

## **Defining a typology of cinemas across 1950s Europe**

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### **Abstract:**

This article presents a new typology of cinemas standardized across seven European cities Bari (Italy), Leicester (United Kingdom), Ghent (Belgium), Rotterdam (The Netherlands), Gothenburg (Sweden), Brno (Czechoslovakia) and Magdeburg (East Germany) and developed within the European Cinema Audiences (ECA) research project, through a cross-analysis of film exhibition and programming in the 1950s. Our contribution addresses the lack of a Europe-wide classification of cinema theatres in the period under scrutiny, which is necessary for any cross-national comparative analysis of the exhibition sector. The article is divided into three sections. In the first section it presents the methodology adopted by the project, aiming to replace missing ticket prices for cinema admission with a “price proxy”. This was used to determine cinema weightings and ranking. Our methodology expands on the limited criterion of seating capacity as the basis of classifying cinemas (Browning & Sorrell, 1952), by taking into account also exhibitors’ programming strategies. The second section illustrates a systematic classification of the types of cinemas across Europe according to the proposed new common characteristics. This section explains the different categories (elite, major, intermediate and minor cinemas) and demonstrates how they apply across our dataset, based on geography, the characteristics of the films screened (such as nationality, year, and genre), and the programming strategies for the Top 20 longest screening films in the respective case-study cities. The final section focuses on the

discussion of case-study films emerging from the programming in the seven cities. On the one hand, it gives a better understanding of the hierarchy of the film exhibition structure in 1950s Europe, and, on the other hand, it explains how cinemas belonging to a specific category performed and operated in terms of programming not only within the local market in a given city, but also cross-nationally in the seven European cities. Hopefully the ECA cinema typology can be used and adapted to other geographical and cultural contexts.

**Key words:** cinema typology, film programming, exhibition, New Cinema History

## Introduction

Geographical locations, programming, capacity, but also management, religious or political affiliation, licence granted by local authorities and even classifications imposed by occupying forces during the war are several of the ways in which cinema theatres have been historically classified across different European countries. Our contribution addresses the lack of a Europe-wide classification of cinema theatres of the 1950s, which is necessary for any cross-national comparative analysis of the exhibition sector.

This article presents a typology of cinemas for 1950s Europe developed as part of the European Cinema Audiences (ECA) project.<sup>1</sup> It aims to investigate and compare film programming and memories of cinema-going across seven European countries: Bari (IT), Leicester (UK), Ghent (BE), Rotterdam (NL), Gothenburg (SE), Brno (CZE) and Magdeburg (GDR). This article reflects on some of the challenges that emerged from the comparative analysis of the programming and exhibition data collected. More importantly, it explains how we developed a new cinema typology that, as an analytical tool, allowed us to compare and analyse the activity of a wide range of venues across these European cities. Cinema typologies have not been widely researched and the sporadic literature on them has been fragmented and only available at national level (Browning & Sorrell, 1952; Furhammar, 1990; Vande Winkel, 2017). Therefore a comparative integration of exhibition datasets raised the methodological challenge of how to analyse cinemas in different geographical and cultural locations and provided us with the perfect opportunity to develop a new typology of cinemas which could be applicable to different European countries. Ultimately, we propose a new methodology that has made use of the film programming data collected for the years 1951 to 1953 as well as exhibition data on variables such as the cinemas' seating capacity and their activity during the years under scrutiny (Ercole, Van de Vijver and Treveri Gennari, 2020).

The article is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the methodology adopted to define a cinema typology across the seven cities studied in the project. Our methodology expands on the limited criterion of seating capacity as the basis of classifying cinemas (Browning & Sorrell, 1952) by taking into account also exhibitors'

programming strategies. The second section of the article presents a systematic classification of the types of cinemas across the seven European cities according to the proposed common characteristics. Finally, the last section focuses on the discussion of a series of case study films emerging from the seven cities, exploring the dynamics between film circulation and cinema typology. On the one hand, this section gives a better understanding of the hierarchy of the film exhibition structure, and, on the other hand, it analyses how cinemas belonging to a specific category performed within the market and operated in terms of programming within a city but also cross-nationally in the seven European cities. The main argument of the article is the need for a clear-cut cross-border typology based on local characteristics in order to find comparative new cinema histories<sup>2</sup>.

Our approach is indebted to John Sedgwick who also guided us through the development, refinement and testing of our methodology.

### **Developing the methodology: price proxy, cinema status index and cinema weights**

For the study of cinema as a cultural practice, historical research into the experience of cinema-going is a quintessential area of research. The ECA project focuses on cinema-going experience of the 1950s - a time in which TV was diffusing rapidly, but when going to the cinema still constituted by far the dominant paid-for-leisure activity in most European economies. Collecting audiences' memories of this period is timely, as those audiences will not be long-lasting. The corpus of data on European cinema cultures is very heterogeneous and up to now there has been little comparative research. The choice of countries for the ECA project allowed for a comparative analysis that takes into account social, economic, cultural and political diversity within Europe. It also compares well developed film and exhibition markets (like Italy or the UK) with less developed ones (like the Netherlands); countries in which American film programming predominated (Belgium, UK and Sweden) with territories with greater resistance to it (Italy, Czechoslovakia, and the Netherlands).

The ECA project aims to make a contribution to the understanding of European audiences and film cultures by problematizing the canonised notion of national cinema and integrating it into a comparative transnational historical context. It does that by analysing 140 video-interviews with older spectators who attended cinemas in the 1950s across the seven cities. Alongside, it explores exhibition data on the 232 cinemas active in the 1950s in all cities under scrutiny, as well as programming data collected for the years 1951, 1952 and 1953, in order to study how films circulated amongst and within European cities and identify similarities and differences in the pattern of film programming.

Comparing seven different cities is a challenge because "cross-cultural differences require careful consideration" (Fischer, 2018, 694). Our selection criteria for the cities was dependent on similar population densities (less than 500,000 inhabitants) and film exhibition structures (between 15 and 30 cinemas in each city), as well as being more

representative of their respective national cinema cultures in comparison to larger metropolitan cities, already widely researched.<sup>3</sup> However, while we have tried to select cities with comparable data (number of inhabitants or number of cinemas), there are many differences in culture, ideology and politics that we need to take into account when comparing Brno with Bari or Ghent with Leicester, for instance. Moreover, from an empirical perspective, data collection's complexity is increased by the process of negotiating results often based on incomplete records. In the ECA research project, we realised that we needed to find ways to replace missing data if we wanted to keep our comparative analysis constant and systematic. This meant applying a methodology that could use broader categories encompassing national ones.

