

GDR Television in Competition with West German Programming

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It's 8:00: the family gathers in front of the TV—the evening program starts. It's the same situation on this and on the other side of the intra-German border—and the same TV programs. *Tatort* (thriller *The Scene of the Crime*) or *Wetten, dass ...* (show *To bet that ...*) deliver entertainment and relaxation into the living rooms of West and East. In his or her leisure time the citizen of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) performs '*Virtuelle Republikflucht*' on a regular basis—a virtual illegal crossing of the border. He brings the Western world into his home via TV screen, marvels at the Western product spectrum and virtually travels to places in Germany and the whole world that are inaccessible to him in reality. And only in the so-called '*Tal der Ahnungslosen*', the 'valley of the clueless', are viewers dependent upon the GDR-owned channels because of a lack of an alternative: the region around Dresden and in the far north of the GDR could not be reached by the powerful transmitting installations of the Western stations close to the border and in West Berlin.

Television across the Border of Political Systems

The research on media use in the GDR was dominated by this scenario until the end of the 1990s. It was a popular and handy hypothesis, which condemned *GDR TV* to insignificance and celebrated the victory of the West German free media over the East German media indoctrinated with party politics.

This was, however, only partly true. More than 10 years after the dissolution of the *television of the GDR* research suggests a new path: the idea of the '*kollektive Ausreise*' [1], collective leaving of the country, which took place every evening as the only form of media consumption and the consequent lack of interest in GDR media, has mostly proved outdated. Research on the history of TV programming in the GDR is very worthwhile. The influence of West German programming can therefore not be ignored. Quite the contrary: writing a comprehensive history of *GDR TV* is only possible if interaction with television from West Germany is taken into consideration. Within the television systems of the GDR and FRG the TV programming of the 'other' Germany led to a policy of distancing. Within this constellation of reaction and counter-reaction each was in a '*kontrastiven Dialog*' [2], a contrasted dialogue.

Furthermore, results of new research on the use of GDR media argue for a higher popularity of *GDR TV*. Michael Meyen demonstrates that the importance of the Western media and especially of Western TV has been overestimated in previous research [3]. Viewers in the GDR sought mainly entertainment and relaxation in

television programs and these needs were satisfied by FRG media as well as their own. Whereas Hans-Jörg Stiehler shows in his analyses of the 'valley of clueless' that 'in regions where it was technically possible, the use of one broadcasting system does not exclude the other, but we more likely can speak of a parallel use' [4], Meyen goes a lot farther than that: he found out that the two 8 pm programs of *GDR TV* on average reached more East German viewers than the competing Western programs.

Therefore most of *GDR TV* viewers faced choice every evening. For viewers living close enough to Western transmitters the TV program provided a pleasant variety: in the late 1960s, they had the choice of at least five channels after the program start of the West German *ZDF*, the second network (1963), and of regional programs as affiliates of *ARD* (1964), and of the second TV network in the GDR in 1969. The audience tuned in to the program that promised to be the most entertaining, exciting and relaxing: whether the program was aired by the opposing systems of the FRG or was produced especially for them by *GDR TV* made no difference. This option established a specific competitive situation for the East German television. Disproving the theory of a one-sided competition supports the thesis of the 'contrasted dialogue'.

The audience in the GDR had the possibility of switching to the 'opposing' station, if they did not want to watch their own television. Because of that fact, the Western stations indirectly forced the program makers in the GDR to adjust to the wishes of their audience. This had many consequences on the programming profile, but also on their own ideas of social responsibility.

West German TV was also part of the dialogical argument with television and the audience beyond the border between the two German states. However, in this case the direct rivalry only existed in limited areas. Knut Hickethier refers to an early usage study of Infratest, a West German opinion research center, which indicated the penetration of GDR broadcast station 'Brocken' in the Harz mountains a maximum of 200 kilometers into the northern West German lowland plain. Therefore, in the beginning of the 1960s only 4% of West German viewers could receive *GDR TV*'s programming in high quality and an additional 5% in lower quality [5]. So the competition was far less 'dangerous' for the FRG than it was for the management of *GDR TV*.

Nevertheless, the intensity of reaction to *GDR TV* within the FRG was different at different times. In the 1950s, West German government circles had discussed how the television from the East Berlin Adlershof studios could be excluded and how the the *ARD* could better serve its own audience. After the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, viewers in the GDR were to be provided specifically with TV programs from the West. The *ZDF* magazine program *Drüben*, launched in 1966, was produced especially for East German audiences. Through single programs, the television networks in West Germany/FRG made decisions about the background of the East German competition as well. For example: the morning programming of the *ARD* was established as an alternative to morning programming in East German TV, which had existed since the 1960s [6].

What can be verified at selected points for television in the FRG is valid for television in the GDR over its entire time of existence: watching television in the GDR meant more than watching the programs of *GDR TV*. What was true for the audience was also the case for the program makers of socialist television: the view of the West was omnipresent. The 'rival' in the air did not only lure viewers away from *GDR TV*, it also served as a model for the East German system and was always regarded as a benchmark for its own achievements.

This approach is consistent with research literature. The fundamental idea that East German television reacted to its Western counterpart is often claimed. All overviews of *GDR TV* history include this thesis. However, up until now research has not paid much attention to evidence for this theory.

If East German television responded to West German TV, there have to be references in the historical records of *GDR TV*. It must also be possible to describe the history of GDR television as a history of a permanent struggle for its own audience, as a history of the dispute with the ‘enemy’ whose invasion the GDR could not stop. Therefore not only individual programs must have made references to Western counterparts, but all programming must have been influenced by the ‘enemy’.

