

Framing Poverty in Lithuanian Community Newspapers: Local Authorities, Community Members and Journalists Communicating Social and Policy Changes

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Abstract. *Community media, as opposed to mainstream newsmedia, is an alternative source of information which plays a facilitative role by encouraging community members to express their interests, to join policy debates, and therefore to give authorities feedback on how ongoing policy changes affect members of communities. Due to high levels of concentration of poverty in Lithuanian rural areas and the start of a social assistance decentralisation program to poor residents in five Lithuanian regional municipalities in 2012, the role of local media in policies concerning poverty reduction has increased. Content analysis of five newspapers that served communities affected by the changes reveals that community members are provided with options to communicate poverty issues through community media. This is an empirical finding which supports the author's claim, presented in this article, that analytical concept of rhisomatic community media rather than liberal critique of local press (which focuses on negative pressures from market and state institutions erected toward the media), is more useful for assessing deliberation processes in local newspapers. Research*

results show that while communicating poverty, community members prefer to communicate charity initiatives and not to directly engage in public policy debate. Coverage of policy changes is dominated by local authorities and community media journalists. Images of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (often without references to actually existing cases) dominate poverty framing in an attempt to support new cash social assistance distributions. Despite facilitating some non-governmental community-organised poverty reduction initiatives, community media acts collaboratively towards on-going policy changes and fails in empowering the poor of the communities they serve.

Keywords: *community media, decentralisation, poverty*

Notion of Lithuanian Local Newspapers as Channels of Community Media

Nowadays, the roots of Lithuanian community media's network is to be found in the process of so called 'communism building' in occupied countries. Beforehand, the literacy of Lithuanian people was relatively low and even if there were newspapers that reached relatively high circulation, the press was directed towards the educated politically-active elite and was not massively read. In the planned economy system, controlled and censored by the Communist party, the mass circulation press, along with numerous administrative reforms, was developed on regional (district) and local levels, MTS stations and biggest workplaces for social engineering, ideological indoctrination and propaganda purposes (Jastramskis, 2011; Burneikienė, 2000; Urbonas, 1995). The communist-established network of the regional and local newspapers did not vanish completely after Lithuania restored its independence in 1991. Moreover, rather than the regional or local *samizdat* of the Singing Revolution (more on *samizdat* see Jaseliūnas, 2006; Vasiliauskaitė, 2006), it was communist-established newspapers that survived up until now. During the Singing Revolution protests and after, most of the communist-established regional and local press got rid of the communist slogans in its name (Burneikienė, 2000), took advantage of

the growing audience's trust in media, and re-invented itself as the main channel for communication of communities.

Terms "community newspaper" or "community media" are not widely used in Lithuanian communication scholarship. Common terms to refer to community-oriented newspapers are "local newspapers", "indigenous newspapers", "provincial newspapers" or "periphery newspapers." The term "community newspaper" is not present in The Law on the Provision of Information to the Public either. The Law (Article 24) provides categorisation of three types of print news media: local (district), regional (county), and national. Local newspapers are categorised as such when at least 90 percent of their circulation is distributed within the territory of a single municipality of a city or district (Article 2. 77); regional – when at least 90 percent of their circulation is distributed within the territory of a single county (Article 2. 54). Lately, the line between regional and local press has become blurred. For example, Mažylė (2012) in her doctoral thesis overarchingly uses the term "regional press" to analyse both – regional as well as local press. Moreover, the National Martynas Mažvydas Library which collects statistics of print news media in Lithuania, suspended categorisation of the newspapers into local, regional or national categories in 2000 and now provides a general overview of the amount of newspapers published in all Lithuanian municipalities. The latest figure on the amount of local newspapers comes from 1999. At the time, 48 newspapers reached local communities (Markevičienė, Tamulygienė, 2000), a number which expectedly underwent dramatic changes during more than a decade's worth of rapid decrease in print news media titles that followed (**Figure. No.1**).

Theoretical definitions of what constitutes community media are mixed. Belgian scholar Nico Carpentier together with two other scientists (Carpentier et al., 2003) analyses four approaches to the study of community media. The first, which the authors call essentialistic, provides specific sets of attributes which are necessary for community media to be defined as such. The necessity is that community media is established and controlled by the community, which creates non-

