

# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONTENT OF LOCAL RUSSIAN NEWSPAPERS

## КОНТЕНТ РОССИЙСКИХ МЕСТНЫХ ГАЗЕТ

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*This article presents the results of content analysis of newspapers in small and medium-sized Russian towns. The study focuses on themes, problems in publication, and communicative characteristics of content: subjects and objects of publications, subjects of opinions, used data sources, genres, headlines and illustrations as ways to attract readers' attention. The results obtained are compared to the findings of the earlier opinion survey of editors involved in the respective aspects of editorial activities. The analysis showed that the thematic and genre diversity of periodicals is rather wide and corresponds to their functional specifics. But the editors' vision of the desired content model is not implemented in full, and this is mainly connected to the economic conditions of editorial offices, limited human resources, and lack of employee professionalism.*

**Key words:** *local press, media space, thematic model, communicative characteristics of media content, newspapers' genres.*

*В данной статье представлены результаты контент-анализа газет в малых и средних городах России. Исследование сосредоточено на выявлении тем и проблем в публикациях, а также на коммуникативных характеристиках контента: субъектах и объектах публикации, субъектах мнения, источниках информации, жанрах, заголовках и иллюстрациях как инструментах привлечения читательского внимания. Полученные результаты сопоставляются с выводами ранее проведенного опроса главных редакторов. Анализ продемонстрировал, что материалы прессы обладают широким тематическим и жанровым разнообразием, которое связано с функциональной спецификой изданий. Однако редакторское представление о желаемой контент-модели не реализуется полностью, и это во многом связано с экономическими условиями, ограниченностью человеческих ресурсов и недостатком профессионализма сотрудников.*

**Ключевые слова:** *местная пресса, медиaprостранство, тематическая модель, коммуникативные характеристики медиаконтента, газетные жанры.*

## **Methodological Base and Program of the Study**

The Periodical Press Chair of the Faculty of Journalism of Moscow State University is cooperating with the Laboratory to study current challenges of journalism and implement the project “Newspapers of small and medium-sized Russian towns in the 2010s.” The study has been performed in two stages. In 2013-14

editors and journalists were surveyed<sup>1</sup>, and in 2014-15 an analytical study of newspapers and their general content in medium-sized and small towns was performed.

The importance of the project was substantiated both in general and in detail in articles and through the authors' publications (Svitich, Smirnova, Shiriaeva, Shkondin, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, etc.). Below are the main arguments in brief.

The importance of such a complex study is connected to the fact that medium-sized and small towns traditionally have been of great importance to Russia. They are important not only for urban agglomeration, but for suburbs, because they are the centers of social, business and cultural life in the region. Municipal bodies, cultural, educational, medical and trade establishments and institutions, as well as transport infrastructure are located in cities. Medium-sized and small towns are the custodians of Russian history, folk culture, crafts, traditions and customs. Unfortunately, many cities are now in poor economic condition.

The local newspaper editions have their niche in a functional and thematic respect. First of all, they deliver information on local events to their audience. Currently, the localization is mostly performed through local media: regional, urban, and district. City editions play an important role in the lives of small and medium-sized towns. Nothing can substitute them in this respect. Sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> During the first stage of the study, editors and journalists of 66 newspapers in 26 administrative units of all Russian Federation constituent entities were polled. The standpoints and orientations of employees involved in the production of newspapers of small and medium-sized Russian towns were analyzed: functions, content, genre structure; convergent processes; relations with audience, founders and owners; status and economic conditions of editions; situation with human resources; problems and prospects of local press development (project managers: O.V. Smirnova and M.V. Shkondin, authors and supervisors of procedures L.G. Svitich and A.A. Shiriaeva).

they are the only source of information about town and district life. Local news' interest in them is a prerequisite for their particular usefulness and viability.

In provincial towns local newspapers *carry out the vital mission of preserving journalism, keeping it close to communities, respecting their needs and desires, and ensuring journalistic content is oriented on basic Russian values*. Local newspapers are expected and able to operatively inform their communities about local problems and engage civil society in the discussion of such problems and possible solutions.

The main focus of the study was the content of local editions. Local editions accomplish the very important tasks of local community consolidation, and developing the economic, social, and cultural potential of towns and districts. They also serve to foster solutions to certain problems relevant to their readers – a task in which they are successful. A detailed analysis of their practice, including the analysis of their content in comparison to the results of the editors' and journalists' survey can improve efficiency of such newspapers.

The content was an *object* of the study at the second stage of the project.

The study *aimed* to analyze the basic characteristics of the content and layout of specific varieties of newspapers.

The implementation of functional and content models of these editions results in the creation of a *media picture*. Presented to the audience, they serve to reflect the main aspects of daily living activities of particular social and territorial locations (activities of local authorities, self-administration, economics, culture, education, social support, leisure and household, etc.), activities of main establishments, institutions and production facilities; lives of different social strata and groups; and the most acute and important problems, taking into consideration the current situation of the towns and the status of their citizens.

The concept of “media picture” has been widely used in the scientific environment lately. As stated in medialogy works, a media picture developed by mass media is a comprehensive formation. It must have certain important characteristics (see, for example, Rogozina, 2013). These characteristics are primarily related to the diversity and relevancy of the presented reality. The main object of media picture is to prevent any distortion of facts, phenomena or processes. When full and objective, the presented media picture minimizes inconsistency between the audience’s real vision, in this case about the city life, their daily experience, and the way it is presented in media. Experience and knowledge, which are formed in the course of daily living activities, subject to adequate presentation in media pictures developed in periodicals, help to diversify the behavioral patterns of the representatives of local governing authorities and citizens for the purpose of their positive influence on the town and community life. Its most important effect is informational and educational (Rogozina, 2003; Shkondin, 2013). Its value-oriented role is not less important.

Media picture is developed based on the *media content* offered to audiences. This term has been widely used in modern communication, science, and medialogy. The terms “media content” and “media product” were separated because they are frequently erroneously used as synonymic, which demonstrates that the typology of media content has been developed (Kolomiets, 2014).

Various areas of journalism, genre forms and the kinds of journalist content have been differentiated (Lazutina & Raspopova, 2011), which is very important in the context of our study. Media content offers integrity and plurality. In media content the needs, values, and standpoints of various participants of informational and communicative processes – namely: journalists, heads of editorial offices, founders, owners, and audience (not only as consumers

of information, but as participants of content production) – are always reflected, though to a different extent. This is an important methodological provision, which allows us to adequately interpret the results of the media content analysis of researched newspapers.

The metafactors, which have globally changed the media content, are processes taking place across the world, the country, and the media system (Vartanova, 2013), including the digital revolution (Smirnova, 2013). The factors that determine the process of developing the content of particular editions are the level of professionalism of journalists, the mastery of new digital technologies, the level of professional independence, the access to data sources, and the quality of editorial management. The environment, in which the content of particular mass media is developed, is also important, particularly the economic condition, human resources, the administrative condition, and the material and technical base. Such factors and conditions must be taken into account to adequately interpret the results of media content analysis, in our case – the content of municipal newspapers.

The cumulative media content comprises constant flows of media texts of various types (separate publications), which are the atomic elements of media content. The concept of media text, as well as media content, are principal in mediology. Currently the theory of media text claims to occupy an independent niche in general textology, which has long-standing traditions and refers to the study of text formation principles.

The works of T. G. Dobrosklonskaya, in which the researcher goes far beyond the main research aspect and media linguistics (Dobrosklonskaya, 2005), as well as M. V. Chicherina, who studies media text in the context of media education issues (Chicherina, 2007), were very useful for the development of this study's methodology. Another important characteristic of media text with respect to

media picture and media content is its relevancy to described facts, phenomena, and processes (Misonzhnikov, 2000; Lashchuk, 2011).

