf>>.

64 *Futures for Civil Society*. London: Carnegie UK Trust, 2007. [online]. [2017-10-01]. Available at: <<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2016/02/pub1455011711.pdf>>.

65 *Meeting the News Needs of Local Communities*. London: Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre, 2010. [online]. [2017-03-18]. Available at: <<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/leverhulme-media-research/Meeting-News-Needs-PDF.pdf>>.

66 PARK, R. E.: The Natural History of the Newspaper. In *American Journal of Sociology*, 1923, Vol. 29, No. 29, p. 278.

67 RANTANEN, T.: The New Sense of Place in 19th Century News. In *Media Culture & Society*, 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 437.

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69 WATSON, B. R.: Is Twitter an Alternative Medium? Comparing Gulf Coast Twitter and Newspaper Coverage of the 2010 BP Oil Spill. In *Communication Research*, 2016, Vol. 43, No. 5, p. 667.

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72 ALTHAUS, S. L. et al.: Media Supply, Audience Demand, and the Geography of News Consumption in the United States. In *Political Communication*, 2009, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 263.

Non-local News Published by Local News Media

Material and method

The following content analysis documents two approaches to news selection adopted by selected local news sites. The leading local news sites of Odesa (Southern Ukraine) and Lviv (Western Ukraine) were studied. Local news websites related to Odesa traditionally prefer local issues; however, in Lviv, local journalists are more interested in international and all-Ukrainian agenda.

News published on the given websites in May 2015 – July 2015 were analysed (from the 25th to the 31st of May, from the 15th of June to the 21st of June, from the 6th of July to the 12th of July: fourth, third and second week of the months in question). The year 2015 in Ukraine was politically active. Reforms of police, media reforms, decentralisation tendencies and anti-corruption measures started. In Odesa, Mikheil Saakashvili, the ex-president of Georgia, was appointed as the head of Odesa’s regional state administration. The situation in Ukraine was also one of the leading topics for international community. All these factors make local news media on the Internet an interesting and significant material to analyse. We are particularly interested in interconnections between local and international content, editorial policies of the news websites and processes of news gathering. Our content analysis works with these categories:

- news geography (city news, regional news, news from other Ukrainian regions, Ukrainian and international news);
- quantity of news visible on a news feed per day;
- exclusive (first-hand) information and non-exclusive sources;
- the ways of news gathering (journalist at the scene, press conferences, reprints – according to indicators and links in texts).

The conducted content analysis aims to fulfil several goals:

- to calculate the percentage of city/region/Ukrainian/international news on the news sites and thus compare Lviv-related and Odesa-related local news websites’ approaches towards news selection;
- to investigate a possible correlation between news geography and news exclusivity (does wider geography lead to use of a bigger number of exclusive sources?);
- to investigate a correlation between news geography and news quality (professional standards’ violation).

Information about the Analysed Local Sites

Dumskaya.net, founded in 2008, is the most popular news site in Odesa. In December 2017, 3.2 million users visited it, average visit duration was 3 minutes, and readers viewed 2.68 pages per visit (*Similarweb* data).⁷³ According to Ukrainian NGO Institute of Mass Information, the owner of *Dumskaya* is Oleksiy Honcharenko, the Ukrainian politician;⁷⁴ however, this information is not published on the site.

Dumskaya is the most read news site in Odesa; on the other hand, there is no evident competition. The website *048.ua* tries hard to compete against *Dumskaya*. In December 2017, there were 1.07 million visitors (the site publishes information about 890,000 unique visitors per month),⁷⁵ average visit duration was 2 minutes, and users viewed 1.82 pages per visit (*Similarweb* data).⁷⁶ *048.ua* was founded in 2009 and belongs to *CitySites* network. It is claimed on the website of the company, that it is “*one of the biggest network of city portals in the world*”,

73 *SimilarWeb*. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <www.similarweb.com>.

74 VASINA, O.: *Komu nalezhat odeski ZMI*. [online]. [2017-11-24]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/komu_nalezhat_odeski_zmi_analiz_institutu_masovoi_informatsii/>.

75 *CitySites*. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <<https://citysitesglobal.com/ua>>.

