

# Provincial Communications Policy

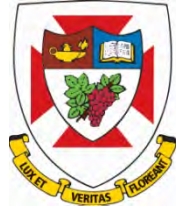
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**The Institute of Urban Studies**





THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

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**PROVINCIAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

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PROVINCIAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Prepared by

Institute of Urban Studies  
University of Winnipeg

and

The Ad-Hoc Committee

July 27, 1971.

One of the key problems of our cities is how to use the advanced technologies which we possess. These technologies which are implemented first by the entrepreneurs of the business world are used to produce an economic benefit. But to have these technologies used to produce an optimum social benefit requires a force from a different direction. That force could be the government of Manitoba which could use these technologies to improve the ability of people to know and understand themselves and the communities they live in.

Therefore it is our purpose to recommend to the Government of Manitoba possible courses of action regarding the use and promotion of one of the most rapidly advancing technologies - the communication media.

For the past two years the Institute has been working with citizens groups in an effort to develop more effective and democratic methods for the transmission of information about decisions and policies to the people who are directly affected by those decisions and policies. In this work, the lack of relevant information available to citizens has become very apparent. Two surveys were done in the central city area - surveys which showed that less than 10% of the population know what was going on in their area and what was being planned for their area. Even more frightening was the fact that the plans made for these areas would effectively change the physical shape and social character of the areas, and people would not learn about them until they had begun.

As a result of these inquiries and the experience gained in developing neighbourhood groups, the Institute began to explore the question of how a more effective system of communication could be established and how such a system might be managed by a community group.

The Institute initiated the following research projects to explore the possibilities of community-communication:

a) In the summer of 1970, VTR and 16 m.m. film were used to produce films on youth, the aged and the Main Street transient population. These tapes and films became tools with which to involve a greater number of people in the discussion and elucidation of their respective needs.

b) In the Roosevelt Park area, an urban renewal area, the Institute was instrumental in helping the people set up the People's Committee for a Better Neighbourhood Inc., a neighbourhood development corporation attempting to engage in renewal and rehabilitation in its area. VTR was used by the people to document an analysis of conditions in the area and a record of their meetings amongst themselves and with members of local and provincial governments. They also have a record of their bid to and success in moving into their area an apartment block scheduled for demolition.

c) VTR was also used extensively in the Windsor Park area, a middle-class suburban community. Attempts were made by the residents to identify the unique needs of this type of community. This community was even more interesting because its bilingual issue in the education system had been creating conflict amongst several groups mainly due to an inadequate exchange of information related to the implementation of Provincial Bill 113 on

on French language instruction. The people arranged to tape a series of School Board Seminars on the question using both French and English film crews and ending up with one French and one English tape. Requests to view these tapes have been overwhelming and the availability of a cable channel on which to show these tapes would certainly increase the awareness of a greater number of people in regards to this issue.

d) In January 1971 a grant of \$10,000 was given to the Institute by the Winnipeg Foundation to support a pilot program designed to explore the feasibility of a system of television broadcasting or cablecasting that would serve to expand the flow of information on events of importance to Winnipeg citizens and offer community groups the opportunity to communicate their own concerns and express their own interests. The objectives of the project were to train community people in the use of VTR equipment and in the preparation of programs, to investigate the technical, financial and organizational requirements of a community television system, to explore the possibility of forming a community communication corporation or Charter Board and to undertake a seminar or series of workshops on community television.

e) The Institute, in co-operation with Red River Community College, carried out tests with various 1/2" and 1" VTR equipment - tests which were in essence, plugging tapes into the CATV system in Winnipeg. From these tests it was indicated that 1/2" VTR could be successfully used as a program vehicle for cablecasting. (See Appendix 1)

f) The Institute prepared and presented a brief to the Canadian Radio and Television Commission outlining the work done during the past two years and detailing some of its observations based on that work.

g) In May of this year the Institute held a three-day conference-workshop on the subject of community television. The conference was successful and as a result of the information presented, a twenty-five member Ad-Hoc Committee was struck. This Committee charged with studying administrative and financial models of community television organizations will present its findings at a conference which it will call in the fall. (See Appendix 2).

h) The Institute, through the Federal Opportunities for Youth Program, is providing summer jobs for twelve students in a community television project. These students are presently training community groups and individuals in the use and potential of VTR and it is estimated that approximately 400 people will have been trained in the use of VTR equipment by the end of August. The Institute feels that this type of training should be expanded to include people in the rural areas.

i) The Institute has also been examining the lack of communication and identification which exists between urban and rural centers - a lack which contributes a good deal to the cultural shock felt when moving from one type of area to the other. There is a tremendous information lag in our cities about the problems of rural life and in the rural areas with regard to the problems of city life.