Within the contexts of cinema venues, the classification available in some cities was different and a standardised format was needed in order to allow a systematic analysis of this type of data. At national level, cinemas were traditionally divided by the industry or the local authorities according to their geographical locations, their programming, their seating capacity and their facilities, as well as their management. These criteria were specific at national level but presented several variables difficult to compare at European level. In order to develop new systems of classification, we needed to find a way to create a typology that allowed us to compare cinemas which were very different - like public houses with "multiple recreational functions" in Sweden (Jernudd, 2005, 93), parish cinemas in Italy (Fanchi, 2006 and Treveri Gennari, 2009) and Belgium (Biltereyst, 2007) and newsreel cinemas in Czechoslovakia (Skopal, 2019). This process allowed us to apply what Biltereyst and Meers call "a more sophisticated kind of comparison, one where aspects of cinema culture are examined at different places by using an identical methodological set-up" (Biltereyst & Meers, 2016, 22). The film exhibition and programming data collected in the ECA project confirms the significant diversity in the film markets already observed by Pafort-Overduin et al (2020), which must be taken into account when classifying cinemas across the seven cities (**Table 1**).

In fact, when looking at **Table 1**, while the number of venues is fairly even (between 14 in Rotterdam<sup>4</sup> and 37 in Gothenburg), the number of unique films shown already presents a more significant discrepancy between cities: as indicated in the table above, Magdeburg had an offering of 364 films in the three years studied while Bari had 2694 (this is explained by a very rapid turnover of films) and Leicester – with its common double bill practice – almost 10 times the number of films shown in Magdeburg (3372). This complex film and exhibition market includes a wide range of cinema venues and diversified programming practices. In cities where state cultural policies had a direct impact on film supply and exploitation strategies, films needed to circulate longer and to more venues "in order to saturate the local demand" (Porubčanská et al, 2020). This process of capitalizing from screening films across most of the exhibition network was a practice common in both Brno and Magdeburg, which is clearly reflected in the lower number of films available on the market.

**Table 1:** Film exhibition market in seven European cities (1951-1953): number of cinemas, films programmed and average films per cinema in one year

### Data on the film market 1951-'53

	cinemas	unique feature films	average films per cinema in one year
Bari	31	2694	54
Brno	25	566	16
Ghent	33	1789	23
Gothenburg	37	1731	25
Leicester	27	3372	65
Magdeburg	20	364	12
Rotterdam	14	1086	32

Developing a cinema typology for the European cinema market (that did not reflect the American *run-zone-clearance* system dismantled in 1948) was, therefore, a priority in the research project, as it would allow a systematic comparison between the film exhibition of the cities under scrutiny. Behind the raw numbers of active cinemas (and programmed films) there is a huge variety in terms of venues (seating numbers, position in relation to film circulation, ideological backgrounds) and national typologies are specific to individual countries and fail to capture these complexities across our seven nations. These established typologies are reliant predominantly on specific (geographical and temporal) variables, such as the circulation of films used in Czechoslovakia<sup>5</sup>, the licence granted by the Police, the geographical location and even the genre in Italy<sup>6</sup>, or the classification imposed by the German occupier on the Belgian venues during WWII<sup>7</sup>. In order to standardize these different categorizations, we have decided to develop a classification of cinemas based on these main characteristics: 1. the seating capacity, which would indicate the potential revenue of a specific cinema, if the cinema was at full capacity; 2. the activity of the cinemas across the year (as some cinemas were closed during the summer period, while many open-air ones would only operate during this season); 3. the ticket pricing, which would establish the differentiation of cinemas according to their position in the local market.

This approach has been partly inspired by Furhammar (1990) in his analysis of Swedish cinemas of the 1930s through the Seating Capacity Norm Coefficient, a measure of average seat occupancy obtained by dividing the total number of cinema visits over a certain period by the total number of cinema seats that were available during the same period. However, our methodology takes into account a wider number of characteristics to profile cinemas and avoids treating each cinema in a territory as the same. To discriminate between cinemas, proxies for prices were created and tested against what was available as price proxies in two of our cities: the price per meter that advertisers were required to pay

for screened promotions taken from the yearbook *Répertoire publicitaire du cinéma belge* 1954 (from the Belgian Chamber of Cinematographic Advertising) and the admission prices for the UK taken from both the *Kinematograph Yearbook* 1950 and from Browning & Sorrell (1952). Once we proved that these price proxies were reliable,<sup>8</sup> we were able to use them across all cinemas in the European dataset to establish the final system.

The first step of the process was to identify the top 20 films in each city using the highest number of screening days. A trajectory of diffusion was established for each film across each city where it was screened: cinemas where these films premiered received a score of 3; cinemas where these films were shown immediately after received a score of 2; and cinemas where these films went last a score of 1. Cinemas which did not screen any of the top 20 films received a score of 0.75, as they were still active during the period under scrutiny, and their activity was visible in the cinema listings in national and local newspapers. This methodology was premised on the assumption that those cinemas which premiered films that proved to be popular were likely to charge prices that were higher. By doing so, we were able to calculate a price proxy – a replacement figure for the ticket prices unavailable in some of the studied cities – which was needed in order to determine the weighting of each venue. However, the price proxy visualization (**Fig.1**) provided much more than just a replacement value for ticket prices. It gave an indication of how the programming operated, as it contributed to understanding how films travelled across the seven cities and provided key information on the exhibition sector. In fact, it allowed us to single out cinemas which had the role of premiering films, while positioning others lower down in the exhibition chain. This way of categorizing cinemas according to their position in the exhibition market is helpful in understanding the offering available to audiences in different parts of the cities.

