Karina Pryt   (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

Using Digital Tools to Locate Living and Working Areas of Domestic Producers and Circulation of their Films in 1910s Warsaw

Abstract

The digital turn has opened up new research opportunities for cinema historians on the three levels of data search, processing, and interpretation. Inspired by the New Cinema History (NCH), this article shows how online libraries and computer software (Excel, Citavi, QGIS) can be used for innovative interdisciplinary studies of cinema in early 1910s Warsaw.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, including statistical data and daily newspapers in Russian, Polish, and Yiddish, this article discusses cinema topography and sheds new light on the biographies and business activities of two local film producers. It then traces the paths of their films, drawing conclusions about the potential audience in the city where Russians, Poles and Jews lived side by side rather than together.

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The two decades before the First World War saw cinema evolving worldwide from a novelty to an entertainment industry. This development proceeded into the Polish lands in the larger geopolitical framework that had been initiated with the partitioning of Poland in the late 18th century. Consequently, the cinema market in the Polish lands was divided and subjected to the different legal state systems of the German empire, Austro-Hungary, and Tsarist Russia. Under these unequal conditions, production activity was undertaken in urban areas of the Austrian partition and in the Russian governed Warsaw, which then became the heart of the Polish film industry benefiting from access to the huge market in

the multinational Romanov empire. In this city, where Russians, Poles and Jews lived side by side regarding themselves as separate nations, the two first longer features were made as early as 1908, and more regular film production started in 1911. Subsequently, the most prolific producers, Mordechaj A. Towbin, Aleksander Hertz, and Henryk (Chaim) Finkelstein, jointly released up to 30 feature films until 1914. As a rule, Towbin made films based on the culture and history of Ashkenazi Jews, while Hertz specialized in features that were rooted in the culture and history of the Catholic Poles. Conversely, Finkelstein founded his production activities on both cultural circles.

Most of these films are considered lost today, and scattered press reports and a sprinkling of cinema programs are in many cases the only evidence of their existence. Likewise, information about their producers is only available in bits and pieces in various sources kept in different libraries and archives in Poland, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia. Hence, related investigations are laborious, involving flipping through thousands of pages, and searching for a needle in a pile. Therefore, credit must be given to authors of earlier seminal works describing the rise of cinema in the Polish lands who embarked on research trips and combed through some of these sources by hand. Thanks to their efforts, most of the film titles have been assigned to their producers, directors, screenwriters, stars, genres and literary template sets.[1]

However, most of the sources have not been accurately sifted through yet, and much relevant information remains undiscovered in the holdings of libraries and archives.

Consequently, many questions about these producers' lives and career paths remain unanswered. The circulation and reception of their film productions have also not been researched yet, and only theoretical speculations have been made about the target audiences.

This article demonstrates how the ongoing shift from analog to digital research methods might promote efficient and quantitative investigations in this field on the three levels of data searching, processing and interpreting. Set in the early 1910s Warsaw, this local study focuses on the business activities of two relatively under-researched producers, Towbin and Finkelstein. Then, it examines the circulation of their films on selected examples also drawing conclusions on the potential audiences. It will be shown how digital tools like online libraries and computer software (Excel, Citavi, QGIS) might be used to compile, structure and analyze a wide range of sources including archival stocks, local press printed in Russian, Polish and Yiddish, Russian film journals, city maps, and statistical data. Furthermore, QGIS is used for mapping the position of both producers and screening venues of their films against the local setting in the city of three nations, which was called Varshava (Варшава) in Russian, Warszawa in Polish, and Varshe (וואַרשע) in Yiddish. Given the fragmentary nature of historical sources, this article does not claim to be exhaustive. However, identifying trends and outlines certainly adds new knowledge

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1) Władysław Jewsiewicki, *Przemysł filmowy w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym (1919–1939)* (Łódź: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1951); Władysław Jewsiewicki, *Polska kinematografia w okresie filmu niemego* (Łódź, Łódzkie towarzystwo naukowe, 1966); Władysław Banaszkiewicz and Witold Witczak, eds., *Historia filmu polskiego*, wyd. 1 (Warszawa: Wydawn. Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1966); Małgorzata Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii polskiej 1895–2011*, wyd. 2 (Poznań: Ars Nova, 2012).

about both producers and gives an idea of the screening venues and target audiences for their films.