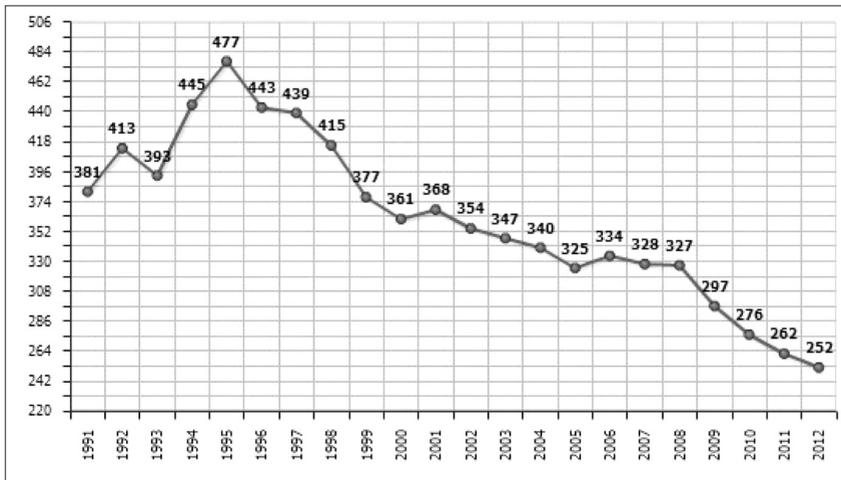


Figure No. 1. Dynamics in Number of Print News media (National, Regional and Local) in Lithuania in 1991-2012.

Source: Lithuanian Department of Statistics.

profit, non-governmental and non-market oriented media institutions with a horizontal organisational structure. Community media is regarded as a *servant* which meets the following criteria: (1) functions as a community's identity and network builder; and (2) provides community members with access to content production, organisation, evaluation, content-producing organisation and the content itself (Carpentier et al., 2003). According to this view, despite providing communities with relevant information, local media might be, but is not necessarily, community media.

As intermediate between essentialist and relativist views, the interpretation of community media as *a part of civil society* could be distinguished. Drawing on the work of British sociologist John B. Thompson (1995), Nico Carpentier et al. (2003) places the notion of community media as one of civil society's organisations (such as charities, political parties, co-operatives, etc.) as opposed to state and market organisations. However, as the authors note, neoliberal reforms in many countries embedded civil society's community media into

the market domain, prompting community media to operate as a free market institution with particular orientation towards community servicing.

There are also two relativist approaches. The first defines community media as an alternative to mainstream newsmedia; the second describes community media using a metaphor of *rhizome* (Carpentier et al. 2003). As an alternative, community media opposes the mainstream in at least one of these matters: a) is small-scale, oriented towards specific, often disadvantaged, communities; b) is independent from the state and market; c) is horizontally structured and allows non-professionals to contribute d) provides a non-dominant, counter-hegemonic discourse (Carpentier et al. 2003: 56). A more fluid and flexible understanding, following French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), of the community media as *rhizomatic* is establishing ownership and/or various forms of contribution links with civil society organisations, and state and market institutions (**Figure No.2.**)

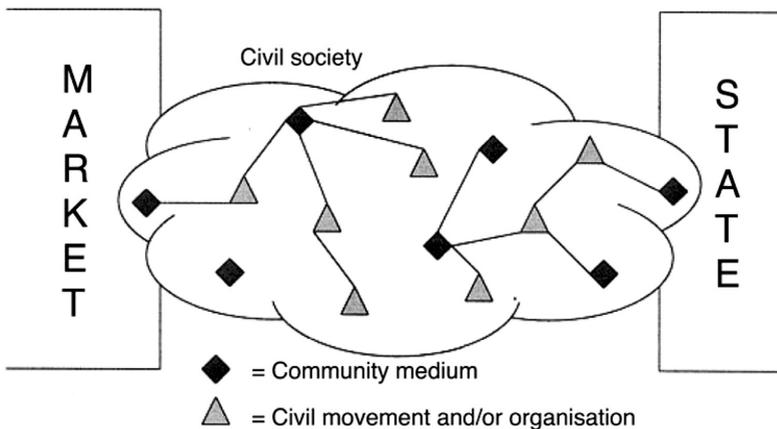


Figure No.2. Civil society and community media as *rhizome*

Source: NICO CARPENTIER, RICO LIE & JAN SERVAES (2003): Community Media: Muting the democratic media discourse?, Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 17:1, p.62.

A contingent nature of geographically oriented community media is also stressed by Polish scholar Nicholas W. Jankowski (2003), who argues that ownership and control of community media is often shared by local residents, municipal governments, and community-based organisations; funding comes mostly from non-commercial sources, but the overall budget may involve corporate sponsorship, advertising and government subsidies. Community media is small-scale and shares objectives to 1) “provide news and information relevant to the needs of the community members”; 2) engage community members in public political discussions; 3) contribute to political and social empowerment of community members (Jankowski, 2003: 8).

