

**European Masters in
Intercultural Communication (EMICC)**

**Semiotics of cultures
The Notion of “Cinema-going”**

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1. Introduction

In this paper we will study the notion of cinema-going as a type of leisure culture. We use the concept '**cinema-going**' to refer to the activity of going to the cinema and the concept '**cinema-goers**' – to the audiences that attend the cinemas. Our aim is to discover the basic aspects of cinema-going in Europe by doing cross-cultural research about the activity of cinema-going in Finland, Estonia and Portugal. By comparing the audiences we try to discover whether there is a profile of cinema-going that may be regarded as common to the cinema-goers in these countries and whether it is possible to talk about European audiences.

The study is carried out in relation to the notion of '**culture**'. First we discuss whether it is possible to consider cinema-going as a form of culture and how it is related to the other leisure time activities. After that we go through the previous research concerning the cinema culture in general in order to justify the perspective from which we choose to study it. The next step is first to shortly discuss the global trends of cinema-going and then the national history of cinema-going in Finland, Estonia and Portugal with a purpose of giving an overview of the historical aspects of this particular form of culture.

After the introduction to the topic we bring in the phenomenon of cinema-going in Finland, Estonia and Portugal as we see it as representatives of our national cultures. The descriptions are based mostly on our experiences as cinema-goers but also on some statistics which give an idea about the current trends concerning cinema-going. By doing some comparisons we realized that there are more similarities than differences amongst the different national cinema-goers and therefore it is possible to talk about them as European cinema-goers.

Then we proceed to exploring the characteristics that all the cinema-goers – as participants in the same activity – share in order to describe what the characteristics of this particular form of culture are. This is done in terms of the concept of a 'social actor' which was introduced to us by Peter Stockinger during the course '*Semiotics of cultures*' (<http://www.semionet.com>). In the end, we bring up the

question of '*McHollywood*' as an insight to the globalization which concerns cinema culture as well.

Besides referring to our own experiences as cinema-goers, we also interviewed our friends, acquaintances, and even a cinema critic when discussing contemporary trends in Portuguese cinema-going. Most of the statistics has been taken from the resources available online. We searched both library and internet resources for the theoretical background information and came to the conclusion that the vast amounts of information on the topic of cinema-going are available mostly online.

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2. Cinema-going as a culture

Cinema is thought to be quite a modern form of popular art, since in modern Europe it was created only at the end of the 19th century. From its beginning it was concerned with various questions of modern culture. In the beginning cinema was showing everyday events, like documentary or travel films. Soon it began to use its technology in order to create tricks and produce a cinema of illusion, of magic. In other words, to produce those spectacular movies that would attract millions of people to the cinemas. (*Cinema culture in Europe.*)

Going to the cinema to watch a movie has always been a popular leisure time activity. As such it could be compared to going to the concert, theatre or museum, traveling, and doing sports. There is undoubtedly more to cinema-going than seeing films. There is going out at night with a group of friends and the sense of relaxation combined with a sense of fun and excitement. The cinemas were known as 'picture palaces' for a long time, and the very name captures an important part of that

experience. Rather than selling individual films, cinema is best understood as having sold a habit, a certain type of socialized experience.

When studying a particular form of culture it is relevant to discuss why it can be considered a culture. This can be carried out by linking the notion of cinema culture to the four definitions of a culture. This gives us a right to talk about the cinema-going as a culture in itself.

First, cinema culture fulfils the requirements if the culture is regarded as a system of knowledge and values that a group shares. As it can be seen later, cinema-going is based on cognitive systems (know-how) which constitute a common framework in terms of which it can be studied. (Semionet 2003:1:10-12.) This knowledge about cinema-going is valued as there are certain cultural preferences within the cinema-culture. What kind of behavior is acceptable in the cinema and how long a film should be, for instance, is included and preferentially graded in the knowledge that cinema-goers share. This hierarchically graded knowledge is used to justify, evaluate and sanction the behavior of the cinema-goers and the production of the film, for example.

Second, cinema-goers have certain needs and strategies to satisfy them which, according to one definition, constitute a culture. Cinema-goers share a need to have "a cinematic experience" which can be satisfied by going to the cinema. This tradition is based on a culturally transmitted schemata which derives from the times before the television, video, DVD, Internet etc. (Semionet 2003:1: 15-16.)

According to third definition a culture consists of species of *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu in Semionet 2003:1:19). This symbolic capital is not equally distributed within a culture and thus the symbolic capital that the cinema-goers possess corresponds to their places in the hierarchy of the culture. Ordinary cinema-goers, for example, do not have the same symbolic and cultural capital as the critics do, due to which they occupy different places in the social field of cinema-culture. However, it has to be emphasized that trajectories from one social space to another are possible and in this case not even rare. Most of the critics and film researchers, for example, have started their "career" by being ordinary spectators and have later moved from

this social position to another one by getting more symbolic capital. (Semionet 2003:1: 19-20.)

Finally, culture always has its history and lifespan. Cinema-going has also had its evolutionary process which includes the increases and decreases of cinema-going, the changes in the movie theatres and in the audiences etc. However, these changes have not changed the fundamental level of cinema-going but are a part of its heritage which makes it a cultural form. (Semionet 2003:1: 21.)

3. Previous research

Through the web and library research it came out that cinema culture has been studied from the numerous different perspectives. When studying cinema culture, one is first faced with the problem whether to approach cinema from the perspective of production or consumption. These two perspectives are, of course, intertwined. The perspective of production would inevitably lead to study films, the institutions producing the films and the economic structures which sustain them. According to Geraghty this does not, however, help us to understand the culture surrounding the films and therefore we have to pay attention to audiences (Geraghty 2000).

