

# ”The Best Cinema System in the World”

## *The Municipal Cinema System in Norway: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*

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In the Norwegian context, for many years one could hear slogans like ”Norway has the best cinema system in the world” and ”We can see more and better films on the Norwegian cinema screens”. However, we lack a substantiation of such and similar claims about the uniqueness of the municipal cinemas in Norway.

The aim of this article is to shed light on central aspects of the municipal cinema system. First, we will briefly discuss the development which led to an institutional organisation of the cinemas in Norway involved at both public and municipal level and which was fully implemented in 1925 with the establishing of Oslo Kinematografer (Oslo Municipal Cinemas). We will also discuss how this system has changed, reflecting modifications in the economic and cultural framework. In addition to a historical perspective we will focus on the present situation. We will do this by analysing current film programmes – the repertoire which the cinemas provide to the audience. Using surveys of cinema repertoires we have attempted to find out whether the claims of the advantages of the unique Norwegian system may be shown to be true. Central to the analysis is whether the offer of films in Norway differs considerably from that of the private cinema institutions in neighbouring Sweden and Denmark. The crucial question is: does the municipally -based cinema system offer a better film repertoire to its audience? An additional question is: can existing differences be

explained by reference to the different institutional organisations?

### **Public Service**

In the discussion of the municipal cinema institution we will start by introducing the concept of ”public service” to the analysis of the cinema systems. This concept is usually connected with the role of broadcasting companies and with broadcasting history. When using the concept of public service in relation to the Norwegian cinemas, we intend to contribute to the understanding of the system in a general perspective of cultural and media policies. When looking into early broadcasting history there are obvious similarities between the developments in the field of radio and television in Norway, and other Scandinavian countries, and in a country such as Great Britain. What was later termed the public service model was the starting point for the development of the above-mentioned broadcasting institutions. Such development in Norway was part of a general development in Central Europe.

One of the more important characteristics of the different public service institutions was that, as public institutions, from the very beginning, they were assigned particular social roles or a special responsibility for the society (Syvertsen, 1992). This fact provided the main basis for legitimacy for those institutions. Interestingly in this context, a publicly managed cinema also had to legitimise itself in relation to the society. It is therefore essential to ask what the reasons for this were, or what was the basis for the legitimacy for organising municipal cinemas. The concept of public service has rarely been discussed with regards to film, but when using it, ex-

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actly at this point we find interesting links between discussions within public service broadcasting and the Norwegian cinema institution.

### **Privileges and Social Responsibility**

A central point in this development is the way in which the concept of public service signals that a privileged position is linked to social responsibility. The basis for the legitimacy of a public service institution lies in the performing of certain duties towards "the public" or society (Syvertsen, 1992). Such a basis for legitimacy is not stable, however, but develops and interacts with the general development of society. At the same time, the basis for legitimacy of an institution obviously constitutes that institution's possibilities to survive and develop. The ability of an institution to survive largely depends on how this basis can accommodate opposing interests and resistance. If the basis for legitimacy is weakened, the grounds for the very existence of that institutions also weakened.

The municipal cinema institution which emerged between 1913 and 1920 was granted an immediate protected position, primarily through the change in conditions for competition. This privileged position was based on the ability of the institution to prove itself economically profitable and to cater to different social and societal interests. Contemporary municipal council recommendations openly express such qualities.

When discussing the establishing of the first public broadcasting companies, Trine Syvertsen uses a similar argument, emphasising the mutual relationship between obligations and privileges:

All institutions are expected to fulfil certain duties in return for a privileged position, and the privileges are usually seen to be necessary for the institutions' ability to fulfil their obligations. If privileges were to be removed or obligations added without reimbursement, there is a danger that the institution may simply exhaust itself. It may become overstrained and impossible to manage, or it may collapse under the weight of external pressures. To prevent this from happening i.e. to survive in this organisational sense, the strategies of the institution must include provisions to keep the privileges intact: This implies designing strategies to legitimise the institutional arrangements. (Syvertsen 1992: 32)

### **Legitimacy: Privileges and Obligations**

Legitimacy is the key word in understanding such institutional survival. If legitimacy is to be obtained, a kind of social sanction or acceptance is needed. For a process of institutionalisation it is essential to define strategies to attain some sanctioning on which the desired legitimacy may rest. A fundamental principle is that the basis for the justification of certain institutional organisational forms lies in external and not internal factors. Somehow it must be justified that the manner of organising is advantageous, if only, to state it negatively, as the least of two evils (Syvertsen, 1992). This is normally done by connecting institutionalisation to different forms of consensus values or to broad, general, value systems.

Instability will always be present since the basis for legitimacy is never constant but relates to historically conditioned social and political circumstances. The ability of an institution to survive is dependent, therefore, on its ability to deal with relevant changes, and to develop a readiness to respond to new demands for legitimacy. In other words, alertness and sufficient flexibility are needed to enable the institution to meet possible new external challenges. The balance between different interests may be disturbed; counter-movements may mobilise and lead to crises and demands for change inside the institution. One way of meeting challenges may be to adapt to whatever the new demands might be. However, crises and conflicts may arise which need different solutions while at the same time attempts are needed to keep the basic organising of the institution intact.

We can clearly see that in Norway this was the kind of crisis that culminated within the private film and cinema institution at the time of the first municipal organising of the cinema sector. The establishment, in 1917, of the National Organisation of Municipal Cinemas (Kommunale Kinematografers Landsforbund, henceforth NAMC)<sup>1</sup> was one of the early signs of the power struggle which took place within the film institution at the time. The crisis, and the open conflict between private and public interests, meant that the private cinema business, after a failed boycott action, and reluctantly and somewhat astonished, had to face the reality of the inevitable municipalisation of the private cinema business<sup>2</sup>. Strong social and political forces had worked against private interests, and at the same time the private film and cinema business had never been

able to repair the loss of legitimacy they experienced especially in the years immediately before and after 1910. As a kind of compensation for the take-over we may note that several private cinema owners were offered central positions within the new public cinema sector.

### **Three Phases in Norwegian Cinema History**

In Norwegian film and cinema history we may distinguish three main phases which have been decisive in the development of the municipal cinema system<sup>3</sup>. The first period of the first phase is obviously centred on the establishing of the municipal system. There then follows a period of consolidation and what must be considered the heyday of the municipal system, culminating with the introduction of television in the 1960s.

The second phase is the period in which the cinemas started to show deficits as a consequence of the competition from television. The result was that the ideological basis for the system had to be redefined in terms of what may be seen as a "modernised" public service concept. The system had to be given a new rationale to be able to sustain and to develop further the basis for the privileged position that the municipal system had attained.

The third and last phase in the development of the cinema system relates to the present situation, and our programming surveys are mainly concerned with the challenges of this period. This is a period where the preconditions in society for the municipal system have changed. Contemporary solutions have to do with deregulation and adaptation to the market. Considering the municipal cinema institution in the light of present solutions to problems in society (implying the liberation of public institutions from their bonds to state and municipality, and leaving them to the forces of market regulations), to many the institution appears old fashioned and unsuitable. Having been established in a period of an expanding public sector, today the main challenge for the municipal cinema system is its ability to argue for the preservation and protection of an institutional mode of organisation. This is one which many consider to be outdated.