In theoretical publications devoted to media text, its types and characteristics are differentiated according to the distribution channel, functional and pragmatic role, sign and genre form, authorship type and other aspects. The available theoretical base allows its efficient use not only for media texts formation, but for applied media research, in particular, the one we perform.

Using available approaches, in the present study we set the *objective to study the following parameters of texts*, published in newspapers of small and medium-sized towns: theme, problem, locality, genre structure, authors' team, opinion subjects, sources of data used in publications, objects of publications, character of headlines, character of illustrations, theme and genre of formal materials, type, and character of advertising materials.

As we know, media text is studied using qualitative and quantitative strategies. Since the objective of this study was to analyze the content of newspaper texts of small and medium-sized towns as an instant flow of information within a certain period of time, the methodology of content analysis was chosen as the most relevant because it was logical, systematic, offered accurate measurements and was able to process large quantities of texts (Semenova & Korsunskaya , 2010; Barsanova , 2006; Pashinyan, 2012).

Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was supplemented by a text analysis of particular editions (case study).

A publication was determined as an analyzed unit, the frequency of a publication's appearance with set parameters (not taking into account the occupied print space) was determined an accounted unit.

The *sampling* was made on the basis of newspapers, the employees of which had taken part in the opinion poll during the first stage of the study. The participation of different regions and administrative units

of the Russian Federation was pursued – editions from nine regions and republics, as well as from six federal districts were represented in the study. Newspapers with different frequency and founders' types (state, municipal, private) were chosen. As a result, 10 newspapers, published in 10 towns, were analyzed during the study, including 4 newspapers of medium-sized towns and 6 newspapers of small towns (fewer than 50 ths. people) in the percentage composition, comparable to the sampling for the survey of editorial staff.

All publications of the chosen newspapers for the period of October – December 2013 were coded. This was the particular period when the survey of editors and journalists was conducted. The aim was to compare the results of content analysis to the data obtained during the editorial staff survey as correctly as possible. In general, 17,362 text and illustrative materials were coded. According to the content structure, 22.4% of editorial and journalistic publications, 9.7% of formal materials, 13.2% illustrations and 46.7% of advertising materials were presented.

### **Thematic and Problematic Structure of Content**

The concepts of “media picture” and “media text” were methodologically important in this stage of the study. The analysis of the first stage's results – the editors and journalists survey (Svitich, Smirnova, Shiriaeva, Shkondin, 2015) – showed that editors and journalists were well aware of the problems in their towns and the interests and needs of local residents; that was why they set forth the dominants in the **content and thematic model** of editions in accordance with the most important, including adverse, aspects of life in small and medium-sized towns, which is natural, taking into account the real conditions in such towns (*Table 1*).

Table 1

**The answers of editors and journalists to the question:  
“To what extent is the coverage  
of the below topics important in your newspaper?”  
(in % of the total number of respondents)**

**Results of content analysis (in % of the number of publications)**

<b>Topics</b> <i>Ranked according to the second column results</i>	<b>Opinion survey results</b>		<b>Content analysis results</b>	
	<b>Highly important topic, %</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Housing and utilities infrastructure, condition and performance of utilities	86	<b>1</b>	7.5	<b>9</b>
Construction, repair of roads, other utilities	81	<b>2</b>	1.8	<b>22</b>
Construction, repair of municipal housing	79	<b>3</b>	2.0	<b>21</b>
Performance of municipal authorities	76	<b>4-5</b>	12.4	<b>2</b>
Health care sector (availability of medical institutions, human resources, remuneration, equipment, quality of health care services, etc.)	76	<b>4-5</b>	4.4	<b>12</b>
Transportation services, town traffic performance	74	<b>6</b>	2.9	<b>17</b>
Education sector (availability and status of educational establishments, human resources, quality of education, development of vocational training, etc.)	71	<b>7-8</b>	8.8	<b>6</b>
Social support (pensioners, disabled citizens, large families, etc.)	71	<b>7-8</b>	6.6	<b>8</b>
Police performance, fight against crime	67	<b>9</b>	10.6	<b>4</b>
Development of industrial sector, production enterprises, medium and small-sized business	66	<b>10</b>	4.3	<b>13</b>
Urban economy in general	63	<b>11</b>	2.5	<b>19</b>

<b>Topics</b> <i>Ranked according  to the second column results</i>	<b>Opinion  survey results</b>		<b>Content  analysis results</b>	
	<b>Highly  important  topic, %</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Cultural sector (availability of cultural establishments, human resources, material and technical, financial conditions, etc.)	61	<b>12</b>	9.0	<b>5</b>
Environment, provision of public amenities, landscaping of towns	60	<b>13</b>	2.9	<b>18</b>
Employment, development of the labor market, creation of new jobs	56	<b>14</b>	1.3	<b>23</b>
Local (municipal) self-administration	54	<b>15</b>	5.7	<b>11</b>
Family issues, parenting	50	<b>16</b>	6.2	<b>10</b>
Moral and ethical issues	49	<b>17-18</b>	3.3	<b>14</b>
Youth issues	49	<b>17-18</b>	3.1	<b>15</b>
Sports, physical education, leisure, tourism, and recreation	48	<b>19</b>	16.2	<b>1</b>
Agriculture, backyard farming	46	<b>20</b>	3.1	<b>16</b>
Accidents, criminal cases	44	<b>21</b>	10.8	<b>3</b>
Performance of commercial institutions (availability of goods, price policy, trade culture, etc.)	39	<b>22</b>	2.4	<b>20</b>
History, ethnography, folk crafts, touristic potential of the town	38	<b>23</b>	7.5	<b>7</b>

If we analyze the first indexed “very important topic” in the thematic model, we see that the editorial staff considers the below topics related to the everyday life of a town and its residents as high-priority (from 60 to 86% of responses): housing and utilities, construction and maintenance of municipal housing, roads, performance of municipal traffic, environment, provision of urban amenities, social support, employment and finances, human

resources for educational, medical and cultural institutions, that means that these are particularly the topics, which the residents of such towns consider urgent and challenging and which must be in the focus of newspapers. The editorial staff also acknowledges the importance of activities of local authorities, law enforcement agencies and the fight with crime. Urban economy, the development of the industrial sector, production enterprises, small and medium-sized businesses, employment, the development of the labor market, and the creation of new jobs also belong to the category of strategic issues, because of the crisis situation in such sectors in small and medium-sized towns.

Nevertheless, the comparison of the vision of editors and journalists of such newspapers about the expected (normative to a certain extent) thematic model with the findings of content analysis study, meaning with the actual content, definitely reveals considerable discrepancies between the model and the actual content structure for a number of thematic positions. The content analysis revealed that the first positions were occupied by publications on the local authorities' activities, which were ranked high in the thematic model characterized by the editorial staff, but were not of the foremost priority (4-5 position). This can be explained by the newspapers' proximity to local authorities and the orientation on the implementation of their program, though it is not rare that local authorities "usurp" media resources, converting them into a tool for information servicing to its agencies.

If we combine such positions of the codification system as "leisure" (8.3 %) and "sports" (7.9 %), as it was in the questionnaire for editors and journalists, we see that this topic dominates among others and accounts for 16.2 % references. At the same time the leisure topic was ranked only 20-th among the most important topics. The third place in the actual content was occupied by the

criminal theme, which was placed on the 22-nd position in the desired model. The reasons are obvious. Publications on leisure and criminal cases traditionally attract readers' attention, so the editorial board, which experiences a difficult economic situation, cannot ignore them, though such topics should not dominate in newspapers of general content.

