

## **TERRITORY PROMOTION THROUGH FILMS — HOW WORLD CINEMA SUCCEEDS IN GENERATING A COMMON PERCEPTION OF CITIES**

### **Abstract**

The following article takes a closer look at how filmmakers can use the potential of film in order to promote a city or even an entire region. With special regards to the role of the term “simulation” (which was first introduced by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard), it examines the effectiveness of cinema products in resonance with their target groups, trying to demonstrate inasmuch a positive image of the city or its administration influences its perception amongst moviegoers.

The article aims primarily at the following objectives:

- to show the inherent characteristics of cinema simulacrum which has the power to crucially increase the attractiveness of a city or region;
- to define the influence of various aspects of the simulacrum which are necessary in order to shape a positive perception in the eyes of different target groups.

In this respect the authors will refer to a bigger number of concrete examples of movies that have successfully changed (or altered) the reputation of a city or region.

By using the method of comparing analysis the authors have come to the conclusion, that “simulation” – exemplarily used in films – plays a major role in effectively promoting a city or region. For some regions – and for some audiences – the technique of “simulation” can in fact be deemed the decisive factor. Especially in most recent, contemporary cases linked to virtual target groups, the concept has proven to be very successful – as with cities or regions that, prior to their appearance in a motion picture, have had only a very vague image, if not to say: no image at all.

**Key words:** filmmaker, promotion of cities and territories, simulation, simulacrum, image

Territory promotion is a complex of activities of the territorial community to identify and implement the interests of the territory and its population, as well as specific objectives of its socio-economic development [2].

Territory promotion includes a wide range of marketing methods and tools, designed to discover, develop or build a competitive advantage of the territory.

When talking about the promotion of a territory through cinema, we can highlight the following goals: First and foremost, the growth of territory attractiveness to tourists. Secondly: the demonstration of cultural and other (economic, political, social) advantages with the aim of attracting human resources. This can even be a tool of information warfare and can be used to create a sense of superiority of one state over another.

The target audience can be divided into the following types: mass and elite, as well as external and internal.

In our view, it is possible to speak about the following types of promotion of the territory through cinema:

- Movie classics. In this case, the territory may not even appear in the film at all, however, its location may become more popular thanks to the popularity of the film. For example, movies like "The Godfather," "Pulp fiction," "Forrest Gump" (and many more that have been met with worldwide acclaim had) significantly generated a positive image of “Hollywood”/Los Angeles, as being the center of international film production.

- Creation of a cinematic product where the plot takes place in a territory (being the object of promotion) that, however, is not necessarily the center of the movie. In this case the territory serves primarily as a background. As a rule, in such cases, the emphasis lies on an interesting plot and vivid characters, the attractiveness of which gets associated by the viewer with the place of its events. The territory is mentioned mainly in the dialogue of the characters or appears as in some cinematic frame, showing the most recognizable view or monuments of the territory.

This approach is more typical for tv series than for feature films. A good examples of implementation of this kind of promotion is the Russian tv series "Bukins family", "You're freaking me out" (location – Yekaterinburg) and also the American tv shows "Baywatch," "NYPD Blue", etc.

- Creation of films, in which the territory is in the center of attention and represents a key element of the plot. In such films, the most attractive objects of the territory are prominently introduced: natural and historical-cultural sites, historical and modern neighborhoods, the city's popular parks, cafes, etc.

An integral part of making any film is, speaking in terms of Jean Baudrillard, the "simulation". J. Baudrillard defines the simulacrum as a copy with no original. In his opinion, "the simulacrum is not what hides the truth, it is the truth that conceals that there is nothing" [1]. The philosopher argues that nowadays this process has come so far that it forces all the real models to match up with the actual simulation. Hence, the major element of perception has disappeared – the distinction between reality and simulation.

In fact, the image of territory presented in any movie is not an accurate reflection of reality, but is a so-called "simulacrum", a kind of alternative, virtual reality. In the case of influence through cinema on external as well as on internal target audiences, the so-called "precession of simulacra" applies, i.e. the situation when reality is perceived through the prism of a pre-learned simulacrum. Here, the territory is never perceived directly in its pure form. Its perception always has an extra dimension, multiple connotations and associations formed by movies.

