

The radio channels of SRG SSR 2015 (French-speaking Switzerland)

Summary

The programme analysis of the SRG SSR radio channels in 2015 included the four full-service channels of French-speaking Switzerland.

Due to different programme concepts and music formats, the RTS channel family is largely arranged complementarily. All in all, the channels offer thematically broad and politically well-balanced information. Their services to promote cultural identity are to be rated more highly than their contribution to integration. Option Musique does little to meet the requirements of the programming remit and hardly sets itself apart from private radios.

Key data on methodology

The following programmes of French-speaking Switzerland were examined in 2015:

La Première, Espace 2, Couleur 3, Option Musique

Random sample: Artificial Week (Mon - Sun) in the period from 16 February to 20 December 2015

Reporting dates: Mon, 13 April; Tue, 8 September; Wed, 3 June; Thu, 30 July; Fri, 18 December; Sat, 31 October; Sun, February 22

Analysed airtime: daily 05.00 - 24.00

Music analysis of daytime programme: Wed, June 3, 05.00 - 20.00

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

Total programme hours analysed: 532

Different, partially complementary programme concepts

The four SRG SSR radio channels of French-speaking Switzerland represent three different programme concepts which cover the audience's different needs and interests. The programme concepts of French-speaking Switzerland are represented by La Première, Espace 2 and the two music channels (Couleur 3, Option Musique):

La Première is a **full-service format** with a low percentage of music and a high level of information density. Its format is unparalleled in the Swiss radio landscape. Its offering of information is extensive, often designed in a sophisticated manner and includes extended orientation services. Besides a high journalistic level, the channel also cultivates verbal entertainment in the form of satire, parodies, or short radio plays. Music is not the priority, yet it presents itself in an unexpectedly unconventional way: La Première plays comparatively many current titles, yet by and large manages to do so without playing mainstream songs.

Espace 2 is a **classical culture channel**, which is typical for countries with a public-service structure. Characteristic for Espace 2 is both the music format, which consists almost exclusively of classical styles in the daily programme, and the thematic focus on culture. Like La Première,

Espace 2 often contains information content that demonstrates a sophisticated formal treatment of information. Similar to its German-speaking counterpart (SRF 2 Kultur), the above-average strong international orientation is striking. Most of all, Espace 2 strongly expresses the geographical and cultural proximity to France.

In terms of programme structure, **Couleur 3** and **Option Musique** correspond to the type of the modern accompanying radio channel with a high proportion of (pop) music and compact information and services. However, both channels cover entirely **different target group needs**. While Option Musique cuts down information to the most essential, **Couleur 3** offers an appealing information service in comparison to other accompanying radio channels. However, the most significant differences between the two channels concern their music formats. In its daytime programme, Couleur 3 features an urban format, based on the latest releases. Thereby, it appeals to a young audience. Option Musique, on the other hand, focuses on light, French-language pop music permeated by many oldies – a music mix geared towards an older and more rural audience. Obviously, the positioning of Option Musique follows the strategy of maximizing the channel's range. Its programme is to address a segment of the audience that is overwhelmed by the wordiness and information density of La Première or that has more modest demands on the contents of a radio channel.

High editorial quality at La Première and Espace 2 – little interest in the economy

Information is among the RTS channels' core competencies: The channels dedicate a high portion of their airtime to information. La Première dedicates two thirds of its programming time to information and Espace 2 also has an above-average information component. Furthermore, the channels put large effort into the formal treatment of this information. Primarily, La Première and Espace 2, in part also Couleur 3, strive to elucidate facts and provide background information. Thereby, they rely on a wide inventory of **journalistic formats**. However, this variety of formats does not seem to be a goal for Option Musique. Instead, the channel presents its sparse information primarily in the form of compact news bulletins that convey the facts without any further contextualisation.

Although the RTS channels embody different programme concepts and appeal to different target audiences, a sense of **thematic complementarity** can only be determined to some extent. The cultural channel Espace 2 is highly devoted to cultural topics, yet culture is also a thematic focus of La Première and Couleur 3. As regards the **topic variety**, La Première offers the broadest and most well-balanced mix. However, the other channels also cover a broad spectrum. Compared to German-speaking Switzerland, tabloid topics and sports, but above all economic topics, receive less attention.

