

Russian Regional Television

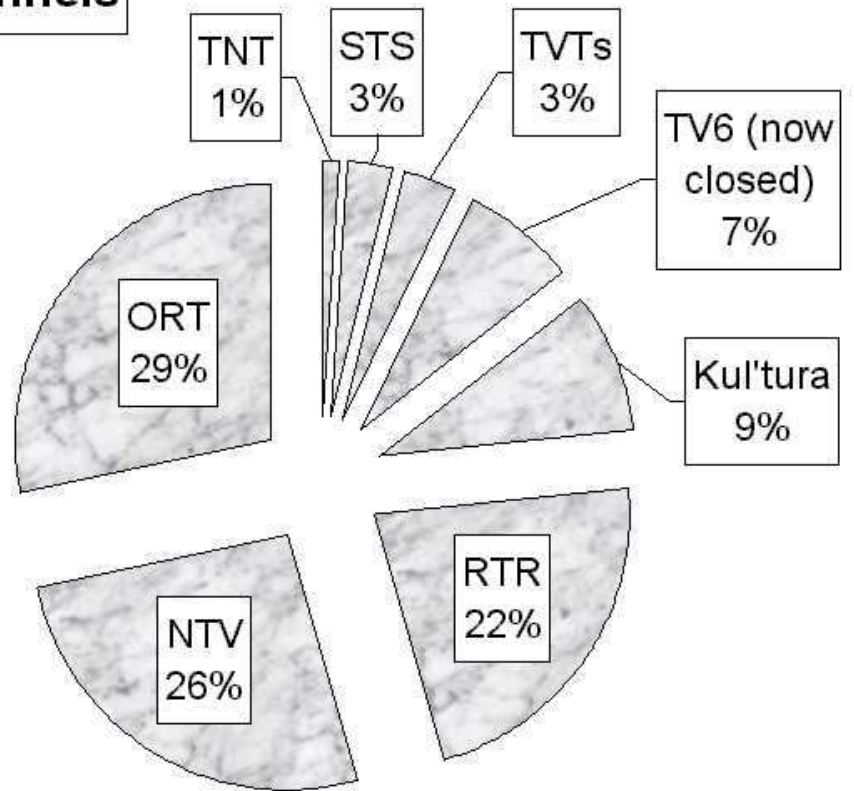
Dr Anat Vernitski has been conducting research into Russian regional television, using the example of Ekaterinburg. Ekaterinburg is the capital of the Ural region, a regional centre where a large number of television channels, both local and central, are transmitted.

On two consecutive visits to Ekaterinburg in 2001 and 2002 television viewing habits in the city were studied. The methods used were questionnaire surveys, interviews and viewers diaries. The methodology used in analysing the results is a combination of qualitative methods in assessing the interview and the viewers diaries and quantitative analysis of the sample questionnaire survey. This research is intended as a preliminary study, leading to a larger project on Russian national and regional television. The results of this preliminary research are shown here:

