



**Intercultural library networking in Switzerland: sharing material and knowledge**

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**Abstract**

*Switzerland compasses an area of just 41.300 square kilometers where 7.7 million people live – most of them concentrated in the so called “Mittelland” region. There are four national languages: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic. During the last decades the number of foreigners living in Switzerland has grown steadily and the number of foreigners living in Switzerland has grown steadily and amounted to 22.62% in 2008. Not included in this number are former foreigners who own a Swiss passport now: their number has reached 5.3% of the total population during the last 10 years. Concerning this multicultural situation and its challenges public libraries, amongst others, are called upon to take their share of responsibility and create new offers for a new clientele!*

*In Switzerland, there is neither a national library act nor a national library institute which could establish obligatory national guidelines for intercultural library services. Therefore, it is left to the communities (or rather their public libraries) if and how they want to react to the challenges of a modern multicultural society.*

*Since the early nineteen-eighties, Bibliomedia Switzerland ([www.bibliomedia.ch](http://www.bibliomedia.ch)), a “library for public libraries”, has been building up a central library for foreign languages in the name and with the financial support of the Swiss government. Today, Bibliomedia offers books in German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian, Serbian, Albanian, Turkish and Tamil as well as bilingual children’s picture books to around 1.000 public libraries and a lot of school libraries. Moreover, Bibliomedia produces and offers material for multilingual storytelling (Japanese “Kamishibai” or picture book cinemas) with texts in many foreign languages. Bibliomedia also develops publications (“Sprachenvielfalt in Schule und Bibliothek”, 2005) or translations of texts supporting libraries in their daily work with foreigners ([www.bibliomedia.ch](http://www.bibliomedia.ch) > Angebote für Fremdsprachen > Werkzeugkasten Multikulturalität).*

*Despite a missing national library act, during the last decades, the Swiss public libraries have made great progress and have opened their doors for their multicultural clientele. In the nineteen-nineties, the first intercultural libraries were founded by foreign parents who were looking for books for their children and themselves written in their own language. They founded the “Association Books without Borders” ([www.interbiblio.ch](http://www.interbiblio.ch)), which comprises 18 intercultural libraries today. Over the last years, some of the big municipal libraries already engaged in multicultural projects became members of the association, profiting and sharing their knowledge.*

*With the help of Bibliomedia even small libraries are now able to offer books and reading promotion in different foreign languages.*

*A few years ago, Bibliomedia in cooperation with the “Association Books without Borders” and “Kinderbuchfonds Baobab” launched the project “Mondomedia” ([www.mondomedia.ch](http://www.mondomedia.ch)) to offer training and courses in intercultural library work. Librarians who take these courses are sensitised to the diversity of our modern society and they get a good overview of the variety of languages around and at the meaning of cultural identity. They get to know useful material to build up their own intercultural library services as well as receiving a lot of concrete suggestions how to use and to form the cultural variety in their library and how to plan and implement intercultural projects. The aim of these courses is to enable small public libraries to make a contribution to the integration of people from different cultural and language background, living in Switzerland.*

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## **Introduction**

Switzerland with its four national languages (German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic) and four different cultural landscapes has had to face from its foundation down to the present day the advantages but also the difficulties and the potential for conflicts of a vivid multilingual community and the coexistence of different cultures. The migration that started in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought people from many cultures to Switzerland, which has increased the social challenge steadily. Therefore, the Swiss libraries as agents of literature, information, and culture are requested to come up with new ideas and offers. The following essay will show how public libraries in Switzerland have reacted to the challenges of a more and more diverse multicultural society.

### **1. Population structure in Switzerland**

Switzerland has an expanse of about 41'300 square kilometers. On the one hand, being a small geographic area proves to be an advantage for the libraries that are working towards the integration of their multicultural population: the participants are known and their number is limited which facilitates communication between the partners. Projects are easier to finance and therefore to carry out. On the other hand, the political organisation of Switzerland is very complex which makes it difficult to organise an all-encompassing Swiss project. One has to deal with 26 cantons and 2636 communities (2009) all of whom claiming their territorial and political sovereignty.