Considerable discrepancies can be seen with regard to other aspects of newspaper content. The topics which occupied first three positions in the editorial staff vision of the thematic model (housing and utilities, construction and maintenance of municipal housing and roads), were found on positions 9, 21 and 22 in the actual content. We must add also transportation services thereto (positions 6 and 17, respectively).

A clearly insufficient amount of attention is devoted to social issues (social support, employment, industrial issues, economics), which are of particular concern among residents and which have been considered very important by editorial staff members.

There are also some "positive discrepancies". Journalists undeservingly placed history, ethnography, folk crafts and touristic prospective of towns on 23rd position among important topics, but these topics occupied the 7th position in the actual content. More attention is devoted to the cultural sector than it was considered necessary by the newspapers' personnel (12th position in the survey and 5th in the content).

A more detailed analysis of the edition types reveals that their content also differs. The content of *medium-sized towns* includes three times more publications on criminal cases and accidents and, hence, the activities of law enforcement bodies, than the content of newspapers of small towns. This is natural, since the bigger the town is, the more offenses are committed. Besides, this can be explained by the fact that editions in medium-sized towns are more

commercialized, as their founders are more often private persons, compared to small towns. Their editors are more inclined to take advantage of such interests of their audience.

In general, the comparison of content with the thematic model, which was developed based on the opinions of editors and journalists of newspapers of medium-sized towns, showed that there was a significant inconsistency with the actual content of newspapers, if we compared ranks. It is especially the case for housing services and utilities, and conditions of transport and roads. This means that editors do not have the opportunity to implement their priorities in practice, which is caused, among other factors, by the financial condition of newspapers and the necessity to serve the audience's interests more than the actual needs of residents.

The study showed that newspapers of *small towns* are closer to their audiences, as well as to their founders – local authorities. The performance of local authorities, which act as newspaper founders, is in the first place. Culture, history, ethnography and sports play a significant role. Among important issues covered in newspapers of small towns, are issues of municipal self-administration, performance of housing and utility services, social support (pensioners, disabled citizens, orphanages, assistance to large families, etc.). The newspapers also cover family issues, parenting, and patriotic education (Frolova, 2014).

The gap between the opinions of the editorial staffs about the desired model and the actual content of newspapers is lesser in newspapers of small towns, though such topics as health care, condition of roads, industrial and economic difficulties, and employment issues are overlooked. In general, newspapers of small towns are closer to their audience than newspapers of medium-sized towns, which is quite understandable, and their staff implement their vision of important issues more consistently in their newspapers.

At the same time the presence of publications on particular topics does not tell us how they are covered, though it is very important for qualitative analysis of editors' offices' performances. For this purpose, *evaluation grids* were included to enable content analysis of publications, qualifying positive, neutral/balanced, and negative coverage of topics (*Table 2*).

*Table 2*

**Assessment modality of publications  
(in % of the total number of publications)**

<b>Topics</b> <i>Ranked according to the second column results</i>	<b>Publications modality</b>		
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral Balanced</b>	<b>Critical</b>
Education sector (availability and status of educational establishments, human resources, quality of education, development of vocational training, etc.)	<b>6.3</b>	2.0	0.3
Cultural sector (availability of cultural establishments, human resources, material and technical financial conditions, etc.)	<b>5.9</b>	2.7	0.2
Leisure, recreation, tourism	<b>5.4</b>	2.8	0.1
History, ethnography, folk crafts, tourism potential	<b>5.3</b>	2.2	0.2
Performance of municipal authorities	<b>5.0</b>	6.5	0.7
Sports, physical education	<b>4.7</b>	3.0	0.2
Patriotic education	<b>4.6</b>	1.03	0.05
Family issues, parenting	<b>4.4</b>	1.5	0.3
Social support (pensioners, disabled citizens, orphanages, large families, etc.)	<b>3.6</b>	2.3	0.6
Local (municipal) self-governance	<b>2.9</b>	2.3	0.5
Development of industrial sector, production enterprises, medium and small-sized business	<b>2.7</b>	1.3	0.4
Moral and ethical issues	<b>2.4</b>	0.4	0.5

Topics <i>Ranked according to the second column results</i>	Publications modality		
	Positive	Neutral Balanced	Critical
Police performance, fight against crime	<b>2.1</b>	8.4	0.2
Youth issues	<b>2.1</b>	0.7	0.3
Condition of housing and utilities infrastructure and performance of utility companies	<b>1.9</b>	2.6	2.0
Agriculture, backyard farming	<b>1.9</b>	1.01	0.2
Health care sector (availability of medical institutions, human resources, remuneration, equipment, quality of and payment for healthcare services, etc.)	<b>1.9</b>	2.0	0.6
Religion, compassion, charity	<b>1.7</b>	0.7	0.02
House-keeping, domestic life, home interior design	<b>1.5</b>	0.7	0.05
Environment, provision of public amenities, landscaping of towns	<b>1.3</b>	1.05	0.5
Transportation services, town traffic performance	<b>1.2</b>	1.1	0.6
Living standard, appearance, fashion, healthy lifestyle	<b>1.1</b>	1.03	0.07
Emergencies, EMERCOM, safety, civil protection	<b>1.1</b>	1.8	0.4
Military conflicts, military service	<b>1.0</b>	1.4	0.1
Performance of commercial institutions (availability of goods, price policy, trade culture, etc.)	<b>0.9</b>	0.9	0.6
Urban economics in general <i>(budget, financing, taxes)</i>	<b>0.7</b>	1.5	0.3
Employment, development of labor market, creation of new jobs	<b>0.7</b>	0.5	0.1
Construction, repair of municipal housing	<b>0.7</b>	1.05	0.3
Accidents, criminal cases	<b>0.6</b>	9.5	0.8
Construction, repair of roads, other utilities	<b>0.5</b>	0.6	0.6
Demography issues	<b>0.5</b>	0.3	0.02

<b>Topics</b> <i>Ranked according to the second column results</i>	<b>Publications modality</b>		
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral Balanced</b>	<b>Critical</b>
Interaction with mass media	<b>0.5</b>	-	-
Psychology of relationships, sexual relations	<b>0.4</b>	0.1	0.02
Gender issues	<b>0.3</b>	0.2	0.1
Gardening, vegetable gardening, private farming	<b>0.3</b>	0.02	0.02
NGO activities, protection of human rights	<b>0.3</b>	0.2	
Migration, interethnic relations	<b>0.2</b>	0.2	0.1
Remarkable events, astrology, etc.	<b>0.05</b>	0.07	-

A brief glance at the character of publications is sufficient to understand that positive materials prevail in the studied editions and there are only few critical ones. Events and persons related to education, culture, history and leisure sectors, as well as local authorities' performance are most frequently presented in a positive light. Usually there are feature stories of positive people, teachers, doctors, cultural professionals, as well as coverage of cultural and leisure events, decisions and acts of local authorities. Thereto publications on the celebration of anniversaries can be added.

The positive mindset of the audience is definitely very important, but towns and their residents experience various problems nowadays, which should be adequately covered in newspapers. But the critical publications are scarce. This came to light unexpectedly from the background of the survey of editorial staff members, wherein the participants were shown to consider disadvantaged life aspects of towns and their residents among the most important. A critical approach can be detected in the coverage of very few topics. Only the condition of housing and utility services is criticized in 2%

of publications. Other topics account for less than one percent. The content analysis showed that local authorities were criticized only in 0.7% publications, whereas the editorial staff survey revealed serious problems in this sphere. But newspapers are reasonably afraid to criticize their chiefs, so self-censorship comes into action.

