

# TOWARDS MAPPING AN ACTUALLY EXISTING TRANS EUROPEAN *MEDIASCAPE*

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## Abstract

In this paper I'd like to argue that a trans or supranational European public mediascape is already in place. I hope to demonstrate, however, that the question is not simple, in basic structural terms, about whether trans-European media exist (indeed one could argue that some forms of pan-European media have existed since the Enlightenment or before), but to know what kinds of pan-European media exist; how these media are interconnected and, most important, how European producers and consumers themselves understand these media.

## Key words

European Media; European producers; European consumers.

## Introduction

"Europe already has a *kratos*, or an institutional building. What it doesn't have is a *demos*, or a European people — people that think as Europeans, and not just as part of their national communities (...) Pan-European media is a way of making that European people through media and public opinion" (Caldeira, 2008). These lines are from an article appearing on the website *cafebabel.com*, which calls itself as "the first European media". The author points out, in a very self-conscious way, that before a pan-European identity can emerge or solidify, a necessary precursor is the establishment of pan-European media.

Anthropologist Benedict Anderson's famous argument (1992) that print media were and are central to processes of nation- and people-making has thus seemingly found in Europe a kind of laboratory for its practical and self-conscious application. If you want a people, or an identity, begin with media, explains this European journalist — as if the formula were ripped from the pages of a socio-political "*how to do*" manual.

With a similar logic, Carl Henrik Fredriksson, writing in the online trans-European journal *Eurozine*, argues that “any common [European] identity is vitally dependent on the existence of a pan-European public space.” But, as he complains, “despite the successful adoption of the euro by many countries (...) the advent of a common [European] public space, seems like a far off dream” (Fredriksson 2004).

In this paper I’d like to argue, *contra* these two authors, that a trans or supranational European public mediascape is substantially already in place. I hope to demonstrate, however, that the question is not simple, in basic structural terms, about whether trans European media exist (indeed one could argue that there have been forms of pan-European media that have existed since the Enlightenment or before) but about what kinds of pan-European media exist; how these media are interconnected; and, most important, how European producers and consumers themselves understand these media.

It is only by understanding the networked circulations of European producers of media, and the social realities inhabiting the components of a European media space, that we can become closer to appraising whether and how these media may indeed be facilitating the emergence of a European “imagined community,” to use Anderson’s famous turn of phrase.

In this paper I adumbrate some components of what I understand to be an already existing European public space. I then describe, drawing on my fieldwork at the transnational and European television station ARTE, some of the perhaps unexpected connections and circulations among trans-European media. Finally, I circle back to the question of whether and how these media might constitute a European “public sphere.”

## I. Components of a trans-European mediascape

How one defines media will, of course, result in different sorts of lists of what one might usefully call “European media.” But here I employ a more or less conventional sense of media, which includes print and online sources of news, websites and blogs, film, television, and events like festivals. In each of these categories one finds a number of already-existing supranational European media organizations. Within and across the categories these media vary greatly in their size, budgets, and audiences; and many of them are quite recent, having only been established in the past five years

or so. At least one of them, *Brelmag*, which claimed to be one of the first pan-European magazines for a younger readership, was only very recently established before disappearing again only months later. Pan-European media are often highly tenuous enterprises, unsure of finding an audience, sometimes relying on funding from European governmental organizations or institutes, struggling to find an attractive editorial line between institutional Europe and a more social or cultural idea of Europe.

