

STIMME – Journal from and for minorities

Jos Stübner

English Abstract

The “STIMME von und für Minderheiten” (voice from and for minorities) is a magazine, published quarterly, that deals with different topics concerning minorities. Following the idea of the editor organisation “Initiative Minderheiten”, the term minority includes everybody who is marginalised and discriminated, whether it is for ethnical, religious, sexual, disability or social reasons. The aim is to find common interests among different groups and to establish a counter public for minorities. In doing so the STIMME provides information and reflections about current minority issues, mostly on an intellectual level.

Abstrat in italiano

Lo “STIMME von and für Minderheiten” (voci da e per le minoranze) è una rivista, pubblicata trimestralmente, che tratta vari temi riguardanti le minoranze. Secondo l’idea dell’editore, Initiative Minderheiten, il termine “minoranza” include tutti coloro che sono emarginati e discriminati, per ragioni etniche, religiose, sessuali, e sociali. Lo scopo della rivista è trovare degli interessi comuni tra i differenti gruppi e stabilire una risorsa per le minoranze. STIMME fornisce informazioni e riflessioni sulle attuali tematiche legate alle minoranze, spesso con un elevato livello intellettuale.

Area

Media

Kind-category of project

Magazine, connecting point

Kind-category of actor

Registered association

Country

Austria

Year

1991

5 key-words

magazine, minorities, discrimination, minority alliance, counter public

1. THE PROJECT

Actor

Initiative Minderheiten
Gumpendorfer Strasse 15/13
1060 Wien
AUSTRIA

1.1 Description of the project

The idea behind – alliances beyond single issues and confirmed identities:

The magazine STIMME is a product of the Initiative Minderheiten and hence follows the same basic principles. Thereby remarkable is the fact that “minority” is used as a very broad term that includes migrant, religious, or social minorities as well as people with non-heterosexual orientation or disabled persons. To Cornelia Kogoj, the executive director of the Initiative Minderheiten, it is an urgent question “how societies deal with minorities in general”.

This leads to the perception that acting which goes beyond the limits of single issues and confirmed identities could better support the interests of minorities. If there is similarity in society’s excluding mechanisms, it seems to be logical and advantageous to articulate interests together. Finally, it might produce a more of power by working in alliances.

“If one had to characterise the idea behind Initiative Minderheiten, *intercultural* or *inter-minority* would fit best,” states Hakan Gürses the chief editor of the STIMME.

The Initiative Minderheiten stands for

- a society where different and individual conceptions of life are accepted as equal and that additionally enables and supports them;
- overcoming common issues and identities, that are often defined by the dominating parts of society;
- establishing alliances between the single groups in order to better articulate their interests.

Aims of the magazine STIMME

In order to achieve these aims Initiative Minderheiten understands itself as a platform where different minority alliances shall be encouraged to find collective means of acting and articulating. Thereby, one of the basic strategies is to inform relevant groups of people and to reach public. Thus publishing a magazine like the STIMME has central meaning for the whole concept.

The magazine STIMME and its goals:

- reducing prejudices by spreading information;
- establishing of an alternative voice which challenges the mainstream media landscape;
- providing a platform for different ideas and opinions concerning minorities and discrimination;
- focusing on overlapping projects and topics;
- supporting a holistic perspective;
- initiating and strengthening of alliances between different minorities.

Form and content

The German-language journal is published quarterly. Every issue tries to focus on a topic which concerns different minorities and allows to be viewed from different perspectives. Even if the topic isn’t such an obvious inter-minority theme as the anti-discrimination law for example, the intention is to connect approaches and views of one group with those from another, for example to look if a rule for the so-called

autochthonous minorities in Austria would be also applicable for migrants. A transferrable theme like this can work as a framework within which members of minorities can argue their demands and exchange theoretical-political approaches in order to find collective strategies.

The appearance of every issue differs according to the chosen main topic. But the structure remains similar regarding some repeating rubrics.

- editorial
- main theme
- other articles/“voices”, where previous themes can be discussed
- self-presentation of different human rights or minority groups about their activities
- book reviews
- cultural event reviews
- hints

Some examples of main topics:

- “Parallel society”
- Minority literature
- Age
- Women among minorities

The journal provides a wide spectrum of articles that range from analyses of legal measures, descriptions of social situations to interviews with relevant people. Basically, the style of the articles is rather essayistic but with a strong academic ambition.

A selection from current issues:

- *“Side by side and together”* – Theoretical article that analyses aspects of city live just as coexistence or as actually living together. (STIMME 58/2006)
- *“From criminalised objects to political subjects”* – Review of a movie about Austrian police action against people from African countries. Authors are a member of the Austrian PEN-Club and a black community activist. (STIMME 56/ 2005)
- *“Lesbian and gay people don’t have much reason to celebrate”* – Article about today’s handling with history of homosexuals especially regarding their suffering in fascist times. The article was written as a part of the main topic that dealt with the 60th anniversary of the second Austrian republic. (STIMME 54/2005)
- *“Problems aren’t resolvable only by EU”* – Interview with the Turkish human rights activist Eren Keskin about situation of minorities and women in Turkey. (STIMME 53/2004)

In most cases the articles dating back from 1997 are available on the website of Initiative Minderheiten.

1.2 Time, structure and steps of the project

In 1991 "magazine STIMME" was founded almost at the same time as the Initiative Minderheiten. The organisation – originally a movement to initiate a “year of minorities” - was founded when the way to understand minority as such an open term and to build minority alliances was not yet very popular but rather almost unknown. In the very beginning, the magazine itself served mainly as a journal from and about the organisation. But this approach changed and the "STIMME" got its today's appearance. Since 1993 it is published regularly four times a year. The circulation increased a bit to about 7,000 issues today.