Even if one chooses to study the audiences, there still exist different ways to approach them. According to Meers (2003), the audiences have been mostly studied in terms of psychoanalytic and semiotic analyses - which lead to study the ideal viewer, the implied viewer in the text – whereas from the social science's point of view they have been more or less ignored. Only during the last decade there has appeared an interest to study the audience in its broader social and cultural contexts instead of concentrating only on the perception of the movies. Due to this, also historical and empirical models of spectator analysis have been established. The context of watching has become important because these days films are no longer watched only in cinemas but also at home and via different media as television, video and internet (Meers 2003). Thus also the cinema-going audiences should be studied in relation to other audiences.

The recent studies in the field of cinema studies have concentrated on defining the profile of the cinema-going amongst different audiences. Paola Bensi (1998) has, for example, researched the young cinema-goers in Europe and their consumer habits in order to construct a profile of the young audience. Some historic researches have also been carried out in purpose to find out the traditions and changes in cinema-going (e.g. Geraghty 2000, Kuhn 1999.) Many researchers have also studied cinema-going on the national level and tried to describe the cinema-going in the context of national state (e.g. cinema-going in Hungary, cinema-going in Japan, cinema-going in Poland). In addition to national cinema, a lot of interest has been shown to study the European cinema-going due to the collaboration between the European Union and European film industry. *Media Salles* is an institution which has recorded the statistics concerning the cinema-going in 32 territories on the European continent since 1992. The results have been published and analyzed each year in *European Cinema Yearbook*. Even though this institution has been established in order to promote European films and the audience researches have served the interests of cinema entrepreneurs, still it also enables to study the audiences cross-culturally.

Still one interesting study has to be mentioned: *The social geographies of cinema* (2000). Phil Hubbard from the University of Leicester has launched a cinema-study from the geographical point of view. This perspective explores the cinemas as sites of recreation, leisure and consumption. In his study, which is still in progress, Hubbard tries to describe the changes that have happened in the geography of cinemas (from traditional town centre cinemas to multi-screen out-of-town cinemas) and to find out how this affects the routines of cinema-going.

4. The history of cinema-going and cinema-going in Europe

By its broad international and social diffusion (it is equally appreciated transversely), cinema is nowadays considered as one of the distinguishing components of the culture. Some of movie characters are known for several generations in certain countries and social groups. Also many of the pre-conceived ideas about heroism,

justice, police investigation, certain historical events and historical characters, certain feelings, etc., come from movies or are transmitted to the audiences through them.

When cinema appeared, the magic of seeing the news, distant lands, legendary creatures and heroes pushed crowds - eager for knowledge, adventure and role models - to the cinemas. Those were the best times for cinema: everything was new and the only competitor was the radio. People dressed themselves up specially to go to the cinema. Often the entire families went to the cinema. (da Costa 1996.)

Christine Geraghty (2000), who has studied the history of the British cinema-going, states that cinema as a social space has changed along the decades. During the post-war period it was considered as a form of entertainment, which was open to all and was a part of the broader increase of popular entertainment. According to Geraghty, during this time the audience of the cinema was most heterogenic and the ways of using cinema as a social place were most diverse. Cinema had its regular cinema-goers who were sitting in the same places every time. The whole cinema-going was surrounded by glamour and physical pleasure. Cinema was a place which offered escape from the reality that the modern people had to encounter.

Nevertheless, in the late 50s and in the 60s, when television became the most important medium, the cinema started to look old-fashioned. Cinema as a place was not the most comfortable place to see a movie anymore and more and more people started to stay at home instead of going to the cinema. (Geraghty 2000.)

In the sixties there was a tendency towards fragmentation of audiences when the young audience became dominant in the cinema. They had always been the majority in the cinema but during this time they took the place to themselves. This affected cinema-going and it started to be characterized as a place for dating. (Geraghty 2000.)

Then in 1970's the VCRs and video clubs appeared, giving people the opportunity to choose the movies they wanted to see at the comfort of their homes. But even then the cinema-going activity resisted. Nowadays people who prefer to stay at home and watch a movie have DVDs, DIVX, VCD, SUPERVCD, INTERNET and Interactive TV at their disposal. All of them are major competitors with the cinemas.

And to all of them the cinema replies with Dolby Prologic Surround systems and special effects, which can be only properly experienced in the cinemas. Nowadays cinema-going is no longer a family entertainment activity - apart from Christmas time. Above all, it is a social activity that extends from the animation movies to war, adventure, and romantic movies to the independent cinema. Today going to the cinema is not a special event anymore, but a way to relax, go on a date, socialize and experience fear, astonishment, surprise, joy or sadness through the screen.

4.1. Finland

The early years of the Finnish cinema have mostly followed the global trends. Still, it has to be pointed out that especially the period from the late 1930s until the 1950s was the golden age of the Finnish film and cinema. During this period, around twenty Finnish movies were produced and presented in the cinemas every year and almost all of them got an audience of 400 000 spectators. Hardly any Finnish movie today can end up having such a large audience. In the late 1950s also the Finnish cinema faced the same problems that cinemas worldwide and the downhill of Finnish cinema was actually going on until the 1990s. (Toiviainen 2003.)

During the last ten years there has been a steady growth of audiences in Finnish cinema, even though the prices of the tickets have been increasing at the same time and the amount of regional cinemas has been decreasing (Finnish Film Foundation 2001). This growth can be partly explained by the renaissance of the domestic film industry which has attracted new audience to attend the cinemas (Nyman 1994:35.) Since 1998 approximately ten films have been produced for theatrical distribution and the films have a market share of 15 % on average (Astala 2002). According to yearly report of European Cinema Journal, Finland was one of the few countries which market grew significantly (17,8 %) in 2002 (Brunella 2003: 2). Brunella suggests that this can be explained by the success of domestic productions (e.g. four films drawing over 200 000 spectators). According to Elo (1999), in 1999 Finnish cinema was living its best times ever, which can be seen both in the amount of the films and in the admissions of the audiences. Uusitalo (*in* Elo 1999) suggests

that this is due to many different factors such as interesting topics, talented producers and supporting politics. The supportive politics has allocated funding for different films in order to reach different audiences.

