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¹ Megatrend University, ² Singidurum University, Belgrade – Serbia

NATAŠA SIMEUNOVIĆ BAJIĆ¹, LJILJANA MANIĆ¹,
ALEKSANDRA MAJDAREVIĆ²

*Framing public policy issues of the City of Niš
in the context of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan**

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to define how the City of Niš (the birthplace of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great) plans to prepare for the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan. This will be a great test of efficiency for the public policy. This paper will try to detect media frameworks through which the importance of certain subjects about public policy of the City of Niš is emphasized. This policy is directly related to preparation in different public sectors, especially in tourism and culture. As a methodological approach, we applied content analysis in order to achieve this detection.

Key words: public policy, Edict of Milan, City of Niš, media framing.

INTRODUCTION

Niš is the third largest city in Serbia and the largest city in its southern part. Niš has 225.518 inhabitants according to data from the last census in 2011. The city lies at the confluence of the river Nišava in South Morava at 43°19' north latitude and 21°54' of east latitude. Niš is 235 km away from Belgrade, 475 km from Bucharest, 155 km from Sofia, 975 km from Istanbul and 977 km from Athens. The city of Niš has a very important geostrategic position in this part of Europe. This position

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was important in the history because there was a route through Niš known as “Via Militaris” in the period of Rome and Byzantine. This route was also known as the Constantinople road (Carigradski drum) during the Ottoman Empire. Nowadays, Niš represents the crossroad of important roads connecting Central Europe with Thessaloniki and Athens, on the one hand, and Sofia, Istanbul, on the other hand. Directions that connect the Aegean, Adriatic and Black Sea are crossed through the city of Niš. Niš is one of the eldest cities in Europe. Prehistoric findings from the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (4000–3000 BC) reveal that the area of Niš was populated during that period. The Celts defeated the Illyrians and named the city into “Naissus” which means “Fairy’s city” in the third century BC.

Today, the city of Niš is an economic, educational, health, cultural and sport center of southeast Serbia, and one of six functional macro-regional centers of Serbia. Tobacco, electronic, mechanical, textile and food industry were developed in Niš during the period of former Yugoslavia. Niš has become very impoverished, unemployment has increased and the industry was extinguished during the large socio-political and economic crisis in the 1990s. The NATO bombing caused severe damage to electronic industry (elektronska industrija), tobacco industry (duvanska industrija), airport (which was not functional during four years) and health center. Several loads of cluster bombs were dropped at the center of Niš.

The trend of decreasing of industrial production was continued after the fall of the Milošević regime. The industrial production started to renew several years ago. Also, new jobs opened and investments of foreign companies were invested in production and development. Services by public enterprises, educational institutions, cultural institutions, media agencies and tourist organizations are very important for all citizens of the city of Niš. Furthermore, according to administrative reforms and integration into the European Union, Local economic development office, Capital investment department, E-service and Ombudsman are developed. In order to improve the quality of life for citizens of Niš and to more adequately realize public policy, City Assembly of the city of Niš passed the Decision on the organization of city governments of the City of Niš on 3rd October 2008. This Decision developed the following city governments:

1. Administration for Citizen Affairs
2. Administration of Finance, Local Self-government Revenues and Public Procurements
3. Administration of Children’s Welfare, Social and Primary Health Care
4. Administration of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
5. Administration for Communal Services, Energy and Traffic
6. Administration for City Planning and Construction
7. Administration for Real Estate and Inspection
8. Administration of Economy, Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection
9. Administration of Agriculture and Rural Development (City of Niš)

The following commissions and councils were established, improved or expanded for the same reasons and based on the main document, the Statute of the city:

1. Commission for Naming Residential Settlements and Streets
2. Commission for Gender Balance and Equal Opportunities
3. Commission for Religious Issues
4. Commission for Social Care Issues
5. Commission for Supervision of Ethics Codex Implementation
6. Council for Energy Efficiency
7. Council for Youth Issues
8. Council for Evaluation of the Functioning of Communal Services
9. Council for Human and Minority Rights
10. Council for Birth Rate Increasing Policies
11. Council for Environment Protection and Sustainable Development (City of Niš)