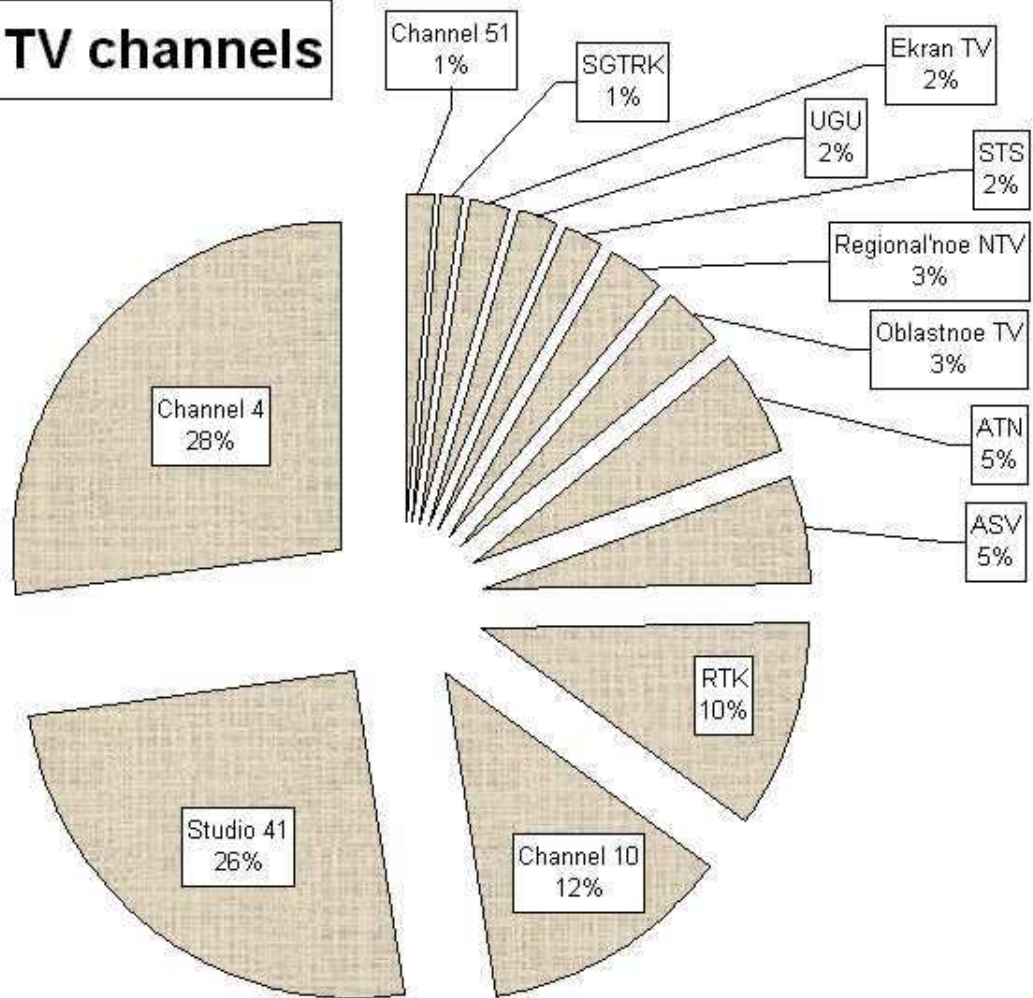
Ekaterinburg 2001: Questionnaire Survey

The survey was conducted with 70 respondents aged 15 to 83. Their professions include students and school children, engineers and programmers, university lecturers, economists, administrators, and media specialists (journalists, TV, advertising). Of course this is not a full picture of social stratification in Russia, but mainly represents the intelligentsia. Yet the fact that both children and pensioners (who tend to watch more television) are included may rectify the limitation proposed by the professional-class makeup of the target group. Respondents said they watch television between almost never to about 40 hours a week, which gives us a wide range of experiences. Many respondents noted that they watch television more on weekends than weekdays, and some noted that more in the winter than in the summer (as we expected). To see the outline of the results obtained please click on [TV survey](#). The summary of quantitative responses is given in the following tables:

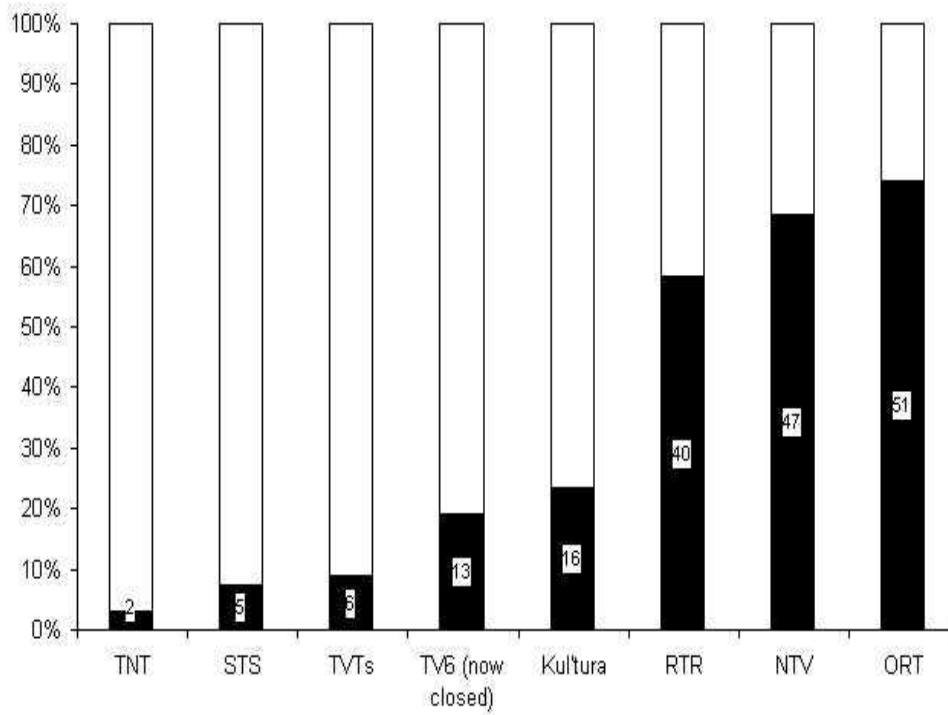
Central TV channels



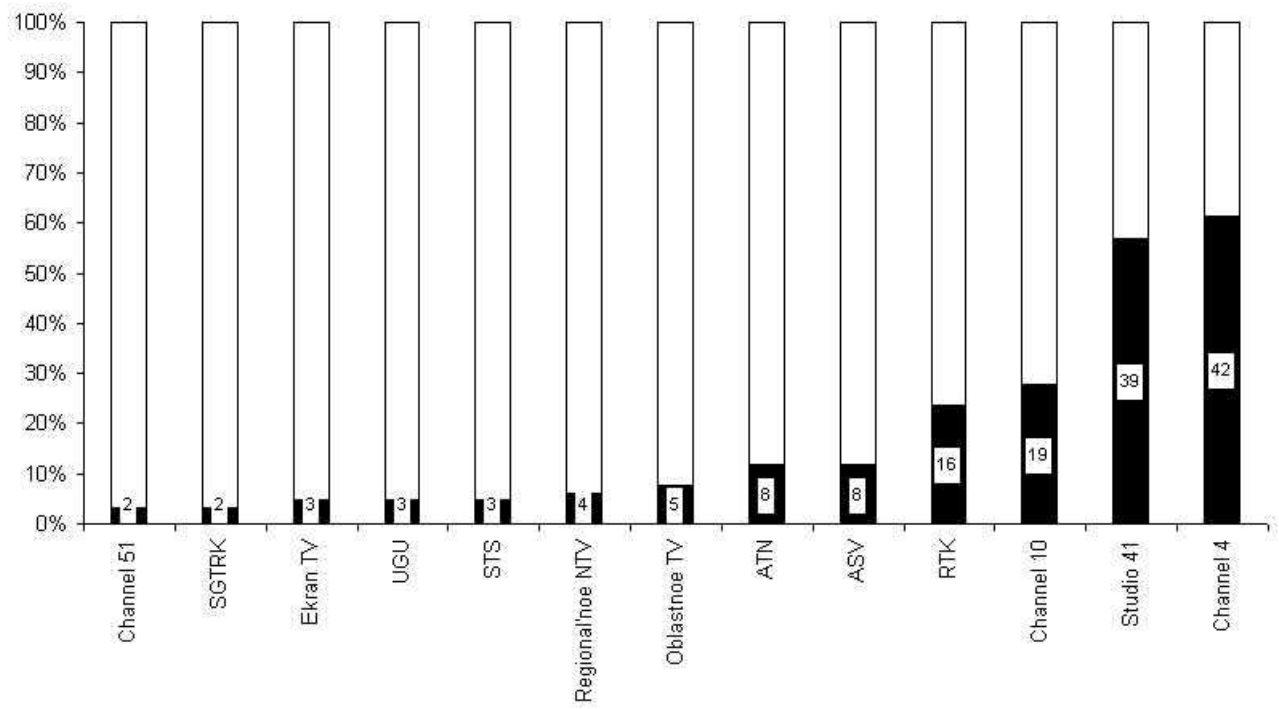
Local TV channels



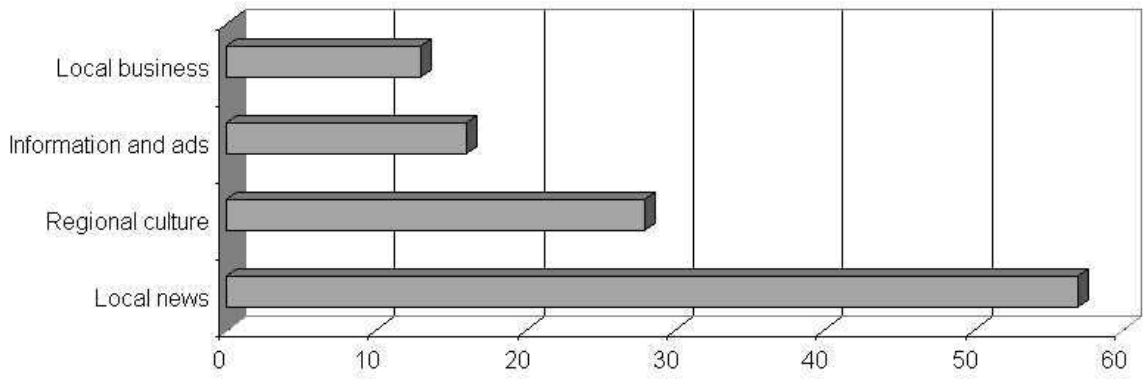
Central TV channels: percentage of people watching each of them



Local TV channels: percentage of people watching each of them



What interests those who watch local TV



As we expected, the most popular programme is the news. It should be noticed that Russian serials are more popular than foreign serials. Programmes geared towards a specialised public (like children's programmes or religious programmes) were the least popular among viewers in general.