The best way to comprehend this is at the level of the ‘*Planer und Leiter*’ (planner and heads) of *GDR TV*, analyzing programming concepts as well as theoretical papers regarding their own work and their effectiveness. Unfortunately, there has been little evidence from historical materials in recent research literature. That is why the parties responsible for *GDR TV* will get a chance to ‘speak’ in this article. For these purposes records from the state-run ‘*Staatliches Komitee für Rundfunk*’ (‘State Committee for Broadcasting’, as it was called earlier), and the ‘*Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen beim Ministerrat der DDR*’ (State Committee of Television at the Council of Ministers of the GDR, since 1968) will be analyzed. Because of the large quantity of material I will concentrate here on the ‘temporal islands’ (‘*Zeitinseln*’) of 1968 to 1974 [7] as well as on the years 1981 to 1985. In all of the projects, analyses of these ‘temporal islands’ should contribute to reconstructing the entire period of *GDR TV*.

Of special interest is the ‘self-picture’ of *GDR TV* as well as the picture of their enemy, West German TV. There are important references that show in which areas *GDR TV* reacted to West German programming. These results can be assigned to different political stages: (1) the height of confrontation between the systems in the 1950s and early 1960s; (2) the turning away from the idea of a unified German nation in the middle of the 1960s; (3) the establishment of an independent East German culture in the 1970s; and (4) the last decade of the GDR, characterized by a policy of separation as well as a normalization of relations between the two German states.

Self-assessment: television as a weapon

Television became a mass medium in both German countries during the peak of the Cold War in Europe. Stemming from the race for predominance in the ‘war for the heads’, the television systems of the GDR and the FRG owe their development to the Cold War [8]. From the very beginning they were ‘weapons’ in the media war between the opposing systems. Both sides tried to reach the population in the other part of Germany by TV: to influence the other population politically and to convince their own inhabitants of the rightness of the ruling system.

One symbol of this exchange of blows on air was the program *Der Schwarze Kanal* (*The Black Channel*) presented by Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler. Here material from West German TV was rebroadcast and used for propaganda by taking it out of context and adding commentary. This program, broadcast since 1960, had displeased viewers for 29 years and was only canceled through pressure from the ‘Monday demonstrators’ in October of 1989 [9]. The show was modelled, though, on a West German TV program: since 1958, Thilo Koch’s *Die rote Optik* (*The Red Perspective*) had been using similar editing of *GDR TV* clips. The program, however, hosted by Koch himself, was broadcast only 10 times up to 1960. Shows presented by his successor, Peter Schulze,

were shown sporadically until 1964. It seems likely that to viewers in West Germany the show could not reach a popularity that could be compared to Schnitzler's 'TV dinosaur' in the GDR.

In the 1950s and 1960s the television systems of both German states dedicated their programs to a (fictitious) all-German audience. That was an order of national politics: both the FRG as well as the GDR claimed to represent Germany. In 1966 East German program makers confidently took on the task of fighting for viewers in the western part of Germany: 'It should be considered whether the *Deutscher Fernsehfunk* can increase its political power in West Germany and West Berlin with a principal change of programming structure—moving the *Aktuelle Kamera* to the timeslot between 7 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. moving the journalistic program to the timeslot between 7.30 p.m. and 8 p.m.' [10]. Although the changes were not made in this way, in theory the program makers were willing to adapt their own programming to the habits of viewers outside the national territory.

In the cooperation agreement between the German Post (of GDR) and the *Deutscher Fernsehfunk*, the influence on West German audiences was named as a main ideological task of *GDR TV*. One of the 'most essential jobs of the socialist program' was described like this:

In the dispute with the class enemy—offensively influencing millions of viewers in West Germany and West Berlin—the historic mission of our Republic is to be graphically illustrated, the peaceful democratic forces in West Germany and West Berlin are to be supported in their struggle, and proof is to be established in word and pictures that the GDR is an historic era ahead of West Germany [11].

With the endeavor to build up an independent East German nation, a fundamental change occurred in the 'German Policy' (*Deutschlandpolitik*) of East Germany. This far-reaching process of transformation of the concept of East Germany started in the 1960s [12]. Gradually, the GDR distanced itself from West Germany, and from the policy of a unified Germany. The start of the grand coalition in Bonn in 1966 marked a turning point—from then on, all of the all-German references were removed from the party ideology of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) step by step [13].

The Party leadership now concentrated on the recognition of the GDR as an equal state according to international law. As West Germany refused that diplomatic acceptance, regulations of intra-German traffic were used to enforce this acceptance. But a normalization of intra-German relations was only made possible through the policy of détente between the USA and the Soviet Union [14] and through the new 'Ostpolitik' of the West German Brandt/Scheel-Administration starting in the late 1960s. In the so-called 'basic treaty' (*Grundlagenvertrag*) signed in 1972, both of the German States committed themselves to respecting the integrity of the borders and to not interfering with the internal affairs of the respective other. The GDR took this as a formal recognition but for the FRG the relations with the GDR remained 'special' ones. The basic treaty paved the way to international diplomatic acceptance and to the admission to the UN in 1973. At the same time, humanitarian arrangements were agreed upon, such as facilitation of travel, improvements in family reunifications, and simplifications for border traffic [15].

The leadership of the SED Party had reached an important goal in foreign affairs but now had to fend off negative consequences of the policy of détente. A too-intensive rapprochement towards West Germany seemed risky. The party leadership tried to

resolve the problem by using a dual strategy: on the one hand they intensified the close relationship to 'Big Brother' USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and on the other hand they intensified the politics of separation towards the 'class enemy' FRG. The observation of one's own population was increased, especially in the field of intra-German contacts [16].

