

# Tuning in to Diversity 2010

## Thinking Forward



**Tuning in to Diversity 2010 Conference  
Budapest, 25 and 26 (morning session) February 2010**

### **“Alternative information” workshop for NGOs representatives**

Journalists cannot be accused of giving unbalanced coverage to minority and immigrant issues if they do not have easy access to alternative information and views from their communities. Blogging, social networking, video sharing, wikis and other web 2.0 tools NGOs can use to fulfil lacking information: the new media offer a wide range of easy, cheap and effective tools.

*Report by Giovanni Massaro (Mira Media, the Netherlands)*

### **Presentation of Wereldjournalisten.nl by Mercita Coronel (Mira Media, the Netherlands)**

Mercita Coronel, editor in chief presented the example of Wereldjournalisten.nl: a Dutch news portal which brings news “with a different perspective, the perspective of minority correspondents”.

The initiative for Wereldjournalisten.nl was a result of the feeling that mainstream media fall short in covering multicultural issues, because of a lack of knowledge, or a lack of interest. This can cause a distorted image/representation of migrant groups. Wereldjournalisten’s slogan is: *“The same news, seen with different eyes”*.

The site works with a network of correspondents, mainly journalists with different ethnic backgrounds. They write features and analyses for the website. The news on the site focuses on the Netherlands and on news from the countries of origin of minorities e.g. Suriname, Morocco, Afghanistan etc.

In addition the site functions as a source for mainstream journalists, offering factsheets (for instance about Muslim media or Polish immigrants), databases on minority print media and minority digital media, an in log to a database to migrant experts and migrant spokesmen and a place where the correspondents can present themselves.

The site is monitored by a statistics module. This module shows that monthly 22.000 visitors come to the site; most of them bookmark the site. These are migrants and non migrants, women and men, but mostly highly educated people: professionals and students.

The project was started by Mira Media, in collaboration with the association of refugee journalists in the Netherlands and another refugee organization and was initially funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education and the Dutch Press funds. There still is a cooperation with the webzine Exponto on refugee issues, that as a separate part of the project was also funded by the Stimuleringsfonds voor de Pers. After the start it became more difficult to found funds, but Wereldjournalisten managed so far by being part of new projects in which the news portal could be an instrument.

The growth and appreciation of the site can be explained by:

- the expertise, knowledge and networks of the editorial staff and the correspondents
- the fact that correspondents are paid (though not very much)
- the use of new media and sustaining media as twitter, Facebook and a weekly newsletter
- the accessibility of the (small) editorial staff
- the involvement and hard work of the correspondents
- the existence and organization of journalists with different ethnic-backgrounds in the Netherlands

Adresses:

[www.wereldjournalisten.nl](http://www.wereldjournalisten.nl) (homepage);

<http://www.wereldjournalisten.nl/migrantenmedia/> (database ethnic print media);

<http://www.wereldjournalisten.nl/digitalemedia/> (database digital media)

<http://twitter.com/wereldje> (Twitter page)

<http://www.expono.eu> (magazine on refugee issues, made by On-file, the association of refugee journalists).

From the discussion after this presentation it became clear that most participants in the workshop shared the view on how idealistically NGO's can use new media to inform society and mainstream-media and fill the lack in knowledge or interest with mainstream journalist.

The possibilities to do so are very different in each country however:

### **Managing websites and funding**

In an ideal world NGO's could organize a diversity news site that they themselves could manage and promote, instead of being dependent of common sites in which to post their blogs or articles and on which they have very little influence. In reality the possibilities to do so are very scarce. In most countries there are very little possibilities to get funding for these kind of initiatives, and certainly not on a national level.

In Bulgaria a few years ago the possibility for European grants made it possible to set up some websites. As soon as rumors that these grants weren't used for their goals started, these project encountered a backlash, and they finished rather soon, without new initiatives being started.

In other countries in theory the means to get grants exist, but they're hard to get: Most of the funding is in the departments of culture and education, but news sites aren't considered as an instrument for culture or education, but as media, while media departments often give priority to audiovisual projects. It is possible however in some countries to get some support on a *regional* scale. In the region Piemonte (Italy) for instance the website [www.notiziesp.info](http://www.notiziesp.info) gives information on local and regional migrant communities, events and actions. This is made possible by some rather small grants from regional and local governments.

Another possibility consists of private funding by organizations: The Open Society Institute for instance finances a website on and for Roma in some countries, e.g. Hungary: <http://www.sosinet.hu/>.

A last possibility: private funding, partly because of commercial aims, seems to offer some possibilities: In Poland a commercial magazine sponsors a blogging site with large attention to migrants out of commercial motives. The large attention to migrants wasn't however in the initial deal, but is a result of the (sometime stealth) activities of one of the founders. <http://www.infotuba.pl/>

A site in Bulgaria sponsored by a large bakery failed only because the sponsor/proprietor in the end hadn't the time to manage both the bakery and the news site.

### **Using open space**

So in most countries the only way left is to make use of open blogging spaces. That doesn't mean that this can't be successful. Some sites have a dedicated group of followers and bloggers and are watched by mainstream journalists in search for new or other topics. An example is the well read [www.wijblijvenhier.nl](http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl) in Holland where young migrants post blogs

The problem is that you have to compete with other bloggers (on different subjects) and there are a few possibilities to influence content and looks of the site. For an example see <http://www.infotuba.pl/> where NGO's from all over Poland can post their information and blogs and [www.agoravox.it](http://www.agoravox.it) where Italian citizens can post their views on society. It's up to NGO's and migrant organizations to stimulate their members to do that and in that way at least influence the content of these sites.

Some blogspots, for instance the [Independent World Report](http://www.independentworldreport.com), have an international character and offer space to articles of NGO's all over the world.

### **Social Networks**

Hyves, LinkedIn and especially Facebook offer possibilities to exchange information within communities, but because of the community character aren't good instruments to offer information to mainstream journalists (or they should be invited and accepted in these networks). Some of these social networks offer the possibility to start groups on topics that are open to all members of the network, and not only to the direct group of relations. This instrument might be used more often in future. (for an example see the ["diversity-a world of change" group](http://www.diversity-a-world-of-change.org))

Apart from the big and known social networks there are also smaller, more specific networks. An example was presented of a network in which refugees could find information on lost relatives: <http://www.refunite.org/>

Twitter isn't much used by the participants, at least not as an instrument to bring news about minority communities to the main stream media.

### **Making use of other facilities**

In Greece the use of local radio run by migrant groups is rather successful. This was made possible with European and national funding (Equal/ESF).

### **Creativity, ambition, skilled people, money and reliability**

What are the elements to ensure a successful use of new media to bring alternative information and news to the public?

From the discussion it resulted that most of all creativity and ambition are important: to believe that it is important to show alternative viewpoints and the creativity to find new instruments to do that, or make a clever use of existing ones.

Secondly: people who are able to write, can do that frequently and enjoy to do it. If you can't find them, you have to look for candidates and offer the training.

Third: money is important as it offers more possibilities: small fees for contributors can enhance their involvement, a site that is made for specific purposes and hosted on a dedicated server offers more possibilities than an open blog site. But money also can make media dependent from grants or other financial sustain.

Last: reliability: a site that isn't actualized frequently or offers wrong information has little chance of success in influencing mainstream media.

### **What next?**

Though demographic and linguistic situations are different in each country it's possible to learn from each others successes and mistakes. Therefore Mira Media will try to set up a Facebook or LinkedIn group on minorities and alternative information. Also [tuningintodiversity.eu](http://tuningintodiversity.eu) will regularly pay attention to the use of new media for alternative information on multicultural issues.