

Should we Consider Local Newspaper Chains Local Media? Development of the Local Press Chain in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Local press, even if it is part of a publishing chain, is understood as a local medium. It is assumed that local press titles within such chains would similarly display an organizational structure typical to local media production. However, serious concerns remain as to just how local these operations are in light of trends towards organizational news consolidation. This paper seeks to clarify these concerns through a mixed-method analysis of the development of the dominant local press chain Vltava-Labe-Press in the Czech Republic between 1989 and 2009. This manuscript considers how this particular media organization has in this period addressed economic change, and the extent to which the focus of its content can actually be defined as local. The VLP chain's local development is traced qualitatively using document analysis and interviews. Content changes were analysed quantitatively. The research findings suggest that there is little distinction between local press chain titles and national newspapers.

KEY WORDS

Chain ownership – Czech media system – delocalization – localization – local communities – local newspapers

1. Introduction

Local media are an irreplaceable part of any domestic democratic media system, comprising a specific set of characteristics that are crucially important for the development and dissemination of the news in relation to its sources and readers – primarily through their proximity, a point several scholars convincingly argue (Killiby, 1994; Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; Demers, 1996). One of the most important attributes of local media, specifically local press, is how they are an inextricable part of the local community. Distinct from other types of media, the local press ostensibly serve two important functions in society related to the construction of community – namely an integrative and emancipatory function.

In relation to the former, Robert Park demonstrated how, individuals' community ties were associated with newspaper use which served to maintain and support those ties (Park, 1975; cf. Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988, p. 456). Merton (1950) further explored a set of relationships between a local community and local newspapers, illuminating how was membership in local community organizations associated with an interest to the local newspapers. In turn, Janowitz (1952; cf. Finnegan & Viswanath,

1988, p. 456) formulated the *community integration hypothesis* – the greater individuals' integration into their communities, the greater their use of newspapers. The community integration concept is operationalized as *participation in*, and *identification with* a local community (cf. Viswanath et al., 1990; Killiby, 1994; Jeffres et al., 1988).

A number of studies have shown that readers prefer local content in the media (Pácl, 1997; Ivantyšyn, 1995; Fenton et al., 2010). But the core feature to this appeal for the local press, according to readers surveyed, is simply *closeness*. Research for Media Trust (Fenton et al., 2010), which focused on the issue of whether local media in the United Kingdom meet the news needs of local communities, provides significant empirical support for the importance of the concept of closeness, or (in the case of the latter above), the *emancipatory function of local media*. For as respondents emphasized in this study, they wanted “to have a voice, to hear stories from their local community and see their local lives reflected.” Moreover, they clearly understood that “local news that is not local is not news.” that a “local news service [...] gives a voice to the voiceless” and that they maintained a preference for the “everyday ‘watchdogging’ that goes with journalists’ actual presence in the community and at events,” as well as their “representation [in that...] local outlets better represented (readers) than national news” (Fenton et al., 2010, pp. 16, 22, 25, 26; cf. Richards, 2012; Ross, 2007; Gaziano & McGrath, 1987).

However, this set of distinctions regarding the characteristics of the local press have their limitations. As Croteau and Hoynes (2001, p. 155) point out, localism maintains two core qualifications: local control and local content. In turn, when local control is lost, it is important to consider how local content is affected. This question is particularly important in the Czech context in light of the development of the local press after 1989. Currently, Vltava-Labe-Press is the strongest local press publishing house with 73 titles represented in virtually every Czech district. It can presume, that this corporate owner lost the local control over the newspaper; the question is if it was conscious management decision, effort of local content producers—journalists or just expectable consequence of economic development of local media. Examining the impact and the growth of this chain has had on the production of local content and the cultural organization of these media outlets is important for determining whether these developments have been positive or negative in relation to serving the public's local civic needs and desires in relation to their local news.

In the following retrospective study, I explore delocalization as a developmental phenomenon and its particular consequences for the idea of the local press. This is followed by a contextual description of developments within the Czech local press. Finally, I consider Vltava-Labe-Press as a case study as a means to discern how the process of delocalization relates to its development as a local Czech press publishing house.

2. Delocalization of Local Press

The local press as an institution is threatened by current developments related to media economics, namely globalized market forces redefining local media as a profit generating business or in reaction to the consequences of 2008 financial crisis.¹ Several scholars have identified the source of this crisis in relation to local media as emanating from commercial pressures (Fenton et al., 2010; Harnischmacher, 2014; Franklin & Murphy, 1998; Franklin & Murphy, 1991; Franklin, 2006; Franklin, 2004).