Although the domestic movies have drawn over the significant audiences, still most of the movies shown are American (52,5% in 2002). The European films were second with the percentage of 40 and Finnish films got the third position with 11,4 %. (Tilastokeskus)

4.2. Estonia

Estonian cinema as an art was born only in the 1960s during the Khrushchev 'melt', although films were produced in Estonia as early as in the beginning of the 20th century. Until the beginning of the 1990s Estonian cinema was dependent on state money, thus being fully controlled and censored by the Moscow Cinema Committee. During the last 10 years the financing of films was in the hands of film-makers themselves, like it had been in Scandinavia from the 1960s onwards. This naturally caused a decrease in the feature film production. But despite clear signs of a crisis, 26 feature films were produced in the 1990s. Many of them were not shown on the regular basis in the cinemas but were rather distributed at different film festivals. Estonian films have always had their own audience. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, when Estonia was still the part of the Soviet Union, the Estonian movies were distributed across the territory of the USSR. But 300 000 feature film viewers have now diminished to 5000 - 15 000. (Ruus 2000.)

But even though the audience for the domestic movies has largely decreased, according to the Dodona Research, Estonia was the fastest growing European cinema market in 2002. As it can be seen from the table below, closing cinemas and increasing price of the tickets didn't influence the number of cinema-goers in the last 8 years (Estonian Film Foundation, 2003).

Year	No. of cinemas	Average ticket price	General Box Office	Admissions	Per capita
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			(EUR)		
1995	214	1 EUR	1 016 474	1 012 000	0,68
1996	197	2 EUR	1 658 269	1 005 000	0,68
1997	179	2 EUR	1 863 077	960 900	0,66
1998	172	3 EUR	2 980 705	1 060 500	0,73
1999	172	3 EUR	2 596 923	874 500	0,61
2000	74	3 EUR	3 162 564	1 083 634	0,75
2001	69	4 EUR	4 834 217	1 303 846	0,91
2002	69	4 EUR	5 846 258	1 558 067	1,14

4.3. Portugal

We could not speak about the Portuguese cinema-going without paying a tribute to those who contributed to the increase of the Portuguese cinema-goers and to the creation of the “Portuguese Movies”. Those are the Portuguese film directors, like António Lopes Ribeiro and João Benard da Costa. But the greatest master of the Portuguese cinema is Manoel de Oliveira. At the age of ninety-five (he made his first film when the movies were still silent), Oliveira remains active and continues to create at an impressive rate. He has practically defined international conceptions of Portuguese cinema for the last several decades.

Since the 1974 revolution, the central government and other organizations have supported film production as a cultural imperative. As a result, Portuguese directors have largely remained free from commercial pressures and have been able to pursue their own interests.

5. Contemporary cinema-going

In this part we will discuss in more detail cinema-going/-goers in Estonia, Finland and Portugal. We will discuss the cinema-goers in each country (who are they, when do

they go to the cinema and why, how they behave in the cinema, etc.). We will also touch upon the cinema theatres and the movies shown in each country.

5.1. Finland

A majority of the Finnish cinema-goers consist of the youth and young adults who go to the cinema with a friend or a group of friends. However, after the flourishing times of the Finnish movie production in the end of the 1990s the audience seemed to get more heterogenic as also the adults, middle-aged and older people got interested in the cinema-going. Going alone might be more common amongst the older people but still it exceptional.

In Finland cinema-going is usually carefully planned in advance and going to see a movie impulsively is quite rare because often the seats have to be booked in advance. Most of the movies are shown in the evenings/nights and during the weekend but after the prices have increased a lot also the special nights became popular. The days when cinema-going is cheaper differ by town to town and in Jyväskylä, for example, the cheapest day is Thursday.

The purposes of the cinema-going are various and also differ amongst the cinema-goers. Many people go to the cinema just to see a certain film. Especially the older cinema-goers might go to the cinema just because they want to see the film everyone is talking about, so that they can participate in the small talk which is going on, for instance, at their work place. Furthermore, amongst them it is also usual to go in purpose to have a cultural experience. The most evident reason for the cinema-going of the youth is their need to socialize with each other. Especially during the winter time it is necessary to hang out indoor and the cinema offers an environment for spending time and meeting the others.

These different kinds of cinema-goers can also behave differently. The people who just go to see the movie are not doing anything else than watching. The youth on the other hand can sometimes chat and giggle during the movie. Generally speaking, most of the audience is usually eating something, like crisps and pop corns

(but not ice cream, nachos etc.). In Finland eating sweets is strongly connected with seeing the movie.

The array of the cinemas in Finland is changing. There used to be one traditional cinema in every town but at the moment the number of them is constantly decreasing. Although also Finland has got its first multiplexes during the last few years, it is hard to say whether this trend is going to continue. Due to the relatively small population in Finland and low number of big cities, it is not evident that all the cinemas will be multiplexes. It can be said that most common criteria for choosing the cinema is still the nearness of the cinema although some movie freaks, for example, might travel to another city in order to have a better sound effects.

Usually the Finnish cinema-goers are attracted to the cinema by the movie. They might choose the movie mainly for three different reasons. Firstly, advertisements about the movie attract the cinema-goers. Secondly, the selection might be due to the reviews they have read and other public discussion concerning the film. Finally, people often follow the recommendations of their friends who have already seen the movie.

