

The Structural Developments of Regional Television in Britain and Germany

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This paper compares the structural developments of regional television in Britain and Germany from the early days of broadcasting to the present from an institutional and organisational perspective. Drawing on a series of interviews with policy-makers and other key personalities, it is argued that the combination of political administrative borders and regional television boundaries, as exists in the German Länder, provides a fruitful basis for a strong regional television service. During the post-war period divergences between Länder borders and Consortium of Public-Law Broadcasting Institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany (ARD) broadcasting boundaries, palpably manifest in south-west Germany, have been harmonised, leading to thorough conformity. However, in centralised England questions of regionalism have strangely played such an important role in the evolution of television, and there are evident disjunctures between regional boundaries and television regions. This applies to the regional structure of Independent Television (ITV) as well as to the regional initiatives of the BBC, which, since the mid-1980s, increasingly takes over ITV's regional duties, fulfilling primarily political demands.

KEYWORDS Regional television; television structure and organisation; broadcasting policy; ARD; ITV; BBC

Introduction

This article compares and contrasts the structural developments of regional broadcasting in Britain with the respective processes in Germany. In doing so, it follows Asa Briggs' dictum: 'It is impossible to understand British Broadcasting, a unique structure in the world context, without comparing it with other broadcasting structures, and without tracing its origins back to the 1920s' (Briggs 11). Britain and Germany reveal striking similarities, such as comparable social standards and values, palpably manifest in the ideal of a public-service driven broadcasting system independent from state interference. At the same time, however, they represent different paradigms for the structure and management of broadcasting and show different trajectories of historical manifestation and movement (Bösch and Geppert 11). This is particularly evident with regard to the developments of television regions and regional television (Fickers and Johnson 3).

Research into structures of regional television in the countries under study has produced a number of studies. In Britain, research primarily concerned with the BBC has to be distinguished from those studies at whose centre is the ITV network. In terms of the Corporation, Harvey and Robins' edited volume *The Regions, the Nations and the BBC* offers possibly the most elaborate account of the BBC's regional policies. With regard to the Corporation in Wales, there are classic studies by Lucas and by Davies. The latter includes the famous cover blurb stating that 'contemporary Wales is an artefact produced by broadcasting'. In terms of Scotland, McDowell's historic account covers the developments

until 1983; later developments are followed-up by Sweeney. Furthermore, Briggs' five-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* is a valuable source in tracing the evolution of regional broadcasting structures. However, it is not the BBC but the ITV network which constitutes 'the best-known and most successful example of "regional" broadcasting' in the post-war period (Wallace 24). Its development, from its start-up in 1955 to the present, has received ample consideration in the six-volume *Independent Television in Britain* series. Johnson and Turnock as well as Williams provide for good overviews of the structural developments covered in depth in this epic work. Further, Fitzwalter has written a history of ITV seen through the lens of Granada Television, and Medhurst has produced a concise history of ITV in Wales.

In Germany, Schütte has investigated the development of regional broadcasting with regard to political structures and federalism in the period from 1923 to 1945. Similar approaches are followed in Först's edited volume as well as by Fuge and Wagner, solely concerned with the North West German Broadcasting Service (NWDR), and also by Quandt and Calließ. The latter book covers a wide spectrum, with regional case studies reaching from Munich to the Ruhr area. The Ruhr is served by the West German Broadcasting Corporation (WDR), which, in 1956, emerged from the NWDR, and constitutes the most prominent example of regional broadcasting in Germany. It receives consideration in Klingler and Lersch's edited volume, covering regional broadcasting developments between 1975 and 2001. The WDR's regional initiatives until the early 1990s have been outlined by Flamm and updated by Katz et al. Apart from that, some broadcasting histories with more general appeal deal with German television regionalisation – principally Bausch's five-volume series *Rundfunk in Deutschland*. Hicketier's German television history further elaborates on regional television.

Beyond these national perspectives, however, there is an evident lack of comparative historical research focusing on regional television developments in Britain and Germany, which is being addressed by this article. We approach the subject matter from an institutional and organisational perspective as distinct from foci on television production, representation and aesthetics, the socio-cultural role of television and technological narratives (Fickers 14–15). At the centre of this approach are interdependencies between media policy strategies and the organisational structures of broadcasters. Wyndham Goldie (12) has stressed that 'television and politics are inextricably mingled'. We seek to unravel this relationship by drawing on a transnational series of interviews with key personalities who had a major stake in shaping the evolution of the respective regional television landscapes.¹ Balfour has highlighted the pivotal role of individuals as originators of ideas and concepts at crucial historical points in time. This applies especially to processes of media policy-making that are first and foremost actor-driven and that determined continuity and change in regional broadcasting developments. The excerpts from interviews with policy-makers, broadcasting executives and other key actors serve to explain on what principles and arguments decisions determining the development of regional television structures in Britain and Germany have been made.