The experience of the IUS has given it an insight into the state of the communications media in Manitoba and an insight into the problems and promises of community television. Based on this experience, we would like to offer the following comments.

## I THE SITUATION

People need to communicate with each other. As society becomes larger and more complex, people tend to narrow down their communication to certain kinds of people only. This creates a gap in communication between different kinds of people.

As society progresses, this "communication gap" becomes larger and larger. Communications is one of man's basic needs, but it is the one which becomes less and less important to man as society becomes more complex.

Since people have a basic need to understand and relate to their surroundings (which means also other people) and since they can no longer do this on a personal basis, they turn to the media.

But most media have turned away from their basic service as communicators and have begun to function in the more profitable role of entertainer.

Entertainers do not challenge their audiences - rather, entertainers make their audience more comfortable with their lives. In order to provide content which captures a mass audience, persuades people to buy things, and makes people comfortable with their life, the media only widen the communication gap by removing people from reality and covering up.

Television had in its beginnings great potential both in the field of human relations and in the field of profit-making. But it soon became obvious that to own and operate a television station was a very expensive proposition and had to be left to big business to run. Therefore TV's potential in the field of profit-making was the field that was exploited.



Cable Television (called Community Antenna TV, or CATV) introduced a new dimension in television programming. A cable TV station is much cheaper to set up than a broadcast TV station. A cablevision station can send out programmes on all channels of the TV set without interference, while a broadcast station has to have some empty channels on either side.

CATV began in 1952 in order to bring improved and varied TV reception. It soon became apparent, however, that it could do a great deal more than that.

It is possible for CATV to send programmes directly into homes without having a station, a transmitter or a certain channel frequency. People are only now beginning to realize the tremendous possibilities of a system which can fill all 13 channels at the same time.

CATV companies have not been interested in program origination because of the very expensive equipment and facilities needed. But now the CRTC has said that CATV companies must do some program origination. This program origination should be community based, but if the cable companies cannot afford the necessary equipment, how can the community afford it?

The answer has become evident in the last few years. Many companies have come out with inexpensive portable video tape recording equipment. This equipment can be used by the community to make video tapes, which can be shown over a modified version of the cable companies facilities.

This equipment is a completely portable, battery-operated VTR system that can be carried and operated by one person. It consists of a hand held video camera (with a zoom lens and a built-in microphone) connected to a shoulder or back carried video recorder. The video recorder is used both to record picture and sound, and to play them back on a monitor, or with an optional attachment, on a regular TV set.

Groups in other parts of Canada have been using this type of a set-up and have been quite successful at producing and showing video tapes over CATV systems.

This type of equipment is presently available, in Winnipeg, for use by community groups. If a group wishes to use this equipment on a rental or loan basis, then nothing is preventing them from starting to make tapes now.

Because of the potential of CATV and because of the need to narrow the communication gap, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) has laid down new operating guidelines for CATV operations. In order to retain their cablecasting licence, CATV operators are going to have to become involved in programming which is more community-oriented and more meaningful to the average person. These guidelines now make it possible for people to gain direct access to TV, to do their own programming, to decide for themselves what is relevant and to use TV as they feel it should be used.

But if people do not take advantage of this opportunity and fight to widen it, then programming will be handed back to the businessmen and they will continue as they have always done. If the people want control of the medium and if the cable companies are providing the right of access, then what do people have to do?

People have to organize among themselves, decide their needs and their aims, decide on an appropriate method of dialogue for their community.

But the people can only do so much. Each community group can organize and train itself and several of them can come together to form a Charter Board or a Communications Corporation. However, each community group will have different ideas and different objectives and yet all must be guaranteed

equal access and representation. Some groups may wish to remain outside of a co-ordinating charter board and yet still wish to cablecast programs. Some groups with long-term interests may want to ensure that they can have a continuing platform without relying on a Charter Board, and some other group with a short-term interest may only want to make one program and then dissolve the group.