The price proxy was able to demarcate the disparity between cinemas in the same city: in the case of Rotterdam, for example, the activity of the Colosseum cinema, which showed 29 films out of the top 20 across the three years, was significantly higher from cinemas such as the Centraal and the Cineac NRC, which did not show any of the top films. Moreover, when comparing the circulation of films between the cities, we discovered that Bari, for instance, would show a film on average across 3.7 cinemas, while in Brno and Magdeburg, a film screened across the majority of their exhibition circuit (12.62 and 14.13 cinemas, respectively). This distinction highlighted a very different way to exploit the films on the market and the need to explore some of these patterns further, in order to understand whether these different practices were dependent on governmental policies or commercial decisions.

The price proxy was used to calculate the cinema weight. The mean score reflects the status of the cinema in the cinema hierarchy (or the position in the cinema in the exhibition market) and, accordingly, is termed Cinema Status Index value (CSI). This CSI was then averaged across all cities (the average of all CSIs), giving a value that was not only





seating weight (the strength of the cinema according to the seating capacity in relation to the rest of the market) and the programming weight (the moment in time when the film arrived in a given cinema), we added the time factor, determined by the activity of the cinema throughout the year.<sup>10</sup>

### **Time Factor to adjust the Cinema weight**

one season (0 - 90 days) = Cinemaweight \* 0.25

½ of a year (91 - 180 days) = Cinemaweight \* 0.50

¾ of a year (181-270 days) = Cinemaweight \* 0.75

full year (271 - 365 days) = Cinemaweight \* 1

For example: the Active Cinema Weight of the Savoia (Bari) = 0.39806 \* 0.25 (= time factor of the Savoia) = 0.09951.

The time factor provided us with an Active Cinema weight (= ACW), which formed the basis for the cinema typology which will be the focus of the next section.

### **The ECA cinema typology**

The ECA cinema typology has five categories. The common characteristic of the venues in each category is the ACW, or the combination of the seating weight, the programming weight and the activity of a cinema. The typology does not include the inactive venues, because it is based on the ACW (extracted from the programming data). These venues were not active in 1951 to 1953 (due to renovations, temporary closures, openings after 1953 or other reasons) but they were active in other years of the 1950s. Therefore, out of our 232 cinemas, our dataset has 187 active cinemas.

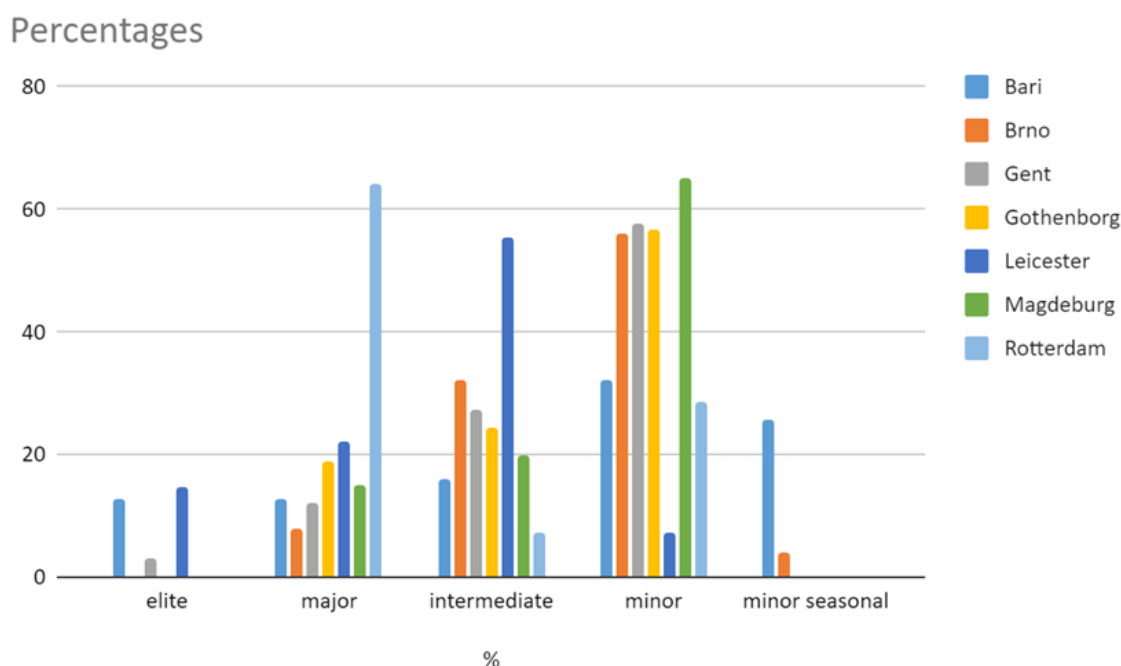
The ACW of the 187 active venues ranged from (ACW=) 2.18 to (ACW=) 0.01. We ranked the cinemas in elite venues (ACW=1.50 or more), major venues (ACW=0.66-1.50), intermediate venues (ACW=0.30-0.65) and minor venues (ACW=0.29 or below). Because of the specificity of the activity in certain seasons during the year, a fifth category are the minor seasonal venues (ACW=0.29 or below).<sup>11</sup> This typology is designed to be flexible and, thus, applicable to other research cases as well. If any of the variables used were to change over time (for instance the activity of the cinema during any given year), affecting the value of the cinema weight (and their position in the exhibition chain), the cinema could switch categories in the typology.

This section describes the venues in each category. We discuss the ACW characteristics (seating, price proxy and activity) of the venues and reflect on additional characteristics such as the geographical locations, management, and the films they screened. The data used for these characteristics relates to two types of data collected: information on the exhibition structure and programming data. The analysis of the programming is twofold: first we looked at the number of films each venue screened (out of the 6761 films present in our dataset); secondly, we looked at the films (nationality, year of



production, genre of the films) and the circulation they had. Nine venues belong to the elite category, 35 to the major, 51 to the intermediate and 92 to the minor, of which we included a necessary fifth category, the 9 minor seasonal. While the elite venues are only present in Bari, Ghent and Leicester, all other categories, except for the minor seasonal venues, can be found in all seven cities, and the minor venues make up for the largest group in our dataset (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2:** Percentages of active venues in the typology



### **Elite**

The nine elite cinemas were located in Bari, Ghent and Leicester. The ACW ranges from 1.92 to 2.18; the seating ranges from 1452 seats (Impero, Bari) to 3020 seats (Petruzelli, Bari) and they have an average of 329 active days in a year. All nine except for the Trocadero (Leicester) were located in the city centres. The elite venues were managed by limited companies.