The advantage of promoting the territory through cinema is that cinema creates a fertile ground for the emergence of a wide spectrum of highly attractive cultural objects that have no relationship to the real past and present of the city. Locations or entire movie sets have been preserved after filming and became tourist attractions, cinema museums, celebrities monuments etc. Such objects arise within the logic of "the precession of simulacra".

In our opinion, interest is the identification of the essential characteristics and elements of the good cinematic simulacrum that can significantly increase the degree of attractiveness of the territory. Another objective of the study is to identify the impact of various aspects of a cinematic simulacrum to shape a positive perception amongst various target audiences. In order to demonstrate this, we will list a number of films that have crucially altered the image of a specific city or region.

The list is long, of course, and yet anything but complete. However, we need to point out that – since world cinema is mainly associated with American, that is: Hollywood and Independent Hollywood cinema - those cities that have been “put on map” of moviegoers are mostly to be found in the United States. In this respect, New York should easily be deemed one of the most striking examples. And when it comes to directors, it’s characteristically Woody Allen who – like no one else – has defined a very specific visual and cultural image of this city. Ever since “Manhattan” and later on “Annie Hall” (both films being photographed by legendary DoP Gordon Willis) New York has been largely associated not only with the iconic shot of Allen and Diane Keaton sitting on a bench in front of Queensboro Bridge - but with a Bohème lifestyle, focusing on amiable neuroses, self-doubt, a nevertheless always positive look into the future, all garnished by classic Jewish wit. Allen himself has decisively contributed to this image by leading a public life very similar to that of his characters, and yet, both the man and his creations being hardly imaginable without the background of the city. Later, when Allen started his tour through Europe, setting his stories in Spain, England and Italy, he moved away from New York – only to finally return to it in his last film “Café Society” which, again, breathes the old Jewish New York spirit through and through.

Another very prominent New York figure – though his stories revolve around decidedly much darker subjects – is Martin Scorsese. “Mean Streets”, “Taxi Driver”, “Goodfellas” – these films (which in some way are very much linked to Scorsese’s own past, having grown up on the rough streets of Little Italy) were extremely successful in shaping an image of a city haunted by destructiveness, crime, religious (catholic, in this case) oppression and people desperately fighting through their daily life.

In this respect, it would be unfair not to mention Nora Ephron who with her films “When Harry Met Sally” and – with regards to the finale – “Sleepless in Seattle” has added a downright “romantic” touch to the city, veering away from Woody Allens mainly introspective, comical approach to true romance.

And in the series “Sex and the City”, New York was successfully marketed as a well of hedonism, luxury but portraying people who suffer from the very basic human problems like most other people do, too.

As with Los Angeles, the second iconic city in the United States, the situation is a little trickier. Being the capital of the movie industry – that is: representing in itself glamour and the promise of becoming a star -, along with its all-time-warm-and-sunny-weather, there was never any need to yet add an image to the city. Films revolving around dreams and broken dreams (“Sunset Boulevard”, as one example of many) only expressed what the city was known for, anyway. Later on, “darker” films (“L.A. Confidential”, dealing with police corruption and brutality”) set a counterweight – but were easily balanced by rather light and pensive iconic movies like “L.A. Story”, “Grand Canyon”, “Short Cuts” or “Crash”.

Other cities or regions that have become famous through films are Boston (“The Departed” but especially through actor/director Ben Affleck), Flint/Michigan (the hometown of documentary filmmaker Michael Moore who shot his first film “Roger & Me” there and returned to Flint in his following movies several times in order to raise awareness) or Omaha/Nebraska, where very renowned Academy Award winner Alexander Payne shot a number of his films, giving the city and the state a face.

Outside of America the following cities or countries have been crucially branded by single films:

Rome: the films of Federico Fellini (especially “La Dolce Vita”) or the Audrey-Hepburn romantic Comedy “Roman Holiday”

London: “Notting Hill” (as a example of romantic comedy), “Mary Poppins” (musical fantasy comedy), and, of course, “Harry Potter”, serving as examples for many, many others

Paris: after “An American in Paris” (1951) practically no other film has branded the city of Paris as romantic and charmingly crazy more than “Le fabuleux destin d’Amélie Poulain” did. Though there were also films drastically depicting the ugly reality of the city (“La Heine”, “Un Prophète” or “Irréversible”) – and it’s fair to call these movies iconic, too – their influence should still be deemed limited, since these movies have simply not met such a large worldwide audience as “Amélie” did.

