

BEYOND NEMO: How to develop European children's cinema

It is the favourite channel of narration with children and young people, who even place it before tv (71% as against 61%), videocassettes (44%) and computers (22%). What attracts them is mainly the big screen and the chance to share an experience with their friends. Briefly, younger people like the cinema, as is shown by a research study carried out by MEDIA Salles (available for consultation on our website in the section "Cinema Research Library - The Young Audience"). Yet children's cinema is still slow to find its own distinctive profile. Compared to the demand, there is a lack of films specifically for this target group, which often finds itself offered films made for adult audiences. Moreover, films specially intended for children and young people are inevitably made by the American majors (from titles such as *Spider-man* and *Scooby-Doo*, to animated films like *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters, Inc.* and *Lilo & Stitch*). European and domestic productions are far less common. The result is that for young European spectators the offer suffers from two limits: the scarce production of children's films, in general, and the even scarcer presence of European titles. Yet how can tomorrow's adult spectators develop an informed taste for cinema, if they lack the opportunity to experience a range of different and appropriate proposals at the outset? And how can European exhibitors offer them this range of opportunities if the already small number of alternatives on offer are accompanied by low visibility? In short, how and where can convincing films be found, thereby making it possible to combine the desire to screen a greater variety of films - including some that succeed in representing a culture that is closer to that of its audience - with the reasonable probability that the budding audience will really appreciate the film chosen?

An important contribution is made here by children's film festivals, which attract many young spectators every year in various parts of Europe. Each year MEDIA Salles runs the **Focus on Europe - Kidflix Special** event at one of these festivals, in the conviction that this is the ideal place for exhibitors whose objective is to promote quality films with young audiences to meet and share experiences. As a consequence, following the positive experiences at the Castellinaria Festival in Switzerland, the Giffoni Film Festival in Italy and the International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Zlín in the Czech Republic, **the new event organised by MEDIA Salles from 10 to 13 March** is moving to **Malmö, Sweden**, and is the guest of the **"BUFF - International Children and**

Young People's Film Festival". Sweden also runs **Skolbio, the project created by the Swedish Film Institute** to bring younger people closer to the cinema. In the two following interviews, we asked **Åse Kleveland, Director of the Swedish Film Institute, and Lennart Ström, Director of BUFF**, to give us an overview of the initiatives for younger audiences that they are responsible for. With them, we also went over the situation of European children's cinema, its present limits and prospects for growth.

Skolbio: schools at the cinema
Launched to promote films in schools, Skolbio, an initiative of the Swedish Film Institute, provides educational services and grants to as many as 180 of Sweden's 290 municipalities.

Ms Kleveland, what are the main characteristics of Skolbio, the Swedish school-cinema programme?

To encourage school screenings of feature films at the local cinema, the Swedish Film Institute administers a governmental grant to encourage municipalities to promote local film screenings within the public school system. The financial support is given for three years, and then the local authority takes over the financial responsibility. Moreover, the Swedish Film Institute has established a close co-operation with Swedish film distributors for the purpose of sub-distributing films. After the first run, these films are available at a fixed price for closed screenings such as those for schools. In 2004 there were over 680,000 total admissions to school screenings.

There is a temptation to consider films about



Ms Viviane Reding, Member of the European Commission, Responsible for the Information Society and Media, during the presentation of MEDIA Salles' "European Cinema Yearbook - 2004 final edition" in Berlin 2005.

From left: J. Hernández, Director of MEDIA Desk Spain, E. Brunella, Secretary General of MEDIA Salles, J. Ph. Wolff, Scientific Advisor to the "European Cinema Yearbook", V. Reding, D. Dinoia, President of MEDIA Salles, P. Rodriguez Gordillo, Vice President of MEDIA Salles.

The Yearbook is now in four languages: Italian, English, French and Spanish.

children, not always for them, as suitable children's films. What is the role of a project especially for young people in remedying this situation?

