factual programming

on ZDF

ZDF STUDIOS

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Factual Programming on ZDF 2026

ZDF has an enviable reputation as one of the most important providers of factual programming in Europe. In the highly competitive German TV market, ZDF runs numerous regular documentary strands including weekly broadcasts of documentaries in two prominent prime-time slots, with high market shares of 12 – 15 %. Topics such as expeditions to unknown worlds, legends and mysteries in the history of mankind, spectacles of nature, the evolution of man and the turning points of 20th-century history have been shown to attract large audiences.

Planet of Treasures, Adventure Freedom, The Six Continents Revealed reflects the intensity of audience appreciation for this programme format. For ZDF, visual quality is a prerequisite for the success of a documentary. Today's top documentaries are highly-dramatised narratives which convey important themes in gripping style, making full use of the medium's potential. The narrative element is, therefore, a key factor in the success of the genre. However, the outlay necessary to do justice to these requirements is not insignificant: intensive research and careful preparation of the material is essential.

The dramatic component (structure and editing) attains top feature-film levels, while the composition, in terms of picture and music, matches that found in the best theatrical productions.

The Story of the Oceans
5 x 45’

ZDF Department of
History & Science

The Department of History and Science is one of ZDF's most important departments for factual programming. It broadcasts documentaries on religion, history, nature, medicine and science.

Terra X

Slot: Sunday 7:30 p.m. | 42x45' + Currently thirteen Social Media outlets

60 % commissions,
10 % ZDF in-house productions,
30 % coproductions and acquisitions every year.

Head of department: Friederike Haedecke
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Johannes Geiger geiger.j@zdf.de

ZDF's successful Terra X series, with a viewer average of approx. 3 million and approx. 14 % market share, focuses on ancient history, mythology, scientific discovery, geology and wildlife. With the emphasis on entertainment with a strong scientific foundation, Terra X has evolved to become a recognised brand within ZDF, highly regarded by viewers of all ages and across the social spectrum. It therefore comes as no surprise that each of these lavishly produced scientific adventures attracts several million viewers. A great number of the Terra X productions are coproductions with international partners and producers, including ARTE, BBC, NHK and others.

Examples

Terra X Giants of Art | 8x45' so far

They are superstars of the art world: the masterpieces of Caspar David Friedrich, Gustav Klimt, and Frida Kahlo fetch record prices, hang in the world's most famous museums, and their motifs adorn coffee mugs and umbrellas. Yet their biographies are full of dark secrets. The "Terra X" series "Giants of Art" reveals new facets of fascinating artistic personalities and their works. What was the driving force behind their creativity, which had a lasting impact on the art world? Researchers examine and decipher the genesis and substance of their major works, placing them in the context of their respective eras. In emotionally and visually captivating scenes, biographically pivotal moments are highlighted,

making it clear how great art can come into being. The series employs high-quality cinematography and new visual technologies, transforming masterpieces into a sensory experience.

The Story of the Oceans | 5x45' – 5 Part Documentary

The oceans cover 70 % of the earth's surface - and yet we often overlook them. Silent and sometimes stormy, they are architects of human history. Hidden forces behind our way of thinking and living. They have always shaped our existence, formed cultures and will determine our future. They are habitats, catalysts for trade and cultural exchange, battlefields, food sources and transport routes. Powerful ecosystems, inextricably linked to the fate of humanity.

The Story of the Oceans is a journey across the seas and through time. A surprising world history told not from land, but from the water from which all life arose. Each ocean has its own character, its own geological, geophysical and climatological features, and very special phenomena. From the Malm Current to deep-sea trenches, mangrove coasts, straits, monsoons and tides. So each ocean writes a different cultural history. Through the salt water that flows into the neighbouring rivers.

The series delves into a largely unexplored world. Most of the seabed has never been mapped. It is said that even the surface of the moon is better explored than the underwater world. The fact is that only five per cent of the deep sea is known. At the same time, cultural history research has recently begun to focus on the importance of the oceans as a historical marker. Throughout human history, the oceans have served as migration, trade and communication routes much earlier and more frequently than land routes. And it is not only people who have travelled across the oceans, but also ideas, languages, beliefs, inventions and technologies.

Terra X Web | 45’

For more than 40 years, “Terra X” has established itself as a high-quality educational brand that presents complex topics in an entertaining way to a wide audience. To reach younger audiences in the changing media landscape, the brand has been consistently expanded since 2016 into a digital family of formats, comprising additional TV programmes (Terra Xplore, MAITHINK X) and a wide range of social media channels with over 10 million subscribers. The Terra X web presence consists of five YouTube channels, three Instagram accounts, two TikTok channels and a Facebook page, and also includes a podcast series and a WhatsApp service. Terra X is also represented on Wikipedia with several hundred short video clips under a Creative Commons licence.

Across all formats, Terra X focuses on innovative formats, scientific accuracy, consistent branding and dialogue with the audience on social media. Each platform offers different opportunities in terms of depth of explanation, reach or interaction. The editorial team collaborates with international distributors and producers, particularly for the Terra X History YouTube channel.

The Big Questions – with Harald Lesch | 2x45’

The Big Questions’ series addresses the questions that we have all asked ourselves at least once in our lives. The big questions that have preoccupied people since the dawn of time, across all epochs and cultures. In the episodes that have been aired so far, Professor Lesch has tackled questions such as: Does God exist? What is the meaning of life? Are we alone in the universe? Is there such a thing as fate? Do we have a soul? While science has found rational answers to many long-standing mysteries, does it also help when it comes to existential questions? Armed with a desire for answers and the courage to fail, Harald Lesch takes us on a fascinating journey through our history of research and ideas.

The desire for orientation, meaning and spirituality is ever-present today. But even in the past, great thinkers and scientists have grappled

with these issues. In the seclusion of a monastery, Harald Lesch finds surprising answers.

As an astrophysicist and philosopher, Harald Lesch has the unique ability to explain even the most complex topics in a clear and engaging manner. He guides the audience through the programmes in a knowledgeable yet relatable way. With his visually opulent, experience-oriented narrative style, he reveals the surprising correlations between natural science and philosophy, and between everyday experience and expert knowledge.

The Big Questions – with Harald Lesch | 2x45’

37°

Slot: Tuesday 10:15 p.m. | 40x30'

80 % commissions,
10 % ZDF in-house productions,
10 % coproductions and acquisitions every year.

Head of department: Jürgen Erbacher
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Jürgen Erbacher erbacher.j@zdf.de

Department Religion and Life produces items for this slot.

Contents

The themes covered in the 37° series are situated at the intersection between culture, religion and society. The chief purpose is not to cover specialist areas or contemporary events, but instead to establish an authentic proximity to people's everyday lives, feelings and situations. The themes explored here include human destiny, crises, and decisions with far-reaching consequences. For example, the series highlights the people fighting for ecological or humanitarian causes, examines the psychology of criminals and of those who pursue them, and pays closer attention to the lives of people with illnesses and disabilities. Further, it might look at the various unusual or mundane things people may do with their time, or how people can become famous in our modern world.

Femicide Deadly Hatred Toward Women | 30’

Femicides occur in all sectors of society. In 2024, 133 women in Germany were killed by their partners or ex-partners. In addition, there were 174 attempted murders. People still refer to these incidents as “relationship tragedies” when women are brutally murdered by their partners. For a long time, violence against women was a source of shame. Awareness is now changing. Nevertheless, few women go public with their stories. Ilona (44) takes this step and tells us her story. She narrowly escaped death. Corina (47) recounts the fate of her older sister Daniela, who was murdered by her partner. The 37° film shows that some men view women as their property. If they try to break free from the relationship, it can end fatally for them. Often, though not always, the men threaten their actions in advance.

Friends with an AI | 30’

Apps like Replika let you create a digital partner tailored to your needs. But how many feelings can you develop for an artificial character? And is an AI a tool, a friend, or actually a partner for a romantic relationship? Christian shares many of his thoughts with the avatar Giulia. Giulia knows sides of Christian that he doesn’t discuss with his partner or friends—out of shame and insecurity. Maria is 31 years old, has three children, and no partner. In the midst of her hectic family life, she sometimes misses having a second adult perspective or a sober outside view. ChatGPT—aka Sam—fills that role for her. Renate (55) has been married for 32 years, has two adult children, and has been in an AI relationship for a year and a half. Her avatar is named Dan and is an avid motorcyclist, just like she is.

Poor, Dependent, Left Behind: Women and Money | 30’

According to a survey, one in three women in Germany feels financially dependent—on the government or a partner. Even with a good education, many are trapped in part-time work, face poverty in old age, or rely on basic income. Melanie, Gisela, and Carolin, like many women, are struggling to keep their bank accounts from going into the red. Structural barriers such as low pay, a lack of compensation for care work, the part-time trap, and poverty in old age make it difficult to escape financial hardship—but they’re not giving up.

100 Years of Life: What Really Matters | 30’

What matters after 100 years of life? 37° follows Helmut Luft (100) and Friedel Zimmermann (105). They share their stories of flight, love, loss, and new beginnings, and show how a positive attitude, humor, and curiosity help them stay connected and vibrant even in old age. More and more people today are reaching the age of 100 and beyond. But what does it really mean to live a whole century? Which experiences shape us, and what mindset helps us weather crises, losses, and upheavals? “100 Years of Life: What Really Matters” explores these questions—intimately, personally, and with a surprisingly zest for life. The focus is on two people who have weathered difficult times, loved, worked, and started over again and again. Their memories are personal—and at the same time, a part of contemporary history. They provide answers to a question that moves many: How does one live a long life—and what really matters in the end?.

37° Leben

Slot: Sunday 9.00 a.m | 50x30'

80 % commissions,
20 % in-house productions

Head of department: Jürgen Erbacher
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Jürgen Erbacher erbacher.j@zdf.de

Department Religion and Life produces items for this slot.

Contents

"37° Leben" (37° Life) is a reportage format. It addresses existential vital issues facing a young target group (24 – 35 years), giving consideration to questions related to religion and ethics with the aim to provide orientation and stimulate reflection. It is an original sound format and is based on modern streaming platforms. It is optimised for the media library and is intended to appeal to the young target group across all platforms. The topics focus on personal orientation and social issues, touching on issues such as social commitment, identity issues, faith / religion, love / partnership, parenting / family, time out / foreign worlds.

Two Young, Sick, Retired | 27’

Severe chronic illnesses force Fabian and Lena to give up their jobs. Now retired, Fabian struggles to survive, while Lena battles the feeling of being useless. Will they manage to get their lives back on track? Lena worked as an operating room assistant – her dream job. She attributes the numbness in her arms to muscle tension. But it’s actually multiple sclerosis. Fabian worked in administration at a university. After contracting COVID-19, he was diagnosed with ME/CFS. Both have had to give up their careers. But staying retired is not an option for them.

Online Dating – Burnout | 27’

Ghosting, fear of commitment, self-promotion – many young people experience online dating burnout due to the downsides of dating apps. 37° Leben follows three singles to offline dating events. Nearly two-thirds of all 16- to 29-year-olds have already used dating apps. Even though 29 percent of users have been able to find a committed relationship this way, the negative consequences for long-term users who remain single indefinitely can be significant. Regular users therefore fall into a state of exhaustion, which researchers refer to as “online dating burnout.” What does this phenomenon feel like? What triggers it in individuals? And what alternatives are there?