In Switzerland, four language areas and four distinctive cultures meet. There are four national languages spoken as well as written: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic. Therefore Switzerland has an existing multilingual tradition – which, however, does not mean

that there are no conflicts at all<sup>1</sup>. An elaborated political system and intensive (multilingual) communication between the four cultures guarantees something like a national agreement. A lot of effort is necessary to keep it that way.

On Switzerland's 41'300 square kilometers lives a population of 7,78 million people<sup>2</sup> - concentrated mainly in the so-called "Middleland". The fact that about 23% of the population in Switzerland does not have a Swiss passport is important when it comes to the topic of library services for a multicultural society. If one includes those foreigners who became naturalised within the last 10 years, the percentage of the population with a migration background amounts to 30%. These 30% are highly heterogeneous as far as language and culture are concerned:

### Nationalities of the main migrant groups living in Switzerland<sup>3</sup>

Country	1988	1998	2008
Germany	81'711	98'934	234'640
Spain	114'875	91'302	65'166
France	49'938	57'881	87'385
Italy	384'786	336'850	291'585
Portugal	57'941	136'581	196'842
UK	18'069	20'222	33'298
Ex-Yugoslavia*	100'867	198'035	
Serbia/Montenegro			184'428
Croatia		43'377	36'281
Bosnia/Herzegovina		29'450	37'631
Macedonia		51'142	59'909
Turkey	57'173	80'286	72'204
North America	13'256	17'156	24'186
South America	11'033	19'316	33'495
Sri Lanka	1'025	14'400	28'024

\* No statistical data has been collected in the newly established states

The most common languages spoken in Switzerland today correspond to this chart: the three main national languages German, French and Italian followed by English, Spanish, Portuguese, Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Tamil. However, there are also minorities speaking Russian, Arabic, Thai, Dutch, Amharic, Chinese, Indonesian and many more languages. The first wave of immigrants who came to Switzerland between 1960 and 1970 were the Italians. Spanish and Portuguese seasonal workers followed, at the time often euphemistically called "guest workers". This first generation of immigrants often still has difficulties using the official language spoken in their surroundings whereas

<sup>1</sup> See Christine Egerszegi in „NZZ am Sonntag“, 15.7.2007, p. 17: „Die Schweiz hat eine lange Tradition im Zusammenleben verschiedener Kulturen und Religionen. Das hat sie nach heftigen Bürgerkriegen mühevoll lernen müssen. Seit 1848 ist in der Bundesverfassung das Recht verankert, dass Minderheiten ihre eigene Kultur behalten und ihre Traditionen pflegen dürfen. Aber dieses Recht bringt auch die Pflicht mit sich, den andern Kulturen im Land mit gleicher Achtung und gleichem Verständnis zu begegnen. Mit dieser festgeschriebenen Grundhaltung ist es der Schweiz gelungen, die vielfältigen sprachlichen und kulturellen Regionen in einem Land zu vereinen.“

<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the population amounted to 7,25 million inhabitants, by 2009 it had risen to 7,78 million. Switzerland is one of the most dynamic countries in Europe as far as population increase is concerned (see: [www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/02/blank/key/bevoelkerungsstand.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/02/blank/key/bevoelkerungsstand.html)).

<sup>3</sup> For the complete chart see:

[www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/07/blank/key/01/01.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/07/blank/key/01/01.html).

their children, the so-called “Secondos”, are well integrated in the Swiss society and culture. After this first migration wave there followed people from Turkey, from the former Yugoslavian countries and from Sri Lanka. These six nationalities form the biggest groups of foreigners living in Switzerland.

With 23% of inhabitants without a Swiss passport Switzerland represents a veritable multicultural society. There are communities where 50% of the population is foreign with highly heterogeneous cultural backgrounds. In certain classrooms there is no more than one Swiss child left. These circumstances pose an enormous challenge - not only for communities but also for schools. Libraries can offer a substantial support by creating and implementing appropriate offers.