Just because the leading character in a film is a child, it does not mean the film is a children's film. We need more films especially made for this young audience. However, discussions about suitable films or media products for children are difficult. Since 1993 The Swedish Film Institute has had a special consultant responsible for subsidizing the production of films for children and young people. Moreover, we import and distribute short films for very young children through the project 'Knattebio' (tiny tots cinema).

How can we increase the exchange of films for young people between the different countries in Europe?

It is important to give producers and distributors of European children's films the best possibilities for working together and co-operating. However, it is also important to encourage young people to watch and appreciate European films. To make young people aware of European films is an important task for both teachers and cinema-owners. We all have to support and promote this work, at a national and European level. *Do you think the development of digital cinema might help to develop a repertoire of films for children?*

Digital cinema is a new technology for distributing and screening films, which will definitely make distribution easier. But it all depends on the distributor's willingness to take the risk of buying, importing, dubbing and releasing children films from "smaller" nations of film producers. Hopefully digital projection equipment in local cinema theatres will also be used to screen films that young people make themselves on video, in schools or in local video workshops. In several municipalities and regions in Sweden, there is a growing movement in support of festivals for films made by young people.

BUFF: making a difference

Started in 1984, and recognised as an official festival by the Swedish Film Institute since 1995, BUFF now hosts 15,000 participants, made up of young people and adults coming from all over Europe. In the six days it lasts over 100 films and shorts are screened. It is also possible to attend seminars and debates specifically devoted to teachers, producers and cultural operators in this sector, with the aim of providing more new activities for children and young people. In the spirit of this opening towards young people, there will also be a series of screenings of shorts by the students of the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg this year.

Mr Ström, what is the distinguishing feature of BUFF in your opinion?

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The main feature is the programming of films. We don't avoid films with topics that could seem problematic for the audience, sponsors or other financiers. We put a lot of energy into giving the young audience films that they really can use in their future lives when it comes to reference points they can identify with. Moreover, the Film Institute arranges a seminar, an annual summit at BUFF for everyone in Sweden who is involved in the Skolbio project. This gives BUFF a very high status on the Nordic festival scene because there is great interest in this project from the other Nordic countries.

What criteria guide you in your choice of films for the audiences at BUFF?

We look for films made with the idea of really making a difference. The films must have a national identity, not be a "copycat" of other highly successful films. Never patronise the audience. For instance, we never use voice over, because it is extremely important that the viewers can *bear* the film. We also try to have a high standard for all the films and not go for the immediate "festival favourites".

What results do you expect from the collaboration between BUFF and MEDIA Salles?

First of all we want to obtain an ever bigger network because I think there is great interest in Nordic films. We consider ourselves as one of the Nordic film festivals. We hope that the members of MEDIA Salles will provide us with some input: BUFF is still a rather small organisation but the festival looks big and the ambitions are even bigger. Our aim is to create a platform where films for kids are put into the limelight.

EUROPEAN FILMS FOR KIDS:

The most appreciated titles

What are the most recent European films that are more appropriate for the young public? We asked this question to several professionals and experts of the sector and these are their replies.

Regarding children, among the most mentioned films were five cartoons: the French *The Dog, the General, and the Birds* by Francis Nielsen (2003), *Black Mor's Island* by Jean-François Laguionie (2004), *Raining Cats and Frogs* by Jacques-Remy Girerd (2003) and the Italian films *Opopomoz* by Enzo d'Alò (2003) and *L'Apetta Giulia e la Signora Vita* by Paolo Modugno (2003).

Also for children were the Estonian and Lettonian co-production *Waterbomb for the Fat Tomcat* by Varis Brasia (2004), *Snowboard's Men*, a Czech film by Karel Janák (2004), and *Two Brothers* by Jean-Jacques Annaud (2004).