Of the national ("central") channels, the ones watched by the great majority are ORT, NTV and RTR. The next in popularity are TV6, Kul'tura, MTV. Less popular are TVTs, STS and TNT. Of the local channels the most popular are Channel 4, Channel 10 (which are the longest existing independent local channels) and Studio 41 (which for reasons of local political changes has gained a larger budget in the last year, and thus became of better quality). Everyone who watches the local channels is interested in local news, about a quarter seem to be interested in local culture and less than that in local business. Some respondents mentioned they are interested in watching films shown on local channels (which have no direct link to the fact they are local), some mentioned that these channels have a good selection of films shown. Only a few respondents were interested in local advertisements. One respondent was interested in children programmes shown on local channels, and two - in programmes about their city.

In answer to the question should television be market-led or government-funded, most respondents wrote it should be partly market-led and government-funded, and only a few thought it should be either market-led or government-funded. 71% of the respondents think that people read less because of television, and 45% were interested in programmes related to literature. Remarks regarding literary programmes included expressed interest in programmes about writers yet not in film adaptations (or the opposite), a view that these programmes are made in low quality, and remarks such as "sometimes" or "when they are not tedious".

Ekaterinburg 2001: Interviews Summary

Interview with Nikolai Koliada (playwright and theatre director) - writing and television in the context of local culture:

Koliada is an important figure in the Ekaterinburg (and generally the Urals) cultural scene. He is one of the most famous playwrights in Russia today, with plays produced and published both in Russia and in Europe and the US. His more recent plays concentrate on marginal figures in the Urals, thus giving voice to the doubly marginalised: socially and territorially. He teaches the degree for playwrights at the School of Drama, Urals State University in Ekaterinburg. Several of his students won important awards (for example, Bogaev and Sigarev won the anti-Booker prize in 2000 and 2001 respectively) and had plays produced in Russia and abroad (for example, Bogaev's and Sigarev's plays were produced in London in May 2001). Koliada is also the editor of the literary journal "Ural", one of the few 'thick journals' to be published in Russia outside Moscow and St Petersburg, which had in 2001 a readership of 2100 (out of which 1600 are subscribers). Furthermore, Koliada has his own television programme. This is why I decided to interview him regarding the interaction of television and literature in the Ekaterinburg cultural scene.

Koliada reminded me that there are 17 television channels in Ekaterinburg, an 18th one planned to be added soon (sponsored by Latyshev, The Urals Region Governor). This makes Ekaterinburg the city with the largest number of television channels, not counting cable TV (compare Moscow with 12 television channels). Thus television is clearly a significant medium in the city.

Koliada's programme "Chernaia kassa" is produced in GTRK (the the local branch of the national channel RTR). The clear advantage of a programme with them is that this channel is transmitted to the whole *oblast'* (like ORT) and not only the city. Koliada has been involved in work with GTRK since 1977, and although had offers from other channels prefers to stay there. This is because the commercial channels are more profit oriented and would not give him as much freedom as he has in GTRK, where profit is not an issue (government funded). For that reason there are also no advertisements on this channel, another advantage mentioned by Koliada.

The programme is shown once a week on Saturday 4 pm (almost prime time), for half an hour. The programme has been produced for already 4 years and according to Koliada has good ratings. The title of the programme refers to a habit which developed, Koliada explained, in work places in the Soviet period. A "black safe" would be organised into which everyone in a given department would put an agreed sum of money every month, and one member of staff will receive the money every month by rotation. Thus the meager salary was complemented with this "mutual help bonus". The television programme consists of profiles, life stories, of people in the region. By giving this name to his programme Koliada wishes to emphasise the mutual help and caring elements in his approach (and, by implication, it asserts the legacy of the Soviet period as having an effect on post-Soviet culture - AV).

Koliada sees his programme as important, because it gives voice to marginalised characters. Typical subjects of his programmes have been a group of disabled women who founded a folk choir, or the life of a man from a village who comes every morning to town to sells dung to owners of private allotments. Furthermore, he explained that it is now easier for him to obtain things for the "Ural" journal or for his playwrights course, because everybody in the city knows him, having seen him on TV. He also says that he finds it interesting to make programmes. In reply to my question he agreed that the programmes he make give him material for plays. To my general questions about his attitudes to television, Koliada said that most of television (especially central - national - channels) tell lies, that he hardly watches television - except to see programmes about local culture in the local channels (especially when one of his students is involved), that television is motivated only by money and politics and this can be in particular seen in election periods. Local television reflects local politics, no objectivity.

