

Equal and EBU Dialogue Conference, Dublin, 5 May 2004

This one-day conference about equality and diversity in broadcasting took place in the wings of a larger Equal conference at Dublin's new Helix Centre. It brought together diversity managers from some of Europe's public broadcasters with others involved in diversity and interested in the portrayal of minorities and their representation in the broadcast media.

In plenary sessions and workshops it set out to explore how public service broadcasters (PSBs) promoted equality and diversity internally within their organisations and how they reflected diversity on the air, not merely in factual programmes but also in drama and entertainment. One workshop pursued this topic further in the afternoon while the other came up with practical proposals for diversity management within broadcasting.

Without confining itself to a single definition of 'diversity' or 'minorities' the conference took in a broad range of themes covering the Irish Equal Authority's 'nine grounds for discrimination': race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, family status, marital status and membership of the traveller community. There was a consensus about the importance of the right equality and diversity policies, but also a shared concern that these were only the beginning, and unless they could be properly implemented they would remain no more than 'fine words'.



The Helix Centre, Dublin

The conference was largely funded by the Swedish Council of the European Social Fund, represented by **Torsten Thunberg**, who stressed the importance of the media in reaching the ESF's goal of achieving working life without discrimination. It was organised by the Stockholm-based 'Umbrella Project' as part of the European Commission's Equal programme, in cooperation with the Irish Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.



Torsten Thunberg, The Swedish ESF Council and Owe Ivarsson, The Umbrella Project (SE)

and by Trinity College's sociology department on immigration from Africa – made for depressing reading.

The morning plenary was chaired by **Karen Coleman**, foreign editor of Ireland's Newstalk 106. The workshops were moderated by RTE's former Director-General, **Bob Collins**, and by international broadcasting consultant, **David Lowen**. A short plenary, with brief reports on the workshops, concluded the day.

In welcoming delegates, Dublin City University's **Farell Corkoran** said migration had given a new meaning to diversity in Ireland. Recent reports – by Amnesty International calling for a leadership role against racism, and



Bob Collins, former CEO RTE, (IE)

Niall Crowley, CEO of Ireland's Equality Authority, set the tone for the conference and his insights fed into the subsequent discussions. He said that in facing the reality of inequality in Ireland the creation of one authority had been a big step forward. It was seen by some in the media as a threat to free speech, but even free speech was not an absolute – it could sometimes conflict with other basic rights. While Ireland's recent equality legislation was coherent and comprehensive, he would like to see it widened to include socio-economic status. He wanted to see a greater onus on businesses to plan for equality.

Secretariat:
The Umbrella Project, a Swedish Development Partnership in the Equal Initiative

Jacob Schulze
+46 70 313 47 10
jacob.schulze@faceurope.se

Carina Möllerberg
+46 70 340 90 78
carina_mollerberg@yahoo.com

Editorial support and rapporteuring by Mathew Salisbury, free lance editor and consultant London, UK
+44 (0)7831 58 43 70

There were a number of recurring themes throughout the day. One was the newness of the challenges posed by migration for some countries, notably Ireland and Finland. Another was the need to take a holistic and comprehensive approach – there should not be a hierarchy of inequalities. In any case most people had multiple identities and frequently belonged to more than one group identified in the EA's 'nine grounds'.

On the broadcasting side there was a recognition that the media carried huge responsibility in this field, but were only a part of the forces that shaped their societies. Broadcasters were not a separate species blessed with unique objectivity – they mirrored society's attitudes just as their output reflected the values of those who made up their audiences. They were not social engineers. At the other extreme there was a danger that, in reflecting the social consensus and being driven (even PSBs) by 'commercial' considerations, they were too anxious not to rock the boat.

There was a sense that PSBs did need to offer a lead. Objectivity did not mean shirking moral judgments, especially in a field where traditional attitudes could no longer be justified. Nevertheless, they did need to reflect the world from as many perspectives as possible – there was no 'single truth'. At the same time 'balance' should not become an excuse to prevent the expression of alternative opinions.