The programming data for these cinemas shows that the elite venues screened 32.7% of the feature films in our dataset. The elite venues screened more American (69%) than national productions (26%). They also had a wide range of genres; they screened 2211 films in 317 different genres, or 7 films per genre. The films screened in the elite venues travelled well across the other cities: 13.4% of the films screened in the elite venues circulated across five different cities.<sup>12</sup> This is the highest percentage among all ranks; meaning the films that circulated in the elite venues were present in most of the other cities (in different ranks). While there was a high percentage of American films screened in the elite cinemas, national productions (especially in the case of Bari) were also very popular:

12% of all the films screened in Bari's elite cinemas were Italian, and were kept in circulation longer (25% of all screenings were of Italian productions). Ghent's elite venues screened no Belgian productions,<sup>13</sup> while Leicester's elite venues had 18% UK productions in 24.1% of their screenings. Lastly, the main characteristic of the elite venues was the dominance of recent films: 82% of all screenings in the elite venues were films produced in 1951, 1952 or 1953.<sup>14</sup>

### **Major**

A major venue has an ACW that ranges between 0.66 and 1.50. All seven cities had major venues. The ACW of the 35 major venues ranges from 0.66 to 1.48. The seating capacity ranged from 600 seats (Cineac Beurs, Rotterdam) to 1800 seats (Roxy, Leicester). The major venues are the most active venues in the dataset with an average of 345 active days per year. Two thirds of these venues were located in the centre of the cities, and a third in the districts or suburbs. They were managed by limited or cooperative companies (with the exception of the state-controlled venues in Brno and Magdeburg).

When looking at the programming, the major venues screened 57.5% of all the films in the dataset, with a preference for American films (60% of the screenings). A third of the films screened were produced in Western Europe, with the United Kingdom, France and Italy scoring the highest percentages. When compared to the elite venues, only 47% of the films screened in the major cinemas were recent. However, these recent films were very popular, representing 70% of all the screenings. National productions (913 films) were present in 22% of all screenings: 22.6% of the films in Brno were Czech, 18.3% of the films screened in major venues in Leicester were UK film productions, 13.8% of the films screened in Bari were Italian films, Magdeburg's major venues had 12,1% East-German films on offer, 0.8% of the films in Rotterdam's major venues were Dutch films and 0.2% of the films in Ghent were Belgian films (which isn't surprising due to the near lack of national productions). What is interesting is that the number of screenings of the national productions in Bari (22.2%), Gothenburg (13.6%), Rotterdam (1.5%) and Brno (35.9%) confirms that even though national productions weren't as plentiful as Hollywood films in major venues, they still proved popular to enjoy multiple screenings. Concerning the genres, the diversity is slightly lower than in the elite venues; they screened 3892 films in 423 different genres, or 9 films per genre. Out of these 3892 films, only 9.2% screened in five cities, which means that the transnational circulation of the films wasn't as broad as in the elite venues.

### **Intermediate**

An intermediate venue has an ACW that ranged between 0.30 and 0.65. All seven cities have intermediate venues. The ACW of the 51 major venues ranged from 0.66 to 1.48. The seating capacity ranges from 400 seats (Praha, Brno) to 1334 seats (Westleigh Kinema,

Leicester). These cinemas were thus smaller in terms of seating capacity (average of 800 seats) and were managed either by limited companies or private exhibitors (with the exception of the venues in Brno and Magdeburg). Only a fourth of them were located in the city centre. The intermediate cinemas were active most of the year; they were open on an average of 317 days per year.

They screened 4655 feature films, or 68.8% of all feature films screened in the seven cities. These venues offered even a lower amount (58%) of American films than the major cinemas. They had a similar number of national productions as the elite and the major venues, and once again Brno kept the national productions in circulation the longest: 34% of the screenings in Brno were national productions, while, for instance, for Magdeburg this was only 15%. The films in the intermediate venue category were also the least diverse in terms of genre; the intermediate venues screened 4655 films in 440 different genres, or 11 films per unique combination of genres. Only 356 films screened in five different cities, or 7.6%, and 54% of the films screened in the intermediate venues were only shown in one city.

### ***Minor***

A minor venue has an ACW below 0.30. All seven cities had minor venues. The ACW of the 83 minor venues ranges from 0.29 to 0.03.<sup>15</sup> The seating capacity ranges from 88 seats (S. Nicola, Bari) to 852 seats (Centraal, Rotterdam). Minor cinemas are found in all seven cities, even though the difference between the amount of minor venues in Leicester and Magdeburg, for instance, is rather large (see **Fig.2**). They are mostly under private management, apart from Brno and Magdeburg, where they were state-owned and state-controlled. They were the least active venues in the set, as they screen films on average 273 days in one year.

The minor cinemas screened 60.5% of all the films in our dataset, offering the smallest amount of American films (42% of the screenings) and presenting a diversity in terms of country of origin slightly higher than the other categories, but lower in terms of recent date of production (only 27% of recent films screened in only 40% of the screenings). Their diversity is slightly higher than the major venues looking at genres: the minor venues screened 4092 feature films in 417 different genres, or 9.8 films per unique combination of genres. Interestingly, the 4092 films that were screened in the minor venues have a more global dimension, as almost a third of their films circulated in three cities, a fourth in four cities and 8.6% in five cities.

### ***Minor seasonal***

There are nine minor seasonal venues in the dataset, eight of them in Bari and one in Brno. The Letni Kino Sport was a small open air out of town state-controlled venue in Brno, with an average of 72 screenings in one year during the summer. The eight open air Italian

venues were located in the centre, district and suburbs<sup>16</sup> of Bari. Only two of them were commercial venues, four were parish open air cinemas, and two were workers' clubs. The Italian venues were active on average 94 days per year. The minor seasonal venues varied in seating range from 85 seats up to 1350 seats.