The 'great' politics had numerous effects on the policy towards the mass media and especially television. From now on television leadership paid undivided attention to GDR viewers. At the same time the 'struggle' against the incoming 'enemy programming' was intensified.

An indication of this policy change was the extinction of the word 'German' by renaming the *Deutscher Fernsehfunk* as *Fernsehen der DDR* (*television of the GDR*) in 1972. Henceforth GDR TV would not try and reach the entire German population anymore but was extended as a propaganda machine for its own population. The number of broadcasting hours steadily increased in the two channels, and programming was adjusted to the wishes of the viewers. What this audience orientation was supposed to look like was dictated by the First Secretary of the Central (Committee of the SED, Erich Honecker, himself. At the 8th Party conference he explicitly criticized GDR TV, while charting a clear direction:

Our television, which has given us good performances, should vigorously try to improve programming configuration, to overcome a certain boredom, to allow for the desire for good entertainment, to arrange television journalism in more powerful ways as well as to comply with the expectations of those parts of the working population whose workday starts very early in the morning and who therefore want to be viewers of valuable TV programs in the early evening hours [17].

This often-quoted statement of Honecker led to a TV program reform which was already realized by 1 January 1972. The biggest structural transformation was the shortening of the news show *Aktuelle Kamera* (*Current-affairs Camera*), which was regarded as long-winded by viewers. The news show was shortened from 30 to 20 minutes and supplemented with the newly-introduced information magazine *Zehn vor acht* (*Ten minutes Before Eight*). Another concession to the audience was the increase of popular information shows, which enjoyed great popularity until the end of GDR TV [18].

The change of GDR TV after the reorientation of mass media policy in 1971 was not only connected to the reorganization of programming. The self-images of the protagonists had changed, too, especially with regard to the policy of distance to Western 'enemy television'. The three TV networks of both German States, GDR TV, ARD and ZDF, remained separated from each other, although as a result of the Helsinki process correspondents were exchanged and studios opened in Bonn and East Berlin. But in all it was no rapprochement—quite the opposite: the leadership of GDR TV claimed that these developments of co-operation did not mean a *détente* but stood for a more aggravated fight against the enemy's programming.

Finally, the antagonist was accused of attempting to influence the people in the GDR through the media:

It has ... to be taken into consideration, that there is an adversary in front of us with a highly sophisticated apparatus of diversion, who has been driven out of the national territory but by no means from the field of ideological dispute,

and who understands to use each omission of socialist education and upbringing with all the instruments of mass temptation [19].

The, ideological diversion' was not stopped by the policy of détente as Werner Lamberz, member of the SED Politburo, pointed out in 1976:

They, the imperialists, were forced objectively to ease tension, but they agreed subjectively to the détente because they hoped for continuation and increase of their capitalist prosperity. They believed they could take advantage of conditions of peaceful coexistence and with their economic power force their way into the socialist system, undermine and change it [20].

The management of *GDR TV* had to deal with the changed conditions of its programming especially after the 8th party conference of the SED and after Erich Honecker's criticism of East German television. On 9 July 1971, at a conference of Party members of the *Deutscher Fernsehfunk*, the chairman of *GDR TV*, Heinz Adameck, summarized this as follows:

The party conference pointed out to us that we have to face another intensification of the ideological class struggle. It emphasized again the fundamental task of the mass media, to contribute to the ideological demarcation through the immunization of our people against the poison of anti-communism. ... The fight against anti-communist diversion therefore means to train understanding of the following questions: peaceful coexistence means tough class struggle and does not lead to rapprochement but to delimitation of the imperialist FRG [21].

Adameck stressed that *GDR TV* had a clear assignment: 'in the first place to create such an attractive and mass-effective socialist programming, that fewer people feel the desire to satisfy their need for entertainment and information by Western television' [22]. The GDR citizens were not only to be withdrawn from the alleged agitation of the West, but should at the same time be ideologically driven by its own state TV.

The socialist program had a clear task, repeated over and over again: the GDR government needed the television programme for 'mass effect politics'. With the whole spectrum of programming TV management wanted to fulfil the social task of 'consolidation of socialist awareness of the people and for the intellectual-cultural welfare of the inhabitants of the GDR' [23]. A working paper, produced by the Department of Agitation of the Central Committee, stated:

Television therefore very intensively and variously affects the consciousness of working people and the satisfaction of their increasing intellectual-cultural desires. The great mass interest television receives allows the medium to gain an especially distinct intellectual influence on people of all classes and ranks, of all age-groups, of all levels of awareness and education [24].

These experts on agitation acted on the assumption of a simple theory of media effects, which fit well into the idea of television as a social weapon: A special stimulus must lead to a definite response. Wilbur Schramm described this simple theory from the early days of media research like this: 'At that time, the audience was typically thought of as a sitting target: if a communicator could hit it, he would affect it ... I have elsewhere called this the Bullet Theory of communication' [25]. *GDR TV*'s task was to keep the viewers 'in the line of fire'.

The only question that remained was what the suitable stimulus would look like. The Agitation Department of the Party's Central Committee understood that

television's specific modes of action included a dilemma that could not be underestimated: the propagandists wanted to broadcast political messages, which the viewers normally did not appreciate and which could lead to switching off or changing of channels. But watching TV was one of the most popular activities in leisure time and provided the people of the GDR with a distraction from the worries of everyday life and therefore could have the effect of stabilizing the system:

Socialist television is an instrument of political information and orientation, of ideological education, of intellectual-cultural enrichment, and at the same time of relaxation and entertainment. The whole program organization therefore has to take into consideration the unity of these factors ... It is also wrong to give in to calls that are adverse to the political-ideological function of socialist TV just as it is unjustifiable to ignore the legitimated and strongly pronounced need of the audience for relaxation and entertainment. Television has the immense responsibility of making all citizens comfortable about living in socialism [26].