#### **Phase one: the Establishing of the Municipal Cinema System**

The so-called Cinema Act of 1913 provides the formal background for the development of this particular Norwegian cinema system. The first paragraph

shows that whoever wanted to "publicly exhibit cinematographic images" needed a municipal licence to do so:

"Public exhibition of cinematographic images may not take place without the consent of the local council or its executive committee or the body to whom it according to paragraph 2, may give such authority". (authors' translation).

However, the cinema act and the introduction of an obligatory licence were not the reason for Norway's developing a municipal cinema system. Having to apply for a licence to manage a cinema was not unique, e.g. early on Denmark established a system based on licences in which private cinema owners needed permission to exhibit films publicly. The special feature of the Norwegian film and cinema history is that the municipalities themselves seized the opportunity in the municipal licence regulations of the Cinema Act to licence the right to public exhibition.

In Norway, a seemingly important factor for the establishment of the municipal cinema system was that strong production companies never emerged that needed to obtain or defend legitimacy by stating the importance of maintaining private cinema companies. The first Norwegian film producers were closely connected with the cinema business, but their contribution was limited compared to that of producers working in the neighbouring countries. The production that did take place was such that neither in terms of quantity nor quality could it be an argument for using cinemas as a corner-stone in a private film and cinema sector. From the debate on the municipalisation we note that very early the question came up whether private cinema owners should be allowed to profit from the notable surplus from film exhibition, when they had been unable to create the arguments that the sector had needed. Furthermore, since the owners were willing to actively enter film production only to a limited extent, they had a problem of legitimacy when, increasingly, proposals were made that the public sector (the municipalities) should be able to utilise that surplus for common benefit of the community.

#### **Social Responsibility and Public Education**

The most important argument used in the earliest processes of municipalisation had to do with the need for social control over what was considered an irresponsible and indecent mode of expression. It

was argued that the take-over of the private cinemas by the municipalities would lead to higher cultural status for film. Furthermore, it was argued that a public cinema would become part of general public education, and last, but not least, that the activity would contribute considerably to filling empty municipal treasuries. Central aspects of the argument used in the decisions on municipalisation were concurrent with the ideology of social responsibility generally prevalent in society. This is the same ideological basis that is also central in the classical public service concept.

Organisations for the preservation of public morals, politicians and concerned educationalists watched the growing popularity of the new media with increasing scepticism in the years immediately preceding the parliamentary decision to introduce censorship on films and mandatory licences. In newspapers and public meetings people stated that "this can not be good for children and young people", and that cinema programming almost exclusively consisted of sensations and attractions with appeal to people's less honourable inclinations. Film titles from the earliest cinema advertising seemed to confirm this, such as *The last night after the wedding*, *The white slave girl*, and *The bride of the robber*. The expansion and popularity of film as a medium had created the first modern instance of media panic. The low position of the film and cinema institution in the cultural hierarchy contributed to the small effect of the private business' arguments against public take-over.

There were demands that the municipalities should themselves introduce control and censorship systems. Certain voices proclaimed that the municipalities would need to take over cinema management for the media to maintain some degree of decency. In Parliament, when the Cinema Act was passed, the Parliamentary Church Committee emphasised that cinemas could not be considered decent as long as they were subject to the laws of competition. In other words, there was widespread scepticism against letting market forces rule. This was in line with the above-mentioned ideology of social responsibility, which was also common within the dominating political party of the period, that is the "Venstre" (Liberal party).

Social responsibility and the education of the people were core issues in liberal ideology, The growing social democratic movement also supported this. Decentralisation was a word with positive connotations in the same political groups, with emphasis on transferring power to the local municipalities. The expansion of cinemas coincided with a pe-

riod when a huge number of other municipal companies were established, e.g. within electrical power supply, communications and other services. The need for municipal financial investment increased, and this contributed to the argument that cinema revenue should be spent on beneficial, municipal projects rather than being left to private owners.

## Money, Culture and Morality

Two main arguments – one moral/cultural and one economic – may be distinguished to defend the decision for the public take-over of cinemas. In autumn 1913, one of the earliest local council committee recommendations concerning the decision to establish a municipal cinema in the northern city of Tromsø referred to the fact that the issue of public cinemas had also been discussed in Stavanger in the south west, where specific values such as moral and educational causes had characterised the issue. The recommendation from Tromsø stated that this moral argument was now less relevant, since the Cinema Act had been passed earlier in the same year, entailing "a nation-wide censorship committee for the images".<sup>4</sup> The recommendation still emphasised that "with the introduction of censorship of images not all requirements have been addressed", meaning that since the cinemas had become main cultural and social centres, for children as well as for adults, certain demands must be imposed on them – on the halls, the music, etc. This had, however, "been difficult in many instances, since the cinema owners seem to be concerned only with making money". It was emphasised that a municipal cinema should not be guided by such demands alone. The rooms, equipment and music must all be as good as possible. Furthermore, a municipal cinema must have higher standards for the simple reason that it shares with all other municipal activities the risk of coming under public scrutiny.

Thereafter, the recommendation turned to economical arguments for municipal cinemas, where first of all it was stated that "regarding economic considerations, it is beyond doubt that a municipal cinema in Tromsø will provide revenue to the city"<sup>5</sup>. Sigurd Evensmo cites corresponding views from a municipal committee recommendation from the town of Sarpsborg, which concluded that the municipality should take over cinemas in order to counteract the harmful effects of cinemas, to utilise cinemas for public education and to provide the municipality with revenue (Evensmo, 1967).

Thus, in order to legitimise the municipalisation of cinemas, the municipalities partly used issues of

social responsibility and morals, preferably with the notion of young people using a new means of expression at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy, and partly addressed the economical opportunities of municipal cinemas. These two elements constitute the core values for the municipalisation of the film and cinema institution in Norway.

## Phase Two: The Television Age and Failure in Cinema Revenues

When in 1917 the first municipal cinemas organised themselves into the National Association of Municipal Cinemas (NAMC), municipal cinemas held a share of 20 per cent of gross box office revenues. Less than a decade later, after the completion of the municipalisation through the establishing of a municipal cinema monopoly in the capital, the public cinema system held about 90 per cent of the turnover. This is a market share it has maintained until now.

The running of cinemas was a good source of revenue for the municipalities and the system remained stable until the 1960s. With the introduction of television, however, the cinemas started to show deficits. Instead of being sources of revenue able to finance several types of municipal activities, the cinemas slowly came to be in need of financial support. After some time, only the cinemas in the cities still showed surpluses. The role of cinemas thus changed, creating the need to revise the motivations for public management of cinemas.