However, because of the lack of the two-way communication between citizens and the public administration, insufficient availability of information and lack of systematic evaluation and monitoring, the success of the administrative reform and all listed services remained unknown. In the context of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan which was planned for the year 2013, it is important to try to determine the way of preparation for this event which will represent the certain test of efficiency of realizing the established goals of common public policy. As a birthplace of the Emperor Constantine, Niš, along with other Constantine cities such as Milano (Italy), York (Great Britain) and Trier (Germany) will represent a cultural center of Europe in 2013. Other Constantine cities such as Arles (France), Iznik (Turkey) and Carnuntum-Petroni (Austria) also joined in the anniversary of the Edict of Milan. As the Roman emperor, Constantine is the most important because of the signing of the Edict of Milan in 313 AD which allowed Christians to profess the Christianity throughout the Empire (MIC). City officials announced great changes in Niš since 2009. These changes were part of preparation for central celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan. According to this, it is important to determine how much the public, including the general public in Serbia is familiar with this event. Also, it is important to detect through which frameworks news about preparation are released in media. It is very important because development of culture and tourism represent strategic goals of the public policy of the City of Niš in this period.

One of key documents adopted in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro is the Agenda 21 as a global action plan of sustainable development. During the last two decades, this document was very successful. Many organizations in all parts of the world seriously understood activities from Agenda 21 and started with their application. The Agenda 21 for culture was adopted in 2004 during the First Universal Forum of Cultures at the 4th Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion of Porto Alegre in Barcelona. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) adopted the Agenda 21 as a key document for their

cultural programs and took over the role of coordinator and the workgroup developed in 2005 represents the meeting point for cities, local governments and networks that emphasize culture within development processes (Agenda 21 for culture).

The purpose of Agenda adoption is finding understanding by government and local governments to sustain the developmental role of cultural resources for which they need to have a priority in local and national plans of development. The public policy cannot be efficiently conducted if it does not include the widest frame of cultural policy. That is the reason why Agenda emphasizes the following:

“The affirmation of cultures, and the policies which support their recognition and viability, are an essential factor in the sustainable development of cities and territories and its human, economic, political and social dimension. The central nature of public cultural policies is a demand of societies in the contemporary world. The quality of local development depends on the interweaving of cultural and other public policies – social, economic, educational, environmental and urban planning” (Agenda 21 for Culture).

The Agenda is adopted by more than 350 cities, local governments and organizations all over the world. The city of Niš signed and adopted the Agenda 21 for Culture in 2010. Culture development strategy of the City of Niš has been planned and aligned with Agenda for a long time and it includes the three years’ period from 2012 to 2015. However, since 2004, the culture is recognized as a strategic goal within the Frame for sustainable development strategy of the City of Niš and in Attachments for defining of cultural development strategy of the City of Niš for the period from 2004 to 2010. Also, the second important segment of the city development, tourism, is recognized in the Plan of Strategy for development of tourism of the City of Niš. The upcoming 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan is recognized as a particularly important part of cultural-touristic potentials of Niš where the Emperor Constantine was born.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The Greek term *πόλις* defines city-state in Antic Greece. The word *πολιτικός* (politics) is derived from it and it is connected with public affairs, i.e. jobs related with citizens of polis as a part of their collective decisions. Aristotle named one of his most important books as *Πολιτικά* (affairs about the polis). He argued about forms of government in Greek polities. According to classical interpretation of these terms, the politics represent the involvement of all free citizens in public life which happens in agora through public conversation about common jobs related to polis.

Socio-political and historical conditions are changed but in modern interpretations of politics, the main subjects are citizens and state. Many different political and nonpolitical organizations which participate in politics have developed during the history. Things that they have in common are: the political system (organized structure of relationships between political subjects) and political process (dynamic

aspect of specific political system functioning). “In short, understanding the policy process requires knowledge of the goals and perceptions of the hundreds of actors throughout the country involving possibly very technical scientific and legal issues over periods of a decade or more while most of those actors are actively seeking to propagate their specific ‘spin’ on events” [Sabatier 2007: 4].

