

Report Media

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Intercultural Media

Living in a media saturated world, the media's power is arguably growing, though the ways in which it is consumed is constantly changing and diversifying. This decentralisation of power allows new and diverse media projects to enter the arena. Intercultural media is not left out of this process; indeed it has allowed new groups of people who previously had little or no access to the media to enter the game. Traditional media often has its own motivating factors – making money, pleasing advertisers, bowing to the whims of its millionaire owners – and so consequently exploring how best to make the intercultural reality work has never been high on the agenda (if at all).

Media, seen as a way of disseminating information, does not have to include just the usual suspects such as television, radio or newspapers (and so on) but can also encompass more varied mediums such as museum exhibitions, pamphlets or web portals. But what is it that could make one of these varied projects intercultural?

Interculturalism occurs when there is communication between people with perceived cultural differences. Intercultural does not mean two different cultures living side by side but essentially independent from each other. It means an exchange of cultures on all sides, a mix creating something new. We are in the process of facilitating the integration of minorities into the dominant cultures of Europe; with the establishment of such money granting initiatives such as the INTI fund, the European Union has shown that they see this as an important issue which needs to be addressed, understanding and documenting the diversity of intercultural projects is a vital part of the integration process (if it is to happen at all).

Intercultural media can be understood as one (or many) of the various forms of media which is the end result of two or more perceived different cultures coming together. This might be a deliberate attempt at interculturalism, or an accidental intercultural outcome, but for a dialogue to take place there needs to be at least two voices.

There is of course a big problem with the definition of culture in this context. Culture must be something more than merely representation. Whilst visual representation of minorities in the mainstream media is an undoubtedly interesting, and hard-campaigned for, project, which has been ongoing especially in the non-Soviet parts of Europe, since the 1980's, the representation-project however, is not always about culture. Having black, female, openly-gay or disabled media personalities who appear to the public with no cultural references is important in regards to anti-racism/sexism etc, but it does not address any specific cultural deficit which may be present within a society.

There do exist, however, a multitude of intercultural media projects throughout Europe. Research undertaken by the Multicultural Centre Prague, classified the different 'intercultural media' projects in the following way: 'Minority Media' projects that are mostly produced by and for minority communities in many different countries; 'Out Reach' projects, where established groups from the majority society attempt to contact and involve minority groups through different mediums; 'Campaigning or Information Dissemination' projects which attempt to inform members of the wider public about minority communities, that are not usually covered, or unfavourably covered, in the mainstream media, and; 'Truly Intercultural' projects which involved communication between people of many different cultures, from both minority and majority groups, often resulting in challenging and innovative activities.

Minority Media

Wherever a sizable minority settles, minority media is usually forthcoming. Whether it be Polish newspapers in Britain, Ukrainian magazines in the Czech Republic or a Turkish press Germany, the

media often takes a similar form: written in the minority language, covering both 'home events' and issues affecting minorities in the 'new' country and featuring stories and articles composed mostly by the migrants themselves. These media projects are as numerous as what they are similar. Sometimes they take on more interesting aspects, such as the regular Polish page in a popular Irish newspaper, but essentially they have questionable 'intercultural' value as they do not involve any communication between different cultures.

It might be argued that minority media projects give the power of information into the hands of the minorities who they can then write about the issues which do not get covered in the mainstream dominated media. However these projects do not involve any communication between different cultures, but rather they help to sustain cultural isolation. Minority media is usually targeted only at the minority group itself and so does not bridge any gaps between the minority and the majority. This is especially true if the language of the minority cannot be understood by the rest of the population. It would be rare indeed to find 'ethnic' Czechs who could read Vietnamese. The benefits and problems stemming from minority media projects are indeed worthy of discussion, but in the context of interculturalism as understood here, they seem to be of little value.

Out Reach to Minorities

One way in which a dialogue between cultures is initiated is when the majority society makes attempt to reach out to the isolated or excluded minorities and facilitate the beginning of the intercultural process. In some cases there has been a concerted effort on behalf of actors to use their position in society to actively target such groups, such as the attempted intercultural activities of the media training by Pangea or the Library in Cheb, Czech Republic . Here the librarians of a town with a sizable and un-integrated Vietnamese population. They stated their explicit aims as to, "To reach out to the city's new inhabitants (ethnic minorities) and to create a space for inter-cultural exchange." They invited in local Vietnamese community leaders, put on exhibitions showcasing their culture and stocked the library with books in Vietnamese. However though the attempts at interculturalism were successful on some levels, according to the librarian interviewed for the research, the project was successful in targeting the majority population but failed to reach adult members of the Vietnamese minority. Contrary to initial expectations, the minority members showed hardly any interest in the acquired literature in Vietnamese language.

In some cases the outreach took the form of non-standard media, produced by groups without a strong media tradition. For instance the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) produced an information booklet for new labour migrants from Central and Eastern Europe into Britain with the aim of informing about, and explaining the fundamentals of, labour laws and workers' rights in the UK. The pamphlet, which was published in various languages was distributed via the workplace and on-line to either potential or actual migrant workers who were coming to the UK after EU expansion in 2004.

