

Radio Multikulti, Berlin: Public Broadcasting in 18 Languages

Author of the case study: Jakob Hurrle

Abstract in English: „Radio Multikulti“ is the name of a radio station in Berlin, which is part of the public broadcasting network. The station targets mainly the city’s migrant population with programmes in 18 languages. Aside of offering programmes in minority languages during the evening, Radio Multikulti offers programmes in German that reach both members of minority communities and interested parts of the majority population.

Area: Media

Kind-category of project: Public Radio Station

Kind-category of actor: Public body

Country: Germany

Year: Since 1994

5 key-words: public radio, minority languages, diversity, intercultural communication, journalism

1. THE PRACTICE

1.1 Description of the project

Project Initiator:

Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg
Radiomultikulti
Masurenallee 8-14
14046 Berlin

www.multikulti.de

Objectives:

- To create a radio programme that reflects Berlin’s multi-cultural reality
- To offer programmes for minority audiences both in German and in the native languages of the minority communities
- To report professionally on local and international issues that are of special interest for the minority communities

Activities and Results:

Established in 1994 as a “pilot project” with a limited duration of three years, Radio Multikulti has since developed into a full-fledged radio station. The station is part of the city state of Berlin’s public broadcasting programme. The radio station’s current 24-hours programme contains **German programmes** (6:00– 17:00) and programmes in the following languages of immigrant communities:

Albanian (Tuesday 21:50-22:05, Sunday 20:30-21:00),
Arabic (Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday: 20:00-20:30),
Bosnian (Tuesdays, Thursdays, Sundays 18:00-18:30),
Croatian (Monday – Friday: 18:30-19:00),
Greek (Monday - Friday 20:30-20:55)
Italian (Monday – Friday: 21:20-21:50),
Kurdish (Tuesday, Thursday: 20:00-20:30, Sunday: 21:00-21:30),
Macedonian (Friday 21:50-22:05, Sunday 18:45-19:00),
Persian (Monday 21:50-22:05; Sunday 19:00-19:30),
Polish (a Polish dialect) (Monday – Friday 19:00 - 19:30, Wednesday 00:00 – 01:00),
Romany (Sunday 21:30-22:00),
Russian (Monday – Friday: 19:30-20:00),
Serbian (Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 18:00-18:30)
Silesian (each second Friday of the month: 19:00-19:30)
Slovenian (Wednesday 21:50-22:05, Sunday: 18:30-18:45)
Spanish (Monday – Friday: 20:55 – 21:20)
Turkish (Monday – Friday + Sunday: 17:00 – 18:00; Thursday 00:05 – 01:00)
Vietnamese (Thursday 21:50-22:05, Sunday 19:30-20:00)

The daily programme is concluded by the night programme, which starts with music programmes like “Bi Dünya Müzik” (from Istanbul), “Discopolis” (from Madrid), and “Kalakutta Republik” (from Lausanne), which are taken over from foreign radio stations. This is followed between 2 AM and 6 AM by Radio Multikulti’s own word music programme.

Most of the programme is produced directly by the editorial staff of Radio Multikulti. Only in case of some of the less-frequently used languages (Greek, Italian, Spanish, Romany) the radio station purchases programmes that were produced by public broadcasting stations in other federal states.

1.2 When and how long: Structure and steps of the project

Radio Multikulti was founded in 1994 as the first institution of this kind in Germany. However, in Berlin and other federal states short public broadcasting programmes in Serbo-Croatian and Turkish have existed already since 1974. These “broadcasting programmes for our fellow citizen from Yugoslavia (Turkey)” were created to grant also foreign-born inhabitants the constitutional right to have equal access to information. In West Berlin’s SFB (Sender Freies Berlin), the programme consisted of 15–30 minutes of daily programme and were produced by the broadcasting station’s political department.

Journalists working for these programmes came in most cases not from Berlin’s immigrant communities yet were recruited from their countries of origin. Consequently, the radio had a quite official character and was completely different from today’s community-serving radio station.

Jacek Tryblewski and Adrian S. Kostré, the two journalists interviewed for this case study, remember the beginning of the new radio station well: “The idea came from our first director Dr. Friedrich Voß, who had heard about a similar programme somewhere

else in the world.” The decision to launch the programme was also a reaction to the rise of xenophobia in this time. In the time before, violent attacks against houses inhabited by refugees and immigrants in many German cities had shocked the German public.