It can be stated that sometimes the talk about the movie is as important as the movie itself. This kind of everyday talk is a way to discuss about the cinematic experience that the cinema-goers share. Sometimes the cinema-goers might also express their opinions and experiences in the local newspaper. When many local cinemas were closed down in the beginning of the 1990s, the public discussion concerned the opposition of this phenomenon. Throughout the discussion it came out that cinematic experience was regarded as a "civil right" – everyone has to have an equal opportunity to the cinematic experience and if possible in the local cinema. However, these opinions differ from the film reviews which are written by the professional and which often include special vocabulary etc.

5.2. Estonia

Even though cinema becomes more and more popular in Estonia, the major group of cinema-goers still remains the same. Most of the cinema-goers in Estonia are

younger people (teenagers and young adults), who tend to go to the cinema usually in groups of three - four people. Some grown-ups (especially the ones who live in Tallinn, Estonia's capital city) also enjoy going to the cinema, but they form a much smaller group than the youth. Seeing people over 50 years old in the cinema will be mostly an exception for the Estonian cinema-going. You might see some grandparents accompanying their grandkids to see an animation or kids' movies, but not during the regular movie shows.

Cinema-going is definitely a leisure time activity for people in Estonia. People tend to go more to the cinemas on Friday evenings and during the weekend. In order to attract more viewers during the daytime, the cinemas have reduced prices for the day movie shows up to 50%. For example, the cinema in Tartu, "*Ekraan*", has a special student rate on Thursday afternoon, which is much lower than a regular ticket at the student rate.

The reasons for going to the cinema are very various, and differ mostly accordingly to the age of the viewers. Seeing a movie everybody around is talking about is definitely the main reason – people want to know what is so special about the movie and they certainly do not want to be left out in the conversations. Many teenagers and younger adults go to the cinema in order to spend time with their friends – going to the cinema might be just a part of the Friday night program. Others can go to the cinema alone, just because they want to relax and watch a nice movie on the big screen. Among the university students going to the cinema to watch a new movie will be a solid excuse (but only for themselves!) to skip a class or two, since – as it was mentioned before – the tickets are cheaper during the afternoons.

Even though the reasons for going to the cinema might be different, the rules of behavior in the cinema apply to all the cinema-goers. As a general rule, it is forbidden to smoke anywhere on the territory of the cinema. People often have popcorn, crisps, cookies or candies and soda when they watch a movie. But one is usually not allowed to take food and drinks which were bought outside the cinema. Many cinemas in Estonia require proper attire; some cinemas emphasize that they have a right not to sell a ticket to the person who comes to the cinema in e.g. beach

clothes. In the cinema hall it is forbidden to disturb other cinema-goers by talking loudly, walking around the hall, throwing things, etc. As a general rule, you are asked to turn off the volume on your cell phone, but many people break this rule and often you can hear the phones ringing and people talking on the phone.

But people talk not only in the cinema, they talk a lot about the cinema and the movies as well. There is a special TV program called "*Cinemax*", which tells about the new movie releases both in Estonia and abroad; gives a brief overview of the movies and their production; presents TOP10 movies in Estonia cinemas; provides the news and latest gossip about the cinema world and the most popular actors and actresses. Estonian daily newspapers also have a special column devoted to the cinema. One can find there the film reviews written by movie critics, brief summaries of movies and advertisements of the up-coming movies. Movies are also a favorite topic for the small-talk in Estonian society. People like discussing movie details, actors' performance and share their impressions about the movie. Often such kinds of discussions prompt others to go see one or another movie.

Despite this huge interest towards the movies and attending the cinema, not all people in Estonia can do that. Definitely, the high price of the tickets is one of the reasons. But it is not the main reason. According to the statistics (Estonian Film Foundation 2003), the number of cinemas decreased substantially between 1991 and 2002 (617 cinemas in 1991 and only 69 cinemas in 2002). There used to be at least one small cinema in every town, but many of them closed during these years and nowadays there might be even no cinema at all in a small town or village. Only twelve cinemas out of those sixty-nine work permanently. Most of the cinemas are located in the capital city Tallinn. They are also the biggest ones, often with several screens. There is only one multiplex in Estonia, *Coca-Cola Plaza*, which is also located in the centre of Tallinn. *Coca-Cola Plaza* opened its doors to the cinema-goers in March 2001. The multiplex tries to offer a cinema program as varied as possible for the cinema-goers of all ages. The movie theatre has 11 screens with the total number of 1968 seats. *Coca-Cola Plaza* is one of the most modern multiplex-cinemas in

Scandinavia. It is equipped with world class sound system and the most comfortable seats available.

But of course the main attraction of *Coca-Cola Plaza* and other cinemas in Estonia is and has always been a wide variety of movies not only from the major studios of Hollywood but also from other parts of the world - the local movie fans have had the chance to enjoy the movies from Great Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Finland, Taiwan and - last but not least - Estonia. Below is the statistics from the Estonian Film Foundation for 2002.

Statistics by Countries Origin (Premiers) 2002	Admissions	Gross Box Office (EUR)	No. of films
Domestic	146 133	521 344	4
European	117 849	482 062	19
USA	998 995	3 903 461	71
Other	102 489	424 836	3
Total	1 365 466	5 331 703	97

People usually pick up the movie they want to see according to the advertisements (TV commercials, ads in the newspapers, posters in the streets, etc.) Often they rely on the film reviews by critics or just recommendations of friends, who have already seen the movie.

5.3. Portugal

The part on the cinema-going in Portugal is based on the interview with **Roberto Prudencio**, a critic for the weekly newspaper '*Lamego Hoje*' and the magazine '*Cinema Independente Fanzine*'.