But these trans-continental media do exist, employing thousands of employees, with millions of Europeans in their collective audience — the *Zoom Europa* television show on the television channel ARTE alone boasts over 100,000 weekly viewers, albeit mostly in France and Germany.<sup>30</sup> The film *L'Auberge Espagnol* and its sequel *Les Poupées Russes* gathered millions into movie theatres to recount the stories of ER-ASMUS students. The Euroglobe festival, a festival featuring performances of plays, beat poetry contests, and providing an opportunity for audience participation, will visit Prague, Ljubljana, and Strasbourg. In each city, thousands of participants will attend its events, which are intended to foster, in its words, “political and cultural elaboration on Europe.”<sup>31</sup> For European news, one million people every month turn to the website euobserver.com, where they can also post comments and forward news stories to others via email.<sup>32</sup> And eux.tv provides text and streaming of video related to institutional and political Europe, the site boasting almost 30,000 hits a day.<sup>33</sup>

This is only to identify a small corner of a much broader European media landscape. While these media obviously remain marginal and supplementary to national and other more established media, these various components of a European media-landscape — news and informational media, television programs, travelling arts and film festivals, books, blogs and websites — are nonetheless regularly accessed and routinely present in millions of Europeans’ lives on a monthly basis.

## II. Connections and circulations: the nodal example of ARTE

I want to move now away from a notion of “components” to the *connectivity* between these media outlets to suggest that a European media-landscape must be un-

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30. Based on internal audience studies conducted by ARTE’s audience studies department, accessed during fieldwork, September 2008

31. <http://www.euroglobe.info/en/about.html>

32. <http://euobserver.com/?aid=26239>

33. <http://eux.tv/staticPage.aspx?p=advertise>

derstood less as a collection of parts or categories than as a complex, rhizome-like network. To do this I want to evoke the ways in which the French-German and European television channel ARTE provides one node in what is a diffuse circuit of trans-European media production.

ARTE, a French-German project, calls itself “the European culture channel,” and was established in 1992 not long after the Maastricht Treaty was signed as an audiovisual means of encouraging “the coming together of European peoples,” as it is phrased in *ARTE’s* founding charter. Though in *ARTE’s* fifteenth year its audiences remain overwhelmingly French-German, averaging about 100 million viewers a week across the two countries, the channel’s programs are also available in a number of other European countries. Here is where the circuitry of European media begins to get complex:

ARTE has a number of co-production agreements with other European public broadcasters, such as SSR/SRG Idee Suisse in Switzerland, ORF in Austria, TVP1 in Poland, YLE 1 in Finland, RTBF in Belgium, and TVE in Spain. These agreements can take several forms, but all involve some agreement between ARTE and the channels to pool funds to produce a set number of television programs and films per year. So ARTE’s documentary unit will co-ordinate production of five documentary films this year with the Finnish public television channel YLE1, for example: proposals will be approved by both channels; each channel will partly fund the projects; and each channel will then broadcast the programs, with the program bearing the stamp and logo of both channels.

In one sense, this seems a simple enough example of European public television finding strength in numbers, a practical budgetary decision that allows Spanish, French, and German public money to accrue towards producing programs they can all then share. In practice this cooperation is at once more complex and more interesting. When two European television channels co-produce, they are both naturally interested in choosing a proposal for a film or program that audiences for both channels will understand and appreciate; this means that when ARTE signs on to a project, its French and German members of its program conference believe that the project will appeal to both French and German audiences. Having completed a year of fieldwork with producers at ARTE, it is clear that this consideration and challenge — arriving at a consensus about which programs are appropriate and interesting for both French and German audiences — is an immensely complex and culturally fraught process. Dozens of phone calls might be exchanged between various members of ARTE’s or-

ganization; a proposal might be suspended for months while it is re-written to be more accessible and comprehensible to French (or German) audiences; members of the program conference might demand that a film about World War II, for example, also try to include other European nations' perspectives. So when ARTE and the Finnish channel co-produce a historical documentary, there is much more than just funding at stake, but a whole series of questions about what will make sense to audiences in at least three European countries, involving weeks or months of negotiations thereof.

