

The regional media's chances – or under double pressure in a competition



A superficial view of regional media in Hungary is that it is not worth researching because it does not exist: Regional television channels and regional radio stations have been abolished, real regional newspapers do not exist. In spite of the fact that the above statements do not cover the whole truth, it is worth dealing with these sentences a little more in depth. People who question the existence of regional media usually support their statements with following arguments: There is no need for regional media, because the national one can perform its tasks and functions, as the local one fulfills its role. Regional *media* cannot perform an actual regional function, or its standard is not good enough, or because it is not viable economically. In my paper I would like to refute these statements. In Hungary research on the press and the media emphasises mainly the market aspect; it aims at a somewhat bigger audience. This alone is not sufficient to consider the statement of admission to be scientific. Only a few analyses with a scientific claim have been published. Fokasz Nikosz writes about news trends in the press; however he deals with the national press only. The media science institute researches the media consumption of Hungarian expats. The local press is researched only by Laszlo Zöldi. For this reason I considered it important to focus on regional media under a double pressure - against the national one - and prove that it can be competitive with the local media.

Before we deal with the misbeliefs and their refutations, let us define the term “regional media”. The question is most precisely answered by the Media Act. According to the legislation definition „Regional media service is the media service that’s transmission area is greater than that of the local media, but the population of its transmission area is less than half of the country’s population” (Mass Comm. Act 2010). The definition of local media service is based on the number of residents in the transmission area. If the transmission area covers one city, it will be maximised in 500.000 residents, if it is more than one settlement, the maximum resident number will be 100.000. As a consequence, regional media is a media that, if it covers one city, will be available to more than 500.000 residents; if more settlements, to more than 100.000 residents, but less than half of the country’s population.

According to the frequency allocation published on the home page of the National Media and Info Communications Authority (NMIA_1, 2015), 17 regional radio

stations operate on the 100MHZ USW length, out of which 11 are available in Budapest, 4 in Miskolc, one in Nyíregyháza and in Eger, respectively. Following the linear radio media service competition initiated by the media authorities, 19 radio stations were considered successful. From these 9 are in Budapest, 3 in the agglomeration of Budapest (Radio Maria, Catholic Radio, Radio Lánchíd), one in Miskolc, one in Nyíregyháza, and 5 in various multiple settlements (NMIA_2, 2015). From the latter 3 can be linked to Miskolc as well. Even if we consider those, in terms of the availability of regional radio stations, Budapest's dominance is obvious in both cases.

Regarding television, 19 regional linear audiovisual media service stations are registered (NMIA_3, 2015), 15 of which are based in Budapest. However, in this case the location of the station is irrelevant, as cable service providers enable coverage throughout the country. A few examples of this category of stations are: Film Mania, Spektrum Home, Fishing and Hunting, Parliament TV, Pax TV.

If we consider the intent of the legislator, county newspapers belong here as well, as their „coverage” includes multiple settlements, and they are available to more than 100.000 inhabitants. Though sold copies are below 100.000, if multiplied by the number of the actual readers it well exceeds that number. Based on content too they must be considered regional. Since the Pest Megyei Hírlap (Pest County News) ceased to exist, we can count 18 printed products.

Those who question the necessity of regional media claim that its functions are already covered by the national and local media. To decide if this statement is true or false, we have to examine the extent of regional news in a national and local media. My test subjects are the Déli Krónika, broadcasted by Radio Kossuth as a piece of national media, and the free council-sponsored newspaper named Győr+ as a piece of local media.

I examined the broadcasts of the Déli Krónika between the 19th and 28th of January 2015. During this 10 day period the most popular radio news included 18 news articles pertaining to the countryside, detailed as follows:

- 28. 2 (1 commentary and 1 news item) Surveillance cameras are installed in Kaposvár, New ambulances (Tiszaújváros, Mór, Szeged, Budaörs, Szigetszentmiklós, Érd).
- 27. 1 Flooded soil in the Alsó-Tisza region
- 26. 0
- 25. 1 Trains delayed between Győr and Veszprém
- 24. 1 Number of flu infections are increasing in Csongrád county as well
- 23. 2 Ócsa has reached its full capacity, Discussions to increase employment rate in Szeged
- 22. 1 (news) Road closure in Balmazújváros due to demonstration
- 21. 4 (3 commentaries, 1 news item) Wine conference planned in Eger, Shelter for the homeless renovated in Békés, Szeged university turns green + Fake ink cartridges found at Rajka
- 20. 3 (2 + 1 news with sound) Waiting list decreasing in Borsod, New factory in Székesfehérvár + Fake bank cards

19. 3 (2 + 1 news item with sound) Homage to victims of air catastrophe in Hejce, Community development program in Debrecen + Unlicensed meat in Zala county.