1.3 Place and context

The social background, which the "magazine STIMME" as well as the Initiative Minderheiten itself is focussed on, relates to large extent to the specific understanding of the term minority (see 1.1 Description of the project). In short terms it is society's structural discrimination on the one hand and the mainstream dominated media on the other hand.

Firstly, the organisation understands the issue of discrimination mainly as a structural problem in society which does not only appear in singular and subject matters like a concrete discrimination of a single minority by other people. According to Cornelia Kogoj, asking and showing which excluding mechanisms are deeply imprinted in the structure of the society and in legal and political practises would be very important in order to identify the political and historical reasons. One of today's most obvious examples might be the debate about transposing the European Union's anti-discrimination directive into national law.

Given this point of view, the media obviously plays an important role. Mainly the question of representation and participation is a problematic factor in a mainstream dominated media culture. According to the opinion of Cornelia Kogoj, media public is a place where positions of power would be fixed. Moreover the media creates a social reality by shaping majority's perception of minorities and also by shaping the self-perception of groups of minorities.

Especially concerning the role of ethnic minorities and migrants in the media, two main problems can be found. On the one hand, mainstream media shows a rather negative attitude towards migration topics. According to Tulay Tuncel, the Vice-President of the Foreigner Integration Council of the Austrian City Linz, sometimes there is a xenophobic attitude and most of the time a deficit in objective reports about ethnic minorities in Austria.

Conversely, “ethnic minorities are almost not existent in the media at all, although they've been living in Austria for years”, says Helga Schwarzwald from Vienna's Radio Orange who criticises the contradiction between social reality and the press coverage. The public media is mostly criticised for not serving its purpose of adequate information of the public, since it does not address all cultural themes and interests.

Lately, the Austrian public media station ORF was sharply attacked by one of its own well-known reporters because of lacking of plurality in internal structures and being under permanent pressure of politicians (see here and here).

The other dominant factor on Austria's media landscape is the “Kronenzeitung” which is said to be one of Europe's biggest tabloid press newspapers in relation to the

country's total population and hence has an enormous, almost monopoly position in influencing opinions.

Given this background, the magazine Stimme tries to change the situation by its approach of enriching the media landscape by a new perspective and another point of view.

1.4 Target

“The target group of "STIMME" is not the readership of the ‘Kronenzeitung’”, stated Cornelia Kogoj. About 7000 issues are sent to a rather academic and higher educated public.

On the one hand there are other human-rights and minority organisations, which serve as so-called multipliers. On the other hand single persons like politicians, teachers or other interested persons receive the "STIMME" regularly.

In general, recipients of the magazine belong to minority groups as well as to the majority of the society.

1.5 Methodology

Some remarkable points are:

- Inter-minoritary approach.
- Online availability of most of the STIMME's issues.
- Anti-discrimination structure also within internal structures: the organisation developed a special anti-discriminatory statutory framework for the rights of employees at their place of work that may serve as model for other companies and organisations and which is already implemented by the Initiative Minderheiten itself – the document is also available on the website.

1.6 Authors, Funding and Networks

Authors

Firstly, there is to mention the Chief Editor, Hakan Gürses. Besides Gürses, there are about 30 people from different minority groups as well as from the Austrian majority writing articles for the magazine. They are asked for a contribution or can offer texts depending on the current main topic.

Funding

- The magazine is financed by different grants from the city of Vienna as well as from the federal state of Tirol where another branch of the Initiative Minderheiten exists.
- The grants have to be applied for every year anew. According to Cornelia Kogoj, financing was also dependent on the different topics of the issues.

Networks

The Initiative Minderheiten understands itself as a supporter of networking. The main cooperation however would find a place within the scope of different single projects. Of course, these projects are also documented in the magazine.

An example for a concrete cooperative "project of STIMME" itself found place in 2005. The "STIMME", “ÖNERI”, a mainly Turkish speaking newspaper in Vienna,

and the "FALTER", a well-known local paper also situated in Vienna, worked together on an interview project that intended to examine positions of different politicians concerning Vienna's upcoming city elections.

2. COMMENTS AND HINTS FOR AN EVALUATION

2.1. Strengths and Critical Points

The organisation's perspective

From the author's point of view the Initiative Minderheiten has achieved to publish a magazine of very high quality. The articles mostly show a deep reflection and often give a very unusual view on the topic. Though Cornelia Kogoj admits that she sometimes did not agree with some of the articles, it might show the approach of open access and diversity.

One of the most remarkable aspects of "STIMME" and also the organisation behind it is the inter-minority thinking. It might seem a little bit confusing and questionable to connect migrants and disabled person's issues but it proved to be a good practise to look at society's excluding mechanisms in such a holistic way. The idea of forming alliances between different minority parts of the society is very appreciable.

Interculture map perspective

"I would be glad to see such articles also in the more mainstream newspapers", Cornelia Kogoj said.

From the organisation's point of view the alternative perspective and creation of another public view is one of the biggest strengths of "STIMME". It is certainly true that the magazine fills a gap in the media landscape. But concerning the targeted counter public emerges also a critical point. The magazine will never reach a broader public and might not be able to really change the above described media landscape. Of course, this is partly because of its ambitious and pretty academic format.

Realistically, it is not possible to evaluate "STIMME" as one single project without considering the whole mission of Initiative Minderheiten, which indeed features projects that target a broader public than the magazine, of which can be said that is a more sophisticated paper supporting the exchange of ideas and opinions within expert or otherwise related circles.

This seems also an answer to the question about real intercultural practise and the possibility of participation within the "project STIMME" One cannot find actual cooperation of different cultural groups or even minority groups, but on the level of the discourse the magazine seems to be able to provide an exchange of ideas and contribute to alternative approaches between different minorities. Authors also come from minority parts as well as majority parts of the society.