Cyril Husbands, a senior diversity manager with the BBC, outlined the corporation's policies under the slogan 'different faces, different voices, one BBC'. He argued that nearly everyone had a relationship with the BBC through its cumulative impact on the nation's cultural life, so underlining the importance of inclusivity. It needed both mainstream and targeted programmes. He noted that, as a result of demographics, the two areas for potential audience growth were older white people and young black people. He said that Radio 4 had changed and was very diverse 'behind' its voices, but even these were reassuringly similar to those of the World Service, which was familiar to many migrants.



Cyril Husbands, B.B.C., (UK) and Bertien Minco, N.O.S., (NL)

The chairman of Swedish Radio, **Ove Joanson**, argued the importance of PSB to our cultural heritage, as a cultural and social insurance policy and guarantor of diversity. It had to retain public support and credibility by not ducking sensitive social issues. But he cited the huge impact of a programme where a Kurdish immigrant talked about his mother – this was not about discrimination but about normality. Commercial broadcasters would like to see PSB curtailed and were increasingly getting the attention of the competition authorities in Brussels. He said a threat to PSB, as in the North American example, was also a threat to this kind of intelligent entertainment.



Ove Joanson, chairman Swedish Radio

[Radio was a more intimate medium than television and was close to the hearts of its audience – this was a mixed blessing as it meant that every development and every change provoked strong reactions.]

Ann Sandelin, director of Swedish language broadcasting for YLE (Finland) and vice president of the EBU radio committee, argued that diversity was embedded in the EBU by virtue of its size and range of members. But this was also reinforced by its own statutes and declarations, and by its support for programme exchanges and inter-cultural programming. While radio was still largely managed (though not made) by men, she felt the glass ceiling was now cracking. She described YLE's diversity programme – part of Finland's first steps towards being a multicultural country.

There was agreement on avoiding stereotypes and tokenism on screen. Members of minority groups could take 'ordinary' roles that did not depend on that membership. A disability did not have to be a storyline in itself. Positive stereotypes could almost as harmful as negative ones and romanticised images were not helpful. There was a danger that the desire to be 'politically correct' could lead to a failure to portray harsh realities or 'tell it how it is'.

This was not just a problem for news, current affairs and drama. Entertainment programmes also played an important role in shaping our cultures and were often overlooked when considering diversity. And it was often easier to make programmes about people far away, as this raised fewer uncomfortable, 'doorstep' issues.

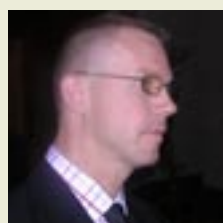
There was a consensus that broadcasters had come a long way in the past decade or so, but at the same time a concern that discrimination was part of the human condition and that our need to belong to groups inevitably led to excluding others. Broadcasters were in the privileged position of being able to do more than most to minimise this tendency, and to raise our awareness and understanding of those around us.

RTE's radio MD, **Adrian Moynes**, said his country's oldest 'diversity' was the Irish language, on which broadcast spending was, for cultural reasons, disproportionate to its actual audience share. But rapid change meant that RTE now had to think about other minority languages. Ireland was also a much richer country now, but not a good one in which to be poor and on the margins of society. He outlined a project to encourage greater gender balance on air and a mentoring scheme that had the additional benefit of enabling managers like himself to get a sense of the organisation through female employees a generation younger. He stressed the importance of making the arguments for equality and diversity in terms of the 'business gospel'.

Antonia Mochan, the European Commission's spokesperson for employment and social affairs, outlined her role and the scope of the recent EU Directives, on race and ethnic origin and on discrimination in employment. These set only minimum standards, but some Member States had failed to meet last year's deadline for transposing them into national law. The Commission's anti-discrimination programme had learned from earlier campaigns and was operating at both European and national levels. Enlargement had brought the Roma issue to the fore and Community law now applied across the new accession states. She said that now was the time to put the case for including equality and diversity in the next Media programme.



Karen Coleman, NewsTalk106FM, Jacob Schulze, The Umbrella project, Antonia Mochan, Spokesman European Commission, Employment & Social Affairs and Torsten Thunberg, Swedish ESF Council



Per Frykman, the Swedish Disability Federation

Elisabeth Lagerlöf, head of communications at the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, outlined the Foundation's role as a research-based source of guidance to policy-makers. Their most recent report showed wide variations across Europe in areas such as female employment, physical violence and sexual harassment at work. She stressed the need for an integrated age management strategy as the working age population was expected to fall, and said racial problems were hard to identify in the broad sweep of data. Reporting on a recent Foundation study, she said those who firmly expected to migrate from the new accession countries numbered between 1.1 and 1.4 million and tended to be the young and better educated, not the unemployed and poor.