## 2. Libraries in Switzerland

In Switzerland, there are no national library laws or regulations and no national library institute. There is no law and nobody to co-ordinate the development of the roughly 1000 public libraries all around Switzerland. The promotion of culture and the support of cultural affairs has traditionally been the duty of the cantons. Some of them (for example the canton of Wallis) regulated the library development with a special law. However, most of the cantons do not have a library law and therefore have no regulations on the support of public libraries. In some cantons there are library representatives but they can only act as advisors. Whether and how a community organises and develops a library is therefore mostly left to its own authority. In the seventies and eighties of the last century big efforts were made to build up a nationwide net of public libraries according to the motto “a library for every community!” This effort paid off: nowadays there are about 1000 public libraries throughout Switzerland with different budgets, many of them founded as societies and depending on the financial goodwill of their community. Many of these small libraries operate with minimal budgets and their staff gets paid no or just the minimum salary. Nevertheless, in the last years all these libraries have become more or less professionally managed local centres for media, information and culture.

The motor behind the development of the public libraries in Switzerland is the *Swiss Association for Public Libraries (SAB<sup>4</sup>)*. In work groups the members of this association define guidelines and standards for the funding and organisation of community libraries<sup>5</sup>. The association also takes care of the formation of the staff working in small public libraries. It defines the contents of the courses that involve about 120 lessons offered to people who have an additional job in a library. Most of the staff of the 1000 public libraries works under these conditions. At the end of 2009, new guidelines for library formation were issued by the *SAB* wherein the aspect of intercultural library work becomes a topic for the first time. This means that in the future, every person who takes the *SAB* courses and passes the final examination will have a basic knowledge in intercultural library work.

Due to the *SAB* standards and guidelines it is guaranteed that almost all public libraries work in the same way: cataloguing, classification, the presentation of the media and the offer of information services are standardised. Since *Bibliomedia Switzerland<sup>6</sup>* and the

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.sabclp.ch](http://www.sabclp.ch)

<sup>5</sup> The „Guidelines for Public Libraries“ (1995; revised edition 2008) and the „Guidelines for School Libraries“ contain minimal standards for the management of the libraries as well as for the communal authorities. The booklet “Arbeitstechnik” (version 7:2003) describes how to organise the daily library work (cataloguing etc.).

<sup>6</sup> The main business of *Bibliomedia Schweiz-Suisse-Svizzera*, founded in 1920 as “Schweizerische Volksbibliothek”, has been from the beginning the lending of book collections to public libraries all over Switzerland, using a rotation system. Using these collections, libraries are able to offer their clients new media without having to buy them themselves. Such a rotation system increases the appeal of the

*SBD.Bibliotheksservice AG*<sup>7</sup> work with the same standards and guidelines all over Switzerland, the stocks and the data are exchangeable and every public library is able to import them into their system. The public libraries in Switzerland have thus the unique possibility to exchange media and data efficiently and without difficulties among themselves or to obtain them from the two major providers.

### **3. Intercultural library networking in Switzerland**

Since public libraries in Switzerland have not started to take on responsibility for offers in the area of intercultural services until very late, immigrants started to become proactive in the nineteen-eighties and created libraries of their own. In the last few years, more and more public libraries have started to reflect on the topic and have been trying to develop offers for a multicultural society on their own. When in need for development, renewal or exchange of their foreign language books, both the intercultural libraries and the public libraries can rely on the large stock of foreign language books that *Bibliomedia Switzerland* has to offer. Since 1920, *Bibliomedia*, functioning as the national “library for libraries”, has been lending books in different languages to libraries in towns, villages and schools. There is no reason for every small library to build up a stock of its own and to have a lot of personal and financial expenses if they can use the services of a specialised provider like *Bibliomedia*.

Moreover, *Bibliomedia Switzerland* is involved with intercultural networking and its aim is to provide local public libraries with books and other media in foreign languages where ever there is demand since an offer welcomes foreigners living here and signals an esteem of other cultures and languages which can help to integrate migrants into the society.

The result of a survey conducted by *Bibliomedia* in small public libraries on the success of the foreign language collections, librarians often mentioned that they had difficulties to lend these books: people speaking these foreign languages would just not come to the library. It is obvious that there was a problem of communication. It is very difficult and requires a special and lasting effort to interest people with no previous library experience for libraries and their services. Therefore, public libraries need *attractive material* (books, other media, information material), *resources*, *specific formation*, and *support from experts*. The result of the discussion with several other institutions was to collect and share all the available knowledge about offers for migrants and the work with groups of migrants and to share it with the libraries. Together, *Bibliomedia Switzerland*, the *Association Books without Borders*, the *Kinderbuchfonds Baobab* and the *Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit* in Lucerne initiated and developed the project *Mondomedia* which will be explained in the next chapter.

