

## **ENVIRONMENT AND EARTH SCIENCES IN COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA IN HUNGARY**

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**Abstract.** After the opinion of the author, the Hungarian media is characterised by lack of the programs in which the problems of the Earth and the natural environment are presented. This situation is due to the market character of the commercial channels and the competitive inferiority of the official ones. The rare scientific programs replay the 20-30 year old emissions which rise nostalgia for the older generation, but are not attractive for the young people. The scarce information flow is one of the causes which explain the lack of interest and desorientation of the watching and listening people for the state of the homelands' Nature and for the public things, too. The proposed solution is the activation of the scientists, of the civil organisations, a real and solid support from the central and local administration for create and spread true and attractive programs.

**Key words:** Hungarian media, Commercial channels, Program strategies, Young generation, Scientific emissions, Earth sciences, Environmental protection

According to media research data, Hungarian public television broadcasts violent acts every 48 minutes, while the two satellite commercial TV channels do so every 19 and 16 minutes, respectively (ORTT, 2003). In the main programme time, scenes portraying brutality are even more frequent, and researchers have found that public television is starting to fall into line with commercial TV channels as far as showing acts of violence is concerned.

This trend can be traced back to the emergence of commercial TV channels, and it has certainly been influenced by strong competition. The consolidation of a dual system of media goes along with the public sector's losing market share. Television and radio companies financed by the state budget lose millions of viewers and listeners, and this process is still far from completion. Commercial media virtually dominate the field of mass media (and advertisement) and force the public sector to fall back on the meagre rest of the audience. It is, however, not only the absolute figures of watching and listening that is worth attention, but the losses of public sector can also be traced in the composition of the audience. Public television channels and radio stations did not excel in winning over the younger generations earlier, either; however, in the last few years the competitive inferiority of public television among teenagers and young adults has become even more evident. It is this age group that is the least attracted to the offer of public media, in other words, the social influence of public

media has decreased the most significantly precisely in the most responsive age groups. One can quite rightly ask: Where are now high standard programmes like *From Budding to Defoliation*, *One Million Steps*, *Delta*, etc, which could entice people to come home in time and children to leave the playgrounds, where are a lot of interesting reports on long-ago and contemporary travellers, the mountains, rivers and seas of the Earth, breathtaking adventures in deep caves and in the craters of volcanoes? And what will all these things finally result in? Do we not lose contact with the Earth and live (if it can be called “life” at all) in a virtual reality, where weapons clash, blood flows, brains are blown out and in the end, the muscle-man marries the fair-haired daughter of the *swahili* prince?

Therefore, it is worth returning to the statistics mentioned in the introductory lines, which clearly show how public television wishes to regain its competitiveness. As we can see, for example, by following the topics and choice of films of commercial TV channels. By this, it can also attempt to increase the time the younger generations spend watching the programmes of public television to some extent, at least when such programmes are on.

That strategy is obviously wrong, but admitting this error would also mean admitting the crisis of public media, which the elite of the media is reluctant to do. However, it is much more important to be aware of the signs of crisis in the case of the younger generations being more susceptible for new things than in the case of older viewers, who are less likely to change their habits. Addressing the future generation is certainly one of the most difficult tasks, but the last decades of television have provided several successful examples in this respect. It would be more advisable for public television service to turn back to its own past rather than to the – not very exemplary – present of its rivals.

It is hard not to notice that, for example, our beloved travel and nature documentaries have shared the nostalgic end of *The Captain of Tenkes* and *The Stars of Eger*. If the television wants to show an event from our historical past on holidays, it has to take several-decade-old feature films out of their dusty boxes, as new ones have not been created on these topics for many years. If one would like to see some geological, natural, cultural historical treasures of Hungary, one can watch again the films of the ‘70s and ‘80s taking us to the rivers Danube and Tisza on foot and by bicycle, as virtually there have been no new works in this field. And although we watch the already grainy shots with pleasure, our happiness is surpassed by our sense of shame, as well as our feeling of debt, even in the place of the public media that have not made great efforts to provide competitive alternatives as opposed to professional nature documentary channels by showing Hungarian values.