However, these complex concepts of policy, political system and political process become more complex when one of main requirements and civilization achievements in democratic societies is development of a public social consensus through organized public policy. As an active conduction of important issues about public life or solving of specific problems of one social community, the public policy should establish strong strategies, define goals and priorities of action, conduct evaluation of situation and monitoring of achieved goals. The real democratic public policy should always react on needs of people, groups, nongovernment organizations, social community in whole in order to achieve all social, economic and cultural rights of citizens. This is the reason why the involvement of citizens in the decision making process is very important. Citizens’ participation is theoretically a strong pre-condition for democracy which is practically the main precondition for improvement of the quality of life. Public participation is “any kind of several mechanisms intentionally instituted to involve the lay public or their representatives in administrative decision making” [Beierle, Cayford 2002: 6]. It is particularly important in local communities and on local level, because public policy is directly reflected on public sector services which are necessary for citizens on daily base (health care, social welfare, environmental protection, economic development, cultural needs). In developed democratic societies such as Switzerland, Finland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, USA, researches show complete involvement and participation of citizens in making decision processes and public policy forming [Vukelić 2009]. However, on the other hand, in less developed democracies with shorter tradition of citizens’ participation, their involvement is incomplete. For instance, researches show that in Romania, which is the EU member (but also former communist country), there is almost no public participation in creating and application of public policy on the local level [Baba et al. 2009] or in other words, citizens still have a weak influence on a work of public institutions [Haruta 2010]. In Serbia, which is not a member of the EU yet, there are large problems in public sector functioning and conduction of a public policy. The involvement of citizens is based on referendum as a form of direct participation of citizens in decision making processes on a local level. According to data, the percentage of actively participating citizens in important decision making processes on the local level is 3% [Vukelić 2009: 310]. Beside other important factors for this condition, the most important is not informing citizens about conduction of public policy which has a direct influence on the quality of their lives.

Since media are fundamental institutions of passing different necessary information in contemporary society to citizens, it is important to determine their role in informing citizens about important issues related to the functioning of a local community.

Without informing through media, there is neither forming of public nor presenting of public opinion. “Public sphere character, development of its institutions and availability of resources have a direct influence on a possibility to participate in common social discursive activity. Normative dimension of this view defines basic condition of democratic media system as openness for presentation of all important interests in society. It should provide their participation in public, prepare them to contribute to public debate and become influential on forming of public policy” [Milivojević 2001: 196]. This is the reason why it is extremely important to detect which topics, stories, announcements are transferred by media and in which way they are formed. Actually, in media studies, the theory about media objectivity is overcome since the process of creation of media images is very complex and under influence of internal and external factors. In 1922, in the title of the first chapter of the famous book *Public Opinion* – “The world around us and the picture in our head”, it is noted that there is an *environment* (world around us) and *pseudo-environment* (our private perception of the world around us). Thus, all newspapers are the final result of a large number of selective processes [Lipman 1922]. According to this, media products are filtrated through framing because it facilitates the choice and process of information.

Erving Goffman explored frameworks as a process through which society reproduces the meaning. He elaborated that in his essays *Frame Analysis* (1974) and *Forms of Talk* (1981). He noted that each culture produces two kinds of primary frameworks: natural and social. Natural frameworks identify events in pure physical plan. People use them to consider events as purely physical without social action. Social frameworks identify events in social plan and people use them to consider events including wishes, will and attitudes [Goffman 1974]. It implies the conclusion that people use frameworks to interpret what happens in their environment which is used to emphasize certain parts of reality, while other parts are neglected. The world is observed through media frameworks in the same way: “Media frameworks, largely unspoken, and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who reported it and, to some important degree, for us who rely on their reporting. Media frameworks are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse. Frameworks enable journalists to process large amount of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences” [Gitlin 1980: 7].

According to this, journalistic practices must function as a process of organizing reality and tipification which enables journalists to be efficient and fastly transfer event into news under deadline pressure. Frameworks are necessary. Everything cannot be presented. Also everything cannot be equally interesting or useful. Something that is defined and emphasized as important, interesting or useful must exclude something else that might potentially include the same references. This process of evaluation of information is very complex. However, journalistic frameworks are used for interpretation of certain aspects through ideological criteria of dominant groups. This is the

way how frameworks become indicators of power in the representation of reality and confirm the hypothesis that media work ideologically [Milivojević 2001]. According to this, the importance added to certain topics in media influences their importance in public. Media impose themselves as key agents of almost all social, political and cultural changes [Simeunović 2009: 509].