### **4. Bibliomedia Schweiz-Suisse-Svizzera**

As mentioned before, *Bibliomedia Switzerland* is one of the main protagonists in the development of varied and nationwide intercultural library services in Switzerland. It is a public trust, which means that the government may support it financially but is not obliged to do so. *Bibliomedia* in its function as a “library for libraries” is, at the behest of the Government, also obliged to generate additional money. This means that libraries using *Bibliomedia* books have to subscribe and pay small annual fees according to the number of books they are borrowing.

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library and relieves the budget. *Bibliomedia* co-operates with other institutions for the development of public libraries and reading promotion all over Switzerland and supports them with its specialised knowledge (see [www.bibliomedia.ch](http://www.bibliomedia.ch)).

<sup>7</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2001, the *Schweizer Bibliotheksdienst* and the German *ekz.bibliotheksservice GmbH* founded a subsidiary company. The aim was to benefit from the synergies of both companies. The new corporation offers Swiss libraries fully equipped media and other library services.

According to the service level agreement with the Swiss Government, the duty of *Bibliomedia Switzerland* is the development of the public librarianship in Switzerland as well as a general reading promotion. *Bibliomedia* has the function of a background or resources library and an information hub. Three so-called “bibliocenters” work for the special needs of their language region. Most of the finances of the foundation are used for these three bibliocenters and thus go indirectly to all the public libraries and schools involved with reading promotion. The bibliocenter for the German part of Switzerland (based in Solothurn) houses the central stock of foreign languages and distributes it throughout Switzerland.

*Bibliomedia Switzerland* was founded in 1920 as the *Swiss Public Library*. At that time, the librarianship in Switzerland was not in a good state. The offers of public libraries did not cater to the needs of a changing industrial society. From the beginning, the authorities decided that *Bibliomedia* should be organised as a central resource library which lends collections of books to local libraries to renew their own stocks. Until today, this has remained the main mission of *Bibliomedia*. What also remained unchanged is the structure of the foundation as a company that acts nationwide and is financed by the government as well as “private” means (public libraries, schools and other institutions).

#### **4.1 The central library for foreign languages**

Corresponding to the four languages spoken in Switzerland, *Bibliomedia* has from the beginning offered books in German, French, Italian and partly also in Rhaeto-Romanic. Since the amount of books published in Rhaeto-Romanic is very small, the build-up of a large stock in this language was given up soon (the rotation system did not work)<sup>8</sup>. From its beginning, *Bibliomedia* has also offered books in English and Spanish – at first for the Swiss who wanted to improve their foreign language skills.

However, in its annual report 1983, *Bibliomedia* mentions the start of the organisation of a special stock in foreign languages catering to the needs of the population with a migration background. From then on, there were stocks built up in Serbo-Croatian (a politically correct expression in those times!) and Turkish, at first starting with just a few books.

A special concept for a growing foreign language library was elaborated in 1990. From then on, the building-up of the different stocks was consistently advanced. In 1991, books in Portuguese were included in the offer and two years later, *Bibliomedia* began to look for books in Albanian. Public libraries became interested in the offer as well as other institutions like asylum/refugee centers or prisons. This has stayed the same until today.

The mixture of languages was kept like that for a long time. Only in 2006 was the offer extended to books in Tamil, and in 2007, *Bibliomedia* decided to build up a stock in Serbian in addition to the books in Croatian which have been ordered directly in Zagreb for many years. The Serbian population living in Switzerland is numerous, the books are imported directly from Belgrad and especially children’s books in Cyrillic script are in high demand. *Bibliomedia* is now offering books in all the languages of the main groups of foreigners living in Switzerland. Due to an intensive planning and controlling of new acquisition, the attractiveness of the stock and the demand for it have steadily grown.

Nowadays, some of the big town libraries, some canton or district libraries with a public charge, and public libraries in bigger villages partly or fully borrow their foreign language books from *Bibliomedia Switzerland*. In the middle of 2009, a basic stock of 4000 volumes in French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian, Turkish, Tamil and Serbian was delivered to the *Pestalozzibibliothek Zurich* which opened a new intercultural library.

