

Interview: Der Weg ist das Ziel – Der Skandal um die Große Nierenspenden Show

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Trotz Kritik im Vorfeld wurde am 1. Juni 2007 ‚De Grote Donor Show‘ in den Niederlanden ausgestrahlt: Eine kranke Frau wählt einen Kandidaten aus, dem sie durch eine Nierenspende das Leben rettet. Die Show war nur ein Fake, Teil einer Kampagne, um die öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit auf den prekären Mangel an Spendernieren zu lenken. Kai Hanke sprach für merz mit Laurens Drillich, Chairman beim verantwortlichen öffentlich-rechtlichen Fernsehsender BNN, über das kontroverse TV-Event.

merz: „The Great Donor Show“ was a programm produced by Endemol N. V., however BNN was responsible for broadcasting the show. Who took the initiative for the show and what were the motives for broadcasting it?

Drillich: Endemol came up with the plan, one year prior to broadcasting. BNN is known for cutting edge programs and BNN wanted to honour founder Bart de Graff, who died in May 2002 of a kidney-related disease. Therefore the rough idea of Endemol was immediately considered seriously. The goal was to attract the maximum amount of publicity of the deplorable state of organ donorship in the Netherlands. Less people registering, less attention in the media, no political moves.

merz: It suggests itself that ethical issues related to the specifically unusual combination of format (casting show) and theme (organ donation) of the show must have been pre-estimated by its producers. Can you describe BNN’s process of considering arguments leading to the decision to finally broadcast the show? Did you have any experiences with previous shows that helped you in this process?

Drillich: We felt it was right from the beginning. It was an extreme measure, but it’s also an extreme situation. If some 200 people die unnecessarily every year, ethics become a theoretical issue. How unethical is not doing anything? BNN has made controversial shows before that attracted a lot of attention prior to broadcasting. So far every time we have been right: after broadcasting usually the critics would be silent or we would even be applauded for our efforts and programs.

merz: After the show a good deal of those who criticized it beforehand considered „The Great Donor Show“ a very intelligent instrument to draw attention to the serious lack of organ donors. However, it seemed that there have been much more proponents in the Netherlands than in Germany. Why are the responses to the show so divers in different countries?

Drillich: I have no idea how Germany responded, but we noticed that the international media loved to jump this

case when they still thought that they were reporting on a scandal coming from the Netherlands and after it was known that this was not the case, they moved on (to another scandal somewhere, or a Paris Hilton prison term) without reporting properly what had happened during and after our Donor Show, leaving people in many countries ill-informed. Also, we tried to change the situation in the Netherlands, we felt it was not our responsibility to do so in other countries, including Germany.

merz: In Germany some media critics blamed BNN, or Endemol respectively, for using some people's distress in need for a kidney to force up BNN's viewer level (see Funk Korrespondenz 23/2007). What is your opinion on this reproval?

Drillich That is a joke and an insult. BNN is a public broadcaster that is not depending on ratings or advertisement. Endemol did not make any money on this onetime show that had a total budget of under € 200.000. Journalists should do their homework properly and not resort to easy prejudices. These fine media critics should ask the opinion of people on the waiting list for organs in the Netherlands if BNN acted immoral. Who better to judge ?

merz: Retrospectively the Donor Show was interpreted as an inventive sort of Guerilla Marketing with much more potential for publicity campaigns than conventional instruments may display. Considering responses before and after the show, does BNN plan to realize media events comparable to „The Great Donor Show“ in the near future?

Drillich: We would be crazy to say that we will. So no, we won't.