Application of digital tools in cinema history:

Revolutionizing the humanities worldwide, the digital shift has unquestionably opened new research possibilities for cinema history, which is a niche of modest but constant interest within Polish film studies.[2] Nevertheless, the greatest progress has been made at the level of data search since a large number of archives and libraries in various countries have digitized their holdings and made them available online with word search functions (Optical character recognition, ORC). Hence, I was able to sift through a large number of historical sources that were previously difficult to access. The University Library of Warsaw Crispa[3] offers access to daily local press including the Russian Varshavskaya Misl (Warsaw Thought), the Polish Kurier Poranny (Morning Courier), historical city maps, and statistical information.

Furthermore, the website Historical Jewish Press,[4] which was created in a joint initiative between the National Library of Israel and Tel Aviv University, provides the Yiddish Haynṭ (Today). Moreover, the commercial international academic publisher Brill[5] gives chargeable access to the collection of Russian film periodicals.

In addition, scholars interested in cinema history in Poland have some thematically related online databases at their disposal: The "Film Polski"[6] stores information on domestic productions, and the promising but due to expiring funding discontinued website "Kultura atrakcji" (Culture of attractions)[7] presents digital copies of some sources on Early cinema and other forms of popular culture. Yet, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb),[8] originally fan-run and now privately owned, is to be considered as the most comprehensive and up-to-date directory for early Polish cinema and beyond.

The benefits of digital tools have been also outlined in theory,[9] while their practical implementation in academic papers tends to meet with restraint. More progress has been

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2) Łukasz Biskupski, *Miasto atrakcji: Narodziny kultury masowej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku: Kino w systemie rozrywkowym Łodzi* (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury and Szkoła Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej, 2013); Andrzej Dębski, "AFGRUNDEN in Warsaw and Asta Nielsen`s Popularity in Polish Territories," in *Importing Asta Nielsen: The International Film Star in the Making, 1910–1914: KINtop studies in early cinema 2*, eds. Martin Loiperdinger and Uli Jung (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing Limited, 2013), 77–85; Andrzej Dębski, "Konteksty 'Dziejów Grzechu' — najpopularniejszego filmu w Warszawie w 1911 Rok," *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 37, no. 89–90 (2015), 327–343; Małgorzata Hendrykowska, *Śladami tamtych cieni: Film w kulturze polskiej przełomu stuleci 1895–1914* (Poznań: Oficyna Wydawnicza Book Service, 1993).

3) "The University Library of Warsaw," *Crispa*, accessed June 20, 2022, https://crispa.uw.edu.pl/.

4) "Historical Jewish Press," *The National Library of Israel*, accessed June 20, 2022, https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers/jpress/.

5) "Early Russian Cinema Online," *Brill*, accessed February 10, 2021, https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/early-russian-cinema/.

6) *Film Polski*, accessed June 20, 2022, https://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php/.

7) *Kultura atrakcji*, accessed September 25, 2022, http://www.kultura-atrakcji.swps.edu.pl/english/.

8) *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*, accessed September 25, 2022, https://www.imdb.com/.

9) Łukasz Biskupski, "Cyfrowa historia kultury filmowej: 'Kultura Atrakcji': Antologia źródeł do badania kina i kultury popularnej na przełomie XIX I XX wieku," *Pleograf: Kwartalnik Akademii Polskiego Filmu*, no. 2 (2016).

achieved within the international scholar's community devoted to the interdisziplinary New Cinema History (NCH).[10] Crossing paths with economics, geography, sociology, and anthropology, this sub-discipline of film studies has been very successful in adapting computer-aided instruments permitting also more quantitative research with new kinds of questions and methodological approaches. Along with the creation of online databases,[11] its representatives also have presented the possible research directions in theoretical reflections.[12] Among others, spatial analyses have been recognized very early as an important instrument,[13] and the Geographical Information System (GIS) software has been adapted in cinema historiographical research.[14] With the *spatial turn* in full swing, further projects have engaged with specially created thematic maps illustrating different spatial features in local cultures including diverse connections between the distribution of cinemas and various factors such as urban infrastructure, transportation systems, and more.[15] Mapping has been also used to trace film circulation[16] and to relate cinema topographies

10) Daniël Biltereyst, Philippe Meers and Richard Maltby, eds., *Explorations in New Cinema History*: *Approaches and Case Studies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

11) Aronson Michael, Elizabeth Peterson, and Gabriele Hayden, "Local Cinema History at Scale: Data and Methods for Comparative Exhibition Studies," *University of Oregon*, 2022, accessed September 25, 2022, scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/27140.