The relativistic notion of community media as *rhizomatic* is relevant for the analysis of post-soviet community media, whose development continues to be influenced by its perpetual and dynamic links with local authorities, civil society organisations, public service and/or market institutions. Numerous research on post-soviet media systems reported that transition from totalitarianism (authoritarianism) towards liberal democracy did not result in formation of a democratic liberal media system or what is believed to constitute it – high journalistic autonomy, competitive media market, accountability and professionalism (see Mažylė, 2012; Juodytė, 2011; Jastramskis, 2011; Balčytienė, 2011; Vaišnys, 2008). Cultural (for example, Lauk, 2009) and economic explanations are provided by domestic and CEE scholars. As for economic explanations, the small scope of the Lithuanian media market is often mentioned (see, for example, Balčytienė, 2011), while the market’s underdevelopment (De Waal, Milosavjevic, 2013), which is particularly important when discussing community media that reaches readers in underdeveloped rural areas with up to 30,7 percent of population (i.e. potential consumers; SILC, 2012) at risk of poverty in 2011, needs more attention. This study aims to digress from liberal critique of the news media by applying the *rhizomatic* community media concept to analyse Lithuanian geographically oriented community media, particularly – its’ role in the decentralisation of poverty reduction policy that started as an experiment in five regional municipalities (Akmenė, Panevėžys, Radviliškis, Raseiniai and Šilalė).

Role of Community Media in the Process of Policy Decentralisation

The social policy decentralization started in 2012 after complex austerity measures and public spending cuts were introduced in the country, The Law on the Provision of Cash Social Assistance for the Poor Residents, which regulates entitlement of poor residents with social benefits and compensations for the cost of house heating, hot and drinking water, also provided legal basis for transferring the state's functions of cash social assistance distribution to municipalities and additional municipal functions of controlling cash social assistance in five (out of 60) regional municipalities. The Law, together with general principles of 1) means-testing, 2) new regulation regarding workfare, 3) reductions of cash social assistance to those beneficiaries who are entitled to long-term social benefits, and 4) additional payments to those beneficiaries who find employment, places under obligation five pilot municipalities to: 1) approve the methods for determining cash social assistance; 2) adopt decisions on the allocation of funds for the implementation of cash social assistance; and 3) approve the description of a procedure for providing cash social assistance (Piniginés socialinés paramos.... įstatymas, Article 30). The government also created incentives for pilot municipalities to reduce the number of beneficiaries by ensuring the discretion of municipalities to allocate the unused part of a target government grant (which otherwise would go back to the national budget) if it is not fully distributed by the end of the year.

Decentralisation, as Indonesian academics Sjamsiar Sjamsuddin and Irwan Noor (2012: 14) note, can be beneficial for the central government as well as local communities. With benefits to central government, decentralisation can foster financial optimisation (in the case of cash social assistance – reduced governmental spending on administering the cash social assistance distribution) and better fiscal discipline. These effects are compatible with austerity measures taken by governments in times of economic crisis. From the fiscal and financial optimisation perspective, decentralisation after the first year of

the experiment proved to be effective. By the end of 2012, Lithuanian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour reported a reduction of spending on cash social assistance by 20,1 percent compared with 2011 in all five pilot municipalities (38,1 percent – in Šilalė region, 29,6 – in Akmenė region, 22,2 – in Raseiniai region, Panevėžys region – 12,6, Radviliškis region – 7,1 percent) (Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija, 2013).

With benefits to local communities, decentralisation as a political process can play a role in enriching local politics: first, by creating a more open political participatory area; and second, by opening up a political space for citizens to be actively involved in governmental matters in their community (Sjamsuddin and Noor, 2012). Regarding the latter, special advisory committees for municipal decision making were formed in municipalities. They consisted of representatives of community organisations, members of locality and elders, and other interested parties (Krankalis, Damskytė, 2012; Piniginės socialinės paramos... įstatymas, Article 23.2.14). As for decentralisation playing a role in enriching local politics, community media is one of the channels to document and observe the dynamics of community political participation. Being regarded by community members more as a good neighbour than a watchdog (Poindexter et al., 2006), community media is expected to function in a *two-way communication mode*, which includes not only mediating the top-down communication of local authorities, but also active participation of communities in deciding how and with what purposes to use community media (Berrigan, 1979). Municipal power in the given circumstances to *approve own cases and procedures of paying additional or refusing social benefits resulted in a number of refusals and replacements of cash social assistance with non-cash social assistance* (Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija, 2013). Such cases occur a) if a resident cohabits with a person who has a decent income (partner or relatives); b) if a resident provides inaccurate information about his or her living conditions (for example, if he or she lives in an undeclared partnership, the declared place of living is not the same as factual one, etc); c) if a resident refuses to perform socially useful activities as defined by municipalities; among others, have been registered by the

community newspapers. One of the aims of this study is to analyse how community members use community media to react to on-going changes in the context of high poverty levels in rural areas.