Perhaps the most important consequence related to this recent commercialization trend is the potential for the *delocalization of local media*, which Croteau and Hoynes theorize as the disappearance of local characteristics of media organization and media content (2001, p. 155). In this scenario, the organizational structure and mode of production related to media content moves from a locality to a centralized location producing a decrease in coverage of local topics and the increase of external media content. Conversely, localization is understood as the strengthening of the local characteristics of media organization at the level of its organizational structure and its production of media content, enhancing the prominence and importance of local topics in its media content. In fact, the processes of delocalization and localization can occur simultaneously in the same medium. Therefore, while there is a movement towards the loss of “locality” in local media, an alternative trend is simultaneously apparent in the form of growing localization (or even hyperlocalization),² a development previously addressed (Ewart, 2013; Waschková Císařová, 2007).

Consequently, delocalization becomes primarily evident at the levels of media organization and media content. The *delocalization of a media organization* is visible as a delocalization of the organizational structure of that media organization, stemming from a tendency to centralize production as a means to save costs. In the publishers’ efforts to centralize key management decisions, local news is literally evicted from its sources and the public it serves, structurally by extracting the decision-making processes from the vicinity and literally, by relocating the press offices to cheaper locations, which most often means from the geographic centre to the periphery of local cities. The consequence is the loss of normal contact between the local newspapers/journalists and their local readers/sources (Franklin, 2006; see also Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Hess & Waller, 2014). Another consequence often consists in a reduction of staff in these organizations (Jakubowicz, 2007) similarly affecting their efficacy to serve their community in myriad of ways (Franklin, 2006).

The delocalization of the media organization can also be manifested in the form of reduced production of local media content (see e.g. Hess & Waller, 2014). In turn, ownership concentration has the potential to produce homogenized media content

¹ However, the delocalization of press production is in wider and historical perspective also understood as part of the media globalization process (see Croteau Hoynes, 2001; Kraidy, 2003; Paletz & Jakubowicz, 2003; Kleinstauber, 1992).

² What is understood as hyperlocal (online) media (see Williams et al., 2014) in fact does not exist anymore in the Czech Republic. After the financial crisis two hyperlocal existing projects were closed down. That is why the analysis is focused on the traditional, local print media only.

through the auspices of centralized production (Franklin, 2006; see also Croteau and Hoynes, 2001; Negrine, 2005). The result is a strengthened central newsroom dictating local press and editorial content electronically to its members in the chain, producing standardized topics and recycled content across many markets and reducing the diversity and local origin of the published information (Jakubowicz, 2007; Franklin, 2006).

In turn, a *delocalization of media content* – due to these processes of centralization (Kleinstauber, 1992, pp. 151–152; see also Franklin, 2006) and rationalization (Franklin & Murphy, 1991, pp. 194–195; see also Franklin & Murphy, 1998; Franklin, 2004; Franklin, 2006) – is often observed in the form of a measureable loss in relation to the number of local topics covered in the editorial content, the content structure itself (sections and pages) and the local formal characteristics of the newspapers (layout, header, etc.). The correlation between the processes of delocalization and the relational decrease in local content remain largely unexplored.

3. Czech Local Press

Very little research has been done on any aspect of the Czech local media. In the past sporadic research was conducted on issues that only link marginally to the subject of this manuscript, namely on readers' structure and content specifics of regional media in the particular area of the Czech Republic (Pácl, 1997), the selected socio-professional characteristics of local journalists (Volek, 2007) and issues of media ownership (Benda, 2007; Šmíd, 2004a, 2004b; Štětka & Kouřil, 2005). Recent Czech thesis work has considered domestic local media; however, these have been focused on very narrowly defined issues such as their role in the overall media system (Heřmánková, 2007; Pakosta, 1995; Tomandl, 2006; Vaněk, 2009). And while there has been a longer tradition of local media research in the Slovak Republic (when the countries were joined as Czechoslovakia), most of the studies are outdated (Brečka et al., 1998; Holina et al., 1988; Tušer & Šefčák, 1986).

Previous research (Waschková Císařová, 2013) focused on the local press³ development between the years 1989 and 2009. As the first systematic study of the structural conditions of the Czech local media, this mixed method (quantitative⁴ and

³ In accordance with several authors' typologies (Tušer, 1995; Aldridge, 2007) I define local and regional press according to its formal characteristics (periodicity – only dailies, bi-weeklies, weeklies and fortnightlies; only paid newspapers; only privately owned newspapers; geographical characteristics – local – newspapers distributed in town and districts; regional – newspapers distributed in area and region). The Czech Republic is organized into 14 regions and 76 districts. The local press is distributed in the village, community or district; the regional press is distributed in more districts or region (see more in Waschková Císařová, 2013).