The decision to create a separate radio programme allowed enlarging gradually the number of broadcasted languages. In addition to the established Turkish and (meanwhile) post-Yugoslavian editorial teams, the project sought to recruit new journalists from Berlin’s other ethnic communities. As remembers Mr Tryblewski, who became at a very early stage part of the new-found Polish editorial team, it was not always easy to reconcile the expectations of these community members with the standards of professional journalists: “In some cases, the ideas about how the radio should look like were too different to be reconciled. So some people left the radio. Other people began to adapt to the professional expectations.” In the same time, Radio Multikulti helped to change the style of the German radio culture: “When we started, the German radio culture was still very conservative. It was for example hardly comprehensible that a moderator would speak a Polish or Turkish accent. Even certain foreign family names were difficult. The example of Radio Multikulti helped to change this.”

1.3 Place and Social Context

13.34 per cent of the inhabitants of Berlin are holder of a foreign passport. Due to the naturalization of migrants and the influx of immigrants of German ethnicity (mainly from the CIS countries and Poland), which are not counted as foreigners in the statistics, the actual number of people with a migrant background is actually much higher. Despite of this, there are many cities in Germany with an actually much more diverse population. One of the reasons for this is the relative low number of Non-Germans in the Eastern part.

Even though there are other cities in Germany, where the percentage of Germans is lower than in Berlin, it was in the city of Berlin, where Radio Multikulti was created. To this day, only the federal state of North Rhine Westphalia created with “Funkhaus Europa” a public broadcasting station with a comparable profile. Maybe this has to do with the fact that the cultural diversity is in Berlin especially visible. This might have to do with the extremely large variety of ethnic groups and the concentration of most foreigners in some of the central parts of the city.

With a number of slightly more than 120,000 (2003), the **Turkish** make up by far the largest migrant group. Almost 30 % of all holders of foreign passports are Turkish. The situation of the Turkish community is characterised by a high spatial concentration in parts of Kreuzberg, Neukoelln, Tiergarten, and Wedding, old working class neighbourhoods in the Western part of Berlin’s inner city. Most of the Turkish Berliners came to the city in frame of the “guest work programme”, by which Germany sought to resolve the labour shortages during the post war era’s periods of accelerated growth. The Turkish began to be recruited for the industries of Berlin after 1961, when the building of the Berlin Wall had curbed the city from the influx of refugees from Eastern Germany.

After the “recruitment stop” in 1974, Turks continued to come as family members and Kurdish refugees. During the war between the PKK and the Turkish Army, the emotions stirred up by the conflict could also be felt in Berlin, which often saw demonstrations by Turkish and Kurds. In light of the Turkish language policy of this time it was not uncontroversial, that Radio Multikulti began to broadcast in Kurdish language.

Since the fall of the war, the situation of the Turkish minority and other minority communities has changed considerably. Due to the decline of the city’s industry, a high percentage of the often-unskilled people migrants became unemployed. Others managed to build up a new existence in the city’s ethnic economy. In the same time, a growing number of Germans have left West Berlin’s inner city neighbourhoods. The growing spatial segregation is reflected in the discussion on the loss of interactions between Germans and Turks and the emergence “parallel societies”. One indicator for this development is the growing number of inner city schools, which are attended by a small number of German pupils, and the worsening of German proficiency among the younger generation of Turkish inhabitants.

As in other European countries, the observation of “parallel societies” has stimulated a debate in Germany on the appropriate language policy towards immigrants. From this perspective, it is interesting to look closer at Radio Multikulti’s language policy. As the name “Multikulti” already states unambiguously the programme is committed to a school of integration theory, which explicitly values the migrants’ linguistic cultural heritage. Friedrich Voß, the radio’s founding father and former director, describes the broadcasting in the minority languages at the same time as a “gateway drug”, which steers the users into the German programme: “It is not true that Turks want to listen only to Turkish radio programmes and Russians only to Russian programmes. They want to be informed about the world, in which they live – through programmes that are made for them.”

Berlin’s second largest ethnic minority group are immigrants from **the former Yugoslavia** (about 54,000 in 2003). Many members of this group came as guest workers, others as refugees during the Balkan wars. In Radio Multikulti, the broadcasting in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian and Romany, is co-ordinated by the “MOST” editorial team. According to the head of the „MOST“, Adrian S. Kostré, the Balkan conflict had surprisingly hardly any effect on the peaceful atmosphere within his team. In the same time, he says that the audiences from the different countries would differ considerably in their expectations towards the programme: “In general, the listeners from the Balkan countries are more interested in developments at home than for example listeners from Poland. This has to do with the geographical distance and with the chaos in some of these countries. According to Mr Kostré, the Bosnian refugees are most interested in information from their homeland, since many must remain prepared in case of involuntary repatriation.