76 *SimilarWeb*. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <www.similarweb.com>.

functioning in nine countries (among them there are seven post-Soviet countries, Great Britain and Comoros).⁷⁷ A businessman Evhen Javtushenko⁷⁸ is the executive director of the network. *048.ua* is a franchise.

Zaxid.net and *Zik.ua* are among the most popular sites in Lviv (2.31 million and 4.23 million visits in December 2017, average visit is 2 seconds on both sites, pages per visit 1.9 and 1.84, respectively). *Zik* was founded in 2004; nowadays it has its own TV channel and offices in Lviv and Kyiv (Ukrainian capital). Petro Dymynsky is the owner of this site. He is a businessman, politician and the president of Lviv football team *Karpaty* (this information is published on the website of *Zik*).⁷⁹

Zaxid.net was founded in 2007. According to the Institute of Mass Information, it belongs to Andriy Sadovyi's holding (Sadovyi is a Lviv mayor).⁸⁰

Limitations

Two approaches to news geography in Odesa and Lviv should also be considered in a wider context. At first, a historical vector is important. For example, in 2010–2012 there was a small percentage of all-Ukrainian and international news on Odesa-related news sites; however, this practice did not continue. And of course, during Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea and the first months of war in Donbas *Dumskaya* published quite a lot of texts from other Ukrainian regions, international news, etc. So it is important to compare data from 2015 with other time periods.

The second point is that the audience's sources of news consumption are very diverse. Thus, not only local media ratings, but all-Ukrainian should be used.

The problem of media ownership is also crucial. Almost all Ukrainian media have been founded to promote their owners' interests (in politics or business), so news geography of a certain news site should be juxtaposed with its owner's ambitions: to take up a position in Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament) or to develop a local company. These three points may be regarded as possible directions of future discoveries.

Results

The differences between online news portals from the two cities in question can be seen in Table 1.⁸¹

Table 1: News Geography on the News Sites of Odesa and Lviv

News about...	Lviv		Odesa	
	zaxid.net	zik.ua	dumskaya.net	048.ua
city	19.00%	9.00%	83.00%	88.00%
region	10.00%	8.00%	16.00%	11.00%
other Ukrainian regions	21.00%	29.00%	1.00%	4.00%
Ukraine	28.00%	28.00%	6.00%	7.00%
world	21.00%	24.00%	13.00%	6.00%

Source: own processing

77 CitySites. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <https://citysitesglobal.com/ua>.

78 VASINA, O.: *Komu nalezhat odeski ZMI*. [online]. [2017-11-24]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/komu_nalezhat_odeski_zmi_analiz_institutu_masovoi_informatsii/>.

79 *Struktura vlasnosti*. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <https://zik.ua/media/pdf/struktura-vlasnosti-novi-komunikatsiyi.pdf>.

80 ONYS'KO, N.: *Komu nalezhat lvivski ZMI*. [online]. [2017-08-15]. Available at: <http://imi.org.ua/articles/komu-nalezhat-lvivski-zmi/>.

81 See also: STEBLYNA, N.: *Geografija internet novostej Lvova I Odessu: O kakikh stranakh pishut chasche vsego*. [online]. [2017-05-20]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/geografiya_internetnovostey_lvova_i_odessy_o_kakikh_stranakh_pishut_chasche_vsego/>.

Lviv news sites cover international/national events more often than local ones, whereas Odesa sites use the traditional approach to describing local affairs: they pay attention to the local events and write about international/national issues only if there is a connection with the local topics. There is also a difference in the attention paid to news related to other regions. Even though Howe explains this by the journalists' wish to attract readers with higher incomes,⁸² in Ukrainian local media it is usually the possibility to publish crime stories which traditionally have a lot of views online. Such news stories among are the majority of news about other Ukrainian regions.⁸³ So we can distinguish a new model of local news sites with predominantly non-local content. And these results can also confirm the thesis about different "regional news cultures"⁸⁴ with different news agendas. On both types of sites there is a lack of attention paid to the events in their region.

News data can be compared with the data on passenger traffic associated with the Ukrainian railway.⁸⁵ If Lviv is perceived as a 'capital' of the western part of Ukraine, Odesa is the central point for all towns in Odesa area; Danylov describes it as "a thing-in-itself" and mentions that Odesa has intense contacts with other Ukrainian cities.