⁴ I have chosen a ten-year period for the analysis (1989–2009), which shows the consequences of commercialization process without a strong influence of the financial crisis consequences. The survey was disseminated within the entire local and regional press in the Czech Republic in 2009.

qualitative⁵) study found the general state of ownership to be strongly concentrated, with one of the publishers, Vltava-Labe-Press (VLP),⁶ attaining a near monopoly on this segment of the media market (of the 132 local and regional titles published in 2009 across 50 publishing houses, 73 were owned by Vltava-Labe-Press. All of these from the VLP chain were local dailies covering virtually every district in the Czech Republic. The remaining 59 titles were mainly weeklies (50), fortnightlies (6) and bi-weeklies (3) and were unevenly represented across the republic.

VLP title sales in 2007 reached 323,855 copies sold, as compared to the average of 6,000 copies sold from its competitors' titles, ranging from a minimum of 700 to a maximum of 23,750 of one title sold in the region.

In comparing the market positions of the Czech local press publishers, there is a problem with a lack of data, as there are no publicly available statistics regarding official sales in relation to the 59 "other" publishing houses' titles, nor is there any data regarding readership and advertising revenue for these titles. Only Vltava-Labe-Press has such statistics publicly available due to their financial standing, in contrast to the smaller publishers. Consequently, in light of their market position and visibility, VLP is understood as the sole representative of the local and regional print media because the other local publishers are not included in the public statistical record in relation to the Czech media system (e.g. audit of sold copies; readership; advertising revenue), thus leaving them on the margins and barely recognizable as part of the Czech media system.

Applying the available data regarding the number of sold copies against measurements of ownership concentration (HHI index; see Napoli, 2007 and concentration ratio; see Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Doyle, 2003; Gulyás, 1999), it becomes clear that the Czech local and regional press market is absolutely (HHI index VLP was 2,162.25 points from a total 2,239.54 points) or highly (CR4 was 56.44%) concentrated, positioning Vltava-Labe-Press as a monopoly (see Doyle, 2003, p. 8; Herrick, 2003, p. 287).

As such, VLP titles are often considered to be the only local press titles available. But to what extent is a monopoly publisher considered as a local media organization and how does it fulfil the functions of local media (in relation to the aforementioned integration and emancipatory potentials; Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; Fenton et al., 2010)? These are questions that are taken up in the next section through a case study of VLP.

4. Case Study: The Delocalization of Vltava-Labe-Press

At the heart of this analysis, there is the consideration how the process of delocalization relates the development of Vltava-Labe-Press. To determine this, three research

⁵ The analysis of the documents from the years 1989–2009 and in-depth interviews with media professionals (10 managers and editors-in-chief from VLP publishing house) in 2009.

⁶ Until August 2015, the Vltava-Labe-Press publishing house was owned by the German publisher Verlagsgruppe Passau (see www.vgp.de), currently it is owned by Penta (see www.vlp.cz).

methods were utilized – in-depth interviews with ten media managers and editors-in-chief from VLP publishing house; a document analysis (internal rules, or economic statistics) and a content analysis of two different titles (České Budějovice Daily and Brno Daily) published by VLP in the years 1989–2009.

The hypothesis employed centres on identifying the growing delocalization of the Vltava-Labe-Press media organization as the consequence of the increasing commercialization process. The document analyses and the in-depth interview responses confirmed that profitability was a key aspect of VLP's commercial publishing ventures. One of the respondents remembered how the publishing house director, a representative of the German owner, checked the numbers every month:

He was there always with a “scorecard” of economic results and he asked why something works or something doesn't. Let me put it this way – they see it all only through the numbers. If the numbers were right, there was no reason to interfere. If the numbers weren't in order, they asked why. If one had compelling arguments why the numbers do not fit, one should find a way to fix it, or the director accepts facts, when it was clear. (respondent Manager 03, in-depth interview)

As part of VLP's delocalization, various indicators were observed. The first one is the gradual centralization of the entire publishing portfolio of VLP's German owner Verlagsgruppe Passau (VGP) in the Czech Republic for economic reasons as part of the rationalization process. In 2000, all of VGP local publishing firms merged into one group, following ten years of increasing ownership concentration (Collection of legal documents, No. B1028 – SL12). This was followed three years later with the merger of the VLP publishing house with peripheral subsidiary companies (Collection of legal documents, No. B1028 – SL45). Further centralization of VLP's publishing portfolio occurred in 2007 in the light of the company's financial problems⁷ leading it to divest from some of its periphery activities (e.g. publishing advertising freesheets) (Collection of legal documents, Nr. B1028 – SL108). Consequently, the whole structure of VGP's portfolio in the Czech Republic was reduced from across seven years from fourteen companies to the centralized Vltava-Labe-Press publishing house.

