

Tuning in to Diversity 2010

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Tuning in to Diversity 2010 Conference Budapest, 26 February 2010, morning session

Workshop for researchers:

Minorities, diversity and the media – pursuing research for policy and advocacy

In cooperation with the organizers of the *Tuning in to Diversity 2010* conference, the Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS) of the Central European University (CEU) hosted a workshop for researchers in the field of media, ethnic minorities and cultural diversity as part of the conference program.

The workshop brought together 18 researchers from across Europe to discuss research prospects in a changing media landscape.

At a time in which the rise of the web, the digitalisation of broadcasting, and the shifting balances in media ownership and public service broadcasting policy are fundamentally changing media experiences, these researchers face a set of shared questions and dilemmas. How will the emergence of new media impact minority communities as media producers and consumers? How are efforts to safeguard or improve cultural diversity in traditional public, commercial and community broadcasting impacted by the structural changes these media era undergoing? What issues urgently pose themselves to the research community with an eye on policy and advocacy?

Participating researchers had already outlined what they considered the most urgent issues in research on media and cultural diversity in a brief survey, which CMCS had sent out in advance to prepare the workshop. In the survey, they were also asked what projects and publications they had worked on or been involved in regarding the subject of the workshop and what partnerships with civil society organizations they had undertaken as part of that work.

On the second day of the workshop, participants split into three subgroups on specific research areas, and returned for a general group discussion. In this latter discussion, they also addressed what needs or prospects exist for developing a network of researchers working in this field, and potential network activities in areas where research interests overlap. Is there a need to better pool information about new research and relevant legal and policy developments? What tools are available or could be developed to that end?

Thursday 25 February, 17:00 – 18:00

On the first day of the conference, the workshop participants met for an hour to introduce themselves. They did so by explaining how they first came to be interested in this field of research, and describing one piece of research or research project that they were currently or recently involved in.

Some of the research work mentioned included:

- A six-country study on the representation of migrants and minorities (FRA/Alexander Pollak)
- PhD research on media usage among Belgians of Moroccan and Turkish origin, and its reflection of a plurality of self-identifications (Hatim El Sghiar)
- A three-country study on media usage of Arab-speakers and its relationship to citizenship (Myria Georgiou)

- Research on the cultural diversity policies of European public service broadcasters (CEREN/Karina Horsti)

Friday 26 February 2010, 10:30 – 12:30

The participants met again for two hours on the second day of the conference. Break-out sessions comprised the main part of the workshop, as the participants joined one of three subgroups. The subgroups were constituted on the basis of the responses to the survey:

1. Online, broadcast and print: minority communities in a changing media landscape

What is the impact of online media and new technologies on the media consumption and production by minorities? What potential do they offer as platform for minorities; and vice versa, what risk is involved in the digital gap between majority and minority groups? In general, how can research best investigate the media use and habits of minorities, in light of insufficient existing research and the flaws of commercial audience surveys?