To be able to place the above data it should be taken into consideration that in the 20 minute program there is only 1.5 minutes for a piece of news.

At the same time it is worth examining if more news could fit into the program. The only newspaper I monitored during the same time interval (between 19 and 28 of January) is Kisalföld, resulting in the following 15 articles that would have been worthy of a national news program as well:

- 23. (updated on the 29th) Closure of Tescos in Győr: properties for rent and/or sale
- 28. Head injury caused by falling tree – casualty rushed to Győr by air ambulance
- 28. Three times murderer sentenced to 40 years in Győr
- 28. Solution for overcrowded trains? Hourly IC train service to be installed on Csorna-Győr-Budapest line
- 27. Rats running among the children in playground in Győr
- 27. Strategic agreement between the Government and NEMAK Győr Kft.
- 26. Medical miracle – severed arm stitched back on and moving
- 23. Shock: 107 illegal border crossers caught on two trains in Győr
- 23. Little girl drowned in toilet – verdict in Győr: no one to go to prison
- 23. Roma mayor of Acs ID-ed
- 22. Conductor called passenger a cheat for using civil servant's discount
- 21. Mayors work together to build Euro Velo 6 bicycle road
- 17 mayors from the banks of the Danube from Győr to Szentendre signed a mutual agreement
- 21. Successful project of 140 million Ft at university in Győr

The two-year project aimed at the promotion and promulgation of scientific results at Széchenyi University.

21. Government promises a road between Sopron and Csorna

19. Fellow patients witness suicide jump at hospital in Győr

Based on the above findings it can be established that there would have been enough regional news, but the national news did not deal with them because it was not created for that purpose. This is also without mentioning the fact that these 15 pieces of news originated from one county only, therefore, due to their quantity as well, the national news could not have included them. In summary it can be ascertained that national media is not able to cover the functions of the regional news service. It should also be emphasized that the above analysis did not include the whole program of Radio Kossuth, but solely one segment of it, the Déli Krónika.

We shall now take a look at the local media. During the same time interval 5 articles appeared with regional news in the Győr+. The issue of the 23rd January includes an article „Road to avoid Győr from the East, and the issue on the 30th has an article titled „Fatal accident on motorway M1 (and subsequent closure and diversion)”, „NEMAK: the strategy of development (the government signed a strategic letter of agreement with the Mexican NEMAK Győr Kft located in the Győr Interna-

tional Industrial Park)”, „Third anniversary of the hospital helipad. The helicopter makes fifty life-saving trips every year’, „University overview: where to?”

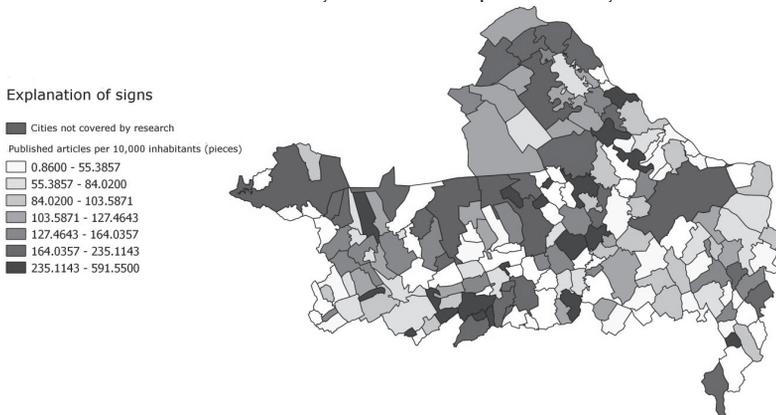
Considering all the above it can be stated that neither the national radio station nor the local daily covers regional functions, and they are not designed for that purpose either.