At first glance we have to mention openness and insularity in the ways of news production and consumption. Lviv pretends to assume the role of the centre, so Lviv readers are interested not only in international/national agendas, but also in their local interpretations,⁸⁶ whereas Odesa readers are keen to see detailed coverage of local issues. However, digital context of this process should also be examined. The Internet gives journalists the possibility to reprint content from all over the world; Internet portals make it possible to transmit this news to the audience. For example, the most popular Ukrainian portal *Ukr.net* has several subsections: world news, Ukrainian/regional news, politics, business, etc., so international news from Lviv site can automatically be published in the subsection 'world news' or news items about Lviv from Odesa site (with mentioning Lviv in a headline) are placed in the subsection 'News of Lviv and Lviv area'. Thus, it is not important anymore where the journalistic text was produced; it is important, however, which place was mentioned. Meanwhile, Ukrainian media market is oversaturated (for instance, there are over 50 news sites in Odesa)⁸⁷ and it can be extremely hard for the audience to remember the names. The Internet gives the local journalists the possibility to write about different places and use an open, non-local model of news coverage, discover new countries and people. However, the quality of these texts should be examined in order to answer the question: does an increase of attention to the international news lead to an increase in understanding of international affairs? And can local journalists provide a deep coverage of the international situation without having journalists at the scene?

Ukrainian local online news media give several interesting examples. For instance, a local news site from Kharkiv (*ATN.ua*), one of the leading news websites in the region, also publishes international news stories more often than the local ones, but almost all of them are rather soft news, like a diet for pandas or an unknown creature that was found in the USA.⁸⁸ Here, international news is the way to attract more readers and entertain them, not to provide a deeper coverage of international affairs.

Nevertheless, one similarity between Lviv non-local news sites and the Kharkiv sites should be mentioned: it is the amount of news. If Odesa news sites publish approximately 25-35 texts per day, Lviv sites produce 100-250 texts, Kharkiv *ATN.ua* tends to post 83 news stories, a local news site from Mykolaiv (*Nikvesti*.

82 HOWE, P. D.: Newsworthy Spaces: The Semantic Geographies of Local News. In *Aether the Journal of Media Geography*, 2009, Vol. 4, p. 57.

83 STEBLYNA, N.: *Regionalni Sayty – Na Kogo I dlia Kogo Pratsuyut*. [online]. [2017-07-20]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/regionalni_sayti_dlya_kogo_i_na_kogo_pratsuyut/>.

84 ALTHAUS, S. L. et al.: Media Supply, Audience Demand, and the Geography of News Consumption in the United States. In *Political Communication*, 2009, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 263.

85 DANYLOV, S.: *Kyiv, dva regionalni tsentry I Odessa v sobi*. [online]. [2017-10-10]. Available at: <http://texty.org.ua/d/uz/articles/dan/>.

86 STEBLYNA, N.: *Geografija internet novostej Lvova I Odessu: O kakikh stranakh pishut chasche vsego*. [online]. [2017-05-20]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/geografiya_internetnovostey_lvova_i_odessy_o_kakikh_stranakh_pishut_chasche_vsego/>.

87 VASINA, O.: *Komu nalezhat odeski ZMI*. [online]. [2017-11-24]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/komu_nalezhat_odeski_zmi_analiz_institutu_masovoi_informatsii/>.

88 STEBLYNA, N.: *Regionalni Sayty – Na Kogo I dlia Kogo Pratsuyut*. [online]. [2017-07-20]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/regionalni_sayti_dlya_kogo_i_na_kogo_pratsuyut/>.

com), which also uses the same approach as Lviv sites with their international and national affairs coverage, produces 65 texts every day. All these news sites also work in 24/7 mode, whereas Odesa news sites publish news from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. So a clear correlation between the number of news and the area of mentioned geographical places can be seen.

Local News Geography and News Quality

In Lviv there are several features of news politics: bigger number of texts published per day, wider geography of news and the 24/7 mode, whereas Odesa sites are in a different situation. In order to understand the quality of news, their sources and compliance with professional standards can be taken into account.