There were quite a few titles coming from Northern Europe for adolescent audiences, such as the Danish films *Count to 100* by Linda Krogsøe Holmberg (2004) and *Terkel in Trouble* by Fjeldmark, Christoffersen and Vestbjerg Andersen (2004); the Swedish films *Nabila* by Håkan Berthas, Johan Bjerkner and Stefan Sundlöf (2003) and *Bombay Dreams* by Lena Koppel; the Norwegian *The Color of Milk* by Torun Lian (2004); the Dutch film *In Orange* by Joram Lürsen; the German *The Miracle of Bern* by Sönke Wortmann (2003). Music conceived as inspiration for a new life is the main

theme of the film *Chorists* by Christophe Barratier, a co-production between France, Switzerland and Germany.

Also from the African, Asian and Latin America Film Festival are several proposals: *Hollow City* (2004) by Maria João Ganga, a co-production between Angola and Portugal regarding the cruel political situation in Angola; *The Wooden Camera* (2003) by Ntshaveni Wa Luruli, a co-production between South Africa, France and United Kingdom revolving around the theme of the apartheid; *Our Father* (2002) by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, a co-production between France, Chad and The Netherlands.

These films have been suggested by:

Luciana Della Fornace, Vice President of Agiscuola (Italy);

Claudio Gubitosi, Director of Giffoni Film Festival (Italy);

Tonje Hardersen, children's films adviser with Film&Kino (Norway);

Petr Koliha, Programme Director of the International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Zlín (Czech Republic);

Alessandra Speciale, Artistic Director of the African Film Festival (Italy);

Rose-Marie Strand, Vice President of Ecfa (European Children's Film Association) and Head of Children and Youth Film Department of Folkets Bio (Sweden);

Felix Vanginderhuysen, Secretary General of Ecfa;

Klas Viklund, Head of the Skolbio project of the Swedish Film Institute (Sweden);

Signe Zeilich-Jensen, Head of the Film Section of Cinekid (The Netherlands).

The fact cards on these films, with a synopsis, release dates and countries, contact and useful information, are all part of the catalogue "Screenings 2004-2005" by MEDIA Salles, that can be consulted on our website, in the "Euro Kids" section.

THE FUTURE OF CINEMA-GOING

Interview with John Fithian – Second part –

In the previous issue of our Newsletter, we asked John Fithian, President of Nato, the US exhibitors' Association, to give us an outline of the scenarios on the international cinema market. Our conversation continues here, as Fithian deals with two important topics: the small cinemas' response to the growth of multiplexes and the difficulty encountered by foreign productions on the American market. He also suggests a "forecast" for the future.

Nato represents both the exhibitors belonging to large chains and the small independent ones. Yet, for some years now, in the US only the megaplexes have been growing. How might the smaller and single-screen movie theaters respond?

It is certainly true that the average number of movie screens in a complex is growing. In the US it's now an average of roughly 6 screens in every complex and it will continue to rise. Most of the new building is in the multiplex format, because that format offers patrons the choice of movies, of multiple show times and other amenities.

At the same time, however, there will continue to be a role for smaller independent

theatres – one or two screens per complex – because there are many patrons who still prefer that type of environment. There are also many locations around the world that simply cannot support the multiplex format.

And so I believe that, though the number of smaller independent theatres will continue to decline slowly, there will always be a role for smaller theatres for certain types of product and in certain types of market.

The offer of films on the US market concentrates almost wholly on domestic productions, whilst foreign movies struggle to find a place. In particular, foreign-language movies are said to be penalised by American audiences' dislike of subtitles. Yet the recent case of The Passion of the Christ, and its success despite the presence of subtitles, would seem to contradict this theory. What is your own opinion and how do you see the prospects for movies that are not made in the US?

I believe that the acceptance of international films by American audiences will grow, but I'm not sure how fast that will occur.