According to Sjamsuddin and Noor (2012), there are several obstacles for decentralisation to boost public political participation and help to reach governmental goals of fiscal optimisation. Positive outcomes might fall short if a low index of human resource development, low level of competition, and low quality of public service are present in the area (Sjamsuddin, Noor, 2012: 12). Shortcomings might affect implementation of reforms; for example, reform might succeed from the financial and fiscal optimisation point of view, while fail from the point of view of boosting public political participation. Even in this case, community media continues to provide discourses on decentralisation; therefore, its role in the policy decentralisation process can be observed and analysed. According to scholars of media and communication Clifford G. Christians, Theodore L. Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Robert A. White (2009), media in policy transformations can perform a *monitorial*, *facilitative*, *radical* or *collaborative* role, which can be mixed in practice. First, by performing a *monitorial role*, the media “intervenes between events and sources on the one hand and individual members of the public on the other” (Christians et al, 2009: 139-140). In that case, media “serves its sources as well as the audience’s informational needs and provides sources with feedback about public response” (Christians et al, 2009: 140). The second *facilitative role* is performed when media seeks to encourage participation of citizens in communication by not only giving feedback to authorities about public opinions and evaluations of civil society’s associations (as in monitorial role case), but also seeks to empower them (Christians et al, 2009: 158-159). The third *radical role* is a mediation model in which media “insists on the absolute equality and freedom of all members of the society” (Christians et al, 2009). Radical media does not only expose abuses of power, but also the causes and consequences of power concentration, helping the public see alternative avenues of action to redistribution. The fourth *collaborative role* of the media

refers to a mediation mode which favours the existing social order, authority institutions and the prevailing policies. The role might appear differently – as compliance, as acquiescence, as acceptance (Christians et al, 2009). These theoretical underpinnings guided the analysis of empirical findings on performance of community media during the decentralisation process.

Methods and Research Questions

In order to assess Lithuania's community media's role in the policy decentralisation process and reveal related nature of Lithuanian community media, this study asks the following:

RQ1 Who and in what contexts communicates poverty in community media?

RQ2 What frames dominate reflection of poverty issues?

RQ3 What and how are outcomes of policy decentralisation experiment evaluated?

The answers to these questions will help assess community media's role in the first year of decentralisation implementing The Law on the Provision of Cash Social Assistance for the Poor Residents in five experimental regional municipalities.

The sample included all articles from five community newspapers published in 2012 that mentioned poverty, the poor, public and private social services directed towards the poor, and the poverty reduction policy reform implemented by the five municipalities. It was decided to include in the sample all information (articles, documents, announcements, etc.) published by community media which was related to poverty issues, despite some of them being advertorials or published in accordance to the publicity contracts with the community media and the local authorities. Such a decision helps to reveal *rhizomatic* links in the Lithuanian community media which was present in all analysed newspapers. Methods of descriptive content analysis and framing analysis to present the empirical findings were used.

The total number of analysed articles is $n=247$ (Raseiniai community newspaper "Naujas rytas" ("The New Morning"), $n=71$, Radviliškis

community newspaper “Radviliškio naujienos” (“Radviliškis News”), n=30, Panevėžys community newspaper “Tėvynė” (“Homeland”), n=47, Akmenė community newspaper “Vienybė” (“The Unity”, n=34), Šilalė community newspaper “Šilalės naujienos” (“Šilalė News”), n=65). In general, community newspapers’ attention to the poverty of local residents was relatively low which was the first sign of collaborative community media’s feature (collaboration as compliance, Christians et al, 2009). Community journalists wrote 44,9 percent of all articles, published on various topics related to poverty, representatives and PR officers of local authorities wrote 34,4 percent of all stories, and 20,6 percent of stories related to poverty issues were written by members of various community organisations, public institutions, and politicians who were not in power at the time and presented themselves as speaking on behalf of communities. During article analysis, seasonal tendencies for topics related to poverty in the press were observed: these articles increase in winter, the media’s attention to poverty issues are lower in spring and autumn, and in the summer, the topic is discussed very rarely in all the analysed newspapers.

The formation trajectory of the chosen articles to analyse community newspapers is worth mentioning. All of the newspapers are community-directed, but only one of them, which was founded during the Soviet times, in 1962, “Tėvynė” („Homeland“), is now published by the Union of Panevėžys region communities. “Radviliškio naujienos” (“Radviliškis News”) is published by an NGO whose owner is a professional journalist working as an editor-in-chief of a bigger regional newspaper “Šiaulių naujienos” (“Šiauliai news”). Two of the analysed community newspapers, “Naujas rytas” (“The New Morning”) and “Vienybė” (“The Unity”), were established in 1945 and 1951 respectively and served as propaganda tools for local Communist party’s units. They became property of the local authorities after Lithuania gained independence and later were privatised by local businesses. “Šilalės naujienos” (“Šilalė news”) was established in 2004, just before Lithuania joined the European Union, and is published by a local businessman. The circulation of all newspapers is no larger than in 2000. Despite different

historical formation trajectories and relative institutional and editorial decision-making independence from local authorities, currently all the analysed community newspapers are dependent on municipal funding and all of the analysed newspapers have publicity contracts with local authorities. Other funding sources are relatively rare commercial advertisements, political candidates during election campaigns, local businesses, and income from subscriptions and sales.

