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MEDIA Salles has organised the 5th "Focus on Europe" at Amsterdam

Exhibiting theatres in Europe and films from Europe: these are the two themes that MEDIA Salles highlighted in the "Focus on Europe" event, organised at Amsterdam at Cinema Expo International 1999.

The results of European production in cinemas, the facts and trends that characterise exhibition in the continent's five great markets, in Scandinavia, in Benelux and in Eastern and Central Europe - these were the subjects of the seminar that opened Cinema Expo. Chaired by Karsten-Peter Grummitt from Dodona Research, the round table hosted contributions from Steve Knibbs (UCI - UK), Jaime Tarrazón Jr (ACEC - E), Timo Manty (Finnkino - FIN), George Mihaly (H) and Lauge Nielsen (Pathé - NL). These were followed by the analysis carried out by Joachim Ph. Wolff, President of UNIC, on the market shares of European films in exhibiting theatres. The aim of the meeting was to define the position of the consumer market in an area which, after the exceptional 1998 results in many countries in terms of tickets sold (although not without some warning signs), was characterised at the beginning of '99 by a slight fall in demand. In his analysis of four of the most important markets - Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy - Steve Knibbs pointed out that European exhibition is experiencing 1999 as a waiting period, in the hope of repeating the success of Titanic thanks to the Star Wars prequel. He added that the drop in audiences that occurred in the cinemas of Great Britain during '98, as opposed to the trend on other markets, could be seen as a warning. It does not seem sufficient to explain the disaffection of British audiences merely as a passing phenomenon, linked to the soccer World Cup. Great Britain - and also Germany, which experienced a decidedly lower increase in audiences compared to Italy, France and Spain in '98 - should, instead, reflect on the excessive offer which now



Romano Fattorossi, President of MEDIA Salles, opening the seminar in Amsterdam.

appears to be a salient feature in some areas.

The risk of an excessive number of screens - as in the cases of Valladolid and Burgos - was also brought up by Jaime Tarrazón, who described developments in Spanish exhibiting theatres. Set in motion and consolidated mainly by home companies, this phenomenon now sees the involvement of the large, international groups. Relatively low building costs and comparatively reasonable ticket prices are two of the factors which have allowed Spain to increase both the number of screens and that of audiences over the past decade. On this broadly positive scenario there are, however, some disturbing signs, such as the progressively lower number of tickets sold per screen. George Mihaly concentrated particularly on this theme of the ratio between investments and cost of tickets in his analysis of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Whilst there is a wave of new multiplexes and announcements of ambitious building projects on the three main markets - Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic - 1998 saw a considerable drop in audiences. According to Mihaly, the main reason, as regards Poland, lies in the excessive increase in prices. Having been increased for Titanic, tickets did not return to their previous prices. Moreover, once they had seen the "big event" film, Polish audiences were no longer ready to pay such a high price to see a "normal" film. Nevertheless, Mihaly continued, in order to finance the modernisation of exhibiting theatres in Central and Eastern Europe, thus allowing the area to develop its potential, the price of tickets must be raised. Mihaly believes, for example, that Hungary, which boasts the most modern structures, could raise the price of tickets from around 2,5 euros to 3,5 euros straight away. The basically stable situation of the Scandinavian countries, where screens and audiences have remained more or less unaltered for several years, contrasts with the dynamism that seems to characterise the markets mentioned so far. Lately, however,

there have been signs of new-found vitality amongst the companies traditionally operating in this area in the field of distribution and exhibition.

Timo Manty, for example, quoted the alliance of the Swedish Sandrews with the Danish Metronome, which resulted in the opening of a complex in Helsinki - where Finnkino, too, had just inaugurated its 14 screens at the Tennispalatsi - and the preparation of projects for the Baltic countries and St. Petersburg.

The Swedish SF also aims to increase its scope of activity, firstly in Norway. According to Manty, new complexes will certainly be built in Scandinavia, too, although at a slower rate than in Great Britain and Germany, partly as a consequence of the high costs involved and of regulation by the public authorities.

A scenario that is similar in many ways was described for the Netherlands by Lauge Nielsen. On this market, where only Pathé can boast any solid experience of multiplexes, several projects have already been announced. In the near future operators foresee an increase in audiences which should allow the Netherlands to reduce Belgium's lead. The latter boasts a per capita frequency of 2,4 but now has the features of a mature market.

Commenting on the increase in tickets sold in Western Europe in the nineties, J. Ph. Wolff concluded the seminar by pointing out that non domestic European films have unfortunately failed to benefit from this increase and tend to attract the same numbers of spectators every year.

Elisabetta Brunella

European films at "Focus on Europe"

During the "Focus on Europe" event two European films were screened:

Todo Sobre Mi Madre (All About My Mother) by the Spanish director Pedro Almdóvar, highly applauded at the Cannes Festival;

Den Eneste Ene (The One and Only), a sparkling comedy by the Danish director Susanne Bier, which was a major success with home audiences.

Euro Kids Network for People's Choice Awards

This year Euro Kids Network is once again supporting "People's Choice Awards 1999", the EFA - European Film Academy initiative, which awards prizes to the best European director, actor and actress in 1999, basing its decisions on direct votes from the audiences in the cinemas.

Every spectator who watches a film on one of the 337 screens belonging to the Euro Kids Network circuit, which covers 16 European countries, will receive a voting slip, allowing him or her to take part in this unusual "people's vote" and express personal preferences regarding European cinema in 1999.