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<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there are five spoken and written idioms in this language region and, in addition to that, there exists also a new artificial standardised written language, the so-called “Rumantsch Grischun”.

Together with 237 smaller public libraries and 46 school libraries, a total of 362 libraries in Switzerland are using *Bibliomedia*'s offer to exchange book collections. Additionally, more and more teachers are borrowing books in foreign languages for their students who speak other languages and come from a different culture.

In 2009, teachers, schools, libraries and other institutions borrowed 91'547 books in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian, Serbian, Albanian, Turkish and Tamil<sup>9</sup> - tendency increasing! In contrast to this amount is the stock of 49'598 foreign language books<sup>10</sup>. The procedure for stock development: *Bibliomedia* buys as many books as needed in every language to be able to offer attractive collections. Whenever the demand exceeds the offer, *Bibliomedia* reacts and acquires more books to enlarge the stock.

## 4.2 Special offers

### 4.2.1 Bilingual picture books

More and more teachers and libraries are asking for bilingual picture books. During discussions with education experts and people from teacher training colleges and the study of scientific periodicals/literature it became clear that such an offer is highly important for children to develop their native language. Since a good command of the first language – oral as well as written – is the necessary foundation with whose help a second language can be learned. Whilst looking at a picture book together, parents and children have the possibility to train their own language as well as the second language (German, French, or Italian) at the same time. A further advantage of bilingual picture books is that if they are offered by a library, it sends out the positive signal that every language is welcome, has its place there and that every language is appreciated.

Following these reflections *Bibliomedia* started to buy almost every bi- or multilingual book that could be found on the market – including the books of Mantra Lingua in London, a publishing company that edits books with bilingual texts (English/ any other language)<sup>11</sup>. Because the amount of bilingual books in German, French or Italian combined with another language on the market does not suffice, *Bibliomedia* asked a group of senior citizens, the “Grey Panthers” of Solothurn, to put text translations of all the languages *Bibliomedia* offers into the picture books. They did handicrafts for months, copied texts, and glued them in the picture books. The board of education of the canton of Zurich provided *Bibliomedia* with the translations (see chapter 4.3). In summer 2009, another “handicraft round” started and as a Christmas present, the “Grey Panthers” were able to hand over 300 additional bilingual picture books to libraries and schools all over Switzerland. The stock of *Bibliomedia*'s bilingual picture books now amounts to 2500 volumes.

Knowing that this kind of books is very important for libraries and schools and that the supply of books in some foreign languages spoken in Switzerland is very scarce, *Bibliomedia* agreed with Mantra lingua in London to publish a special edition in the main languages German and French. Two stories were chosen and produced in German or French combined with Croatian, Albanian, Tamil, Turkish, Spanish and Portuguese. *Bibliomedia* financed the production and started to sell the books to libraries and schools in 2008. The work group of

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<sup>9</sup> Lent books in foreign languages according to the annual reports in 2002/2004/2006/2009: 2002: 67'976 volumes; 2004: 69'989 volumes; 2006: 76'109 volumes, and 2009: 91'547 volumes in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian and Tamil.

<sup>10</sup> Stock of books in foreign languages according to the annual report 2009: English: 15'251, Spanish: 7'300, Portuguese: 3'857, Croatian: 5'556, Albanian: 6'963, Turkish: 5'238, Tamil: 3'867, Serbian: 1'566 (under construction).

<sup>11</sup> For further information and an overview of its program: [www.mantralingua.com](http://www.mantralingua.com)

the *German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband)* for intercultural library services helped to spread the information about this new offer to German public libraries in Germany.

#### **4.2.2 “Reading Tips for reading fun”**

Children with migrational backgrounds often have insufficient reading skills in the second language. Therefore, *Bibliomedia Solothurn* does not only offer books in foreign languages but also a big German stock with special books for young readers with reading difficulties named “Reading tips for reading fun”. In this special collection one can find books with simplified, easy-to-read texts with ragged margins, a lot of space between the lines and big characters and the stories also interesting for older readers. The demand is enormous, these books are especially sought after by teachers working in multicultural surroundings, therefore, *Bibliomedia* is constantly looking for new titles to be added to this special collection.

