

The radio channels of SRG SSR 2014 (German-speaking Switzerland)

Summary

The channel analysis of SRG SSR radios in 2014 included the six general interest channels in German-speaking Switzerland.

Mainly due to different music formats, the SRF channel family is largely arranged complementarily. Overall, the channels offer thematically broad and varied information, interpreting the channel mandate, but in different ways. Their services to promote cultural identity are to be rated more highly than their contribution to integration.

Methodological key data

The following channels in German-speaking Switzerland were examined in 2014:

SRF 1, SRF 2 Kultur, SRF 3, SRF 4 News, SRF Musikwelle, SRF Virus

Sample: artificial week (Mon - Sun) in the period from 26th August, 2014, to 17th January, 2015

Sample days: Mon, 22th December; Tue, 26th August; Wed, 17th September; Thu, 4th December; Fri, 10th October; Sat, 17th January 2015; Sun, 9th November

Analysed airtime: 05.00 - 24.00 each day

Music analysis of daytime programme: Wed, 17th September, 05.00 - 20.00

Music analysis of evening programme: Mon – Sun, 20.00 - 24.00

Total programme hours analysed: 798

Complementary channel concepts mainly due to the music formats

The six SRF channels represent four different programme concepts: **SRF 1** is a **full-service format** with a relatively high word and information content. The focus on a somewhat older audience is not least due to the music format. This has changed since 2009, when the proportion of older songs was increased, with the result that SRF 1 now differs more clearly from **SRF 3** in terms of the music it plays. This is a typical **accompanying channel** based on an "adult contemporary" music format; the daytime programme primarily consists of widely accepted pop music, interspersed with regular information blocks and services. **SRF Virus** has a similar concept, but with a much lower word content and fewer information services. It differs markedly from SRF 3 in that its music format is geared to a special adolescent target audience. The music takes new styles and current songs into account to a large extent. The proportion of Swiss music is high. SRF Virus hardly plays any famous songs from international charts. **SRF Musikwelle** is also a music-dominated accompanying channel with a special interest character thanks to its special, independent music format. It appeals to an older, rural minority audience by focusing on styles like Schlager music and especially (Swiss) folk music that are hardly offered by other channels. **SRF 2 Kultur** is a **culture channel** with a high word content. Its music format is based on classical music with additions from the field of jazz. The strong **international focus** of the information

content is characteristic of SRF 2 and in line with previous years. **SRF 4 News** is Radio SRF's information channel, which hardly plays any music. The most important topic area is (international) politics, which means the channel is slightly differently positioned from the other SRF channels in terms of topics. The way information is presented is also characteristic, relying heavily on dialogic forms, longer reports and features.

The SRF channel family is largely arranged **complementarily** in terms of channel concepts, but especially with regard to music formats. This helps to optimise the range of listeners and keep the market share high.

High editorial quality and thematic variety

Information is one of Radio SRF's core competencies. This is reflected not only in the fact that one of the channels (SRF 4 News) almost exclusively broadcasts information and that other SRF channels (SRF 1, SRF Kultur 2) attach great importance to information, but also in the fact that great effort is put into the formal **treatment** of this information. In particular, the channels with high word content strive to put facts into context and elucidate the backgrounds. They rely on sophisticated journalistic formats, correspondents' reports, expert interviews and on-site reporting. However, there are considerable differences in editorial quality between channels. SRF 3 and SRF Virus increasingly concentrate information into simply structured news bulletins that convey the basic facts.

Although the individual channels have thematic focuses – for example, SRF 4 News has a high political content, SRF 3 features a lot of sports, comparatively – they all offer a broad and balanced **range of topics**. Politics usually plays a major role, however. Nonetheless, social issues, economics and culture are included in the information provided by all channels. This is also true of classic tabloid topics (bad news/human interest), which are not neglected by SRF radio channels. However, the variety of topics within the SRF channel family does not necessarily mean diversity of events. Since the information is centrally processed, the event selection is also largely controlled centrally. This and the exchange of various information programmes among the broadcasters promote a certain homogenisation of the information content, which is also reflected in the structural similarity of topics of SRF 1 and SRF Musikkwelt, for example.

Regional news closely associated with the authorities

When it comes to **key protagonists in politics**, it should first be noted that the close **association with the authorities** often observed in the media is almost entirely absent from most SRF channels. An exception to this is the **regional news**, which tends to a strong bias towards authority-related reporting. **Diversity of opinions and perspectives** is also reflected in the fact that reports on different social groups are featured and that these groups can contribute their views. The

range of protagonists featured on SRF 1 and SRF 3 is especially wide, while the range is somewhat narrower on SRF 2 Kultur and SRF 4 News due to the thematic priorities.