Taking our example of Intercultural Media however, it is clear that neither of the above mentioned projects really delivered something which could be described as truly intercultural. This is not to deny their worth; for instance migrant workers discovering their rights is without a doubt for the workers concerned a massive improvement in their situation.

However, when working towards the goal of improved intercultural relations, it was clear that there is also another important target group, after all a conversation has two sides: not the minority sections of society but rather the majority population whose concerns also have to be addressed.

Campaigning and Information Dissemination

Many prejudices stem from misinformation, different project attempt to redress this balance through a range of different mediums such as newspapers, exhibitions and magazines. Their contribution to improved intercultural relations stems from the fact that they help to create more fertile ground for cross-cultural activity in the future, by allowing the majority population to understand more about the minorities with whom they live: their history, their cultures and their lives.

For instance the Gastarbajter exhibition on labour migration to Austria illuminates the role migrants had from the 1960's onwards in helping the Austrian economy in the post-war boom. The exhibition, and others like it such as Kreuzbrg Museum, also help to give emotional substance to the stories of migrants, especially when revealing the tough decisions migrants made when leaving behind their friends and family. The process of dissemination was further helped by the exhibition taking place in a 'mainstream' museum and so it was made available for many members of the public who might not usually educate themselves about the history of migrants workers into the country.

Other projects take a more direct approach to tackling the problem by explicitly outlining the problems faced by certain groups. Gute Zeitung for example, imitates the tabloid press in style, has a large circulation and so manages to confront large numbers of Austrians with positive stories (as opposed the usually negative reports in the mainstream press) about asylum seekers and the work of the NGO 'Integration House'. This free once yearly publication arrives on people's door mats with a different and often challenging message. Přes, a magazine in the Czech Republic disseminates information, only on refugees, in a similar way (indeed it is the only publication dedicated to refugees in the country), Klub Hanoi provides information about Vietnam and a one-off G2 Polish Special from the British newspaper The Guardian addresses issues faced by labour migrants in a more journalistic way.

Such projects however, do not always involve the migrants so directly in their running and conception (although Klub Hanoi now has a large amount of Vietnamese users). More importantly, they do not address first of all the minority yet the majority population. Consequently, as useful and interesting as they were in both methodological and 'good practice' senses we still had trouble labelling them as truly 'intercultural.' They do, once again, help with the process of dialogue between cultures because they break down prejudices and offer insights to people who might not always find them left to their own devices.

Truly Intercultural Projects

Projects are in existence throughout Europe which mix people from different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities to produce truly intercultural media. Of course within these projects there are examples of both good and bad practices and some are far more successful than others, but these projects are not just based upon creating intercultural understanding, or developing links between majority and minority groups (which are both important and fostered by the projects) but that they have the added value of being intercultural in their nature. They are the results of a communication between perceived different cultures: intercultural media.

For instance Journal Stimme which is produced by and for minorities or the Exiled Journalist Network (EJN) in Britain is a group of journalists exiled from their home countries for various reasons, who came together, after a British Media Ethics organisation began to contact them with the aim of forming a database of exiled journalists on the island. Now an organisation in their own right they help their fellow journalists by assisting them in finding ways to be journalists again. They organise retraining seminars and the like as well as monitoring the media for unfair treatment when dealing with migrant related stories. Its mere existence helps build ties between journalists from all over the world as well as gaining large support from the National Union of Journalists in Britain, resulting in intercultural network of journalists. There is intercultural communication between both British and 'migrant' journalists as well as the different journalists from all over the world.

Similarly, Radio Multikulti in Germany brings together many different ethnic groups living with the country to create a radio station which broadcasts in 18 different languages to a variety of cultures. In the beginning the station used presenters from the countries of origin, keeping a genuine feeling

of different cultures in one place; which arguably enhances the intercultural nature of the station. Other radio stations by and for minorities exist in other parts of Europe, such as Radio FRO, Radio Stimme and Radio Orange.

Whereas Radio Multikulti clearly divides people by their ethnic background in an attempt to make sure that all sizable ethnic groups are accommodated for in their schedule other intercultural media projects, such as Indymedia's Migration Page or Kanak TV, also in Germany, become intercultural by ignoring questions of ethnicity and origin completely. They, through their provocative films, instigate an interesting intercultural media - which arguably do more for integration than traditional attempts which automatically bracket different groups.

Resumé

We tried in this summary of our findings to come up with a functioning classification of projects. Of course, there is something arbitrary in this, because there are in fact many projects that combine different elements. Also, there is hardly such a thing as a perfect project; many of the intercultural projects can even be seen as relative failures in promoting the integration of minorities in throughout the European Union. With the truly diverse range (both in geographical distance and methodological implementation) there is much projects can learn from each other in regards of good and bad practice if new projects can be successful in the completion of this lofty aim.