12) Deb Verhoeven, *New Cinema History and the Computational Turn* (COPEC – Science and Education Research Council, 2012); Richard Maltby, Dylan Walker, and Mike Walsh, "Digital Methods in New Cinema History," in *Advancing Digital Humanities: Research, Methods, Theories*, eds. Katherine Bode and Paul L. Arthur (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2014).

13) Robert C. Allen, "The Place of Space in Film Historiography," *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 9, no. 2 (2006), 10.18146/tmg.548; Robert C. Allen, "Reimagining the History of the Experience of Cinema in a Post- Moviegoing Age," in *Explorations in New Cinema History*, eds. Maltby, Biltereyst, and Meers, 41–57; Jeffrey F. Klenotic, "Class Markers in the Mass Move Audience: A Case Study in the Cultural Geography of Moviegoing, 1926–1932," *The Communication Review* 2, no. 4 (1998); Jeffrey F. Klenotic, "'Like Nickels in a Slot': Children of the American Working Classes at the Neighborhood Movie Hause," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 48 (2001).

14) Deb Verhoeven, Kate Bowles, and Colin Arrowsmith, "Mapping the Movies: Reflections on the Use of Geospatial Technologies for Historical Cinema Audience Research," in *Digital Tools in Media Studies*, eds. Michael Ross, Manfred Grauer, and Bernd Freisleben (New Brunswick and London: Transactin Publishers, 2009), 69–82; Jeffrey Klenotic, "Putting Cinema History on the Map: Using GIS to Explore the Spatiality of Cinema," in *Explorations in New Cinema History*, eds. Maltby, Biltereyst, and Meers.

15) Jeffrey Klenotic, "Space, Place and the Female Film Exhibitor: The Transformation of Cinema in Small Town New Hampshire During the 1910s," in *Locating the Moving Image: New Approaches to Film and Place*, eds. Julia Hallam and Les Roberts (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 2014); Jeffrey Klenotic, "Roll the Credits: Gender, Geography and the People's History of Cinema," in *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Laura Horak, "Using Digital Maps to Investigate Cinema History," in *The Arclight Guidebook to Media History and the Digital Humanities*, eds. Charles R. Acland and Eric Hoyt ([Sussex, England]: Reframe Books in association with Project Arclight, 2016); Daniel Biltereyst, Thunnis van Oort, and Philippe Meers, "Comparing Historical Cinema Cultures: Reflections on New Cinema History and Comparison with a Cross-National Case Study on Antwerp and Rotterdam," in *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, eds. Biltereyst, Maltby, and Meers.

16) Colin Arrowsmith, Deb Verhoeven, and Alwyn Davidson, "Exhibiting the Exhibitors: Spatial Visualization for Heterogeneous Cinema Venue Data," *The Cartographic Journal* 51, no. 4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1179/1743277414Y.0000000096.

to information on population to gain an empirical basis for further analysis on cinema audiences.[17]

However insightful and innovative, mapping with GIS is still not widely used probably due to the fact that its practical application is not part of the educational canon of the humanities. Complicating matters further, special training courses are usually offered for the natural sciences only. This was also the case at my university, and I had to overcome this disciplinary barrier to get permission to attend a five-day training course in ArcGIS. However, serious progress has been achieved only upon switching to QGIS with help from the geohistorian Tomasz Panecki and further support from Jeffrey Klenotic. After taking part in their courses specifically designed for the humanities, I was able to collect data in QGIS and create maps on my own. Both scholars deserve my special thanks also for reminding me of the limited validity of maps, as they present only a moment in history and show as much as they hide. Consequently, they are not self-explanatory, and their meaning must be decoded and explained by the researcher.