Strong orientation services of La Première and Espace 2

The close association with the authorities often observed in the media is neither observable for the RTS channels nor for the SRG channels of German-speaking Switzerland. Put differently, the RTS channels report at least as often about the activities of the political parties and the legislative bodies as about those of the executive protagonists. Here the differences between the channels are very small. An analysis of the focus on protagonists of different political party orientations shows that the attention is broadly distributed. However, the governmental parties' activities are taken into greater account than those of the other political groups.

It is helpful for the audience if the different opinions and perspectives on a given topic are elucidated. This **orientation service** is provided most consistently by La Première and Espace 2 – due to their pronounced culture of debate. In this regard, Option Musique hardly offers more than an average private radio channel.

Far more attention to France than to other linguistic regions

The SRG's special position in the Swiss media landscape and its fee privilege tend to be publicly justified with its integration mandate. Therefore, particularly high standards are to be placed on the integration services. One major integration service could consist of the SRG channels helping to increase knowledge of the respective other **parts of the country**.

The RTS programme creators pay by far the most attention to events **abroad**. Three out of four channels dedicate significantly more than half of their entire information service to events abroad; the other channel dedicates just below fifty percent to such events. Notably, events in the neighbouring country of **France** often become the focus of attention. In all channels, France occupies a lot more space than any of the other Swiss language regions. For Espace 2, events in France are even more important than events in French-speaking Switzerland and they indeed take up twice as much airtime as national events. With the exception of Espace 2, national events occupy broad space in all channels – but considerably less than in the SRG channels of German-speaking Switzerland. While, on average, about one third of all news items in German-speaking Switzerland concern national events, in French-speaking Switzerland it is barely one fifth. Although even this coverage might have an integrative effect, it of course does not help to increase knowledge about the **other language regions**. On average, information on other Swiss language regions takes up about seven percent of the airtime dedicated to information – a percentage value that is clearly above the corresponding values of the German-language SRG channels. However, the coverage on the other language regions almost exclusively deals with events in German-speaking Switzerland. **Italian-speaking Switzerland**, on the other hand, is just as **non-existent** on the RTS channels as on the SRF channels. All in all, the attention paid to other language regions by the RTS channels has hardly changed since the last data collection in 2012.

Neither a development nor any indication of a strategic management of attention to other parts of the country can be recognised. In particular, the **de facto disregard for Italian-speaking Switzerland** is hardly compatible with the integration mandate.

When it comes to fulfilling of other **integration objectives** – the exchange between religions and cultures or the language communities and parts of the country – content analysis can only review if such topics occur in the programmes - even if they are just briefly touched upon. In the artificial week under examination this is sometimes the case, but almost exclusively on La Première and Espace 2. Both channels address the integration of foreigners primarily in the context of the coverage of the refugee crisis and of the asylum topic. On the other hand, the exchange and solidarity between the language communities and parts of the country are hardly ever featured as topics.

Although the **foreign residential population** in Switzerland comprises almost one fourth of the population, it is even more weakly represented in the RTS channels than in the SRG channels of German-speaking Switzerland. Foreign-language broadcasts or broadcasts for foreigners are lacking in the RTS programmes as well as in the SRG programmes. Therefore, the regulation under concession law to contribute to the integration of foreigners is difficult to meet.

Swiss music has less of a significance than in German-speaking Switzerland

Swiss culture is the only topic relevant to concession law that is substantially dealt with in the information content of RTS channels. Most frequently, this occurs during the cultural programme of Espace 2. Despite its heavy focus on events in France, Swiss culture does play a significant role.

The SRG programmes contribute directly to promoting Swiss culture by presenting **local music**. Notably, La Première and Espace 2 often play Swiss music as part of their daily programme; Couleur 3 does so less often. By contrast, Option Musique hardly provides exposure opportunities for the Swiss music scene and does not create any additional value compared to private radio channels. All in all, the RTS channels play much less Swiss music than the German-speaking SRG radio channels. The fact that local music has a larger significance in German-speaking Switzerland is, however, not limited to the SRG channels, but also applies to private radios.

Overall, it can be determined that the RTS radio channels have a higher performance level in the field of the **cultural identity** than in the field of integration services. However, it is lower than the performance level of the SRG radios in German-speaking Switzerland. The music-centred accompanying channel Option Musique, however, doesn't play a part in contributing to either the cultural identity of Switzerland or to integration.