Another indicator of VLP's delocalization is its increased centralization of various managerial levels of its publishing house. This development came to the fore primarily in 2007, when a flattening of the organizational structure occurred leading several respondents interpret it contrastingly as a delocalization *and* localization tendency. Those who perceived it as a delocalization tendency did so in the light of how it strengthened VLP's centralized organizational structure (centralized management and newsroom) and weakened its peripheral local subsidiaries (regional management and local newsrooms), redeploying decision-making powers. This decision was enacted by VLP's Managing Director and Chairman of the Board Zoltán Morvai,⁸ can-

⁷ Partly because of the publishing house development and partly because of the financial crisis consequences (for more see Waschková Císařová, 2013).

⁸ Director Morvai made several decisions leading to the VLP publishing house and its

celling the regional management level and strengthening the central newsroom (Collection of legal documents, No. B1028 – SL99).

Critics of this development (e.g. respondent Editor-in-chief 02 and Editor-in-chief 03, in-depth interviews) framed the key problem as one of a disruption of the communication among newsrooms, as well as the advertising and distribution consensus, which lacked common management on the regional level. Simultaneously, it distanced the production of local newspapers from its readers / sources / advertisers.

As one of the respondents who witnessed these development from the beginning pointed out, there were “continuous debates” about the centralization of the organizational structure and its economic benefits.

There were immense visions of what could be achieved through centralization, and in the end we can see that it didn't bring such effects, on the contrary. [...] We had one man in charge of the distribution in every region [...] there were close communications with customers [...]. After the centralization [...] the bond was disrupted [...]. People were calling to an anonymous number and there was maybe support [...] but the local newspapers didn't know about any problems [...], it was a huge loss [...]. This wasn't considered, we thought only about savings [...]. The centralization of the company grew over time [...] but it is not endless. (respondent Editor-in-chief 02, in-depth interview)

In the same period (between 2006 and 2008) there were significant attempts to strengthen the position of the local newsrooms in VLP's organizational structure, which were supported by the Editorial Director of the publishing house and member of the Board Roman Gallo. He tried to emancipate local newsrooms, give them more people, better technology and stronger decision-making powers (respondent Manager 04, in-depth interview).

If there hadn't been Gallo [...], this newspaper would have had a national character and we would get only one page of regional news [...]. Gallo was able to convince Morvai that we have to think locally, not nationally. (respondent Editor-in-chief 02, in-depth interview)

Unfortunately, this localization tendency ended when Gallo left the publishing house in 2008 and the subsequent management decided again to strengthen the regional level of the organization ultimately at the expense of the local level (respondent Manager 01, in-depth interview).

products delocalization after 2006. He decided to change the newspapers' headings to the unified title Daily plus name of the particular district. It meant disappearance of dozens of traditional titles of local press and formal unification of the chain newspapers which can be understood as a disruption of the local press, local readers and local sources relationships, or delocalization. All 73 titles of the chain were understood as the only one national newspaper Daily, which started to compete on the national newspapers level, for example in circulation and readership statistics.

Another important reason for delocalization was related to human resources.⁹ The local newsrooms had more work after 2006 due to the flattening of the organizational structure and online publishing development. Moreover, the 2008 financial crisis brought efficiencies into the picture, producing a reduction of the number of the employees together with an increased workload in the form of a convergence of the journalists' functions and a further deterioration of working conditions for journalists.

There were seven journalists in the local newsroom [...], today there are only five of them [...], but they have to prepare the content for print, online [...], agency, multimedia [...]. They have a lot to do, so let's take away several pages from the local part of the newspapers [...]. And the reader will find less content from the locality. (respondent Editor-in-chief 02, in-depth interview)

Reducing the number of employees within local newspapers affects the ways media organizations connect with their locality, a point only exacerbated by the fact that VLP reconfigured their operations by centralizing the decision-making process and relocating their subsidiary offices to cheaper locales outside the city centres. In turn, this produced a more 'rationally-efficient' news production process, while similarly alienating local readers / sources / advertisers. (Košťál et al., 1992).