Interview with Arsen Titov (Head of the Ekaterinburg Branch of the Union of Russian Writers) - literature and television:

Titov explained than in the Soviet period there was one local TV and radio channel, under the authority of the central TV and radio. On this channel there were sometimes literary programmes. Yet this channels could be watched only in the city and was not transmitted (for technical reasons) even to the *oblast'* around, thus it had impact only on the city and not the whole region. Central television and radio was of course transmitted to the whole region, which shows that much more budget was invested in it than in the local media at that time. Now, Titov explained, local television channels have no literary policy and make no literary programmes, as a representative of the Union of Writers he is never contacted by television channels. Literary programmes have low ratings, and what is mostly shown on television is bad American TV (cheap action films), and not even informative programmes about the West [I noticed that the same claim was made by a number of respondents on the questionnaire forms, in writing and in interviews - AV]. Titov thinks that television does not help to develop culture (especially literary culture) because it does not pay any attention to literary culture.

Interviews with Sergei and Natal'ia Menshikov (television directors, working in local TV channels) - culture and television in the context of Ekaterinburg and the Urals:

Sergei and Natalia Menshikov are TV producers who create programmes about culture, mainly the history and culture of Ekaterinburg and the Urals. They work in local television channels: previously in Studio 41, and now in OBT (Oblastnoi televidenie).

My first interview was with Sergei Menshikov, a television director with more than 20 years experience and a graduate of VGIK Institute of Cinematography. He is especially interested in programmes about the culture of the Urals. He sees the Urals as a unique place, being an ancient land with an aboriginal past and a wealth of natural (especially mineral) life, and it is also the border between Europe and Asia. The Menshikovs have produced a series of 30 programmes under the heading "Uralskie istorii" for the local channel OBT. Sergei wanted to have clear thematic structures to the series, yet as he says "television is wild" and he had to deal with various topics, not always in the order he wished to follow. Programmes deal with archeology, minerals, and a series called "Liudi ukhodiashchego veka" which was done for the new millenium and interviewed old people with interesting life stories. Some of the interviewed already died, and this, says Sergei, is the role of television: to record what will later pass, to keep a record of the cultural heritage.

Sergei complained of budget restrictions and technical difficulties. He explained for example that when he prepared a series of programmes about the history of Ekaterinburg he found that difficult, because from the earlier periods (the city was founded in 1724) there was not enough visual material, and television programmes are by their nature visual. Yet still he was able to create a series of 15 programmes about Ekaterinburg in the 18th century.

Recently the Menshikovs have produced a series of 10 programmes under the heading "Metalurgii Urala", requested and funded by the Local Government Ministry of Culture. In general, they are not given enough resources for producing programmes about culture. Now they have a series in OBT called "Kul'turnaia sreda". The programmes in this series are shown once a fortnight, and Sergei complains that a programme shown less than once a week has no impact on the viewer and loses its effect. They have also started making programmes about Old Believers communities (the Urals has always been and is still now one of the main centres of the Old Believers - AV), in which there is use of literary source material. They are very interested in pursuing further the topic of Old Believer culture in the Urals.

They have not had the opportunity yet to produce literary programmes. Although such a subject interests them in principle, they feel that they are not sure yet as to how to present textual material in the predominantly visual medium of television. In general Sergei first said that there is no place for cultural programmes in local television, that it does not interest the policy makers and they almost do not allot any budget for cultural programmes (one may note that some of the Menshikovs' programmes were funded by the Local Ministry of Culture, as noted in the previous paragraph, which shows they have to rely on external sponsors- AV). The classics of Ural literature may sometimes be referred to (Bazhov, Mamin-Sibiriak) but no mention is made

of the contemporary literary and artistic scene, although there is much that is interesting nowadays. Later Sergei corrected himself and said that nowadays it seems there is slightly more interest in culture in local television, but did not give specific details. A slightly larger number of cultural programmes exist on national television, he said, especially on the "Kul'tura" channel and some on NTV and ORT. As their financial resources are greater than these in the provinces, Sergei notes that they should have put more emphasis on cultural programmes (as they can afford it).

As a general comment Sergei expressed his dislike of the fact local television tries to copy (usually unsuccessfully) national television, which in its turn tries to copy (also not always successfully) Western television. He complained of unprofessionalism in the field and of lack of support to creative people who may have a lot to offer.

My second, shorter, interview was with Natalia Menshikova, an Art History graduate. She talked about her attitude to television and culture. She explained that local politicians are the main source of financing local television channels. When these politicians start their career they always want to create a cultured image, and thus they fund some cultural programmes. Very soon, however, they realise that such programmes are not profitable and stop funding them. The programmes most frequent on local TV are political ones, as the politicians fund them. In my interview with her husband Sergei he expressed the same view as well.

She explained that nowadays viewers in Russia are used to the colourful and quick-moving standards of Western television, and thus are not interested in literary adaptations, which, she says, even when were made recently, are still usually made in "older" style.