My further thanks go to my student assistants Agnieszka Banaszkiewicz Klein, Anna Mendzheritskaya, and Melanie Haag, who have helped me collect sources in three languages, Polish, Russian and Yiddish, respectively. Along with sharing my enthusiasm for the project, they willingly learned to work with digital tools. Available also in the cloud, the literature management software citavi enabled us to work collaboratively on recording and processing a large amount of data from different sources and literature in a user-defined, sortable, and categorizable way. Using keywords, categories, and groups, we clustered different pieces of information to identify new connections between them and prepare the data for interpretation. In addition, we applied excel spreadsheets to compile cinema programs from dailies in three languages (*Kurier Poranny*, *Varshavskaya Misl*, and *Haynt*) systematically. In the sample for 1913, cinema programs were collected on a daily basis, while the circulation of selected films was gathered selectively for the two preceding years.

1. Cinema Topography in 1910s Warsaw

Warsaw had the strongest local cinema market in the Polish lands and became the center of the Polish film industry due to its favorable spatial factors. It was by far the largest Polish city accounting for 797 thousand inhabitants in 1911 and ranked third in the Russian Empire after St Petersburg with 1.9 million and Moscow with 1.4 (or 1.6) million.[18] Being

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17) Verhoeven, Bowles and Arrowsmith, *Mapping*; Julia Noordegraaf et al., "Semantic Deep Mapping in the Amsterdam Time Machine: Viewing Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Theatre and Cinema Culture Through the Lens of Language Use and Socio-Economic Status," in *Research and Education in Urban History in the Age of Digital Libraries: Second International Workshop, UHDL 2019, Dresden, Germany, October 10–11, 2019, Revised Selected Papers*, eds. Florian Niebling, Sander Münster, and Heike Messemer, 1st ed. 2021, Springer eBook Collection 1501 (Cham: Springer International Publishing; Imprint Springer, 2021), 1501; Karina Pryt, "Cinemas and Cinema Audiences in the 'Third Space' in Warsaw (1908–1939)," in *Researching Historical Screen Audiences*, eds. Kate Egan, Martin Smith, and Jamie Terrill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

18) Adolf Grigorevich Rashin, *Naselenie Rossii za 100 let*: *(1811–1913): Statisticheskie ocherki* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Statist. Izdat, 1956).

an important transportation and trade hub, the city benefited from closer connections to Berlin and Vienna on the one hand and duty-free access to the sizeable Russian market on the other. In political terms, it was the capital of the Polish Kingdom, which had been founded in 1815 but lost its autonomy in 1863. After that, the region was incorporated into the legal and economic system of the Romanov Empire and constituted its western-most point, and one of the empire's economically strongest and most densely populated provinces. Warsaw became the seat of the Russian administration and thus the domicile of the imperial elite of army members, officials, and clerks.[19] Living mostly from the govern-ment posts in central parts of the city, the Russians formed a closed universe with privi-leged social and economic status. Identified in historical statistical surveys according to the Orthodox confession, the total local Russian population comprised however only a minority of about 4 percent of the total.[20] Conversely, the majority of the population of 56 percent consisted of Catholic Poles followed by the Jewish population, which made up 38 percent.[21] The latter were Polish Jews with only tiny strata acculturated into the Polish language and culture, and Jewish newcomers, called Litvacs, from the territories of today's Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. They immigrated to Warsaw as a result of antisemitic po-groms that took place there between 1881–1884 and 1903–1906. They spoke different Yid-dish dialects and differed in terms of their religious customs and the degree of accultura-tion into the language and culture of the Poles and Russians respectively.[22] In summary, Warsaw was a city of three nations, but it could also be divided into four communities that were aloof and rather distrustful of each other. Simultaneously, they also shared many overlaps in the economic, social and cultural fields.[23]

One of these intersections was the emerging cinema culture, which was introduced in Warsaw with the first film shows as early as December 1895 and saw the first fixed cinema to operate seasonally being launched only eight years later in October 1903. The further shift to permanent cinemas was however retarded due to political events linked to both the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 and the 1905 revolution, which was also called the first Russian revolution and lasted until 1907. Only after relative political liber-alization accompanied by new freedoms for national minorities was introduced in the Ro-

19) Malte Rolf, "Russische Herrschaft in Warschau: Die Aleksandr-Nevskij-Kathedrale im Konfliktraum poli-tischer Kommunikation," in *Jenseits der Zarenmacht: Dimensionen des Politischen im Russischen Reich, 1800–1917 (Historische Politikforschung, Band 16)*, ed. Walter Sperling, 1. Aufl. (s.l.: Campus Verlag, 2008).

