

Mass media as crucial accelerator for new social movements dealing with rural development: evidence from Lithuania

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Abstract – This study focuses on one of mass media forms - television broadcasts, concerned with rural development issues - and its potential to become an accelerator for the emergence of new social movements dealing with rural development or strengthening the existing platforms for collective action in the industrial cultural domain. Empirical study is based on Lithuanian data. Research results show that TV broadcasts related to rural issues may act as accelerator for the emergence and further enhancement of new social movements dealing with rural development in Lithuania. The potential of other forms of mass media needs further investigations.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the post-industrial [economy](#) resulted in a new wave of social movements distinct from those social movements arising during the industrial economy (Buechler, 2016). The new social movements emerge with the aim to reach the best synergy from aligned views and interests of particular social groups for social and economic change which is necessary for the evolution of post-industrial society (e.g. Wieviorka, 2005; Inglehart, 2015; Touraine, 1971, 2016; Melucci, 2016; etc.).

Big group of social movements deals with rural development issues and most of them are new social movements tightly targeted to social and cultural changes, rather than economic or political considerations. Their activities covers various aspects, but usually they are focused on a single issue, or a limited range of issues which are related to a broader theme, e.g. protection of environment, changing lifestyle and activity in rural regions, etc.

Recent research more and more often gives evidence of the tremendous social impacts made by mass media on the emergence and power of new lifestyle and new social movements (Lopes, 2014; Romero, 2014; Castells, 2015; Vivian, 2012). The impact of mass media on the emergence of new social movements is measured using its forms separately (television, radio, newspapers, social networks), or systemically, i.e. using all forms together (Lopes, 2014; Romero, 2014).

Thus the type of information proposed through various mass media channels might act as crucial accelerator for the variety of new social movements. However, the impact of mass media on the emergence of new social movements dealing with rural development in any of its forms had not been found in scientific literature yet.

This study aims to answer the question “Does the mass media hold potential to become an accelerator for the emergence of new social movements dealing with rural development or strengthening the existing platforms for collective action in the postindustrial cultural domain?” More specifically, this study focuses on television (TV) broadcasts concerned with rural development issues.

DATA AND METHODS

Empirical data were collected in March-April 2017 on the Internet for the year 2016. The five main Lithuanian television channels were identified under the aggregated monthly TV audience research results (TNS, 2017), based on the two basic criteria: average channel accessibility per day and average television channel viewing time per day.

Research is based on **mixed methods** approach (Creswell, 2013) and includes identification of the scale of rural development issues, the intensity of spreading new ideas in Lithuanian TV broadcasts alongside its influence to the audience.

Content analysis method was applied to distinguish the TV broadcasts related to rural issues using titles and abstracts of TV programmes from the five main Lithuanian TV channels. Then inductive content analysis of abstracts was performed to identify the main themes of ideas for rural development which are spread through the television broadcasts concerned with rural issues. The latter analysis aggregated the main fields of ideas for rural development, which have a potential to become new social movement, dealing with rural development.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

Empirical research gave evidence, that 95 percent of Lithuanian inhabitants are keen on watching TV (TNS, 2017). Therefore information spread through TV broadcasts is considered to be crucial accelerator for spreading the ideas which might further give birth to any of the new social movement. The scale of rural development issues in Lithuanian TV was composed by listing the titles and abstracts of television broadcasts related to rural issues from the top five Lithuanian channels (4 commercial and 1 non-commercial). It should be stated, that most of TV broadcasts related to rural issues were found in commercial channels (71.4%), despite the fact that the majority of Lithuanian territory is classified as rural region (except the only one Vilnius county - predominantly urban region), there is relatively poor broadcasting time in national non-commercial channel (33.3%) devoted to discuss rural issues and raise social innovations. Content analysis of abstracts of TV broadcasts dealing with rural issues helped identify 3 broad fields of new ideas for rural development in Lithuanian TV (see Table 1).

Table 1. Content of new ideas for rural development spread through TV broadcasts and broadcasting time in 2016

Content of new ideas for rural development	Total broadcasting time, minutes	TV %
Industrial society-based	130	16.2
Postindustrial society-based	365	65.8
Rural cultural heritage	100	18.0
	555	100

Source: authors calculations using TNS (2017) data.

The latter findings are parallel with actual situation in Lithuania. In recent decade sharp increase of targeted new social movements had been spectated in Lithuania: ecovillages, urban-rural gardening, slow food, raw food and separate groups of local food market developers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Lack of scientific evidence propose that the impact of mass media on the emergence of new social movement – either in separate forms or systemically – should be taken into special consideration both from theoretical and empirical point of view due to its

observed explosive power for transforming industrial society into post-industrial society.

Initial empirical data which was collected and aggregated in Lithuania propose that one form of mass media – TV broadcasts dealing with rural issues – might be considered as increasingly important accelerator for new social movements dealing with rural development: post-industrial society-based new ideas for rural development are dominant in Lithuanian TV broadcasts and already give evidence for its potential impact.

Limitations of this study are caused by incomplete picture of all forms of mass media, which restrain generalizing conclusions on the overall role of mass media as crucial accelerator for new social movements dealing with rural development - radio, newspapers and social networks are not included in this study. Nevertheless, analysis of TV broadcasts dealing with rural development adds to topical research in the field of new social movements and gives directions for future investigations.

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