The analysis of problems covered in publications reflects the low analytical potential of local newspapers. Urban media picture, presented in a newspaper, must not only immediately inform on day-to-day events, but also reflect the most important trends and processes in the economic, political and cultural life of a town and its residents. This involves analysis of urgent problems, standpoints, opinions, evidence-based critiques of negative developments, proposals for their solution, and elaboration of efficient behavioral patterns for authorities and citizens.

The survey of editors and journalists, carried out earlier, demonstrated that they were completely aware of the problems in their towns and the interests and needs of local residents; that was why the dominants in the desired content and thematic model were ranked in correspondence to the most disadvantaged aspects of residents' lives. The most acute problems as of the survey period (the end of 2013 – beginning of 2014) were detected as a result of the survey, such as unemployment due to closure of many enterprises, and lack of jobs for young citizens, which forced them to move to big cities. The problem of aging is closely connected with the above processes. All the issues mentioned above plus insufficient municipal budgets and investments in production resulted in the economic instability of the towns, low level of income, and poor standard of living. As consequence, there are problems in the municipal economy, the housing and utility services, the environment and provision of public amenities, the condition of cultural, medical, and educational institutions, the lack of qualified human resources, and

low income level. Often these problems relate not only to economic factors, but also are caused by the inadequate performance of local authorities, the poor management unable to attract new sources for town development, for example, to develop small and medium-sized business, eco-tourism, etc. All this leads to serious psychological consequences: apathy, depression, and alcohol abuse.

Naturally the content must reflect the most acute problems of towns. Let's analyze content with regard to quantity and percentage of publications on problems in newspapers. Below are the content analysis findings: *19.5% of publications in medium-size towns raise issues, 30.8% – in small towns, 25.0 % – in general.* There are more publications covering important problems in small towns. This is related to the lack of resources in small towns, resulting in more problems, especially connected with the financial support of various social sectors. Most probably, there is one more reason: residents of small towns have more possibilities to check the fairness of publications with their own everyday experience.

Let's analyze the problematics of the researched publications in detail (*Table 3*).

*Table 3*

**Problems**  
**(in % of the total number of publications covering problems)**

<b>Problems</b> <i>Ranked according to the second column results</i>	<b>Medium-sized towns</b>	<b>Small towns</b>	<b>Total</b>
Social diseases and problems	15.1	16.3	<b>15.8</b>
Problems of the housing and utilities sector	12.6	17.6	<b>15.6</b>
Poor condition of transportation infrastructure	8.5	6.4	<b>7.2</b>
Economic and industrial problems	5.9	6.2	<b>6.1</b>
Moral, ethic, and spiritual value issues, religion	8.7	4.3	<b>6.1</b>

<b>Problems</b> <i>Ranked according to the second column results</i>	<b>Medium-sized towns</b>	<b>Small towns</b>	<b>Total</b>
Problems of formation and functioning of civil society	11.8	1.9	<b>5.9</b>
Social problems	3.3	6.2	<b>5.1</b>
Problems of health care sector	2.3	5.4	<b>4.1</b>
Environmental issues	2.3	4.8	<b>3.8</b>
Low standard of living	3.1	3.1	<b>3.1</b>
Issues related to activities of law enforcement agencies	3.3	2.9	<b>3.0</b>
Educational problems	3.1	2.8	<b>2.9</b>
Problems of urban development and beautification of settlements	1.5	3.8	<b>2.9</b>
Family issues	4.9	1.7	<b>2.9</b>
Cultural problems	1.0	4.0	<b>2.8</b>
Issues with the functioning of municipal bodies	1.8	3.1	<b>2.6</b>
Youth problems	2.3	2.1	<b>2.2</b>
Inefficiency of government authorities	0.3	3.1	<b>1.9</b>
Financial and other offenses	2.3	1.4	<b>1.8</b>
Unemployment	1.0	0.7	<b>0.8</b>
Demographic problems	0.3	1.0	<b>0.7</b>
Gender/female-specific problems	0.5	0.9	<b>0.7</b>
Problems of interethnic relations	0.5	0.2	<b>0.3</b>

Social “diseases” and problems in the housing and utilities sector occupy the first two positions in the rating of problems (about 16% of publications). In the 5 to 7% zone are the poor condition of transport infrastructure; economic and industrial problems; moral, ethical, and spiritual value problems; issues of formation and functioning of civil society; and social problems.

Unfortunately, a truly fundamental issue – the low standard of living – is covered only in 3.1% of publications, unemployment – in 0.8%. The issues of municipal management are raised in approximately 2% of publications – 3.1% in newspapers of small towns and 0.3% in newspapers of medium-sized towns. Corrupt practices in economic and financial sectors are discussed in very rare cases. Urgent demographic and youth problems are also out of the focus of editors’ attention.

The program of content analysis study included analysis of how the issues that were raised were covered in newspapers: either the newspaper just acknowledged their existence, or it analyzed them or offered their solution (*Table 4*).

*Table 4*

**Publications’ means of presenting problems  
(in % of the total number of references  
to a particular problem indicated horizontally)**

<b>Problems</b> <i>Ranked according to the third column results</i>	<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Solution proposal</b>
Financial and other offenses	88.9	<b>22.2</b>	
Municipal bodies functioning issues	100.0	<b>14.3</b>	14.3
Problems of the housing and utilities sector	67.3	<b>12.2</b>	28.6
Family issues	84.2	<b>5.3</b>	36.8
Economic and industrial problems	73.7	<b>5.3</b>	21.1
Moral, ethic, and spiritual values issues, religion	67.6	<b>2.9</b>	47.1
Social diseases and problems	94.9	<b>1.7</b>	33.9
Issues related to activities of law enforcement agencies	100.0		13.3

<b>Problems</b> <i>Ranked according to the third column results</i>	<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Solution proposal</b>
Cultural problems	100.0		25.0
Gender/female-specific problems	100.0		
Youth problems	100.0		14.3
Social problems	92.9		14.3
Low standard of living	91.7		8.3
Educational problems	90.9		9.1
Problems of healthcare sector	88.9		11.1
Problems of formation and functioning of civil society	75.0		25.0
Poor condition of transportation infrastructure	57.6		51.5
Demographic problems	50.0		50.0
Problems of interethnic relations	50.0		50.0
Inefficiency of government authorities			100.0
Problems of urban development and beautification of settlements			100.0

As we see, the acknowledgment of the problem and not its analysis prevails in publications. Only one third of 21 complex problems have been analyzed. This applies to financial and other abuses, activities of municipal organizations, housing and utility services, and economic and industrial problems.

It is noticeable also that journalists offer in publications solutions to certain problems without an adequate substantiation, which points at the necessity of cooperation with respective specialists.

## **Communicative Characteristics of the Content of Municipal Press**

The concepts of “communicative process” and “communication” are important for discussing the results presented in the section of the article. The majority of publications on mass communications studies set forth the so-called higher level theories (meta theories). Unfortunately, the middle-level theories are underdeveloped, though they are very important for applied media studies and can become their methodological base for analyzing the function of various means of mass communication, for example, content analysis of mass media. The work of M.M. Nazarov is “Mass communication and society. Introduction to theory and research” (which covers issues related to the mass media audience, effects of activities and content analytical studies), as well as the work of researchers from St. Petersburg about personal participation in mass communication processes are considered essential for the development of the methodology of this aspect of the study (Korkonosenko, 2010).

The concept of “media space” is one of the central concepts in this area of editors’ activities analysis. Media space can be analyzed in the context of different levels of mass media functioning and the country in general (Dzhaloshinsky, 2015), or particular regions and towns (Kasatkina, 2011).

