

Focus on the Distribution of Films for Children in Europe:

They Come Around!

It is clear, when looking at the box office figures for films for children (or families) in various countries, that these films are well represented in the top ten of each country. These films, of course, are mainly the big American movies or sometimes a „national” production. Another generality we have often heard for many years now is that children's films rarely pass the border of their country of origin. Here, we will take a look at the exact situation of these European children's films and how they pass (or not) the borders.

Of course there are some premises to this first analysis on the distribution of European children's films:

1. This research is based upon the figures of the „automatic support scheme“ of the European Commission, Programme MEDIA from the years 2000 - 2004. This support project means that every distributor in the European Union can automatically obtain a certain amount of support for every ticket that has been sold for a „European non-national production”. This amount varies from 0,5 to 0,7 Euros, depending on the production's country of origin.
2. Thus the distributors should be interested in declaring the number of sold tickets as high a number as possible. But, for there is a maximum of support a distributor can receive per year, perhaps „bigger companies” do not declare all their films.
3. This support programme is only directed at European companies. The US-majors cannot enter applications. For the analysis given here, that means that European movies which are distributed by these majors, do not appear in our listings.
4. So this analysis does not pretend to be „complete”; but it certainly shows the most important tendencies.
5. Because the programme only shows the figures of the non-national productions, we cannot see the success of certain movies within their country of origin. As we know some of these „home children's films” beat the US-majors' movies at the box office.
6. Most figures were taken from the old 15 EU-countries. Some information will be given on the situation in some of the new EU-countries.

The Figures

We have detected 90 films that were sold abroad during the five reference years:

- 2 of them were sold to 8 countries
- 4 of them were sold to 7 countries
- 5 of them were sold to 6 countries
- 6 of them were sold to 5 countries
- 5 of them were sold to 4 countries
- 9 of them were sold to 3 countries
- 17 of them were sold to 2 countries
- 42 of them were sold to 1 country

Top 11 of the most distributed films

Help, I'm a fish (DK)	8 countries
Kirikou and the Sorceress (F)	8 countries
Pettson & Findus 1 (S)	7 countries
Ali Zaoua (F)	7 countries
Tsatsiki 1 – Mum and the Policeman (DK/S)	7 countries
The Living Forest (E)	7 countries
Pettson & Findus 2 (S)	6 countries
A Witch in the Family (S)	6 countries
There is only one Jimmy Grimble (UK)	6 countries
The Pellet (E)	6 countries
Catch that Girl (DK)	6 countries

Top 10 of the most „visited“ films

Title	Visitors	Country
Pettson & Findus 1	1.385.709	(7)
Pettson & Findus 2	901.023	(6)
Pippi's Adventures on South Seas	640.536	(3)
Help, I'm a fish	535.632	(8)
Karlsson on the Roof	470.529	(5)
The Living Forest	382.284	(7)
K3 and the Magic Medaillon	344.410	(1)
Kirikou and the Sorceress	281.438	(8)
Catch that Girl	189.902	(6)
Lucky and Zorba	174.860	(5)

Number of titles imported

Country	Titles	Visitors	Average
Austria	27	1.055.583	39.096
Germany	33	3.497.355	105.980
Belgium	30	459.765	15.325
Denmark	18	221.734	12.318
Spain	7	210.121	30.017
Finland	12	140.014	11.668
Ireland	1	1.120	1.120
United Kingd.	1	3.647	3.647
Sweden	22	328.952	14.952
Netherlands	23	799.417	34.757
Greece	4	17.703	4.426
Italy	8	316.310	39.539
Portugal	5	101.268	20.354
France	9	718.914	79.879
Norway	27	614.407	22.756

Number of distribution companies involved:

Austria	2
Germany	6
Belgium	8
Denmark	5

Spain	4
Finland	6
Ireland	1
United Kingdom	1
Sweden	6
Netherlands	5
Greece	3
Italy	3
Portugal	3
France	7
Norway	11