Results

Contexts in Which Poverty Issues are Discussed

With respect to RQ 1, **Table 1** shows criteria of what community media present as newsworthy when talking about poverty issues. Community media becomes a communication platform for the community's journalists, local authorities, politicians, members of public institu-

Table 1. Context in Which Poverty Issues are Discussed/ Mentioned

N=247

Context	Frequency	Percent
Cash Social Assistance	101	40,9
Charity	37	15,0
Social Services	24	9,7
Social Policy	24	9,7
Social Aid	15	6,1
Social Work	13	5,3
Public Health	9	3,6
Social Housing	8	3,2
Crime or Disaster	6	2,4
Historical experiences of the nation	5	2,0
Education	5	2,0
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>100,0</i>

tions, and community organisations. 111 or 44,9 percent of all analysed articles were authored by journalists, 85 articles or 34,4 percent by local authorities, while 51 or 20,6 percent were written by members of communities, including politicians who were not representatives of local authorities at the time and who presented themselves as speaking on behalf of the community members.

The implementation of cash social assistance reform was the most frequently discussed topic (40, 9 percent of all articles), indicating that an ongoing social policy decentralisation process, according to the community media, is newsworthy. However, the biggest part of information published on this topic was not prepared by the community journalists. As mentioned above, all of the analysed newspapers have publicity contracts with the municipalities. More than half (53, 5 percent, **Table 2**) of all information published on the topic of an on-going reform was prepared by the representatives of local authorities and PR officers of local municipalities and was often published in special sections (usually named “Municipality’s news”) of the newspapers. Newspaper journalists wrote 42,6 percent of all stories related to the reform while the rest of the articles (4 percent) were written by members of various community organisations, public institutions and politicians (usually candidates) who were not directly involved in the implementation of an on-going reform.

After comparing contexts in which journalists of the newspapers discuss or mention poverty, it can be stated that the cash social assistance reform is not the most newsworthy topic, according to community media journalists. It appears that poverty for the media becomes newsworthy in contexts of (1) crime and disaster (100 percent of these stories were written by journalists), (2) historical experiences of the nation (80 percent), (3) public health issues (66,7 percent), (4) social housing (62,5 percent), (5) education (60 percent), (6) social work (53,8 percent), (7) charity (51,4 percent), (8) *cash social assistance* (42,6 percent), (9) social policy (33,3 percent), (10) social aid (26,7 percent), (11) social services (25 percent) (**Table 2**). Thus, it can be stated that when deciding on its independently produced content,

Table 2. Context in Which Poverty Issues Were Raised according to Authors of Publications

Context		Authors of publications		
		Journalists	L.A.*	C.M.**
Cash Social Assistance	Count	43	54	4
	% within context	42,6	53,5	4
	% within author	38,7	63,5	7,8
Charity	Count	19	2	16
	% within context	51,4	5,4	43,2
	% within author	17,1	2,4	31,4
Social Services	Count	6	13	5
	% within context	25,0	54,2	20,8
	% within author	5,4	15,3	9,8
Social Policy	Count	8	1	15
	% within context	33,3	4,2	62,5
	% within author	7,2	1,2	29,4
Social Aid	Count	4	11	0
	% within context	26,7	73,3	0
	% within author	2,6	12,9	0
Social Work	Count	7	2	4
	% within context	53,8	15,4	30,8
	% within author	6,3	2,4	7,8
Public Health	Count	6	0	3
	% within context	66,7	0	33,3
	% within author	5,4	0	5,9
Social Housing	Count	5	1	2
	% within context	62,5	12,5	25,0
	% within author	4,5	1,2	3,9
Crime or Disaster	Count	6	0	0
	% within context	100	0	0
	% within author	5,4	0	0
Historical experiences of the nation	Count	4	0	1
	% within context	80,0	0	20,0
	% within author	3,6	0	2,0

Education	Count	3	1	1
	%within context	60	20	20
	%within author	2,7	1,2	2

*L.A. – local authorities

** C.M. – members of community organisations and local public service institutions as well as politicians, speaking on behalf of communities and not acting as representatives of local authorities at the time.

the community media, tends to first notice negative the contexts of poverty (as will be confirmed by the framing analysis in the following chapter) or to refer to poverty as a phenomenon of the historical past (usually inter-war period of 20th century and during occupation under the Soviet Union), while surrendering discussions of an on-going poverty reduction policy to the representatives of local municipalities who are implementing them.