At the same time, the status of the film media had changed from what it had been when the municipal system was established. In the 1960s, the emerging consciousness of film as an artistic means of expression, (with the recognition of *auteurs* such as Bergman, Fellini, Truffaut, Resnais and Antonioni), led to an increase in the cultural prestige of film. In Norway, the film journal *Fant* was an important mediator of new trends in international film, and contemporary films came to be seen as pieces of contemporary art. As a consequence, awareness grew that it was necessary to give financial support to so-called art film, which had little commercial potential in cinemas. The issue was raised on the quality of film programming in municipal cinemas: did film with high ambitions get a fair chance? In 1969, this and similar issues led to the first state import support for valuable film.

It also became clear concerning art film that the municipal cinemas had a role to play. Due to the new cultural prestige film had gained, it was now possible to support films and cinemas over municipal cultural budgets. The municipalities were also

given greater responsibility for cultural policies during the 1970s, which had led to the setting up of separate municipal cultural boards. Cinema management became a natural part of this. What had initially been a negative starting point or motivation for the municipalities' involvement in film and cinemas was now being turned into positive involvement and cultural commitment.

Thus, in the years before and after 1970, there was a public debate on the goals for Norwegian cinema politics as cultural policies. When, in 1969, the cinema director of Oslo, Arnljot Eng, formulated a motivation for municipal cinema management in the journal *film & kino* he was concerned with the improvement of conditions for art film, "film for the selective minority" as he put it. This issue is also prominent in what may be called NAMC's first cinema political manifesto, the booklet *Kinoen i dagens samfunn* (Cinema in contemporary society) from 1976. Here, a totally different view on the medium appears than that of the earlier phase discussed above. Film, it says, must be selected on the basis of quality, while at the same time considering the interests of the wider public who seek the film only for pleasure. The classical ideas of popular education and of the protection of public morals, having been the original motivation for public involvement in film, have now lost their importance as an argument for the public cinema system. Film is seen here as a piece of art with independent value, to which the population should have their share. To ensure quality in film culture, the municipal system is needed, with its commitment to cultural policies, financial support systems and municipal subventions. Film as a cultural offer is given prominence in the new basis for legitimacy of the system. Only a municipal cinema, it is said, will be able to consider issues beyond market-based and commercial ones.

This positive attitude towards film as art is predominant also in the Public Reports and Parliamentary White Papers following in the wake of the discussions in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the Parliamentary White Paper discussing the role of film, those films which are not catered for by a commercial system are especially considered: art film, Norwegian film, short film and films for children and adolescents. If we read the subsequent White Papers, *Kultur i tiden* (Contemporary culture) (White Paper no. 61 to the Storting, 1991-92) and *Media i tida* (Contemporary media) (White Paper no. 32 to the Storting, 1992-93), both from the time of Minister of Culture, Mrs. Åse Kleveland, the same kind of goals are emphasised. The following citation from the former may illustrate this:

The intention is to preserve our de-centralised cinema system, which provides, also in an international perspective, a uniquely balanced offer of art film and entertainment film to the whole country.

... a uniquely balanced offer of art film and entertainment film to the whole country. (authors' translation)

We want to emphasise that here a modern, reformulated ideology of cinema policy is expressed, in line with the above-mentioned policies developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Cinemas are no longer associated with negative motivations or the need to protect or educate, as in the ideologies of morality and educationalism of former times.

In place of social responsibility and public education there is now the argument that cinemas must be able to provide a cultural offering to everyone, independently of taste and living area. The old public service motivations that had been closely linked to morals, education and municipal revenue have now been replaced with terms such as quality, variety and access. Incidentally, this coincides also with the modern, reformulated public service concept we find in contemporary public service broadcasting institutions. The issue that has recently been raised is, however, whether one needs a *municipal* cinema to attain these goals.

### **Phase Three: Threat of Privatisation and New Needs for Legitimacy**

Today within cultural policies we see that discussions on the issue of the basis for the cinema system have been linked to the challenges and crises that the system has had to face over the past few years. These challenges are to some extent triggered by increased competition from other media and other methods of film exhibition that are threatening the economic basis for running cinemas, such as video, cable-TV, satellite channels and the Internet. This is in many ways a reinforcement of the tendencies that the introduction of television in the 1960s represented. When cinema management shifted from the income side to an item of expenditure on many municipal budgets, several municipalities decided to limit or discontinue their involvement in running cinemas, or attempted to offer their cinemas to private companies to avoid economic risks. This is motivated in a new political climate in which there has been a shift towards dissolving monopolies and towards privatisation in many fields, not least in the media and telecommunications sector.

Today, it is primarily the modern ideology of deregulation that challenges the municipal cinema system. We may well ask whether it is not old-fashioned to defend a public system when exposure to market forces and competition has been launched as the new solutions to most contemporary challenges. As we have pointed out, large private cinema actors prefer the profitable segments of the Norwegian cinema market, and they apply for a licence to run cinemas, often in competition with established municipal cinemas.

Thus, the main challenge to the municipal cinema system is the threat of privatisation. The defenders of the municipal cinema system, therefore, again need to substantiate the advantages of a public system over a possible private alternative.

These are processes that have occurred in the history of broadcasting over the last couple of decades. The first advances towards abandoning the monopoly situation were made when local radio was deregulated at the beginning of the 1980s. The former broadcasting monopoly was forced to adapt to the new situation and it succeeded in doing so. As mentioned above, the privileged position of an institution depends on its ability to sustain and develop its basis of legitimacy in pace with other developments in society. The question then is whether the municipal cinema system has developed relevant arguments, sufficient to withstand the challenges it faces today as well as those concerning the future institutional organising of cinemas in Norway.

### **A Modern Concept of Public Service**

Today, defendants of the municipal model of cinemas use arguments like "equal access for all, quality and diversity" in debates on reasons for keeping the system; the updated and more general concept of public service is applied. Generally, we may state that the motivation for a publicly managed public service cinema has moved towards regarding film in a cinema as a cultural offering to an audience which is seen as consumers. There is, thus, a move from the traditional public service idea that the audience should be given what is good for them, towards a "modern" way of thinking, and that the audience must be given what they want. This is a parallel to the development within the broadcasting sector. However, a basic problem with this idea is that naturally private, commercial cinemas are also concerned with their consumers.

What distinguishes a modern public service based institution from a commercial one is said to be that a public service institution provides its audi-

ence with an offering even in cases when this is unprofitable. This is the obligation of the modern municipal cinemas towards society and the audiences they serve; until now this has been the motivation for giving the cinema institution its privileged position.

The offering by the cinema to its audience is, in other words, the key to the legitimacy of the municipal cinema system. The moment a cinema model based on private ownership can perform such tasks just as well or even better than the municipal one, the most important argument for preserving the public cinema system will crumble. We have thus reached the very foundation of the municipal cinema structure.

### **Comparative Studies – Who is More Public Service?**

We have already described the ideological basis for, and the legitimacy of, the Norwegian cinema system. A main challenge for single projects within the research programme "The Norwegian municipal cinema system" was to establish which results this system accomplishes, that would distinguish it from systems based on private ownership. This is interesting from a public service perspective, since a system based on goals such as quality, variation and access should ideally be complementary to an offering based on sheer market-oriented evaluations. This type of documentation, where an "additional offer" is substantiated, is becoming more and more important in a market characterised by deregulation and competition, in which public intervention needs a motivation beyond the ideal goals. It is no longer sufficient to claim to be acting in the interest of the audience or for the benefit of public interest; it is also necessary to show proof of the results. Failing to do so may provoke criticism of spending public resources to favour one's own enterprise, or of preferring public enterprise at the cost of private ones.

