

Goldmark Is Testing New

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Rural Society Based on Electronics

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—The man who invented the long-playing record, the first practical color television system, the video tape cassette and other revolutionary communications devices is now at work trying to engineer a society of the future.

To Dr. Peter C. Goldmark, that means a society that could take full advantage of recent advances in communications technology to free people from the economic necessity of living near large cities, thus eventually solving the urban crisis, the rural crisis and the energy crisis.

Dr. Goldmark, who was president of the Columbia Broadcasting System's laboratory division here for 35 years until his retirement last year, has convinced the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to underwrite his "New Rural Societies" experiment with two \$362,000 research grants.

"The New Rural Society is not something we will create, it will form itself automatically," Dr. Goldmark explained, once people see that existing technology imaginatively used can allow them to move to small country towns linked electronically to entertainment, business, medical and government centers.



C.B.S. Laboratories

Dr. Peter C. Goldmark, who is now searching for ways to enable masses of people to live in the countryside.

EPPI

ically linked remote operations there to meet the region's most pressing need—employment.

The problem, as Dr. Goldmark sees it, is that vast numbers of the nation's city dwellers—would rather live in the countryside than in the city.

But, forced by economic necessity, 30-million Americans have left the countryside since 1940, leaving the country in decline and the cities in crisis.

Commuting to work consumes about 50 per cent of the nation's gasoline production every year, he says, as urban areas get bigger and people commute longer distances.

The solution, he says, is simple. If work, health care and entertainment could be as close as the living room television set or a "village green community communications center," the people who want to live in the country could live in the country, the people who really want to live in the city could live in the city and virtually everyone could walk to work.

"The technology is already there, almost nothing needs to be invented," said the 67-year-old, Hungarian-born Dr. Goldmark, who speaks quietly with traces of a Continental accent. "It's the system engineering and the economic viability of it that we're working on now. We have to show business that it is economically viable to work this way."

Tests Are Under Way

Already, tests on communication systems and people's attitudes toward them are under way in a 10-town rural section of northeastern Connecticut centering on the city of Willimantic. The city, an older mill town known for the manufacture of thread, and the largely agricultural region around it, were chosen because it was felt they were somewhat typical of rural regions across the country.

A research team of engineers, social scientists, psychologists and urban planners drawn from the Goldmark Communications Corporation's engineering staff here, the Windham Regional Development Agency in Willimantic and the staff of Fairfield University have been surveying the area's needs and planning electronic ways of meeting them.

Although work is still in the research stage, the suggestions include electronic classrooms and cable television systems to answer the region's educational and cultural needs, facsimile transmission of medical records and X-rays, and convincing employers to locate electron-

Teleconferences Held

Businessmen, government officials, officers of the Salvation Army, a librarian association and a community service group have already conducted regular business meetings between Willimantic and Hartford by "teleconference."

"In general, they've been very successful," said Dr. James A. Barone, provost of Fairfield University and contract director for the HUD program. "It's merely a question of the block many non-technical people have about technical things."

Unlike the work Dr. Goldmark did for C.B.S., which often required great technical leaps, the hardware part of his new "Rural Societies" program is, by modern standards, relatively simple.

The conferees in Willimantic sat before a television camera and watched their counterparts in Hartford on a television screen.

The lack of a sense of presence that some conferees



felt while looking at the television screen was met, at least somewhat, by installing stereo speakers so that each participant had an audible "place" on the screen. The complaint that documents could not be exchanged was met by installing a telefacsimile machine.

'I Liked It'

"I thought it worked quite well," said Robert Young, director of the Windham Regional Development Agency, who participated last year in a telecommunications conference with state development officials in Hartford.

"It was one of a series of staff level conferences they were having with all the planning regions and it wasn't a make-believe thing," he recalled. "It wasn't as good as face to face, but I liked it and the others did, too."

"It was a little stilted, there was a feeling of being on stage and all the technicians were tripping over wires and things like that, but they wouldn't be there when this kind of thing becomes routine, and anyway, you get so caught up in what you're doing that you don't notice them after a while anyway."

Dr. Goldmark does not expect the full flowering of his new Rural Society much before the year 2000, 27 years from now.

Sometime before then he hopes to see community communication centers where large, projected television images in a central hall will serve as mass entertainment and educational theaters and with small "teleconference" or "telelibrary" rooms.

A Cultural Network

Still closer he has dreams of a nationwide cultural network set up as part of the bicentennial celebration in 1976, and using the commercial relay satellite to be orbited next year. "It would be better than a lot of rockets and firecrackers that no one will remember in a month," he said.

"Cultural events would be available in all the middle-

size towns, or where there are cable TV systems, in the home. The communities that will be targets of the satellites will have the kind of offerings people migrate to the big cities for and then don't get to see anyway. Instead of having 4,000 people at the opening of the Metropolitan Opera, you could have four million people. It would make money."

There are those who say that the whole new Rural Society idea seems too good to be true, Dr. Goldmark says, but then, there were those who said that about the long-playing record.