Many people have asserted that American patrons don't like subtitles but I believe that is no longer the case, perhaps because American patrons watch news programs that include text at the bottom of a screen, they're getting used to the fact that they can watch and read at the same time. We have seen in a limited number of films that subtitling works very well. *The Passion of the Christ* is a recent example of a huge movie that sold over 300 million dollars in the US, that was subtitled. In the past *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* did extremely well, too.

There is still the huge marketing advantage that American films have with American audiences; and there are just many barriers to foreign films making it in this marketplace because they have a hard time getting known to our audiences.

But I believe that, as the marketplace globalises and as Americans become more aware of the cultural offerings of foreign territories, that will include acceptance of an attendance at foreign films.

If you were to imagine the situation of the cinema market in a hundred years' time, which aspects would it have in common with the present and which would be different?

It's very difficult to predict what will happen in a hundred years. Certainly the cinema will be competing against new and different forms of entertainment.

The communications age has rapidly grown and will continue to do so. Consumers around the world will be offered a multitude of entertainment options in their home as well as out of their home.

The cinema, I believe, will continue to offer a unique experience to be shared with other people, and this is something traditional and historical about human nature. People don't want to be at home where they're worried about everyday problems. They like to go to the cinema, escape from the day and experience something different. Cinema owners must continue to innovate, to adopt new technologies, to improve the variety of the products they offer their patrons and to respond to their patrons' demands and, if we do that, the cinema industry will be alive and well in a hundred years.

DETERMINING THE IDENTITY OF THE CINEMA AND DEFINING ITS MISSION

The column launched in this issue intends to suggest certain basic marketing principles for cinema exhibitors, together with examples illustrating their practical application. Thus, in each issue, space will be made for a short contribution, which will develop in a simple and immediate way certain important topics linked to the definition and practice of a marketing strategy for the cinema. These will include the determination of the cinema's identity, the definition of its mission, the completion of a SWOT analysis and the choice of the target group, as well as the identification of the attributes and advantages of the offer and determination of the theatre's positioning.

Cinema exhibitors address a public characterised by a wide range of different demands and behaviours, whose cinema-going choices are spread over numerous alternative offers. Consequently, in order to improve their competitiveness, exhibitors must carry out a marketing strategy based on the differentiation of their offer, compared to that of their competitors.

Objective and tangible differentiation seems increasingly difficult to pursue these days. Instead, a determining factor is the ability to create *added value linked to the communication of the cinema's values*, in order to establish both its distinctive characteristics and its style of being and offering culture, shows and entertainment.

In particular, by means of its identification with a specific type of programming, or a given segment of the public, or through other concrete or symbolic elements, the cinema must attempt to build its own *identity* and communicate this correctly to the public. The elements that make up a cinema's identity, from a managerial point of view, can be summed up under three main types:

- **visual elements**, such as the *name*, which may sound lofty and important, like Odeon or Excelsior, or else exclusive, addressing an elite audience, such as Vip or Studio; the *structure and premises* of the building; its *location*;

- **managerial aspects**, such as the *staff* and the corresponding level of courtesy, willingness to help and professional awareness; the choice of the *genre towards which the cinema is oriented* and the *type of programming, or viewing times, any alternation of titles on the same day, the offer of series of films etc.*;

- **strategic elements**, such as *market positioning*, which may be that of a leading cinema with a plethora of promotional initiatives, characterised by international programming, or of a niche cinema with strong links to the territory, characterised by programming for a specific type of audience; the *competitive policies* adopted, such as membership of a circuit or participation in vertically integrated groups; *marketing and communication policies*, including pricing, for example reductions or membership cards, direct marketing, such as the mailing of the cinema's programming, or the organisation of events and activities to foster customer loyalty.