By nature the media space possesses the following characteristics: communicativeness, availability of numerous subjects (polysubjectivity), pluralism, and inhomogeneity. It includes the integrity properties. Media space serves as a field for a social discourse – an interaction between communication participants. Its main potential is related to the possibility of arranging horizontal (among social strata, groups) as well as vertical (between a person and various communities; people and the government) social networks

and interactions in society. In our study media space is considered a field of multi-spectral information and communication among various social participants: information producers and consumers, journalists and audiences, authorities and people, various groups and governing bodies.

The present study focuses on the communicative practice of newspapers of small and medium-sized towns and the opportunities which such editions offer in terms of representing various social strata and groups in the context of urban media space, formed, in part, by newspapers. For this purpose the below characteristics were included to the codifier to enable content analysis on communicative aspects: authors of publications as subjects of communications, opinion subjects, objects of publications as subject of communication, sources of information.

The polysubjectivity of publications reflects the diversity of life, and the functioning of urban society. Editors' and journalists' publications account for half of all texts (46.8%) in newspapers of small and medium-sized towns. Naturally, journalists as central professional players (actors) in the information field are the main authors of the publications (43.9%). In small towns, 56.6% of publications are prepared by journalists, whereas, in medium-sized towns, the figure is only 32.2%. This is connected with the fact that in such editorial offices the percentage of messages from news agencies is higher (12.3% in newspapers of medium-sized towns and only 2.3% in newspapers of small towns), and bigger is the number of texts prepared by representatives of governing agencies (13.2% and 6.4% respectively) and specialists/experts (8.0% and 4.8%). Even average residents appear on pages of newspapers of medium-sized towns more often than in small towns (9.2% and 5.7%).

Apart from journalists, the most frequent authors in local press are representatives of authorities (9.9%). Specialists, chiefs of various organizations, and average residents appear less, and NGOs are definitely underrepresented. Hence, the structure of non-journalistic content is, in general, more or less balanced in its communicative subjectivity.

The gender mix of authors as communication subjects is also important. 40% of all publications where an author could be lexically determined belonged to male authors and 60% to female authors (in newspapers of small towns male authors are more frequent). In general, it correlates with the gender mix of editorial boards with approximately 25% being men. This factor deforms to a certain extent the communication process in the context of attention to various topics, presentation of interests, character of assessment of facts and events from the point of view of male and female parts of audiences.

The accuracy and objectivity of facts and events, presented in publications, largely depend on what sources of information the authors use. Use of the most trustworthy sources such as personal observation and situation analysis enhances the status of the journalist, while offering readers the possibility of receiving first-hand information. A positive trend is that this particular source of information occupies the first position, according to the editorial staff survey and content analysis, currently the replication of information is treated as a negative phenomenon (*Table 5*).

Table 5

**Information sources Results of content-analysis  
(in % of the number of publications).**

**Journalists' answers to the question: "What sources of information do you use in your work most frequently?" (rank of the answer option)**

Information sources <i>Ranked according to the fourth column results</i>	Content analysis			Survey
	Medium- sized towns	Small towns	Average	Rank of the answer
1. Personal monitoring of the situation as a journalist	16.1	32.0	<b>23.8</b>	<b>3</b>
Specialists, experts	12.6	21.6	<b>16.8</b>	<b>12</b>
2. Representatives of authority	13.7	17.8	<b>15.7</b>	<b>4</b>
3. Average employees, ordinary people	11.1	12.5	<b>11.8</b>	<b>1</b>
Press services, press conferences, briefings, press releases	15.5	7.8	<b>11.8</b>	<b>7</b>
Immediate communication of a journalist with people, residents	5.3	12.8	<b>8.9</b>	<b>1</b>
4. Legal, regulatory documents	4.6	5.1	<b>4.9</b>	<b>16</b>
5. Statistic data	4.3	3.9	<b>4.1</b>	<b>13</b>
Archives	1.1	6.5	<b>3.7</b>	<b>*</b>
6. Editorial office mail	5.8	1.0	<b>3.5</b>	<b>5</b>
Internet, including	3.2	3.9	<b>3.5</b>	<b>11</b>
Internet service (without a link to source data)	2.5	2.6	<b>2.5</b>	
Internet service (with a link to source data)	0.7	1.3	<b>1.0</b>	
7. Mass media (press, television, radio)	2.6	2.9	<b>2.7</b>	<b>9</b>
Books	1.0	1.9	<b>1.4</b>	<b>*</b>
Financial documents	0.8	1.8	<b>1.3</b>	<b>20</b>
Personal documents	0.6	1.3	<b>0.9</b>	<b>*</b>
8. Information agencies	0.7	0.3	<b>0.5</b>	<b>10</b>
9. Social networks. Twitter, blogs	0.1	0.1	<b>0.1</b>	<b>14</b>
Unclear, no reference to source	19.4	7.5	<b>13.6</b>	

\* This answer option was not available in the journalists' survey

The fact that 23.8% of journalists personally observe a situation proves that the real lives of residents are described on the pages of local press. Journalists of newspapers of small towns themselves monitor the situation, they describe, two times more than their colleagues from medium-sized towns (32% and 16% respectively). The same applies to direct communication with residents (12.8% and 5.3%). It is caused by the town size, but obviously it is also connected with the intention to be closer to the epicenter of events. The following fact evidences this trend: the newspapers of medium-sized towns two times more frequently use second-hand information, including that which they received from press services or at conferences and briefings (15.5% and 7.8% respectively).

According to our results, representatives of the professional segment of a town, possessing a higher competence – town governors and experts – are considered important sources of information. Various documents (legal, financial, statistical, etc.) comprise a significant part of the materials used (in general according to the number of references – 19%), authors from newspapers of small towns use them more often (22.4%). Personnel of newspapers of medium-sized towns work with editorial office mail more actively. Content analysis showed that the Internet, including social networks as well as materials from information agencies, were quite seldom used as a source of information in researched newspapers, which could be explained by the newspapers' orientation on local topics. This sets newspapers of small towns apart from larger editions, where journalists often use information derived from the Internet, telephone calls, third parties, etc.

The analysis of opinion subjects and publications' characters is mainly about the variety of opinions represented, and standpoints concerning the issues and problems raised. It is also important to take into account that not all materials offer a distinct opinion; certain

information genres do not envisage it at all. Hence, no opinion is presented in every fifth publication and it is impossible to trace it in another 10% of publications of a factual, descriptive nature (*Table 6*).

*Table 6*

**Opinion subjects in publications  
(in % of the total number of publications)**

Opinion subjects	Medium-sized towns	Small towns	Average
Journalist	23.3	25.7	<b>24.4</b>
Revision	2.2	0.6	<b>1.4</b>
<b>In general journalist and editorial board</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>25.8</b>
Specialists, experts	9.3	15.6	<b>12.5</b>
Ordinary people, residents	10.8	12.5	<b>11.6</b>
Representatives of authorities, governing bodies	6.7	14.3	<b>10.4</b>
Information agencies	12.3	1.5	<b>7.1</b>
Representatives of NGOs	1.7	4.8	<b>3.2</b>
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	0.3	2.7	<b>1.3</b>
Without a signature, unclear	8.8	10.7	<b>9.7</b>
No opinion	24.8	11.3	<b>18.3</b>

Every fourth publication contains the journalist's opinion, though distinctly represented are the voices of specialists/experts (12.5%) and ordinary people (10.4%). Every tenth publication delivers an opinion from representatives of governing bodies (10.4%). If we add official materials (decisions, orders, instructions and other official documents) to publications, which account for 9.7% of all publications and were coded separately, but in fact represent the standpoint of authorities, it becomes obvious that the opinion balance of the content is biased towards power structures.