- Use of web communities and online social networks by minority groups; examples of sites that have been successful (Maroc.nl, Judapest, an invite-only Romani social network).
- Role of a group's "own" online space as "safe haven" - where, paradoxically, users are less forced into identifying on the basis of their identity. On a mainstream site, they might be reduced to defending their own group, while the breathing space on one's own site allows for a more sophisticated level of identification, and conversations about common interests that are not directly related to ethnic issues.
 - Issues of ownership: Romani site eventually failed because no one felt responsible; Judapest is highly moderated, no democracy
 - Cross-fluences of online and offline communities and actions. Judapest avoided offline existence at first, turned to activism eventually; Maroc.nl suffered a political backlash over controversial comments on the site.
 - Is the increasing centralisation of Web 2.0, with Facebook becoming all-dominant where a variety of social networks were popular, affecting the multitude of smaller web communities too? Dilemma: how to measure minority usage of mainstream networks?
- Access defines choice of media (print, broadcasting or web). But does not always work out in expected ways: in Madrid, Internet is dominant among immigrants because many are illegal, have no established residence and no TV, use Internet cafes.
- Misconceptions about media usage about minority groups; e.g. study of media use by Arab-speakers disproved assumption that "they all watch Al-Jazeera". The station is popular among immigrants from Middle East, not those from Maghreb, and its popularity seems correlated with experience of exclusion and hostility. Non-Muslim/Arabic transnational TV stations like RFI and BBC World also popular.
- Problem faced by researchers: lack of reliable audience research that includes data about the media use of minority communities. Much of the available commercial audience research is commissioned by advertisers, who are not interested in small communities; much of it is not available in any case, or only at a prohibitive price. Research funding, meanwhile, is sometimes available for new / one-off studies, but not for monitoring over time.
 - In Holland, Motivaction undertook audience research for minority communities (500 people / 6 cities), but funding halted.
 - The lack of data goes the other way round too: little info about who watches that migrant programme, reads that Roma journal. The importance of subsidies in facilitating minority media/programming could trigger demand for data, but also reluctance to find out.
- Risk of focusing analysis wholly on ethnic and religious indicators. How do you integrate the possibility of various alternative forms of identification that may be at work in determining what media are watched, what topics followed, what ways people respond to media coverage? Importance of querying usage by age group, gender, professional interest, political views, language competency, generation.
 - On the other hand, importance to recognize that the social and political pressures minorities face makes questions of ethnic/religious belonging especially salient. E.g. what

it means to people to be Muslim, Arabic and how that is different for first generation immigrants and a second generation that has become more politicized and likely to identify with a global, Muslim Ummah in the face of marginalisation. (From a migrant to a diasporic mediascape?)

- The dilemma for researchers is thus to avoid getting stuck in essentialist categories of ethnicity and religion, but also not becoming too non-political and postmodern in the face of racism/xenophobia. They need to recognize the parallel role, in shaping communities, of pluralist self-identifications and essentialist ascriptions of identity by others. These twin drivers manifest themselves in media representations too: diversity of identities in community media and web communities, vs stereotyped, categorical portrayals in national media.

2. The path ahead for ethnic, bilingual and community minority media, programming

What role for minority broadcast and print media, and minority programming, in tomorrow's media landscape? What are the pros and cons of bilingual and minority media in terms of integration / segregation / intercultural dialogue? How is the legal framework for such media developing in West and East, what role do standards set by international bodies play, and how can they be improved? Are there marketing potentials and potentials to collaborate with mainstream media?

- Minority programming suffers from lack of stability, and dependence on political developments. Example from Poland: programs are started, then closed again after the next elections and government change.
 - Politics and tradition play a role in the unequal availability of minority media / programming for traditional, national minorities on the one hand, and new / migrant minorities on the other (example from Finland). Often, different legal frameworks apply. Related example from Romania: there are Hungarian- and German-language programmes, but no Romani-language ones; part of the difference lies in the importance of good relations with Germany, while Roma lack political power.
 - The funding woes that plague public service media, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, affect minority broadcasting as well.
- Some useful resources are mentioned, also in terms of terminology and definitions and possible conceptual frameworks, which can be used as starting points for investigation: the proposed Framework Convention on Community Media, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the recommendations made to governments by the OIC.
- Some notable examples are mentioned: Roma programming on radio station in Tetova, Kosova.
- Minority broadcasting vs. mainstreaming: dilemmas and potentials of minority-language and bilingual media, and how they are seen and treated in the political realm. Example from Macedonia: Albanian-language minority media seen as disruptive/segregating factor. Does minority broadcasting, within and outside public service broadcasting, contribute to emancipation and cultural dialogue, filling the minority community needs, or does it strengthen division and segregation? Research findings are divided. Do they function as minority ghettos on air, or are they able to influence discourse and policy? Argument that example from Vojvodina points to the former rather than latter. Would subtitling minority-language programs contribute to intercultural understanding?
 - Broader argument: diversity of media is as important as diversity in the media.
- The impact of hyperlocal spaces on the place of minority media. How much of minority media emerges from or serves very local, neighborhood needs? How does this feed back into national or regional efforts?
- To meet the civic and media needs of minority groups, contributions from both public service and commercial broadcasters are needed as well as community media. In those sectors, however, the participation of minorities in the production and management of media content is low. Of the two, policy pressure is more easily brought to bear on public service media, appealing to their remit and to the funding and legislative framework regulating their place and obligations.
- Both community and public broadcasters would benefit if there were better contacts between community, public and commercial broadcasters that could be used to discuss problems of

multicultural programming / reporting. Commercial media, if anything, even harder to interest in such exchange as public service media.