20) Włodzimierz Wakar, *Ludność Warszawy wobec wyborów do Rady Miejskiej: Szkic statystyczny* (Warszawa: Drukarnia Noskowskiego, 1916).

21) Wakar, *Ludność*, 9–10.

22) Kalman Weiser, "The Capital of 'Yiddishland'?," in *Warsaw: The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, eds. François Guesnet, Glenn Dynner, and Antony Polonsky, IJS studies in Judaica, volume 15 (Boston: Brill, 2015).

23) Stephen D. Corrsin, "Language Use in Cultural and Political Change in Pre-1914 Warsaw: Poles, Jews, and Russification," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 68, no. 1 (1990); Stephen D. Corrsin, "Aspects of Pop-ulation Change and of Acculturation in Jewish Warsaw at the End of the Nineteenth Centure: The Census of 1882 and 1897," in *The Jews in Warsaw*, eds. Wladyslaw T. Bartoszewski and Anzony Polonski (Cambridge and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Theodore R. Weeks, "A City of Three Nations: 'Fin De Siècle' Warsaw," *The Polish Review* 49, no. 2 (2004); Scott Ury, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Trans-formation of Warsaw Jewry,* Stanford studies in Jewish history and culture (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univer-sity Press, 2012).
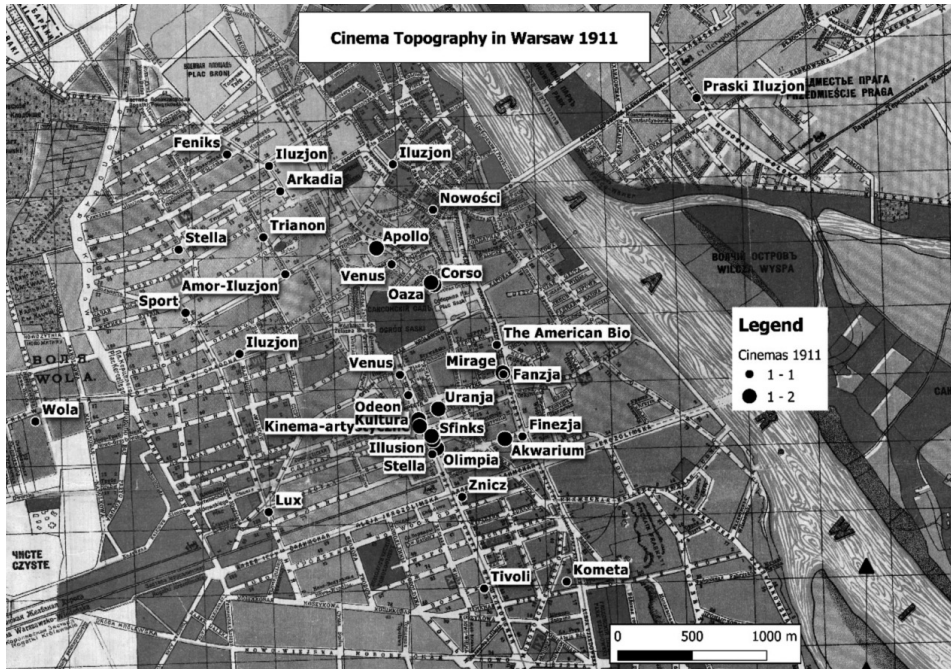
Fig. 1. Spatial visualisation of location and categorisation of cinemas on a city plan of Warsaw for 1911 (Source: Author's own design)

manov Empire, did the cinema boom start in Warsaw in 1907. Driven also by the general economic upturn and cultural revival, cinema numbers increased steadily, reaching about 30 in 1911[24] and 40 in 1914.[25]

Both in historical sources and in the earlier research literature, cinemas were until then only arranged in alphabetical order by name with their corresponding addresses. In this form, these long lists of venues were rather incomprehensible and hence difficult to utilize for spatial analysis. Conversely, as demonstrated in my earlier work,[26] mapping with QGIS makes it possible to visualize and interpret spatial dependencies in cinema topography (Fig. 1.)

