

THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST – A STUDY ON A MUSIC-FOCUSED FAN CULTURE

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Background

The Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) is the largest international contest for popular music in the world. Since 1956, the show has rallied a considerably high number of fans all over Europe. The study's focus is on the characteristics of the German fan-community.

Aim

The aim of the study was to empirically verify the results of a study by Heinz Moser (1999) on the ESC fan culture in Switzerland with regard to their consistency and transferability to the ESC fan culture in Germany. In addition, it was hoped to gain knowledge and insight into the original build-up of the Song Contest fandom as a music-focused fan culture.

Among others, the following theses of Moser were to be verified:

- According to the terminology of Gerhard Schulze (1992) the Song Contest fans can be assigned to the "Harmony Milieu" due to the popular hit song ("Schlager") nature of the Contest.
- ESC fans are mostly gay and specifically seek a sense of belonging and nearness in the fan club.
- Fandom is directed at social intercommunication; the formation of the fan club includes a „moment of revelation“ as a time-wise definable turning-point for the true fan.

- Above and beyond Moser's assessment, the question of corresponding socializing influences in the origins of the Song Contest fandom were to be analysed.

Method

The study is based on interviews with 208 Members of OGAE-Germany, the only ESC fan club in Germany at the time of the study. By means of an anonymous four-page questionnaire, data on the demographic structure of the German fan community was collected, and also information on the fan's requirements and expectations in respect to the Eurovision Song Contest and its fan club.

Results

- Most of the interviewed subjects are between 30 and 40 years old. 94% are men, 52% single.
- 55% obtained school matriculation and of these, more than half are university graduates.
- Musical interests lie mainly in the direction of national and international pop music.
- The Eurovision Song Contest is not considered to be a hit-song contest ("Schlagerwettbewerb") by the majority of the fans (68%).
- The voting procedure, the international character and the variety of languages are key features of the Contest.
- For the majority of the members (84%) the fan club is used as an information source. The possibilities of social intercommunication are

considered important but only 25% of those interviewed actually take advantage of them.

- Interest in the Song Contest began in most cases prior to puberty (peak values between 8 and 11 years).
- In 29% of cases, interest was aroused through parents.

Conclusions

These results show a picture contradictory to that of Moser:

- All milieu-induced signs (age structure, level of education, daily aesthetic) indicate that Eurovision Song Contest fans belong to the "Self-made Milieu", to use Schulze's terminology.
- There is no evident scientific connection between Eurovision Song Contest fandom and being gay. Nevertheless similar social requirements can be assumed.

- The high proportion of men in the club can perhaps be explained by the Song Contest's specific structure as a „male TV programme“, according to the definition of John Fiske (1987).
- For certain pronounced Song Contest fans, social intercommunication with other fans, respectively fan club membership, is not a necessity. The feeling of being a fan exists even in isolation.
- A moment of revelation is to be found in the childhood experience of one's first Eurovision Song Contest and for most of those interviewed, this is the starting point of their fan career. Of considerable importance here is the parental socialization influence.