- Interest in mapping existing (qualitative, comparative, etc) research on how well public service broadcasters are able to serve the needs of minority groups within their frameworks. Other comparisons across countries that could clarify informational gaps could focus on e.g. differences in defining minorities, or assessments of the impact of private/community minority broadcasting on social relations.
 - Mention of the Minority Media conference “An alternative self-representation? Ethnic minority media, between hegemony and resistances” at the University of Poitiers on 18-19 March, where 30 case studies on minority media are presented.
- Agreement that researchers would benefit from easier ways to access new research and data. What opportunities for community of researchers to pool and network such information? Need for a database of relevant research and/or up-to-date information on relevant developments. New database, or look at existing databases? (Mention of Media Diversity Institute's new global portal).

3. Tackling the portrayal and representation of minorities in mainstream media

What can the role of research, and partnerships between researchers and NGOs, be in countering manifestations of xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-gypsyism and minority stereotyping in the media? What impact is the integration drumbeat in political discourse and government policy having on the language used in media representations of minorities? What progress is being made in the participation of minorities in media employment and production?

- Most research is still on a descriptive level – signaling instances of negative portrayal. Need for interdisciplinary methods: new tools, methods and strategies are needed to substantiate the impact of negative media coverage on public perceptions and opinions about minorities and majority/minority interactions. Going beyond the descriptive signaling of individual cases would also facilitate a more persuasive advocacy to politics and media.
- The interaction, for NGOs and researchers in this field, with people in the media and in politics remains problematic. World of media professionals hard to access: your message ends in the dustbin. Need for networks, spaces to network with journalists; especially with young and critical reporters, possibly on a transnational scale. Importance of identifying willing partners.
 - Possibility of connecting with Schools of Journalism – but many people who become reporters never go to one.
- Need to internationalize research, Not just because it yields comparative knowledge, but also because it offers a strategic advantage when disseminating results and making politicians and media listen; voices from abroad or speaking as part of international partnership more likely to be listened to.
- The emergence of new media raises new dilemmas. Many blogs, comments and posts are anonymous, decreasing accountability for media content. Pressure to achieve hate speech legislation should take into account these new challenges. The decreased accountability also makes teaching media literacy all the more important.

Concluding observations

- General interest to stay in contact as a network, in addition to new bilateral contacts made during the conference.
- CMCS willing to play a role as hub for a network, by facilitating a list or other ways to pool information (group 2 had mentioned a database of existing research, could be interactive / community effort).
- Alternative path forward is to contribute to existing networks, to avoid duplicating existing efforts:
 - The Media Diversity Institute website is mentioned (which has a database of resources, an open blogging and debate space, and a budding social networking space, though that has just 49 members)
 - The Diaspora, Migration and the Media Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA)

- The International Communication Association (ICA), Ethnicity & Race in Communication Division
- The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), Diaspora and Media Working Group; the IAMCR also has Working Groups on Islam and Media and on Media, Religion and Culture
- The Diasporas, Transnational Communities and the Media mailinglist (Myria Georgiou)
- Make use of experiences of Migra-Nord, the Nordic Research Network for Media, Migration and Society (which brings together some 90 academics in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, and aims to include researchers from the Baltic countries). While the members who collaborate and pool resources through this network are academics, the network also does activities in collaboration with journalists.
 - Examples from the Migra-Nord experience could be implemented on a broader European level. Problem is funding; Migra-Nord is funded by governments.
- Another useful follow up would be to propose panels on our subjects on relevant conferences – too late for ECREA 2010 in Hamburg, but other opportunities will emerge.
- Regarding international media monitoring initiatives, references are made to the Global Media Monitoring Project on gender (of the WACC), the work done by the FRA, and European NGO-conducted monitoring events coordinated by Mira Media in past years in a European Week of Media and Minorities. The need for more involvement of academics in the field of cultural studies is also mentioned.