

What is 2008 going to be like for the cinemas? It is still too early to give an answer because, although the end of the year is close, we already know that these last few weeks, and in particular the Christmas period, are of crucial importance for cinema-going. Often, cinema attendance in November and December has proved critical for determining the year's results.

The appointment with the European Film Awards nonetheless encourages us to hazard a few predictions based on the results of the first nine or 10 months of the year, and on the judgement of authoritative representatives of the European cinema community.

After a 2007 characterised by a dip in audiences but also by the positive affirmation of European films, what can be expected of 2008? Will cinema-going have suffered from the consequences of the negative trend in the economy and on the financial markets or, as has already happened in the past, will it manage to swim against the current, catching hold of the desire to escape from the difficulties of daily life?

From the five main European markets - those that are 'worth' at least 100 million spectators each (even approaching the coveted 200 threshold), various different signals are emerging. With regard to Spain, the wave of drops in admissions, which began in 2005, does not seem to be coming to an end in 2008. "After one of the best



summer seasons of the last years, we estimate that overall admissions will be about 10 million less than in 2007. In fact, 2008 suffers from a lack of very successful domestic productions, such as the horror movies *El orfanato* and *[Rec]*, two blockbusters both at home and abroad," says Borja de Benito Porto, Head of Communications and Marketing at the Federación de Cines de España.

Italy arrives at the threshold of the Christmas period with a slight dip: this means that the results of the two-month November-December period will be decisive, in particular the Christmas holidays, a traditional time for the release of the annual 'made in Italy' comedy which draws mass audiences. "Tickets sold in the first 10 months of 2008 show a 5% decrease compared to the previous year. If we consider that 2007 was an exceptional year, characterized by a 11% increase, we can be satisfied with the expected results for 2008," notes Paolo Protti, President of ANEC. "The real challenge will be in 2009, when we'll see how cinema will react to the financial crisis". In the meantime it can already be confirmed that, after a 2007 market share amounting to 33%, in 2008 Italian productions have not only won an important share of the home market (at the end of October one point more compared to the previous 12 months), but also international visibility, thanks to the success of *Gomorra* (1.7 million tickets sold at home) and *Il divo* (783,000 tickets). Italian statistics see European productions, including the French films *La graine et le mulet*

and *Persepolis*, the German *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* and the Belgian *Le silence de Lorna*, in a strong position, even though it must be remembered that in several cases these are co-productions with the US, like *Cassandra's Dreams* and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

"Stable or growing slightly" is the forecast for the German market by Detlef Rossmann, president of the organisation representing the arthouse sector in Germany, who emphasises the great success of European titles such as *Planet Earth* (a German/UK co-production which drew 3.7 million spectators in Germany) and, coming from France, *Astérix aux Jeux Olympiques*, standing at 1.6 million, followed by *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*. The market share of domestic productions - led by *Keinohrhasen* (4.7 million tickets sold by the end of June) is very high, too.

"After recording an exceptional number of admissions in the summer - the highest for 40 years - the UK is confident of repeating, if not improving on, the excellent 2007 results, i.e. over 160 million spectators," says Philip Clapp, chief executive officer of the CEA, whose calculations are supported by attentive analysts of the British market, who have taken into consideration not only the trend of the first 10 months of the year, but also the potential of coming releases over the next few weeks. In 2008, the commitment of the UK Film Council to support the circulation of foreign-language films continues, thanks also to



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HOMEOWN HITS

Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis (far left) broke records in France, while *Keinohrhasen* (left) sold 4.7 million tickets in Germany.

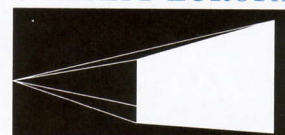
the fast track by which distributors can obtain economic support for digital distribution. Consequently, the titles that have appeared in British cinemas also include such specialty films as *Caramel*, *4 luni 3 saptamini si 2 zile*, *Caos calmo*, *Mio fratello è figlio unico* and *Anche libero va bene*.

All-round optimism for France, too, which closed October with almost 153 million spectators, or 3.6% more than the same month in 2007. Good news as well in terms of domestic productions, which have secured as much as 47% of the market up to now, three points more than those from the USA.

Amongst the titles that cross national borders, apart from those already mentioned, are *Babylon A.D.*, *Taken* and the 2008 Palme d'Or-winner *Entre les murs*, sold to 50 or so markets and already released in Belgium and Italy.

Lastly, amongst the most interesting expressions of European film-making capable of establishing themselves on the international stage, are two productions coming from small but dynamic countries: the bold Danish production *Flammen & Citronen*, dealing with the German occupation - bold in terms of both the resources used and the topic it deals with - and the Belgian *Fly Me to the Moon*, which has succeeded in its task of distinguishing itself on the innovative scenario of 3D productions that are candidates for digital screening. In conclusion, Europe is providing us with quality content and forward-looking technology.

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