Local municipalities actively use publicity as a tool secured by the publicity contracts with the community media: 63, 5 percent of all information, provided by the municipalities about poverty to the community media, raises poverty in the context of an on-going cash social assistance reform. Changes in obtaining and distributing social services, directed towards the poor and other social aid issues (all of the information that raises more than one measure of the poverty reduction policy as belonging to the “social aid” category is marked) are most often communicated by the local municipalities (54,2 percent and 73,3 percent, respectively).

Participation of members of communities in discussions on cash social assistance appeared to be weak while moderation of community media’s journalists relatively passive. However, community members/ organisations and journalists tend to raise poverty related questions more often while talking about charity initiatives. This context is the second most frequently appearing in the community media (**Table 1**). Approximately 1/3 (31, 4 percent) of all stories that were written by members of communities and published in the community media concerned charity initiatives (**Table 2**). Within the context of

charity, 51, 4 percent of articles were written by community media journalists, 43, 2 percent – by the members of communities and politicians, and 5, 4 percent – by the local authorities, who are usually thanking citizens and community organisations for charity initiatives. Charity is a non-governmental, civil society's tool used for assisting poor community members. Therefore, community media plays civil society's facilitative role by firstly emphasising and supporting charitable civil society's actions and secondly, by voluntarily offering community members a communication platform to organize and report results of charity initiatives. Similar community media's role could be observed after analysing the category of social policy discussions in which poverty problems are raised – most of them (62,5 percent) are initiated by the community members and community politicians or the media itself (33,3 percent). The interplay between community media and community members and/or organisations could be observed after analysing the context of public health – 33, 3 percent of all articles were written by community members/organisations, 66, 7 percent – by community media's journalists. Local authorities did not raise questions on poverty problems in this context at all.

Frames that Dominate Reflection of Poverty Issues

In the previous chapter, contexts for poverty framing and actors, who use community media to communicate poverty and poverty reduction policies were described. With respect to RQ2, in this chapter the analysis focuses on what framing is dominant and how different actors frame poverty. The method of framing helps to identify explanatory frameworks of various social phenomena, including poverty, constructed in communication processes; results of the framing analysis provides insights for the analysis of media's role in policy making (Matthes, 2012; Bell, Entman, 2011; D'Angelo, Kuypers, 2010; Entman, 2010; Thurston et al., 2005 etc).

Poverty in Lithuanian community media most often is framed through poor agents; although, as the previous research has shown (Donauskaitė, 2013), poor members of communities are very rarely

quoted by the community media. Poor agents used as an explanatory tool for the phenomena of poverty leads to appreciating individualistic, focusing mainly on the eradication of cultural causes of poverty-directed (Keršienė, 2011) policy solutions. There were 208 stories (n=208) in which the poor were framed. As **Table 3** shows, three main groups of frames of the poor are constructed by all of the actors involved in communication of poverty in the community media: sympathetic framing (31,9 percent), technical framing (24,48 percent) and negative framing (44,33 percent).

Table 3. Frames of the Poor in the Community Media, n= 208

	Community Media	Local Authorities	Community Members	Total (count/percent)
Sympathetic, percent	29,66%	15,24%	74,47 %	121/31,19%
<i>as people deserving assistance</i>	65	16	34	115
<i>as proud enough to solve problems on their own</i>	5	—	1	6
Technical, percent	9,32%	64,76%	10,64%	95/ 24,48%
<i>as objects of policy changes</i>	22	68	5	95
Negative, percent	61,02%	20 %	14,89 %	172/44,33%
<i>as people undeserving assistance</i>	16	5	2	23
<i>as abusers of social provision system</i>	76	12	2	90
<i>as people in debt</i>	9	1	—	10
<i>as lazy</i>	24	1	—	25
<i>as a threat to society</i>	9	1	3	13
<i>as aggressive</i>	10	1		11
Total (count/percent)	236	105	47	388/100%

Categories are not mutually exclusive. Presence or absence of each was coded per story

Community media journalists provide diverse framing of the poor, but compared to frequencies of technical and sympathetic framing, negative framing is dominant (61, 02 percent). Compared with the framing of the poor by other actors who use media to communicate poverty, diverse negative framing is most often found within independent journalistic productions. On the contrary, community members (who mostly communicate charity initiatives) tend to frame the poor in a sympathetic way, while local authorities most often frame them as objects of an on-going cash social assistance reform, using technical terms from various official documents. It should be noted that technical terms are not neutral: Lithuanian scientist Laimutė Žalimienė (2011) analysed them in the context of legislative social policy discourse and found that “the process of categorization [of the poor – D. D.] in social policy legislation in Lithuania creates a discriminatory environment for social assistance recipients”, which is “one of the factors making <...> policy and provided services inefficient” (Žalimienė, 2011: 60).