Opinions of non-governmental organizations are expressed less, maybe due to the fact that they are poorly represented in small towns. This makes our media space weaker and proves that newspapers undervalue their role in the development of civil society. One can't but notice that the content of newspapers of small towns offers a wider range of opinion subjects than the newspapers of medium-sized towns; that means their "subjective representation" is wider. This confirms that such editions, due to the proximity to their audience, maintain closer ties with representatives of different social strata and groups of town residents, involving them and moving them towards cooperation. Hence, their journalists moderate public participation more actively.

Despite the relative diversity of opinion subjects (authors), the majority of materials (90%) offer only the author's opinion. Only every tenth text includes different standpoints; there are three times more such publications in small towns than in medium-sized towns (15.3% and 4.4%). These results confirm the findings of the editors and journalists survey: only 35% of the editorial staff think that the newspaper reflects various standpoints, 56% deem that newspapers manage to do this only partially, and 6% acknowledge that newspapers do not offer different opinions. According to how they responded to the survey, newspaper personnel of medium-sized towns are convinced that they offer more opportunities for residents to influence the content of their edition, initiating discussion of urgent issues (86% in newspapers of medium-sized towns and 71% in small towns). But this information is not adequately presented in newspaper content. The necessity to initiate discussions of urgent issues on newspaper pages to develop a more pluralistic media space is obvious.

The structure of publication objects as the object of communication generally corresponds to the specifics of local press. It includes various organizations, social groups, and individuals represented in a balanced manner. Approximately every fifth material is personalized —

it can be noticed that newspapers of medium-sized towns write more about certain persons than newspapers of small towns (28% and 17.6% respectively). Social phenomena, problems which are raised in 10.9% of publications, are two times more often covered in newspapers of small towns than of medium-sized towns (14.7% and 7.2%), indicating the higher level of publicity. It is significant that the main character in local press is an ordinary individual (37.9%), which distinguishes it from the press of big cities. We can assert that ordinary people and their interests are represented in local press and in town media space rather substantially. Leaders of municipal organizations / institutions or specialists (teachers, doctors, cultural professionals, etc.) also often act as main characters (approximately in one third of all publications). 5% of publications are devoted to historic or prominent persons.

More details on persons in publications can be derived from the information on their activities, age, and gender (*Table 7*).

*Table 7*

**Profile of main characters (in % of the total number of publications, where a main character was mentioned)**

<b>Sphere of activities of main characters</b>	<b>Medium-sized towns</b>	<b>Small towns</b>	<b>Average</b>
Culture	9.7	11.4	<b>10.5</b>
Education, science	6.1	13.7	<b>9.8</b>
Management, power structures	7.2	12.2	<b>9.6</b>
Sports, leisure	3.8	9.5	<b>6.6</b>
Military field, EMERCOM	6.1	4.0	<b>5.1</b>
Industrial production	4.5	5.3	<b>4.9</b>
Construction, maintenance and repair, housing and utilities	3.4	4.8	<b>4.1</b>
Health care	3.1	3.0	<b>3.0</b>
Social services, pensioners' support, other social sectors	2.3	3.2	<b>2.8</b>
Criminal cases	3.4	1.0	<b>2.2</b>

<b>Sphere of activities of main characters</b>	<b>Medium-sized towns</b>	<b>Small towns</b>	<b>Average</b>
Agriculture	2.2	1.9	<b>2.0</b>
Mass media, advertising and PR	2.2	1.0	<b>1.6</b>
NGOs	1.1	1.9	<b>1.5</b>
Legal and judicial system	1.1	1.7	<b>1.4</b>
Religion	2.2	0.4	<b>1.3</b>
Business	0.5	0.6	<b>0.6</b>
Finance, banking operations	0.7	0.6	<b>0.6</b>
Transport	0.9	0.6	<b>0.7</b>
Trade	0.4	0.4	<b>0.4</b>
Pensioner	8.4	10.6	<b>9.5</b>
Unclear	30.9	13.5	<b>22.4</b>
<b>Gender of main character</b>			
1. Male	61.8	47.0	<b>54.6</b>
2. Female	30.2	34.0	<b>32.0</b>
Unclear	8.1	19.0	<b>13.6</b>
<b>Age</b>			
1. Children	5.6	11.2	<b>8.3</b>
2. Youth	16.3	16.5	<b>16.4</b>
3. Middle-aged	22.4	26.4	<b>24.4</b>
4. Elderly	21.9	28.7	<b>25.2</b>
Unclear	33.8	17.1	<b>25.7</b>

Pensioners as an important segment of audience enjoy significant attention (in contrast to “big” editions), as well as professionals employed in culture and education, representatives of governing bodies, and power structures (approximately 10% of publications). Publications about famous persons in sports or entertainment are also not rare (from 7% to 11%).

In general, main characters of publications represent a wide range of areas, fields of activities, professions, and social status.

Middle-aged and elderly people prevail (which corresponds to the audience structure), as well as male characters (especially in newspapers of medium-sized towns).

Territorial positioning is another important characteristic of an object of publication: local press is the only source of information of local issues for residents. That is why it is natural that the main object of 76 % of publications in the context of locality is a particular town, its suburbs and adjacent rural settlements. The administrative unit of the Federation is the object of 13% of publications, the whole country in 7.7% of publications. Only 1.5% of materials are devoted to foreign countries, as this information is irrelevant for local press. Content analysis revealed that the structure of territorial and administrative locality corresponds to the specifics of local editions, reflecting the functional and typological peculiarity of such editions and promoting not only horizontal, but also vertical communication.

### **Creative Forms of Content Communication with Audiences**

The means of content communication with audience, that is the interaction with audiences through texts and pictures, are manifold. They relate in the first place to newspapers' content: agenda, problematic, and thematic structure, which must be based on the needs of society and the interests of audiences. In the selection of genre, stylistic expressive means play an important role in the process of communication with an audience, attraction of its attention, and promotion of interest in the offered content and in interaction with a newspaper. Among such means, we studied genre structure of publications, headlines, and pictures character.

The content analysis proved that the genre structure of municipal newspapers generally takes into consideration typological

peculiarities of their editions. This is optimal with regard to the functional model. The findings of content analysis of genre groups were almost identical to the ratings which we received during the editors' and journalists' survey, which indicated that they quite accurately determined the genre mix of their newspapers, in contrast to thematics and problematics.

It is natural that information genres and their versions dominate in genre structure of municipal newspapers, according to the number of publications (not their volume) (*Table 8*).