The minor seasonal venues screened 1052 unique feature films, or only 15.5% of the films in our dataset, but they had a very fast turnover. Whilst the average turnover in Bari was three days, minor seasonal cinemas screened films for no longer than two days. Moreover, minor seasonal venues had the highest diversity in genre (5 films per unique combination of genres), yet screened the lowest number of American films (47% of all the movies screened in the minor venues). Not surprisingly 21% of all films screened in the minor seasonal venues were Italian productions, and 15% were Czech and Soviet films. These films were mostly shown in other venues in Brno and Magdeburg, and only exceptionally in West-based venues. They have the lowest number of recent films (22%), and from the 1052 films screened, 11% screened in five cities, which is second to the elite venues.

To sum up, all the categories have distinct differences concerning their ACW characteristics (seating range, programming weight, and the average activity per year) (see **Fig.3**). As we analyse our venues from the elite to the minor, we observe some trends. First, there is a gradual move from the city centre to the outskirts. Second, there is a move from the largest venues to the smallest in size. And third, there is a shift from limited companies to a mixed-management approach where the limited companies are seen alongside private and family-run exhibition structures. As for the films they programmed, there was a gradual decline of American and British films and an increase of French and Soviet films from elite to minor venues (see **Fig.4**). This could correlate with the price of booking American films, but also with local cultural policies at play, such as the higher the number of minor venues in a city screening national productions and a lower presence of the American films (as was the case in Brno). For the case of French films, a local factor in Ghent is the widespread use of the French language.

In terms of years of production, unsurprisingly the elite venues presented a very significant number of recent films (see **Fig.5**), while there was an increased presence of films from the late 1940s when moving from major to minor seasonal venues. Moreover, the genre diversity is the highest in the elite venues, while the minor and minor seasonal venues have a lower diversity in genre and genres like romance and war films climb to the top 5 in both categories (see **Fig.6**).

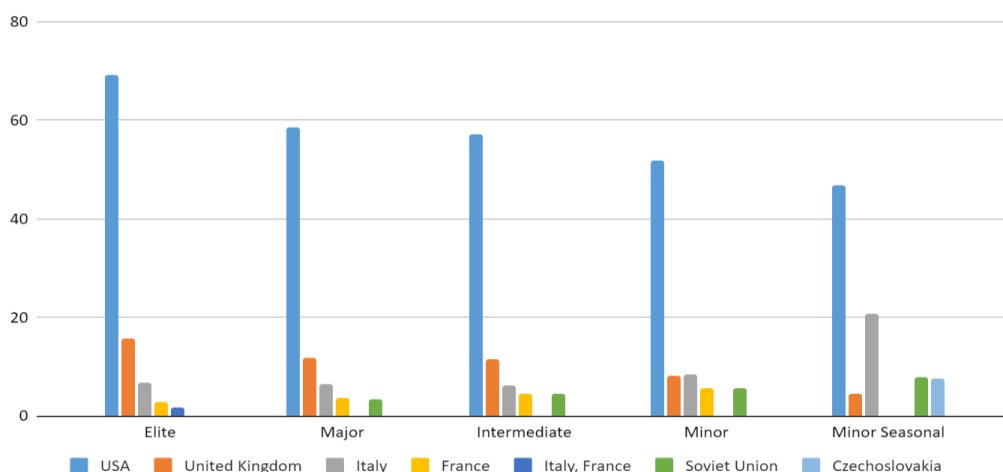
To conclude, the elite have a significant presence of recent American films with a higher diversity in genre that circulated well. The major venues screened less recent films with a lower diversity in genre. The intermediate screened most of the films in the dataset, and the minor cinemas had less recent films, lower genre diversity and more national productions, with films that did circulate more broadly. The minor seasonal venues were a

very distinct rank, screening older films that had been screened more often in the other cities than other categories of venues.

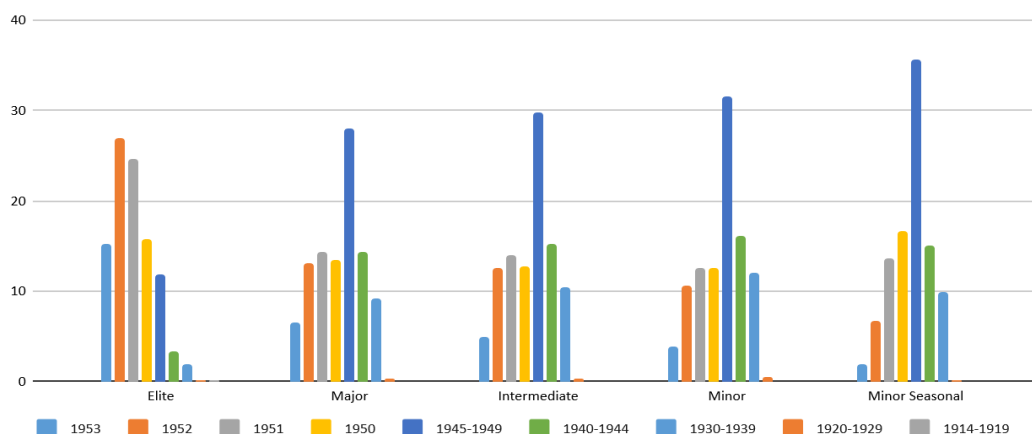
**Fig. 3:** Cinema ranks details

	Location	Management <sup>17</sup>	Average seating capacity	Average days of activity	% of films screened from our dataset	% of films shown that were also screened in other cities
<b>Elite</b>	Centre	limited companies	2000	329	32.7%	13% 5 cities
<b>Major</b>	centre + ½ district	limited companies	1000	345	57.5%	9% 5 cities
<b>Intermediate</b>	centre + ¾ district	limited companies / private exhibitors	800	317	68.8%	7% 5 cities
<b>Minor</b>	centre + ¾ suburbs	private exhibitors	380	273	60.5%	29% 3 cities
<b>Minor seasonal</b>	diverse	diverse <sup>18</sup>	480	91	15.5%	11% 5 cities