Some argue that regional media is unnecessary as it is not able to cover the entire region, because they only broadcast from the city where they are based. To refute this I am citing the analysis of the local daily, *Kisalföld*. In the program titled „The Győr Vehicle Production Region as the new direction and means of regional development” we have examined the connection between the number and length of the articles written about a certain settlement and the distance of this settlement from where the newspaper headquarter is based.

In our study we examined 294 issues from 2013. We didn’t deal with the large towns such as Győr, Sopron and the medium sized towns such as Mosonmagyaróvár, Csorna and Kapuvár, since they already have designated pages in every issue. We examined the quantity of the articles, the cover page appearances, the length of the articles and we compared those with the distance from the city where the publishing company is based, so basically the distance the correspondent needs to travel in order to write the article.

The number of articles per 10,000 residents is depicted on the map (figure 1.). It can be seen that even though there are blank areas, these cannot be definitely linked to the distance. It is obvious that the newspaper dealt more with the small towns halfway between Győr and Kapuvár, Győr and Mosonmagyaróvár, to the benefit of Abda, Lébény, Ásványráró, Rábapatona and Enese, respectively. Around Sopron you can see Fertőd in darker colours, around Mosonmagyaróvár it is Jánossomorja, Hegyeshalom, Rajka, Dunakiliti, and to the South Tét and Beled.

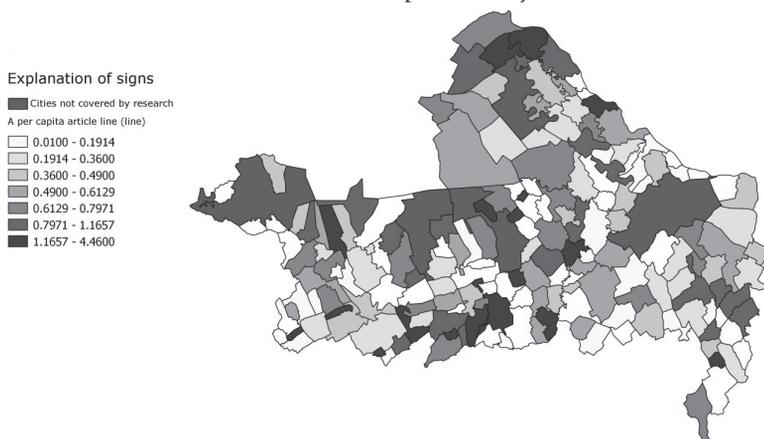
Figure 1: Number of articles per 10,000 residents in the 2013 issues of *Kisalföld* in Győr-Moson-Sopron county



Source: own edition based on data in *Kisalföld*.

Figure 2. shows the same except it is based on the length of the articles instead of their quantity. The two maps are almost the same, so with the distance from Győr the length of the articles does not either.

Figure 2: Number of article lines per resident in the 2013 issues of Kisalföld in Győr-Moson-Sopron county



Source: own edition based on data in Kisalföld.

Even common sense dictates that neither the amount nor the length of the articles decreases with distance. It is in the newspaper's interest to cover all areas in the region; failing to do so would ruin its reputation. Why would it be regional/countywide, if it didn't deal with a settlement just because it is too far away from the location of the newspaper headquarters? Therefore they monitor the frequency of articles about each settlement and if there is a longer gap, they will create one even if nothing special happens.

Capital residents are often astonished about the severity of cultural and other values of the countryside, about the existence of newspapers, television and radio. Usually they are the ones to argue for the unnecessary of regional media, referring to its low standards. Table 1 demonstrates the opposite; it shows that journalists who work in the countryside are able to perform at the same level as their counterparts from the capital.

Table 1: Performance of a journalist from the countryside in Radio Kossuth

	November	December	January
Number of days his writings appeared	26	28	29
Redaction-hosting	5	3	6
Interview, report, commentary	53	66	70

Source: own research.

He did all of these in 11 programs: Jelenlét (Presence), Hajnal-táj (Dawn), Közelről (Close-up), 180 perc (180 Minutes), Szombat délelőtt (Saturday Morning), Szombat délután (Saturday Afternoon), Vasárnap délután (Sunday Afternoon), Belépő (Entry), A hely (The Place). Beforehand this person had worked in regional media, just like the majority of the countryside correspondents working for the radio station. Obviously he is successful in the national programs of Radio Kossuth, otherwise his employment would have been terminated a long time ago.