Television in general, as well as programming, balanced between ideology and entertainment, played an important role. And television had to comply with requirements of this role under the 'aggravating circumstances' of competition from Western TV. How intense the pressure of politics on the leadership of TV must have been is demonstrated in planning for the year 1971:

The fight for the viewer, for his consciousness, for his attitude towards life problems of the 1970s has started. Systematic effect politics has to assume that large parts of the population of the GDR have five channels to choose from. Success ... under these circumstances, isn't luck but struggle. And: Success is a duty [27].

The Enemies' Weapons in the Television War

While the management of *GDR TV* was convinced that fighting for the success of television was only for the benefit of their own citizens—the 'weapon' of television therefore only protected the socialistic peace—to look at the West seemed to reveal sordid intentions:

For the state of Bonn [West Germany] the existing three television channels are important instruments of class struggle. Day after day, the imperialists are anxious to exert ideological influence on the television viewers in both German States with all of their characteristic methods of misrepresentation, untruthfulness, falsification and malicious agitation [28].

While one's own programming was considered important instrument of propaganda 'the responsibility of *GDR TV* for the consolidation of the socialist consciousness of the people' [29] was pointed out—the opponent was accused of the very same intentions:

The main direction of West German television ARD and ZDF predominantly aims inwards. It is directed at the domestic aim to protect and to consolidate the system of rule of late bourgeois capitalism in West Germany and to manipulate the masses in terms of the maintenance and expansion of the power of monopolies [30].

There are numerous reports that deal with FRG TV and the assumed intentions of the Western program makers. The essay 'Some trends of political-ideological manipulation

of West German television', written in 1969, offers interesting insights into television management's thoughts. This report analyzes which strategies the 'enemy' uses to influence its own inhabitants:

The chief method of manipulation is the leading away from social reality, the attempt to deny and to cover up class differences, to distract from the real, urgent questions of society which society has to face ('Manipulation starts, where the question of classes is denied', W. Ulbricht). First is the distribution of the late bourgeois world picture, the representation of their own world [31].

Descriptions of the 'sphere of production' and the 'correlations and backgrounds of power as well as production conditions' [32] were left out intentionally. By banning the problems of the working class from the screen, class consciousness, which is important for the building of socialism, is undermined:

In the few exceptions, where the worker appears ... he is introduced as a compliable idiot who is willing to make sacrifices or he is an individual that is corrupted into petty bourgeoisism, who actually cannot feel associated with the working class anymore [33].

Instead of supporting the class consciousness and giving the power to the working class West Germans were encouraged to participate in forming ones own state, but without using his mind: thus the medium television served the state in order 'to replace the thinking of the citizen ... with ... political-moral central ideas and to polarize the diffuse existing intellectual-cultural and moral models with the aim of developing a consciousness with regard to society as a whole. The passive structure of behaviour of the masses stimulated for years should be overcome and transformed into a political activity which is affirmative to the imperialistic state and serves reactionary intentions' [34].

The competence of West German television in regard to the so-called 'manipulation of the audience' was considered a serious threat. The GDR experts tried so hard to understand the 'manipulative intentions' that they detected 'mistakes' in the manipulation. They believed it possible to show that West German TV propagated ideals which had a negative effect on the political ambitions of the FRG. This meant the 'distribution models, which are personality deforming, demoralizing and pseudo-free from ideology'. The failure was obvious to the GDR experts because they believed that the medium of television could not address the masses but only the individual:

All knowledge and experience ... is reduced to the smallest part of the understandings and impressions of the unique individual, to his own little world of personal experience, to his private life and sphere of consumption. This happened primarily with use of the instrument of spiritualization, of psychologization, of isolation of the individual from its environment. It is characteristic to address the personal affinities and tendencies (*sexuality inter alia*) as well as turning towards the metaphysical. [35]

This development would do more harm than good to the so-called 'politics of Bonn,' because on the one hand the viewer would 'develop a moral attitude of mind, which to an increasing degree comes into conflict with the requirements of the aggressive imperialistic politics of domestic and foreign affairs [36].

To promote the desired 'readiness to combat', FRG television would be 'tied to thoughts of fascism' and spread 'nationalistic and chauvinistic mottos and atmospheres': 'More frequently, "national" traditions and virtues such as self-sacrifice,

people's community, loyalty, honour, sacrificial spirit, cleanliness, *inter alia* were mentioned', [37]. How this had been observed and which programs had backed up this tendency was described only superficially: 'The verifiable influence of neo-nazism is constantly reflected in the programs of current and consolidated journalism, in which the need for interior state reform is promoted' [38]. The report alluded to the West German Emergency Laws (*Notstandsgesetze*) that became effective in 1968 and were taken as proof of the new 'state doctrine' of nationalism.

As much as the leadership of *GDR TV* condemned this nationalism in FRG television reporting—they were much more afraid of the media implementation of 'anticommunism' [39], the alleged second major state doctrine. This doctrine was described as a huge threat to the GDR, because: 'The ideological diversion, as main part of the psychological warfare, is at present the most important method of implementation of anti-communist aims and intentions' [40]. The paper suggested that the Cold War indeed was waged 'hot' in the media—West German TV was concretely alleged of 'attempting to ideologically infiltrate' the GDR. They were trying to 'immunize' the West German population 'against forward-looking ideas' [41] while pushing 'permanent reformist and revisionist efforts' [42] into the Eastern bloc countries. Only one year after the suppression of the 'Prague Spring' by Warsaw Pact States in 1968, the culprits of the Czechoslovak rebellion were looked for in the opposing systems' media.

