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# Bridging the gap with Radio X-Tra

A TOURIST, I once read, is a person who visits another country because he wants to discover a way of life that is different – and who then complains when he finds out that it is.

Certainly if you're leaving Britain for a holiday abroad this summer you'll have to give up a few familiar features of home life – like kippers, cricket and Coronation Street, for example.

Radio programmes in one's own language frequently fall into this category, too. But not if you're heading for Switzerland and your listening language is English.

Listeners in Switzerland can tune in to English language radio at almost any time of the night and day – provided they have a shortwave receiver.

The shortwave bands are packed with programmes in English from almost everywhere in the world, including the BBC in London and Switzerland's own international service, Berne-based Swiss Radio International.

But if you don't or can't listen in to shortwave, then the choice here is much more restricted. Non-shortwave listening programming in Switzerland is provided mainly as a special service of SRI.

Twice daily, SRI broadcasts news and current affairs on the Swiss Wire Broadcast Network (Telefonrundspruch/Télédiffusion) a system whose subscribers include 400,000 homes, hotels – and even hospitals if that's where you're unfortunate enough to be.

These twice daily broadcasts are a bulletin of news and weather at 12.15 Monday to Saturday and then in the evening Monday to Friday, following the 7 o'clock BBC news, SRI's regular *Dateline* current affairs programme.

This English language service is prolonged each Wednesday evening by either spoken word or musical features, again prepared at the Berne studios of Swiss Radio International.

For nightbirds, Dateline can also be heard at 03.45 and at 06.30.





*Mike McMahon (left) – head of Swiss Radio International's English Service – with Colin Farmer, also of SRI.*

The most popular of these programmes offered by SRI is clearly the evening *Dateline* news magazine. It includes a bulletin of Swiss news, commentaries, analyses and interviews on world affairs, plus programme elements on life in this country.
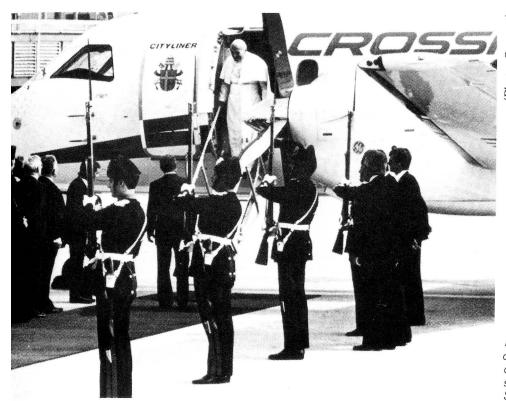
But by far the most ambitious exercise to date in English language broadcasting in Switzerland was last year's *Radio X-Tra* project in Geneva. It was a 12 hours a day experiment to ascertain if there was a need for such a service in Switzerland's westernmost city. Organized and produced by Swiss Radio International in cooperation with Radio Swiss Romande, the trial programme was meant to test the feasibility of using radio on a regional basis to bridge the gap between the large international community there and the native Swiss.

Judging from the overwhelming favourable reaction, *Radio X-Tra* was also greatly appreciated by English speaking tourists and other temporary residents in the Geneva area.

In the three months it was on the air, *Radio X-Tra* became a kind of "electronic village square" for a fragmented and far-from-home community. When the trial terminated it had even attracted 11 per cent of the *entire* Geneva audience – that is, including Swiss listeners as well.

Says Mike McMahon, head of SRI's English Service and programme controller of *Radio X-Tra:* "The Geneva experiment was a possible indicator of a trend that might become commonplace in the future; English-

(Photo: Crossair)

*Pope John Paul arrives in Geneva at the start of his six-day visit to Switzerland*

language community broadcasting in places where large international communities are established. Such a station already exists in Vienna. Since 1979, Blue Danube Radio has been programming for the international community in the Austrian capital and has even attracted a large following among the Viennese themselves".

Listeners in Geneva clearly want to have their *Radio X-Tra* back. A *"Friends of Radio X-Tra"* association has been formed in Geneva and an application for a broadcasting licence is being made to the Swiss Communications Ministry. The major problem of finance still has to be overcome, but enthusiasm is high.

So one day a complete Swiss radio programme in English may become an established fact – at least for one part of the country.

★ ★ ★

*POPE John Paul says the "wisdom and way of life of the Swiss" should serve as a lesson to the rest of the world.*

*The Papal praise came as the Pontiff ended a six-day visit to Switzerland, during which he was received by the entire Swiss cabinet in Berne and addressed huge crowds in Lugano, Fribourg, Sion and Lucerne.*

*"Switzerland loves peace", he said in a farewell statement in German, French and Italian. "She has learned to bring about the co-habitation of divergent cultures and convictions in respect and democracy".*

*The Swiss way of life, added the Pope, "goes beyond a simple compromise in a world so inclined towards aggression and retreat into isolation.*

*"I hope that Switzerland's wisdom and her philanthropy will serve as a lesson to the world".*

★ ★ ★

AS if the Soviet-led boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics hasn't caused enough headaches, the Lausanne-based International Olympic Committee has also been under attack within Switzerland itself – from environmentalists and emblem-makers.

Following a campaign by conservationists, the IOC has had to drop plans to build new headquarters on a select lakeside site at Ouchy on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Official planning permission had been received, but the IOC agreed to look for an alternative site because of strong local opposition. The committee had hoped that its new Sfr 20 million (£6 million) headquarters –

comprising a 250-seat auditorium, IOC offices, residential quarters and an Olympic museum – would be ready by 1986.

In the other controversy a Swiss company is taking court action against the IOC for allegedly failing to honour a contract on the use of the Olympic motif and pictograms.

The Intelicense Corporation – a Geneva-based company specialising in licensing arrangements – claims that the United States Olympic Committee and the organising committee of the Los Angeles Games have unfairly monopolised the commercial use of the emblems in the US.

Intelicense says that in 1979 the IOC signed a contract giving the company exclusive worldwide rights to market the emblems "for the next 70 years". The company said the agreement would give the IOC 40 per cent of the net income from royalties, of which a third would go to help athletes in developing countries.

According the Intelicense, market studies had showed that IOC income from the deal could be in excess of Sfr 20 million a year.

A lawyer for the Geneva company said the IOC had been subjected to great pressure from US business interests – "but the committee must stick by its agreement".

The IOC has declined to comment on the dispute.