1. Who are the cinema-goers in Portugal?

"Everyone in general likes to go to the cinema in Portugal. Not only intellectual people or kids, but everyone. However, if we want to define the target group of the Portuguese cinema-goers, then a typical definition would be people between the ages of 16 to 34 from high/middle socio-economic class. The socio-economic qualification is motivated by the consideration of the price of movie tickets in relation to earnings. According to the last published statistics, there were 19 480 000 people attending the cinema in 2002. Portuguese teenagers (those supposedly elusive, lost readers) put cinema-going high on their list of leisure activities. About three-fourths of the teenagers go to the cinema approximately three times in a month."

2. With whom do people go to the cinema?

"I tend to believe that most people go to the movies with at least one other person, if not more. It's a great way to spend an afternoon with a friend and often makes a nice place to take a date. Actually some people also go to the cinema alone. I used to do that a lot myself."

3. When?

"People go to the cinema mostly on the weekends, but also during the week. It really does not matter if you work and have your own money. However, students go mostly on Mondays because it is cheaper (half the price)."

4. What is the frequency of going to a movie theatre in a 30-day period?

"Almost half of the people attend a cinema at least once in a 30-day period. Frequency of attendance varies from less than once a month to more than two movies a month. Opening weekend is a very accurate predictor of success."

5. Why do people go to the cinema?

"People in Portugal go to the cinema mostly in order to socialize. We know that there has to be a social dimension, something you do not get in the living room. We know that sensuality is not just sitting back and passively taking in a prepared emotion. We know that the evening cannot be limited to a movie show. We know that we must convey the sense of sharing and actively joining a peer group, with the stress on "actively". We know that the evening must live. It must be something that engages us, not something that makes us escape.

Of course we, the Portuguese people, do not only go to the cinema in order to escape loneliness. But we usually prefer to pay in order to see a movie in a company rather than take a cassette off the shelf and watch it at home alone. Somehow the emotional perception is different. Company makes a difference, that's why we want to *have* it as well. We materially acquire what we emotionally crave. That is how our basic instincts have become big business.

Usually the typical family situation comes up where the question is asked, first, "Should we go to the movies tonight?" and only then, *in the second place*, the question is raised as to what film they want to see. The same principle - experience first, name of film second - is also, of course, at the base of the whole multiplex experience."

6. How do people behave – what is the normal behaviour?

"People in general behave well. However, young people (between the ages of 16 and 23) do not behave that well, especially if they are in big groups. Then they tend to talk loud, make loud remarks about the movie, make a lot of noise eating popcorn, etc."

7. How do people talk about it?

"People talk about the movies amongst themselves, usually at work or college groups. Here in Portugal they talk to friends if they liked the movie or not. Critics' reviews are a common thing in newspapers and magazines. Some people follow the critics, but I usually do not. A lot of Portuguese people say that they turn to the newspaper to make a decision.

When I feel like going to a movie and I want to see what's on, I often look at the movie ads in the newspaper. The movie information in the paper (such as reader contests, reviews and other editorial coverage or advertising), promotions and ads help to motivate people to go to the cinema or see certain movies."

8. What kinds of cinemas are there in Portugal?

"I like small rooms, however, a cinema with facilities, coffee, popcorn... Here in Portugal most cinemas are multiplexes with great facilities. Independent movies can be seen in the old movie theatres which have been reconstructed. There are 245

cinemas or places of movie projection in Portugal, 25% are located and 45% are associated with shopping centers."

9. What kind of movies do people attend in Portugal?

"All kinds of movies. From drama to comedy, once it comes out almost everyone goes to see it. Especially American movies (92%). Independent movies are only seen by faithful viewers. Besides that we have a lot of Disney fans, especially on occasions such as Christmas when parents take kids to see what has just come out."

5.4. Comparison

When comparing the cinema-going in Finland, Estonia and Portugal, we have realized that there are more similarities than differences. In all three countries the main audience consists of teenagers and young adults. In Finland and Portugal also older people attend the cinema quite often, whereas in Estonia seeing people over the age of 35 in the cinema would be rare.

Cinema-going is a social activity, and therefore people usually go to the cinema in groups. It is often a part of the 'night-out' activity. Though in Estonia, where the ticket price is very expensive in relation to the average monthly income, going to the cinema becomes an event itself. But the ticket prices have risen quite high in Finland and Portugal as well. However, the high ticket prices have not influenced the admissions in all three countries – vice versa, the admissions have been increasing together with the ticket prices.

What came out is that people in Portugal go to the cinema much more often than in Finland or Estonia. According to statistics, the admission per capita in 2002 in Portugal was 2,4, in Finland 1,3, and in Estonia 1,14.

Even though the American movies are dominant in Finnish, Estonian and Portuguese cinemas, there is still a big difference in the numbers of people who go to see those movies. For example, in Portugal people mostly go to see American movies (92%), while in Finland and Estonia "only" around 70% of cinema-goers attend the Hollywood films.

The other difference that we found is the number of multiplexes in each country. In Estonia there is only one multiplex; in Finland there are just a few of them; but in Portugal multiplexes become more and more dominant.

As a result of our comparison, we came up to the conclusion that there is a more stable cinema-going culture in Portugal than in Finland and Estonia. First of all, more people attend the cinema in Portugal. Secondly, there are many more cinemas in Portugal (and they mainly multiplexes). And thirdly, people in Portugal go to the cinema much more often than in Finland or Estonia.

6. Cinema-goers as a social actor

Culture can be understood by investigating the **social settings** within which it appears. Social setting itself consists of two dimensions: **social practice** and the **social actors** who participate in social practices. (Semionet 2003:1:4.) Also cinema-culture can be described by studying the social settings in terms of which the social actor (cinema-goer) participates in the social practices (cinema-going).