Ekaterinburg 2002: Anonymous Interviews Analysis

Here is a summary of some interviews I conducted with people in Ekaterinburg about their viewing habits: Q: What are your favourite television programmes and why? A: (female in her 50s) 'Tushite svet', serial 'Den'gi', 'Rastitel'naia zhizn' ' and 'Poka vse doma'. The first is enjoyed as a political satire for both the humour and the political commentary. The last two are enjoyed as examples of human interest programmes in which famous people are interviewed in their homes or dachas and discuss their personal lives. These programmes specifically are felt to show a decent non-sensational mode of life that appeals to the viewer. (female in her 30s)

Watches only films, especially foreign quality films, and considers all other programmes on television to be a waste of time. (male in his late 20s) Favourite television channel is TVS, as considers them to have a good feel of the times and their news are more objective than other channels'.

Q: Have you got favourite advertisements and why? A: (female in her 50s) No (female in her 30s) No (male in his late 20s) Several. For example an ad to coffee 'Tsif', because I like coffee and the ad creates a nice atmosphere which I associate with drinking coffee Q: How much do you trust what you hear on the news on television? (female in her 50s) Oppositional mode.

Watching several channels to compare and try to understand what is the reality behind the news (Soviet-style reading between the lines with the additional practise of comparing various sources of information freely provided). Explains that most people of her generation have this practise of watching the news. (female in her 30s) Does not watch the news at all, thinks it is a waste of time. (female in her late 20s) Does not watch the news at all, finds it distressing. (male in his late 20s)

Negotiating mode. Watches and trusts news on TVS, is aware of the fact that although they are relatively a free channel one still needs to read between the lines in order to achieve objective information. Trusts more than news on television the radio news of 'Ekho Moskv'y'. The male respondent who watches the news finds that people with his interests, people 'like him', are sometimes represented on television, the other respondents were vague about this question and did not seem to orient themselves vs. television representation.

Ekaterinburg 2002: Viewers Diaries Analysis

Viewer Diaries were based on a list of questions devised by Dr Hutchings and Dr Vernitski, which you may view if you click on [Viewer Diary Form](#).

Here is the analysis of results collected during summer and autumn 2002:

1) Viewer no. 1, female in her late 50s:

Summer:

The viewer is married with two grown-up children already not living at home but sometimes coming to visit, she is an engineer working full-time (although passed pensionable age). The viewer has a clear division of programmes she watches by herself and those she watches with her family (husband and sometimes the grown-up children). She also has a clear division of weekday and weekend watching habits. During weekdays she watches television between 7 PM to midnight (sometimes starting later or rarely finishing later). She watches in average on weekdays between 1 to 5 hours. On weekends she watches television sometimes during the day as well as in the evenings, partly on her own in the kitchen or while ironing and partly with the family.

The first hours of watching television she watches by herself, usually in the kitchen while preparing the dinner. In these hours she watches programmes such as Agatha Christie films, a concert on television, programmes about art on the 'Kul'tura' channel or sometime a film. These are usually the programmes she watches less attentively, sometimes only the beginning or the end of a programme. She notes that the Agatha Christie films are usually repeats, so that they do not encourage an attentive mode of watching but are rather a pleasant background to household chores.

Later in the evening she watches programmes with her husband, and sometime the grown-up children join them. These programmes they watch in the living room, or - if she and her husband are cooking together (such as making jam) - in the kitchen. The programmes they watch together are usually news on the local channels, sometimes programmes about art on 'Kul'tura'. She watches them with a varying degree of attentiveness, sometimes chatting to members of the family while watching. On weekdays always watches the satirical programme 'Tushite svet' on TVS, usually with other members of the family. This is the most regular programme she watches and tries not to miss.

On weekends the viewer watches television during the day as well, sometimes while having breakfast or while doing household chores. She usually watches these programmes with other members of the family and often chats to them while watching. She watches on weekends programmes like 'Puteshestvie naturalista' (NTV), 'Poka vse doma' (ORT), 'Zavtrak s Solovievom' (TVS) and 'Rastitel'naia zhizn' ' (NTV) - all programmes designated for family watching by their modes of address.

The viewer notes that some programmes she watches as entertainment (such as Agatha Christie film) and some for information (such as the news), while about watching programmes about art she notes that they are 'dليا dushi'. She also wrote that she specifically watches only news on local channels and not on the central channels, as the central channels keep talking and showing mostly reports about the war in Chechnia, which she finds depressing and feels helpless watching them. Local news give information that is relevant to her daily life. She also notes that her favourite talk show is 'Vremena' on ORT (presented by Pozner). She appreciates the professionalism of the programme and especially of its presenter.