The point we want to make in our comparative analysis is that the federal Länder structure of the German polity served as an extremely fruitful basis for television regionalism whereas, in England, the link between regional television and regional political

borders is much less distinctive. Within centralised England, London is the political, economic and cultural metropolis, and this has had a lasting effect on the historical development of television. At the end of the article, we will briefly review the reasons why governments at all times were so fond of local regional television. In order to underline the disjuncture between regional television in centralised England we start with the respective developments in Germany.

The Structural Development of Regional Television in Germany (1945–85)

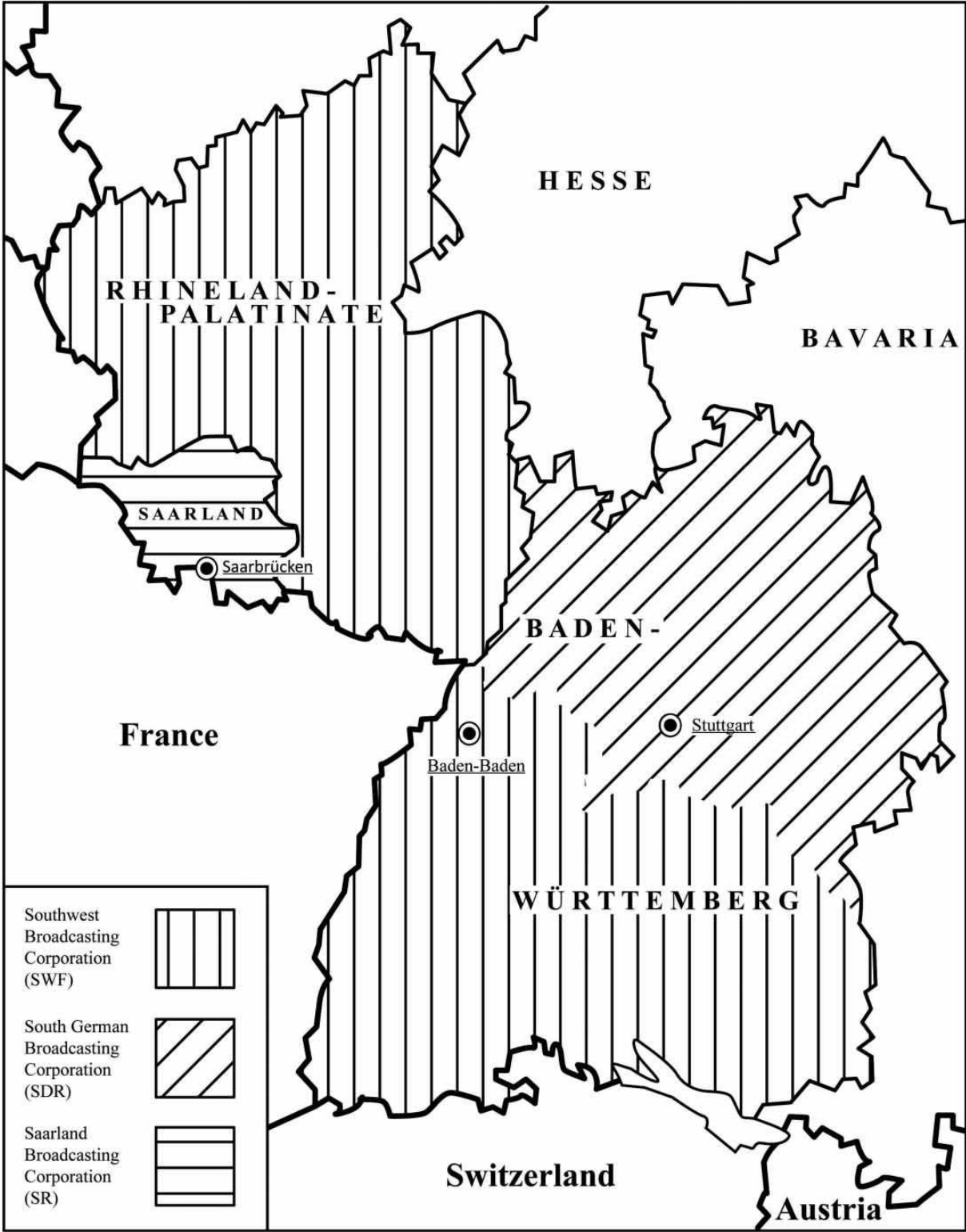
Historically, Germany is known for its *Kleinstaaterei*, typified by its large number of tiny states led by courts. The formation of the Reich in 1871, under Otto von Bismarck, changed this system towards a unitary German nation state. Nevertheless, the strong traditions of political and cultural regionalism were never wiped out (Urwin 181). The broadcast media has clearly reflected this regional division. Hence, in 1929, the German Reich had the most decentralised and regionalised broadcasting system within Europe (Schütte 68). Subsequently, the Nazi Government dissolved the regional form of organisation in order to gain ultimate control over broadcasting and to use it as a means of propaganda.