It should also not be mistaken that community media journalists are solely the main producers of negative frames of the poor. As the previous research has shown (Donauskaitė, 2013), main sources of community media journalists are representatives of local authorities who also provide journalists with framing of the poor. Journalists tend to pick negative poverty frames from local authorities, modify and distribute them within the independently produced content. The presence of negative framing is strengthened by the fact that community media journalists are not using alternative information sources: community media does not seek comments from scientists, scholars, political analysts or the poor themselves (Donauskaitė, 2013). This analysis shows that local authorities do not use the communication channel secured by the publicity contracts with the community media for spreading negative frames of the poor. Local authorities use this publicity tool to report implementation of the reform and to guide the public through legislative changes, while surrendering negative framing of the poor to journalists who spread it voluntarily.

Combination of various framing of the poor used per story and within all the community media content on poverty acts as a legitimate tool of present social policy directions. Opposition of framing the poor as deserving or undeserving of assistance in Lithuanian community media like in the mainstream media of old democratic countries (Gans, 1992; Katz, 1990 etc.) can be distinguished. Poor people who, according to the media, are not the ones to blame for their situation and/or are putting many efforts to come out of poverty are in the poor as deserving category. It consists of children, fire victims, hard working people, large families, single mothers, people who do not have alcohol addictions, people who obey rules of an on-going reform. Those who do not fall under this category are framed negatively. The most frequently appearing frame is one of poor as abusers of the social provision system. These frames are presented as facts, though often without references to actually existing cases. Under the category of poor, who abuse the social provision system, falls illegal workers, the unemployed, smugglers, people living in undeclared and unregistered partnerships, emigrants who according to the media come back to claim benefits and leave immediately, people who constantly get cash support from their emigrant relatives, people refusing to do compulsory municipal work required by the new Law rule.

Results of community's media framing of the poor analysis signals a highly collaborative stance, taken by the community media towards present social policy direction. Community members are given a platform to communicate their views on poverty and are provided an alternative framing of the poor; however, they avoid to directly challenge on-going policy changes through the community media.

Outcomes of Cash Social Assistance Reform, Considered by the Community Media

With respect to RQ3, here presented are the results of the specific outcomes of an on-going poverty reduction policy decentralisation reform that was considered by the community media. Out of 101

articles that were written either by community media journalists, representatives of local authorities or community members, 97 (or 96 percent) on the topic of cash social assistance favours on-going policy changes, while only 4 articles (4 percent) evaluate the changes critically. The main categories of arguments used by the community media are as following:

1. An on-going reform will rationalise spending on cash social assistance by eradicating corruption from the distribution system and misconduct of administrative staff. The rationalisation of spending will help to cover municipal debt, allow to invest in new municipal infrastructure projects, and help other members of the community.
2. Reform will restore social justice (cash social assistance will be distributed to the deserving poor only, abuses of social provision system will be ended).
3. Reform will empower communities and local authorities (by giving them decision-making power).
4. Reform, which introduces workfare, will be beneficial for the whole community and to the poor themselves, because it will encourage them to find employment and which in turn will revive the labour market, lower unemployment levels and reduce poverty problems.

The latter argument is interesting, because it spreads the similar image of workers belonging to cults during Soviet times. It seems that a Soviet cult of workers and work has been resurrected by the post-soviet community media in the context of modern poverty reduction policy changes. The paradox is that unlike in Soviet times, when the phenomena of poverty was neglected and when community media used the image to build collective Soviet identity and to facilitate exertion of a state's power over all aspects of human life, nowadays the same image is used to support the state's minimal role in securing the well-being of citizens.

Other arguments reflect concerns of the Lithuanian civic society – high levels of perceived corruption (Transparency International

Lithuania office, 2013), lack of social justice (DEMOS, 2013) and civic helplessness (Pilietinės visuomenės institutas, 2013) – and that makes them powerful discursive tools (PR tools from applied theory point of view) for legitimising on-going policy changes. These arguments and framing of the poor, combined with context analysis, can be interpreted within the broader context of modern ideology of poverty reduction policy, constructed and supported by Lithuanian community media: while favouring spending cuts on poverty reduction measures and thus legitimising state's minimal role in securing well-being of citizens, community media supports community-organised charity as a substitute for state's run policy.

Conclusions

This study applies the *rhisomatic* community media concept in order to analyse Lithuanian local newspapers, particularly their role in the decentralisation of poverty reduction policy that started as an experiment in five regional municipalities in 2012 (Akmenė, Panevėžys, Radviliškis, Raseiniai and Šilalė). The decentralisation process is expected to affect deliberation process in local politics, in which community media, as a mediator of public policy deliberation, might play monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative roles. The community media approach to the analysis of Lithuanian local press has enabled and helped to identify community newspapers' links to local authorities, community members and organisations, and public service institutions (though no direct links to market institutions) in the process of deliberation of poverty issues. Research has shown that three main agents are leading poverty debates in the community media: local authorities, community members and community media journalists.