Autumn:

The respondent sometime watches television on her own and sometimes with her family, with varying degrees of attentiveness. She almost only watches the news on local channels, only once in the period of a fortnight does she note watching the news on ORT. She watches television either in the living room or in the kitchen, more on weekends than on weekdays.

In weekends she watches the same programmes with her family over breakfast or dinner: 'Poka vse doma' (ORT) and 'Rastitel'naia zhizn' ' (ORT).

On weekdays she watches the news with varying degrees of attentiveness, sometimes while doing household chores, sometimes on her own and sometimes with other members of the family. She tends to watch the news in the kitchen. She sometimes watches films that are repeated in the schedule, but then with a low level of attentiveness and usually while doing household chores. She noted watching the serial 'Linia zashchita' on RTR with moderate to low attentiveness, sometimes while doing household chores, because 'the actor is nice'. But she watched attentively and with interest the new talk show on Kul'tura, 'Shkola zlosloviia', presented by the writer Tatiana Tol'staia. This talk show was only launched recently and seems to generate much interest according to the viewers diaries and Internet discussion forum. She also watches occasionally the satirical programme 'Tushite svet' (TVS).

2. Viewer no. 2, female in her late 20s:

Summer:

The viewer is single and lives with her parents, a programmer working full-time. The viewer notes in general that she watches television rarely, and especially tries not to watch the news. She also mentions the war in Chechnia as a topic that depresses her, and she adds that most of the news is of that quality (useless and depressing), even on local channels. She professes to never switch on the television herself, but rather watching causally if others at home are watching. She prefers to watch musical programmes, especially on MTV and MuzTV, as well as some films on television (especially on the weekly programme 'Kult kino' on TVS). She also watches regularly the satirical programme 'Tushite svet' on TVS. She sometimes watches programmes about art on channel 'Kul'tura', especially about the theatre. She hates ads, and if watching a programme on

television she flicks channels every time ads appear to watch a musical clip, as many Russian channels use musical clips as a 'slot filler'.

The viewer watches the art programmes with other members of the family, but the music programmes she usually watches by herself (there is a clear contradiction here between her image of herself as not initiating television viewing and her recording of her experience - AV). She watches programmes with a varying degree of attentiveness, yet does not note doing anything else while watching, except eating. She often watches only a couple of a minutes of a programme and then switches to doing something else. she sometimes enjoy watching 'Kult kino', which she watches usually on her own, and 'Tushite svet', which she watches with other members of the family. She watches in average between 1 - 2 a day, with days when she does not watch television at all.

Autumn:

The respondent's pattern of watching television is divided to chosen programmes and random watching. She notes that she tries to watch every night during weekdays the short satirical programme 'Tushite svet'. Because this programme comments (ironically) on current events it encourages continual watching as a habit. She also watches films on channel 'Kul'tura', and within the two weeks when holding the diary she mentions watching one film. Film in this channel tend to be either classics or quality films which make a difference from the usual diet of mainstream or low quality American films usually shown on Russian television. Regarding random watching, the respondent watches between half an hour an hour television in the evening, either while doing house chores or out of boredom. In these cases she watches films or talk shows on channel 'Kul'tura', usually without much attention and not from beginning till end.

3. Viewer no. 3, female in her early 30s:

Summer:

The viewer is married with a 4 year old boy, working part time as a Art History teacher in a local Higher Education Institute. Her diary covers both a week when she was in town and a week of holiday with relatives in another region. This gives an interesting picture of patterns of viewing on holiday as opposed to usual viewing. Yet the viewer hardly watches the local channels and thus she watched the same channels on holiday and at home

The viewer watches television between 3 - 4 hours a day on weekdays, and between 5 - 7 hours a day on weekends or on holiday with relatives. She usually watches on weekdays in the evening, while on weekends this can be throughout the day. She watches the news every day, sometimes on several central channels: ORT, NTV, RTR and EvroNews. She also watches films and serials such as Agatha Christie films and 'Kamenskaia', and sometimes the talk show 'Okna'. She usually watches television with her family and usually not very attentively. On one Sunday she notes to have watched television in the evenings with friends who came to visit.

The viewer states that she usually watches television out of habit, does not choose favourite programmes but rather watches what is on when she feels like watching television. Sometimes she explains that she had watched television and read a book at the same time. One day she noted to watch television while doing household chores.