#### **4.3 Multilingual material for reading promotion**

Thanks to the collaboration with *QUIMS (Quality in multicultural schools)*, a project initiated by the board of education of the canton of Zurich<sup>12</sup>, *Bibliomedia* was able to develop material for multilingual storytelling in libraries and schools. *QUIMS* offered translations for six picture books one of which was transformed into a “Kamishibai”<sup>13</sup>, a small Japanese “suitcase-theatre”. Other picture books were made into so-called “picture book cinemas” (story telling by slides) which were bought by *Bibliomedia* from external sources. Three other picture book cinemas, however, were produced by *Bibliomedia*, including the production of the slides and a CD with a powerpoint presentation. Another important step was the scanning of all slides to be converted into powerpoint presentations since slide projectors are rarely used nowadays. At the moment, *Bibliomedia* offers six multilingual “Kamishibais” and nine multilingual picture book cinemas, each of them in several copies. This multilingual material with texts translated into up to nineteen languages was offered to libraries, kindergartens, schools and other institutions (e.g. day nurseries). Out of the two home made picture books (“Ali Baba” and “Fox fables”), *Bibliomedia* created special boxes by buying all the other *Mantra lingua* issues in over 20 languages. Using these boxes it becomes easier for schools and libraries to develop projects that show the richness of the world of languages to children.

#### **4.4 Publications**

##### **4.4.1 Library introduction of clients speaking foreign languages**

As mentioned above, many libraries have been complaining about their difficulties in establishing contact with foreign people living in their area. Thus, *Bibliomedia* tried to help them by creating a manual with sample texts. Using these texts, libraries are able to create a welcoming leaflet containing a short introduction of their library and its services in the following languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Albanian, Croatian and Turkish. These sample texts were published in print<sup>14</sup> as well as put on the *Bibliomedia* homepage. Sample texts for shelf inscriptions were also added: “Books in English”, “Türkçe kitaplar” (“books in Turkish”) etc.

The workgroup of the *German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband)* for intercultural library services was very interested in this offer and asked for the permit to

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<sup>12</sup> See: <http://www.vsa.zh.ch/internet/bi/vsa/de/Schulbetrieb/QUIMS.html>

<sup>13</sup> See: Edith Montelle: La boîte magique. Le théâtre d'images ou kamishibai. Histoire, utilisations, perspectives. Strassbourg: Ed. Callicéphale, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Tipps und Materialien zur Einführung fremdsprachiger Kunden in die Bibliothek. Solothurn: Bibliomedia Schweiz, [2004].

use these translations. They adapted them for the use in German libraries and with the help of Goethe Institutes worldwide, they were able to enrich the corpus of sample text with a lot of new translations. Customers can find the sample texts under the following address: [www.bibliomedia.ch](http://www.bibliomedia.ch) > Angebote für Bibliotheken > Werkzeugkasten Multikulturalität.

#### **4.4.2 Language variety in schools and libraries**

During discussions with a lot of library and school experts it became evident that something had to be done to increase the networking between libraries and schools in order to achieve a better integration of students with a foreign native language. In cooperation with the board of education of the canton of Zurich, *Bibliomedia* elaborated and produced a manual titled “Language variety in libraries and schools” which encourages the two institutions to work together more closely by offering a lot of tried-and-tested examples. Searching for best practice examples, *Bibliomedia* discovered Linda de Vos’ excellent work with multicultural groups of children in the *Central Children’s Library in Frankfurt*. She agreed to write an article for the manual. The two municipal libraries of Winterthur and Schlieren, who both have outstanding libraries for their multicultural populations, contributed best practice articles for the manual. So did teachers engaged in *QUIMS* who wrote about their experiences in multicultural classrooms to encourage their colleagues.

#### **5. Association “Books without Borders” (VBOGS)**

Next to *Bibliomedia*, the second main actor in the area of the development of multicultural library services all over Switzerland is the *Association Books without Borders* (Verein Bücher ohne Grenzen Schweiz, VBOGS)<sup>15</sup>. At the beginning of 2009, seventeen libraries were members of the association and by the end of march this year, two new members had joined.