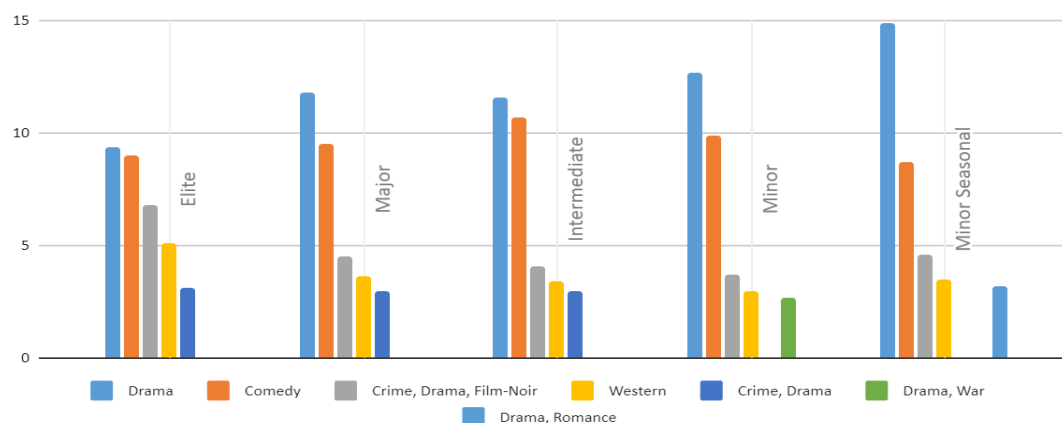
**Fig. 4:** Production countries per rank (Top 5)



**Fig. 5: Production years per rank (all films)**



**Fig. 6: Genre per rank (Top 5)**



### Case studies: dynamics of film circulation and cinema typology

This final section focuses on the discussion of case studies emerging from the seven cities. On the one hand, it provides a better understanding of the hierarchy of the film exhibition structure, while, on the other, it analyses how cinemas belonging to a specific rank performed within the market and how films circulated within each city. In order to select a film for the case study of each city we have chosen one title in the midrange within the top 20 in terms of most frequently screened in 1952. Moreover, all films selected for this study were recent films (produced in 1951). In order to understand the circulation of each title we looked at how many screenings the film had within the city, how long the film stayed on the market, how the film circulated according to cinema ranks and, finally, how the film moved geographically within a city.

DATE	1952											1953		
	18/4	4/7	11/7	21/7	22/8	3/10	10/10	17/10	24/10	31/10	2/12	13/3	10/4	28/4

Cinema Type	Major	21															
	Intermediate		4		1		4	4									
	Minor		4	4		4			4	5	4	3	4	4	3		

Fig. 7: No. of days that *Dream of a Cossack* (Yuli Raizman, 1951) was screened in Brno, by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

For the city of Brno the circulation of the Soviet *Dream of a Cossack* (Yuli Raizman, 1951) was investigated. This film was shown in fifteen cinemas and had seventy-three screenings, confirming the density of circulation around the city identified by Porubčanská et al (2020). As highlighted in their article, between 1949 and 1953 films in Brno “were screened within so-called circular distribution, which ensured screenings in selected cinemas all over the city” (7). The practice secured high attendance numbers and is reflected in the circulation of *Dream of a Cossack*. The film premiered on 18th April 1952 in a major cinema in the city centre where it remained for twenty-one days (see Fig. 7). From the end of July to the beginning of October the film moved alternately between minor and intermediate cinemas in different areas of the city, while from mid October 1952 to the end of March 1953 it remained in minor cinemas. Whilst *Dream of a Cossack* had a market lifespan of just over a year, it must be noted that its programming presented long gaps in between screenings. However, what is noticeable is the low number of screenings that the film had in each intermediate and minor cinema, especially when we consider that in Brno the majority of cinemas were in the minor category (14 out of 24 in operation in 1952).

DATE		1952														1953			
		8 / 2	22 / 2	7/3	4/4	11 / 4	25 / 4	2/5	30 / 5	10 / 6	13 / 6	22 / 7	22 / 8	28 / 10	24 / 2	30 / 6	8/9	11 / 9	
Cinema Type	Major	7	7																
	Intermediate			7				7		3									
	Minor				7	7	7		4		7	2	7	3	3	3	3	7	



**Fig. 8:** No. of days that *Gyarmat a Fold Alatt* (Károli Makk and Mihály Smenez, 1951) was screened in Magdeburg, by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

A similar pattern of distribution can be seen in Magdeburg where we analysed the screenings of the Hungarian film *Gyarmat a Fold Alatt* (Károli Makk and Mihály Smenez, 1951), which had ninety-eight screenings in total. As already seen for the case of Brno, in Magdeburg this film circulated in a high number of cinemas, eighteen out of the twenty-one cinemas in operation in the city in 1952. The film premiered on 8th February 1952 for seven days in a major cinema in the city centre and then moved to two major cinemas in the districts, where it was shown again for seven days. Despite some exceptions (see **Fig. 8**) the exhibition in Magdeburg followed a pattern in which the film was shown in each cinema for seven days, regardless of the geographical location of the cinema or its category. In terms of market lifespan *Gyarmat a Fold Alatt* remained on the market for over seventeen months, with significant gaps in between screenings, especially in 1953.

DATE		1952					1953			
		8/3	7/4	15/4	21/4	5/5	19/5	1/1	13/7	14/9
Cinema Type	Major	35	6						7	
	Intermediate			6						
	Minor			6	14	7	7	4		7
					7					

**Fig. 9:** No. of days that *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minnelli, 1951) was screened in Gothenburg by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

For Gothenburg and Ghent the Hollywood film *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minnelli, 1951) was investigated where the two cities presented very different patterns of circulation. In Gothenburg the film had one hundred and six screenings across ten cinemas. It premiered on 8th March 1952 in a major cinema in the city centre where it stayed for thirty five days. In April it was shown in a major cinema in one of the districts for six days and then in two intermediate cinemas (one in the suburbs and one in the districts) at the same time for another six days. On 21st April the film was screened in two minor cinemas, one in the city

centre and one in a district. As evident from the table (**Fig. 9**) the geographical position of the cinema might have dictated the difference in time the film was shown for. The film was, in fact, screened in the city centre three times throughout its life span of eighteen months. This can be explained by the fact that amongst the seven cities studied for the project Gothenburg was the one with the highest number of minor cinemas evenly distributed between centre, district and suburb. As explained by Pafort-Overduin et al (2020), the long-life cycle of films in this city can be justified by the small size of cinemas: “the low average and median seating capacity possibly created a structure that encouraged long life-cycles and more films to move” (39).