*Table 8*

**Genres of publications**  
(in % of the total number of publications)

Genres	Medium-sized towns	Small towns	Average
<b>Information</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>65.7</b>	<b>64.9</b>
Sketch	39.2	39.4	39.3
Chronicle	16.3	3.8	10.2
Report	5.7	9.2	7.4
Reportage	3.4	5.8	4.5
Informational interview	1.7	4.6	3.1
Summary	0.6	2.0	1.2
Announcement	0.4	0.5	0.4
Press release	0.2	-	0.1
<b>Analytical</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>10.6</b>
Article	7.3	4.9	6.1
Correspondence	0.7	3.2	1.9
Comments	1.3	1.2	1.2
Analytical, problematic interview	0.5	1.4	0.9
Overview, review	0.4	0.5	0.4
<b>Communicative</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>8.2</b>
Letters to the Editor, including emails	8.0	3.7	5.9

Genres	Medium-sized towns	Small towns	Average
Response to letters	0.1	1.8	0.9
Discussions	0.5	0.6	0.6
Editor's announcement	-	0.6	0.3
Materials in column "Actions taken"	0.3	0.1	0.2
<b>Publicistic</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>5.3</b>
Sketch	1.2	2.3	1.7
Feature story	1.2	1.4	1.3
Memoirs	1.8	0.2	1.0
Interview-portrait	0.4	1.1	0.7
Essay	0.5	0.3	0.4
Review, summary	-	0.4	0.2
Survey	0.1	0.4	0.2
Newspaper satire	-	0.1	0.05
Travel essay	-	0.1	0.05
<b>Informative and advisory</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>
House keeping, household, gardening tips, etc.	2.2	1.1	1.7
Legal counseling	0.9	1.2	1.0
Hints on psychology, gender interrelations, family relations	0.4	0.5	0.6
Health care tips	0.2	0.9	0.5
Safety tips	-	0.5	0.3
Fashion, makeup tips	0.2	0.1	0.2
Fraud prevention advise	-	0.2	0.1
Discussion of tours, travel agencies	-	0.2	0.07
<b>Entertainment, leisure, culture</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Poems	1.6	2.8	2.2
Crosswords, crossword puzzles, etc.	0.4	1.0	0.7
Prose	1.0	-	0.5
Anecdotes, jokes, humor	0.7	0.1	0.4
Horoscopes	0.2	0.2	0.2
Quizzes	-	0.2	0.1

Information genres account for 64.9% of all publications. Sketches dominate among information genres (39.3%). Report, reportage and information interviews are also widely used.

Not only factual information is important to readers, but also analysis of situations, and problem-oriented approaches to complex processes of urban life. Audiences would like to receive explanations of topical issues, understand trends in relevant developments, have convincing evidences for their objective assessment, broaden their knowledge about urban life, develop their axiological knowledge, and possess certain behavioral models. The above explains the important role of analytical journalism. It is nominally represented in newspapers, but, unfortunately, content analysis shows, as stated above, that problems are usually only acknowledged. Comprehensive analysis of their causes can rarely be found – only in one third of all materials that raise any issues.

Publicistic genres have been revived in local press, and not only enhance the imagery perception, but also promote social activity. Content analysis revealed that these genres, considered obsolescent, have reappeared in urban press: we found sketches, feature articles and even essays in newspapers.

The editorial staff survey found out that editors of local newspapers pay less attention to an active interaction with their audience. The content analysis showed that, in general, communicative genre forms are widely represented in newspapers, though their diversity is modest. These are mainly Letters to Editors. At the same time we found few answers to them, as well as statements on the effectiveness of newspapers' address. Not more than 1% of publications include debates on problems in a discussion format, though journalists pointed out that newspapers conducted such discussions regularly. Obviously, non-textual public discussions are not always covered in press.

Communication with readers focuses not only on problems which are socially important, but also on issues which are important for everyday life. That is why materials of advisory and consulting character consume considerable space on newspapers' pages – namely: legal advice, housekeeping hints, household and gardening tips, and health care and relationship tips. This is further evidence of the proximity of such newspapers to their readers.

The range of genre forms used in newspapers of medium-sized towns is less diverse than that of newspapers of small towns, where sketches, feature articles, reportages, and interviews that are not purely journalistic, but also publicistic genres, are published more frequently. In general, the number of genres used is 41 in newspapers of small towns and only 33 in newspapers of medium-sized towns. This fact confirms the results of the editors' and journalists' survey that small municipal press uses creative, emotional and vivid resources of genre forms, based on the Russian journalist tradition, to attract the attention of a wide audience.

Headlines as ways to encourage readers' attention have also been studied during the content analysis, because headlines are one of the most important communicative way to capture an audience's attention and navigate through the offered content. In modern newspapers they are traditionally the main element of content, demonstrating the level of journalistic professionalism, and availability or absence of creative approach to the presentation of publications.

The newspapers researched generally used headlines that were simple in their structure (more than 60%). Newspapers give preference to simple headlines, preceding complex heading structures which consist of a headline, subheading, and a text box (only 10.9%). Newspapers of small towns use simple headings less than their colleagues from medium-sized towns, considering

the educational level of their audience and making perception of publications easier (more than 69%). Complex heading structures can be found two times more in newspapers of medium-sized towns (14.2% and 7.9% respectively). Journalists of such editions are more inclined to take into account modern trends in heading production and its role. The analysis also yielded that a lead, a very important element of modern newspapers, though more frequently used in local press (20.0 %), is, like the heading structure, still not very actively used.

The analysis of use of tropes and other creative means brought about the expected results (*Table 9*).

*Table 9*

**Headlines character**  
(in % of the total number of headlines)

Availability of tropes and other creative means	Medium- sized towns	Small towns	Average
Simple descriptive headline	87.8	78.1	<b>82.5</b>
Avalability of metaphors and other tropes	2.2	7.6	<b>5.1</b>
Paraphrasing, word play, use of new words	0.8	7.9	<b>4.7</b>
Proverbs and sayings	2.3	2.4	<b>2.4</b>
Quote from a literary work or other famous source	1.8	1.9	<b>1.9</b>
Phraseological units and their transformations	2.0	0.8	<b>1.4</b>
Rhyming headline	1.1	0.7	<b>0.9</b>
Paradoxes	0.8	0.6	<b>0.7</b>
Miscellaneous	1.2	-	<b>0.5</b>

A simple descriptive headline prevails in newspapers of such towns (82.5%). Creative headlines were found in 17% of researched newspapers. Their portion is not very large, but it should be noted that use of tropes in newspaper headlines is not always relevant, because publications devoted to serious topics and problems, do not allow room for word play. At the same time, editors tend to use creative means in headlines to attract their audience. Metaphors and other tropes are used in newspapers of small towns three times more than in medium-sized ones (7.6% and 2.2%). Paraphrasing, word play, and new, unusual words are used in newspapers of small towns 8 times more frequently, than in medium-sized towns (7.9% and 0.8%). Other forms are rare. Proverbs and sayings, quotes from literary works and other famous sources, and phraseological units and their transformations are used in headlines with equal frequency. Rhyming headlines and paradox-containing headlines are the rarest.

Headline analysis with regard to rationality/emotionality showed significant dominance of rational (69.8%) over emotional (22.3%) headlines, though the former are not rare if we take into consideration the 7.7% of headlines of mixed character. It was noticed that newspapers of medium-sized towns are more “rational” (79.8% vs. 60.1%), probably demonstrating a more formal style. Newspapers of small towns, on the contrary, demonstrate a higher level of emotionality of headlines.

The aim of headlines is not limited to the attraction of audience attention. Another important function is to actively involve a reader in the content of a publication, its topic and problem. According to their stylistic modality, headlines can be divided into two main groups: declarative headlines and headlines that express exclamations, questions, assessments, opinions, or appeals, or that contain other properties of stylistic modality. Declarative headlines

firmly dominate in local press (72.9%), and their portion in editions of medium-sized towns, containing more factual information, is larger than in newspapers of small towns (79.5% and 67.6% respectively).

The exclamation headline is holding a leading role in a group of headlines, possessing certain characteristics of stylistic modality and fostering a more active perception of publications (7.8%). According to the level of their popularity, the exclamation headline is followed by an assessment headline (5.3 %), a questioning headline (5.1 %), an opinion headline (4.1 %), and a headline appeal (2.1 %). Journalists of newspapers of small town use headline modalities more frequently, demonstrating more creativity and ingenuity than their colleagues from medium-sized towns, which to a large extent is caused by the peculiarities of their audiences.

