MASS MEDIA: THE MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON EUROPEAN FUNDING FOR THE AVERAGE PEOPLE

MASS-MEDIA: SURSA PRINCIPALA DE INFORMAŢIE DESPRE FONDURILE EUROPENE PENTRU PUBLICUL LARG

ELENA CLAUDIA CONSTANTIN[1], I. PETROMAN[2]

[1]Politehnica University of Timisoara, Department of Communication and Foreign Languages, Timisoara, Romania; claudia.constantin@cls.upt.ro
[2] Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Timişoara, Agricultural Management Faculty, Timisoara, Romania

Abstract: *The authors present the results of two surveys conducted to identify the sources of information, on EU and EU funds, used by people with rural and urban residence. The results indicate mass media as the official source of information, but the quality of the information is mediocre. The authors do not sustain the decision of the authorities to rely mostly on mass media to disseminate information on EU and EU funds.*

Key words: *mass media, European Union, European Funds, communication, average EU citizen*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of Romania not being able to access European funds was the starting point of a research on the management of communication on European funds meant to investigate if there is any connection between the way in which communication on EU funds is made and the low percentage of the absorption EU funds in Romania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

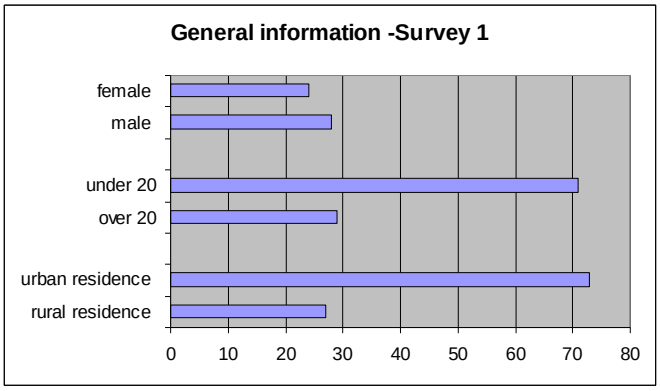
Two successive surveys have been conducted, at almost 4 years after Romania joined EU, one in October 2011 and the second one in February 2012. They were intended to find out what people living in the Timis County know and think about European Union and European funds, what

their sources of information are, what their level of awareness regarding societal changes after 2007 is and what they think about mass media as a source of information.

In this paper, we are going to present only the part regarding the sources of information on European Union and European Funds.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first survey was short enough to ensure that most people would complete it in 15 minutes. It consisted of a combination of 15 questions: 13 close-ended and 2 open-ended. Table 1 presents the group structure.



We decided to choose, for Survey 1, this age segment because young people are able to access the latest technology, can use the most sophisticated sources of information, spend a lot of time in front of the computer, live an active life, are still following a kind of guided education and are interested in everything that can improve their living standard.

Table 2 presents the 8 options regarding the sources of information that the respondents had at their disposal and the way in which they answered. As shown in Table 1, the answers were also grouped according to the place of residence of the respondents, as we needed to know if this factor might lead to major differences between the two groups.

It can be seen that both groups, Group A and Group B, identified mass media as the main sources of information, i.e.: television, newspapers, and radio. Group A also selected other sources, but did not mention them. The results show that there is no significant difference regarding the sources of information. This piece of information will be taken into consideration in the next steps of the research.