After the Second World War, Germany was divided into four occupation zones, with each occupying power aiming to implement their conception of broadcasting derived from the role model embedded in their respective national context.² Starting from 1946, radio services were built up, which, from the early 1950s, developed into television services. Following the centralised BBC model, in the four Länder that made up the British zone only one broadcaster, the NWDR, was licensed. This central organisational form was rejected by many Germans and Hans Bredow, the founding father of German broadcasting, regarded it as an incisive alteration of the well-tried arrangement which had existed before 1933 (Fuge and Wagner 208).

In 1950, one year after the adoption of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany had made the country a federal state, involving a large degree of Länder-autonomy, a conjoint proceeding of six broadcasters allowed for the establishment of the Consortium of Public-Law Broadcasting Institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany (ARD). The ARD was founded as an umbrella organisation whose members were loosely integrated. From 1954, it broadcast a national programme composed of contributions from the regional broadcasters. Each station catered for a certain percentage of programming, leading to six, and later nine, fully-fledged production sites (Hickethier 126). As early as 1955, the ARD structure changed when the NWDR divided itself into WDR and North German Broadcasting Corporation (NDR). This separation had political reasons while also reflecting historical differences in culture, economic power, religion and mentality between the Rhine-Rhur area, with its largest city Cologne, and the Hamburg region (Fuge and Wagner 215–16).³

Since its inception, the ARD has been licence-fee funded and, throughout Germany, the areas from which the ARD broadcasting corporations collect the licence fee correspond with the borders of the Länder (Bausch 249).⁴ The only exception was to be found in the Land Baden-Württemberg, founded in 1952 and combining Württemberg-Baden, in the former American zone, with Württemberg-Hohenzollern and Baden, both from the former French zone. Baden-Württemberg was the only Land divided between two

broadcasters. The South German Broadcasting Corporation (SDR) served the North of Baden-Württemberg, and the Southwest Broadcasting Corporation (Südwestfunk, SWF), based in Baden-Baden (Baden-Württemberg), catered for Rhineland-Palatinate as well as the south of Baden-Württemberg (see Map 1).



Map 1
Broadcasting organisation in south-west Germany, 1952–1998.

Siepman (3–4), the British director of Regional Radio, identified this arrangement as one of the striking inconsistencies of the German post-war broadcasting set-up.⁵ Baden-Baden, home of the SWF, was, due to technical, cultural and historic reasons, a curious place for the centre of a broadcasting corporation. Furthermore, the SWF transmission area followed the borders of the French zone, neglecting the political, cultural and historical conditions. A clear indicator of this inauspicious arrangement was that the SWF catered for its highly heterogeneous area by a multiplicity of branches as well as sub-regional and local studios. On the other hand, as Walter Schütz, a delegate to the second Michel Commission which dealt with the broadcasting organisation in south-west Germany notes:

... the SDR had a cohesive transmission area ... [I]t kept studios in Heidelberg and Stuttgart but nowhere else, neglecting even Ulm. Compared with the SWF this was a completely antipodal policy.⁶

By 1958, the ARD combined nine independent broadcasters whose programme contribution rates were arranged according to the size of the stations and their licence-fee catchment areas.⁷ Between 1955 and 1959, the broadcasters started with regional opt-in programmes at fixed daily times (Lersch 111). Between 6 pm and 8 pm the stations broadcast a patchwork of regional programmes, including news, advertising-supported programmes and commercial breaks, which was often exclusively for their area.

In 1963, the public-service-oriented national channel Second German Television (ZDF) began broadcasting. Beforehand, in its first broadcasting decision (1961), the Federal Constitutional Court made clear that the sole responsibility for broadcasting rested with the Länder and that the Bund was solely responsible for the technical communications infrastructure. As a response to the ZDF foundation, some broadcasting corporations, combined in the ARD, pressed ahead with the set-up of regional television organisations that were known as 'Third Channels'. The first Third Channel was provided by the BR and went on air in 1964. It was followed by the Third Channels of the HR (1964), and the WDR (1965). The ARD model of cooperative federalism thereby enabled some ARD broadcasting corporations to transmit their Third Channels jointly. Content-wise, the Third Channels dedicate a large share of programming to regional culture and regional news. Therefore, the regional elements in the collaborative ARD programmes endure; with the creation of the Third Channels, the ARD corporations' commitment to regionalism is two-tiered. It remained stable until the mid-1980s and even beyond.