The public Norwegian cinema system is unaccustomed to providing documentation about its results. There is no lack of self-advertising in favour of the system, however. In an article in the journal of the cinema business *film&kino* (Film and Cinema), Kristin Clemet, then chairman of the board of the National Association of Municipal Cinemas, made the following unsubstantiated statement: "We go to the movies more frequently, we watch more quality film, we get a higher number of film releases, we have more cinemas in sparsely populated areas...." (4/1998: 75). Clemet does not specify the countries with which she compares Nor-

way. This is understandable since research has no hard job in proving that she is wrong. Thus, in Iceland people go to the cinema more frequently; the Swedes have higher density of cinema theatres, the French have a higher number of film releases and nobody has surveyed who views more quality film.

### **To Measure Public Service**

In our survey we intended to find systematic differences in the programming of cinemas between the municipal system in Norway and private systems of other countries with which Norway may be compared. For several reasons, the offer of film to the spectators was the main focus of our studies. The repertoire is important in a public service perspective, where the quality and diversity in the film programming set the terms for the freedom of choice of the cinemagoers. The notions of quality and variety are, as shown above, central values for the concept of public service. A main political argument in favour of the Norwegian cinema system is that it provides a better (broader, more varied) repertoire than other systems. Another reason for our focus on the repertoire is that the lack of documentation is greatest on this point. Much of the empirical research in the project has been about the analysis of the cinema repertoire in Norway, and comparisons with the offerings by cinemas in other countries.

We have also looked into admission figures. High admission figures are often presented as a merit in favour of the Norwegian cinema system, but high admission figures may not be regarded as a public service value. A fully commercial system may attain high admission figures by exhibiting exclusively commercial products. We have therefore discussed admissions in relation to the repertoire, in order to try to find indications whether higher admission figures may be a sign of a better offer to the audience.

We have no intention to set up a Scandinavian championship in public service cinema – the rules of the game are too loosely defined to do so, and the goals of the countries also vary. We will, though, attempt to produce rankings in relation to the simple statistical measures we use, and discuss these rankings with regard to general public service values. While avoiding a final verdict on which country is "better", it is still our intention to provide some research-based insights into the understanding of the different systems, and into the debates on their future.

We have mainly based our research on our own comparative studies, selecting Sweden and Den-

mark for most of our comparisons. These two Scandinavian neighbours show many similarities with Norway – they are welfare states with active cultural policies, they have a cultural basis and values quite similar to those of Norway, and like us they are small nations on the fringe of Europe. Both countries have private-based cinema systems, which are very different from each other, giving us the possibility of comparison with two different private systems. Significant differences, such as the difference in the size of the population and the size of the national film production are taken into consideration in the comparisons as far as possible.

### Admissions and the Size of the Cinema

One of the assumed differences between private cinema systems and public systems is that the public systems may provide film even when this is not economically profitable. In the cinema market this should be more visible in smaller municipalities, where the basis in terms of the size of its potential audience base is insufficient to run cinemas commercially. In other words, a publically financed cinema will be able to provide quality and a varied offer even when the market is too small for it. Such an offer will contribute to higher admissions. Another factor to consider here is the quality of the screening halls. It is thus possible to state that high admissions *may* be an indicator of a good offering, particularly in smaller markets. However, this must also be seen in relation to other variables, at the same time keeping in mind that high attendance is not a public service value.

In order to investigate correlations between admissions and market size, we have compared cinema-going cities with the same level of admissions<sup>6</sup>

in Norway, Sweden and Denmark<sup>7</sup>. In these figures some interesting differences appear (Table 1).

It is difficult to establish what the actual market for the cinemas in a city is since many cities attract considerable audiences from the neighbouring municipalities. The number of inhabitants in a given municipality will, therefore, often be different from the actual potential audience base of a cinema. For example, the Oslo Cinemas estimate that 25 per cent of its audience is from neighbouring municipalities (Oslo kinematografer, 1997). For this reason the figures after the decimal cannot be given too much importance. Still, there are some clear tendencies.

In Norway the figure is falling with the size of the city, but so that all the included cities are above the national average. It is quite clear, therefore, that the admission figure for small municipalities is the factor that presses the national average down. In Sweden and Denmark the tendency is the same – the smaller the cinema-going city, the lower the per capita admissions.

When comparing the countries, the admission figures for the capitals are more or less the same<sup>9</sup>, admissions in Oslo being slightly below that of Copenhagen and Stockholm in 1998, whereas in 1996 it is on fairly the same level. Explanations for the differences in the national admissions statistics are thus not found in the figures for the capitals.

The big divide comes with the remaining cinema-going cities. For big cities as well as medium-sized cities admission figures are considerably lower in Sweden and Denmark than in Norway. Here we may expect to find an explanation for the high average admission figures for Norway. Even if the figures are based on only a few cinemas, there is no reason to assume that they should not be typical for the country as a whole. We have taken care to

**Table 1.** *Cinema Admissions per Capita*<sup>8</sup>

	National 1998	Capital <sup>a</sup> 1996	Capital <sup>a</sup> 1998	Large town <sup>b</sup> 1998	Medium town 1998
Norway	2,61	6,1	5,5	5,4	4,5
Sweden	1,79	5,9	6,0	2,8	2,5
Denmark	2,08	6,7 <sup>c</sup>	6,1	3,2	2,4

a) Sources: Willbergh/Asbjørnsen 1998, *film&kino* 3A 1999. The Swedish Film Institute, The Danish Film Institute.

b) The figure here and that in the next column is taken from Igdu (2000). The large cinema-going cities surveyed are Trondheim (N), Malmö (S) and Odense (DK). The medium-sized ones are Drammen (N), Gävle (S) and Esbjerg (DK). Henceforth referred to as "The 1998 survey".

c) The figure is valid for the municipalities of Copenhagen and Fredriksberg, i.e. the central parts of Copenhagen. If one includes Gentofte (as is done in *Danmarks statistik*), the figure for 1998 is 6.1 visits per capita, bringing us even closer to the Oslo and Stockholm figures, (see *Danmarks statistik* 1999:3).

select typical cinemas, based on the available information. Naturally, certain background variables may have escaped our attention, but we assume that admissions in big cities and medium-sized cities in Norway are higher than in Sweden and Denmark.

There are several possible explanations for *why* admissions in Norway are higher than in Sweden and Denmark. One variable is the number of cinema screens. An increase in the number of cinema screens are quite likely to lead to an increase in admissions. We do have some evidence of that effect in our material: in Odense (DK) as well as in Malmö (S) large, new cinema centres were opened towards the end of 1998. This was visible in the admissions statistics for 1999 – admissions per capita increased from 2.8 to 2.9 in Malmö and from 3.2 to 3.5 in Odense. The increase in the number of screening halls thus leads to some increase in admissions, but this alone will hardly bring admissions figures in the Swedish and Danish cities up to the Norwegian level.