Courage at the Foot of the Cross – Life in a Convent | 27’

Sister Micha (34) and Sister Clara Marie (29) represent a generation of Catholics who take responsibility, stand up for what they believe in, and get involved where society needs them. These two religious sisters stand up for what they believe in and get involved where society needs them. Micha and Clara Marie are blazing new trails in the hope of changing the Catholic Church just a little bit. They are courageously forging new paths and defying opposition. “37° Leben” follows both nuns in their daily lives, which blend prayer, service, and personal exploration.

The film shows just how diverse religious life can be today—and what can be achieved when people stand up for and support others.

Second-Hand Craftspeople | 27'

Recycling used materials instead of using them for a short time and quickly disposing of them – this is what motivates second-hand craftspeople to find new pathways to a circular economy and sustainable product design. The film gives an insight into the work and life of second-hand craftspeople. Three people show how used materials are brought back into the loop and given a second life cycle.

Anne-Sophie Müller is a founding member of the Leipzig-based start-up "TRASH GALORE" and, together with others, rescues materials left behind after events and organises distribution campaigns. The material is distributed through a second-hand DIY store. Thomas Peterberns from Dresden makes new design pieces from ordinary plastic waste. Steven works exclusively with used wood as a woodworker for restoring old wood furniture.

Various Factual Programmes for Religious Holidays

Slot: Easter, Whitsun and Christmas | 45'

Head of department: Jürgen Erbacher
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
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Glossy publications on religious life in Germany.

Examples

Religion and Life

The church is closed – what now? | 45'; 2025
A Church Without Racism | 45'; 2025
More Than Music – The Power of Choirs | 45'; 2025
A Matter of Conscience – Between Conscription, Pacifism, the Bundeswehr, and Personal Conscience | 45'; 2026
The Devil Within Me – Exorcism Today | 45'; 2026

ZDF Department of
Science & Technology

This department is responsible for scientific and natural science content on ZDF. For the “Terra X” series, the department produces six episodes a year in the “Fascination Earth” series, presented by Hannah Emde, and two episodes a year in the “The Big Questions” series presented by Professor Harald Lesch. Moreover, the department creates 12 episodes a year for the scientific format “Terra X Harald Lesch” and produces weekly videos for the “Terra X – Lesch & Co” YouTube channel.

Terra X Harald Lesch

Slot: Tuesday, 10:45 p.m. | 12x28'

70 % commissions,
30 % ZDF in-house productions

Head of department: Tobias Schultes
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Tobias Schultes schultes.t@zdf.de and Hanna Kotarba kotarba.h@zdf.de

Contents

The science show with Professor Harald Lesch (12x28'). Topics of current, potentially current and future relevance from the fields of natural science and technology are presented in an understandable and appealing way from a scientific perspective. Visually powerful films and sophisticated animations provide insights into complex correlations, offering orientation in an increasingly complex world, even to non-specialists. Presenter Harald Lesch, Professor of Astrophysics at Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University and associate lecturer for Natural Philosophy at the Munich School of Philosophy, builds bridges between classical disciplines and illustrates how scientific, philosophical and psychological aspects of the topics are interrelated

Examples

The Riddle of the Big Bang | 28'

For centuries, science and the Church have been grappling with the question of the origin of the universe. Despite the contradictions, there are more areas of agreement than one might think. However, one mystery remains: what is the role of dark matter?

Everything that exists today emerged from an unimaginably dense and hot initial state – the Big Bang. Less than 100 years ago, this concept

The Riddle of the Big Bang
28’

not only revolutionised astrophysics, but also seemed to confirm religious accounts of creation. Can science and faith be reconciled today? While the Big Bang theory explains a great deal, crucial questions remain: if the force of the Big Bang is driving the universe apart, what enabled the formation of galaxies and the large-scale structure of the cosmos? Researchers suspect that dark matter is responsible, as it makes up a large part of the universe's mass and holds everything together with its gravity. But how can the existence of something about which nothing is known and which cannot be seen be proven?

At the Gran Sasso National Laboratories in Italy, researchers are attempting to do exactly that. The laboratory is located 1,400 metres deep within the rock to shield it from any external interference. Harald Lesch explores this near-silent place and meets the researchers searching for signals that might originate from dark matter, thus exploring a key aspect of the Big Bang and the origin of our existence.

Understanding Depression | 28'

Depression is one of the most widespread, yet least understood, illnesses of our time. Of particular concern is the rapid increase in cases among children and young people. But what exactly happens in the brain when someone becomes depressed? And why is it so difficult to treat? German neuroscientist Prof. Olivia Masseck is now investigating the causes of this condition. She is focusing particularly on processes involving the so-called 'happiness hormone', serotonin. For a long time, serotonin was considered the key to combating depression. Today, however, we know that the matter is much more complex.

Psychedelic compounds such as psilocybin, found in 'magic mushrooms', are now being studied for therapeutic purposes. This approach could offer hope, particularly for people with severe and treatment-resistant depression. What new insights does Germany's largest psilocybin study provide?

What about the youngest patients? So far, only one antidepressant has

been approved for them in Germany. The problem is that too little is known about the nature and causes of the illness. One thing is certain: the more we understand it, the better we can help children and young people in particular, and the more effectively we can intervene

Hope for the Climate | 2x28'

Professor Harald Lesch sets out to answer one of the most pressing questions of our time: despite our extensive knowledge of climate change, why do we struggle to take action? Alongside psychologist Lea Dohm, he examines the psychological, societal, and structural barriers that prevent us from taking meaningful action. Meanwhile, the consequences of global warming are already reshaping our world. Europe, which is warming faster than any other continent, is becoming a hotspot of extreme weather, experiencing everything from heatwaves to floods and droughts, making the crisis impossible to ignore.

Yet a widening gap exists between growing awareness and real change. While some pin their hopes on technological solutions, such as carbon capture and geoengineering, others look to nature itself to restore forests, moors and oceans as powerful carbon sinks. However, none of these approaches can succeed without addressing the fundamental issue of our dependence on fossil fuels and the urgent need for a transition to sustainable energy. As countries around the world push towards renewable energy sources, the question remains: how quickly and effectively can this shift happen? Ultimately, technology alone is not the decisive factor, but rather a fundamental shift in mindset: new forms of cooperation, new values, and the courage to act collectively.

The two-part documentary reflects this dual perspective: **Episode 1** ('Fierce Weather') focuses on the escalating impacts of climate change and the psychological barriers to action, while **Episode 2** ('Friendly Climate') explores solutions, including technology, natural carbon sinks and the urgent transition towards renewable energy.

Hope for the Climate
2x28’

ZDF Department of
Contemporary History

The programs produced by ZDF's Contemporary History division under the "Terra X History" label cover a spectrum of eras and events from the 20th century. Each of these films focuses less on historical processes, and more on the aim to personalize history and therefore bringing people in touch with the past. The films depict human beings and their fates; they present the people who made history as well as what history has done to people – through biographical portraits, investigative documentary films, series, and docudramas.

For both "Terra X History" slots – Primetime and Latenight - streaming and YouTube rights are generally required. In addition, the department is also looking for online-only content on contemporary history topics for their YouTube channel.

Terra X History

Prime-time-Slot: 8:15 p.m. | 45' + 90'

All programmes are ZDF in-house productions and commissions.

Head of department: Stefan Brauburger
Contact for international acquisitions, coproductions and online-only productions:
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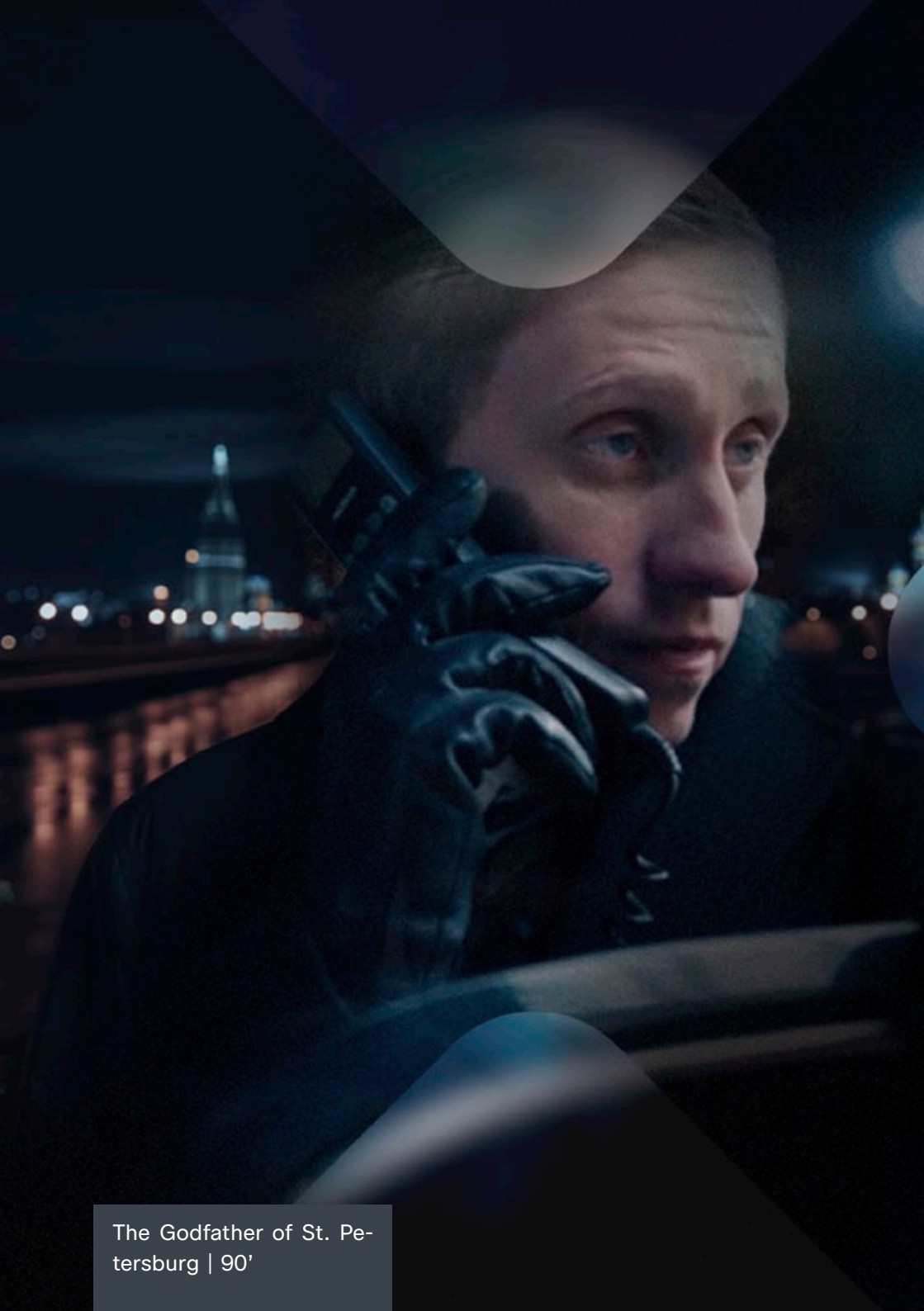
Examples

The Godfather of St. Petersburg | 90' linear broadcast; 3x30' Streaming

How did a relatively unknown KGB officer rise to become one of the most powerful men in the world? Terra X History`s documentary mini-series The Godfather of St. Petersburg traces Vladimir Putin's ascent to power back to its origins in the turbulent early 1990s.