The aim of this work is to detect frameworks through which the importance of certain subjects about public policy of the City of Niš is emphasized. This policy is directly related to preparation in different public sectors, especially in tourism and culture, for the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan. In order to achieve that, the content analysis is applied. This analysis can be quantitative, qualitative and mixed. It is most efficient when it is used as qualitative with quantitative process of data. The scientific research “needs to include four parts: description of a problem which can be solved by research, defining of goals, defining of subject and data needs to be collected and selection of method for data analysis” [Branković 2008: 65]. This research includes an analysis of articles from online issues of daily newspapers in Serbia, on the local, provincial and national level, including web sites of national televisions, one capital television and one provincial radio station:

RTS – Public service broadcaster in Serbia. One of the most watched televisions with national coverage. A broadcasted program is intended for all citizens of Serbia. Television broadcasting was introduced in 1958.

B92 – One of the most watched commercial televisions. It has the richest news program. Recognizable by the contents which contribute to fight for freedom of opinion and protection of human rights. It has a marked social responsibility in business.

RTV – The public broadcasting service for the citizens of Vojvodina province. It is in the Serbian language and the languages of national minorities; it broadcasts television, radio and multimedia program.

Studio B – The most watched city television. It broadcasts program intended for residents of Belgrade. It publishes all news through informative program, but the emphasis is on the news from Belgrade. The program schedule is represented by a number of educational programs. A lot of program time is devoted to art.

“Politika” – The oldest daily newspaper in Serbia (founded 1904) with small circulation, serious, traditional character. It is dedicated to educated readers.

“Danas” – Daily newspaper of small circulation, more expensive than others. It has serious, critical approach to social and political issues and cultural events. It is intended for the educated segment of the population. It is mostly read by inhabitants of Belgrade.

“Večernje novosti” – Daily newspaper with a long tradition of editorial policy under terms: quickly, briefly, clearly. Besides a serious approach to current social issues, it provides space for light topics and entertainment. It is a widely read newspaper in Serbia beside “Blic”.

“Blic” – European-oriented editorial policy. The newspaper acquired the reputation during the nineties of the 20th century as the most credible opposition newspaper. It

is widely read newspaper in Serbia beside “Večernje novosti”. “Blic” is mostly read by younger people and those who belong to the middle generation.

“Press” – It appeared as a tabloid known for its titles which were on the border of good taste, but later it turned to much more serious approach to daily political and social issues, with a conspicuously modest process of light contents.

“Kurir” – It is the first real tabloid with low price and high circulation. It is mostly bought by a part of society on the lowest social level.

“Alo” – It is a high circulation tabloid made in accordance with European tabloids. It is recognizable by sensationalistic headlines and edgy critics for the government. With a low price and highly oppositional content it became one of the mostly read newspapers in Serbia within the period of five years.

“Pravda” – It is a low-circulation daily newspaper, dedicated to extreme opponents of the government. It is known as a supporter of the nationalist and anti-European policy.

“Šumadijapress” – Local newspapers published in Kragujevac. Emphasis is placed on news from the City of Kragujevac and its surroundings.

“Južne vesti” – Local newspapers which covers the southern part of Serbia (Niš, Pirot, Leskovac, Vranje, etc.) and deliver mostly local news.

Radio 021 – Regional radio-station founded in Novi Sad. It broadcasts rich informative program.

“Dnevnik” – Local daily newspaper from Novi Sad. It publishes news related to politics, economy, culture, sport and local chronicle.

“Nacionalni građanski list” – Local newspaper from Novi Sad which stopped publishing after financial loss in 2011.

“Vesti” – Daily newspaper and informative portal with twenty-four hour reporting about events in Serbia, former Yugoslav republics and all over the world.

The analyzing unit was an article in a whole. Within the online base of newspaper articles “Naslovi.net” the amount of 101 articles related to preparations of celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan were found. These articles were announced during the year 2011. Also, they are checked in archives of all selected media. Five variables were defined: Name (name of the media), Topics, News category, News Genre and Headline. First variable has 18 categories (each category is related to a kind of media), second 7 (Pope, Serbian Orthodox church, Plan, Culture, Science, Tourism, Other), third 7 (News of the day, Society, Politics, Regions, Culture, Economy, Other), fourth 4 (Hard news, Investigative reports, Editorials, Soft news) and fifth 3 (Descriptive, Metaphorical, Sensational). Data are processed with the use of program for statistical process of data (SPSS).

PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES AND ANNIVERSARY

Quantitative analysis of articles according to defined variables and categories indicates that preparations for celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of

Milan were the topic from time to time, without clear media interest and familiarity of journalists with the problems of a local public policy. The most important framework through which media formed information about preparations is the speculation about the Pope's arrival in Serbia during this celebration. In 42.6% of articles, the main subject was the Pope's arrival. Since media observed this as a first-class event which included potential religious conflict and different political implications, 75% of articles was announced as hard news. Although most of headlines are characterized as "descriptive headlines" (57.4%), in order to attract readers' attention, headlines with the Pope as the main subject were categorized as sensational (20%) and metaphorical (15%). Framing of the Pope's arrival in Serbia is mostly common in politics of reporting by daily newspapers "Blic", "Vesti" and "Večernje novosti". Local papers such as "Šumadijapress" and national daily newspapers "Danas" and "Pravda" were the only ones which did not report about the Pope's arrival. This subject was mostly placed in category under the common title "Society" (63%), then in category "Politics" (19%) and in the remaining categories "Regions", "News of the day", "Other". The Pope's arrival was not observed through categories "Culture", "Tourism" and "Economy".

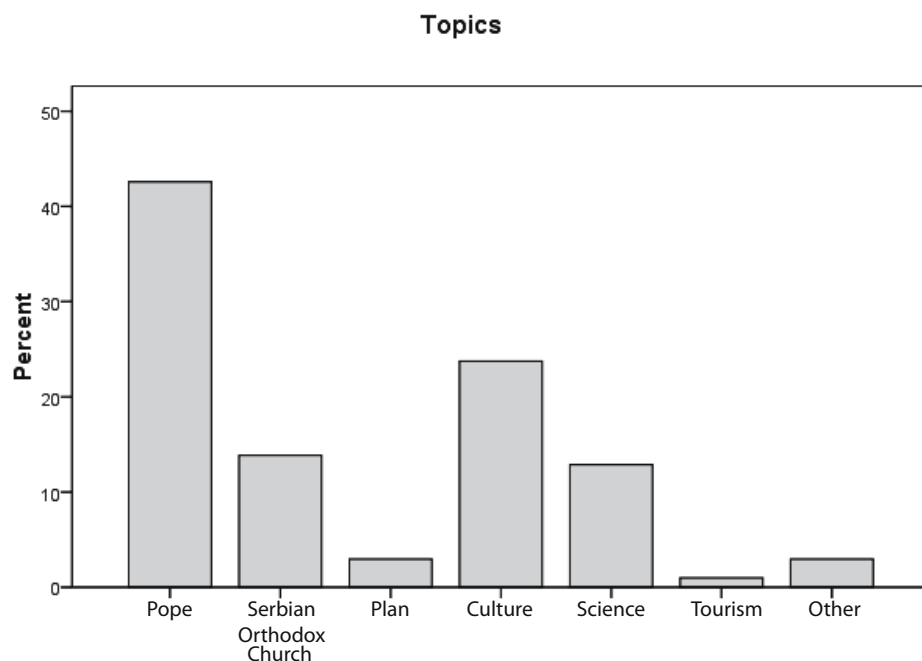


Figure 1. Major topics in the news.

The largest number of articles (12.9%) was published by daily newspaper "Blic", then "Vesti" and local newspaper "Južne" vesti (10.9%). The smallest number of articles was published by newspapers which cover other Serbian region, "Šumadijapress" (1%), and provincial daily newspaper "Dnevnik" (1%). Journal genres are placed in

the following way: total hard news (44.6%), soft news (34.7%) investigative reports (12.9%) and editorials (7.9%). Hard news are mostly presented by “Vesti”, RTV and B92, but these media have no text that can be placed in the category “investigative reports”. “Dnevnik”, “Šumadijapress”, “Alo” and “Danas” did not publish hard news, and the largest number of investigative reports was published by “Politika” (38%). Soft news (17.5%) are published by “Blic” and “Južne vesti”.