David Lowen, Sysmedia, (UK) and Tiina Kangro, Haridusmedia, (EST)

Workshop A:

Jo Groebel, director of the European Media Institute, illustrated the PSB dilemma, that if they catered entirely for the minority audiences ignored by commercial broadcasters, they would struggle to justify a universal licence fee or tax funding. He cited the BBC's Goodness Gracious Me as combining ethnic minorities and popular entertainment. But 'diversity', like 'Europe', was still an abstract for most people. Barriers to diversity included language (programme exchanges across Europe were in decline), and economic problems (minority and social programmes were the first to suffer). He warned that Europe was about more than geography – it was also about cultural influences and values such as human rights and democracy, which could conflict with the values of other cultures.

Romanian filmmaker, **Georgiana Lixandru**, spoke about discrimination against Europe's Roma communities. She said that, for the two million Romas in Romania, the government's EU-supported development programmes were still on paper only – in practice there was little or no progress. The workshop watched her video on segregated education (the key to improving Roma conditions), which continued despite government orders. She believed that the power of the media imposed on them a huge responsibility to help change society's attitudes. As a freelance journalist she felt discriminated against at work.

Greg Philo, the Glasgow Media Group's research director, outlined and illustrated their work on images of diversity. Minorities were still under-represented outside news and current affairs; and in drama it was only recently that their portrayal was becoming more embedded in real life. He described the use of post-colonial stereotypes in coverage of the Rwandan genocide and the reluctance of editors to allow journalists to do 'explainers' for fear of losing the audience. In fact it was clear from the Group's audience studies that people were confused – they stopped watching and supplied their own stereotypes in the absence of background and context.



*Jo Groebel, E.I.M. (DE)
Renate Fries, P.I.D (DE)
Inger Etzler, S.V.T (SE)
Teresa Moderatho, S.V.T, (SE)*

In the two sessions of Workshop B, **introductory presentations on diversity management** in the media were made by:

Inger Etzler and **Teresa Moderatho**, Multicultural Centre Swedish Television

Tiina Kangro, MD of Haridusmedia (Estonia)

Jean-Joseph Scheffknecht, consultant to France 3 and

Per Frykman, media adviser at the Swedish Disability Federation

Carmelita Serkei, project manager at Mira Media (Netherlands)

Gunilla Ivarsson, diversity coordinator at Swedish Radio

This summary of discussions are only attributable to the context of the event, for further dissemination of separate statements please check with the relevant speaker.

Action points arising from Workshop B:

- Diversity and gender issues must be regarded as continuing issues, integral to forward planning, not as subjects for short-term projects.
- The Baltic states should be integrated into the exchange of best practices in diversity management.
- PSBs should be braver and take more risks in choosing presenters.
Staff aged 40+ still need training, especially in technical and transferable skills.
- HR departments need to work closely with programme-makers to ensure that recruitment more closely matches the needs of programmes and contributes to the overall branding of networks.
- Awareness of discriminatory language should be included in the training of broadcasting staff.
- Diversity and gender work in PSBs must have its own budget.
- Senior management must be involved with diversity issues – the most senior diversity manager should report direct to the CEO.
- While PSBs must be totally independent of interest groups in their programme making, NGOs play an important role in cooperating with PSBs on diversity and gender issues – not least in regional broadcasting.



Wish-list of tools for diversity management in PSBs (Workshop B):

- an agreed policy statement on diversity
- a check-list for self-assessment on diversity and fair portrayal in programmes (available on the intranet);
- information for audiences to enable them to discuss and analyse the content in programmes in relation to diversity;
- working groups on how to implement agreed policies (a number of PSBs already have them – for example, SVT and BRT);
- focus groups (already widely in use);
- clauses underlining diversity policies in contracts with suppliers;
- incentives (awards, scholarships) to staff for improvements related to equality and diversity;
- measurement against targets including:
 - analysis of programme output
 - review seminars
 - use of databases.