Berlin: this city has been put on the map mainly by 2 very influential German films - “Lola rennt” and “Der Himmel über Berlin”

Venice: has mostly become iconic for its morbid, eerie atmosphere through the films “Death in Venice” (which, of course, was an adaption of Thomas Mann’s novel by the same name that set, on its part, already the same tone some 60 years earlier) and “Don’t Look Now”, a still very popular horror film from the seventies, literally feasting on the dark, grisly aura of a dying European culture.

Sweden: We actually can not define a single film linked to a single city (maybe “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”, being set in Stockholm). Nevertheless, a combined number of adaptations of Sweden’s most popular crime novel writers (Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell) has shaped an image of rather murky, bleak landscapes with human abysses in between.

India: it stands to reason that the typical “Bollywood” genre (oftentimes featuring likable characters played by actor Sharukh Khan in its center) has clearly defined the perception of an entire continent. Even Danny Boyle’s “Slumdog Millionaire” did not really evade from this concept.

Finland: if any filmmaker successfully created an image of Finland and its people as taciturn, (amiably) weird and unexpectedly humorous – it’s Aki Kaurismäki. Especially his early film “Ariel” contributed to this.

And then there is the James Bond franchise that put, if not cities but instead single locations on the map (and turned some – much to the discontent of its owners – into well sought-after tour-

ists' spots): the rock in Thailand ("The Man with the Golden Gun"), the pyramids in Egypt ("The Spy Who Loved Me"), the monastery in Greece ("For Your Eyes Only") and so on.

Russia: the film "The cranes are flying" by Mikhail Kalatozov, winner of the "Palme d'or" at the Cannes International film festival in 1958. The main characters love each other, are going to get married. Strolling through Moscow, they notice a flock of flying geese in the sky. While walking they hear the clock on the Spasskaya tower, hitting 4 a.m., then they return home. This morning the war began. In this case, the combination of romantic stories, intense images of military action and well-chosen images of the city exerts a powerful influence on the formation of a positive perception of the territory by the audience.

Another striking is Tarkovsky's film "Solaris". In this film, the Soviet Union itself does not appear, however, the film is strongly associated with the cultural wealth of the state and has had a positive effect on its perception amongst the world community.

Some other examples of films that have made a significant contribution to the positive image of the USSR and Russia are "Moscow does not believe in tears", "Office romance", "Urga, territory of love", etc.

Taking the above mentioned films into account, we can reach the following conclusions:

- The most effective way to promote a territory through cinema is to place it into the center of film's story. The other two listed methods are also effective but to a much lesser extent;
- A mandatory condition for the success of the film is the application of the principles of "simulation";
- Elements of an effective cinematic simulacrum are: a riveting plot (it should include an original idea, ensuring a strong emotional and psychological impact), famous actors, well-chosen music, well-chosen spots of the city, an aesthetically appealing form of its presentation.
- In order to reach mass audiences, tv series have the greatest impact in terms of creating a positive attitude towards the territory, as well as such feature film genres like romance, action, comedy. An elite target audience (which traditionally appreciates films that have a more philosophical dimension) will rather prefer genres like drama, comedy and art-house. It is important to emphasize that in the case of an elite audience the formation of a positive perception of the territory is provided more by the actual quality of the film and less by the imagery depicted in the movie.
- When creating movies primarily for an internal target audience, the role of simulation may become even bigger because this audience knows the territory with all its inherent problems, so the formation of a positive image can only be achieved by films that have a strong emotional and psychological impact. In other words: much less than putting emphasis on the territory, the key elements to successfully influence the image of the region to internal audiences are a convincing plot and high-quality-actors.

When looking at most Russian regions – with the exception of Moscow and St. Petersburg – we have to underline the fact that the competent use of the technique of "simulation" as a tool to create a positive territory image is not sufficiently developed. On the other hand, for some territories with a weak image the cinema cannot, in principle, be an effective promotion tool.

### **Bibliography**

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