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PS31 The Architecture of Television

Davide Spina, University Of Hong Kong, Hong Kong and Léa-Catherine Szacka, University of Manchester, UK, Co-Chairs

Broadcasting Eurovision: Turning European Parliament into a Mass-Media

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Abstract

This paper explores how the European Parliament became a mass-media platform by mobilizing buildings and television networks to broadcast messages to the European public. Since the 1950s, the European Parliament has utilized various buildings in Strasbourg, Luxembourg, and Brussels not only as assembly spaces for parliamentary politics but also as channels to address the European public through the medium of television. As democracy and television became intertwined in the latter half of the twentieth century, television emerged as a vital tool for the European Parliament to engage with the emerging European electorate, particularly during the first European elections in 1979. The European Parliament adopted pan-European television programs like Eurovision, Eurikon, and Europa TV, leveraging them as instruments for European integration. To facilitate this communication, the institution established satellite transmission standards and television studios to broadcast the plenary sessions of the parliament. Concurrently, architects and designers were enlisted to reshape the physical space of the parliament, effectively transforming it into a mass-media setting. Unlike other governmental institutions, the European Parliament held the unique ability to influence media politics on a European scale, enabling it to simultaneously shape the television infrastructure and redefine its own image.

The contribution critically examines the dynamic relationship between the European Parliament and media networks, highlighting how this connection necessitated constant adaptation and obsolescence of the plenary hall architecture. Moreover, it explores how these media networks influenced the perception of the Parliament in the European public. By delving into the intertwining of architecture, mass media, and European politics, this research sheds light on the complex interplay between media history and architecture, showcasing how the European Parliament strategically harnessed the power of television to engage and connect with the European public.