

A report after the 1st stage of research "Cinema Open to Youngsters"

The first stage of research opens the project entitled "Cinema Open to Youngsters" and constitutes a starting point for the implementation of the next part of the project. The research was conducted in all three cinemas/cities participating in the project. It started on 19th and 20th October in Gdynia, and was continued on 26th October in Elbląg and on 9th November in Jarocin.

In every city participating in the project, there are three groups of participants that are differentiated according to their age. According to the project assumptions, the groups include participants aged 8-11, 12-14, and 15-16. Individual groups watched the following films: "Poly" (2020), "Comedy Queen" (2022), and "The Silent Twins" (2022). In each cinema, children and youth watched the same sets of films.

The first stage of research was based not only on working with the youngsters, but also on developing the concept of the research implementation. As a result, a methodological report was prepared that includes detailed guidelines for the implementation of the research part of the project. The material collected within the entire duration of the project will help to prepare a report including the conclusions of the project work as well as the recommendations on the further steps in building the strategy of reaching out to young cinema audience.

In the first stage of the research, focus group interviews were conducted with all groups participating in the project. The average duration of an interview was ca. 45 min. All interviews resulted in collecting interesting information on the participants' impressions concerning films they had watched. There were, however, some differences in the way of conducting the interviews, in dynamics of the groups, and in subjects mentioned during the interviews.

Although there are no major differences between groups from different cities, the dynamics of interviews in various age groups is completely different. It reflects the stage of development of children and youth, their level of knowledge of film/cinema, and their interest in various forms of participating in culture. Therefore, in the groups of high school students, the discussion was deepened, their opinions were more elaborated, and their answers concerning a given film and their cinema habits were the most reflective.

Within a given age group, the answers given by children and youth from all three cities were similar. Some difficulties appeared during interviews conducted in "middle" groups (aged 12-

14) in Gdynia and Elbląg. Some students from these groups were either not interested in participating in interviews, or made it difficult for other participants to express their opinions. It is worth noting that such a situation did not occur in Jarocin. It seems that this age group requires a careful consideration of possible forms of their participation in the workshops in the next stages of the project. The activities should be highly engaging and utilising the energy of adolescents.

Overall impressions concerning the films the project participants had watched were very positive. Most of the students liked the films or at least found them interesting. Interestingly, more pupils was willing to include a given film in the cinema programme than to recommend it to their friends. At the same time, relatively few students would be interested in searching for more information about films after having watched them.

Most of the children and youth like or very much like watching films. Majority of them also consider watching films as trendy and worth talking about with others. Their preferences concerning film genres are very diverse, but they often indicated action films, animations and horrors. Project participants admit that they watch films rather often. Many of them watch films regularly, even a few times a week. They do it both alone as well as with their family or friends.

The most popular channel for watching films are streaming sites such as Netflix or Disney+. Some of the students watch films also via websites such as CDA or file exchange services such as torrent sites. Much less often, they watch films on traditional television. Their source of knowledge on films is often accidental, or at least not based on a deep reflection. Information on films is sometimes obtained on TikTok, but they also learn about them from other people, film posters, or happen to watch it on TV.

American cinema is rated the most favourably by the project participants. They consider American productions as refined and appreciate their large budgets. Against this background, Polish cinema appears for them to be uninteresting, boring and rough. European cinema is barely recognizable, yet the youth is not prejudiced against it. There are isolated cases of students who e.g. don't like the sound of German language, so they do not watch German film productions.

The younger the project participants are, the more difficult it is for them to indicate their favourite actors and film directors. Many of them are unable to list the names from casts of given titles. Older students often mention Tim Burton as their favourite film director – such indication appears in all three cities, which may be an interesting hint for project coordinators concerning the kind of film aesthetics that is very popular among children and adolescents.

Project participants like different film characters. They often mention comic superheroes or Harry Potter, but there is a wide and diverse range of their other favourite characters.

The level of knowledge on how films are made is rather low. Children and adolescents are aware of the existence of certain film resources, but they lack detailed knowledge on how films are produced and what competences are useful / necessary to make films. Relatively small group of students declared their interest in learning how to become a filmmaker.