As mentioned above, in a public service perspective, access to cinemas is important. We may assert that in the Danish and Swedish cities in our survey there is equal or better access to screening halls and a higher number of seats than in Norway (see Willbergh/Asbjørnsen 1998, Igdun 2000). Lower admission figures are thus not a sign of lower level of access to cinemas. However, as we have stated above, diversified programming may contribute to explaining high admissions. In such a perspective, this will be a merit in favour of the public system: by providing an offer to all audience segments one attains higher admissions. To establish whether there really is such a correlation, we need to examine the film programming in the three countries. Repertoire is naturally a value in itself in a public service perspective.

## Number of Films

The number of films released annually may be an expression for success in the public service goal called diversity; the higher the number of films the greater the diversity and options for the cinemagoers. A high number of film releases is also an advantage for the cinemas, which can choose between more titles, and have access to new titles to replace those which are not a success. The number of film releases has to do with the size of the production of national film and the size of import of film from abroad. In recent years, Norway has generally had a relatively equal number of film releases as Sweden, and lately considerably more than Den-

mark (see Kalkvik 1998, MediaSalles 1998a)<sup>10</sup>. In the same period there is also a tendency towards more film releases in Norway than in Sweden.

The reasons for variations in the number of film releases are complex, an essential element being demand: Denmark most probably has a lower number of new films than Norway and Sweden because of its lower number of screening halls.

We suggest a structural explanation for the higher number of film releases in Norway, though. Willbergh and Asbjørnsen (1998) showed that Oslo Cinemas had a somewhat higher number of *new* film releases than the cinemas of Copenhagen and Stockholm, but that those cities had a considerably higher number of different *titles* annually. Repertoire policy in Oslo thus gives priority to new releases, Oslo Cinemas having few re-releases. Since Oslo is the more important Norwegian market, with approximately one third of national gross box office, and it is the gate to the rest of the Norwegian market, one may assume that this repertoire policy stimulates import. The cinemas demand "fresh products" and the distributors comply. Films that do not attain satisfactory admission figures are immediately replaced with new films. This is an advantageous system for the cinema, because the losses for an unsuccessful film must be borne by the distributor. The advantage for the cinemagoers is, as mentioned before, more options in terms of number of titles. The disadvantage is that a film may be taken off the bill before the audience gets a chance to see it. The effect of the lack of special re-release cinemas in Norway (except Rock Cinema in Oslo) is that for cinemagoers, film clubs and cinematheques are the only remaining options to see films which have been taken off the bill in cinemas where they were originally released.

The Norwegian collective film agreement is an important reason for films being taken off the bill when admission figures are low. For most films the cinema pays rentals as a flat percentage, independent of audience figures. Swedish and Danish cinemas pay lower film rentals if the audience figures decrease, and therefore they are able to leave the film on exhibition for a longer time without losses, since they may keep a higher share of box office revenue. This obviously stimulates the cinemas to screen the films for a longer period. The collective Norwegian film rental agreement prohibits negotiations on levels of film rentals.

Another possible explanation for the higher number of new film releases in Norway may be that the film titles are given ample distribution in towns and districts across the country. A higher number of

screenings per title gives higher profits and is the basis for further imports. For this we still do not have exact figures. We do have figures, though, showing how many films are released in cinemas of different sizes in the three countries, which may give an indication of the size of the market for imported films in cities of different sizes in the three countries (Table 2).

Concerning the capitals the situation is as stated above: Copenhagen and Stockholm have a higher number of different film titles, whereas Oslo has a higher number of new films. Coherence is good between the national figures given earlier on and the number of new releases in the three cities. We may assume a pattern in which Oslo has the highest number of new releases, Stockholm is second and Copenhagen third. The size of the differences and what counts more for cinemagoers may only be roughly estimated. The Oslo audience has 30 more new title options than that of Copenhagen and ten more than in Stockholm. There is, thus, greater diversity in *new* titles. Conversely, the new titles will probably be kept in exhibition for longer in Copenhagen and Stockholm, and the total number of title options will be higher<sup>11</sup>.

Looking at the large cities, differences are small. It is, therefore, problematic to explain differences in audience frequencies with the number of films. The offer to the audience in terms of number of titles seems to be fairly equal in Trondheim (N), Odense (DK) and Malmö (S). In the medium-sized cinemas in the 1998 survey differences are considerable, and the same tendency is present in the 1996-survey figures. We note that Drammen in Norway may be compared with the considerably larger cities Odense (DK) and Malmö (S) in terms of number of titles.

Also, the number of titles is higher in Norway for all categories outside the capitals.

There is a clear tendency of high consumption of titles in Norwegian cinemas. The difference from Sweden and Denmark increases in inverse ratio to the size of the city. The high consumption of titles supports our hypothesis that the high number of releases in Norway may be ascribed to a high demand for new films by the cinemas. The competition between the import agencies implies that this demand leads to higher import.

In relation to the number of titles it is also remarkable that in the 1998 survey, Norwegian large and medium-sized cities show considerably higher admission figures per capita than Swedish and Danish ones. In short, the Norwegian cities of Trondheim and Drammen have attendance levels and title offers which in Denmark and Sweden are limited to larger cities.

## The Repertoire

In a perspective of public service not only the number of titles is important, but also *what kind* of films are exhibited in terms of diversity of the repertoire as well as its quality. In several surveys we have compared the repertoires of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish cinemas in order to uncover what kind of films are offered.<sup>12</sup> As our point of departure we have taken the country of origin of the film, which is used in most contexts for the classification of film repertoire. One may object that country of origin does not express anything about quality, and that the quality of American film may be as good as or better than European film. Yet, films that are not American will more often be imported because of

**Table 2.** *Number of Different Titles Exhibited in Different Cinemas/Cities in Norway, Sweden and Denmark*

	Capital 1996 <sup>a</sup>	Large town 1998	Medium town 1998	Medium theatre 1996 <sup>b</sup>	Small theatre 1996
Norway	248 (213)*	237	211	156	93
Sweden	321 (203)	219	154	**	**
Denmark	358 (183)	229	122	131	65

a) The figure here, and those of the following tables are taken from Willbergh/Asbjørnsen, 1998.

b) The figure here, and those in the next column are from Aanes 1998. The surveyed medium-sized cinemas are Mo i Rana (N), Aveny (in Skellefteå, S) and Gladsaxe Bio (DK). The small ones are Nes (N), Stjärnan (in Torsby, S) and Tisvilde (in Tisvildeleje, DK). The comparison has been made between cinema companies with comparable audience sizes and not between cities.

\* The number of new releases in parenthesis.

\*\* The figures are not comparable since there is more than one cinema in the municipality.

**Table 3.** *American Film in Percentage of Total Number of Titles*

	Capital 1996	Large town 1998	Medium town 1998	Medium theatre 95-96	Small theatre 95-96
Norway	55	51,1	52,6	51	53
Sweden	45	59,4	67,5	65	58
Denmark	57	49,3	70,5	45	49

their quality, often by means of public support, than American ones. US films are more often than other films commercial genre films, which primarily are made for reasons of profit. Admittedly, American film is wide-ranging, including everything from art film and independent-films, to films awarded with Oscars – dramas and action films with huge budgets.