The site *Dumskaya* from Odesa has been the object of such scrutiny for several times and it has the biggest number of exclusivity both in Odesa region⁸⁹ and in Ukraine (among other local sites, which were the objects of such a study).⁹⁰ During the period of monitoring, *Dumskaya* and *048.ua* published 30% and 18% of news respectively with journalists present at the scene.

Sites from Lviv produced 12-13% of such texts; however, a majority of these texts on the sites *048.ua*, *Zaxid.net*, *Zik.com.ua* were not exclusive – the texts contain reports from press conferences, public presentations, etc. *Dumskaya.net* is an exception, but other sites from Odesa also prefer to publish non-exclusive content. To sum up, the local news sites, with a few rare exceptions, usually have a big percentage of reprints from different sources (press releases, other media, posts from social networks, etc.). This study (as well as other ones) confirms this as well.⁹¹ Local journalists often work from their offices and do not stay in touch with the local environment.

Professional standards need to be mentioned as well. Ukrainian local news media are constantly reflected on by NGO's research (Internews, Institute for Democracy, named by Pylyp Orlyk, Institute of Mass Information, etc.). According to their data, journalists usually publish news with the reference to one source and do not double-check their information. As a result, hidden political and commercial adverts (in Ukraine called "jinsa") are often published, mostly because of violations of editorial independence standards and low culture of media ownership; there is a lack of context and neutrality in journalistic production.⁹²

The average level of news quality on the local news sites in Ukraine is low; according to the Pylyp Orlyk Institute for Democracy's data, compliance with professional standards on Lviv news sites is higher than on Odesa sites.⁹³ As it seems, there is no correlation between two different approaches to news geography (non-local and local) and violation of professional journalistic standards. Journalists can publish reprints and stay neutral if they provide accurate information and context.

However, the low level of exclusivity and reliability on one single source can be mentioned as a common feature of news on the local online news websites in question. It is a logical consequence of the increase in the number of journalistic products that should be prepared per day, the reduction of the amount of editorial staff members and the specifics of the Internet as a medium (both local and nationwide Ukrainian online news websites almost do not generate their own information, but rather serve as a platform for gathering and re-posting topical information from different sources.⁹⁴

89 STEBLYNA, N.: *Regionalni Sayty – Na Kogo I dlia Kogo Pratsuyut*. [online]. [2017-07-20] Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/regionalni_sayti_dlya_kogo_i_na_kogo_pratsuyut/>.

90 STEBLYNA, N.: Presrelizm u Mistsevykh Vydanniah, abo jak Jurnalisty Dopomagaut Vladi Vyhovuvaty Sluhniannyh Hromadian. In DZERDZA, F. S. (ed.): *Mas-media. Demokratia. Informatsiina Vijnna*. Kyiv: SPD Matvienko, 2014, p. 48.

91 VASYLYK, L.: *Provladnist ta opozitsiynist... A standarty g!* [online]. [2017-03-03]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/provladnist_ta_opozitsiynist_a_standarti_ti_zh>.

92 YEREMENKO, S.: *Pres-relizy ta Facebook – Osnovni Dzerela Informatsii Regionalnoi Jurnalistyky*. [online]. [2017-11-25] Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/piar_dlya_kandidativ_nedorogo/>.

93 YEREMENKO, S.: *Pres-relizy ta Facebook – Osnovni Dzerela Informatsii Regionalnoi Jurnalistyky*. [online]. [2017-11-25] Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/regional_newspapers/piar_dlya_kandidativ_nedorogo/>.

94 STEBLYNA, N.: Presrelizm u Mistsevykh Vydanniah, abo jak Jurnalisty Dopomagaut Vladi Vyhovuvaty Sluhniannyh Hromadian. In DZERDZA, F. S. (ed.): *Mas-media. Demokratia. Informatsiina Vijnna*. Kyiv: SPD Matvienko, 2014, p. 51.