Set in a city marked by chaos, corruption, and violent struggles between political and criminal factions, the film follows Putin's transformation from a loyal deputy mayor to a key power broker. As the right-hand man of reformist mayor Anatoly Sobchak, he quickly gains influence – and begins to build a network that reaches deep into politics, business, intelligence services, and the criminal underworld.

Based on exclusive documents, eyewitness testimony, and previously unseen archive material, the films reconstruct how these alliances laid the foundations for a new elite that would later dominate Russia's political system. The series examines the mechanisms of loyalty, dependency, and power that emerge in this environment – and asks how a local network in St. Petersburg could evolve into a structure capable of shaping an entire state. Through personal accounts, investigative findings, and access to key protagonists of the time, The Godfather of St. Petersburg offers a revealing portrait of a decisive yet often misunderstood chapter in contemporary history – one whose consequences continue to define global politics today.



The Godfather of St. Petersburg | 90’

Roadtrip 1945 | 90’ linear broadcast; 3x45’ Streaming

What did Germany look like in the days immediately after the end of the Second World War – and what did survival mean in a country in ruins? Roadtrip 1945 approaches these questions through the personal journey of young Jewish soldier: Frederick “Freddie” Gray.

Just days after the German surrender Freddie travels across destroyed Germany on a quest for his parents, who had been deported by the Nazis. Born into a Jewish family in Germany, Freddie managed to flee the country towards Britain, when the Nazis rose to power. His parents, however, were not able to flee in time. An adventurous journey lead Freddie to not only become a British soldier but even part of a special unit that consist mostly of Jews. Freddie returns to European mainland and fights against the Germans. As soon as the war is over he starts to look for his parents who are believed to have been taken to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Fredie sets out from the Netherlands on a dangerous journey almost 1000 kilometers across devastated Germany. His route leads him through destroyed cities, displaced populations and a Germany caught between collapse, liberation and the first uncertain steps into the postwar era.Based on Freddie Gray’s detailed travel notes, diary entries and letters to his future wife Anita, Roadtrip 1945 reconstructs a deeply personal journey at a decisive moment in history. Terra X host Mirko Drotschmann follows Gray’s traces and meets his descendants, connecting the historical road trip with the memory of the family today.

Survived! Tsunami 2004 | 90’

What does it take to survive one of the deadliest natural disasters in modern history? Survived! Tsunami 2004 tells the stories of people who lived through the catastrophe of December 2004 – and whose lives were changed forever in a matter of minutes.

When a massive earthquake beneath the Indian Ocean triggers a devastating tsunami, entire coastlines are destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people lose their lives. The documentary focuses on individual

experiences, reconstructing the dramatic hours of the disaster through the memories of those who survived.

Eyewitnesses recount how they were caught off guard by the waves, how they fought for their lives in the chaos, and how chance, instinct and resilience determined who survived. Personal testimonies are combined with archive footage to create a vivid and immediate picture of the events as they unfolded.

By following these individual stories, the film brings viewers closer to the human dimension of the disaster. It is a story of loss and trauma, but also of survival, strength and the long path back to life after an event that reshaped entire regions – and left a lasting mark on those who experienced it.

Testimonies – Interviews with Holocaust Survivors | Streaming-project

Holocaust survivors share their life stories in order to preserve their memories and pass them on as a message to the present and to future generations: a reminder that what they endured must never happen again.

Testimonies is an interview project by ZDF's Contemporary History department in cooperation with the Jewish Claims Conference. Since November 2024, the films – featuring accounts from around 30 survivors – have been made available to the public via ZDF's streaming platform. A central aim of the project is to reach younger audiences. The survivors want their experiences to be heard and remembered by future generations – not only to keep the memory alive, but also to help ensure that history does not repeat itself.

The Queen and I | 45'

What was Queen Elizabeth II really like – besides the carefully maintained public image? The Queen and I approaches the life of the British monarch through the memories of those who knew her best.

To mark what would have been her 100th birthday, the documentary gives voice to members of the Queen's inner circle – including her private secretary, close friends, advisors and long-time companions. Through their personal recollections, a more intimate portrait emerges, revealing the character of a woman whose thoughts and feelings largely remained hidden from the public eye. Their stories offer unique insights into everyday life at the heart of the monarchy: moments of duty and discipline, but also of humour, warmth and personal passion. Whether in private encounters or official settings, the film explores how Elizabeth II managed to balance her role as head of state with her identity as an individual.

By focusing on these first-hand accounts, The Queen and I moves beyond the familiar narrative of a global icon. It presents a nuanced and human portrait of one of the most recognisable figures of the 20th and 21st centuries – seen not from afar, but through the eyes of those who stood closest to her.

Terra X History

Latenight-Slot: Sunday 11:30 p.m. | 47x45'

In-house productions, commissions, coproductions and acquisitions.

Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Michael Renz renz.m@zdf.de
Contact for online-first productions: Stefan Gierer gierer.s@zdf.de

Examples

Putin's Trail of Blood | ongoing chronicle, currently 4x45'

On 24 February 2022, Russian troops invade Ukraine. What was intended by the Kremlin as a swift "special military operation" soon evolves into the largest war in Europe since 1945. Putin's Trail of Blood reconstructs the course of the conflict in a detailed chronicle, tracing its escalation year by year.

Part one (2023) follows the first days of the invasion. Russian leadership expects a rapid collapse of Kyiv and the installation of a pro-Russian government. Instead, Ukrainian forces resist – and the war takes an unexpected turn.

Part two (2024) captures the shift into a protracted conflict. As the frontlines stabilize, the fighting continues with undiminished intensity. What emerges is a war of positions, marked by ongoing casualties and growing destruction.

Part three (2025) looks at the end of the third year of war. Ukraine faces the challenges of a war of attrition against a superior aggressor, while uncertainty grows over continued support from its Western allies.

Part four (2026) brings the story into the fourth year of the conflict. Russia still fails to subdue Ukraine, yet the geopolitical situation becomes increasingly fragile as political support – particularly from the United States – is called into question.

Combining chronological reconstruction with analysis, Putin's Trail of Blood offers a comprehensive account of a war that has reshaped Europe – and whose outcome remains uncertain.

Hitler's Final Days – The End in the Bunker | 45'

April 1945. As the war is lost, Hitler continues to send his last reserves into battle while retreating into his bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. A detailed animation reconstructs this place with unprecedented accuracy.

There, he marries his long-time partner Eva Braun, dictates his final testament and withdraws into his private quarters – where both take their own lives as Soviet troops close in. In the aftermath of Germany's surrender, intelligence services and investigators begin to reconstruct what happened inside the bunker and whether Hitler really committed suicide. Audio and film recordings of key eyewitnesses document their accounts. Terra X History presents these remarkable testimonies, including the interviews with Hitler's secretary Traudl Junge.

Marilyn Monroe – Her true Face | 45'

Her lips, her hair, her walk – Marilyn Monroe remains one of Hollywood's most enduring icons. But who was the woman behind the image? To mark what would have been her 100th birthday, Terra X History reveals a very different portrait. Drawing on personal notes, diaries and letters, the film moves beyond the familiar clichés of the glamorous sex symbol and celebrated actress. Instead, a more complex figure emerges: reflective, intelligent, lonely and vulnerable. Through her own words, the documentary offers a rare insight into the inner life of a woman whose public image often stood in stark contrast to her private reality.

Animals at War | 2x45’

They carry, search, warn and fight: for thousands of years, animals such as dogs, horses and elephants have accompanied soldiers into war – shaping battles and saving lives.

From Hannibal’s elephants to cavalry horses and military dogs in modern conflicts, animals have always been part of warfare. Terra X History traces their role from antiquity to the present day – and shows that war does not only bring suffering to humans.

ZDF Department of
Current Affairs

ZDF's Current Affairs department is committed to delivering exciting and controversial as well as entertaining documentaries and provides distinct insights into the world we live in – delivering analytical context in an increasingly complex world, while not shying away from popular genres such as consumer interest and royal affairs.

The Current Affairs / ZDFzeit editorial team produces high-quality documentaries for linear primetime television as well as ambitious documentary series for ZDF's streaming platform. They produce both foreign-policy and domestic political subjects. Consumer-oriented programs and series are also an important focus, reaching a wide audience with refined productions.

ZDFzeit

Slot: Tuesday 8:15 p.m. | 40x45'

80 % commissions,
15 % ZDF in-house productions,
5 % acquisitions per year.

Head of department: Caroline Reiher
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Caroline Reiher reiher.c@zdf.de

Since 2012, "ZDFzeit" – the only prime time documentary series on German television – has produced hundreds of documentaries and covered a variety of domestic, international and historical issues including extremism, elections, inequality, tourism, healthy food, climate change or Auschwitz.

Examples

Trump: Follow The Money | 3 part series 3x45'

The series examines possible entanglements between Donald Trump's political actions and his private global business interests.

Submission: Part 1 analyzes the origins of the Trump system and shows where business interests and political power appear to merge.

Gold Rush: Part 2 tells how Donald Trump went from a crypto critic to a kind of industry messiah and how his family profited from it.

Untouchable: Part 3 shows how a network of political, economic, and religious actors secures Trump's power and how oversight mechanisms lose their effectiveness.

Trump: Follow The Money | 3x45’

North Korea's Secrets | 2 parts series 2x45'

1: Weapons of the Dictator: The Documentary traces North Korea's path from an isolated country with a mocked head of state to a threatening dictatorship seeking closer ties with Russia and China. North Korea's support for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine marks a turning point in global attention to the country in East Asia, which is increasingly claiming a place among the world's great powers.

2: An Inside Look at a Closed Country: The official images portray North Korea as a country on the rise. However, the testimony of refugees and satellite images tell a very different story: luxury for a minority and a harsh daily life for the majority. What is life in North Korea really like?

Putin's Warriers | 4 part series 4x45'

In an extraordinary film project, ZDF looks behind the façade of the seemingly all-powerful Russian army. For more than a year, a team worked to gain access to Russian officers. They were once loyal soldiers of Putin until the war in Ukraine shattered their illusions. Now they are ready to testify before international investigators and hope for asylum or witness protection. In these films, they speak about it for the first time – unprecedented accounts from inside a black box: the Russian army.

North Korea's Secrets
2x45'

Die Spur

Slot: Wednesdays 10:45 p.m. | 30' – 45'

90 % ZDF in-house productions and commissions,
10 % coproductions and acquisitions every year.

Head of department: Markus Wenniges
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Markus Wenniges wenniges.m@zdf.de

"Die Spur" is the name of the weekly documentary format, broadcast on Wednesdays at 10:45 p.m. – right after the Auslandsjounal.

Die Spur succeeds the former ZDFzoom as a weekly documentary format examining current social and political issues. Investigative research points at problematic developments and scandals. Journalists report on ground, accompanied by forensic analysis of data and visual investigations as a key element of storytelling.

