TELECOMMUNITY FOR APPALACHIA

NOW
As we all know, Appalachia has a host of well documented problems. It has also been resorted to doing something about it problems that is as yet virtually unthought. That resource is cable television.

There are well over one hundred cable systems operating in Central Appalachia alone, ranging from systems with less than 100 subscribers to a giant complex in Johnstown, Ohi o, Kingsport, and Bristol with about 34,000 subscribers. Unfortunately, only a handful of these systems are doing any kind of local program origination. Practically none are currently involved in "community programming."

Under a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, we began work in April, 1971, to study the feasibility of using cable television for rural community development in Central Appalachia.

The study, which we've dubbed the Appalachian Community Television Project, began with an exclusive focus on ways local origination may help in solving community problems.

Background research included a CATV facilities survey, a survey of existing program sources, and an assessment of need survey. As we got deeper into the subject it became apparent that local program origination was only one of a number of areas that needed concentrated work.

We felt that any comprehensive approach for development of cable for community purposes must include some means of access to cable for those not now served, some means of influencing communities considering franchises, some way of instituting a "community access" channel, and some means of bringing broadband cable services to rural Appalachia.

LATER
Our recommendations to the Commission will include a request for funds to establish a multi-purpose, nonprofit telecommunication development corporation based within the Region. It will be the purpose of "Appalachian Telecommunity" to promote evolutionary social change in Appalachian communities through usage of telecommunication. Project areas that are interested in pursuing include:

(A) CATV Program Origination — providing technical assistance and funds to selected local communities for demonstrations of the feasibility and viability of various methods of producing local programming, i.e., cable system-produced programs, independent productions, outside source.

(B) Community Programming — helping a local community get started in grass roots television by providing portable equipment, training personnel, to see that EVERYONE has the opportunity of using the local channel.

(C) Community Construction and Operation of CATV — aid local communities in identifying funding sources for construction and operation of local cable system. Many mountain towns are too small to support a profit making cable company but could support a nonprofit CATV company locally franchised and operated, also a good way to insure long-term support for community programming.

(D) Legal Aid — community advocacy for those towns not now cabled, legal help in those areas already cabled, model franchises, other services.

(E) Regional Production foster development of cable and broadcast outlets to provide more programming specifically produced for the Appalachian audience.

IMMEDIATELY
We are now building preparing our final report for the Appalachian Regional Commission. It is our intention to convince them that the potential of cable warrants an operational phase of our project that will put our proposals in the field. We need money, people, and equipment to start working toward making CATV systems in Appalachia more than master antenna systems.

Above the immediate, there stands the long range implications of our actions. We must begin exploring cable's community applications now, if for no better reason than the fact that the twig is still green and pliable. As the Sloan Commission has stated, choice is still possible in regards to cable television. Citizens may still take a hand in shaping cable television's growth and institutions in a fashion that will bend to society's will and society's best intentions.

There is, in short, still time . . . time to be used in attempting to shape a technology that, in time, will shape us.

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