Most of these intercultural libraries are situated in the French speaking part of Switzerland, the so-called “Romandie”. It is in this area where the first intercultural library called *Globlivres* had been founded in 1988 near Lausanne. All these early intercultural libraries were set up by migrants as self-help organisations. Foreign parents from different cultures speaking another language wanted their children to grow up with books in their own native language. That is why there was a need for many books and other media in a lot of different languages from all over the world. The parents started to build up *Globlivres* which nowadays offers around 25’000 media in about 270 languages to children, youth and adults. Step by step, other intercultural libraries were founded in the “Romandie”, and in cosmopolitan towns like Basel and Zurich. In 1993, the *Association Books without Borders* was founded for their support. The association organises and coordinates the communication and contact between all these intercultural libraries and organises corporate projects and a continuing education. The work in most of the *VBOGS*-libraries is done by voluntary staff, most of them migrants coming from all over the world. Until now, only a few of these institutions are able to pay for part-time staff. Thus, not only public libraries but also some *VBOGS*-libraries profit from the foreign language stock built up by *Bibliomedia Switzerland* and enlarge their own media by borrowing collections using the rotation system. This helps to save money since most of the *VBOGS*-libraries, that are not supported by public enterprise, have to deal with financial problems.

Some years ago, more and more public libraries came to the understanding that in a multicultural society libraries also have the duty to contribute to the integration of all the migrants coming from such different countries as Sri Lanka, Serbia or Portugal. A growing

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<sup>15</sup> For more information see: [www.interbiblio.ch](http://www.interbiblio.ch)

number of public libraries in towns and villages took responsibility and started to develop offers for the foreign population living in their area.

In the last few years, some of the bigger public libraries like the *Stadtbibliothek Winterthur* or the *Freihandbibliothek St. Gallen* became members of the *Association Books without Borders*. Both of them are doing excellent work and collaborate intensively and continuously with migrants to develop additional multicultural services. And at the end of March 2009, the *Stadtbibliothek Aarau* with its intercultural children's library and the intercultural library of the *Pestalozzibibliothek* in Zurich became new members of the association. As members, all these public libraries get the unique opportunity to exchange and discuss experiences and problems directly with the staff of intercultural libraries.

In addition to books for children, youth and adults, the members of the *Association Books without Borders* also offer dictionaries, encyclopaedias, language courses and a lot of other media to their users. The founding *VBOGS*-libraries have more varied stock in more languages than *Bibliomedia Switzerland*. Besides German, French and Italian, they offer books in languages such as Amharic, Punjabi, Somali, Swahili, Tagalog, Urdu, Wolof, or Zulu - sometimes they can offer just one copy of a book in one of these languages. However, if a public library is looking for a book in, say, Amharic, it can be found in some of the intercultural libraries!

If one takes *Bibliomedia's* roughly 50'000 well equipped and permanently renewed books in Albanian, English, Croatian, Portuguese, Serbian, Spanish, Tamil, and Turkish in account and thereto adds the stocks of the *VBOGS*-libraries offering books in 270 languages, Swiss libraries can profit from an exceptional fund of literature in foreign languages, additional material and a lot of know-how. Librarians working in Swiss public libraries need to be aware of this offer and use it to be able to provide multicultural offers to foreigners living in Switzerland.

## **6. Mondomedia**

About six years ago, *Bibliomedia Switzerland*, the *Kinderbuchfonds Baobab* and the *Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit* in Lucerne decided to launch a project for the development of public libraries in the area of multicultural services. From the beginning, the *Association Books without Borders* was invited to join work group since its members have a long-time experience in intercultural library work and intercultural communication. The aim of the project (named *Mondomedia*) was to concentrate intercultural knowledge that was spread all over Switzerland, to develop the formation and courses where the staff of public libraries would be informed about migration and its implications for a multicultural society and about the needs and the way to develop multicultural services for foreigners.