The creative potential of an editorial staff becomes apparent not only in text publications, but also in the use of illustrations as a means of visual communication. A newspapers' illustrating constitutes a rather powerful means for audience attraction. Visualization is a common trend in media content production nowadays (Tulupov, 2012). This is caused by various reasons – technological improvement, competition among editions, and need for a wider audience attraction, including young people, oriented towards visual content. The peculiarities of perception of the surrounding world and, consequently, of media text by audiences has changed. Analysis of illustration types showed that the researched local editions used mainly illustrations to support texts (92.9 %) (*Table 10*).

Table 10

**Type and genre of publications  
(in % of the total number of illustrations)**

Analysis properties	Medium-sized towns N=1158	Small towns N=1170	Average N=2328
<b>Type of illustration</b>			
Illustrations to a text	93.6	92.3	<b>92.9</b>
Individual illustrations	6.4	7.7	<b>7.0</b>
<b>Genre of illustration</b>			
Usual photograph, photo illustrations	67.4	76.1	<b>72.6</b>
Pictures and other graphical illustrations	21.6	8.5	<b>15.1</b>
Artistic, staged photographs	5.4	11.3	<b>8.3</b>
Infographics, charts, diagrams	1.6	2.1	<b>1.8</b>
Caricatures/cartoons	0.1	0.3	<b>0.2</b>

Separate illustrations, which do not directly connect to publications and constitute a separate genre, such as photo reportage or photo news, account for a considerably small portion (7%). They are used to enrich editions with additional visual content.

Analysis of illustration genre diversity showed that in 72.6% of publications a usual photograph was used. A common share of artistic or staged photographs is not large in both types of newspapers – 8.3%. Graphic illustration can also be often used (15.1%), though their portion in newspapers of medium-sized towns is significantly bigger than in newspapers of small towns (21.6 % and 8.5 % respectively). Possibly, this can be explained by the different economic conditions of newspapers: to prepare pictures or other graphic illustrations, a newspaper need to employ or cooperate with designers, illustrators, which seems almost impossible for small editorial teams of newspapers of small towns.

Another regrettable finding is the almost complete absence of tradition for the printing press illustration type – caricature. It is definitely related to the specifics of certain newspapers, their organizational charts and the absence of professional illustrators on the staff.

As of now, infographics, a popular and the most up-to-date means of visual information presentation, are used only in rare cases (only 1.8%). Editorial offices should master the latest technologies more actively.

People are the most common object of illustrations – 67.8%. Aside from people, material and technological objects are frequently pictured, whereas the portion of illustrations of nature or animals is insignificant. Probably, editors think that residents have gotten used to the beauty of the local landscape and are not interested therein. But it downgrades the emotional appeal of press.

It is also noticeable that illustrations usually depict a group of people, rather than one person, most often in a photograph taken during some event. If the illustration shows only one person, then it is more often a man than a woman, young rather than middle-aged. This means that illustrations “moderate” the picture, which we have obtained based on the analysis of objects of text publications targeted towards younger populations; the gender imbalance is less evident.

## **Main Study Conclusions**

Main conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- Analysis of the thematic and problematic structures of newspaper content showed that the newspapers researched are generally universal editions, covering various aspects of town life. They meet the needs and satisfy the interests of their audiences in local information to a significant

extent. The content and thematic structures of newspapers of small and medium-sized towns are considerably wide and diverse, the most important thematic focuses are more or less covered, and the structure in general corresponds to the interests of town residents, the range of topics and problems which are important for citizens and connected with their everyday activities, their basic needs. This enables the development of a significantly diverse media picture of a town. The researched editions (especially of small towns) tend to preserve cultural and educational orientation, pay attention to town culture, history, traditions, family, parenting, patriotic education, and present social topics.

- Comparison of content analysis findings about publication topics to the results of the editorial staff survey revealed that journalists often exaggerate newspapers' attention to particular topics and underrate attention to other topics, and are not always aware of the existing thematic imbalance. A continuous monitoring of publication topics could be useful in this context, which is not difficult with modern information technologies.
- The thematic model presented by editors and journalists during the survey and which, in their opinion, is in conformity with local newspapers functions, is not fully implemented in practice. While mentioning a social orientation of the thematic model, aimed at newspapers' participation in the addressing of the immediate needs of citizens, the editors are forced to implement a model which is more commercial, oriented towards "light" interests of readers, connected mainly with leisure activities and topical criminal cases. This can be explained by underfunding and the need for income generation because the available economic support is clearly not sufficient.

- According to their assessment modality, positive materials prevail in the researched newspapers (these are mainly materials related to cultural events, memorable dates, feature stories about positive individuals and positive experiences). It is, however, alarming that despite the numerous problems of towns and their residents – which journalists mentioned during the survey –, critical publications in newspapers are rare. Most probably, this is connected with reasons of two kinds: fear of extremely negative feedback to heavy criticism and the resulting self-censorship, and lack of journalists' confidence in their own competences.
- The range of problems raised in newspapers is rather wide and covers the most urgent and acute issues for towns and their dwellers. In general, newspapers' attention to problems of small and medium-sized towns is evident: the share of materials, and raising or analyzing problems, amounts to 25% of publications. Though in fact, the majority of publications only acknowledge the existence of problems. Publications which analyze causes and factors leading to their formation are definitely insufficient: such publications cover only one third of all problems listed in the codifier. Possible solutions were offered for 19 of 21 listed problems, though the solutions offered are not sustained by comprehensive analyses. This definitely points at the necessity to increase the number and upgrade the quality of analytical publications devoted to a comprehensive analysis of urgent issues, which are quite numerous in medium-sized and small towns. Besides improving the professional competences of journalists, a closer cooperation with specialists could be useful.
- The study revealed a considerably diversified range of communicative characteristics of content, connected with

authors' teams as subjects of communication, and objects of publications as central elements, around which the content communication with audience is developed: continuum of representative opinions, used information sources, genre, heading and illustrative structures. Content clearly represents its polysubjectiveness: different social strata and groups are more or less equally represented as subjects of communication. But published materials are mainly monologues. A certain imbalance is evident in the representation of opinions of different segments of urban society to the benefit of governing bodies, not only in publications of an individual author, but of an authors' team (taking into consideration a significant number of official documents in content structure). The objects of publications are also quite diverse. Territorial locality (extent of events coverage) is in general consistent with characteristics and objectives of such editions. Information sources used in journalists' publications are considerably diverse. Materials are usually developed based on personal monitoring of a situation or direct contact with its participants – that is, on the first-hand information –, which is extremely important for local press, because readers have the opportunity to prove the objectivity of facts and events coverage from their own experience.

- Various creative communication means are widely used to attract the attention of an audience. The range of genres used is diverse, though the lack of meaningful analytical publications is evident. Letters to Editors dominate among means of communicative interaction with audiences. The genre of discussion is almost not represented. Editors actively take advantage of the communicative opportunities of headlines and visual content. Published photographs allow moderating to a certain extent of demographic imbalance,

revealed in text content (in the context of age and gender characteristics). The correspondence of communicative means used to publication content and characteristics of such newspapers' audiences is clearly seen. The advantages of infographics are used insufficiently.

- It is significant that, according to study findings, newspapers of small towns are closer to their audience, they use communicative resources to a fuller extent, and tend to use more creative means in communication with audience, though do not take full advantage of the creative potential of the press.
- Problems revealed in the functioning of newspapers of small and medium-sized towns are connected, in the first place, to the understaffing of editorial teams and lack of qualification of employees. This is true, first of all, with regard to journalists able to work with analytic, publicistic genres and to hold public discussions of acute problems on pages of newspapers, as well as designers/illustrators of newspapers. Against such a background, the improvement of the economic situation in editorial offices, and the implementation of an efficient system of training and retraining of press professionals constitute very important tasks nowadays.

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