Social actors can be divided into **formal** and **un-formal (loose)** categories according to the level of organisation of the social actor. Formal social actors such as family, profession or institution, for example, are tight up together more closely than the loose social actors such as political movement or TV-audience. (Semionet 2003:1:5.) Cinema-goers form a loose social category, which has many common characteristics even though the relationships within the social category are not very evident.

A social actor consists of different groups and members who can themselves be either formal or loose (Semionet 2003:1:6). Thus cinema-goers can be divided into ordinary cinema-goers, movie freaks and critics, who all can be defined as cinema-goers but whose relationship to the cinema-culture is different. The critics, for example, can be seen as a more formal category than the ordinary cinema-goers because they also form a professional category. However, all these categories are the consumers of the movie culture and therefore can be generally categorized as cinema-goers.

Social actors never act alone but in relation to other social actors. Together with the other social actors a social actor constitutes **a society of social actors** which share a common set of cultural references. (Semionet 2003:1:6-7.) Cinema-culture includes numerous social actors who all share the interest in movies or films and thus form a broader and more complex society of social actors. Cinema-culture in its broadest sense includes the social actors from the film production (film makers, scriptwriter, actors etc.), film distribution (cinema entrepreneurs, advertisers etc.), film researchers, etc. These different social actors work together according to a contract which shows the roles each social actor should fulfil.

6.1. Characteristics of the social actor

Social actors are often defined as a group of people who refer to a common cognitive framework, to a common culture. People in this group usually share common knowledge and values; common 'activities'; common language and communication means; objects; a social place; a common history; and a common relevant context.

Common knowledge and values: All cinema-goers share the common tradition, i.e. going to the cinema. They might go to the cinema for different reasons (e.g. on a date, in order to spend time with friends, or simply to see the new movie). They might go to different kinds of cinemas: one-screen small town cinema, shopping-mall 15-screen multiplex or a huge, specially built for the 'whole family entertainment', cinema complex. They might be big movie fans or simply occasional cinema-goers, but going to the cinema is a common action, a common tradition for all the social actors, who belong to the cinema-going culture.

Cinema-goers as social actors also share the general knowledge about the cinema, movies, appropriate behavior in the cinema hall, etc. Norms of behavior in the cinema can vary according to different countries. In some cultures it is seen to be normal to express your emotions loudly or e.g. to throw popcorn at the screen when you think that the actors' performance or the movie in general is bad. In the other cultures such kind of behavior will be seen disruptive. But at the same time there are

some spoken and unspoken rules of behaving in the cinema, which the cinema-goers usually have already learned in their childhood. All cinema-goers know that one is supposed to get a ticket when s/he wants to see a movie. They know that they are not supposed to talk and disturb other cinema-goers during the movie show.

Cinema-goers usually share some general knowledge about the movies as well. Many of them know the names of the director and the actors starring in the movie. They might know some facts about the production of the movie. Many of them know the plot of the movie beforehand as well. But even if the cinema-goers do not know the director and the actors, or the movie plot, at least all of them know the name of the movie they are going to watch.

Common 'activities': Rather than selling individual films, cinema is best understood as having sold a habit, a certain type of socialized experience. Like we have already mentioned above, the cinema-goers might go to the cinema for different reasons. Cinema-going is often seen as a night-time activity. Going to see a movie is a common need for all the social actors. Among other common needs we could also mention a need to socialize, just to spend some time (time-gap-filling activity), or to write a film review (e.g. for all movie critics as they also form a part of our cinema-going society).

Common language and communication means: Cinema-goers as a social actor share a common language. It does not mean that cinema-goers from Finland or Estonia can easily understand cinema-goers from Portugal, because they all would communicate in a kind of 'cinema'-language. It would rather mean that all cinema-goers usually use the same language patterns (e.g. the same questions all cinema-goers usually ask after watching a movie, like 'How did you like? What do you think about this movie?'). There also exists a shared vocabulary among the cinema-goers, concerning movie production, story, techniques, and actors/actresses. A deeper discussion of the common language of a social actor will follow in the chapter on linguistic culture.

Objects: The cinema-goers as a social actor share some common objects. First of all, the movies are, of course, the most evident product that actually makes the whole cinema-going exist. Another quite fundamental object related to the cinema is the

tickets they buy. Even though today it is possible to book a seat electronically, the cinemagoers still get the concrete ticket when they arrive at the cinema. However, nowadays there are also many other objects which can be seen as by-products of the movies. In the cinema it is possible to buy drinks, food, posters etc.

Social place: In the case of cinema culture the social place is very important to the social actor because it is actually the most concrete thing that this loose social actor has in common. Cinema gathers up the people who want to see a movie, people who have a common need.

Nowadays the social places can be divided into different cinemas: traditional cinemas, multiplexes and shopping mall theatres. What makes it interesting is the fact that different cinemas may attract different audiences. Some "specialists", for example, prefer the traditional cinema whereas shopping mall theatres might attract impulsive audiences. By choosing the cinema the social actors can differ from the other social actors in the society of the social actors.

Most heterogenic audiences one can probably find in the multiplexes where several movies are going on at the same time and where people might also join some other entertaining facilities such as shops, restaurants and bars. According to Hubbard (2000) today many cinemas incorporate themed restaurants, shops and amusement arcades which show that we can no longer distinguish cinema-going from other forms of urban leisure.

Common history: According to our opinion cinema-goers share a common history of going out to see a movie, even though the situation has changed a lot since the early years of cinema. According to Jacobs and Stoffelen (*in Meers 2003*) the movie consumption in the cinema is not that usual anymore due to the fact that it is possible to stay at home and consume the movies via other media, like television and video. Still, during the recent years the number of audiences has been increasing again. This indicates that people actually go to the cinema for the different reasons and not just in purpose to see the movie, since they could have done that at home as well. Above all, they share the knowledge of "the cinematic experience" which can be only achieved by going out and seeing the movie.

