APPENDIX A – Background Information Germany

Germany has a ‘dual system’ of public and private/commercial broadcasting, with private television networks surviving almost exclusively on advertising revenues, whilst the public sector is primarily funded by license fees (in addition to a few minutes of early-evening advertising). The public broadcasting sector is comparable to the BBC in its values and objectives. It is legally bound to produce a basic supply of information, education and entertainment, and provides (high-brow) cultural programmes that seek to reflect different cultural trends. Germany has a population of c. 82 million and consists of sixteen states (Bundesländer), each of which is ‘culturally sovereign’ and thus plays a decisive role in public audiovisual media output. The country’s first major public broadcaster is ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands), which was co-founded by Germany’s nine regional corporations (commonly referred to as ‘Die Dritten’, i.e. ‘The Thirds’) in 1950. Each corporation contributes to the nationwide channel, ‘Das Erste’, whilst also producing regional output which can be received in other parts of the country via cable, satellite or, more recently, digital signal. The second major public broadcasting provider is ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen), founded in 1961 (first broadcast: 1963) and based in Mainz. Together, ARD and ZDF have created two specialist documentary/politics and children’s channels (Phoenix and KiKa) and are also involved in productions for the cross-country corporations arte (with French arte Corp.) and 3sat (with Austrian and Swiss channels ORF and SRG). The first private networks (first Sat.1, then RTL) aired in 1984, followed by Pro 7 in 1989, VOX in 1991, Kabel Eins in 1992, and others (including programme off-shoots, like RTL 2 and Super RTL). From the outset, the privates were known to produce inexpensive game and talk shows and depended on a variety of US imports. They were renowned for their interest in ratings over quality, and though they have undergone some image changes over the years (in parts as a result of shrinking revenues after a mid-90s boom), they continue to have a tainted reputation, particularly in the upper (middle) classes. While there is now a
relative balance of market shares between public and private providers (in slight
favour of public service broadcasting, see below), viewing preferences are largely
linked to age and education. Young viewers tend to watch more private television
programming than their older relatives, which has in the past fuelled public
criticism akin to the British ‘dumbing down’ debates. Amongst young viewers,
private broadcasting is particularly enjoyed by teenagers with a lower secondary
school education (Hauptschule and, to some degree, Realschule), while attendees of
Gymnasiums (the higher-level secondary schools) tend to watch more public service
broadcasting.

Despite the un-representativeness of my group of German participants, these
general trends were reflected in viewers’ diary entries and other self-reports of
viewing tastes and preferences. Particularly the older generations were often
exasperated by the amount of advertising they had to endure on private channels.
For some, the commercial breaks were enough to put them off viewing private
programming altogether. Even if they did not make the distinction between private
and public providers relevant, their preferences were evident from viewing logs.
Young people’s routine daytime viewing was often dominated by American sit-
coms and German soaps, while their parents and grandparents relied on television
to provide them with information and entertainment regarding nature, sports,
travel and current affairs, alongside some fictional programmes, such as the
‘Krimis’.
The data and historical information provided here derive from two main sources: the European Journalism Centre (http://www.ejc.net/media_landscape/) and MAVISE, the database of TV companies and TV channels in the European Union and candidate countries (http://mavise.obs.coe.int/).

From http://www.medienforum.nrw.de/ (last accessed 8 September 2008).