It is evident that organizational restructuring influenced the delocalization of the production of media content. The reason for centralization of production in the VLP publishing house – as in most delocalization efforts – were economic. Reducing the marginal production processes by centralizing production decreases advertising and printing costs. It also, however, distorts the production phases (newsroom, advertising, printing house and distribution), which are located in different parts of the country. For this reason, the production structure distanced itself from its local constituency, as explained by one of the respondents:

What is the most striking in centralization, is the centralization of the printing in one place. Centralization of newspaper printing – it dramatically changes newsroom deadlines and the reader is losing something from the content. This recreates the barrier between local readers and local newspapers, it again means losing supporters. Centralization steals away and alienates readers and advertisers from local newspapers. The relationship with the reader must be built. The centralized production of advertising is logical but it does not fit with the character of the local newspaper. But the editors

⁹ The number of VLP's employees peaked in 2001 after the acquisition of other publishing houses (1,716 employees), and subsequently declined until 2005 (1,553 employees). There was an increase in the number of employees in 2006 due to the strengthening of the local editorial staff and the growth of online reporting (1,710 employees). The number of employees then decreased further to a historical low in 2009 (1,339 employees) in response to the financial crisis (Collection of legal documents, No. B1028 – SL78, SL92, SL94, SL95, SL108).

do not even know what advertisements are in their newspapers. These are little things, bits and pieces, but they definitely create a barrier between local advertising clients and local publishers. These nerves that bond local newspapers to the locality are cut and we are losing readers. It all works, but it has its ends. (respondent Editor-in-chief 02, in-depth interview)

This development was enabled by technological innovation. From 2006 VLP innovated most of its common communication systems so as to simplify sharing content and information among all 73 local newsrooms, the central newsroom and all other parts of production process. A new editorial system, advertising system and production system were introduced after 2006 as well (Collection of legal documents, No. B1028 – SL108). Consequently, all parties acknowledged this development as delocalization, including most of the respondents (in-depth interviews) and the publishing house management itself (Collection of legal documents, No. B1028 – SL108).

The impact of delocalization becomes expressly evident in an analysis of media content of two VLP dailies – *České Budějovice Daily* and *Brno Daily*¹⁰ – between 1989 and 2009.¹¹ As an outcome of the centralization prospect, one would expect to see a homogenization of content and procedures across every local daily of the VLP chain,¹² as news production becomes increasingly produced from a central newsroom or wire sources (e.g. press agencies).

From the findings, there was an immense growth (more than three times) in the local topic coverage between 1990 and 1993 in the *České Budějovice Daily* (CBD) (see figure 1), Confirming the thesis, that there was originally an increased focus on local content after VLP initially purchased it.¹³

Since 1993, a nearly steady decline in the coverage of local topics in the CBD content can be observed, in contrast to the (more or less) balanced coverage of

¹⁰ Both analyzed dailies is published in the bigger towns (Brno has ca. 380,000 inhabitants and *České Budějovice* has ca. 93,000 inhabitants, but the dailies have been after 1989 profiled as local, district type of media.

¹¹ In the content analysis, I analyzed 11,996 units of editorial content (article, graphics) – 8,138 in the *České Budějovice Daily*, 3,858 in the *Brno Daily*. Analysis of the formal characters of the media content (structure and hierarchy of sections, heading) was focused on 108 entire issues in the *České Budějovice Daily* and 60 in the *Brno Daily*. The analysis focused on the content of *České Budějovice Daily* (CBD) between 1989 and 2009 and *Brno Daily* (BD) between 2000 and 2009, taking into account the long-term development of the content and its state before (1989 and 2000) and after the purchase of the title by the VLP publishing house.

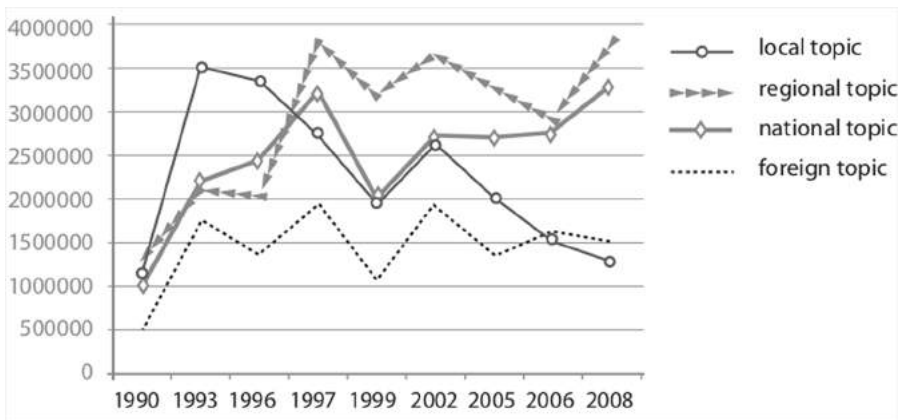
¹² In the content analysis I distinguish among local topics (topics related to the village, community, town and district); regional topics (topics related to the region or other districts beyond those that the analysed dailies are formally connected with); national topics (topics related to the whole republic or other regions) and foreign topics (topic related to foreign countries).