It was feared that the events of August 1968 in Czechoslovakia could spread to the GDR. The leadership of television was warned of 'disruptive actions' by West German television. The research group 'planning' Karl-Marx-University's journalism section analyzed these 'enemy agitations' in 1970. The manuscript with the title 'Ideological guidelines in Socialist Journalism for the Developing of State Consciousness of Citizens of the GDR' warned: 'The ideological diversion of the state of Bonn and its cooperating organizations and institutions continue to attempt to pit citizens and the East German state against one another, to manoeuvre them apart, and—because a split is not possible—at least to produce and increase partial differences' [43]. West German television was alleged to be; 'attempting to characterize the working class party ... as being a hindrance to social progress' and of prosecuting 'the rapprochement of both systems' [44]. This was to be achieved by 'attempting to reduce the civic behaviour of GDR citizens to just making demands'—and at the same time by stimulating 'desires of consumption' [45].

In a society of short supply like the GDR this was an especially alarming scenario: a population that demands the Western standard of living, which is shown on enemy television, for themselves. The report warned that the opposing media had 'the direct intention ... of producing, of blowing up and of dramatizing a daily discord' [46]. At the same time, the television of the FRG wanted to 'provide evidence that the socialist economy absolutely lags behind the capitalist economy that is lead by the principles of competition, because the socialist economy is less productive' [47].

Given this ominous agitation in a very delicate sector for the GDR, the Section of Journalism in Leipzig demanded the 'gathering of effectiveness of enemy ideology (for instance imperialistic radio and television programs) and the degree of their success' [48]. Information about the technical, personnel and financial provisions of West German TV companies had already been collected since the 1950s, but now these investigations were to be intensified. The relevant 'enemy material' [49] was to be evaluated and used to prepare GDR journalists for the television war. In fact there are many proofs in the documents of the leadership of *GDR TV* of the meticulous analysis of sources in order to find information about television companies and its

programming. So the West German specialist literature on media developments was observed as well as newspapers and journals in order to get a better impression of the opponent [50].

The program structure itself was also observed: there were frequent assessments of broadcast programs [51]. The program structure of *ARD* and *ZDF* was also registered and often presented in comparison to East German programming. It was therefore possible to show what the daily competition looked like—and which strategies could be successful in their own program structure.

Strategies of *GDR TV*

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the competition with the West German television was handled more freely. Before that, references to the ‘enemy’s programs’ could be found mostly in top secret documents, but now the whole ‘collective’ of television employees was confronted with this subject. The GDR state also behaved more kindly towards the audience. Spectacular measures like the famous operation ‘Ochsenkopf’ of the late 1950s were a thing of the past: this operation had been named after a hill in the Harz Mountains, where the West German TV transmitters broadcast their programs into the territory of the GDR. Members of the FDJ (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*/Free German Youth—the socialist youth organization) had turned aerials on Eastern roofs towards the East in order to prevent the reception of the Western stations. Aside from such occasional activities, the state placed its hopes on counterpropaganda and repression until the beginning of the 1970s. Under the threat of sanctions they tried to exert pressure on the population. These measures also often failed to achieve their desired effect. In May 1973, at the 9th plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, Erich Honecker himself allowed the population—except members of the army, police and ‘national education’—to watch whichever channels they wanted.

By the mid-1970s, it was no longer speculation that the citizens of the GDR consumed Western television. Audience surveys provided television committees with reliable information about the viewing numbers. These inquiries did not ask about tuning to Western stations—it was probably expected that people would not give honest answers, despite all assurances—the missing data were calculated through the results of a survey of leisure time habits of the GDR citizens. It became obvious that more people in the GDR spent their spare time watching TV than those who were determined to be viewers of East German television by television research. Publication of these results was out of the question for the GDR government. Privately, though, TV management now admitted the unpleasant truth. This did not lead to capitulation, however, but to more aggressive action against the competitors: from now on the reflection on program structuring often took place against the background of Western program structure. The ‘contribution to the discussion of the decisions to the program structure’ of 1970 demanded that with regard to ‘all changes of program structure ... the structure of enemy programming is to be considered in details, too’ [52].

GDR TV tried to introduce structures of Western TV in its own programming. To keep viewers tuned to its own channels the following approach was developed: attractive programs of the West, such as entertainment programs, shows or thrillers were pitted against mass-effective programs of the East. If the ‘opponent’ was broadcasting a program of less interest for Eastern audiences, *GDR TV* showed journalism program, which were despised by viewers.

Considerations arose about each weekday evening schedule, based on what FRG television had to offer. This can be demonstrated with two examples: by the three weekend evenings, which were of course especially important, and by programming on Wednesday.

Friday evening had to become more attractive, because this was when the weekend started for most of the viewers. The competition offered attractive programming on that evening, especially in the popular area of thrillers. Reason enough for the managing director Heinz Adameck himself to ask for improved programming: 'On Friday evening, which to a special degree has to be considered from the viewpoint of previous strong effects of enemy programming, popular entertainment programs at eight o'clock already have high viewing figures' [53]. That is why, for instance, the *Rumpelkammer* (*The Junk Room*) repeated old, but popular film clips. Television planners did not shy away from 'capitalistic' imports to offer the audience the entertainment they demanded. Six years later the positive development of attendance figures provided reason for optimism: 'The standard of Friday evening programming—as the first evening of the weekend—could possibly help win our viewers over for our channels' programming the rest of the weekend' [54].