ESTABLISHING A NEW BALANCE

Since gaining its independence in 1991 Lithuania and its cinema have undergone huge changes. The transition from totalitarian film policy in the Soviet Union to market economy in the newly born country was really hard and led to unexpected results: the sudden decrease of film production, the rapid closure of exhibition venues, the absence of private distributors. The complicated withdrawal from the Soviet Union and the loss of the huge financial resources for film production has been influencing the development of Lithuanian cinema for almost 15 years now. Today, the quantitative level of film production in comparison with other European countries is still very low. On average, starting with the year 1997, 1 feature film, 10 documentaries, 8 shorts, 10 animations per year are being produced. Nevertheless, Lithuanian films are highly appreciated at home and around the world. The chain of exhibition venues around the country is still small and weak. Out of 700 cinemas during the Soviet times, only 61 are open now, of which 47 are in towns and only 14 in rural areas. The frequency of cinema-going in Lithuanian cinemas in general is on the decrease, dropping from 2,102,900 spectators in 2000 to 1,396,300 in 2003. The 2003 average number of admissions per capita varies from 1.4 in Vilnius to 0.1 in smaller towns and rural areas. The distribution sector is dominated by private companies. There are 10 private distribution companies operating on the market. Three of them – those with the biggest market share – are the representatives of the major Hollywood studios: Warner Bros, Buena Vista, Columbia Pictures etc. Hollywood production dominates European and world films in a ratio of 80 to 20. One of the most problematic issues of the cinema sector is film culture. There is no state-run or state-aided film institution in Lithuania. The Ministry of Culture has the responsibility of drawing up Lithuania's film policy, but there is no official body to implement it. Thus, nobody is officially promoting national cinema abroad or spreading film culture in the Country. Though officially declared as a priority, the situation regarding films for children and young people is especially poor. During the 15-year period of in-

Moreover, the cinema must define its *mission*, i.e. the role it intends playing within the social and economic context where it operates (city centre, town, province, region). The cinema may, for instance, set itself up as a meeting point for social and cultural life and entertainment in the centre where it is located, contributing, by means of its social and cultural initiatives, to enhancing the local environment and taking part in initiatives for territorial promotion.

Communicating the basic features of the cinema's identity and mission allows it to create or consolidate a precise brand image in the mind of the general public that is distinct from that of its competitors. In this way spectators are able to grasp and appreciate the specific content of its offer and a more stable and long-lasting relationship is established between the cinema and its audience.

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dependence, only one long feature film has been produced for children (*Hansel and Gretel*, directed by Vytautas V. Landsbergis, 2003). Nevertheless, private initiatives for promoting and spreading film culture amongst children and young people are emerging. One of the most prominent organizations focusing on cinema activities for children is Cinema Centre Skalvija. During the past few years it has developed several film education programs for children and young people. Having involved famous Lithuanian film critics and filmmakers, Skalvija is constantly organizing different film history classes for schoolchildren and teenagers: "The Rise of the Cinema", "Types of Cinema", "Film-making", "The Story of the Star" and others. The main task of the educational program is to make children and young people acquainted with the most interesting moments in film history and to let them experience the process of film-making. Children do not just listen to the lecturers, but also watch films and work with the filmmakers. Last year Cinema Centre Skalvija also initiated the 1st International Children's Film Festival. It was the first attempt in Lithuania to provide Lithuanian children with the possibility of seeing the best contemporary films made especially for them. Thus the event was of special importance for Lithuanian children and for the whole society.

Goda Sosnovskiene
Project Leader of Image Culture
Laboratory, Lithuania

NEWS FROM MEDIA SALLES

EXHIBITOR TRAINING: Budapest 2004

Prospects for the cinema market, following the new balance determined by the multiplexes, were a central issue in the fourth edition of "European Cinema Exhibition: A New Approach", the well established training course for cinema exhibitors promoted by MEDIA Salles and specifically devoted to cinema management and marketing. The initiative, which exists thanks also to the support of the Italian Government, is the first ever within the MEDIA Programme to address movie theatres. Amongst the main topics on the course, which involved over forty professional operators from all over Europe – from France to Finland and from Greece to the United Kingdom – were: **future developments in the sector, the marketing models most likely to become successful, making room for European films in multi-screen and other cinemas**. These topics were examined in detail thanks to talks by **Ferenc Port**, President of the distribution and exhibition company Budapest Film, and **Adnan Akdemir**, President of Afm, Turkey's main exhibition company, quoted on the stock exchange since October 2004. Of great significance was an analysis of the role played by **strategic communication and promotional events** for the cinema's success, outlined by **Tony Meehan and Rob Arthur** of RAAM Management Limited (UK), and the reflection on the present state of **digital cinema**. Starting out from the overview provided by MEDIA Salles, a succession of presentations were made of initiatives al-