¹³ Creating local (district, not regional) dailies was the original aim of the German owner of VLP director Franz Xaver Hirtreiter, who formulated it at the founding General Meeting of the publishing house (Collection of legal documents, Minutes of the General Meeting).

foreign, national and regional topics between 2002 and 2006. After the significant publishing strategy transformation in 2006 (see above) by which control of production was centralized and local content development was ostensibly emphasized, the coverage of the local topics paradoxically fell, while regional and national topic coverage increased.

The significant increase in the coverage of regional topics in the CBD in 1997 can be attributed to new law at the time which created new regional municipalities in the Czech Republic. This trend in the growth of regional and national topic coverage in the CBD content continue up to 2009.

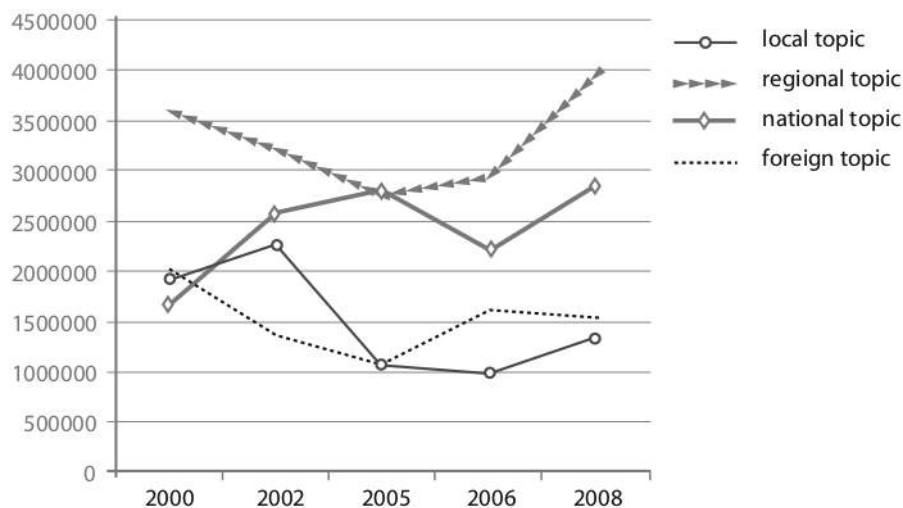
Figure 1: Local/regional/national/foreign topics coverage (mm²) development in České Budějovice Daily (CBD)



Source: Author’s own.

Moreover, in examining the development of topic coverage in the Brno Daily (BD) a gradual convergence of the title’s content with the content of the CBD becomes evident after 2001, when it was purchased by the VLP publishing house (see figure 2). Prior to this acquisition, in 2000, BD was clearly profiled as a regional newspaper with strong coverage of regional and national topics, and less focus on local and foreign topics. However, this clear classification began to fade following its transition within the VLP chain. The trend in topic coverage observed in the BD is almost identical with developments in the CBD – regional news being the most covered topics followed by national, foreign and then local topics.

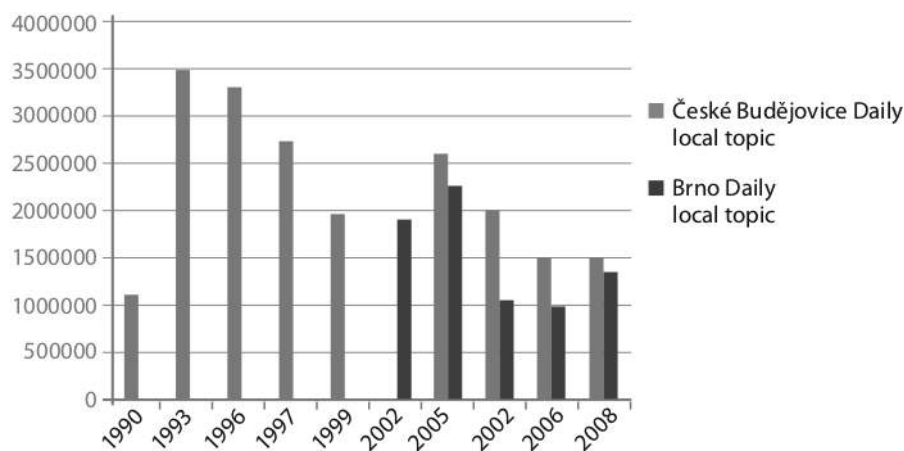
Figure 2: Local/regional/national/foreign topics coverage (mm²) development in Brno Daily (BD)