Analysis of the focus of SRF channels on non-executive protagonists of various **party political orientations** shows that this focus is mostly distributed across the entire political spectrum. There is no evidence of discrimination against or preference for certain parties or political views in this respect. Rather, the effort to provide **balanced** reports on the various party political protagonists is evident.

Opinions are mostly conveyed in the media directly, namely via involved **sources**, unless opinion leaders are providing direct quotes on the microphone or being quoted by the programme creators. The SRF programme creators also clearly strive to offer **balance** in this regard as well. Looking at the party political sources shows that the proportions are distributed primarily and quite evenly among the governmental parties. Other parties that are not represented in the Swiss Federal Council have little chance to express their opinions in the information content of SRF channels. The Greens are the exception, although this was in connection with a single event in the artificial week under examination.

It is another question whether the **range** of different opinions and perspectives is apparent to an average audience that listens to the channels selectively. This is the case when controversial opinions and different perspectives are referred to in a given thematic context. This **orientation service**, which requires correspondingly more complex treatment formats, is provided by SRF channels in different ways. This is rarely the case for SRF 3 and SRF Virus, which scarcely differ from the private commercial radio channels in this respect. The other channels, in particular SRF 1 and SRF 4 News, offer their audiences an overview of the different positions on a controversial topic comparatively often.

Modest integration effort

The SRG channels are supposed to provide an essential integration effort by helping to increase knowledge of **other parts of the country**. However, it is precisely regarding this aspect that scientific studies have established considerable deficits for years.¹ The current study of SRF channels can qualify this general finding only partially. SRF programme creators dedicate by far the most attention to events abroad. Considerable space is also given to national events. SRF channels hardly provide any information on events in the **Romandie** or **Ticino**, however, with the exception of SRF 4 News and SRF Musikwelle. In particular, **Italian-speaking Switzerland** is hardly

¹ Grossenbacher, René (2015): Die SRG-Radios und der Integrationsauftrag. In: Leonarz, Martina (ed.): Wissenschaftliche und praktische Medienpolitik als politische Daueraufgabe, pp 177-178

featured at all on SRF channels. The respective proportions are less than one percent, except for SRF 4 News. Only **SRF 4 News**, which has introduced its own programme for this purpose, actually systematically deals with the other language regions.

Consideration of the other language regions has actually slightly decreased since 2012. An integration concept² announced by SRG in 2012 has evidently not taken hold (yet), at least in the field of SRF radio. The chance that an average listener of an SRF channel will find out anything about the other language regions in the course of an average week is still extremely small.

When it comes to fulfilling other **integration objectives**, the exchange between religions and cultures, the integration of foreigners, and contact with the Swiss nationals living abroad, content analysis is not a very suitable means for determining any effects of radio channels. What can be determined, however, is whether these issues are featured on the channels. Although the relevant results are mixed, they are in line with the preliminary studies since 2009. They also confirm that these issues usually have a chance to appear on the channel only when incidental current events provide the necessary journalistic "hook" or when specific programmes exist.

Widely represented Swiss music

Swiss culture is the only issue relevant to concession law that is substantially dealt with in the information content of almost all SRF channels. SRF Virus is closely concerned with the young Swiss music scene, while SRF Musikwelle deals with Swiss folk music. SRF 1 is also dedicated extensively to Swiss culture topics. Contrary to expectations, but consistent with previous surveys, Swiss culture is not a thematic priority for SRF 2 Kultur, on the other hand.

Cultural identity can also be strengthened very directly through music by giving the local music scene exposure opportunities. This is the case for all channels that play music, albeit to varying degrees. However, it is noticeable that the coverage of Swiss music is based on a strategy, particularly as the proportion of Swiss music is usually significantly higher in comparison with the private commercial channels. The highest proportion of Swiss music is played on the **SRF Musikwelle** daytime programme, which especially supports the Swiss folk music sector. However, **SRF Virus** also offers Swiss musicians an attractive platform: every third song played is of Swiss provenance. This is considerably more than on SRF 3, which nonetheless still plays a comparatively large amount of Swiss music.

It is striking that most Swiss music is played on the niche channels SRF Musikwelle and SRF Virus. Obviously it is considered to only have limited majority appeal, which is why noticeably fewer

² Stärkung der gegenseitigen Verständigung und des nationalen Zusammenhaltes durch die SRG SSR. Bericht des Bundesrates in Erfüllung der Motion Maissen (10.3055) vom 7. Dezember 2012, p 21

Swiss songs are programmed on the wide-coverage channels SRF 1 and SRF 3 during the day. However, the music editors make much bolder choices in the **evening** after 20.00: in the evening programming, the proportion of Swiss music is significantly higher on all channels.

Overall, it can be said that the SRF radio channels exhibit a high, albeit inconsistent, level of performance in the field of **cultural identity** and probably meet the media policy objectives better than in the field of integration services.