In this article, the cinema topography was created on the data collected from Sine Fono and press entries with a digitized and georeferenced historical city plan,[27] the first figure makes the integration of cinemas into the inner-city infrastructure visible at one glance. Smaller and larger dots reflect the division into two categories regarding the standard of the venues as indicated by Sine Fono. Accordingly, the larger dots present the up-

24) G. A. Krzhizhanovsky, "Po gorodam i teatram: Varshava," *Sine-fono: zhurnal, posviashchennyi sinematografam, govoriashchim mashinam i fotografii*, October 15, 1911, 2.

25) Mariusz Guzek, *Co wspólnego z wojną ma kinematograf? Kultura filmowa na Ziemiach Polskich w latach 1914–1918* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2014), 49.

26) Pryt, "Cinemas and Cinema Audiences in the 'third space' in Warsaw (1908–1939)."

27) F. Kasprzykiewicz, „Plan M. Warszawy" (Warszawa 1905), *Mapster*, accessed June 20, 2020, http://igrek. amzp.pl/11797798.

market cinemas, while the smaller dots reflect the downmarket movie houses. A clustering of cinemas in the central districts along the major streets with well-established commercial infrastructure and transportation systems is clearly recognizable. Unsurprisingly, all nine of upscale cinemas are also to be found in this area. It is striking that the density of cinemas in the more distant neighborhoods varies greatly: there were significantly more cinemas in the north and west than in the south and east of the city.

Mapping with QGIS makes it possible to relate this uneven distribution of cinemas to other sociodemographic factors such as settlement areas of particular communities. In the following example, the cinema topography is linked to the density of the Jewish population revealing quite clearly a positive correlation. Accordingly, in the districts further south with a majority Christian population, there were only two venues, while cinemas were clustered in areas with more than a 35 percent Jewish population. Moreover, the actual Yiddish Warsaw called also the *Northern District*, where the majority of all Jewish inhabitants in Warsaw lived,[28] had as many as seven cinemas. Three of them: *Feniks*, *Iluzjon,* and *Arkadia* were located in both ambits, where Jews comprised 72 percent and 93 percent of the total population. Further south were the other venues Stella, Sport, Amor-Iluzjon, Trianon and further southeast Apollo, Nowości and Iluzjon, which targeted Jewish audiences, as entries in the Yiddish press show.
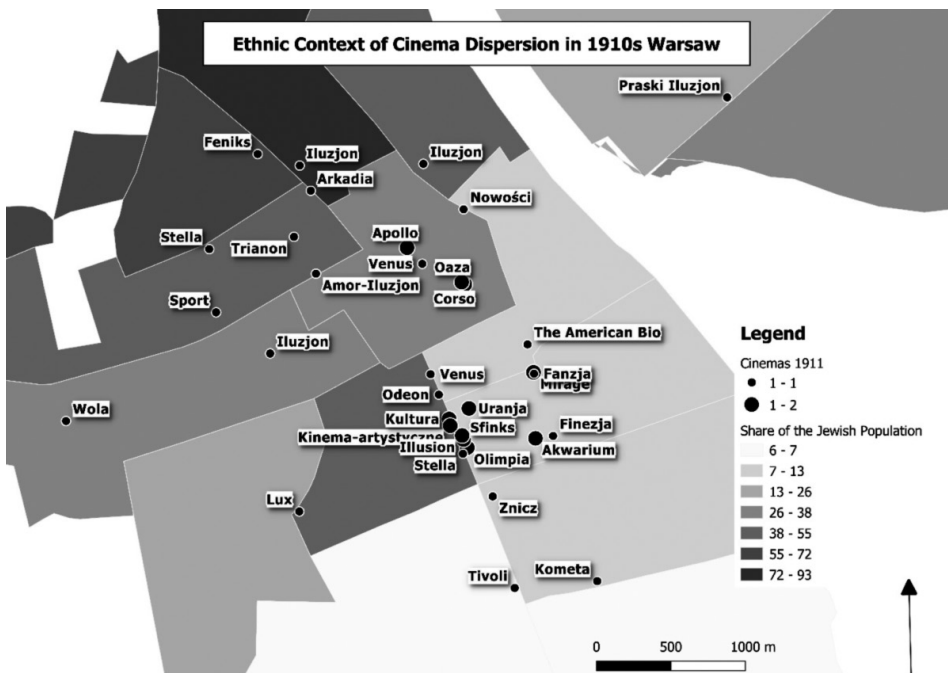