The Structural Development of Regional Television in Germany (1985 Onwards)

In Germany, private commercial operators started broadcasting in 1984 – almost three decades later than in Britain. When licensing Sat.1 and RTL, the heads of the Länder governments took full advantage of the scarcity of frequencies and committed the companies to offering Länder-based regional programmes. This system is still prevalent today. At present, the two leading commercial channels, RTL and Sat.1, are obliged to deliver a half-hour daily regional programme between 5:30 pm and 6 pm (Sat.1) and 6 pm and 6:30 pm (RTL). These regional-window programmes have been compared with the

regional opt-ins on the ITV network (Volpers, Salwiczek and Schnier 315–22).⁸ However, before the commercial companies could even start their services, in anticipation of competition, the public-service-oriented broadcasters combined in the ARD launched a second wave of regional initiatives. The most popular example in this regard is provided by the WDR, whose director Friedrich-Wilhelm von Sell (1976–85) introduced the best-known and most extensive shift toward regionalisation and decentralisation. Von Sell notes:

I thought we needed to release the WDR from its over-arching dominance in favour of new citizen proximity, a new level of communication to the citizens in the regions. This was an operational, psychological motive ... Apart from that, in terms of strategy we should feature a substantial presence in the regions before the arrival of private competitors.⁹

The commitment to regionalism allowed the WDR to sharpen its public service profile while, as with the ITV network in its early days, the regional character made it distinctive and gave it a competitive advantage. In 1982, the WDR started to implement von Sell's theme and established five regional television studios, which went on air in 1984. Since then regional and sub-regional programming in North Rhine-Westphalia has been steadily expanded and, today, the WDR simultaneously broadcasts 11 regional opt-ins. For the year 2009, this accumulated to 1831 hours of first-aired *Lokalzeit* programmes and 2332 hours of *Lokalzeit* repeats.¹⁰ The *Lokalzeit* audience rating for the first half-year of 2010 amounts to 21.1%, securing the WDR top audience ratings between 7.30 pm and 8 pm.¹¹ Regional news is valued particularly highly by the Cologne-based broadcaster, amounting to more than one third of the total WDR broadcasting hours (Seidel 9).

After reunification with the German Democratic Republic, in 1990 the ARD network was enlarged to cover the six (new) Länder.¹² With the Middle German Broadcasting Corporation (MDR) and the Brandenburg East German Broadcasting Corporation (ORB), two new broadcasters were established.¹³ The Land Mecklenburg-Western-Pomerania was attached to the NDR, becoming its fourth treaty member. Jobst Plog, NDR director (1991–2008), was instrumental in integrating it into the NDR. Plog notes:

All three NDR Länder had SPD governments and courted Mecklenburg. Also the oppositional CDU factions from Lower Saxony, Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein helped convince the Mecklenburg-Western Pomeranian CDU/FDP coalition Land government in favour of the NDR, although it had been given strict orders by Kohl [the CDU party chairman (1973–98) and Federal Chancellor (1982–98)] not to join the red NDR.¹⁴

This happened on the premise that 'Mecklenburg has always been oriented westwards. The Mecklenburg countryside belongs to the North. Its regional cultural integration, therefore, went without any difficulty'.¹⁵ Kohl's opposition, rooted in party politics, could thus be overcome. Based on strong cultural similarities in two cases (south-west Germany and Berlin/Brandenburg) it was even envisaged anticipating Länder combinations by the integration of broadcasting corporations.

There had been various attempts to restructure the broadcasting set-up in south-west Germany. Eventually, in 1998, a solution was found and SWF and SDR merged to form the Southwest Broadcasting Corporation (Südwestrundfunk, SWR). The solution agreed on had

been unanimously rejected by the second Michel Commission, which had investigated broadcasting-policy developments in south-west Germany (Michel 259). In its report, the Commission had assumed that Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland would integrate in the future and, therefore, the Commission had voted for a solution which envisaged a single corporation for Baden-Württemberg and a common corporation for Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland (Michel 259–64) (see Map 1). Walter Schütz notes on the SWR foundation:

Some areas which belonged together historically were culturally and politically divided by the zonal division of the American and French Allies ... Under Teufel [head of the Baden-Württemberg Land government 1991–2005] the combination succeeded because all sides made major concessions. The former SDR transmission area is, meanwhile, similarly contaminated with branches, sub-regional and also local studios, as has been the former SWF region. On the other hand, the Rhineland-Palatinate Land government acceded to the demand that the SWR headquarters be situated in Stuttgart [formerly headquarters of the SDR], at the expense of Baden-Baden [formerly headquarters of the SWF]. The Michel Commission had rejected this solution as the worst possible option.¹⁶

The latest structural change occurred in 2003 when the two ARD corporations Broadcasting Station Radio Free Berlin (SFB) and ORB merged to form Broadcasting Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB). Since reunification, it was a matter of debate whether to combine the Land Berlin with Brandenburg. It was expected that this would also involve merging the ORB with the SFB. However, in 1996, a referendum that would have allowed the combination of the Land Berlin with Brandenburg failed. Subsequently, there was an attempt to anticipate the later Länder integration by a combination of the broadcasting corporations. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Sell, the first ORB director, thought this ‘could create a maelstrom which would accompany the process of Länder integration’.¹⁷ In 2003, the ORB and SFB combined to form the RBB. Yet, despite the combination of the broadcasting corporations, the Länder integration failed.¹⁸

As we will see in the next section, this link and conformity between regional, Länder-based, political structures and regional broadcasting boundaries is much less distinctive in England. Still, until the mid-1980s the development of the ARD network was paralleled by ITV in Britain, notwithstanding that in the early days of broadcasting British history was fundamentally different to its German counterpart.

The Structural Development of Regional Television in Britain (1945–85)

In centralised England, historically, regional or quasi-federal structures were not pronounced. Accordingly, when, in 1926, the Crawford Committee recommended the BBC’s transformation to a public corporation, the enquiry stressed that it would act as the ‘trustee for the national interest’ (HMSO, *Crawford Committee* para. 20a). The BBC thus emerged as a London-centric *national* broadcaster (Scannell and Cardiff). Local and regional programmes existed but were undermined by the ‘crudely oversimplified’ regional arrangement (Scannell 35) which, prior to the reorganisation in 1970, included merely three English regions with quite arbitrary boundaries (McDowell 200). In 1951 the Beveridge Committee recognised the ‘dangers of Londonisation’ (HMSO, *Beveridge Committee* para. 185). It called for independent corporations for Scotland and Wales, but it did not require the BBC to devolve

powers within England (HMSO, *Beveridge Committee* paras. 193, 534). Following the enquiry's demands, during the 1950s, three BBC Boards were created for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Garitaonandía 285).

On 30 July 1954, the Television Act received Royal Assent. The Act created the Independent Television Authority (ITA) whose function was to establish and develop the new ITV system and to provide for supplementary advertising-funded television broadcasting services by licensing programme contractors. According to the Act (sections 3e, 5.2) the authority was bound to ensure 'that the programmes broadcast from any station or stations contain a suitable proportion of matter calculated to appeal specially to the tastes and outlook of persons served by the station or stations' and, second, 'that there is adequate competition to supply programmes between a number of programme contractors independent of each other both as to finance and as to control'. In terms of structure the ITA opted for a federal television network with a strong regional base and character which featured a vertical time-split between weekdays and weekends.¹⁹ It took the ITA seven years to build up and develop the transmitter network in order to allow for nationwide availability, starting with the licensing by Associated-Rediffusion in London and ending with Wales (West & North) (WWN) in the West and North Wales region. In the first period of franchises the 14 regions were served by 15 companies, five big (serving the most densely populated areas), five medium and five small.

There was a mixture of motives which affected the regulator's choice of structure. Robert Fraser, the first Director-General of the ITA (1954–70), noted that the regions should be 'workable', and companies should be of an 'equal and balanced size' (Fraser 3). A seven-day company for London was ruled out on grounds of policy because 'that must become the Titan of a single system ... changing its whole nature from a system of distributed powers into a system of centralised power' (Fraser). In addition, George Thomson, Chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) (1981–88), emphasised the ITA's desire 'not to replicate the BBC with its London-centralism'.²⁰ According to Thomson: 'The original ITV regional map is certainly a technical convenience ... because terrestrial broadcasting didn't easily recognise natural and cultural boundaries ... The English regions by and large reflected the kind of regional local government, rough-and-ready'.²¹ Also vital was the economic imperative to ensure the franchises' viability by dividing the British population into groups of approximately the same size and buying power, thus making them equally appealing to advertisers (Sendall 68–69). Market research surveys, identifying carefully-selected audience demographics, provided an expedient tool in this regard.