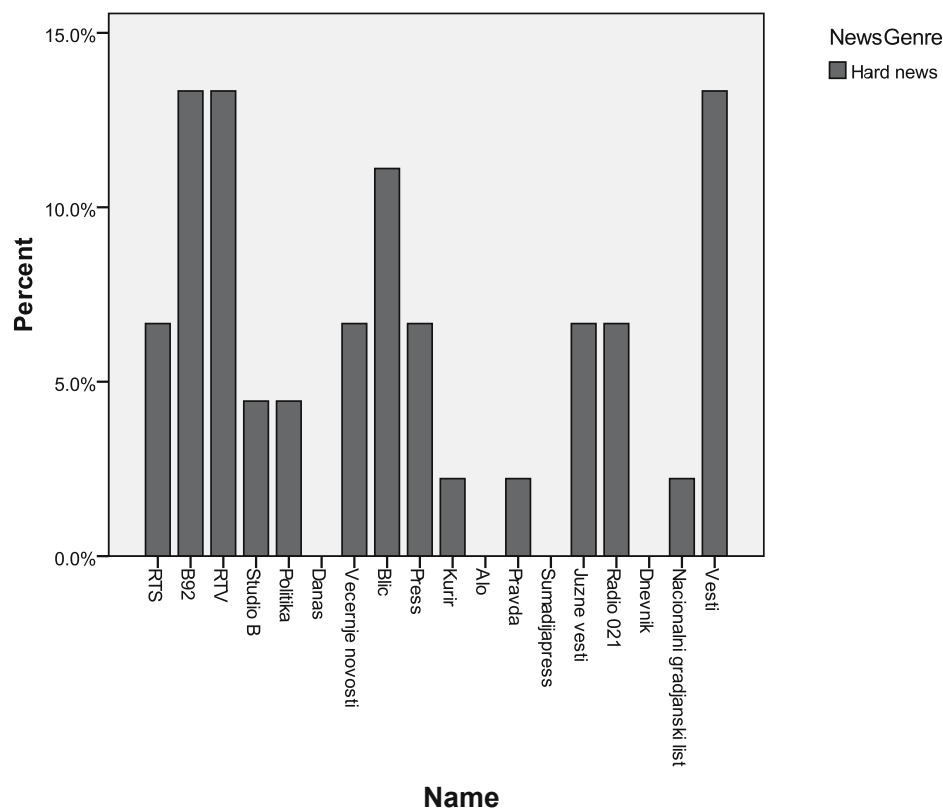


Figure 2. Frequency of hard news stories

While observing all analyzed media, information about preparations for celebration are mostly presented through category “Society” (49.5%), and at least through category “Economy” (1%). As mentioned earlier, in total amount, there are mostly descriptive headlines (57.4%), metaphorical (25.7%) and sensationalist (16.8%). Articles with descriptive headlines are mostly published by “Blic” (17%), while these headlines are not published in tabloids “Kurir” and “Alo”. Articles with sensationalist headlines are mostly published by “Večernje novosti” (24%) while such headlines are not published in “Nacionalni građanski list”, “Dnevnik”, Radio 021, “Šumadijapress”, “Press”, “Danas”, Studio B, RTV, RTS.

Table 1. News headlines

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Descriptive	58	57.4	57.4	57.4
	Metaphorical	26	25.7	25.7	83.2
	Sensational	17	16.8	16.8	100.0
	Total	101	100.0	100.0	

Articles on tourism are published only by local newspapers “Južne vesti” (100%). Also, articles with culture as a central topic are mostly published by “Južne vesti” (25%). Only three media reported about the plan of preparation for the celebration: “Politika”, “Večernje novosti” and “Press”. Other media did not even check this subject.

The analysis of processed data indicates plans for a large celebration which media did not report about. Celebration plans were aligned in documents of public policy of the City of Niš, but journalists did not try to find anything more about their realization. Reporting remained in a domain of sporadically mentioning that the celebration will be held in Niš in 2013. As regards the celebration, the mostly mentioned facts were the reconstruction of villa of the Emperor Constantine in the archaeological area Mediana, raising the cross at the Vinik hill near Niš, raising the monument for the Emperor Constantine in Niš, and scientific meeting related to the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan. Government of the City of Niš planned to arrange cultural-historical monuments, raise a new one and promote cultural and touristic potentials of Niš by the time when the celebration should be held. However, newspapers do not offer information about public services which are involved in celebration preparations. Culture and tourism sectors cannot be independently functional without dependency on economics, traffic, communal and other services.