Environment of the cinema-going: Environment of cinema-going means the common relevant context of the cinema-goers. Firstly, cinema-going is related to the broad economic context. Cinema-going is consumption of the movies which on the one hand is affected by broader economic issues (the economic recession etc.) and on the other hand can itself have an impact on the other economic systems (e.g. movie production, movie theatres). Secondly, cinema-going can be seen within the context of mass media and mass communication because many of the movies are designed to reach mass audiences. And thirdly, closely related to mass media, is the issue of globalization which is also a context for the phenomenon of cinema-going. Due to the globalization people all over the world see the same movies which most often have been produced in Hollywood.

6.2. Interaction rituals

When studying the social actors it is also relevant to investigate the interaction rituals related to the social practice in which they participate. In the case of cinema-going at least three rituals can be mentioned: the ritual of buying the ticket, the ritual of discussing the movie and the ritual of dating.

When the cinema-goers buy the ticket they become cinema-goers and they get the final admission to see the movie. During the occasion of buying the ticket people may also inquire some information concerning the movie (the length, opinions etc.) and in many places choose their seats. In addition to buying the ticket, the cinema-goers often buy some other things such as drinks and snacks too. In traditional cinemas it usually happens at the same time and at the same place, whereas in the multiplexes it happens after one has bought the ticket and in a different shop. Another interaction ritual mentioned here are the cinema-goers' discussions. Before the movie it is usual to discuss the expectations for the coming movie and after the movie the opinions of the movie. This interaction ritual might be one reason why people do not usually go to the cinema alone but with someone they can share the experience. Cinema-going has been connected to dating since the early cinema culture. Dark cinema offers a convenient place for establishing

relationships and the movie seen gives topics for the conversations afterwards at least amongst the youth.

Another issue which has to be taken into account when discussing the interaction rituals is what the cinema-goers do before and after the actual social practice. There are many pre- and post-activities related to cinema-going which differ case by case. Having a dinner is one kind of common activity but whether it is a pre- or post-activity seems to be culture specific. In Finland, for example, cinema-going usually follows the dinner whereas in Portugal the dinner often comes after the movie. Thus in Finland the dinner is most often a pre-activity and in Portugal a post-activity. This kind of difference can be explained by different culinary cultures because in Finland it is not usual to eat that late as in Portugal. In addition to having a dinner, it is also common to have a drink either before or after the movie which due to the multiplexes is nowadays possible also in the same place. These kinds of activities show that cinema-going is connected to the more general ritual of going out because it is equated with the other social activities as having a dinner or going for a drink.

6.3. Linguistic culture

The European cinema-goers – even though they belong to one society of social actors – do not share the same natural language. Unsurprisingly, with the dominance of the American movies in the European cinema market, English language could be seen as a common language for the cinema-going culture. But actually the range of languages the cinema-goers speak is very wide: English, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Portuguese, Estonian... And the movies themselves are often dubbed or subtitled into different native language of social actors.

But even if the European cinema-goers do not speak the same natural language, they do have their own 'cinema'-language. This 'cinema'-language, being an important resource of communication among the cinema-goers, provides them the access to the linguistic community of the cinema-going culture. Consequently, all cinema-goers are expected not only to have at least some knowledge of the 'cinema'-

language, but they are also expected to know how to use this language appropriately in the social context of cinema-going (i.e. they must share the common linguistic and – especially – pragmatic knowledge of language). For example, all cinema-goers discuss the movies after seeing it. Amongst the cinema-goers the most common question – and also the most natural and expected question, especially when seeing a movie with friends – would be: "So, what do you think about the movie? Did you like it or not?" Cinema-goers expect each other to talk about the movie and express own opinions and impressions. They also expect each other to discuss the movie itself, the actors' performance, the plot.

People often say that if you hear two football fans speaking about the game, or football in general, you will never understand their conversation, even if they speak in your native language – unless you are a football fan yourself or at least familiar with football. The same phenomenon could be applied to the cinema-going culture. When talking about cinema – or about football – people use lots of different names (e.g. in cinema: directors, actor and actresses, studios, etc.; in football: players, coaches, teams, etc.). They might even refer to some actor/actress using the name of the character s/he played in one of their previous movies. Cinema-goers' shared language also includes the knowledge of common 'cinema' vocabulary and some specific words like: different movie genres, Oscar nominee, stunt man, extras, make-up artist, animation effects, computer graphic etc.

In other words, the European cinema-goers have their own linguistic culture. This linguistic culture could be better defined as 'socio-linguistic competences of members of a social actor or again of people who have to deal with a social actor' (Semionet 2003:2:17).

It is also possible to describe the cinema-going culture as one having diglossic communities – or as one containing at least two languages. According to Charles Ferguson (Ferguson 1959 *in* Semionet 2003:2:20), "diglossic communities" can be described as communities that possess a High variety Language (which is very prestigious) and a Low variety Language with no formal – or 'official' – status. Diglossia clearly identifies a typical pattern of linguistic behavior and assigns

particular roles to each of the language varieties. But at the same time one can observe complementarities between these different roles: High variety language fulfills the functions that cannot be fulfilled by the Low variety language without a risk to exhibit inappropriate linguistic behavior. (Semionet 2003:2:20.)