The ITA defined four sorts of 'regionally flavoured' programmes: first, outside broadcasts of events of special interest to a region; second, documentaries and current affairs programmes; third, local as well as regional news bulletins; and, fourth, programmes produced outside London (ITA 16). This led to the most diverse outcomes. For example, Channel Television repeatedly put out half-hour programmes in Portuguese to cater for the considerable number of Portuguese-speaking people on the islands. In other cases, companies made the virtue of an economic niche out of the necessity of an enforced regionalism. To illustrate, Anglia Television, a middle-sized licensee, specialised in wildlife programming and became a leading player in this genre (Wallace 107). Other companies adhered to the fourth specification and produced programmes outside the greater London area, which led to the

emergence of regional production bases. The most prominent example was Granada's *Coronation Street*. Its appeal, however, was deliberately transnational and many of the programmes that the regulator counted as regional productions were designed for network presentation or the international (US) market. In any case, audience demand did not legitimate the regional structure within England and the ITA was aware:

...that public tastes did not greatly differ between the London, Midland and Northern regions and that, generally speaking, the viewing public was less interested in receiving distinctive regional programmes than in receiving the most attractive ones available irrespective of the source from which they originated (ITA 16).

There were a few oddities in the arrangement of the ITV regions; for example, the Channel Islands were originally divided into two television regions. The Scottish carve-up included three television regions: central Scotland was served by Scottish Television (STV); north-east Scotland was served by Grampian Television; and the borders were served by Border Television (MacDonald). In the early 1960s, Wales was not considered capable of sustaining a commercial television company on its own and was served by two ITV companies: Granada, with its base in Manchester, catered for the North, and Television Wales and the West (TWW) provided its services in South Wales and the West of England. The Welsh struggle for the representation of nationhood is perhaps best exemplified by the ITV company WWN, which started broadcasting in 1962. As outlined in Medhurst's detailed account of the company's short lifespan, covering only 16 months, its emergence followed from bottom-up cultural and political demands for a separate television service for Wales. WWN was the only ITV contractor that failed financially, bringing to the fore the tensions between culture and commerce, manifested in the hybridity of ITV as a commercially-funded public broadcasting network (Johnson and Turnock).

It was this popular advertising-driven character that was heavily criticised by the Pilkington Committee. With regard to the BBC, the enquiry found that television in Scotland lacked 'a full expression of the distinctive Scottish culture' (HMSO, *Pilkington Committee* para. 104). The BBC had joined Wales to its West of England region, but this arrangement failed 'to satisfy the distinctive needs of Welsh audiences' (HMSO, *Pilkington Committee* para. 105).²² In contrast, with regard to the English regions, the enquiry stressed that they lacked 'a strong and widespread demand for more programmes addressed to their special needs' (HMSO, *Pilkington Committee* para. 108). Similarly, in 1977 the Annan Committee advised that: 'The BBC should have particular responsibility for providing national broadcasting services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland' (HMSO, *Annan Committee* 476). It should not, however, 'develop further its regional services in England but should produce programmes in the regions for its network service' (HMSO, *Annan Committee*). In fact, none of the post-war committees of enquiry criticised the BBC for its neglect of the English regions as long as politicians with their constituencies in the regions were given a platform by the regional ITV companies and regional audiences were served.²³

However, as the ITV network developed, the 'big five', Associated-Rediffusion, Associated Television, ABC Television, Granada Television and STV, produced most of the peak-time network programming and continuously expanded their lead. In order to thwart this development there were various attempts on behalf of the regulator to enforce

television regionalism. As one of many examples, for the contract period 1969–81, the ITA did not reappoint London-based TWW but gave the franchise for the Wales and the West of England region to Harlech Television (HTV), based in Bristol and Cardiff.²⁴

The Structural Development of Regional Television in Britain (1985 Onwards)

By the late 1980s, the ITV companies found themselves in a multi-channel environment, competing for advertising revenues with a multiplicity of operators. In 1992, the Thatcher government introduced the auctioning of franchises to competitive tender, increasing marketisation pressures. In this regard, a quality threshold determined that applicants committed themselves to costly ventures, such as local opt-outs and local news services (Goodwin). As a consequence, between 1990 and 1997, the ITV network experienced a temporary rise in regional television output. Subsequently, from its peak in 1997 (9718 hours) to 2003 (6821 hours), ITV's regional output has decreased by 30% and is continuing to do so.²⁵ Since the early 1990s, the maelstrom of market activity factored ITV into a series of takeovers and mergers, finally resulting in ITV plc., which operates 11 of the 15 licences the network holds. Regional obligations were continuously reduced and, today, ITV plc. operates de facto as a wholly commercial company. It has been clearly indicated that the ITV network licence is no longer sustainable, beyond 2012, if no replacement funding is available.

