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PROJECT

Intervision: Popular Music and Politics in Eastern Europe

Funded by the Lise Meitner Fellowship of the Austrian Science Fund

During the Cold War, Eastern European national television broadcasters organised the Intervision Song Contest (ISC) as a “socialist” alternative to Western Europe’s Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). However, unlike the ESC, the ISC has hardly been the subject of academic research. Just as the ESC is often interpreted as reflecting European politics, this project examines the cultural, economic and political reasons for the development and decline of the ISC and considers what the contest can tell us about relations among Eastern Europeans during the Cold War and between Eastern and Western Europeans during and after that period.

This project is producing the first transnational history of the ISC. It is furthermore innovative in that it examines how popular music produced in Eastern Europe was appropriated by Eastern European states in their cultural diplomacy. Academic studies on popular music and cultural diplomacy in the Cold War have tended to focus on American popular music and its impact on Europe. With its focus on how Eastern European popular music was used to articulate national concerns and identities within the Eastern Bloc, the project uses the ISC to interrogate the cultural, economic and political hierarchies, stereotypes and tensions between Eastern European states.

An aim of this project is to challenge Western European preconceptions of Eastern Europe - which are still expressed in media reports on the participation of Central and East European states in the ESC - as culturally backward, closed and homogenous. The project examines whether Eastern European states were, despite the political censorship imposed by their ruling communist parties, more open to Western European cultural influences during the Cold War than is usually perceived in historiography. The ISC was, for example, more open to cooperation with Western European national television broadcasters – such as Austria’s ORF - than the ESC was with Eastern European ones. Indeed, this project approaches the ISC as part of a pan-European network that connected popular music industries on both sides of the Iron Curtain and contributed to the forming of a common European popular culture by producing stars who were popular in both Eastern and Western Europe.

This project is based on an original collection of documents and recordings from the archives of the Austrian, Czech, German and Polish national television broadcasters. The results of the project will include an academic monograph, two academic articles, an international workshop and a seminar course, and the research will also be disseminated through conference presentations, internet blogs and media interviews. This project builds on the one “Eurovision: A History of Europe through Popular Music” that I previously led as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, and the major result of which is the first ever scholarly monograph on the history of the ESC, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).