Source: Author's own.

An analysis revealed that the constant decline of local topic coverage is similar for both CBD's a BD's content development (see figure 3). Furthermore, a gradual homogenization of the two dailies' content is also apparent.

Figure 3: Changes in the coverage of local topic (mm²) in České Budějovice Daily and Brno Daily



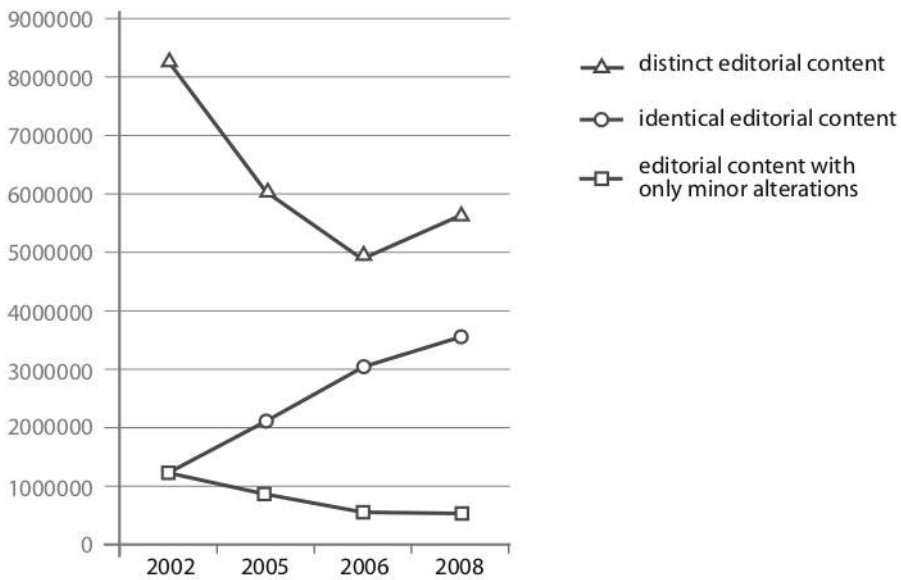
Source: Author's own.

In contrast with the manifest delocalization of the analysed content, the formal features of these newspapers *localized*. To summarize, the formal features analysis showed that the structure and hierarchy of sections in both analysed newspapers

reemphasized the local – e.g. the local (district) sections moved gradually forward in the newspapers’ structure, replacing the regional and national sections. Local topics were increasingly placed on the front page and in the most prominent positions of the front pages in both analysed newspapers. Thus, although the contents of both analysed dailies significantly *delocalized*, the concurrent development of their formal features seeks to give the impression of a growing emphasis on local topics. Yet the decreasing emphasis on local topic coverage in the analysed dailies’ content is clear even from the homogenization perspective (see figures 4 and 5).

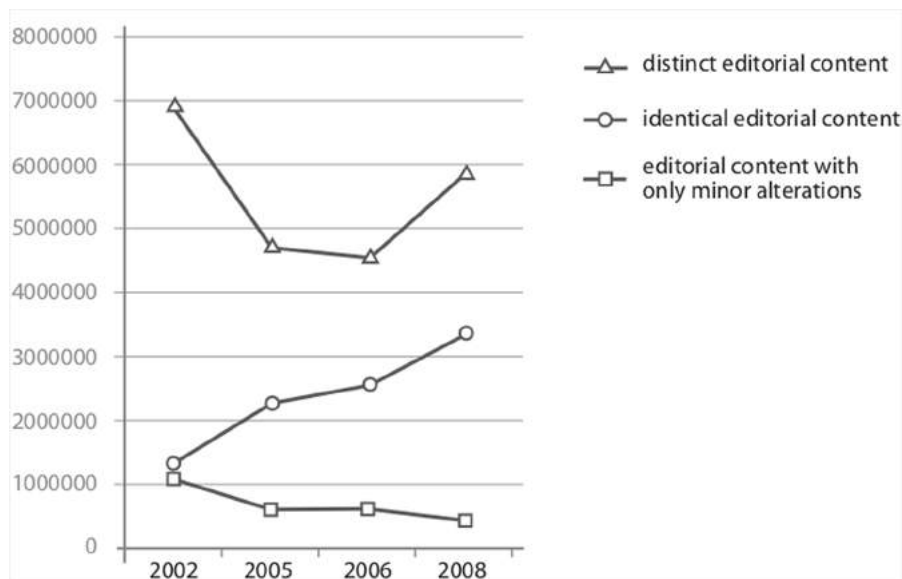
In the next section, a closer look at the growing similarities/differences in the content and formal features in both analysed dailies is presented.