The answer to the question: why do we find such a lack of information about the celebration which should be the national and international event, lies in the fact that the main framework of media reporting was the possible arrival of the Pope in Serbia during the celebration. Media attention was directed to different kinds of speculations, intrigues and interesting news about the information who will call the Pope and how He is going to come to Serbia. Also, media insisted on description of details about the potential conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church, political organizations and the whole society because it would be the first official visit of the Catholic leader in Serbia where the Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion. This is the reason why this subject was treated as hard news so all other topics were marginalized. Furthermore, articles had a sensational approach in headlines, therefore, media marked the arrival of the Pope as the main event instead to give significance to this celebration. The context in which the Pope’s arrival is defined includes political, social and religious crisis. It is very specific for media frameworks since new frameworks are created or some old ones are modified in new events, which has a great

influence on people's thoughts. Cohen noted that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" [Cohen 1963: 13].

In this connection, there is a very small amount of articles with research approach where journalists are trying to get information and inform public about the true reasons of celebration and its details such as: The Council for the preparation of jubilee organization did not meet at all, the plan for the anniversary is being worked out and not in final version, the city did not start with the marketing campaign. Representatives of different political parties announced that the City of Niš should be the host of this event while there are no buildboards with such a claim [Kocić, "Press"]. There is a justified fear about the capability of the Government of the City of Niš to organize this kind of celebration since there are no visible signs of its preparations. This celebration might put Niš on the world map. "The only sign of preparation is building of access roads to archaeological area Mediana" [Kocić, "Press"]. At the end of the year, only one article disclosed that the local Plan of activities for the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan had been adopted at the last meeting of the City Parliament. "According to the mentioned document, the birthplace of the Emperor Constantine shall be proudly marked in 2013. Till then, there are plans to finish works on the construction of the Church of St. Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena, arrange the archaeological area Mediana, the Fortress, City field and access roads. Some important cultural manifestations are provided for this celebration. These manifestations are planned to be held before the great scientific meeting 'Niš and Byzantine' which was planned for 2013. The International project of music-theater work Oratorio 'Konstantin Magnus', then a large sailing regatta and the bike race through Serbia 'Roads of Roman Emperors' are some of these manifestations" [Stojanović, "Večernje novosti"].

Sporadic and poor media reporting about problems in public policy of the City of Niš left the public unfamiliar with concrete plans for celebration and their realization. This fact made impossible the participation of public in decision-making processes about a very important subject. It is extremely important to note that this subject has a local and national character.

CONCLUSIONS

Serbia is a country in a transition process which became more complicated instead of expectations about the transition itself. Although many citizens expected a complete break up with nondemocratic elements of former regime and planned economy guided by state and public policy which belonged to the party after five-October changes in 2000, many important institutions did not manage to respond to requirements of the new, modern civil society. It is mostly visible in increasing regional inequality and insufficient development of local government capacities. Weak sides

of local public policy are related to a participative approach to public policy forming, insufficiently informed citizens, lack of a two-way communication and evaluation of strategic program documents. This research is an indicator that public policy is not based on a partnership of all society sectors. There is a problem in coordination of different institutions responsible for conduction of public policy on a local level. Local level needs reorganization of civil sector engagements and opening of serious professional and public debate about the local public policy of the City of Niš. The main role for this opening should be given to media. They need to be generators of common democratization of society.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Nataša SIMEUNOVIĆ BAJIĆ, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Culture and Media, Megatrend University, Belgrade, Serbia, E-mail: vasariste@gmail.com, nsimeunovic@megatrend.edu.rs

Nataša Simeunović Bajić teaches Communication History and Cultural Politics. Professor Simeunović Bajić's background in Political Sciences, Media Studies and Cultural Studies, has shaped her interest in cultural politics, social and political history, ethnic minorities and media representations. She has published several significant works in national and international scientific journals and presented several conference papers in Serbia and abroad. Currently she is involved in two research projects of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Ljiljana MANIĆ, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Culture and Media, Megatrend University, Belgrade, Serbia, E-mail: ljmanic@megatrend.edu.rs

Ljiljana Manić was born in Belgrade in 1966. She graduated from the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Economics in 1990, after which she got her Master's and PhD at the Megatrend University, Faculty of Culture and Media. She is the author of many papers concerning sociology, public opinion and public relations, and she also participated in many conferences in these fields. Currently, she is teaching the course Models of Cultural Policy.

Aleksandra MAJDAREVIĆ, PhD student, teaching assistant, Faculty of Economics, Finance and Administration, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia, amajdarevic@fefa.edu.rs

Aleksandra Majdarević is graduate teaching assistant in Methodology of Applied Research. She has a particular interest in methodology including mixed methods. She has carried out a number of empirical studies. Currently she is involved in two research projects of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.