By providing access for community members to communicate poverty issues, community media is performing its facilitative role. However, despite community members participating debates on solutions to end poverty by spreading information on charity initiatives, which they often organize themselves, and despite them framing the poor

more sympathetically than other agents involved in communication of poverty, community members are not challenging dominant poverty framing in the context of an on-going reform which is predominantly led by local authorities and community media journalists in all the analysed community newspapers. Analysis of content of community newspapers did not witness a boost of public political participation in the process of policy decentralisation, exact causes of which need to be analysed more closely than the scope of this study allows.

The analysed community newspapers acted collaboratively towards a new mode of distribution of cash social assistance implemented by five experimental regional municipalities (Akmenė, Panevėžys, Radviliškis, Raseiniai and Šilalė) in the first year of the reform. Poverty in Lithuanian community media was most often framed through the individualistic agency of the poor who were presented as deserving or undeserving of assistance. Combination of frames of deserving and undeserving poor is interpreted in this article as functioning as a legitimisation tool of municipal and state's social policy direction. The media's more radical role, which has a potential to spark public political participation, discussions and understanding of structure of distribution of public funds as well as policy making in general, is absent in the community newspapers.

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Skurdo įrėminimas Lietuvos bendruomenių laikraščiuose. Vietos valdžia, bendruomenės nariai ir žurnalistai, skelbiantys apie socialinius ir politinius pokyčius

Džina Donauskaitė

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pristatoma vietinės žiniasklaidos kaip vietos bendruomenių žiniasklaidos samprata argumentuojant, kad, skirtingai nei pagrindinėse (nacionalinėse, regioninėse aprėpties) žiniasklaidos priemonėse, kuriose stiprios profesionalių žurnalistų pozicijos, vietinių žiniasklaidos priemonių turinio hierarchija nėra akivaizdi: įvairūs bendruomenių veikėjai (žurnalistai, vietos nevyriausybines organizacijos, viešąsias paslaugas teikiančių institucijų darbuotojai, vietos politikai, vietos valdžios atstovai ir kt.) pateikiami kaip lygiaverčiai. Bendruomenių laikraščių vaidmuo išaugo nuo 2012 m. pradėjus įgyvendinti Piniginės socialinės paramos nepasiturintiems gyventojams įstatymą, kuriame, pirma, kaip eksperimentas 5 Lietuvos rajonų savivaldybėse (Akmenės, Panevėžio, Radviliškio, Raseinių ir Šilalės) įtvirtintas piniginės socialinės paramos skirstymo decentralizacijos principas. Skurdas yra viena opiausių Lietuvos miestelių ir kaimo vietovių problemų, tad svarbu įvertinti vietos bendruomenių žiniasklaidos vaidmenį politinio sprendimo galios poslinkio iš centro į periferiją kontekste. Šiame straipsnyje pristatomi 5 vietos bendruomenių laikraščių turinio tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad bendruomenių nariai naudojami žiniasklaida skurdo problemų, daugiausia – jų pačių organizuojamų labdaros projektų, komunikacijai, empatiškai pateikia skurstančių bendruomenės narių situaciją, tačiau apie vykstančią reformą ir jos padarinius nekalba, jos žiniasklaidoje nevertina. Socialinės politikos pokyčius vietos bendruomenių žiniasklaidoje daugiausia nušviečia vietos valdžia ir žurnalistai. Vietos žiniasklaidoje skurdas įrėminamas kaip individo problema, konstruojant nusipelnusiųjų ir nenusipelnusiųjų paramos įvaizdžius (būtent įvaizdžius, nes jie dažniausiai pateikiami kaip savaime suprantami, kaip abstrakcijos, neanalizuojant konkrečių atvejų). Šie įvaizdžiai tampa diskursiniais vykstančios reformos įteisinimo įrankiais. Straipsnyje daroma išvada, kad, nepaisant vietos bendruomenių žiniasklaidos potencialo palengvinti ir paskatinti bendruomenių narių dalyvavimą viešosios politikos procesuose, vietos bendruomenių žiniasklaida reformos kritiškai neįvertino, jos pasekmės paramos netekusiems

skurstantiesiems pirmais reformos įgyvendinimo metais liko neužfiksuotos, tad vietos bendruomenių laikraščių vaidmuo skurdo mažinimo politikos decentralizavimo procese vertintinas kaip grįstas bendradarbiavimu.

Esminiai žodžiai: vietos bendruomenių žiniasklaida, decentralizacija, skurdas

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