What's more, ARTE and YLE are likely to seek other funding partners, one of the first being the European Union itself. The European Commission's MEDIA program will match up to half of the funding put forward for film projects that satisfy a number of criteria about the European origins of the production and its staff. The Council of Europe's similar program, EURIMAGES, further stipulates that projects that it co-funds satisfy certain topically related requirements. EURIMAGES stipulates on its webpage that "Eurimages' first objective is cultural ... it endeavours to support works which reflect the multiple facets of a European society whose common roots are evidence of a single culture."<sup>34</sup>

Once funded by ARTE and/or a European co-producing television channel and/or European institutional funding bodies, a film or documentary often makes its way not only onto the little screen but also to the big as an official entry into film festivals. At ARTE, for example, there is a staff person who ensures that its films are submitted to all appropriate festivals, in conjunction with various producers. Many of these festivals are themselves European in scope and some, like the European Film Festival, travel to a number of cities throughout Europe. Many of these festivals are themselves partly funded by the European Commission. Finally, many of the films will find their way to arts festivals; just outside of Paris in the coming weeks the "*Temps d'Images*" arts festival will take place, drawing thousands to see live performances, film, and art installations. Among the films shown will be several produced by ARTE and its partners. Indeed the *Temps d'Images* festival itself is produced in partnership with ARTE.

The links among and between various forms of production and distribution of European film and television are thus multiple and often fold back upon themselves in complex chains. A further example of the complexity of this network of production is the website *cafebabel.com*. *Cafebabel* is the project of former ERASMUS students who wanted a website that would cater to the experiences and European sentiment

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34. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/eurimages/About/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/eurimages/About/default_en.asp)

of European university exchange students, many of whom still find themselves living in countries that are not their native ones.

Having quickly drawn attention for its unique perspective—now available in five languages — *cafebabel* was invited to contribute a weekly segment to the news program *zoOm Europa*, a news program which airs weekly on ARTE treating European political and cultural topics. Staff from each of the media collaborated over a number of months to produce a segment intended to attract younger viewers to *zoOm Europa*; To continue mapping this circuit of production, *cafebabel* is partly funded by the European Commission, and is itself linked into hundreds of other blogs about Europe, many created by other ERASMUS students either on a page hosted by *cafebabel* itself, or on an independent website. What's more, *cafebabel* and *zoOm Europa* both partly rely on European news sources such as euobserver.com and the Eurovision news wire service, so that their relationship to other European media opens up into European news industries.

ARTE co-production, film and arts festivals, *cafebabel* and *zoOm Europa*, blogs, and European news services form together, then, a nexus and chain of European media that often find in each other collaboration, resources and funding; what we observe is a fledgling European media-scape in which actors, ideas, and funding flow through a number of interconnected parts. Again, I focus here only on one part of a much larger system; a map of Europe-related websites and blogs alone would fill a huge poster — like the one hanging at the headquarters of *cafebabel.com*, which shows over 1100 websites gathered together in what is a trans-European web.

### III. Conclusion: Mediascapes and public spheres

If I have argued that the components of a supra-national European media are not only in place but that they form a complex web-like whole in which resources and ideas are exchanged, so that one might eventually argue that there is also an ongoing coordination of agendas, I have stopped short of calling these components, these connections and circuits — this map — a European “public sphere.”

And here I want to conclude, without entering into a full discussion of the differences between Arjun Appadurai's understanding of “media-scape” and Habermasian notions of the public sphere (1989), by emphasizing that a media-scape does not equal a public sphere. In contrast with the authors with whom I began this paper, I would

argue that, even as Polish audiences are treated to French-German and European-funded documentaries, even when these documentaries are created in the spirit of trans-European co-operation and with solidly pro-European narratives or themes, if the Polish viewer doesn't realize this, or doesn't care, it is difficult to make the argument that the film remains in any important sense "European."

In other words, key to Europeanization of media in Europe are socio-cultural processes happening alongside the building of trans-European networks of media production and consumption. Media production and processes of identity formation must happen through a sort of dialogical process, and cannot be reduced to any simple causality. We misread Anderson and other theorists of media if we too eagerly simplify these processes into if/then relationships, hitching "identity" to "media" as if either of these could be so reified, much less hitched together like a carriage to horse. Identities are not merely forged by media but emerge alongside and through them; and this, I think, is ultimately what we must remember as we continue to evaluate the "European-ness" of media and whether it constitutes an "imagined community."

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