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ready underway, which demonstrated that close attention is being concentrated on new technologies. This is the perspective of the project developed by the UK Film Council for setting up a network of around 200 digital screens in the United Kingdom – presented by **Steve Perrin**, Deputy Director of Distribution and Exhibition of the UK Film Council – with the “desire to use the new technologies in order to strengthen the market for domestic works, niche products and those coming from all over the world”. Confidence in the possibilities of digital screening also emerged from the words of the Norwegian **Rolv Gjestland**, Technical Consultant for Film&Kino: in Norway advertising in movie theatres is shown on electronic projectors. In the same way, the project aiming at the conservation and the circulation of the Country’s domestic film heritage also makes use of the new technologies. Crucial for the development of the cinema market, whether for digital or 35mm screening, is the fight against piracy: **Trevor Albery** of Warner Bros outlined the main strategies adopted for combating the market for counterfeits. Lastly a reflection by **Jan van Dommelen**, President of Unic, offered some ideas and guidelines as to future trends in cinema-going and as to the expectations of the public regarding the offer of leisure activities. Ample opportunity was also allowed for exchanging views, thanks to the presentation of **initiatives on behalf of spectators and the promotion of European films**. **Lisa McNamara** spoke of promotion in multiplexes, describing a vast range of activities on offer in the SBC cinema she manages in Faro, Portugal. **Enrico Chiesa**, Vice-Delegate of Afcac in France, presented the collective

promotional campaigns organised by the network of French arthouse cinemas, whilst **Kenneth Just Hansen**, Director of Grand Teatret, situated at the heart of Copenhagen, explained the proposals by a “quality multiplex”. He was echoed by **Robert Kenny**, Director of Curzon Cinemas in London. Quality as the objective of a carefully planned corporate strategy was the central theme of **Roman Gutek’s** talk. The distribution and exhibition company that he founded and presides over plays a crucial role in the circulation of European films in Poland, thanks also to synergy with a festival that has become very popular with younger audiences. Also inspired by European films were the visits to two art-house cinemas operating in Budapest, the **Cinema Művész** and the **Uránia National Cinema Palace**, and two multiplexes, the **MOM Park**, managed by Palace Cinemas, which houses one of the three digital screens in Central-Eastern Europe, and the **Lurdy Ház**, managed by InterCom, a vertically integrated leader on the Hungarian cinema market.

More information and the fact cards of the cinemas on our website, in the “Training” section.



Participants and organisers at Budapest 2004.

MEDIA SALLES' COMING EVENTS

“DIGITRAINING PLUS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR EUROPEAN CINEMAS”

At the headquarters of Barco Kurne (Belgium), 6-10 April 2005

Amongst the main topics of this course, specifically addressing digital cinema, the present state of the international market for digital screening, business models and experiments that have already been carried out in this sector by some important European exhibition chains. The latter include the Danish **Nordisk Film** – whose spokesman will be **Jan Petersen**, its **IT Manager**. The distributors’ point of view will not be neglected and will be presented by **Antoine Virenque**, **Secretary General of Fiad (Fédération Internationale des Associations de Distributeurs de Films)**. It will then be the turn of **Jens Schneiderheinze of AG Kino**, the **German Association of art-house cinemas** belonging to CICAIE, to sum up the impact of the new technologies on the art-house sector. Carrying forward a formula that has already been successfully experimented, an overview of the technology will be followed by a visit to a cinema equipped for digital screening. This time it will be **“Château du Cinéma”**, a cinema belonging to the Kinopolis chain and situated at Lomme, in the vicinity of Lille.