Another reason for basing the analysis on nationality is that American films dominate cinema repertoires and that they are the films that traditionally become blockbusters. Therefore, most European nations in their cultural policies have as their goal to limit the share of American film, a fact that is also true in the Scandinavian countries. The share of American titles that are imported and exhibited in cinemas is interesting both with regard to commercialism and cultural policies (Table 3).

This table does not show any particular national pattern concerning which country offers more American film. The stability in the Norwegian film offer regardless of the size of the cinema theatre is noteworthy, though, all cinemas carry between 51 and 55 per cent American films.

Apart from this, Norway and Denmark are fairly similar in four of the categories, whereas the Danish medium-sized cinema theatre in the year 1998 (Esbjerg) is remarkable for its high share of American titles. This probably has a structural explanation. Odense (DK) has an art cinema to supplement the city's repertoire offer, which Esbjerg does not. The medium-sized Danish cinema theatre in the 1995-96 survey (Gladsaxe) carries a share that is below average. This is, however, a municipal cinema on the outskirts of Copenhagen, and is thus some-

what atypical for medium-sized Danish cinemas in general. The small Danish cinema in the 1995-96 survey is managed by a volunteer organisation. Differences in structure and in the organising of cinemas make the material too diverse to draw general conclusions on cinema categories in Denmark.

The table also shows that Sweden has a very high share of American titles in all categories except the capital, where it is very low. There is thus a clear tendency that the film offer outside the capital in Sweden is more dominated by American film than in Norway and Denmark.

The figures do not allow us to conclude that Norway has higher attendance due to more emphasis on American audience-friendly films. The share of such films is more or less equal to that of Denmark and lower than that of Sweden, with the deviations that we have already commented above. However, the total number of film titles exhibited in Norwegian cinemas is higher than in Sweden and Denmark, meaning that Norway does not have a smaller offering of American film. The number of titles and the share of American film must be seen in relation to each other.

In a cultural policy perspective, the share of national film in the cinemas is an important element. Supporting national film is, however, not a public service value in itself. If it is used, the national element must be seen in relation to arguments of variation and quality. This is a discussion we cannot address here. The essential thing is that national film is present in the cinema repertoire. In the next section we shall look into its presence in the surveyed Scandinavian cities.

**Table 4.** *National Film in Percentage of Total Number of Titles*

	Capital 1996	Large town 1998	Medium town 1998	Medium theatre 95-96	Small theatre 95-96
Norway	9	8,9	9	10	15
Sweden	19	12,8	11	13	14
Denmark	10	13,5	13,1	15	13

A striking feature of table 4 is the weak position of Norwegian national film, especially in larger cinemas. Naturally, this is a result of Norwegian film production being relatively small. Production also varies to a considerable extent from year to year to the extent that it is difficult to draw general conclusions across the years of our survey. If it is a goal to increase the share of national film, this can only be done by increasing production, since Norwegian cinemas screen most Norwegian films that are made. Norwegian cinemas also carry many national film as re-releases (Kjelstrup 2000).

In other Scandinavian countries, the ‘share of Nordic film’ is a less used category for the classification of the film repertoire. We consider this to be an important category, however, due to the general public service goal of variation as well as due to the fact that, in relation to film, the Scandinavian countries culturally and as a market, are quite uniform. An important goal in cultural policies has also been to present films from one Scandinavian country to other Scandinavian countries.

One very obvious feature of table 5 is the high share of Nordic film in Norwegian cinemas. Compared with the other Scandinavian countries it is twice as high in the capital and three times as high in large and medium-sized cinema-going cities. Here there is a clear Norwegian tendency towards prioritising Nordic film. This may possibly have to do with the low share of Norwegian national film which is “compensated” with a high number of films from other Nordic countries. Norwegian national film not being strong on the home market is probably equally weak in the other Scandinavian countries. Even if we have not made exact calculations here: a very low share of the category Nordic

film in Sweden and Denmark is likely to be Norwegian film, a fact that is naturally disappointing from a Norwegian point of view.

An important category with regard to cultural policies is the share of other European film. It has been a pronounced goal for Norwegian cinemas to increase this share. Considerable effort and capital is spent also within various EU programmes to encourage European film in European cinemas.

Whereas European film is more or less equally represented in the capitals, there is great variation between the cinemas and within the categories of cinemas in those countries. Denmark has the highest share in three of the categories, particularly high in Odense, which is due to special concentration on European film in its art cinema. Apart from this, there are no other clear tendencies apparent in the table.

‘Other film’ is a category comprising film from Asia, Africa and Latin-America, and also Australia and New Zealand. With the exception of Australia, these are marginal areas in the cinema market all over Europe.

Here variations are also small, and the divide does not follow national borders. The particular score for Odense is due to special campaigns on exhibition of films from “the South” offered to Danish art cinemas.

Despite the differences we did find in the cinema repertoire, the main tendency is still similarity. All cinema repertoires are dominated by American film. European, Nordic and national film have lower shares, whereas other types of film are marginal. The figures here also give no reason to assert that Norwegian cinemas are more “public service” than Swedish and Danish ones. We found significant

**Table 5.** *Nordic Film in Percentage of Total Number of Titles*

	Capital 1996	Large town 1998	Medium town 1998	Medium theatre 95-96	Small theatre 95-96
Norway	8	15,2	13,3	10	13
Sweden	4	5	3,9	4	3
Denmark	4	3,1	4,1	8	8

**Table 6.** *‘Other European Film’ in Percentage of Total Number of Titles*

	Capital 1996	Large town 1998	Medium town 1998	Medium theatre 95-96	Small theatre 95-96
Norway	24	15,6	16,6	24	16
Sweden	26	15,5	11	15	20
Denmark	23	21	8,2	26	23

**Table 7.** 'Other Film' in Percentage of Total Number of Titles

	Capital 1996	Large town 1998 <sup>a</sup>	Medium town 1998	Medium theatre 95-96	Small theatre 95-96
Norway	24	15,6	16,6	24	16
Sweden	26	15,5	11	15	20
Denmark	23	21	8,2	26	23

variation between the categories of cinema-going city sizes, however, but only a more comprehensive survey will show whether Norwegian medium-sized cinema-going cities generally have a broader repertoire than those of Sweden and Denmark.

The Norwegian cinemas, carrying a lower share of American film compared to Swedish and Danish cinemas, still show higher admissions despite the fact that American films are regarded as more audience friendly. However, the figure for the share of titles does not express how many times each title is screened, nor which films the spectators actually see. There is, therefore, a possibility that the high Norwegian audience figures may still come from our watching many American films. We will discuss this further in the next section.

### Market Shares in Norway

The distribution of titles seen in relation to national categories expresses which films the audience has the possibility of seeing, but does not to the same extent reveal their priority in the cinemas and attendance. The number of shows is an indicator for the priority in the cinema, since it discloses whether the title has been screened several times. Gross box office figures or audience figures show the types of film which attract an audience. For this there are, unfortunately, no national, Norwegian statistics. As a result, we can only make limited comparisons between market shares in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish cinema-going cities. Let us therefore look

into some available Norwegian national figures before making comparisons with Sweden and Denmark (Table 8).