General Observations

- The overview contains 90 productions, almost half of them were only sold to one foreign country; mostly a neighbouring country where the same language makes the distribution easier.
- Only 17 films (app. 20%) were sold to five or more countries.
- It is remarkable that only five of the eleven most distributed films were animated films. Usually animated films are considered to have more „commercial” potential.
- Regarding the ten most visited films, eight of them were animated films, but hereby we have to remark that these high figures were mostly due to the fact that these movies were distributed in Germany.
- Germany has indeed the highest average of visitors per film, even if they were also the biggest importer of foreign films.
- The high average of France was due to the fact that three films have been quite successful (Help, I'm a Fish, The Living Forest and Little Polar Bear); they were responsible for 75% of all the sold tickets.
- Almost the same in Italy, where two films (Kirikou and The Living Forest) took 66% of the tickets. Also remarkable in Italy: among eight imported films, there was only one fiction film (Jimmy Grimble). All the rest were animated films.
- In the Netherlands one film (K3) was responsible for nearly 43% of the ticket sales. This was a Belgium film which was only exported to the Netherlands.
- Austria got a rather high average per film because they imported many German films; in Austria these titles score from 100.000 to 160.000 visitors.
- There was a clear difference between the north and the south of Europe; or should we say between the Anglo-Saxon (except Ireland and the U.K.) and the Latin countries. In France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece the highest number of imported films was eight; in the north, most countries imported more than 20 films.
- Looking at the distribution companies involved in children's films, we can conclude that they were a very closed group. Only a few distributors per country were interested in the importation of foreign films for children. Again one clear case apart: France. Here we found seven distributors who imported all together nine films.
- A closer look at the numbers of visitors that most of the imported children's films received, showed that (most of) the distributors did receive external support from national support systems or from the Media Programme of the EU. The income from the ticket sales can not cover the expenses needed for the releases of these films.

Country Observations

Austria and Germany

These two countries in the middle of Europe are the leaders in regard to the importation of foreign films for children.

It is quite remarkable to see how a small country like Austria is doing very well in the field of children's film. Of course the fact that they are neighbouring Germany has a very positive influence, but nevertheless there are two distributors who are working with this kind of films: Filmladen and Constantin. They are not only interested in the German blockbusters (The Flying Classroom, Bibi Blocksberg, Emil and the Detectives), but also distribute Scandinavian and French films. Knowing that there was also some domestic production, we can conclude that children's films are well present in Austria.

In Germany there are also two companies which are quite active in this field: MFA and Arsenal. Almost 90% of their acquisitions come from the Scandinavian countries, a few more come from France or Italy. In the beginning of the reference period there was also Atlas, but they have reduced their activities during the last years and came back with some films in 2005.

What is quite remarkable is that the above mentioned German blockbusters (plus some other German productions) did not find any buyer outside the German speaking area. But it also proves that „home made movies for children” can generate enough income to keep a national production alive. This is also confirmed by the fact that in Germany some US-major companies invest in the production and distribution of children's film. Warner did so with Little Polar Bear and Laura's Star, Buena Vista was partner for *The Wild Soccerbunch*. But as these productions were also distributed by these majors abroad they do not appear in this research.

Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg

Belgium and the Netherlands are in many ways comparable to Germany and Austria. They also have a quite big importation of foreign films for children and they also play a lot in the same language area. This of course is quite complicated in Belgium. Some distributors work more in the Flemish part and they have a strong link with Dutch productions. Others work more in the French part of Belgium and therefore are closer to France. This leads to the fact that in Belgium there were more Dutch and French productions available than in Germany. A big difference to Germany is that here many films can be released in subtitled versions. Thus the release costs for a film are much lower. But looking at the restricted potential market (only ca. 20 million Dutch speaking population versus 90 million German speaking people), this is the only possible way to go. The most active distributors in these countries are A-Film, Twin Film, Cinéart and Jekino-films.