The MEDIA Salles’ Course Reports currently available are to be found in the “Training” section of the website (www.mediasalles.it).

2005 CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

Presentation of the MEDIA Salles’ Newsletter “European Cinema Journal” no. 3/2005, with an overview of cinema-going in Europe in 2004.

DIGITAL CINEMA AND MORE

DIGITALA HUS: A new lease of life to small cinemas

In this issue another new column starts, devoted to analyses and experiments in the field of D- and E-Cinema. To help shed some light on the most widely debated issues and to create an opportunity for sharing some significant experiences and the success or obstacles they have met with.

They began in August 2002 with 7 cinemas and are gradually spreading: there were 10 by the end of 2004 and many other small towns in Sweden are now ready to set up their own theatres. This is how “Digitala Hus” (Digital Houses) which, in the words of one of their creators, **Rickard Gramfors**, constitute the “first European digital cinema circuit”, were founded and are continuing to develop.

In reply to those who object to the use of the term digital for 1.3K DLP projectors, Gramfors retorts that quality does not lie in a parameter that is defined once and for all, but in the right balance between projector and theatre: thus on an average 7-metre screen, a 2K projector would not only be useless but would even detract from the quality of the image which, instead, on a 1.3K projector would be better than on 35mm. “Once we installed a 2K projector on one of our cinemas and the result was we had to modify it, since the light source was too bright for the size of the theatre and the

screen”. Any remaining scepticism can be overcome with the help of a few figures: the circuit has seen its box office grow by almost 30% in two years and in a single year, since February 2004, it succeeded in offering a total of 40 *premières*, many of which were domestic films. A very different situation from that experienced with 35mm where, for example, a film like *Finding Nemo*, of which 150 copies were distributed throughout the Country, only 5 to 10 copies come to the circuit, and with a 6- to 8-week delay.

This means that the film is in very poor condition and, moreover, “too much time has gone past so the urge to see the film has weakened, as the attraction of the advertising is already over, in favour of some other novelty”.

All this despite the fact that the Folkets Hus theatres – the “peoples’ houses” which up to now count as many as 270 screens – can seat a total of almost 54,000 spectators: “this makes us the Country’s leading cinema owners – emphasises Gramfors, who is Content Manager of Folkets Hus – but as our locations are in rural areas, our market share only amounts to 5% of tickets sold and we are therefore of little interest to distributors”.

And if the audiences appreciate undamaged images, the exhibitors appreciate the lower cost of the copy: a 35mm copy does, in fact, cost 2,600 euro, whilst a digital copy for a circuit of 7 cinemas costs more or less 500 euro, “and the cost will be halved when the number of theatres increases to 20”. To make

the copies from an HD master, add any subtitles and encode the film, a post-production laboratory with the right technology is required. In Sweden there is one, “FilmTeknik”, which has invested almost 300,000 euro in equipment for digital cinema and is now able to satisfy the Country’s needs.

Thanks to the lack of wear and tear, the quality is “far better than 35mm”, and there are greater opportunities for screening art-house movies, local productions, documentaries, classics and shorts. Room, then, for alternative content, such as concerts and musicals.

Together with the Belgian company Euro1080, for instance, the circuit broadcast the 2004 European football championships live, as well as musical events such as Aida and the New Year’s Eve concert from Vienna, in 2004 and 2005. Another important event, thanks to the agreement with Sony Music was the live David Bowie concert.

And what of the new, interactive opportunities offered by broadband and satellite, such as debates and seminars, but also electronic games with X-Box and Playstation? Last but not least, there is local advertising: “with a digital camera, it can be filmed at the shop round the corner, which presents its latest offers, and screened the same evening”.

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