Conclusions and Discussion

The Internet gives a lot of technical opportunities to both journalists and civil activists; almost everyone can be a founder of a news site (here an example of Long Eaton can be mentioned; Tony Fountain, an activist, started publishing a blog with local news after the one and only local newspaper in the town had ceased to exist).⁹⁵ However, in Ukrainian reality having many local news websites to choose from does not mean that they provide deep and quality coverage of local affairs. Local media in Ukraine possess neither trust of the general public nor its attention; people tend to get information from national media (predominantly television) or use news aggregators (portals like *Ukr.net* or social networks).⁹⁶ So there is quite a weak connection between a certain local news site and a reader. Moreover, national media do not cover local affairs deeply and use various tabloid practices, specialising in covering crime stories.⁹⁷ Given the increase of non-local news on the local news websites, it seems that the readers' attention is not concentrated on the local affairs. The local news websites use non-local ways of coverage and write about conflicts and crimes, hoping to gain a bigger audience. However, if journalists perceive their audience as consumers only, a contradiction between a successful business model and "fostering a sense of citizenship" can emerge.⁹⁸

Taking into consideration the given facts, the local audience's knowledge about the world becomes wider, whereas the interest to the closest environment evaporates, especially if news websites like Lviv online news media do not demonstrate any connection between international and local news. Thus, the term "local news deserts" can also be mentioned.⁹⁹ In Ukraine, it is not about the absence of local media in a certain area, it is about media that are not trusted and media that do not pay attention to the local affairs, offering local news as something secondary.

Whereas two types of local affairs coverage by Ukrainian local news websites as well as two types of "regional news cultures" can be distinguished, quality of local news remains a problem for both of them. Readers, who are provided with a lot of local but poorly verified and unbalanced content, can also have problems with participating in political or social life of the community, because of the incomplete picture of life in their city/region they perceived through media.

However, the topic of local/non-local content of local media should be addressed more widely in the future. It could be interesting to compare the media agenda and principles of news gathering of Ukrainian online news websites with local news websites of other countries. Perhaps the preference should be given to regions, which are situated near the country's borders. And here the specificity of Ukrainian media audience needs be mentioned: nationwide news is much more popular than local news in Ukraine. Although there are countries where the situation related to local news media is different.

As the connection between a number of news displayed on news feed and news geography is obvious, it is important to find out when non-local Lviv news websites began publishing international and all-Ukrainian news. Was there a period when Lviv journalists published only local news? And, of course, Lviv newspapers, which pay their attention to international and all-Ukrainian events, could be analysed. Expert interviews with local editors and journalists may add some significant context to this research as well.

Taking into account the connection between the participation in local affairs and the interest in local media, we can see the importance of further research on the audience's awareness of the local environment and their readiness to improve the local environment, maintaining the local authorities' control, etc. Writing about the revolution of corporate culture and the future of media, Iggers mentions:

95 *Meeting the News Needs of Local Communities*. London: Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre, 2010. [online]. [2017-03-18]. Available at: <<https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/leverhulme-media-research/Meeting-News-Needs-PDF.pdf>>.

96 KRAINIKOVA, T.: *Reitung doviry do ZMI: Chomu vnyz*. Released on the 8th of September 2015. [online]. [2017-09-08]. Available at: <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/reitung_doviri_do_zmi_chomu_vnyz/>.

97 SUCHACEK, J. et al.: From Regional to National Clouds: TV Coverage in the Czech Republic. In *Plos One*, 2016, Vol. 11, No. 11, p. 16.

98 For more information, see: IGGERS, J.: *Good News, Bad News. Journalism. Ethics and the Public Interest*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999.

99 *Michelle Ferrier Presents Media Deserts, Hyperlocal Online News Research*. [online]. [2017-04-15]. Available at: <<https://www.elon.edu/e-net/Article/67473>>.

If there is hope for journalism as a public practice and for journalism ethics as a meaningful public discourse, it must lie in a new vision of journalism ethics – one that recognizes the central importance of the public in journalism and the necessity of finding ways to reengage the public in public life.¹⁰⁰

Nowadays, this problem remains a very topical one: if local news media do not fulfil their functions of watchdogging and community integration, people in the era of new media will have to find other adequate tools for the formation of civil society.

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100 IGGERS, J.: *Good News, Bad News. Journalism. Ethics and the Public Interest*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1999, p. 186.

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