Officially, the **Polish community** is with some 32,291 members Berlin’s the third largest ethnic community. However, as points out head of Radio Multikulti’s Polish editorial team Jacek Tryblewski, this number does by far not reflect the actual number of people with Polish background in Berlin. Among the listeners of the Polish programme are also Poles of German decent, temporary workers, and people who officially count as tourists. As it is probably the case of all the minority language

programmes broadcasted by Radio Multikulti, it is not easy for Mr Tryblewski to satisfy with one single radio programme the very different needs and expectations of a heterogenous listenership, which includes different educational backgrounds and age groups: “There is for example one monthly satiric magazine, which is produced by members of the “Club of Polish Losers” [a well-known association of Polish artists living in Berlin]. In this format, they sometimes ironize German TV programmes. There is no way that a Polish worker, who just arrived a week ago from Poland, will understand this. Once such a person called and said that he never in his life heard such a nonsense like this programme.”

Another interesting group served by “Radio Multikulti” is the **Vietnamese community** with some 10,000 members. The majority of the Vietnamese community came to Berlin through the “contract worker” programme of the former GDR, where Vietnamese contract workers were employed in the industry. Since they were to leave the country after five years, there were no attempts to integrate them into society. Even though the state sought to return most of the Vietnamese to the GDR, there continues to be a larger amount of former contract workers living in the eastern districts of Berlin. Second to the former contract workers, West Berlin’s “boat people” are the next largest group inside the Vietnamese ethnic community. They came in the mid-Seventies from South-Vietnam, escaping from communist rule. According to Multikulti employee Wolfgang Holler, both of these groups would “have no alternative if they want to hear something about current developments in Vietnam”: “We are told that everyone hears our Vietnamese programme. If that’s true, than we reach a dream quoto of almost 100 per cent.”

1.4 Target

Radio Multikulti is mainly a programme for Berlin’s migrant communities. However, thanks to the day programme in German language and the music programmes, the radio station targets also those parts of the German inhabitants, who want to enjoy the city’s cultural diversity. According to studies, about 70 per cent of the users are actually from migrant communities, while about 30 per cent are Germans.

1.5 Project methodology

This case study mentioned already some of the features, which characterise the working method of Radio Multikulti. To provide a full overview, we will summarise these features and mention some additional features:

1. **As one of the radio stations of “Rundfunk Berlin – Brandenburg”, Radio Multikulti is part of the Germany’s public broadcasting station.** It is important to know about this status, because it determines several aspects of its character and working structure.

Content: Financed through the (mandatory) contributions of every radio owner, the German public broadcasting stations have the mandate to inform the public on a non-profit-making basis. In case of Radio Multikulti, the programme is made **without any advertisements**. The programme is mostly financed through mandatory listener contributions, which are paid by any owner of a radio. A smaller

part of the budget is earned by the sale of programmes to other stations (both within and outside of the German public broadcasting system).

Independence: The chosen structure ensures a high level of independence. At least the fifteen steady employed members of the radio station enjoy a high level of job security, which certainly increases their chances to resist political pressures. A high level of independence characterises not only the relation to the political sphere (the public broadcasting stations are not directly subordinated to the government), but also the relation to the established structures within the city's minority communities. At least in the beginning, this independence led in some cases to considerable frictions between the radio and established community groups, which were not used to journalistic scrutiny or had hoped to instrumentalise the new radio station for their agendas.

Quality: As a part of the public broadcasting system, the journalists working for Radio Multikulti are expected to comply with the standards and ethics of professional journalism.

2. **Radio Multikulti targets both minority communities and interested parts of the majority population.** Unlike many other minority media it is hence *really an inter-cultural* platform.
3. **The programme attempts to satisfy the needs and interests of its listeners.** Depending on an ethnic group's situation and level of integration, the programme would focus rather on local issues or on the situation in their country of origin.
4. Radio Multikulti **mixes programmes in minority language with programmes in German.**

2 Collaborations and Networks

On a professional level, radio Multikulti co-operates with other public broadcasting stations in Germany. There is a steady co-operation (overtaking of programmes) with Funkhaus Europa, which was established by "Westdeutscher Rundfunk" (West German Broadcasting, the public broadcasting station of North Rhine Westphalia) following the example of Radio Multikulti. Radio Multikulti cooperates also with some international radio stations, which produce a couple of the programmes for the night programme. Aside of 15 steadily employed employees, the station works with more than 200 external co-operators. Some of these freelancers report from abroad.