Examples

Missing: The German Woman from the Epstein Files | 29'

For more than ten years, a young German woman has been missing without a trace — then her name appears in the Epstein files. Did she, too, fall into the clutches of Jeffrey Epstein? "Die Spur" reconstructs the case. The investigation, based on the recently released files, reveals how the sex offender's recruitment system operated. What happened to the German woman mentioned in the Epstein files? The documentary traces the story of Michele, who was 22 years old when she disappeared in 2015, and sheds light on the dark sides of the international modeling and escort industry. The trail leads all the way into the orbit of the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Likes, Luxury, Lies? Influencers Targeted by Tax Investigators | 29’

Travel, luxury, gifts – influencers earn a lot of money with all of it. But some want to take a lot without giving anything back and refuse to pay taxes. Now they are in the sights of the tax investigators. According to tax authorities, the damage amounts to millions. With clever tax tricks, some influencers try to dodge the payments they owe. In 2025 alone, companies in Germany paid influencers more than 800 million euros for advertising collaborations – income that, of course, must be taxed. Income tax, VAT, trade tax – depending on the case, almost half of the earnings may ultimately go to the state. But often, they don’t. “Die Spur” shows how the system of tax avoidance works. The team filmed undercover at a tax advisor’s office who promotes aggressive tax schemes and gives influencers advice that crosses the line of legality.

White Tiger and the Sadist Network 764 | 3x30’

The case of a teenager from Hamburg leads to the online network 764, where perpetrators pressure minors worldwide into self-harm, violence, and even murder. The documentary series reconstructs how perpetrators approach minors on social media, messaging services, and online games, pretending to be understanding friends. What begins as a seemingly trusting interaction can end in psychological dependency, blackmail, and disturbing violence. Research by Die Spur shows how sadistic networks operate: a loose digital web of perpetrators, followers, and imitators that expands internationally and constantly spawns new offshoots. The perpetrators know exactly how to connect with each other and how to quickly erase their traces in the digital space.

White Tiger and the Sadist Network 764 | 3x30’

Am Puls

Slot: Irregular release schedule | 45'– 55'

100 % ZDF in-house productions and commissions.

Head of department: Markus Wenniges
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Markus Wenniges wenniges.m@zdf.de

Well-known ZDF presenters explore the issues that move Germany. They listen, immerse themselves in the everyday lives of viewers, and shed light on how political decisions affect people across all parts of society.

Examples

Am Puls with Sarah Tacke: The Social Welfare System: Living Without Contributing? | 45'

Job centers without real authority, benefit recipients caught between genuine need and blatant fraud. Sarah Tacke asks: What is going wrong in the Social Welfare System? Millions in Germany receive Bürgergeld, while at the same time the country faces a labor shortage. How does that add up? The "Am Puls" documentary takes a look behind the scenes of Germany's job centers. Is the system being exploited, or is it failing on its own?

In this documentary, Head of the ZDF Law and Justice Team, Sarah Tacke, searches her way through the dense jungle of German welfare bureaucracy. She accompanies job-center employees in Berlin who do their best to help their clients get back on track. Another insider from within the job-center system tells her about structural failures: real jobs are rarely mediated – at best, people are sent to qualification programs. Some recipients, he says, have settled into the "Welfare lifestyle," combining benefits with mini-jobs and undeclared work.

Am Puls with Florian Neuhann: Is AI stealing our jobs? | 55’

She writes texts, analyzes contracts, and programs code. Fast, inexpensive, and available around the clock: artificial intelligence is transforming the world of work. How threatening is this for our jobs? Head of the ZDF Economics/Finance Team, Florian Neuhann, shows in his “Am Puls” documentary the pressure that trained professionals in particular are facing because of AI. In Silicon Valley, he meets leading thinkers of the technological revolution and asks himself: Is my own job replaceable by AI? Florian Neuhann wants to find out whether the trends emerging in California already offer a glimpse of what may soon be coming to Germany. Throughout his journey, he repeatedly asks himself to what extent his own job as a business journalist could be replaced. AI gathers information and already answers questions on economic topics. So why would we still need humans?

Is AI stealing our jobs?
55’

ZDF Department of
Environmental Affairs

This ZDF documentary series on environmental and sustainability issues covers a wide range of subjects relating to our planet, including conservation, biodiversity, development, energy, the green economy, climate change, and more. Viewing figures usually range from 800,000 to 1.6 million.

planet e.

Slot: Sunday 3:30 p.m. | approx. 18x45'

The majority of these programmes are commissioned productions, and these programmes are also repeated on the digital channel, ZDFinfo. The majority of these programmes are custom productions.

The main focus of these productions is on the ZDF streaming portal, where they primarily target a younger audience between the ages of 20 and 40. The ZDF environmental editorial team thinks first and foremost in terms of series that can be continuously expanded for the streaming platform.

For instance, there is the series "Greenwashed?" with host Sherif Rizkallah, which examines the sustainability goals of individual companies and uncovers misconduct. Another series, titled "Genuss mit Beigeschmack" (pleasure with an aftertaste), deals with our food. Where do the products come from? Do people and nature suffer in the cultivation areas? What do the supply chains look like? The series gets to the bottom of questions like these.

Other offerings for the streaming portal include episodes of the series "Umweltcrime" (Environmental Crime), which traces past crimes, and "Tiere in der Stadt" (Animals in the City), which looks at the coexistence of humans and animals in increasingly cramped habitats. Singular documentations are typically produced for special occasions—such as annual climate summits - or triggered by current events, like providing background on extreme weather.

Head of department: Cathérine Kipp
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Cathérine Kipp kipp.c@zdf.de

Examples

Greenwashed? LEGO: How green are the colorful bricks? | 45'

LEGO is a childhood dream. LEGO is love. But the colorful bricks are made primarily of plastic! The toy corporation is working on sustainable alternatives. But is it working?

Greenwashed? LEGO: How green are the colorful bricks? | 45’

The secret recipe for LEGO's success is a mix of cult following, creativity, and crude oil. In the past, nobody minded the oil and the plastic produced from it. Today, it is facing heavy criticism.

The thing is: finding alternatives is a tricky business. They have to function just as well as the oil-based original. LEGO is experimenting with mixing in plant oils, using recycled materials from kitchen countertops, or bio-plastic derived from Brazilian sugarcane.

But how much "bio" is actually in this bio-plastic? Environmental reporter Sherif Rizkallah took a look around Brazil – the place where the sugarcane for LEGO's bricks is grown and processed into bio-plastic. Is this alternative viable? And is it scalable? In any case, LEGO aims to continuously expand its share of sustainable materials.

By 2032, the brick empire wants to reduce its emissions by 37% – primarily through CO2 savings in factories, offices, and supply chains. Additionally, LEGO is investing in a series of still-developing technologies for carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere, such as Direct Air Capture.

Is that enough for genuine climate protection? Measured by revenue, the family-owned company from Billund, Denmark, has risen to become the largest toy manufacturer in the world. One reason: LEGO has long outgrown the children's room and has – also – become a luxury item for adults.

Reporter Sherif Rizkallah, at least, is eyeing the Star Wars Death Star, but hesitates given the price tag of 999.99 euros. Licenses for the Harry Potter world, the Marvel universe, or the upcoming KPop Demon Hunters are also filling LEGO's coffers. And, of course, the fanbase is eagerly awaiting Minas Tirith, the mighty fortress of Gondor from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Expected to feature 8,278 pieces, it will be one of the largest LEGO sets ever.

In other words: lots of new bricks, the production of which generates tons of climate-damaging CO2. Can plastic toys be sustainable at all – or is this a case of greenwashing?

Matcha – pleasure with a bitter aftertaste | 45’

Green, greener, Matcha. The trend drink from Japan is hyped all over social media. However, the high demand is causing rising prices, supply bottlenecks, and fake products.

In 2025, more than 600 tons of Japanese matcha were imported into Germany – more than ever before. But what are the dark sides of the matcha hype? Reporter Victoria Reichelt travels to Japan – and encounters counterfeit matcha, contaminants, and environmental issues.

On social media, matcha is celebrated as a trend drink. Under hashtags like #matcha, millions of photos and videos show the tea in all possible variations – from iced matcha lattes and matcha cheesecakes to ice cream and even matcha-scented candles.

In Japan, on the other hand, enjoying this special green tea has been a tradition for a very long time. Victoria Reichelt accompanies Jintaro Yamamoto during the matcha harvest. The farmer produces matcha in the sixth generation in Uji, Japan – the region famous for high-quality matcha. The traditional production process of matcha is extremely labor-intensive. “For us, picking takes about two weeks, whereas you can harvest the same amount in a single day with a machine,” the tea farmer says. As a result, producers here can only meet a fraction of the global demand. The consequence: more and more low-quality matcha products are flooding the market. This is because “Matcha” is not a legally protected food term. Many companies and coffeehouse chains therefore resort to blends using cheap green tea powder. “It is barely traceable where the matcha actually comes from. There are no strict seals of approval. Therefore, I assume that there is a lot of cheating going on,” explains matcha expert Marcel Karcher.

But how can you tell high-quality matcha apart from cheap green tea powder? Is matcha really as healthy as is often claimed? And what are the consequences of the global matcha boom for the environment and health – such as pesticides and other pollutants in the tea? Victoria Reichelt meets consumer experts, matcha connoisseurs, medical professionals, and food chemists to get to the bottom of these questions.

Matcha – pleasure with a bitter aftertaste | 45’

Breakthrough or Failure: Where Does Global Climate Protection Stand? | 45’

While Trump’s America actively fights climate protection and the Green Deal falters in Europe, electrification and decarbonization are becoming export hits for China.

The COP30 UN Climate Change Conference in Brazil is taking place in difficult times: Trump’s America is acting as a wrecking ball to climate protection. In Europe, the Green Deal is under fire. China, meanwhile, is trying to turn climate technologies into a business model.

It wasn’t that long ago that climate protection was highly valued: in the US,ing images from Argentina and Uruguay. She fears that the mares’ poor condition is deliberate: “Basically, it’s about working as efficiently as possible. And we have field reports that show the more emaciated the mares are, in other words, the worse their general condition is, including their nutritional status, the higher the PMSG level.”

And yet the hormone is not absolutely necessary in order to produce pork economically. In the organic sector, its use is as a rule prohibited. But even those who farm pigs conventionally could work differently. Prof. Axel Wehrend conducts research on the reproduction of farm animals at the University of Giessen. “We looked for commercial farms that do without PMSG. And it turned out that many farms do just as well without PMSG as with PMSG.”

More and more suppliers of PMSG preparations are now using PMSG from Iceland. But conditions there are hardly better than in South America – as new images from the Animal Welfare Foundation also show. Nadine Henke is a veterinarian and keeps sows herself – without PMSG. She sees a problem in the system of how farm animal medicines are marketed. The drugs find their way into the pigsties directly via vets, with many livestock breeders unaware of how the preparation is obtained. And as consumers, we have very little chance of discovering what is actually behind the pork we buy.

Breakthrough or Failure: Where Does Global Climate Protection Stand? | 45’

plan b

Slot: Sunday 3:30 p.m. | approx. 19 x 43’30

All of the programs are custom productions.