Saturday evening was the time for the great TV variety show and it provided GDR TV with fairly stable viewing figures: 'For years, the profile of the Saturday night has been relatively unchanged, because of the partly year-long continuation of broadcasting of traditional entertainment programs ... Most successful (in numbers of viewers) was *Ein Kessel Buntes* [55] [*A Kettle full of Color*]'. The show, newly established after the 8th Party Conference, was very well received by audiences. Nonetheless audiences were not completely satisfied on this evening, because in this night also the 'enemy's headwind' blew: 'Our audiences' "changing channels" is made twice as easy through feeble programming, because the ARD either broadcast "great" entertainment or feature films, the ZDF (alternating) likewise!' [56].

In judging the three weekend evenings, Sunday evening (or the evening of a holiday) was considered to be the most important: 'Sundays not only influence the mood of millions in lieu of the new work week in general, through verbal propaganda on Monday morning the opinion on the overall quality of television programming is mainly formed by Sunday's programs' [57]. In 1971, the leadership of GDR TV was not content with this evening as well and asked for 'a radical change of Sunday programming'—again towards more entertainment. GDR TV placed its hopes on mixed programming—homegrown dramatic TV productions such as *Polizeiruf 110* (*Police Call 110*, a thriller serial), amusing dramas, variety shows, game shows (*Schätzen Sie mal/Take a Guess*), feature films, and contemporary drama. Different programming, for example, journalistic programs, on the most important evening of the week would have been more desirable from an ideological point of view, but considering the competition this was inconceivable: 'Should the response to this program be retained and the opponent "eliminated" to the greatest possible extent ... it is to be complied with the basic trend of desires towards the Sunday evening programming, entertainment, excitement and happiness' [58].

The only chance for placing a regular information program was on Wednesday evening, according to the 'Program strategic considerations about the further image of the I. and II. channels of GDR TV of 1975. One important reason: the 'protective zones', agreed upon between ARD and ZDF, that led to a broadcasting of journalistic programs on both channels on this night. In order to get through to their own people with magazines and documentary programs, GDR TV had only one possibility:

The journalistic magazine programs are shown on Wednesday evening at eight o'clock on the First channel; only in exceptional cases are singular journalistic shows of high quality shown on Tuesday or Sunday at eight o'clock as well. With this it should be possible that our consolidated programs or special opinion-forming programs are no longer in opposition to entertainment programs in adversarial television [59].

This tactical manoeuvre was only partly successful. The 'better response' on this weekday was not satisfying, so that criticism of the Wednesday evening programming was devastating: 'It is true that with the series the Second channel has above-average attendance figures on Wednesday evening (in some cases higher than those of the First channel), but less than 10% of viewers for the journalistic program plus 5% at most who watch the Second channel is too low a response for two TV channels!' [60]. Western TV alone could not be held responsible for the results, so demands for improvements fell back on one's own programming: 'The results show that the low response to the journalistic programs of the First channel is not inevitably followed by a more frequent tuning to the Second channel. Because the opponents (ARD and ZDF) broadcast journalistic programs on Wednesdays, too, we have to succeed in tying more viewers to our program with more powerful journalistic reporting' [61].

Arguments like this show clearly that the competition from the neighboring German state served as a model for *GDR TV*. In the reconstruction of programming decisions one can demonstrate the increasing orientation on entertainment which the West dictated to the East. This cannot only be shown by the arrangement of programming components. The individual formats as well had to face the competition. To GDR viewers the already not very popular journalistic programs seemed a lot more monotonous when compared to the programs on West German TV. By the late 1960s, the Western broadcasts added entertaining elements to their journalism, presenting itself with greater public appeal.

This development, considered dangerous, was closely followed by the leadership of *GDR TV*:

The West German television networks declare that they ... want to extensively reform 'content, message, form and therefore the expected effect of programming on the viewer'. ... The council of West German program managers declared the maxim: ... entertaining presentation of the relevant. Whoever presents this most skilfully will be ahead by a nose [62].

The Television Committee that felt its own journalism had to go along with this reform in order not to fall behind West German TV: 'The people who say this mean business. From this side, too, we have no reason to rest on our laurels' [63]. TV official Glatzer agreed with this view: 'It's right to combat the influence of the rival ... mainly by explaining one's own policy by using more popular forms of agitation and propaganda (which does not exclude but includes mass-attractive counterpropaganda in forms and ways just as popular)' [64]. Adameck also demanded improvements, especially in the daily news. At the same time he defended the previous style which had become obsolete: 'In doing so we shouldn't be unfair and hold anyone of the employees of the *Aktuelle Kamera* responsible for things they weren't liable for. Quite a few of the tractors that are still rolling across the TV screen today, of the superficial reports of factories that appear, are things we demanded from ourselves not too long ago' [65].

In the first half of the 1970s, changed concepts of Western TV obviously caused a critical debate over GDR programming which had not been possible during the 1950s

or 1960s. However, this change of view did not necessarily lead to visible results. *Aktuelle Kamera* still was broadcast ‘closed to the public’; towards the end of GDR was viewed by less than 4% of the audience [66]. Even though one cannot infer the entire programming from the daily news—it had a small audience since its inceptions—these figures seem to support a trend: *GDR TV* lagged more and more behind the developments in the West, and the West German media landscape was changing faster and faster.