Parallel to the ITV network's demise, the BBC has increased its regional initiatives. In 1986 they established a Regional Directorate and created five English television regions: North West region, based in Manchester; North East region (Leeds and Newcastle); Midlands region (Birmingham); South-East and East regions (Elstree and Norwich); and, South and West region (Bristol, Southampton and Plymouth) (Garitaonandía 285, Wallace 56).²⁶ According to Greg Dyke, BBC Director-General (2000–2004):

It became pretty obvious ... that ITV's dominance of the regional system of television would go on to disappear and that, therefore, BBC would have an obligation to do more regional programming and to spend more money on regional programming.²⁷

Between 1990 and 2003, the combined regional output of BBC1 and BBC2 increased from 3683 hours (1990) to 6185 hours (2003).²⁸ Subsequently, the BBC went on to maintain the lead and in 2009 the Corporation broadcast 6308 hours of regionalised output in the UK, 4186 hours thereof in England. During the same period ITV (including the absorbed franchise for Wales and the West of England), STV and Ulster Television (UTV) broadcast 4131 hours of regionalised output, including 2594 hours in England.²⁹

The BBC provides distinctive services for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland while currently having divided England into 12 regions: North East and Cumbria, Yorkshire, North West, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, West, South, South East, South West and London. The latest change to this structure occurred in 2004 when BBC North was split into BBC Yorkshire and BBC Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Apart from that, the Corporation has fostered the emergence of a regional production base in Manchester and it is envisaged that, by the end of 2012, nearly half of its staff should be based outside London (Williams 176, Noonan).

Regional Television in England: The Square Peg in the Round Hole?

What becomes apparent from this outline of regional television developments are patterns of continuity and change. First, from the beginning of the post-war period to the mid-1980s, the federal ARD structure corresponded approximately with the regional structure of ITV. Second, from the mid-1980s onwards, there is continuity in Germany whereas the British developments diverge. The regional character of ITV withered and the BBC became more regional.

In Germany, the key forces which determined the federal structure of the broadcasting system, as well as the functioning of the individual broadcasting organisations, are political in nature, linking regional broadcasting and Länder politics. The fact that the Länder have large degrees of independence and the legal responsibility for broadcasting gives the Länder-based ARD broadcasting set-up a strong underpinning whose existence is ensured by constitutional law and licence-fee funding. The German legal framework prescribes that the Länder have constitutional responsibility for broadcasting, while the Bund is responsible for the technical communications system. Furthermore, the Federal Constitutional Court has given a constitutional guarantee for the existence and development of public service broadcasting which guarantees public funding (Witteman). There is no such guarantee for public service broadcasting in Britain. In contrast to the prominence of legal rule in Germany, the British tradition of regulating has been referred to as ‘pragmatic, sensible, orderly, undoctinaire’, suggesting less reluctance towards change (Kinchin Smith 27). Most importantly, however, England is a centralised state. Following from this, as Douglas Hurd, Home Secretary under the Thatcher administration (1985–89), notes:

England is not easily divided into regions, they’re not natural regions. The history has not created regions as it has to some extent in Germany and so the boundaries are artificial.³⁰

Historically, structures of regional government in England are less powerful than the German Länder. Also English regional cultural identities, in many cases, are less distinctive than in Germany. This brings one questions to the fore: why were governments and regulators so keen to have regional television in England? The first reason is that the concept of the region was romanticised by stressing its importance for democratic processes and cultural diversity (Harvey and Robins ‘Voices’ 46–47). Once the regional ITV structure was created, there were vested political interests to maintain it. As one very well informed commentator, who stayed at the heart of the ITV system for several decades in various executive roles, noted:

It was ... necessary politically to keep the 15 companies as most MPs liked regionalism (they were always appearing on their local stations). It was likely to be difficult to carry such a change [towards ITV consolidation] through Parliament.

Furthermore, television regionalism had a spin-off for the health of regional economies and in many areas ITV fostered or created commercial regionalisation.³¹ The ITV network structure led to the emergence of regional production bases and the television set-up brought investment and employment to regions which had suffered from London-centrism. Apart from that, in the early days of ITV, companies that wanted to buy advertising divided their marketing along the lines of the television boundaries.

For example, Procter & Gamble advertised heavily in the Tyne Tees region, which they used as a test market. However, when the consumer goods manufacturer decided to launch a product on the basis of the regional market research, the scope was nationwide. As advertising had long been sold on a regional basis, the company had to make 15 different purchases of advertising space to achieve national coverage. The advertising lobby, therefore, aimed to nationalise advertising. Beyond that, the concentration of power in the hands of the 'big five' brings to the fore the tensions between commerce and culture which lie at the heart of ITV settlements. Eventually, it led to the marginalisation of regional production bases and eroded the regional structure. This development was reinforced by later processes of concentration amongst the ITV companies.