The aim of *Mondomedia* is that those 20% of people coming from foreign countries, speaking other languages, encounter a low-threshold access to culture and education, to literature and information. Whenever needed, our 1000 public and/ or school libraries should be able to develop their intercultural offers and services to support the integration of the migrants living in Switzerland. Therefore, the libraries need staff with enough knowledge about intercultural library work and all the material and information offered in this area by *VBOGS*-libraries and *Bibliomedia*. Besides media in foreign languages, intercultural libraries should also offer material (e.g. audio-CDs) to facilitate the learning of one or more of the Swiss national languages. To be able to achieve these goals, public libraries cooperate with associations of migrants, parents or schools and other institutions (e.g. adult education centres).

The *Kinderbuchfonds Baobab* asked the Federal Office for Migration for financial support for *Mondomedia*. The project was granted CHF 50'000.- for a period of two years. Although CHF 25'000.- is not a vast amount of money, *Mondomedia* could be launched. After the first two years, the project received more money from various foundations which secures its continuation until 2011.

First of all, *Mondomedia* hired a team of teachers to teach the formation courses for the staff of public and intercultural (*VBOGS*) libraries. Today, The *Mondomedia*-team consists of 10 members, who promised to get involved with the project for a longer time. These team members all hold intercultural library courses on behalf of *Mondomedia*. They get further education and attend several meetings to exchange information during the year.

At the beginning, the *Mondomedia*-team had a basic formation course of eight days with a theoretical introduction about the topics of migration and intercultural library work. They discussed their own experiences and got an overview about all the offers public libraries can refer to for their intercultural work in multicultural surroundings: books to borrow in foreign languages, information material in a lot of languages, important addresses etc. Moreover, the members received basic training about project planning and realisation. Finally, the *Mondomedia*-team created a manual with information material, transparencies and guidelines for teaching. The main principle of *Mondomedia*-courses is team-teaching: one Swiss teacher (with knowledge about public libraries) teaches together with another teacher with a migration background (with knowledge about intercultural libraries/ *VBOGS*). From the beginning, staff of the *Stadtbibliothek Winterthur* and the *Stadtbibliothek Schlieren*, both with a lot of experience in intercultural library work<sup>16</sup>, have been members of the team. In the last few years, all these *Mondomedia*-teachers were able to share and provide their knowledge and their experience to many public libraries in Switzerland. They have shown what a municipal library with about 100'000 inhabitants and smaller libraries in communities with about 10'000 inhabitants can do, even with a moderate budget.

As a next step, the work group made contact with the different cantonal library commissions responsible for the formation of the (small public) library staff in the German part of Switzerland. Soon after, the first teaching team started to teach its first courses. The courses are highly esteemed by the participants and evaluations have shown very encouraging results. The *Mondomedia*-team has held around 25 courses all over the German part of Switzerland and has trained about a hundred librarians in intercultural library work. The project work group always stays in contact with the library commissions, encouraging them to offer new *Mondomedia*-formations to public library staff. Thus, intercultural library services and offers for the integration of migrants stay on the agenda and are a subject of discussion in public and school libraries. To support libraries in their daily intercultural work, *Mondomedia* developed a special website which acts as information platform ([www.mondomedia.ch](http://www.mondomedia.ch)).

Further education is good – basic education is better! Therefore, *Bibliomedia* has been (in the name of *Mondomedia*) involved in a work group of the *Swiss Association for public libraries (SAB)*. The task of this group is to revise and modernise the instructions for the basic training of staff in small public libraries. For the first time, intercultural library work is explicitly mentioned in these instructions – another important step to ensure the sustainability in intercultural library services has been completed!

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<sup>16</sup> See also „Sprachenvielfalt in Schule und Bibliothek“, pp. 53-57: „Mehrsprachigkeit in der Integrationsbibliothek“ (Christian Brassel); „Fremdsprachige Kindergartenkinder und ihre Eltern entdecken die Bibliothek“ (Heidi Berri).

## **7. Vision**

Wherever there is need for it, local public libraries (from small village libraries to big municipal libraries) offer media in foreign languages, media to learn a Swiss national language and special information for migrants, of course also available on the internet. Intercultural libraries develop a comprehensive program with storytelling and other animation for children. Together with other programs for youth and adults, all these efforts should help to start intercultural communication and an interrelation between different ethnicities as well as between the Swiss and migrants. Libraries cooperate with communities and/ or school authorities, with adult education centres, with all sorts of groups of migrants, with parental associations and with teachers for all age and ability groups (starting with kindergarten).