4. Viewer no. 4, male in his late 20s:

Summer:

The viewer is single and living with his parents, he works as a journalist in several local newspapers. He does not watch television every day, and when watching it is usually between 1 - 2 hours. He watches television only late at night, not earlier than 11 PM. He sometimes watches television with his parents, but mostly by himself after midnight. He usually watches the news both on central and local channels, also watches quite regularly 'Tushite svet' and sometimes a programme about travel or a film. The films are usually not watched attentively, and mostly not to the end. When he watches by himself he usually watches the news attentively and other programmes with varying attentiveness, when watching with his parents he usually watches not so attentively. The viewer does not note doing anything else while watching, except occasionally having late supper. In most entries the viewer notes that it is important to him that it is quiet when he watches television, which is usually the case as he watches late (usually till midnight but

sometimes later). He watches television no more than 2 or 3 days a week. The viewer gives as reasons for watching a programme the fact that it is interesting or that he enjoys watching while having his supper. On one occasion he notes that he has watched television especially attentively, as an item on several of the local channels news programmes were about a project he himself initiated.

5. Female, 27 years old:

Summer:

The respondent is married with a small child, and her parents live with them as well. She is a teacher at the university. She watches television between 2 - 3 hours on weekdays and about 4 hours on weekends. On weekdays she watches television during the evening, while on weekends her watching patterns change to watching in various hours of the day. On weekdays she usually watches television with her mother, some of the programme are chosen by her and some by the mother. During weekends she watches television with all the family, or when the parents are away in the family dacha she watches with her husband. On weekdays she watches television out of habit and because her mother has the television on, even if she is busy in household chores during that time or is watching with low attentiveness. On weekends she watches television, especially in the evening, as part of the pattern of spending time with her husband. On weekends she noted the only children's programme she watches with her daughter, which is 'Sesame Street'. The programmes she watches on weekends during the day are the ones she chooses to watch, while in the evening she tends to watch what is shown on television without much specific choice. The respondent always flicks channels in order to avoid ads. She also flicks channels while watching a film repeated on the schedule. Her reasons for watching television vary. She watches the news in order to be informed but most of the other programmes she watches out of habit, boredom or because this is what is on at the time. The exceptions are the serial 'Chto skazal pokoinik' (ASV) which she enjoys and tries to watch regularly, and the programme 'Svoia igra' (NTV) which she also chooses to watch. She does not require silence at home while watching television; she seems to accommodate, while watching television, to the tastes of other members of the family as well as to household chores to be done at the same time. The only day she noted not to have watched television is an evening when she was going out, so television is an essential part of her evening relaxation when she is at home.

6. Male, 27 years old:

Summer:

The respondent is married to respondent no. 4, he is a Production Manager in an advertising agency and also teaches at the university. He watches television between half an hour and an hour and a half on weekday, and about 4 hours on weekends. Like his wife, he watches in the evenings programmes which are usually not of his choice, while during the day on weekends he watches programmes he chooses. Interestingly, he notes that on weekends he usually prefers to watch television when nobody disturbs him and he can watch attentively, although on one occasion on the weekend he writes that he enjoyed playing with his daughter while watching television with a low level of attentiveness.

He watches television with his wife or with his wife and mother-in-law, with a varying degree of attentiveness. While watching television, he sometimes talks to members of the family, answers the phone, is busy with household chores (yet less frequently than his wife according to her diary) reads a book or works at the computer. Sometimes he watches television only in order to make fun of the wife and mother-in-law who enjoy the serial 'Chto skazal pokoinik' (see no. 3). He flicks through the channels when ads are shown. Like his wife, watching television is an integral part of his relaxation unless he is going out. The reasons he gives for watching television are boredom or need to relax, once he states that he has watched television in order to find something to do while his wife puts their child to sleep. Only once he notes watching television in order to learn a specific piece of news about the war in Chechnia. Once he also gives as reason to watching television the fact that new interesting ads are shown, which he watches out of professional interest.

7. Male, 28 years old male:

The diary covers two weeks in October 2002:

The respondent is a journalist specialising in art and culture. He lives with his parents, and in average watches television for two hours a day in the evenings, with his parents in the living room. He mostly watches programmes about current affairs in channel TVS and sometime ORT (no record of watching local channels). A programme he watches every day is the satirical short new analysis `Tushite svet' (evidence to its popularity may be seen in the fact it is mentioned in most of the diaries). He sometimes watches talk shows on channel `Kul'tura'. While watching television he usually is quite attentive, sitting and having tea (sometimes having dinner while watching). He does not note requiring silence while watching television yet stressed that he mostly watches programmes he chooses or is happy about watching and that his motives for watching television are `to know what is happening in the country'.

An exception to the respondent's usual routine are the days of the terrorist attack on the theatre in Moscow. During these days he reports to watching television between 4 to 6 hours daily, first concentrating on news reports and then on analytical programmes dealing with the situation and its aftermath. During that time he partly listen to the radio in order to get extra information, alternating between radio and television. The radio stations he chooses to back up information with are dissident ('Ekho Moskv') or foreign (Russian BBC and Radio Liberty).