From 2005 onwards the BBC took over the lead in terms of regional programme hours. However, the Corporation has repeatedly changed its regional structure, suggesting a certain degree of unease with regionalism which follows from the historically-rooted English disjuncture between regional boundaries and television regions. In federal Germany, on the other hand, regionalism thrives as a result of the compatibility of broadcasting borders and political boundaries.

Notes

1. The interviews were conducted as part of a broader body of research concerned with the comparison of British and German communications policies from the early days of broadcasting to the present. For more detail with regard to the interviews, their methodological and empirical dimension (see Potschka (8–9).
2. Excluding the Soviet Russian occupation zone, 10 Länder were created. The British occupation zone comprised the Länder Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Lower-Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia. The American occupation zone included the Länder Bavaria, Hesse, Bremen and Württemberg-Baden. The French occupied Rhineland-Palatinate, the Saarland, as well as Württemberg-Hohenzollern and Baden. Berlin was subdivided between the four occupying powers.
3. North Rhine-Westphalia contributed more than half of the NWDR licence-fee revenues and local politicians aimed for their own station in order to control it independently (Bausch 204). Since 1956, the WDR has catered for North Rhine-Westphalia. The NDR caters for the Länder Lower-Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and, since 1991, also Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.
4. Since the mid-1960s, the ARD generated additional revenues from advertising.
5. Siepman, Charles *Der Rundfunk in Westdeutschland* (1951), DRA, ARD 7–32.01. Siepman identified another two inconsistencies. First, Radio Bremen (RB) lacked adequate funding and catered for a very small audience. Second, the NDWR catered for a disproportionately large area.
6. Interview, Walter Schütz, Dec. 2006.
7. In 1954 the ARD was joined by the Broadcasting Station Radio Free Berlin (SFB). In 1958 the Saarland Broadcasting Corporation (SR) followed suit. Until 1964 the WDR contributed 25% of programming, the NDR 20%, the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation (BR) 17%, the Hessian Broadcasting Corporation (HR), SDR, SWF and SFB 8% respectively and RB and SR contributed 3% each (Bausch 282–84).
8. During 2008 and 2009, RTL and Sat.1 broadcast 10 different regional window programmes, fulfilling their formal requirements as determined in the Länder broadcasting laws (Volpers, Schnier, and Bernhard 97).
9. Interview, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Sell, Jan. 2007.
10. WDR Zuschaueranfrage Programmplanung.
11. WDR Zuschaueranfrage Programmplanung.
12. These six (new) Länder are Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western-Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.
13. The MDR was established to cater for the (new) Länder Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. The ORB served the Land Brandenburg.
14. Interview, Jobst Plog, Jan. 2007.
15. Interview, Jobst Plog, Jan. 2007.
16. Interview, Walter Schütz, Dec. 2006.
17. Interview, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Sell, Jan. 2007.
18. Whereas the citizens of Berlin (not used to such a long tradition of federal sovereignty as, for example, Hamburg and Bremen) were not concerned about Berlin losing its Land status, the citizens of Brandenburg were worried about a dominant Berlin position and rejected the plan in a public referendum.
19. After allocating the three largest regions, the ITA abandoned the vertical time split and appointed all remaining franchises as seven-day services.
20. Interview, George Thomson, Oct. 2006. George Thomson was also the first British Commissioner for the European Community with responsibility for regional policy (1973–77).

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21. Interview, George Thomson, Oct. 2006.
 22. In 1964 the BBC separated Wales from the West of England and established BBC Wales (Lucas 200).
 23. Still, in 1970 the three large English regions were replaced by eight smaller regional BBC centres. Three of those would become network production centres (Garitaonandía 285, McDowell 187).
 24. Independent from the development of the ITV network, in 1982 the Welsh fourth channel S4C was launched, aiming specifically at a Welsh-speaking audience.
 25. Broadcaster annual reports and accounts and broadcaster returns to Ofcom.
 26. From the early 1990s to the end of the century, these five BBC regions were reduced to three: North, South and West, and Midlands and East (Wallace 56–57).
 27. Interview, Greg Dyke, Jul. 2006.
 28. Broadcaster annual reports and accounts and broadcaster returns to Ofcom.
 29. Hours of data for first-run originations only. Data exclude Gaelic and Welsh language programming but include some spend on Irish language programming by the BBC.
 30. Interview, Douglas Hurd, May 2006.
 31. Interview, George Thomson, Oct. 2006.

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