Although maybe a weaker argument, but since opponents of regional media often claim that it is not economically viable, it is still worth an examination. Table 2 shows the number of copies of the county and national newspapers. I would like to point out that the copy number of the historically leading news source, Népszabadság, has decreased from 108,000 to 43,000 in 6 years, and at the same time Kisalföld's copy numbers decreased from 76,000 to 64,000. This means that while the national newspaper lost 60% of its readers, the regional one lost only 16% of them.

Table 2: Number of newspaper copies between 2008 and 2014

Title	Sold copies altogether during the first 6 months of 2008	Sold copies altogether during the first 6 months of 2013	Sold copies altogether during the first 6 months of 2014
Kisalföld	75819	65401	63772
Vas Népe	53761	43891	42878
Zalai Hírlap	52519	42117	41202
Népszabadság	108503	49189	43571
Magyar Nemzet	59231	38708	37539
Népszava	22447	15245	14001

Source: own edition based on MATESZ data.

If assumed that the selling rate is linked to the economical power of the newspaper and accepted that just like in every other economical context it is true for the media as well, that only the economically powerful companies can subsist, then we have to ascertain that the local daily is by no means weaker than a national one.

After the analysis of the data released by the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (Table 3) it can be stated that between 2011 and 2013 the same happened with regards to the local media: the regional stations were more lucrative than the local ones.

Table 3: Profit of local and regional electronic media between 2011 and 2013

	Produced profit			Produced loss			Even		
	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013
Local radio	47%	53%	69%	46%	39%	31%	7%	8%	0%
Local TV	54%	37%	55%	43%	55%	37%	3%	8%	8%
Regional radio	50%	70%	62%	44%	30%	38%	6%	0%	0%

Source: own edition based on NMIA data.

In the research mentioned earlier we also examined the question: where do local citizens get their information? Then we examined the relation of local and national versions of the same media type to the local and national information collection based on all the answers. (Table 4) 2706 people answered the question regarding their information source of national news and 2712 the question regarding news of their close environment. Concerning the media, local and regional news is read in the newspapers, national news is viewed on national TV channels.

Table 4: Differences between references to local/regional and national media

media	national (2706)	local, regional (2712)
weekly newspaper	193	1024
daily newspaper	422	998
national TV	3151	632
commercial radio	531	832
online	729	456
networking	1173	1560

Source: own edition based on answers in FAQ.

From the comparisons it can be ascertained that people use more local printed media for local news than for national news, regardless of the frequency of the issues (daily or weekly). However, concerning national news people predominantly use national TV and the Internet. This means that people are willing to pay for local information, but not, or very seldom, for national news.

In sum, this writing tells us that regional media definitely has a place, as it is able to meet its objective. Its role is covered neither by national nor by local media. It is economically self-reliant and is even able to compete with national media. Journalists working in local daily are competent enough to perform at the same level as their counterparts in the national media.

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HUNGARIAN SUMMARY

A magyarországi médiarendszerben a legnehezebb a regionális média elhelyezése. A nehézséget az okozza elsősorban, hogy a felületes szemlélő szerint olyan, hogy regionális média nem is létezik. Hiszen a regionális televíziók kapuira éppúgy lakat került, mint a regionális rádiókéra, tényleges, valódi regionális újságok meg nem léteznek. Ezek a mondatok már önmagukban sem fedik le a teljes igazságot, de ennek ellenére érdemes mélyebben megvizsgálni az állításokat. Azok, akik megkérdőjelezik a regionális média létezését, általában a következő érveket szokták felsorolni: nincs szükség a regionális médiára, mert egyrészt az országos, másrészt a helyi ellátja a feladatát. Az is gyakran elhangzik, hogy azért nincs rá szükség, mert nem tud ellátni tényleges regionális feladatot, vagy mert nem életképes gazdaságilag. Végül a regionális média létét tagadók szerint azért sincs rá szükség, mert nem megfelelő a színvonala. Írásomban tényekkel cáfolom ezeket az állításokat.