It is not only the presentation of specific areas of Hungary that is missing, but Hungary itself is not in the screen. In the developed parts of Europe, the Cork Statement aiming at the revaluation of the country has been a directive being followed for several years, and it raises the protection of the environmental and humanistic values of the country to the level of international developing projects (Mundruczó & Stone, 1997). If we do not show the values of the countryside of Hungary, how will we transmit the Cork mentality to preserve values to the youth? What can be inherited without inheritance? Education is not simply the transmission of knowledge, but also

that of norms and vocations by which younger generations can and must be motivated to achieve mutual social goals (Fekete, 2006). The lack of publicity is the main thing that prevents us from completing our aims today. Let us consider the multitude of civil organisations protecting nature and the environment, the geological researches, which constantly fight to get included in a national programme, not only in connection with scandals of environmental protection, but also with their exemplary initiatives. However, they are often unsuccessful, because the proportion of civil publicity is far smaller than that of politics in the media, and special programmes are very rare. Or let us *take Leader Action Team*, which develops the country and gives examples how to modernise small regions by planning innovative usage of the areas in several parts of the country (Kerney, 1997). However, there is not a special programme dedicated to regional development in a European mentality, whereas the tackling of the complex socio-economical problems of the country reach far beyond the framework of the still existing agricultural programmes. Or we can also consider eco-tourism, which familiarise people with local natural values without damaging them, and transmits not only knowledge, but also a modern approach to the viewers – however, there is no special programme on this field, either! Young Hungarians know more about the natural beauties of Bali and Hawaii than those of Homokhátság or the National Park of Hortobágy. However, we can only love (in a true sense, not on the level of banners) those things or people we know. And this issue concerns our immediate environment, our homeland and, actually, the European community admitting our country, the natural and human values of our close or distant neighbours (Cairns, 1994).

The list above can be extended long, but let us rather think about the solution now. One of the tasks is self-evident. Public media should change their strategy, return to their own best traditions and reach out for the younger generations, giving priority to encouraging viewers to love nature in the choice of programme topics and adjusting itself to the knowledge provided by educational material of different age groups. If the media do not start to play a role in socialisation in childhood, they do not only complete their duties of public service, but they do not cater for the supply of their own audience, either. We should restore the original prestige of film series that depict the natural, cultural and geological treasures of our country in an entertaining, popular and educating way, and we should restore TV workshops whose works of international standard met with success earlier (Kovács, 2003). Film competitions hardly support works showing nature in a popular and scientific way nowadays, therefore the priorities of competitions should be reconsidered. The example of the *series “University of Omniscience”* demonstrates that if knowledge transmission through lectures can be so successful, programmes showing scientific work on its natural spot can gain even more popularity. Another positive effect of such series may be that, besides the information, they can bring science and scientists closer to the viewers, and those scientists, with their exciting personality and career, make the things they say more authentic and can attract more viewers.

It is also necessary to have special programmes that can throw light upon the social conflicts concerning the protection of natural and environmental values and present the solutions of state, municipal and civil organisations. One cannot over-emphasise the importance of providing models: education should always go along with

the encouragement to follow patterns. It is also to be applied in the case of programmes on developing policies, which have so far neglected those programmes of rural areas (Living countryside, 1996) that introduce new modernising approaches based on natural and environmental features and values. It is essential to emphasise the importance of special scientific programmes. If there are no scientific programmes, there is no scientific journalism, and, therefore, there is no supplying base that can become the partner or even the ally of science and environment. Furthermore, in order to protect and utilise the earth, air, water and all natural treasures competently, science needs more and more allies. It has enough rivals, the greatest of which is (accidental or deliberate) disinformation.

In my view, the civil and scientific sector – precisely because of the above-mentioned facts – should deal more with how to attract the attention of the public and should firmly defend its view, if necessary, against the media, too. But let us hope that communication and agreements between the media and science will produce the true results by realising that the issue of programmes dealing with nature is not a private matter of certain institutions, but a social matter, where everyone concerned has a say in what we teach the younger generation, what social models we give them and what the heritage they are to transmit further is.

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