Regarding the domestic films for children we see that in the Netherlands there is a booming production. Companies as Bos Bros, Lemming Film and Shooting Star produce one or two blockbusters every year. These films most often co-operate with a US-major distributor which means that their figures for Belgium do not appear in our listings. But these figures were substantially different from those in Holland. Films like *The Flying Liftboy*, *Minoes*, *Pieter Bell* had more than one million visitors in the Netherlands, but in Belgium they were responsible for a maximum of 50.000 visitors. This „cultural” difference between Belgium and the Netherlands was even more evident when we look at the (non) success of Flemish films in Holland (except of course this K3-movie).

Another remarkable point in the Netherlands: one distributor who regularly imports foreign children's film is completely absent in our listing. It is Park Junior and it only shows that they do not apply for the support of the EU-Media programme.

Luxembourg is in a special position. For the „normal” films they approached Belgium

companies for copies with French subtitles. However children's films they mostly received from Germany in the German version. Luxembourg is small but has the highest average of cinema frequentation, so the distribution of a children's film in Luxembourg is a welcome surplus.

France

It was a quite disappointing surprise to see the figures for France. In general this country is regarded as one of the places where children's film is well developed, on the production as well as on the exhibition side. There are an overwhelming number of children's film festivals, a well functioning arthouse circuit, ... Especially the company GEBEKA, managed by Marc Bonny, has an international reputation for this work in France. But with these figures it becomes clear that this reputation is mainly based upon their excellent work with „local French productions”. Regarding the importation of foreign European films for children, they were one of the seven companies which once in five years released such a film.

Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway

For many years now the northern countries were certainly the most active countries regarding the production of films for children. Regarding the importation of European films for children they are also close to the top. They do not meet the import numbers of Germany, Austria, Belgium or the Netherlands, but they are following quite closely. Of course there is a heavy traffic of films produced among these countries, but nevertheless they also import the most well known films from France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. As our figures are ending in 2004, a new Norwegian company specialised in the distribution of European children's films, Coriander film, does not yet appear in this overview.

Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece

Obviously the situation in the south of Europe is difficult. The import figures of European films for children go from four to eight in a period of five years. This is hardly an average of one film a year in these countries. Once again it proves that the impact of the „commercial films” offered by the US-major companies is much stronger in these countries than in the northern part of Europe. This is also confirmed by the fact that from the eight movies imported in Italy, seven were animation films. Also remarkable: from the 17 different films that were imported in these five years, only two came from Scandinavia. This is completely different from the other countries where a majority of the imported films came from Scandinavia. This shows also the different „children's culture” in the north and the south of Europe.

United Kingdom and Ireland

One European film was bought by one company (Soda Pictures) during the reference period of five years - if we are broad-minded enough to classify the film *The Miracle of Bern* as a children's film. Of course there was a domestic production of children's movies and the major companies have imported some quality films as *Little Polar Bear*, but after all it was very poor. The problem here seems that the decision makers on one side do not accept that films for children from the age of 9 or 10 years up can be subtitled (which is generally accepted for foreign films for adults) and on the other side they do not want to invest in dubbings. With this policy there was only place for genuine English spoken films. They did not come from Europe, but from the USA and sometimes from Australia.

The New EU-Countries

As these countries just recently joined the European Union, there are not yet many figures available, but I see that in Poland as well as in Hungary, two companies seem to be interested

in the distribution of European films for children. In Poland three movies were released during the last year, in Hungary there were four. It is a start and we can hope that their membership of the European Union (and their access to the Media Programme) will create more opportunities for this kind of films.

Conclusion

When we look at all these figures we can say that after all there is a certain traffic of European children's films; they do cross borders. But the situation is different between the north and the south (including France) which probably is a general question of „different cultures”! Another conclusion is that there are not so many distribution companies involved in this field. There must be a possibility of getting these people together in order to co-operate on a much larger scale than at present. This certainly could lower the costs for each partner and also could mean a better access to the funds of the European Media Programme.

By Felix Vanginderhuysen, Managing director of the distribution company Jekino-Films & ECFA's general secretary

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