This development became especially apparent in the early 1980s as TV in the FRG began to prepare for massive changes: the introduction of the so-called ‘Dual System’ of public and commercial networks. Starting on 1 January 1984, commercial television was allowed to come into existence next to *ARD* and *ZDF*. These two traditionally public channels anticipated this new competition by reforming their programming structure in the direction of ‘television as entertainment’, which not only convinced the viewers in the West but in the East as well.

It is no coincidence that the second programming reform of *GDR TV* took place in the same time period. The change of GDR programming structure goes back to the developments in FRG TV, anticipating Western commercial competition as well. *GDR TV* performed tactical turns to lure GDR viewers away from the West German TV to its own channels. On *DDR 2*, the so-called ‘alternative program structure’ was to offer the viewer an ‘alternative’ to the programming of *DDR 1*. Actually it was quite different: the most important intention was to offer a competitive alternative to Western television.

Previous publications rate this reformation process of the years 1982/1983 as the beginning of the end for *GDR TV*. Television gave up the plan to mediate its own contents in favor of keeping viewers tuned to their own channels. With that the television of the GDR seemed to have taken on a defensive position in the competition with Western television [67]. An increasing orientation on entertainment, the broadcasting of Western movies, and neglecting *GDR TV*’s own productions, resulted in a loss of its own identity. After launching ‘alternative programme planning’, the state’s social realities were repressed even more than before. For example, the cancellation of the problem-oriented contemporary television-play led to a depoliticization of television. Peter Hoff described this trend as ‘the increasing dispensability of the *television of the GDR* as a source of information and the interchangeability of its contents with those of the Western channels’ [68]. Stefan Wolle went so far as to claim that *GDR television* was partly to blame for the end of the GDR. With its unrealistic information programs—characterized as ‘boring and dull styled, wooden in the way of speaking and shamelessly false in political contents’—it pitted the inhabitants of the GDR against their own state: ‘Nothing did more harm to the GDR than its own propaganda’ [69].

These arguments provide a tempting picture of the failed *GDR TV* like the scenario of the GDR inhabitants who became ‘mental emigrants by the push of a button’ [70] every evening. Here, too, the danger may be that complex facts are simplified in favor of handy hypotheses. The ‘end’ seemed only to be possible as a climax of a continuing downward trend [71]. The ‘loss of acceptance’ [72] of *GDR TV*, mentioned often in the research, in the last years of its existence, has still not been proven. There are new quantitative studies which do not find proof of this trend [73].

Up to now, the picture of the last decade of *GDR TV* is not yet totally clear. In order to gain a solid picture of the last decade using traditional sources, it has to be analyzed as to how it actually worked in the 1980s. Which concepts existed, how did it assess its own effectiveness and which strategies were realized? Of course the competition with

West German TV has to be reconstructed in detail, too: after all in the second half of this decade the balance of power between the three German television systems changed even more dramatically.

With commercial channels financed by advertising, new ‘enemy programs’ came along that had no other task than to satisfy the audiences’ need for entertainment. They did not broadcast directly to the East German viewers, mainly because there was little or no purchasing power for the advertised products in East Germany. But because of the technical range they would have become part of the GDR television landscape—remember the progress of satellite transmission techniques—had the crumbling of the German Wall in 1989 not started the dissolution of the socialist state.

Conclusion

To sum up then the results of our research as to the competition between the two German television systems: the character of the rivalry was subject to the actuality of intra-German politics. Cold War, of détente, separation and rapprochement of East and West Germany in each case led to changed conceptions of the social task of television. With the turning away from the all-German perspective in the late 1960s and the turn exclusively towards a GDR audience, television intensified the orientation to the needs of its own audience. One consequence of the audience orientation and of the competition of the Western channels was an increasing number of entertainment programs. It was constantly assumed by the management of East German TV that the TV from the FRG always tried to seduce the audience in order to influence them ideologically. This was seen as a danger to the socialist state, *GDR TV* received specific orders to keep viewers tuned to their own channels.

In its own program planning, *GDR TV* tried to react strategically to the structures of Western television: apparently, in order to fight the competition and fight against the attractive programming of the West, *GDR TV* needed to broadcast especially popular material on its own channels. The journalistic television programs of the GDR, not highly regarded by audiences, were broadcast while the ‘enemy’ presented less appealing programs for East German audiences. Changes in the individual formats of *ARD* and *ZDF* led the management of *GDR television* to critical discussions of their own offerings.

The so-called ‘contrasted dialogue’ was less characterized by open ‘clashes’ than by hidden rapprochement. Western TV was observed with jealousy. Its programs seemed to encourage the East German competition to its best possible performance. However, this is not to be taken as criticism of *GDR TV*, but rather as a socialist strategy of survival. The leadership of East German television orientated themselves to a well-known maxim of the socialist overlord Wladimir Iljitsch Lenin: ‘It is an old truth that in politics very often one has to learn from the enemy’.