In cinema-going culture, the high variety of 'cinema'-language could be represented by the critics (when writing a movie review), journalists (discussing cinema issues and movies), and public opinion leaders (expressing their opinions about the movies in newspapers, on TV, Internet, etc.). Those people use the "formal" 'cinema'-language, which is accurate, prestigious and proper. The low 'cinema'-language norms are usually practiced by ordinary cinema-goers, especially the younger ones (we should not forget that teenagers and young adults constitute the major part of the cinema-goers). They use those norms in informal conversations (e.g. discussions about the movies, sharing own emotions after watching a movie, etc.). It should be also mentioned here that the language used in the movies is in general a Low variety Language (Semionet 2003:2:21).

As many other cultures, cinema-going culture can be seen as a bi-lingual one: the High variety Language and the Low variety Language represent two separate languages within one culture. Then we could also speak about the code-switching: some people might be good both at High and Low variety of 'cinema'-language; they can switch easily from one variety to another depending on the situational context. At the same time there might be some people for whom the other variety language will sound as a 'foreign' language and they will need an 'interpreter' in order to continue a conversation. Usually the High variety users can switch to the Low variety but not the other way around. (Semionet 2003:2:22.)

6.4. Cultural translation

Cinema-going constitutes a special culture, with its own shared norms, values, language, knowledge, activities, and history. As every other culture, the cinema-going culture has its cultural 'others'. In order to communicate effectively with the cultural 'others', cinema-goers must have a general vision of other cultures and an

appropriate knowledge about the others' values and norms. Cinema-goers must be able to 'translate', or transfer, the meaning of a 'text' (message) from a source language (i.e. 'cinema'-language) to a target language (i.e. 'others'-language) and vice versa.

When we look at the cinema-going as a part of leisure culture, then those cultural 'others' can be various: e.g. travelers, concert-goers, sportsmen, etc. Still, the best example of cultural 'others' for cinema-going will be theatre- and opera-goers. It seems that these cultures are very close and at some point even similar, but people who belong to cinema-going culture and theatre- or opera-going culture would never want to be identified as being similar. Theatre- and opera-goers see themselves as the representatives of a 'high culture', i.e. very educated, intellectual and intelligent, they value only real art. They call cinema a popular art, meaning primitive, inferior and common to ordinary people. Those cultural stereotypes of each other can be often observed in the conversations between the representatives of these cultures.

The cinema-goers and theatre-/opera-goers might also use the same vocabulary but the semantic meaning of the words might be quite different. That's why it is important to 'translate' correctly not only the meaning of different words, but also activities and cultural forms and norms of the 'other' culture into the own culture (in our case, from the theatre-going culture into the cinema-going culture). This 'cultural translation' is vastly influenced by the personal experiences of the representatives of different cultures, visions and stereotypes of the 'others' available in one's own society (cinema-going society). 'Cultural translation' has to be seen as the 'interpretation' of knowledge and values of the 'other', i.e. cinema-goers must try to understand the values of the theatre- and opera-goers. They are not supposed to accept and like them, but they have to respect them.

7. McHollywood

One of the most controversial aspects of globalization is the worldwide spread and dominance of the American culture. Just as U.S. goods flooded world markets in the

post-World War II era, U.S. culture has been penetrating every continent through the dramatic growth of mass communications such as television, films and the Internet.

According to Sifaki (2003), Hollywood's domination on the European markets is not a new phenomenon and it stretches back to at least the end of the First World War. Movies were one of the first means of communication which were involved into the process of globalization. The financial support and the well organized distribution of the American movies granted them hegemony and leadership in the worldwide movie market. Denis McQuail (McQuail 1994: 28-29 *in* Sifaki 2003) said that an 'international media culture' is the consequence of the growth of an international media industry. It can be seen from the similar standards world-wide and in content forms and genres. European cinema, which is often regarded as art cinema, is now being forced to go commercial, because Hollywood standards are dominating the movie production and cinema around the world. This left many traditional European film producers to fight against the decreasing numbers of audiences.

But if the Europeans want to protect their national film industries, they must first plan on doing the battle at home. If major national schools of film-making, like the French, the British, and the Italian, go into terminal decline and their art is left to Hollywood producers, then Hollywood will be more dominant than ever. In order to avoid that dreary prospect, Europe needs talented directors, who are ready to compete, more than any protection from the Hollywood productions.

American movies might dominate for now, but there is a reason to believe that in the long run, film diversity might be better served by giving audiences what they want. Kusturica, Besson, von Trier, Benigni, Almodovar and de Oliveira can be our instruments of change imposing a European quality type of film within Europe and also by worldwide.

But not everything depends on the talented directors. The preferences of the audience when choosing a movie also play an important role. At the moment, the Hollywood movies conquer the largest audiences – this can be also seen from the example of three countries we have researched. However, the American influence can be traced not only in the choice of movies in the European cinemas, but also in

the changing nature of cinemas and cinema-goers' behaviour. More and more multiplexes emerge all over Europe. And the activities related to the cinema-going have become more American-like (e.g. eating popcorn during the movie show).

8. Conclusion

In this paper we studied cinema-going as a type of leisure culture. We came to the conclusion that cinema-going can be considered a culture. We thought that the best way to study the cinema-going culture is through the concept of '*social actor*'. By choosing this perspective we managed to gather the characteristics, which are common to all the European cinema-goers regardless their country of origin. Cinema-goers in Europe have their own interaction rituals, linguistic culture and cultural 'others'.

By doing some comparisons between Finnish, Estonian and Portuguese cinema-going, we realized that there are many more similarities than differences amongst the different national cinema-goers. That gives us a right to talk about European cinema-goers as a whole.

Cinema-going culture has its own rich history. It has not been stable in the past, and it definitely will have its ups and downs in the future. Right now we can observe the influence of globalization – or better to say, Americanization – on the European cinema market. However, cinema-going remains the most popular leisure time activity, and people go to the cinemas despite the changes it encounters.

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