

Abstract DH Benelux conference (11-13 Sept Liege)

## **Movie Circulation in Four European Cities (1952): A Network Analysis of Film Programming**

Thunnis van Oort, Clara Pafort-Overduin, Kathleen Lotze, Asa Jernudd

The rise of the cinema as a cultural industry since the dawn of the twentieth century and its endurance into the twenty-first has had an abiding impact on modernizing societies. Questions that address the wider contexts of the production, distribution and – especially – consumption of film form the groundwork for a growing field called New Cinema History (Biltereyst, Maltby & Meers, 2019). The increasing interest in the specific circumstances in which films were circulated and watched historically has resulted in a proliferation of often local or regional case studies. A key challenge facing this field of research is to integrate the diversity of micro-historical studies into interpretative frameworks at the meso level (Maltby, 2011). One promising way to attain a higher level of generalisation, is transnational comparative research (Biltereyst, Van Oort & Meers, 2019). Comparisons of moviegoing patterns and strategies of film exhibition and distribution between European countries are virtually uncharted territory, in particular for the post-WWII era. The small number of publications that does exist has, however, pointed to remarkable differences (Convents & Dibbets, 2008; Garncarz, 2015; Pafort-Overduin, Sedgwick, Van de Vijver, 2018; Van Oort, 2016).

The growing interest in the application of digital research methods and tools in the humanities during the last decade has stimulated comparative research and resulted in the creation of digital databases (Noordegraaf et al., 2018). In this paper we lay some of the groundwork for such a cross-national comparison of film exhibition and distribution patterns, by zooming in on four second-tier European port cities: Antwerp (Belgium), Bari (Italy), Gothenburg (Sweden), Rotterdam (Netherlands). We have collected film programming data from newspapers for each of these cities for one year, designating which film was screened in which cinema at which point in time. We focus on the year 1952, at a time when the industry was flourishing before a recession set in during the late 1950s.

We propose to analyse the programming data as a network of films flowing through the cinemas in each city that provides us with an empirical basis to establish patterns of exhibition that may create profiles for individual and clusters of cinemas. Noting also the location in the cities of the cinema theatres, the analysis can answer questions such as: Were the local film markets divided into geographical zones dictated by the so called run-zone-clearance system with a hierarchy of first-run, second-run cinemas, and those further down the line? To what extent did these second tier cities have cinemas with more specialized programs, for instance films produced in specific countries, or particular film genres, and where were they located? A comparison of the results in the four cities puts us on a track towards identifying local specificities but also wider generalisations about film consumption in Europe at a time when cinema going was in its prime.

## References

Biltereyst, D., Maltby, R. & Meers, P. (Eds.) (2019). *Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*. New York: Routledge.

Biltereyst, D., van Oort, T., & Meers, P. (2019). Comparing historical cinema cultures: Reflections on new cinema history and comparison with a cross-national case study on Antwerp and Rotterdam. In D. Biltereyst, R. Maltby, & P. Meers (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* (pp. 96-111). Abington and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Convents, G. & Dibbets, K. (2008) Verschiedene Welten: Kinokultur in Brüssel und Amsterdam 1905 - 1930. In C. Müller and H. Segeberg (Eds.), *Kinoöffentlichkeit (1895-1920). Entstehung, Etablierung, Differenzierung / Cinema's Public Sphere (1895-1920). Emergence, Settlement, Differentiation* (pp. 150-156). Marburg: Schüren.

Garncarz, J. (2015). *Wechselnde Vorlieben. Über die Filmpräferenzen der Europäer, 1896-1939*. Frankfurt am Main/Basel: Stroemfeld.

Maltby, R. (2011). New Cinema Histories. In R. Maltby, D. Biltereyst & P. Meers (Eds.). *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* (pp. 3-40). Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Noordegraaf, J., Lotze, K. & Boter, J. (2018) Writing Cinema Histories with Digital Databases: The Case of Cinema Context. *TMG - Journal for Media History* 21(2): 106-126.

Pafort-Overduin, C., Sedgwick, J., Van de Vijver, L. (2018) Identifying Cinema Cultures and Audience Preferences: A Comparative Analysis of Audience Choice and Popularity in Three Medium-Sized Northern European Cities in the Mid-1930s. *TMG - Journal for Media History* 21(1): 102-118.

Van Oort, T. (2016). Industrial organization of film exhibitors in the Low Countries: comparing the Netherlands and Belgium, 1945–1960. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1-24. DOI:10.1080/01439685.2016.1157294