DATE		1952					1953		
		23/5	29/8	19/9	10/10	7/11	21/11	6/2	27/2
Cinema Type	Major	14 7							
	Intermediate		7	7 7			7		
	Minor				7	7		7	8

**Fig. 10:** No. of days that *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minnelli, 1951) was screened in Ghent, by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

*An American in Paris* followed a different pattern of market exploitation in Ghent, where it had seventy-eight screenings in ten cinemas. On 23rd of May 1952 it premiered at the same time in two major cinemas in the city centre. Apart from the initial fourteen days of continuous screenings in one cinema, in each major, intermediate or minor cinema – and throughout its market lifespan of fourteen months – the film was shown for the same amount of days (seven) in each cinema independently from their typology. However, the film’s distribution follows a traditional pattern, from major to minor cinemas and from city centre to suburbs.

DATE		1952						1953
		26/5	14/8	28/8	2/10	6/10	16/10	5/10
Cinema Type	Elite	6						
		6						
	Major				4			
	Intermediate		4		4	3	3	3
					4	3	3	
Minor			3					

**Fig. 11:** No. of days that *On Moonlight Bay* (Roy Del Ruth, 1951) was screened in Leicester, by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

In Leicester the Hollywood film *On Moonlight Bay* (Roy Del Ruth, 1951) had 46 screenings in twelve cinemas. Leicester is the city in our project with the highest number of elite (four) and intermediate cinemas (fifteen). As shown in the table (**Fig. 11**) the programming in Leicester seems to have taken a very different pattern. The film opened on 26th May 1952 in two elite cinemas at the same time. One cinema was in the city centre and the other in the district and the film was screened for six days in each. In August the film was shown in the suburbs, but in October it had parallel screenings in three intermediate cinemas in the district. Parallel screening in multiple venues is a very common pattern in Leicester and it is due to the fact that seven cinemas in Leicester belonged to the same circuit of distribution. In our case all six cinemas that provided simultaneous screenings of *On Moonlight Bay* belonged to the Evington Cinema Circuit.

DATE		1952			
		6/9	20/9	31/10	26/12
Cinema Type	Major	7	7		
		7			

	<b>Intermediate</b>				7
	<b>Minor</b>			3	

**Fig. 12:** No. of days that *Distant Drums* (Raoul Walsh, 1951) was screened in Rotterdam, by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

Rotterdam represents a unique case within the European cities we studied. The American film *Distant Drums* (Raoul Walsh, 1951) had thirty-one screenings there but it was only shown in four cinemas across the city. Moreover, the film had a very short market lifespan (four months). At the beginning of September 1952, the film premiered for seven days in two major cinemas at the same time. One was located in the city centre, the other in the district. After these initial screenings, the film moved to a minor cinema and then to an intermediate one over the Christmas holidays. Rotterdam had only one intermediate cinema, while all major and minor cinemas were located in the city centre and in the district. In their study of the film circulation in Rotterdam in 1952 Pafort-Overduin et al (2020) suggest that only 11% of the films screened in that year were shown in a second cinema, therefore the number of “moving films” was very low. The case study of *Distant Drum* confirms that titles in the top 20 list circulated the most within the city despite the low number of cinemas in operation.

DATE		1951	1952			1953	
		29/12	30/7	3/10	9/10	4/4	24/7
Cinema Type	<b>Elite</b>	7					
	<b>Major</b>		5	4			
	<b>Intermediate</b>				4		3
	<b>Minor</b>					5	

**Fig. 13:** No. of days that *Valentino* (Lewis Allen, 1951) was screened in Bari, by cinema type and date. Cinemas in green were located in the city centre, those in yellow in the district and in grey in the suburb.

The circulation of the British film *Valentino* (Lewis Allen, 1951) in Bari is our last case study. It had twenty eight screenings in six cinemas. Bari was the city with the highest concentration of cinemas in the city centre and the circulation of *Valentino* reflected this geographical aspect. It is also important to highlight that the film had a very long market lifespan (nineteen months). *Valentino* premiered for seven days in an elite cinema in the city centre on 29th of December 1951. After the premiere it was shown for five days in July 1952 in a major cinema in the centre of Bari, and then in October for four days in a major cinema in the centre and in an intermediate cinema in the district. Finally, the film was shown again in April 1953 for five days in a minor cinema and in July for three days in an intermediate. Again, both of these cinemas were located in the centre of the city.

The patterns of film circulation discussed above suggest three areas of consideration. First, they show that, regardless of national context, political system of government, socio-cultural specificities or geographical location, in 1950s Europe films always (predictably) premiered in either an elite or major cinema and then gradually moved to the other typologies of cinemas. However, it was not always the case that intermediate cinemas showed the film before minor cinemas. As we have seen for Rotterdam and Brno, *Distant Drums* and *Dream of a Cossack* were screened in a minor cinema just after they premiered in a major one. The hierarchical structure of the ranks we have identified, therefore, needs to be considered within an analysis of a broader set of market and distribution dynamics. Second, the clearance windows between screenings in two different ranks of cinemas vary significantly between cities. For instance, in Gothenburg *An American in Paris* was shown in an intermediate cinema immediately after it was screened in a major. In Ghent the same film was screened in an intermediate cinema three months after its premiere in a major. This is a significant aspect of the circulation patterns amongst the different ranks of cinemas that need further investigation, especially in relation to the geographical location of the venues. Finally, six of the seven cities present a pattern that involves simultaneous screenings in two or three cinemas. Only in two cases this happened across two ranks of cinemas, in Brno between intermediate and minor and in Leicester between major and intermediate. This data will have to be considered further in relation to cinema ownership. For instance, as we pointed out in the case of Leicester, all of the cinemas that provided simultaneous screenings of *On Moonlight Bay* belonged to the same cinema circuit. These are the initial considerations that will guide our future analysis of films within a larger section of the programming data gathered for the project.