Head of department: Sina Schwerdt
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Sina Schwerdt schwerdt.s@zdf.de

“plan b” is a documentary series that demonstrates how things can be done differently. The films tell stories of success and present ideas for solutions to social and environmental problems. The documentaries are characterized by a positive, constructive tone and a focus on inspiring, forward-looking perspectives.

Examples

Superstars of Nature – How corals, seagrass & co. protect us | 43’30

Climate change, overfishing, and pollution are disrupting the balance of our oceans. But how can we protect this extraordinary ecosystem? Covering more than two-thirds of our planet, the oceans are essential for food, climate regulation, and biodiversity – yet they are under immense pressure. Still, there is hope: from marine protected areas to 3D-printed coral reefs, innovative solutions are emerging worldwide. In the Sept-Îles nature reserve in Brittany, a German-French research team studies the endangered porbeagle shark – a key species that has recently returned to the region. For scientists, this is both a sign of recovery and a call to action. New technologies are also supporting reef restoration. A Swiss team develops 3D-printed clay modules that allow coral larvae to settle and rebuild ecosystems. Meanwhile, in the Colombian Caribbean, seagrass meadows – vital carbon stores and nurseries – are protected through conservation and sustainable tourism. The documentary “How Corals, Seagrass & Co. Protect Us” presents inspiring solutions and launches the series Superstars of Nature.

Courage for reconciliation – Peace instead of hostility | 43’30

How can former enemies find their way back to each other? Initiatives in Germany, the United States, and Colombia show how reconciliation can succeed – between religions, political opponents, and even victims and perpetrators. In Colombia, Kelly Diaz meets her father’s killer 22 years after his murder, seeking forgiveness and inner peace as part of a unique project where victims and perpetrators later rebuild war-torn communities together. In the U.S., the Braver Angels foster dialogue across political divides through workshops on empathy and active listening. In Munich, Youth Bridge connects young people of different backgrounds to build understanding and counter polarization. These stories show: reconciliation is possible – if people are willing to listen and move closer again.

The Search for Home – and Finding It | 43’30

Mass viewings, soaring rents, and stalled construction projects have turned finding an apartment into a lottery. While more building is needed, smarter use of existing space is just as crucial. Across Germany, tenants, landlords, employers, and cities are working together to tackle the shortage.

In major cities like Cologne and Munich, the market is especially tight. John Weinert promotes apartment swapping via an online platform, matching people with surplus space to those who need more. His aim is to make swapping a standard housing option. Architect Markus Plöcker focuses on efficiency: smaller, well-designed apartments and the conversion of vacant buildings. Repurposing offices into housing saves costs, resources, and CO_2. Adding extra floors could create up to 2.7 million new apartments nationwide. Modern modular construction - now using sustainable wood - speeds up building. In Heidelberg, new modular housing is being developed for hospital staff. The project revives employer-provided housing, ensuring workers can actually live where they work.

The Search for Home – and Finding It | 43’30

ZDF Department of

Das kleine Fernsehspiel

As broadcasters of innovative films and young artists' work, "Das kleine Fernsehspiel" offers a weekly slot on Mondays around midnight. The department helps authors, directors, editors, actors and producers to make their first one to three films.

Das kleine Fernsehspiel

Slot: Monday 0:00 midnight | 40' – 120'

open slot; approx. 50 % commissions and
50 % coproductions and acquisitions every year,
mostly with German production companies.

Head of department: Burkhard Althoff
Contact for international coproductions:
Burkhard Althoff althoff.b@zdf.de

"Das kleine Fernsehspiel" commissions 26 new productions every year, ranging from fiction, documentaries and essays to transmedia programmes or hybrid forms and experimental pieces as well as documentary series and fictional mini-series. Recent coproductions include Mascha Schilinskis transgenerational drama "Sound of Falling" (Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival) as well as feature documentaries like "Soldiers of Light" about the increasingly popular scene of self-proclaimed 'healers' with links to the far right or "Around Paradise" about neo-colonialism practiced by 'settlers' from around the world in one of the poorest regions of Paraguay.

The department also runs a small production lab called Quantum, which creates pilot programmes and short-form mini-series for new TV formats, such as the latest internationally award-winning two series "The Flaws" and "Sheep".

Documentary profile

This department promotes ten outstanding personal and creative documentaries about everyday life, society and politics in Germany each year. In the case of international productions, it seeks filmmakers who can present interesting visual styles and offer insights into their particular country of origin.

The Empty Grave | 94’42

The German-Tanzanian directorial duo Agnes Lisa Wegner and Cece Mlay explore the trauma that German colonial rule has left behind in Tanzanian communities. Their documentary follows the journey of two Tanzanian families in the search for their ancestors. Their investigation leads them to Berlin, where tens of thousands of human remains from the former German colonies are still held today. These remains were taken at the beginning of the twentieth century – partly for scientific research and partly as trophies.

“The Empty Grave” sheds light on the lasting trauma caused by German colonial rule, while also portraying the resilience and empowerment of descendants who are tirelessly campaigning to uncover and acknowledge colonial crimes. Although the issue has now reached the political arena, a crucial question remains: how can these human remains be identified and returned to their communities and descendants.

Sometimes, I Imagine Them All at a Party | 91’

Fourteen years after surviving an attempted femicide perpetrated by a fellow student, the filmmaker Daniela Magnani Hüller returns to the defining moments and key figures of that time. Her memories are filled with warmth and hope, but also with coldness and brutality.

Through a fragmented and self-reflective narrative, she approaches her experience anew and reconnects with the people who played an important role during the three years surrounding the attack: a teacher, a former classmate, a doctor, a public prosecutor, a police detective, her half-sister, and a friend in Brazil. In these conversations, she explores their recollections of that time and searches for answers to the questions that have accompanied her ever since. Her journey takes her from Munich to Rio de Janeiro.

The Empty Grave | 94’42

ZDF Sports Documentaries Department

The reports and documentaries produced by the ZDF sports department cover a broad spectrum and go beyond classic results reporting. From emotional portraits to accompanying an entire competition – also beyond the end of a season. The programmes aim to make every facet of sport tangible, in victory and defeat, as well as in its relevance for fans and society.

Sports

Head of department: Fabian Farwick
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Clemens Schröder schroeder.c@zdf.de and Fabian Farwick farwick.f@zdf.de

Mesut Özil – Friend and Outsider, 20.03.2026 | 3x45’

Through the rise and fall of Mesut Özil, one of the most gifted German soccer players in history, the series tells a complex story about belonging, identity, and exclusion – and, by extension, about Germany itself.

Özil, the grandson of Turkish guest workers, was once celebrated by many as the shy poster boy for successful integration, an international superstar made in Germany. By the time he won the World Cup in 2014, he had reached the pinnacle of his soccer career. But when Özil posed for a photo with Turkish President Recep Erdoğan, an entire country turned against him and Özil fell from grace.

Through exclusive statements from key associates likes former national team coach Joachim Löw and Özil’s father Mustafa, who are speaking out for the first time about Özil’s break with Germany, and a multi-perspective reconstruction of the events surrounding Özil’s retirement from the national team, it leverages the reach of a polarizing soccer star to make a socially relevant and highly topical set of issues accessible to a broad audience.

Mesut Özil – Friend and Outsider, 20.03.2026 | 3x45’

3sat

3sat, the European satellite programme that broadcasts in German, is a co-venture between four public broadcasting companies from Germany (ZDF and ARD), Austria (ORF) and Switzerland (SRF). Mainly concentrating on cultural programming, 3sat presents only the best productions supplied by the four partners. Most of these films, fiction as well as documentaries, are first featured by one of the four 3sat partner channels.

Documentary film time

Slot: Monday 10:30 p.m. | 45x75' – 100'/12 premieres

90 % coproductions mostly with German,
Swiss and Austrian production companies,
10 % acquisition.

Head of department: Katya Mader
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Katya Mader mader.k@zdf.de

Although it presents all kinds of documentary formats, 3sat gives priority to outstanding auteur driven documentaries made by directors and producers living in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. This slot features personal, creative documentaries in the German language on any subject.

Documentary profile

The majority of documentaries shown on 3sat are supplied by the channels mentioned above. However, about 10 % of the documentaries shown on 3sat are acquisitions. Documentaries produced or acquired by 3sat tend to focus on original themes that are not usually seen on other TV channels. In prime-time documentaries on culture and society, 3sat looks at things from new perspectives and provides unusual insights.

Examples

The German People (Das deutsche Volk) | 131'

The film tells the story of the 2020 racist attack in the city of Hanau in the German state of Hessen from the perspective of the bereaved relatives and the survivors. Within a few minutes, the perpetrator shot nine young people dead because he did not consider them to be German. Director Marcin Wierzchowski accompanied the protagonists for four years as they

The German People | 131’

faced their grief and strived to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. But the film also reveals their struggle for recognition and a sense of belonging in the country they call home. The relatives feel abandoned by the authorities and politicians alike because, despite many words of sympathy, they themselves are left to uncover the circumstances of the crime. In the process, they encounter the bureaucracy of a system that is unprepared for such an attack – even though right-wing terror is a tragically commonplace part of German history.

Tracing Light | 98'

Light is a fascinating phenomenon. Without light, there would be no cinema, no film – and no life. So light is at the origin of everything, and yet it remains invisible to the eye until it hits matter. This moment is the starting point of Thomas Riedelsheimer's latest work and his search for the origin of the images we form of this world. For this quest he dived deep into two spheres that seem to follow different laws but always strive to fathom the magical: physics and art. An intellectual and poetic resonance room opens between researchers from the Max Planck Institute in Erlangen and the "Extreme Light Group" of the University of Glasgow accompanied by internationally renowned artists such as Ruth Jarman, Joe Gerhardt, Julie Brook, Johannes Brunner and Raimund Ritz.

Materia Prima | 89'

The world's largest deposits of lithium are found in the Bolivian Andes. These rare metals spark a new gold rush. Europeans want the raw material to save the automobile industry, while Bolivians want to combat poverty, and companies from around the world are exploring their options. A historical document from the 16th century, kept by the Royal Danish Library, connects the past with the present. Filmmaker Jens Schanze follows negotiations over mining and extraction rights while also drawing on the words of an indigenous chronicler from 1615. A film about resource justice and structures that stubbornly repeat themselves.

Current affairs on Wednesday

Slot: Wednesday 8:15 p.m. | approx. 10 first runs x 45

Head of department: Wolfgang Aull
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Wolfgang Aull aull.w@zdf.de

During the prime-time slot on Wednesday at 8:15 p.m./9:00 p.m., 3sat broadcasts high-quality documentaries on current affairs on society, politics and history. The programmes take on current issues and new themes, offering viewers a fresh perspective on the world. The objective is to explore the intricacies of the subjects covered and place these within a broader cultural context. The aim is to inform and inspire audiences through drama.

Examples

The Kentler Experiment – State-Funded Child Abuse | 45'

Children are being abused. Arranged, condoned, and funded by the youth welfare office. What sounds like a wild conspiracy theory actually happened.

For over three decades, Berlin youth welfare offices sent troubled minors to pedophile offenders – under the supervision of Helmut Kentler, a bestselling author, expert (featured, among other places, in the Oswalt Kolle films), highly respected sexologist, and professor of social pedagogy at the University of Hannover.

