

The radio channels of SRG SSR 2018 (French-speaking Switzerland)

Summary

The programme analysis of the SRG SSR radio channels in 2018 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 provide a service that is thematically broad and highly diverse in terms of form, with a strong focus on cultural topics. Their services to promote cultural identity are to be rated more highly than their contribution to integration. Option Musique, whose programme concept is not very close to a public service broadcaster, is out of the ordinary.

Key data on methodology

The following programmes of French-speaking Switzerland were examined in 2018:

La Première, Espace 2, Couleur 3, Option Musique

Random sample: Artificial week (Mon-Sun) in the period from 8 January to 9 December 2018

Reporting dates: Mon, 30 April; Tue, 27 November; Wed, 27 June; Thu, 18 January; Fri, 24 August; Sat, 20 October;

Sun, 11 March

Analysed airtime: Daily 05.00 - 24.00

Music analysis of daytime programme: Wed, 27 June, 05.00 - 20.00

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

Total programme hours analysed: 532

Significant changes to programme concepts since 2015

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

La Première is a **full-service format** with a low percentage of music and a high level of information density. Its offering of information is extensive, often presented in the form of dialogue 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: by and large, the range of music features no mainstream songs, plays many Swiss tracks and has radically turned to a younger target audience since 2011.

Espace 2 is a classical **cultural channel**, which has a similar programme concept as the second SRG channels of German- and Italian-speaking Switzerland. Cultural topics and classical music take high priority and, although Espace 2 also places focus on sophisticated, complex verbal content, music is the channel's most important element. The programme concept has **changed drastically** since 2015: the percentage of music has been significantly increased at the expense of information and the traditional classical **music format** has been **expanded** to include jazz, world music and pop. The focus of content has also shifted more strongly to **Swiss culture**, focusing on French-speaking Switzerland, after a marked orientation towards France had been evident previously.

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 **different target group needs**. While Option Musique cuts down information to the most essential, **Couleur 3** offers a more developed information service and also features numerous elements of verbal entertainment. 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 focuses on light, French-language pop music permeated by many oldies. Obviously, the positioning of Option Musique follows the strategy of maximizing the network's range. Its programme is to address an older 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 – focus on cultural topics, economy given little attention

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 a reduced but still high 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. They make use of a wide inventory of **journalistic formats**. Option Musique instead presents its sparse information primarily in the form of compact news bulletins that convey the facts without any further contextualisation.

The vast majority of the information content broadcast by the RTS channels is also – in contrast to SRF channels – **original** in nature, i.e. the percentage of repeated information elements is low, standing at 14% of the total information volume (SRF: 55%).

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. Overall, **culture** accounts for more than one third of the total RTS information production and is much more present than other relevant topics such as politics, economics or science. Compared to German- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, economics receives less attention. Tabloid topics and sport also receive less attention on the RTS channels (with the exception of Option Musique) than on the SRG channels in the rest of Switzerland.

Broad range of actors – different orientation services

The RTS channels include a **broad range** of actors, which has expanded considerably even since 2015. The close association with the authorities often observed in the media is not observable for the RTS channels. Put differently, they report at least as often or even more often (La Première) about the activities of the political parties and the legislative bodies as about those of the executive protagonists. An analysis of the focus on protagonists of different political party orientations shows that the attention is broadly distributed. However, the activities of the parties represented in the Federal Council 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 by the RTS channels in different ways, but to a much lesser degree compared to the previous analysis. La Première most often focuses on the spectrum of perspectives and opinions thanks to its pronounced culture of debate, which is hardly the case with Couleur 3 and Option Musique.

Slight decline in consideration of other language 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 **other parts of the country**.

With one exception, the RTS channels pay more attention to events happening **abroad** than to national events or those in French-speaking Switzerland. Option Musique and Couleur 3 in particular grant foreign countries significantly more airtime than Switzerland. As in previous years, **France** enjoys a lot of attention – more than the other language regions. Only Espace 2 deviates from this pattern. The cultural programme has abandoned the strong focus it placed on France until 2015 in favour of a much stronger focus on French-speaking Switzerland. However, Espace 2 and the other RTS channels do not report on the **other language regions** more often than they did before. Since the last survey (2015), attention on the other parts of the country has even declined slightly. And when reporting on other language regions, the focus is almost always on

German-speaking Switzerland. **Italian-speaking Switzerland** is just as **non-existent** on the RTS channels as on the SRF channels.

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. The 2018 survey confirms the results of the previous studies, indicating that these topics usually only have a chance of appearing in the programme if random current events provide the necessary journalistic "hooks" or if specific programmes are scheduled. All in all, this occurs very rarely, most likely at La Première. The corresponding percentages of information are each less than one percent of the total information output of an RTS channel.

The same applies to the consideration of the **foreign residential population** in Switzerland. Foreign-language broadcasts or broadcasts for foreigners are lacking in the RTS programmes as well as in other SRG programmes. The representation of the foreign population in the information content of the RTS channels is just as weak in the analysed artificial week as in the other SRG radio channels and has hardly changed since the beginning of the surveys.

Swiss music gaining in significance

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**, which has massively increased its attention to this issue since 2015 and is now at the top of all SRG radio channels when it comes to taking Swiss culture into account. On the other hand, Option Musique's service in this respect is very modest and offers the least among SRG channels.

The SRG programmes contribute directly to promoting Swiss culture and strengthening cultural identity by presenting **local music**. The RTS channels have consistently seized this opportunity in recent years and further expanded their range of Swiss music in the daily programme. They are thus continuing the development of SRF channels in German-speaking Switzerland. Since the beginning of the surveys, the percentage of music of Swiss origin played on RTS channels has never been as high as in 2018.

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. Only the music-based accompanying channel Option Musique contributes neither to Switzerland's cultural identity nor to integration.