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NOTES

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- [2] Rüdiger Steinmetz and Reinhold Viehoff, Unterhaltende Genres im Programm des DDR-Fernsehens, *SPIEL*, 20 (2001), pp. 1–43.
- [3] Michael Meyen, Kollektive Ausreise? Zur Reichweite ost- und westdeutscher Fernsehprogramme in der DDR, *Publizistik*, 47 (2002), pp. 200–232.
- [4] Hans-Jörg Stiehler, *Leben ohne Westfernsehen*, Studien zur Medienwirkung und Mediennutzung in der Region Dresden in den 80er Jahren (Leipzig, 2001), p. 44.
- [5] Knut Hickethier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens* (Stuttgart, 1998), p. 139.
- [6] See *ibid.*, pp. 138–139.
- [7] See Claudia Dittmar, Das, feindliche Fernsehen—das DDR-Fernsehen und der ständige Krieg im äther, in Claudia Dittmar and Susanne Vollberg (eds), *Die Überwindung der Langeweile? Zur Programmentwicklung des DDR-Fernsehens 1968 bis 1974* (Leipzig, 2003), pp. 99–146.
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- [9] See Rüdiger Steinmetz, ‘The Opening of the Wall,’ in this issue.
- [10] Bericht der Intendanz und der Zentralen Parteileitung des Deutschen Fernsehfunks über den Stand der Durchführung der Beschlüsse des 11. Plenums des ZK der SED (23 June 1966), Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) Berlin, BArch DY 30–481, p. 16.
- [11] Festlegungen zu den ökonomischen Beziehungen zwischen der Deutschen Post und dem Deutschen Fernsehfunk (16 February 1965), Federal Archives Berlin, BArch DR 8–79, p. 1a.
- [12] See Tilo Prase, West-östlicher Alltag 1968/1969, Der Fernsehvergleich als Beitrag nationalstaatlicher Legitimation, in Claudia Dittmar and Susanne Vollberg (eds), *Die Überwindung der Langeweile? Zur Programmentwicklung des DDR-Fernsehens 1968 bis 1974*, (Leipzig, 2003), pp. 185–215.
- [13] See *ibid.*, p. 188.
- [14] Since the 1969 Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which culminated in the SALT I Agreement on 26 May 1972 on the occasion of the visit of US President Richard Nixon to Moscow, first visit of a US President to the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics/USSR.
- [15] See Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat, Geschichte und Strukturen der DDR* (München, 1998), pp. 199–226, and Helmut M. Müller, *Schlaglichter der deutschen Geschichte* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 393–394.
- [16] See Schroeder (1998), pp. 224–226.
- [17] Erich Honecker, Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den VIII. Parteitag des Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, *Neues Deutschland*, Issue B, 16 June 1971, quoted in Hickethier (1998), p. 384.
- [18] See Hickethier (1998), pp. 384–385.
- [19] Dieter Glatzer: Erfahrungen der Jahresplanung im Deutschen Fernsehfunk, Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Praxis der längerfristigen Planung der sozialistischen Massenmedien in der DDR (Berlin, 1969). Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv/DRA (German Broadcasting Archives) Potsdam-Babelsberg, Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen: Vorsitzender des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen (1969–1972), Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden, Sekretariat Glatzer, pp. 321–322.
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- [22] *Ibid.*, p. II/11.
- [23] Thesen zur Funktion und zu den Aufgaben des Fernsehens der DDR in der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft (Abteilung Agitation des Zentralkomitees, 22 July 1975), Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv/DRA (German Broadcasting Archives), Potsdam-Babelsberg, Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen, Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden (1973–1983), AG Fernsehwissenschaft, Sekretariat Glatzer.
- [24] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- [25] Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts, *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (Urbana, 1972), p. 8. Quoted in Klaus Merten and Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien. Eine Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft* (Opladen, 1994), p. 294.

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- [27] Probleme der Wirkungspolitik, Vorbereitung der Vorgabe 1971 (Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen). Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv/DRA (German Broadcasting Archives), Potsdam–Babelsberg, Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen, Vorsitzender des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen (1969–1972), Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden, Sekretariat Glatzer, p. 16.
- [28] Bericht der Intendanz und der Zentralen Parteileitung des Deutschen Fernsehfunks über den Stand der Durchführung der Beschlüsse des 11. Plenums des ZK der SED, insert 4, p. 1. Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv/DRA (German Broadcasting Archives), Potsdam–Babelsberg, Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen.
- [29] Thesen zur Funktion und zu den Aufgaben des Fernsehens der DDR in der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft, p. 2.
- [30] Einige Tendenzen der politisch-ideologischen Manipulierung im westdeutschen Fernsehen, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv/DRA (German Broadcasting Archives), Potsdam–Babelsberg, Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen, Vorsitzender des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen (1969–1972), Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden, Sekretariat Glatzer, p. 1.
- [31] Ibid.
- [32] Ibid.
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- [34] Ibid., p. 2.
- [35] Ibid., p. 1.
- [36] Ibid.
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- [38] Ibid., p. 3.
- [39] Ibid.
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- [45] Ibid.
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- [48] Ibid., p. 17.
- [49] Ibid.
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- [51] See, for instance, Monatsbericht (Mai, 1974) für das Staatliche Komitee für Fernsehen (Programmdirektion, 12 June 1974). Federal Archives Berlin, BArch DR 8–141, p. 32.
- [52] Diskussionsgrundlage für die Entscheidungen zur Programmstruktur (Programmdirektion, 14 July 1970), Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv/DRA (German Broadcasting Archives), Potsdam–Babelsberg, Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen, Vorsitzender des Staatlichen Komitees für Fernsehen (1969–1972), Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden, Sekretariat Glatzer, p. 2.
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- [55] Ibid., p. 18.
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- [58] Maßnahmen zur besseren Profilierung des I. und II. Programms, p. 22.
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- [61] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- [62] Probleme der Wirkungspolitik—Vorbereitung der Vorgabe 1971, pp. 15–16.
- [63] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
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- [66] See Hoff in Hickethier (1998), pp. 412–413.
- [67] See Hickethier (1998) and Peter Hoff, Organisation und Programmentwicklung des DDR Fernsehens, in *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens in der BRD*, Vol. 1, Institution, Technik und Programm (München, 1993) and Dietrich Schwarzkopf (ed.), *Rundfunkpolitik in Deutschland*, Vol. 2 (Munich, 1999).
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