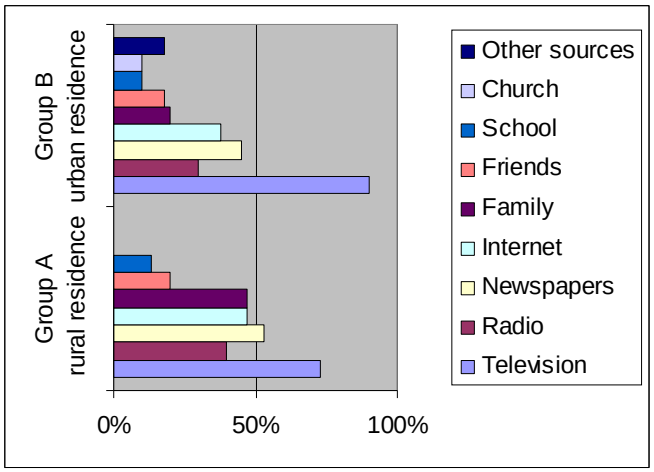
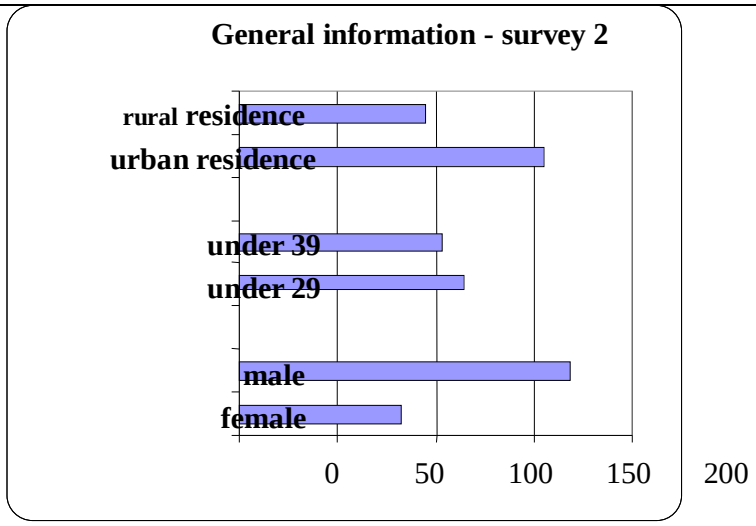


Fig. 2. Sources of information on EU and EU funds

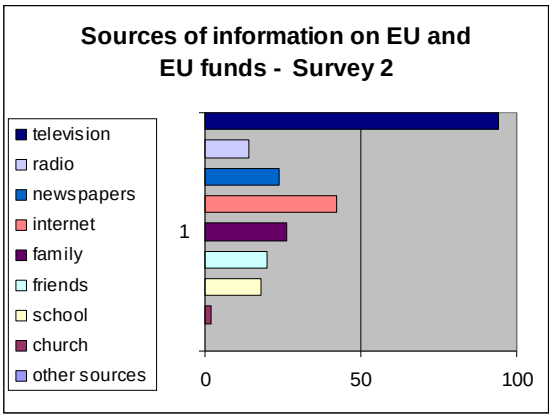
Even if internet scored very high, we are not going to analyze the score here, as we are not investigating individual, intentional search for information (Constantin: 2011).

The data obtained in Survey 1 were used when designing Survey 2. Therefore, we decided to add 7 supplementary questions to help us get a better insight on the issues under research, i.e.: the way people think regarding EU and EU funds, their involvement in societal problems, their awareness regarding current political issues, role of the mass media, etc..

The age group was extended to include people below 39 years, thinking that they represent the active population (see Table 3 for the group structure of Survey 2). We have identified a new category for the urban residents, i.e. people who officially have urban residence, have a work place in towns but spend their free time at the countryside.



The results obtained at Survey 1 were validated, i.e.: the same three main official sources of information were identified (see Table 4).

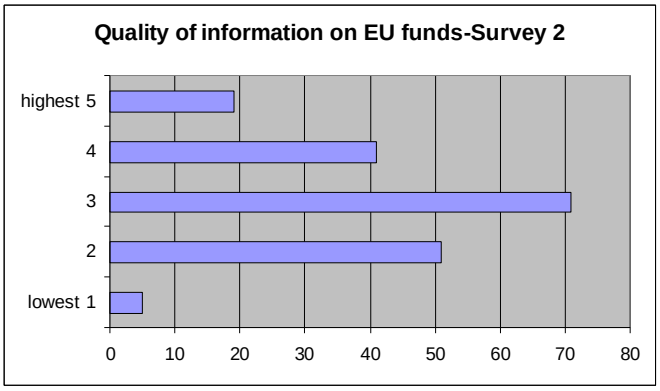


We did not classify the respondents according to the place of residence as the results of Survey 1 indicated no significant difference in sources of information. We noticed the high score of unofficial sources of information, such as family and friends. It is also significant the high

percentage obtained by school in Survey 2, that might be caused by the fact that this age segment also included the respondents with university degree.