This diversity of community interests should be promoted and groups should not be forced to join together in order to gain access. The Charter Board could be the gateway between community interests and the cable operators. The conflicts among groups and ideas that are arising and are bound to arise are going to cause problems both among the groups and between the groups and the cable companies. Also there is the question of control - access is fine but without control access does not mean very much as community programs could be edited and shuffled as the cable operators saw fit.

In order to alleviate these problems which are bound to arise, regulations and structures would have to come from an authority higher than the community level - that authority being the Provincial Government.

## II PROVINCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

There is at this time a sense of urgency for formulating a provincial position as regards the future development and control of cable television. As the CRTC in its policy paper of July 16, 1971 said, "It is imperative that governments, Provincial and Federal, establish at all levels fiscal and economic policies providing an environment oriented toward the most rapid and effective use and growth of Canadian creative resources." However, the overall question

of communications in the province should be the issue and not simply the economic and jurisdictional aspects of communications.

As noted previously, communications is a very vital part of life and as all of these communication systems are becoming more interdependent and entwined, some sort of overall co-ordinative policy is needed to ensure that all systems contribute to the social well-being of the province. This policy must contain broad and enlightened considerations to attempt to revive the stifled and stifling process of the established systems and to prevent the new systems from developing in total abstraction of pressing public needs.

The CRTC and the Federal Department of Communications have been issuing new guidelines and regulations with the intention of creating a more democratic communications milieu and the provincial government now must examine guidelines and regulations which would reinforce, supplement and co-ordinate the areas of activity which the senior government has left to its jurisdiction. It does not appear that question of jurisdiction needs to be dealt with at any great length for both the federal and provincial levels appear to be agreed on this point.

There is a need for the provincial government to investigate the scope and content of regulations and guidelines regarding cable systems in general and community television in particular. There is also a need for the provincial government to accept responsibility for the promotion of cable systems all across the province. Cable operations in remote areas of Manitoba could be co-ordinated with similar operations in the urban areas to serve in tying the province together as one cohesive unit.

But the key concept underlying these rules and regulations should be the concept of experimentation. The Institute does not feel that there is at present enough knowledge about the implications and spin-off effects of community television to allow policies and regulations to be formed. More experimentation, research and thought must be given to the whole concept of community television, not just for the purpose of making it work, but for the purpose of making it work effectively for the people. This research and experimentation should have four aspects - economic, technical, human and social.

Questions of access should be examined carefully but along with a guarantee of access should go the guarantees of control. But control brings in the question of legal liability - if the cable company has no control over what is cablecast on a community channel, then it would be unfair to hold them legally liable for it. So, a method of making community groups legally liable for their own programs should be investigated - the concept of a Communications Corporation of citizen groups might provide the answer.

A Communications Corporation could, however, tend to become a tightly-knit closed body and therefore the province should investigate ways of promoting participation among groups and individuals, providing training in equipment and techniques and guarantee access to the Corporation and thus to the cable.

And the question of authority over the cable system itself must be examined carefully. There should be a partnership of public and private control over the cable systems. If either sector had a monopoly then the diversity which characterizes community television would in time be lost. The province

Itself should have some interest in the cable systems for two primary reasons - to encourage growth of cable systems in remote, now-unserved areas of Manitoba and to encourage the growth of cable systems to those people in urban centers who cannot afford to purchase the service at the present time.

The Institute feels that at the present time the Province does not have the necessary body to carry out this task of developing policy while investigating all aspects of the community television concept, and so the Institute recommends the establishment of a body created specifically for this purpose and representing all sectors of concern within the province.

### III PROVINCIAL INVOLVEMENT

It is necessary for the province to become involved with both the cable companies and with the citizen's groups in order to investigate all sides of the question and to formulate policies regarding the interaction of the two. It might be useful at this point to look briefly at some models of interaction presently being utilized by other urban centers in Canada:

Thunder Bay - There is at present no large co-ordinating body in Thunder Bay

although they do have a small co-ordinating group which works with a production group to train people to make their own programs as well as making programs for them. The group works at some distance from the cable company and the cable operator has complete editorial control over everything which is cablecast. The cable company is also competing with the community group by having its own co-ordinating and production group for those people who wish to deal directly with the cable company. There is community television in Thunder Bay, but of a

very weak kind - at present most programs are bicycled in from other parts of McLean-Hunters cable system.