Helmut Kentler, born in 1928, was one of the stars of sexology at the time, a progressive educational scientist in high demand by the media. A middle-class figure, a man who appeared on television in a suit and tie to educate frightened parents about "doctor games" in kindergarten, sex education classes, and homosexuality among adolescents. He was

no crackpot like the wild revolutionaries of Kommune 1, but a serious researcher. His sex guides captivated liberal middle-class people and intellectuals seeking to escape the prudishness and entrenched taboos of the postwar era.

At the time of the pilot program, Kentler was working as a department head at the Pedagogical Center in Berlin, a reform laboratory recognized nationwide. A charismatic figure with impressive speaking skills, he was also deeply caring. The educator took in homeless boys himself, adopting three of them. He, too, abuses those in his care. The Berlin Youth Welfare Office, on Kentler's advice, sends teenagers with behavioral problems to Kentler's colleague Herbert E. Colla-Müller and to the Odenwald School. They, too, experience sexual violence. And to make matters worse, the network of pedophile perpetrators even charges a hefty fee for its "services." How could this have happened? With the knowledge and funding of government agencies? Why doesn't anyone notice the monstrous things that are going on there?

Banned Books – A Culture War in the U.S. | 45'

A culture war is raging on America's bookshelves. On one side are vocal advocates of sweeping book bans; on the other, librarians defending the right to read freely.

For decades, school libraries have been a safe haven for reading and learning – a place for students' first encounter with the vast, unknown world. But to conservative U.S. activists, they are a thorn in their side. Anything that doesn't align with their worldview is to be removed from the shelves.

In October 2021, Matt Krause, a Republican member of the Texas House of Representatives, released a list of 850 books that schools should review for "obscene" and "racist" content. Most of the titles in question deal with topics such as discrimination or LGBTQ+ identity. He argues that students must be protected from "pornography" and anything that might cause them "discomfort" or "feelings of guilt" – by removing such

books from school libraries. Self-proclaimed parent advocacy groups, such as the ultra-conservative “Moms for Liberty,” have since been beating the propaganda drum nationwide. More and more books have been targeted, and these attacks have become increasingly coordinated. Thousands of books have now been banned from school libraries.

Librarians who are simply doing their jobs – providing children with access to a wide, age-appropriate selection of literature – are facing defamation and threats, both online and in their daily lives. Nevertheless, many of them have refused to back down; they have resisted, organized, and fought back. In some cases, they have paid for this with the loss of their jobs.

This documentary tells the story of these heroic fighters. Ordinary citizens who have unexpectedly become defenders of democracy – and who are risking everything to protect the fundamental rights of their young charges.

Nano Doku
Science on Thursday

Slot: Thursday 8:15 p.m. | approx. 15 first runs x 44'

70 % commissions,
30 % coproductions and acquisitions every year.

Head of department : Catrin Powell
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Bianca Charamsa charamsa.b@zdf.de

The prime-time 44-minute documentary slot **Nano Doku** showcases science at its finest. The program airs on the Swiss-Austrian-German channel 3sat and also enjoys remarkable success on the Nano YouTube channel since its launch in 2025, reaching new audiences.

Our documentaries – some of the hosted – delve into themes of international significance, ideally featuring also locations and protagonists from the broadcasting countries. The films explore subjects like Outer Space, Psychology, Health, High-tech and Innovation, AI, Nutrition, Evolution, Sexuality, Climate Change and Sustainability.

Nano Doku ventures into unknown, challenging, and complex scientific domains, presenting them in surprising and engaging ways to captivate, entertain, and enlighten the audience. The spectator is invited to experience science firsthand, as the films appeal to both, the intellect and emotions.

Following the science documentary slot on Thursday, a 60-minute **Nano-Talk** continues the exploration of the documentary's subject, providing a deeper understanding.

We seek topics and productions that are fresh and highly relevant and appealing to a broad and diverse audience.

Extreme Science – Our Worldview at Its Limit | 44’

Is our reality a simulation? Does the universe consist of nothing but pure information? From the nanosphere to outer space and back to the middle of the earth: Join host and science journalist Ingolf Baur on a gripping journey to the frontiers of human knowledge!

Metabolism Update: How to Boost Your Energy | 44’

Why do some people gain weight despite a healthy diet – while others stay slim seemingly without effort? New insights from metabolic research reveal how the brain, hormones, and even fat tissue regulate our energy balance.

Hacks Against Cancer – Your Lifestyle Counts | 44’

Every year, more than 500 000 Germans are diagnosed with cancer. Yet, up to 40 % of these new cases could be prevented. Host and science journalist Jasmina Neudecker wants to know: could changing our lifestyle protect our health and lives?

Hacks Against Cancer – Your Lifestyle Counts | 44’

DocuMe

Slot: 6 premieres per year | 30' – 45'

Head of department: Katya Mader
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Daniel Schössler schoessler.d@zdf.de

Contents

Within its "DocuMe" series, 3sat presents portraits distinguished by the creative narrative approaches characteristic of auteur filmmaking. These short documentaries focus on individuals engaged in processes of transformation – people navigating new beginnings and periods of transition while confronting personal challenges.

Example

DocuMe – "Hello new body, how are you today?" | 30'

In her early thirties, young filmmaker Laura Kansy develops ME/CFS – an illness for which no cure is yet known. What does it mean not to know whether, or when, one will recover? How does one find a place within a new body, now marked by illness? This autobiographical film is an attempt not to give up filmmaking, but to use it as a means of staying alive. An attempt to carve out a space of freedom within a state of confinement.

Hello new body, how are you today? | 30’

3sat Culture

Slot: Saturday 7:20 p.m. | 37'

Head of department: Anne Reidt
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Meike Klingenberg klingenberg.m@zdf.de

The cultural documentaries broadcast by 3sat on Saturdays at 7:20 p.m. are designed in form and aesthetics for a culturally engaged audience with diverse leisure activities and a broad range of interests, encompassing both culture and entertainment.

The documentary series **Secrets of the Masters** takes a close look at masterpieces of painting. A team of experts embarks on a detective-like investigation. Using state-of-the-art technology, they research the background of its creation, while an artist attempts to create a perfect copy. In the end, the original and the reconstruction hang side by side in the museum. **Secrets of the Masters (Season 1, 2024 / Season 2, 2025, Season 3, 2027).**

Music, fashion, art: in the 1970s and 1980s, queer people claimed new spaces for themselves. What had long been hidden became part of a bold, vibrant and self-confident new pop culture. In the 1990s and 2000s, queer styles conquered the world of mainstream entertainment. Club aesthetics moved into the cultural mainstream. Today, queer codes are everywhere: in music, fashion and advertising. Has the avant-garde become part of the mainstream? The three-part series **Queer Pop** paints a dazzling portrait of contemporary culture through archival footage, personal experiences and compelling stories. A journey through decades defined by courage, self-expression and social change. **Queer Pop: Icons, Codes and Commerce (2025)**

Cities have personalities. In **Pop Metropolises**, iconic urban centres tell their own stories. Through music, fashion, art and popular culture, the series explores how cities became creative powerhouses whose influ-

ence continues to shape global trends today. From ABBA to Falco, from groundbreaking design icons to legendary clubs, the series combines city portrait, contemporary history and pop culture into an entertaining and insightful journey through Europe's cultural engines. **Pop Metropolises (2026) – Vienna, Stockholm, Prague, London, Milan**

Evil is a three-part journey into the world of iconic villains and the darker sides of human nature. The series decodes archetypal forms of evil in film and literature, exploring their psychological and cultural roots. Whether Joker, Hannibal Lecter or Alex Forrest, villains are often the most fascinating characters in any story. Combining close character analysis with insights from psychology, cultural studies and sociology, the series offers a fresh perspective on famous antagonists, revealing them not as one-dimensional monsters, but as reflections of human emotions, fears and moral conflicts. **Evil (2026)**

Fashion Empires tells the story of legendary fashion houses in five compelling episodes, tracing their evolution from their origins to the present day and exploring how they became global icons while preserving their mystique across decades. At the heart of each film are the visionary designers and creative leaders who shaped the distinctive style and enduring myth of these brands. The series explores the tension between creativity and power, personal drama and public provocation, while revealing the cultural impact these fashion houses have had far beyond the world of fashion itself. **Fashion Empires: Scandals, Legends and Secrets (2026) – Chanel, Dior, Gucci, Versace, Yves Saint Laurent**

ARTE

ARTE, the French-German cultural channel, is a joint venture between the French broadcaster ARTE France, the German public broadcasters ZDF and ARD and ARTE GEIE, with headquarter in Strasbourg. ZDF supplies approximately 1,424 hours of programming to ARTE every year as part of its participation agreement, of which 28 % are new productions – coproductions involving ZDF – and premiering on TV in both Germany and France via ARTE. Documentaries represent about 33 % of ARTE's total programming, or approximately 2,799 hours annually. In 2025, the entire ARTE programme consisted of approximately 46 % coproductions, around 21 % acquisitions and about 21 % commissioned productions.

ARTE Discovery

Slot: daily access prime time | 43'

Head of department: Michael Gries
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Petra Boden boden.p@zdf.de, Linde Dehner dehner.l@zdf.de and
Michael Gries gries.m@zdf.de

The early evening slot held by ARTE Èvasion hosts wildlife documentaries and excursions to the most beautiful places of the world which are among the best national and international coproductions in terms of content, quality and technical expertise. These are aimed at a family audience. Additionally, ARTE Èvasion is taking viewers on a journey to discover the authentic and unbiased view of lifestyles, crafts, traditions and daily adventuers of people around the globe. This series allows viewers to take an inspiring perspective on foreign cultures and societies, often non-European, along with their specific and often seemingly exotic traditions, values and beliefs.

These documentaries focus on the mutual relationship between people and their natural or social environment.

Re: / ARTE Regards

Slot: Monday to Friday, 7:40 p.m. | 30'

Head of department: Jean-Christoph Caron
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Frederic Ulferts ulferts.f@zdf.de and Martin Ehrmann ehrmann.m@zdf.de

In just half an hour, "Re:" tells stories of people who represent a single aspect of a wider European issue. Zooming into the micro level, these stories make it easier to grasp the issues that are moving Europe. Each episode forms a closed narrative arc and interacts closely with the reality of these people's everyday lives. The aim is to address the themes that are shaping Europe with calm objectivity, through concrete examples, to further the understanding of issues and explore solutions.

ARTE Regards “Re: Flat-Sharing with a Centenarian”

“La Lucarne” – Auteur Documentaries

Slot: Monday late evening, no fixed length

Head of department: Rebecca Gross
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Kathrin Brinkmann brinkmann.a@zdf.de

A late-night documentary programme featuring films that surprise both visually and in terms of content. The auteur films shown in this slot should have a distinct personal style; personal, poetic, offbeat, brazen and edgy films that may also cross documentary boundaries, films that are generally only screened at festivals. ARTE shows films by authors who present the world in original and surprising ways.

Tuesday's Theme

Slot: Tuesdays at prime time | 90' or 2 x 52', 52'

Head of department: Jean-Christoph Caron
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Susanne Mertens mertens.s@zdf.de and Türkan Schirmer schirmer.t@zdf.de

Thema du mardi is the network's weekly cover story and concentrates particularly on investigative features and scientific documentaries. The pro- gramme examines current affairs from a European and global perspective, and provides the information viewers need to form their own opinions. It covers anticipated, yet under-reported social, political, economic and environmental issues that are shaping the world we live in. The key focus is on topics that concern and affect viewers in both countries.