No other sources of information were named by the 305 respondents. Local authorities have not been given as an answer option on purpose, as we did not want to influence the respondents. However, we expected the subjects to mention them as the primary official source of information, especially for the rural areas. The results of the two surveys did not show the involvement of local authorities or of any other authority in promoting EU funds.

The subjects of Survey 2 were also asked to evaluate the quality of the information on EU funds (see Table 5) and most of them consider it mediocre.



We also wanted to know whether our respondents' knowledge on EU funds is only theoretical or not. Therefore they were asked to say if they know people who have accessed European funds and in case of affirmative answer they had to state the field. A percentage of 12.5 indicated that they know people who have accessed European funds for: agriculture, constructions, and beekeeping.

MASS MEDIA - AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

The results of the surveys show that our respondents think that mass media represents the official point of view of the Romanian authorities.

However, Romanian mass media keep on informing people of the low access rate of European funds.

Why do Romanian authorities rely so much on mass media? Is their decision to rely mainly on mass media to inform the Romanian people on issues of national interest good or not?

First of all, as far as mass media are concerned there are various opinions. Some specialists (McQuail:1999, McLuhan:1994) see it as: a source of power, influence and control, a space of public life display, a source for the image of social reality, even the key to celebrity, a way to conquer time and space.

Mass communication (McQuail: 1999) is done at a large scale connecting institutions specialized in communication, such as newspapers, radios, televisions, etc. and the actors of the communication are collectivities not individuals. The public is extensive and heterogeneous, not organized, without ordered expectations or perceptions; the only thing that connects them is that they are exposed to the same message. The relationship between communicators and the receivers is asymmetric, uneven, being in the favour of the former who has the initiative.

The fact that a huge number of people can be reached simultaneously might be one reason to justify the authorities' decision to disseminate information mainly through mass media.

What about the message sent?

Logically in communication, any message is transmitted with the intention to communicate a certain piece of information. Usually information means the communication of a certain content not known before the communication process.

In mass communication through media, as far as the content is concerned, an important characteristic highlights: any message serves the interests of a certain group. Research in communication (Lull: 1999) show that organised thinking is never innocent. All means of mass information, even the simple ones, such as stamps, shop windows, etc. transmit messages that serve only the interests of certain groups. A mean of mass information is not a just a channel that transports ideas from one place to another it represents an ideology. Mass media interprets and synthesises images in accordance with the hypotheses of the dominant ideology and people are exposed through means of mass media. However, in order to have an

ideological impact (Lull, 1999:20) neither the government nor the public administration sponsors the content of mass media.

The images transmitted by mass media are selective; the points of view are ready made and not familiar to the majority of the audience. At first sight, the quotations from advertisements, news, entertainment shows, seem innocent. In fact they have a big ideological force once they are put into circulation on the social plan. Mass media can be a transmitter of new ideologies.

Thus, we can infer that as far as the message is concerned it is selected and presented in a certain way to comply with the interest of certain groups.

If we consider the results of our surveys concerning the quality of the information on EU and EU funds we can say that this subject is not of particular interest to mass media and to Romanian authorities.

We think that even if by using mass media a large number of people can be reached, authorities cannot be sure that the message sent is unbiased. Only their representatives can inform population without being suspected of being biased.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can say that our surveys proved to be very useful for our research. We found out that, at least for the people living in the Timis County, mass media is the main source of information. We found out that information on European Funding relies entirely on mass media. We found out that the ones in charge with disseminating information are the reporters and the journalists of different TV channels and newspapers who represent the point of view of a certain group of interest.

Our surveys revealed that neither the local authorities nor the national ones reached our respondents in any other way.

Considering the specialists' points of view regarding the fact that mass media transmit selective images, sustained by ready made points of view on matters not known to the majority of the audience, we do not think that a matter of national importance, such as the possibility to improve the life of the people living in rural areas should be treated so inexpertly.

We think that local authorities should be more involved, be better organized and targeted on certain segments, such as the rural population, in

order to make them aware of the existence of a potential source of financing their activities. And if the rural population decides not to access EU funds it will be because people do not want to, not because they are not properly informed.

Considering the importance of the matter we do not consider that communication on EU funds is made professionally and adequately and we do think that communication on EU funds plays a part in the low access rate of European funds.

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