Some clear tendencies are discernible. American film has a higher share of the total number of shows than the total number of titles. Each title is, thus, exhibited more often and thus for a longer time than other types of film. For Oslo and Kristiansand we also find a very clear tendency that profit is higher than what the number of shows should indicate. This is mainly because these films attract a larger audience per show than other films<sup>13</sup>. American film thus has a higher share of number of shows and turnover than suggested from the number of titles. More than 70 per cent of turnover for these two cinemas comes from American film.

The town Hønefoss is an interesting exception. The share of titles and shows of American film is much higher than in Oslo and Kristiansand, but the share of gross box office for the films is lower. This is probably due to the fact that Norwegian film was quite successful in Hønefoss, where particularly the box office hits *Gurin with the Foxtail* and *The Olsen Gang's Final Mission* took the market share from American film. These films were also exhibited in Kristiansand, but here Norwegian film was unable to gain the same market share. We do not possess statistical evidence for the possible existence of a general tendency for Norwegian film to be more successful in smaller cinemas.

Concerning Norwegian film, the tendencies are also complex. In all three cities, Norwegian film has

**Table 8.** *The Relationship Between Titles, Number of Shows and Gross Box Office in Three Norwegian Cinemas. All Figures in Percentage of Total Number/Sum*

	Oslo 1996			Kristiansand 1998-99			Hønefoss 1998-99		
	titles	shows	gbo	titles	shows	gbo	titles	shows	gbo
USA	55	61	71	52	59	73	66	70	65
Norway	9	11	7	9	14	11	9	14	24
Europe	24	17	9	21	12	6	9	6	2
Nordic	8	9	9	13	11	7	10	5	6
Others	5	2	1	5	4	2	6	4	3

a higher share of the number of shows than what their share of titles predict. This indicates that cinemas prioritise Norwegian film, exhibiting each title more often. In Oslo and Kristiansand the share of gross box office is also lower than the share of screenings, which indicates that these films are given more screenings despite low admissions. In Hønefoss, however, the gross box office share for Norwegian film is very high (as much as 24 per cent), implying that revenue on Norwegian film is high, which in itself is a reason to keep exhibiting them.

Screening European film is not very profitable for any of the cinemas especially compared with American film: a considerable number of titles are launched, but many turn out to be failures and are taken off the bill after only a few screenings. In Oslo, Nordic film shows a better balance between number of titles, share of screenings and attendance/earning power. In Kristiansand and Hønefoss, however, there is a clear tendency for Nordic film to be given a lower number of screenings and having a lower share of admissions than what may be expected from the share of titles.

These Norwegian figures disclose that Norwegians are very fond of American film, and that there is little coherence between what the cinemas screen and what is actually seen. It is therefore interesting to note that the surveyed cinemas display quite a number of films with limited market potential. This may indicate that Norwegian cinemas feel a public service obligation to have a broad repertoire. All the screening halls in multiplex cinemas could have been filled with audience friendly films, but this is not done. One might of course ascribe this fact to market considerations: to attract wider audience groups than just young people it is necessary to offer a certain share of film with appeal to a "grown-up" audience. This is a way, then, of expanding the cinema's audience base.

The question remains, though, whether the above scenario is actually an effect of the public, municipal system. Do Norwegians watch fewer American films than Danes or Swedes? We do not have figures for the relationship between repertoire and market shares in single cinema theatres in the Scandinavian countries. Instead, we must study the national figures.

## Market Shares in the Scandinavian Countries

As mentioned above, with the exception of Norwegian film, there is no registration of admissions and gross box office in relation to the film's country of origin. Thus, it is not possible to compare with European figures for the audience distribution between American, European and other films.

Our material is sufficient, though, to make an estimate for 1998. Figures from the Association of Norwegian Film Agencies (Norske Filmbyråers Forening), shows that for film rental, American film had a share as high as 82.2 per cent in 1998<sup>14</sup>. This was a year in which the market share for American film increased considerably in Europe because of the blockbuster *Titanic*, and the figure shows how important American films are for distributors. The percentage of revenue in cinemas is somewhat lower, blockbusters being more expensive to rent than other films.<sup>15</sup>

We have made the following comparison with Denmark and Sweden based on estimations for Norway and figures given by Media Sales:

The figures for market shares (Table 9) differ most significantly for national film. We regard the weak position of national film in Norway, compared to that of Sweden and Denmark, as the more important explanatory factor. Norway's film production is low compared with that of Sweden, which in average produces almost twice as many films as Norway (23.8 in average in the last ten years against 12.3 in Norway). In Denmark, however, only a few more films are produced (14.2 in average) and these have a much higher market share.<sup>16</sup> Kalkvik (1998) gives figures supporting the argument Danish more often go to see national film in their cinemas. Whatever the reason, Norwegian film has a relatively weak position on the home market.

The share of European film is somewhat higher in Norway than in Sweden and Denmark. This is perhaps because of the number of other Nordic films. We have already seen that Norwegian cinemas screen many more Nordic titles than their Swedish and Danish counterparts. If we look at the figures in Table 8, Nordic film in Norway has a higher share of gross box office than other European

**Table 9.** National Market Shares for Film with Different Countries of Origin in 1998

	National	USA	Europe	Others
Norway	8	80*	11*	1*
Sweden	14,6	76,1	8,6	0,7
Denmark	12,8	77,8	9,1	0,4

film. We do not have figures for the market shares of Nordic film in Sweden and Denmark, so exact comparisons are impossible. Still, it is tempting to assume that Nordic film in Norway takes some of the market shares that Norwegian film hypothetically could have had. In other countries in Europe it is also primarily the *national* film that causes the largest variations in market shares.

The market share for American film is highest in Norway. Here we need to adjust figures for the weak position of Norwegian national film, so that with a stronger position of national film the share of American film would probably have been lower (see the example of Hønefoss). It is still remarkable that out of 10 Norwegian kroner spent by ticket buyers, 8 kroner were spent on American films, and that this share is higher than in Sweden and Denmark. Norwegian cinemas offer a variety of titles from other nationalities, in most cases more than the other countries, but these are not the films cinemagoers come to see. This is particularly so in a year with blockbusters like *Titanic*.

To summarise this, we may say that market share for American, European and other film is very similar in the three countries if we adjust the figures for the amount of national film. Norway is first and foremost different with regard to its low share of national film.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Norwegian cinemas offer the highest number of titles, the American films are the ones cinemagoers choose to see, just as in other Scandinavian countries. The difference is that in other countries, national film has the possibility to take considerable market shares from the American film. As we have seen above, the low Norwegian figures are not due to lack of priority in the cinemas.

It is arguable whether low market share is a problem in relation to public service. To screen national, European and other films despite their low market share may be taken as an indication that these films are prioritised in order to expand the repertoire. Still, in terms of cultural policies it is puzzling that there are few visible results from this prioritising, especially since these films are also the recipients of support from various public support systems.

