

**National and Regional Identity of TV Programmes. A Content Analysis of the TV Channels of
ZDF, ORF 2, BR and MDR.**

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Abstract

Already Benedict Anderson pointed out in his very influential work “Imagined Communities” what a powerful role mass communication can play in the development of modern nations.

In Germany there are both national and regional public TV broadcasting corporations. One of the tasks of the nine regional TV broadcasters within the ARD is to support characteristics of the diverse German regions. This includes not only supplying of news from all over the provinces but also care for regional culture.

On the other hand one remit of the national public TV channel ZDF is to bring forward the solidarity of the unified Germany. This is an element of the legal framework for the ZDF. In Austria there is a centralized public broadcasting service. One of the legal tasks of the national public TV is to promote the Austrian identity as well as the identity of the Austrian provinces.

The coexistence of both national and regional TV programmes raises questions whether TV programmes are distinguished as “national” or “regional” beyond pure designation. Are there certain patterns in the media content which make them to be recognized as German or Austrian programmes or Bavarian or Middle German? Which are the characteristics for a certain national or regional TV programme?

This study gives a content analysis of two national (German and Austrian; ZDF, ORF 2) and two regional (Bavarian and middle German, BR, MDR) TV channels. This study addresses to the question if and how the broadcasted content of TV channels distinguishes them as specific German or Austrian or Bavarian or Middle German programmes.

There are several studies on the importance of TV for the public negotiation of the relevance of national or regional identities. These studies assume that several TV programmes offer specific national or regional frames. But this cannot be taken for granted. Because of tendencies of globalization and standardization that are going on in TV. This study steps up to fill this academic void. It is revealed if and how formal patterns as well as the actual content can help to make a TV programme to be recognizable as a specific national or regional one.

The content analysis shows different results. As there is no clear dichotomy of national and regional programmes regarding certain formal aspects like percentages of information programmes, fictional vs. non-fictional entertainment and the like. This means national and regional TV programmes cannot be recognized abstractedly. The contents of the examined TV channels differ in several aspects. These differences can be explained by the historical and cultural peculiarities of Germany and Austria or Bavaria and Middle Germany. These differing contents do not show a clear dichotomy of national and regional TV programmes as well.

Regional frames of public communication content cannot be presumed as the findings prove. Especially further research on the importance of regional identities should therefore focus on the singular specifics of regional TV programmes.