## Conclusions

A comparative study of cinema histories must have a basic comparative model, which in our case is the cinema typology. Up to date a typology that allows a systematic comparative analysis of the exhibition data and the programming strategies used in different European countries to attract audiences does not exist. Therefore, our aim through this article was to

illustrate the ECA cinema typology and demonstrate its application across the seven European cities under scrutiny with specific case studies. In this way, the typology allows us to understand how cinemas operated, and what programming strategies they had in place. Moreover, while the dominant typologies (such as the run-zone-clearance system) are bounded by their national context, our cinema typology is designed to work across national and temporal boundaries and is based on the active cinema weight (taking into account the seating capacity of a cinema, its place in the distribution chain and the activity of a venue).

Several variables were taken into consideration (such as seating capacity, yearly activity, programming strategies and film popularity as well as cultural differences across the seven European countries) to ensure the proposed typology was applicable to such a heterogeneous dataset. The analysis of the exhibition sector across the cities has revealed key commonalities among cinemas belonging to a specific rank (elite, major, intermediate and minor) even from distinct geographical locations. The investigation of specific characteristics (like film genre, year and country of production, as well as transnational circulation) has indicated that the proposed typology works across different countries, as it seems to have identified cinema venues with similar properties which were subsequently tested at national and cross-national levels. The typology establishes patterns which unquestionably align Eastern European cities such as Brno and Magdeburg which share, for example, a similar high number of minor cinemas as well as a pattern of circulation aiming to exploit the success of a film across the entire exhibition network. However, by problematizing the notion of hierarchy amongst cinemas, our comparison also challenges the Western/Eastern partition, and identifies similar characteristics in cities which in the 1950s were socially and politically very different. For instance, Magdeburg, Ghent and Gothenburg maintained a 7-day cycle of exhibition for each film regardless of its popularity. By breaking boundaries, this new typology sheds light to new patterns across countries until now rarely investigated together, ultimately looking “for similarities in the cinema networks across the Iron Curtain” (Porubčanská et al. 2020).

This analysis has already exposed some aspects of film circulation: for example it has revealed how major cinemas across the seven European cities performed a low turnover of films (and a high number of screenings) in the 1950s, confirming a need to exploit higher end of the cinema market in order to maximise profit, while on the contrary minor cinemas operated a much higher turnover of films than the other categories and a lower number of screening (apart from Ghent, which maintained a regular 7-day turnover even in this rank, and Magdeburg, which often presented the 7-day cycle). These preliminary findings are important in order to establish patterns of circulation, corroborate programming strategies and achieve a truly systematic analysis of the European cinema market in the 1950s.

The proposed typology can also help question and reconsider our understanding of film popularity, which will need to take into account a wider range of factors. The next step of our analysis will be testing the preliminary findings presented here against the patterns of

circulation of a larger number of films selected amongst the nearly 7,000 feature films listed in our project's database, in order to confirm or confute some of the results emerged.

### **Biographical notes:**

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) (2018-2022). European Cinema Audiences, from now on ECA.

<sup>2</sup> For the importance of comparative cinema histories see Biltereyst and Meers, 2016 and the special issue "Comparative Histories of Moviegoing", *TMG, Journal for Media History*, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.europeancinemaaudiences.org](http://www.europeancinemaaudiences.org) for details.

<sup>4</sup> The small number of cinemas in Rotterdam was not a sign of an underdeveloped film culture, but of a combination of an air raid at the start of the war, which demolished 12 of Rotterdam's 19 cinemas, and a reconstruction process 'purposefully slowed down' by the Nederlandse Bioscoopbond (Netherlands Cinema Alliance, or the NBB cartel) (Van Oort, 2017, 482-483). The air

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raid was responsible for destroying the largest first run theatres of the city, which might be a reason why Rotterdam did not have any elite cinemas. Moreover, the subsequent emergence of ‘wild cinemas’ (organised clandestinely in club houses and pub rooms) is difficult to map (Van Oort, 2017, 483).

<sup>5</sup> See the example of Brno, where cinemas were divided into seven categories: “five premiere cinemas, five cinemas of “first re-run,” four cinemas of “second re-run,” and another nine cinemas divided into four “districts.” (Skopal, 2019, 36).

<sup>6</sup> Quirico 1957, Di Chiara, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Cinemas were divided into 6 categories in occupied Belgium. These categories were based on the city in which they were located, their location in relation to other cinemas and their number of seats. The categories defined minimum ticket prices and served as a run system. Vande Winkel, Roel, “Cinema in Occupied Belgium (1940-1944)”, [www.cinema-in-occupied-belgium.be/categories.html](http://www.cinema-in-occupied-belgium.be/categories.html). First published 17 Nov 2020. Last update: 07 May 2021.

<sup>8</sup> as there was a strong positive correlation between them and the Ghent advertising prices (0,88) as well as the UK admission prices (0,89)

<sup>9</sup> To access the price proxy for all cities see <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/eca/price-proxy/all>.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, once the time factor was added to the Cinema weight, 14 cinemas in the dataset were adjusted, as they changed categories across our typology.

<sup>11</sup> The names of the categories are purely pragmatic and in no way reflect or appeal to theories of cultural capital, or the perceived reputation of these venues by the local audiences: a research question we will look into when analysing the oral histories of the ECA project.

<sup>12</sup> Not one film screened in all seven cities, and only 5 films screened in six different cities. Our analysis of the transnational circulation of films is therefore based on their ability to screen in five different cities.

<sup>13</sup> Between 1951 and 1953 there were 8 Belgian films and 3 co-productions with Belgium in circulation; 6 films were recent productions (between 1950 and 1953), but none premièred in Capitole, the only elite venue in Ghent.

<sup>14</sup> A recent film is defined as a film produced in the year 1951, 1952 or 1953.

<sup>15</sup> The Dukla in Brno was open on an average of 33 days per year, and was therefore included in the minor category despite its ACW being 0.35.

<sup>16</sup> We use the term suburb to indicate independent areas which in the fascist period were annexed to the main city of Bari. District is, on the other hand, an area of a city characterised by a particular activity (like public housing programme or working-class presence).

<sup>17</sup> with the exception of the Brno & Magdeburg state-controlled venues.

<sup>18</sup> This includes parish cinemas as well as workers’ clubs, so a wider range of management.