## Summary of the Findings

To conclude, we can say that concerning the general structure of the repertoires, there is great similarity between Norwegian, Danish and Swedish cinemas. In all three countries, American films dominate what is offered. Concerning the number of film titles we have found that the Norwegian cinema cities

generally carry a higher number of titles on their repertoire during one year than those of their neighbouring countries. This is a tendency which increases markedly when comparing smaller towns like Drammen (N), Esbjerg (DK) and Gävle (S). When looking at the share of American film, the repertoire survey shows that this is greater in the smaller towns of Sweden and Denmark compared to corresponding towns in Norway. Another difference is the position of Nordic film. In Norway, films from the neighbouring countries have a larger share of the repertoire than in Sweden and Denmark.

Concerning national film we see that Norway scores lower than Sweden and Denmark. In other words, the position of Norwegian film is weaker than that of Swedish film in Sweden, and Danish film in Denmark. There is no reason in our material to believe that this is due to Norwegian films not being prioritised by Norwegian cinemas. On the contrary we find that cinemas in Norway give Norwegian film a rather higher number of viewings when taking into account the audience figures. An obvious difference is that the number of productions is lower in Norway, but it seems clear that Norwegian film does not enjoy the same popularity as Danish and Swedish film with their respective home audiences.

Concerning what the audience chooses to see in a cinema, we have found that preferences are fairly similar in the three countries. The cinema audience spends about 8 out of 10 cinema crowns (monetary unit of the Scandinavian countries) on American film in Norway as well as in Denmark and Sweden. European film (including Nordic film) has, however, a higher share of the market in Norway than in the neighbouring countries. This variation between countries is due to national film having a weaker position in Norway, which gives space for a higher share of other European film.

Finally, we point to the fact that Norway has higher audience figures per capita than Denmark and Sweden. This difference is particularly accentuated outside the capitals Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm.

Based on the results of our study, we believe it is possible to see what may be termed a "public service effect" of the Norwegian municipal cinema system. This effect becomes more visible outside the capitals, where the Norwegian cinemas carry a higher number of titles and have a more heterogeneous repertoire than their Danish and Swedish counterparts. The dominance of American film outside the capitals is also weaker in Norway, a fact that also indicates the existence of such an effect.

We conclude that in Norway the cinemas offer more variety in their repertoires, thus providing their audiences with more options and that this stems from a public service effect pertaining to the organisational structure of the Norwegian cinema system.

## Conclusions

In this article our first ambition was to explain why the particular unique Municipal cinema system was established in Norway. To do this we borrowed the concept of "public service" from the field of broadcasting research. We hope to have shown that similar arguments were used for establishing the public, municipal cinema system, as for the establishment of public radio and television. The concept of public service also proved to be fruitful in analysing how the legitimacy of the Norwegian cinema system changed according to the modifications in the more general cultural policies. We therefore conclude this part of our investigation with the observation that the modern concept of public service in cinema policies is now similar, if not the same, as in broadcasting, the main elements being equal access, quality and diversity.

The second part of our project was to investigate the "performance" of the public service cinema system according to the modern definition of public service. We did this recognizing that as such a system cannot survive for ideological reasons alone, it

would at some point have to prove that it delivers what it promises. Through comparative studies, mainly with the other Scandinavian countries, we found great similarities between public and private systems. However, we found that the Norwegian cinemas had a somewhat better offer of films from a public service point of view; thus being more diversified, and allowing for a greater choice for the audience.

It is not certain, however, that a system that has proved to be effective and useful in the past will survive in the future. The wider "mega-trends" of economy and technology may doom this system as out-of-date, or even unfashionable. The system might die due to ideological reasons. The current tendencies of privatisation of the Norwegian system has led to great confusion among the players. The old owners – the municipalities – are trying different ownership models to meet this new situation. Some municipalities have lost a significant amount of money in this process and others have big problems making up their mind what to do. Given this state of uncertainty, we do not want to make too many speculations about what will happen. The system might collapse, it might survive in a slightly modified version, or it might change more profoundly. What one might hope for – if we are allowed to be somewhat normative here – is that some of the public service values we have identified will still survive.

## Notes

1. Today the organisation is called Film og Kino (Film and Cinema).
2. The private film and cinema business reacted to the emerging municipalisation with an attempt to block access to films for the municipal cinemas in 1919. The boycott was a failure, and after some months cinema distribution returned to normal. See Evensmo, 1967.
3. See Asbjørnsen and Solum, 1998.
4. Tromsø kommunale cinematograf gjennom 35 år (Tromsø Municipal Cinema through 35 years), Tromsø 1951.
5. Net revenue is estimated to NOK 17,250, based on figures from the municipal cinema in the town Notodden.
6. The basis for our comparison is thus the number of people in the cinemas (actual attendance) and not the size of the market ("potential attendance").
7. The problem in establishing what is the actual potential audience for a cinema, and in using the population in a municipality as the basis for it, has been discussed in Kjelstrup 2000. We still find that the figures give good indication of a pattern in admissions frequencies in relation to cinema and market sizes in the three countries.
8. The number of sold tickets divided by the number of inhabitants in the country/municipality on 1 January of the given year.
9. For a discussion of the computation basis we refer to Willbergh/Asbjørnsen 1998.
10. There is a certain amount of uncertainty also in these figures. The Norwegian figures are based on the number of films censored by The Norwegian Board of Film Classification in the given year. Due to changes in age limits releases must be re-censored and are therefore included twice in the statistics, which is not the case e.g. in Sweden. In addition, from 1998 IMAX films are included. Sometimes there is no distinction between import and release, so that also national films are included in "import" figures (e.g. in Kalkvik) A more thorough study,

over a longer time-span, is needed to make hypotheses on the reasons for a possible higher number of film releases in Norway.

11. This is an assumption, since we do not have figures for average exhibition time for new titles in a cinema. But the relationship between the number of titles and number of releases makes the assumption probable: the titles that are not releases must be older films.
12. We have used the titles that are actually screened, without discerning between releases and re-releases. We have not included national figures, partly because they are non-existent for Norway, partly because where they exist, they are based on different estimation methods (number of films imported, censored, shown, number of releases, etc.)
13. Due to variations in ticket prices there is a difference of 1-2 per cent between the audience share and the share of turnover for American film.
14. The figure is the one reported to MediaNorge, University of Bergen, see URL: <http://www.medienorge.uib.no/>
15. The film rental (i.e. the distributors' share of gross box office revenue) is calculated on a model in the film rental agreement. See Kalkvik 1998 for a description of it. Due to the complexity of the calculation model it is difficult to assess exactly the difference between the share of revenue for the distributors and that of the cinemas.
16. In 1999 Denmark had a market share of no less than 27% for national films.
17. We presume that these figures are more reliable than the estimations made in Kalkvik (1998), which we think calculate a far too low market share for American film in Norway. An inquiry made to the European Audiovisual Observatory on their method of calculation disclosed that for several years the share of titles had erroneously been used as basis for the Norwegian figures.

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