

Jan Wieten, Graham Murdock, Peter Dahlgren (eds): *Television across Europe. A Comparative Introduction*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage, 2000.

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Television across Europe attempts to give a picture of the processes that influenced the development of television as the dominant medium in Europe, one which will become increasingly relevant in the future. In doing so, television appears as a medium of symbolic representation and as an institution that depends on the structures of economy. Primarily, television makes public reflection possible and produces, slows down and accelerates social processes. It is this social and institutional framework of television that the first part of the book deals with. The authors are concerned with the monopoly of public television and the division into public and private networks that took place in many European countries during the 1980s. Here, central topics include the consequences of political-economic deregulation, the fragmentation of viewership caused by the emergence of new channels, the influence of digital transmission methods and the increasing convergence of television, telecommunications and computers. The second part of the book addresses current trends and patterns as well as organization and financing of contemporary television programs. The authors approach the issue of whether the acceptance of imported contents and commercial television formats has brought about an Americanization of European television.

Furthermore, different types of program production are described. Private networks, for example, no longer mainly try to develop original programs. Instead, they follow a strategy called 'programming'; productions with the sole aim of selling viewer ratings to advertising companies. On the basis of selected television genres and new 'hybrid' program forms, the third part points out changes within the European television society and the complicated relationship of the global and local. MTV's altered strategy of adapting musical, cultural, and linguistic diversity in order to compete with local television stations may serve as an example

here, as may the European acceptance of the American breakfast television format, a mix of information, service and entertainment linked by a strong involvement of viewers.

In their chapters – all of which were produced in the context of the ‘Euro-Media Research-Group’ – the authors elaborate a comparative European perspective which manages to take the different historical, social, and national contexts into account and, furthermore, demonstrates the divergence of American media society. *Television across Europe* primarily addresses students of media and communication sciences, of film and television theories and of European Studies. Due to its descriptive, understandable and tedious style the book can be recommended as introduction to the comparative European discussion of media. To attain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, however, additional texts and theoretical concepts seem necessary to me. As I see it, the heavy emphasis of empirical, quantitative examples will not be very useful for students at the start of their studies and the lack of explanations below many of the images used makes it hard to put them into context. Yet the didactic design of the individual chapters is remarkable: each has a detailed introduction, explanatory transitions between greater areas of topics, emphasis of key terms, suggestions and questions concerning further research, and annotated bibliographies intended to guide advanced studies.

Researchers with an already advanced level of knowledge concerning the subject matter will probably not have much use for this book, as its conception as a textbook precludes deeper theoretical analyses, although the many examples of quantitative research may prove to be an incentive to further comparative research. Thus, the importance of this publication for the field of cultural studies rather lies, in my opinion, in its well made, didactic design and its application of a culturally comparative perspective.

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