

Title:

Televsual spill-over: Border regions, transnational infrastructures, and mediated identity formation in the early days of European television

Research theme:

Media play a key role in the stabilization or creation of (imagined) identities. Many scholars in media or cultural studies have emphasized the constitutive role of different media in the shaping or invention of national identities, or have – in the last years – tried to apply the concept of “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson) at an even larger scale: the global one. In contrast to the rich theoretical and speculative literature on these subjects, our historical knowledge on actual processes of transnational identity formation – for example on a regional level – is rather limited (at least in contemporary history). Media historians too have mainly restricted their research to the national level, supporting the idea of media as agents of nationalism and cultural identity formation.

This project aims at analyzing the effects of the televisual “spill over” in the process of regional identity formation in the early days of European television (1950-1970). Two transnational regions par excellence, the Euregio and the Saar-Lor-Lux region, will serve as historical cases for a comparative study on the different dynamics of the emergence of television in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Luxemburg. The historical study of the regional tensions caused by the different dynamics and the “spill overs” in the development of the national television infrastructures might challenge the master narrative of television as “national institution”. At the same time it could produce more nuanced insights into the complex processes of domestication and appropriation of television as a new technology and cultural phenomenon. Central research questions will be: How – if so – did watching to neighboring television stations affect the construction or restructuring of regional or national identities? What were the every-day experiences with television in a trans-border perspective? How did the television industry (for example Philips), retailing and the local dealers react to the regional need for multi-standard receivers and antennas? What have been the effects of watching “foreign” television programmes on consumption and social behavior? How did the national PTT administrations and broadcasters deal with the spill-over effects of television and how did it influence the strategic positioning of transmitters and relay stations?

The design of this project is clearly transnational. Under the lead of Andreas Fickers, a team of experts in the field of regional history (Prof. Ad Knotter (Maastricht) and Prof. Armin Heinen (Aachen), Prof. Alfred Minke (Eupen)), media studies (Dr. Jack Post (Maastricht) and Dr. Geoffrey Geuens (Liège)) and history of technology (Prof. Pascal Griset (Paris) and Prof. Karin Bijsterveld (Maastricht)) will be collaborating in order to ensure the comparative and interdisciplinary focus of this project. Because of its interdisciplinary approach, the project perfectly connects to the core themes of cultures of innovation and Europe and the world. Both television and the regions functioned as laboratories of Europeanization and cultural modernization. The project therefore perfectly bridges the programmes of European studies, STS and history at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Project A (PhD)

Television between window on the world, national institute and regional practice.

Contact: Andreas Fickers

First supervisor: Prof. Ad Knotter, second supervisor: Dr. Andreas Fickers

This PhD project focuses on the different and overlapping spatial dimensions of television, more concretely on the tensions between the local, regional, national and transnational potentials of television. Using a comparative historical approach, the project aims at combining media theoretical concepts dealing with media and identity, transnational circulation and national/regional appropriation of media formats and the economy of cultural transfer with historical research on a micro level. The candidate needs to be able to combine different research methodologies, for example historical discourse analysis and oral history. A prerequisite is the mastery – at least on a basic level – of two of the following languages: Dutch, French, German.

Project B (PhD)

Televsual interferences: trans-border television between transnational infrastructures and national techno-politics

Contact: Andreas Fickers

First supervisor: Prof. Karin Bijsterveld, second supervisor: Dr. Andreas Fickers

Using a history of technology and STS perspective, this project analyses the regional effects or consequences of the development of a European television infrastructure in the 1950s and 1960s. Special attention will be paid to the tensions between the technopolitics involved in the building of the national television infrastructures and the early European initiatives to construct a transnational network for television exchange (Eurovision). In this respect, the project will be able to have an innovative look at the regional impact of standardization and to study technological infrastructures in their material, institutional and symbolic dimension.