Many of the employees and freelancers working for Radio Multikulti came from community-based organisations. Since the cultural and political life of the Radio Multikulti informs about the activities of community organisations. However, it seeks to avoid to become instrumentalised by them and insists on sticking to its journalistic standards when reporting about their activities.

3 Experiences

3.1 Strengths

Due to the creation of private radio programmes and the emergence of satellite TV and internet radio, today most of Berlin's ethnic communities have alternatives to Radio Multikulti. While some of these alternatives are made in Berlin, others are imports from the home countries. In view of the rise of Islamist movements and other fundamentalist ideologies, this leads to the understandable question about the values and political contents that are disseminated through such programmes. While it is difficult (and problematic) to control the exchange of information in a globalised world, it is certainly right and recommendable to offer alternative information sources to minority communities, which are processed by journalists that share the values of a democratic society. The integration of Radio Multikulti in the public broadcasting system seems to be a very good strategy to achieve this goal without creating the impression of creating something like a propaganda channel.

In the German public discussion, the availability of satellite television from the home countries is often lamented for having worsened the migrant community's proficiency in the German language. However, at the same time there have been only very limited offers by the established media that would have targeted those parts of the German population with foreign family roots. For example, till the 1990s there was only a very limited number of people with foreign faces, names and accents working for the public broadcasting stations. The establishment of Radio Multikulti did not only provide a locally made information channel for Berlin's minority populations, but it helped also to change somewhat the media culture in the rest of the country. A large number of journalists from minority communities began their career in Radio Multikulti and changed later to other stations, where it is today much more accepted to moderate with a foreign accent. This might increase the acceptance of mainstream media among the large percentage of people in Germany with a foreign background.

According to empirical studies, Radio Multikulti reaches a large share of minority audiences in Berlin. This impression is supported by the two journalists interviewed for this case study, who stated that there is always a lot of feedback by listeners of their programmes.

3.2 Critical points

Considering the number of people with migrant background who live in Germany, one will hardly find the establishment of "Radio Multikulti" and its North Rhine Westphalian pendant "Funkhaus Europe" sufficient to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of listeners. In view of the fact that also the migrant population contributes with their mandatory listeners' contribution to the costs of the public broadcasting, this discrepancy between the number of programmes targeted at migrants and the number of people with a foreign background living in Germany seems even more striking. Since TV is certainly the most important public-run information channel, the public broadcasting stations would be well-advised to no longer limit their offers to migrant populations to the sphere of radio.

The political scientist Joerg Becker of Marburg University noted in a critical assessment of the public media programmes targeted to migrants that Radio Multikulti has massively lost Turkish listeners after the establishment of the private Turkish language radio station “Radio Metropol” (Becker, Jörg (2003): Multikulti hat ausgedient. Die Türken in Deutschland laufen den ARDSendern davon, In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13. 11. 2003, p. 44). In Becker’s view the intercultural concept of Radio Multikulti would have mainly reflect idealistic ideas among the majority population while failing to take into account that the city’s Turkish population would prefer a programme that is only in Turkish language. This observation seems interesting, even though we would not follow Becker in interpreting this as a sign of a wrong concept. The migration of Turkish listeners from Radio Multikulti to Radio Metropol, which sends the entire day in Turkish, could rather be seen as the end of an unnormal situation, when the daily hour of Turkish programme on Radio Multikulti was the only Turkish radio available in the city. Due to its character as a public radio programme, measuring the success or failure of Radio Multikulti should be based on programme’s quality as well as the number of listeners.

3.3 Lessons Learnt

- The public broadcasting stations should better reflect the diversity of media consumers in most of the Western European countries.
- In the case of migrants from countries with strong nationalistic or fundamentalistic currents, the provision of public media programmes in minority language can be a promising way to counter the unwelcome influence of media from the home countries.
- Minority population will not always prefer programmes in minority language. To mix reporting in minority and majority language can help to reach a mixed audience. This is a precondition for true inter-cultural communication.
- The programme offer needs to reflect the size of the groups that live in the target area. In the case of large groups (such as the Turkish minority in Berlin), it is insufficient to grant very much limited sending times, which do not allow to address sub-groups within the minority (e.g. youth, elderly, gay, highly educated).