Tuesday's Theme "The Night the Flood Came – Protocol of a Climate Catastrophe"

History

Slot: Tuesday, prime time or late evening | 52', 2 x 52', 3 x 52', exceptionally 90'

Head of department: Jean-Christoph Caron
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Miriam Carbe carbe.m@zdf.de and Martin Ehrmann ehrmann.m@zdf.de

Histoire depicts the history of the 19th and 20th centuries, including contemporary 21st century history, and analyses major topics in political, economic and social history. By placing the highlights in a historical context, it gives viewers the elements necessary for a better understanding of today's world. The use of cinematic archives and reports by contemporary witnesses and historians is combined with photos, documents, reenactments, computer animations and excerpts from feature and television films.

Geopolitics

Slot: Tuesday, late evening | 52', exceptionally 90'

Head of department: Jean-Christoph Caron
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Frederic Ulferts ulferts.f@zdf.de and Miriam Carbe carbe.m@zdf.de

This slot compiles and analyses political, geopolitical, socio-political and economic questions and phenomena across Germany, France, Europe and the world. The objective is to provide viewers with a deeper understanding of the broader contexts and interconnecting influences that shape current affairs. The main focus is on under-reported topics affecting the world today and those which raise major political, economic and social questions. The slot is open to both classic documentaries and new documentary formats.

Geopolitics “Theatre of Violence”

Society

Slot: Tuesday, late evening | 52'

Head of department: Jean-Christoph Caron
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Türkan Schirmer schirmer.t@zdf.de

This slot is dedicated to topics and questions from the everyday lives of the audience. The focus is on people whose personal stories point beyond themselves and relate to social conditions. Stories from the everyday lives of viewers, preferably in Germany, France and Europe are told from an individual perspective, while having relevance for society as a whole. Sociological, political and economic analyses are no more than mere observations. The slot differs from Theme and Geopolitics through the exclusion of sociological, political, economic analyses and investigative documentaries.

Big Format Documentary

Slot: Wednesday, prime time or late evening | 90'

Head of department: Rebecca Gross
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Sabine Bubeck-Paaz bubeck-paaz.s@zdf.de and
Susanne Mertens mertens.s@zdf.de

This time slot is the network's documentary highlight with a high production value and cinematic approach on Wednesday eveningsThese documentaries present strong stories on a wide variety of topics and are characterised by unusual structure and distinctive cinematography. Directors present topics from around the world, ensuring fascination and emotional stimulation by offering a different perspective on people and their circumstances.

Cultural Documentary

Slot: Possible the whole week, 2nd Prime Time and web only | 30 – 60'

Head of department: Rebecca Gross
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Rebecca Gross gross.r@zdf.de and Dieter Schneider schneider.d@zdf.de

Cultural documentaries are designed to spark curiosity and invite reflection. They combine depth of content with an engaging and accessible cinematic approach. They enable viewers, regardless of their prior knowledge, to discover major works, significant cultural events, and influential phenomenons from across the arts and cultural landscape.

The documentary offer is dedicated to both contemporary and classical cultural achievements, ideas, artistic expression, literature, and film culture from Europe and around the world. It explores cultural developments, movements, and trends across a wide range of fields, including music, performing arts, literature, cinema, photography, architecture, design, and the visual arts, while also addressing current perspectives on cultural heritage. Complex subjects are welcome, provided they are approached in a way that remains accessible both in terms of content and cinematic form. The tone is open, inviting, and introductory, encouraging discovery rather than expertise. The aim is to make cultural phenomena and ideas tangible, offer fresh perspectives, and foster a lasting curiosity about the richness and diversity of art and culture.

Cultural Documentary “The Art in War”

History Light

Slot: weekdays, prime time | 43', 52' or 90'

Head of department: Michael Gries
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Linde Dehner dehner.l@zdf.de, Eva Schmidt schmidt.e@zdf.de and
Petra Boden boden.p@zdf.de

The documentaries in the **History light** prime or late prime time slot deal with popular subjects of contemporary history from technological breakthroughs to social developments of popcultural relevance including biopics of famous thinkers or inventors. In contrast to the geopolitical/investigative focus of "Histoire" on the Tuesday PT slot and the ancient history focus of "The Human Adventure" on the Saturday PT slot, **History light** does not cover political or martial topics.

The aim is to tell entertaining stories about significant historical events and personalities and their impact on our present society. The topics often come from the 'collective memory', popular science, nostalgia and viewers' own life experiences.

Pop Culture Documentary

Slot: Friday 2nd Prime and web only | 30–75'

Head of department: Rebecca Gross
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Dieter Schneider schneider.di@zdf.de and Rebecca Gross gross.r@zdf.de

The Pop Culture slot is devoted to the protagonists of popular and mass culture from the 1960s to the present day. Music, cinema, fashion, comics, bestsellers, youth culture and Internet culture all have their place here. Themes relating to the avant-garde or subcultures are only picked up if they are a phenomenon of mass culture. This is a highly informative and entertaining slot. It is emotional and provocative, and identifies with its viewers. The documentaries analyse, provide context and decode mainstream phenomena. There is an element of surprise, with new aspects revealed and unexpected angles adopted. When tackling subcultures, the documentaries arouse curiosity in an unfamiliar issue by pursuing a narrative that is as catchy and comprehensible as possible. The slot definitely welcomes portraits of figures in pop culture and character-driven films, with a preference for stand-alones.

The Human Adventure

Slot: Saturday, prime time | 90' or 2x52'

Head of department: Michael Gries
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Petra Boden boden.p@zdf.de, Sebastian Nuss nuss.s@zdf.de and
Michael Gries gries.m@zdf.de

L' Aventure humaine is designed for a broad family audience and recreates ancient history in a lively and entertaining way. It covers past human civilisations, their rise and fall, conflicts, development, achievements, lifestyles and beliefs. Key players, periods and events in history may all figure in the stories, alongside the scientific, technical and artistic discoveries that were milestones in the history of mankind on our planet up to the 19th century. Films shown in the slot are based around a strong dramatic structure, onto which the required elements of observation and information are grafted. The program features character-driven stories that excite the curiosity and expectations of viewers from the start. An inventive and spectacular visual approach backs up a fluent, well-paced storyline, with sustained dramatic tension throughout. The content is backed up by the expertise and restraint of acknowledged experts, who provide the indispensable guarantee of the programme's integrity and conformance to historical and scientific standards

Science

Slot: late prime time | 52'

Head of department: Michael Gries
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Michael Gries gries.m@zdf.de, Ann-Christin Hornberger hornberger.a@zdf.de and
Eva Schmidt schmidt.e@zdf.de

This is a time slot for documentaries that give a dynamic view of scientific subjects. They are designed to arouse curiosity and are in tune with the daily reality of viewers, allowing them to offer the kind of scientific awareness which we need to understand the world around us today. The films are aimed at a broad public with a general interest, rather than at a niche of experts.

The documentaries cover current developments, showing scientists at work both in the laboratory and in the field. They explain the most recent discoveries and research projects in context with their social and ethical implications. Besides looking for progress and beneficial effects, the films also address potential negative consequences of technology or medical advances. Therefore, the slot is suitable for science-based investigations into current problems affecting the general public (health and safety issues, etc.). The subject matter may come from all fields of science from maths to medicine, from agriculture to astronomy. Creativity and strong visual concepts are essential, especially when covering invisible subjects from microcosm or sensible fields like mental health issues.

The narration should never be over-dramatic or enticing. Storylines must follow a clearly stated and identifiable central question. ARTE science is no place for science PR but a forum for science journalism – neutral and critical. Although the chief priority is to inform, an entertaining storytelling approach is key o a successful linear an non-linear distribution of the program.

Science “Naked – Sex and Gender”

Prime Time Culture Documentary

Slot: Saturday, 8:15 p.m. | 1 x 90' or 2x52'

Head of department: Rebecca Gross
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Rebecca Gross gross.r@zdf.de and Dieter Schneider schneider.di@zdf.de

These ambitious, narrative-driven stories explore major cultural movements, landmark works that transformed their era, and the iconic figures who have shaped the worlds of culture and the arts. They may notably take the form of investigative narratives, complete with twists and revelations. Whenever possible, they are anchored in compelling human characters. These films are expected to meet the highest production standards, with a strong cinematic ambition and outstanding visual execution.

Tone: Accessible, original, and immersive, with a powerful visual and musical identity. Dynamic, engaging storytelling with strong dramatic momentum.

Portrait

Slot: all week Prime Time or 2nd Prime Time, web only | 30' – 90'

Head of department: Rebecca Gross
Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Dieter Schneider schneider.di@zdf.de and Rebecca Gross gross.r@zdf.de

The Documania slot during the second phase of Sunday evening prime time targets a broad family audience with an assumed lower age limit of around 45 years. It centres on figures that are well known in both France and Germany and whose life or work is typical of a particular field (especially cinema or the fine arts) or a cultural or historical period from the mid-20th century onwards. While this person's life will always be situated within a broader context, the focus is on their personal story. Newly discovered facts and recent images may cast that story in a new light.

ZDFinfo

ZDFinfo, ZDF's documentary brand, is dedicated to providing knowledge-based storytelling in the fields of history, politics, science, and society. Its main distribution platforms include the joint digital channel 'Info by ARD and ZDF' with public broadcaster ARD starting in January 2027, as well as ZDF's own streaming platform and YouTube channels. The programming focuses on curated themes and long-form formats, offering viewers guidance, depth, and context in an increasingly complex information landscape.

ZDFinfo commissions and acquires a wide range of high-quality documentaries and non-fiction series on the international market, supplemented by co-productions and strategic partnerships. The focus is on powerful narratives, distinctive perspectives, and reliable storytelling that resonates across platforms.

As a key documentary brand within the ZDF portfolio, ZDFinfo plays an key role in shaping ZDF's digital presence, where curated collections and recommendations based on its content are central to user engagement.

With its strong portfolio of non-fiction programming, ZDFinfo is a cornerstone of ZDF's documentary offerings, expanding its reach to digital platforms and connecting with audiences through relevant, accessible, and contemporary storytelling.

History & Contemporary History

Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Annette Harlfinger harlfinger.a@zdf.de and Sonja Rode rode.a@zdf.de

ZDFinfo is dedicated to bringing the past into the present through compelling, accessible storytelling. With a strong focus on global history, its programming explores major events, key figures, and transformative developments that continue to shape our world today. The editorial scope spans series on 20th-century history, the history of earth, human history, and historical crimes, as well as key eras such as the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, and Imperialism.

Alongside its international perspective, the department maintains a strong focus on modern German history, particularly within commissioned productions, while the acquisition strategy remains broadly international in scope.

A clear editorial priority is the exploration of historical anniversaries and milestones. We are particularly interested in projects that offer fresh perspectives on well-known topics or uncover lesser-known stories. Recent series such as “The Nazi Cartel” and “Forbidden Love: Queer Victims of the Nazi Dictatorship” exemplify this approach, combining thorough research with contemporary storytelling and highlighting overlooked perspectives.