Figure 4: Homogenized media content in České Budějovice Daily (coverage in mm²)



Source: Author’s own.

The content development in both dailies led to the content homogenization – i.e. coverage of the identical subject matter in both titles simultaneously grew. At the same time, there was a decline in coverage related to “editorial content with only minor alterations,” suggesting that the more similar the formal features of the analysed dailies are, the less they need to differentiate editorial content or its position in the paper for the respective readers.

Figure 5: Homogenized media content in Brno Daily (coverage in mm²)

Source: Author's own.

To summarize, from the homogenization standpoint there was a significant convergence, which ended in virtually complete homogenization (delocalized content), in 2008. This concurs with what was observed in the formal features analysis of both dailies. Immediately starting in 2002, a gradual homogenization of the formal features of both analysed newspapers – increasing number of identical sections, same structure and hierarchies of the pages in both dailies – is observable.

In conclusion, the development of media content between 1989 and 2009 of two VLP dailies confirms the processes of delocalization. In terms of the formal characteristics and media content structure, the analysis suggests localization despite and in contrast to the findings of the analysis of media content which confirms the delocalization of media content in both analysed dailies. In turn, it can be concluded that the publisher of both analysed newspapers sought to gradually strengthen the identification of the titles with the locality (district) in terms of the papers' formal characteristics, as a measure to hide the fact that the coverage of local topics actually decreased, leaving centrally produced (and homogenized) topics (e.g. national and foreign topics) in greater number than regional or local topic coverage.

Moreover, this inconsistent approach to the dailies' development, changing focus on centralization or localization, respondents of in-depth interviews (2009) reflected as the VLP publishing house's absence of vision (cf. Rouger, 2008). Respondents considered this ambiguity of publishing house direction as the major long-term problem of its development.

5. Conclusion

In considering when a local subsidiary of a chain newspaper is a local medium, many things must be considered. Paraphrasing Croteau and Hoynes (2001, p. 155), it is prudent to ask if the loss of local control means the loss of local content and whether increased commercialization and the consequences of corporate ownership produce a direct path to delocalization. These questions have driven the analysis of the delocalization process within the Czech publishing chain Vltava-Labe-Press in this manuscript.

Indeed, several indicators suggest a delocalization tendency within the operation of the VLP media organization and in relation to its content development. The consequences within its organizational structure include a move towards to increase economic efficiencies – namely a centralized publishing portfolio, as well as management and editorial structure, which can be interpreted (along with Croteau & Hoynes, 2001) as a weakening of connection to the locality, or delocalization. This weakening connection among local journalists, local sources and local readers is evident in the reduction of employees, according to Jakubowicz (2007), or in the relocation of business offices and reconfiguration of professional protocol (see Franklin, 2006; Croteau & Hoynes, 2001).

However, two trends related to localization were observed – a general expansion of local dailies in every district of the Czech Republic and an initial tendency to strengthen the position of the local newsrooms in the VLP's organizational structure, a development which ended with the resignation of key management.

In turn, the delocalization of the VLP publishing house led to the delocalization of newspapers' content, which could be expected (Kleinstauber, 1992; Franklin, 2006). The development of the media content between 1989 and 2009 within two VLP dailies further confirms and identifies the expansion of the delocalization process, where despite format reconfiguration to accentuate the local character of these presses, the content analysis confirms less actual local coverage.

In conclusion, this investigation has revealed that one consequence of corporate ownership and commercialization is the delocalization of the local press. Paradoxically this development can become a vicious circle, in that the more separated from the locality the local press is, the less attractive it is to local readers (see Fenton et al., 2010). Abdicating the press' close connection to its community means to give up on its unique relationship to that community, which is namely its biggest value that goes well beyond simple economical terms.

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