Almost all students assess their visits in the cinema positively, emphasizing a positive atmosphere there. There are, however, no specific expectations regarding films the groups would like to watch in the next stages of the project – indications range is very diverse.

The participation of children and adolescents in institutional culture is rather limited. The majority of students do not go to the theatre, museum or cultural community centres if not with their school groups. A few of them take part in cultural events and go to cultural institutions with their parents or other family members (e.g. a sister who is a student in a big city).

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Poly (2020)

For the young viewers, the most important thing was that the film concerned our attitude towards animals – taking care of them, treating them well, not dropping them off at shelters, and having friendly relationships with them. Students emphasized that one should not eat meat (produced of animals' bodies) or go to the circus where animals may be mistreated. It was agreed that the film is attractive mainly to people who like animals. What is more, it was emphasized that the biggest value of the film is the positive message it conveys – that you should never give up, but believe in yourself and help others. According to the viewers, the film is also about friendship, and it constitutes a touching and a bit sad story that calls for reflection. Children liked the atmosphere of the film and the fact that it “was not boring”. They highly valued its fast-paced action. It reminded one person of a similar story about saving a dog from a circus. The students had never heard of the film before they watched it. After the screening, some of the students (a minority of them) would like to search for more information on what inspired the filmmakers to create this film, if there will be a sequel, where the film was set (“subtitles were in French”) and when the film will be screened in cinemas. According to students, this information can be found in Google. The film can be recommended to their friends “because it’s cool” and included in a cinema’s programme so that more people could watch it. More participants would include it in a cinema’s programme than recommend it to their friends.

Comedy Queen (2022)

It was primarily emphasized that it is the film about various ways of coping with an extreme situation like the death of a parent. The film constituted a good starting point for a discussion about mental health and the need to take care of it (e.g. by seeing a therapist). The film was described as “cool but sad”. Students emphasized that it concerned important subjects and referred to life experiences and emotions they evoke (sadness, helplessness, having to deal with problems “beyond our strength”). Some of the viewers stated that the film was not inspiring, and others emphasized that it encouraged to reflections on different ways to deal with crises, but also invited to trying to follow ones dreams and not giving up. According to the students, the film also encouraged to trying to be happy. The film was assessed positively as adjusted to the youth’s expectations and perceptive capabilities. The students had rather not heard of the film before they watched it. One person stated that “it rang a bell” and that he or she “had seen it somewhere”, but did not clarify the information. The participants will not be willing to search for more information on the film after they have watched it. Those students who would recommend the film to their friends would do that because “it makes you laugh” and because the film shows how to pursue their goals. They would also include it in a cinema’s programme because it teaches you that it is good to talk, and the film is touching.

The Silent Twins (2022)

The film was described as “hard” to watch, terrifying at times, pushing back into the seat, and sending shivers down the spine. It was also described as specific and surreal, leaving much room for interpretation (“was it real or was it just an illusion?”), but at the same time not fully comprehensible (“I didn’t know what was happening”). Most of the students considered the film “good”, full of emotions, and showing a complicated and toxic relation between sisters. It was emphasized that the film characters are ambiguous, and their roles are complex. The youth had trouble figuring out which of the sisters is “good” and which is “bad”. However, they did notice their strong relationship and negative impact on each other. Students suggested that maybe their hermetic withdrawal was caused by some traumatic experiences in the past, and that the film presents their attempts to turn the situation around. According to project participants, the film presents the complexity of human nature, uncertainty about what people think and what they are like, but it also shows the specificity of mental disorders. There were also some opinions that the idea was good, but its realization was not satisfying, and that the film was too long / tedious. One of the comments concerned the interesting light – from dark or grey in most of the scenes, to occasionally exaggerated in some other ones. Some individual persons had heard about the film before watching it. One of the students have known one of the actresses from a different film. If they have any information on a given film before watching it, they get it from TikTok or from an Internet browser. The students who would be interested in searching for more information about the film after watching it indicate that they are interested in the story the film was based on. They would also check the cast and get to know the reviews. They are also interested in the contrast between the actors and the characters they play. They also would like to know more about the death of one of the characters. The students would more often include the film in a cinema’s programme than

recommend it to their friends due to a potentially wide audience willing to watch it. According to the young people, the film is worth showing due to the fact that it conveys important values.