Toronto: The most successful group in Toronto is the Downtown Community Television Group which deals with just a very small sector of Toronto. It is a very unstructured and very changing group. It has a small core of co-ordinators and a very mobile contingent of community groups. The cable company, Rogers Cable, is very open and although it does retain editorial control over content it gives the groups a great deal of latitude on this question. This group functions very well but on a very small scale, much smaller than that proposed for Winnipeg.

Vancouver: The Metro Media Association of Vancouver is operating on a much larger scale than either of the above two. It has as a co-ordinating body, a large Council which represents as near as possible, a cross section of community groups. The Council has a production group working under it as well as a facilitator for encouraging people to become involved. The relationship with the cable company is very good and the Council retains editorial control over all of its own content. It is, however, still in the initial stages of operation and is rather early to see any definite trends or results.

The theoretical concept around which the organization of community television in Winnipeg should be structured would be close to the structure evolving in Vancouver with a few minor alterations.

There should be an umbrella group (Charter Board) licensed by the CRTC and composed of the community organizations with slots for individuals.

The umbrella group would have complete responsibility and control for all programming. The cable company would work very closely with and be a part of this umbrella group. There should be a separate production group operating under the authority of the umbrella group to train people and aid them in making tapes. This production group could be a full-time contractually-related group. A facilitator or facilitators should also be available to encourage groups to participate and become involved in community programming and would work closely with citizens and the production group.

At present, there is an Ad-Hoc Committee (see appendix 2) in Winnipeg which is investigating ways and means of setting up some sort of umbrella group to co-ordinate community programming in Winnipeg. This Committee is presently being supported by the Institute of Urban Studies but has need of further and continuing encouragement both financially and direction-wise. This should be provided by the Provincial Government through a body specifically created for this purpose.

To solve the problems raised in the above discussion, the Institute would recommend that the Provincial Government take the following steps:

- establish by September 1971 an ad-hoc Provincial Communications Commission composed of representatives of the provincial government, the cable companies, community groups, the Ad-Hoc Committee and interested individuals. This Commission would further investigate all aspects of community television with a view to recommending policy and guidelines to be created by the provincial government. It would, during this process, give financial encouragement and a sense of direction to the groups presently organizing in the Winnipeg area. It should explore sources of funding not only from the provincial government



but also from the private sector. The Commission should have the power to recommend directions and areas of policy to the provincial government and should have the power to elicit and distribute financial support. Besides promoting and funding the Charter Board in the Greater Winnipeg area, the Commission could also promote and fund the development of similar boards in the rural sections of Manitoba. The Commission's main tasks would be to begin developing policy while further promoting the investigation and research presently underway regarding the concept of community programming.

-- The revamping of the role of the MTS as it affects the cable systems in the province. The Provincial government through the MTS is already involved in the operation of cable systems. MTS at present owns the coaxial cables and charges the cable company approximately \$5000 per mile for the initial installation as well as an annual rental charge of approximately \$200 per mile/per year. The MTS has been making a profit of over \$30,000 annually from these charges. The MTS also has control over the micro-wave equipment used at the cable station head-end. If the province through the MTS became a part owner of the cable company then installation and rental charges could be reduced resulting in a reduced charge to subscribers thereby allowing more sectors of the population to become a part of this system. Also some of the MTS profit could be used to help finance community programming.

-the Provincial government should look at the following specific areas:

1. look immediately into the feasibility of having candidates for the Uni-City aldermanic elections being given a cable platform from which to carry out part of their campaign, thereby making it possible for candidates with little financial backing to achieve the optimum amount of coverage.

2. look at the support and encouragement of ethnic programming.  
The Italians in Winnipeg are presently involved in making Italian-language tapes to be shown over cable systems. This type of strictly ethnic programming should be encouraged.
3. the creation of a cable-based community information center to provide city government information and personal services to all citizens.
4. a two-way educational television system for adult education.
5. the possibility of expanding rural services to provide a cable-based rural medical care system which could link up under-served rural areas with the medical expertise of the urban centers.
6. The creation and support of training centers in both the urban and rural areas - both to introduce people to the concept of community programming and to train them in the use of the equipment.
7. Carry out and support others carrying out experimentation as to new techniques of cablecasting with special emphasis on the portable, easy-to-operate 1/2" VTR equipment.

In conclusion, the Institute stresses the need for further research and experimentation before the setting down of any definitive policy or guidelines but also stresses the need for a body to co-ordinate and give direction to this research and experimentation.