The department also develops formats that resonate with younger audiences, presenting history as vivid, relevant, and emotionally engaging. Distinctive storytelling, modern narrative approaches, and high production values are key to making historical content accessible and meaningful for new generations.

Successful productions such as Chernobyl (2023) continue to feature in the schedule, representing high-quality storytelling that connects audiences with historical events of lasting significance.

Chernobyl

Science

Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Annette Harlfinger harlfinger.a@zdf.de and Sonja Rode rode.s@zdf.de

ZDFinfo's science programming brings complex topics to a broad audience through engaging and accessible storytelling. The editorial focus lies on science as part of everyday life, exploring how scientific discoveries, technological developments, and research shape the world we live in.

A key pillar of the portfolio is the exploration of the universe and space, with a strong emphasis on visually striking, narrative-driven series that make complex phenomena tangible and emotionally engaging. From cosmic events and space exploration to fundamental questions about our place in the universe, ZDFinfo is particularly interested in projects that combine scientific depth with compelling storytelling.

Beyond space, the spectrum includes documentaries on innovation, technology, and the people behind groundbreaking ideas, as well as formats that shed light on the influence of science on society - from evolution to modern engineering.

Society

Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Michael Scheuch scheuch.m@zdf.de and Wolfgang Aull aull.w@zdf.de

Here we concentrate on people, with observations from everyday life in Germany, life stories and destinies, help and tips.

The range of themes is as varied and colourful as life itself. Films are produced in collaboration with zdf.reportage on the everyday realities of life for ordinary workers and those ostracised from society, including the homeless and drug addicts. The series “Knast in Deutschland” takes a look behind prison walls, examining inmates and prison conditions, the issue of drugs, rehabilitation, and recidivism, and asks whether inmates take responsibility for their actions.

Paulina Krasa, one of the most successful podcasters in Germany, takes on spectacular true crime cases in “Schuld und Sühne”.

Two TV series “Einsatzbereit” and “Neu beim Bund” explore military readiness and life in the army. They follow new recruits during their first days in the barracks, their training in the Bundeswehr, and the challenges facing modern armies.

Current Affairs

Contact for international acquisitions and coproductions:
Michael Scheuch scheuch.m@zdf.de and Wolfgang Aull aull.w@zdf.de

Documentaries about commercial considerations, social issues and global players.

Investigative reporting and vital information about market trends, product development and purchasing patterns. The team searches extensively for current political and economic documentaries and produces exploratory documentaries on current German policy issues. In elaborate documentaries, the team deals, for example, with the collapse of Rene Benko's real estate empire, the Wirecard scandal, and the disappearance of CFO Jan Marsalek and his ties to Russian intelligence.

In two episodes "Die gefährlichsten Firmen der Welt" (Worlds most dangerous companies) explores the power of big tech companies and how they use data not only to make as much money as possible, but also to manipulate public opinion and sentiment.

The projected miniseries "Public Enemies" explores the efforts of libertarian-minded billionaires to create cities and zones with their own legal systems outside the jurisdiction of nation-states. From Greenland to Honduras, the first attempts to establish economically liberal entities free from democratic oversight are emerging.

Overview Programmmes
Time Slots

ZDF Department of History and Science:

History + Society

Sun	7:30 p.m.	42x45’	**Terra X**
Tue	10:15 p.m.	40x30’	**37°**
Sun	9:00 p.m.	50x30’	**37° Leben**

Holiday programmes (45’)

Easter, Whitsun and Christmas	**History + Society**
Easter, Whitsun and Christmas	**Religion and Life**

ZDF Department of Science and Technology

Tue	10:45 p.m.	12x28’	**Terra X Harald Lesch**

ZDF Department of Contemporary History

Primetime	8:15 p.m.	45’+90’	**Terra X History**
Sun Latenight	11:30 p.m	47x45’	**Terra X History**

ZDF Department of Current Affairs

Tue	8:15 p.m.	40x45’	**ZDFzeit**
Wed	10:45 p.m.	30’–45’	**Die Spur**
Irregular release schedule		45’–55’	**Am Puls**

ZDF Department of Environmental Affairs

Sun	3:30 p.m.	18x45’	**planet e.**
Sun	3:30 p.m.	19x43’30	**plan b**

ZDF Department of Das kleine Fernsehspiel

Mon	0:00 a.m.	40’–120’	**Das kleine Fernsehspiel**

3sat

Mon	10:30 p.m.	45x75’–100’	**Documentary Film Time**
Wed	8:15 p.m.	10x45’	**Current Affairs on Wednesday**
Thu	8:15 p.m.	15x44’	**Science on Thursday (Nano Doku)**
6 premiers per year		6x30’–45’	**DocuMe**
Sat	7:20 p.m.	37’	**3sat Culture**

ARTE

Daily access prime time		43’	**ARTE Discovery**
Mon – Fr	7:40 p.m.	30’	**Regards**
Mon	late evening	no fixed length	**Auteur Documentaries**
Tue	prime time	90’/2x52/52’	**Tuesday’s Theme**
Tue	p.t./l.e.	52’/2x52’/ 3x52’/90’	**History**
Tue	late evening	52’/90’	**Geopolitics**
Tue	late evening	52’	**Society**
Wed	p.t./l.e.	90’	**Big Format Docu**
2nd prime time, web only		30’–60’	**Cultural Documentary**
Weekdays	prime time	43’/52’/90’	**History Light**
Fr	2nd prime time **and** web only	30’–75’	**Pop Culture Documentary**
Sat	prime time	90’/2x52’	**The Human Adventure**
Late prime time		52’	**Science**
Sat	8:15 p.m.	90’/2x52’	**Prime Time Cultural Documentary**
All week prime time or 2nd prime time, web only		30’–90’	**Portrait**

ZDF Studios
Who we are

ZDF Studios is a commercial subsidiary of ZDF, one of the largest TV broadcasters in Europe. Founded in 1993 and headquartered in Mainz, Germany, the ZDF Studios Group operates more than 30 direct and indirect subsidiaries and affiliates in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom spanning TV production, distribution and services.

The parent company, ZDF Studios, is responsible for global programme distribution, realisation of international co-productions, acquisition of licences and merchandising of successful programme brands under its own name, for ZDF and third parties. ZDF Studios has the largest German-language programme inventory in the world and a constantly growing range of international productions, consistin g of series and mini-series, television films, documentaries and children's programmes.

The companies of the ZDF Studios Group cover the entire value chain from the development of scripted and unscripted TV content to production, marketing and monetizing, including TV and streaming licences as well as merchandising and online rights.

The positioning of ZDF Studios as an integrated media company enables the development of innovative, outstanding and high-quality programmes and makes the Group an attractive workplace for German and international talent to flourish in a very inspiring and creative environment.

ZDF Studios's team of programme buyers cover all significant film and television markets throughout the world and negotiate the financial terms for all ZDF programme purchases and coproductions. For many years now the ZDF Studios buyers' team has enjoyed an excellent relationship with national and international distributors. In addition to fulfilling its mandate as a service provider for ZDF, ZDF Studios also secures programme licenses for its own distribution purposes.

Furthermore, on behalf of ZDF, ZDF Studios also negotiates licensing and coproduction agreements for the broadcasters that ZDF is associated with. These include the German-French culture channel ARTE as well as 3sat, Phoenix, the Children's Channel "Kinderkanal" and ZDF's digital sector, which combines zdfneo, zdfinfo and zdfkultur.

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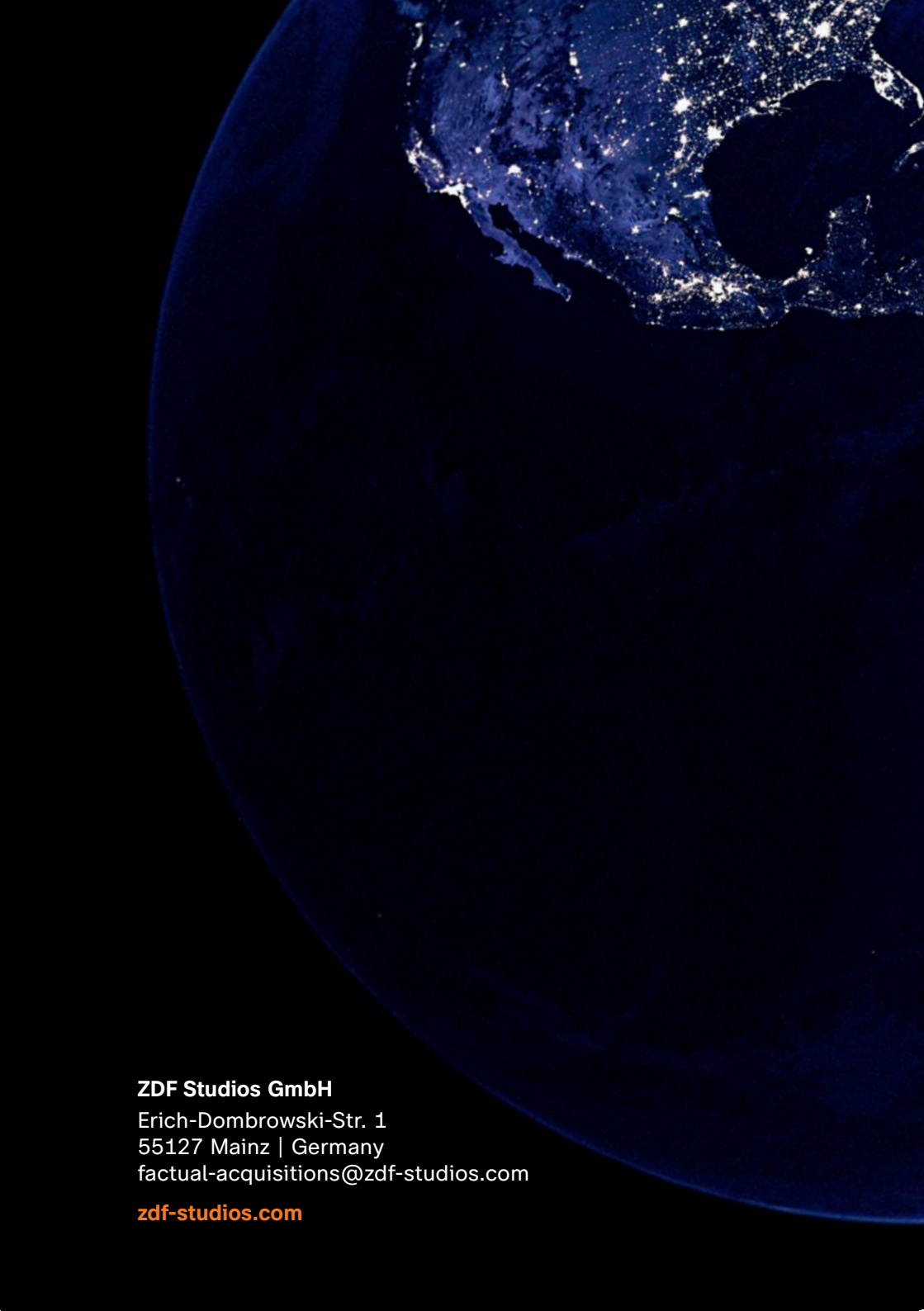

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