Fig. 2. Spatial visualisation of cinema topography and the share of the Jewish population (Source: Author's own design)

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28) Gabriela Zalewska, *Ludność żydowska w Warszawie w okresie międzywojennym*, wyd. 1 (Warszawa: PWN, 1996); Eleonora Bergman, "The 'Northern District' in Warsaw: A City Within a City?," in *Reclaiming Memory Urban Regeneration in the Historic Jewish Quarters of Central European Cities* (Materials from the International Conference Held on 25–26 June 2007 in Krakow, Krakow: International Cultural Centre, 2009).

Analyzing the venue's topography also allows the first conclusion to be drawn regarding audiences. Like on other studies[29], the assumption is that the majority of cinema parons tended to visit venues within walking distance of their homes. Consequently, it can be deduced that only a few cinemas were likely to have patrons belonging to one confessional group, while the majority hosted mixed audiences with a relatively high proportion of Jewish visitors.[30] This draws our attention to the social setting among entrepreneurs.

2. Pioneers of the Polish Film Industry

Indeed, many catholic Poles were among prominent inventors working on perfecting film techniques.[31] However, like elsewhere, it was Jewish entrepreneurs who launched the film industry in Warsaw and were the driving force in this business.[32] Here, both Polish Jews and even more Litvacs were prominent among cinema owners, distributors, and producers.

Undeniably, Aleksander Hertz (1879–1928) was the most successful among the pioneers of the Polish film industry. He was born in Warsaw into a wealthy acculturated Jewish family and was firmly established in the upper social class of his hometown. With his company Sfinks, founded in 1909, he was the only film producer who managed to remain in business despite the turmoil of the First World War. In the newly independent Poland, he took a leading position among film entrepreneurs and has been often recognized as the father of the Polish film industry.

This honor nevertheless belongs to Mordechaj A. Towbin (1872– ca. 1920). He was born to a merchant family in Zaslavl in Volhynia (in today's Ukraine) and must have come to Warsaw at the latest around the turn of the year 1906–1907. Belonging to the wealthy Litvacs, Towbin quickly built his career in the film business in Warsaw until 1914 (or 1915) and then in Odessa from 1916 to 1919. He was the first in the Polish Kingdom and one of the first in the whole Romanov Empire to cover all three segments of the film industry: screening, distribution and production. Consequently, he occupies a special place in the historiography of the Polish and Russian film industries and Jewish filmmaking.[33] Mapping with QGIS allows us to embed and analyze his life and business areas in the local infrastructure (Fig. 3).

Unlike the majority of the Litvacs, Towbin did not settle in the northern part of the city where the Yiddish language was spoken in the streets. With his family, he rented a flat at 26 Zielna street in the prestigious central part of the city,[34] where wealthier residents pri-

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29) Arrowsmith, Verhoeven, and Davidson, "Exhibiting the Exhibitors: Spatial Visualization for Heterogeneous Cinema Venue Data"; Noordegraaf et al., "Semantic Deep Mapping in the Amsterdam Time Machine: Viewing Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Theatre and Cinema Culture Through the Lens of Language Use and Socio- Economic Status," 1501.

30) Pryt, "Cinemas and Cinema Audiences in the "third space" in Warsaw (1908–1939)."

31) Władysław Jewsiewicki, *Kazimierz Prószyński* (Warszawa, 1974).

32) Natan Gross, *Film żydowski w Polsce*, wyd. 1, My, Żydzi polscy (Kraków: Rabid, 2002).

33) Karina Pryt, "Mordechaj Abramowicz Towbin," in *Polski Słownik Bibliograficzny*, T 54 (Kraków, 2022).

34) Anoni Żwan, ed., *Adresy Warszawy: Rok 1909* (Warszawa, 1909), 356.
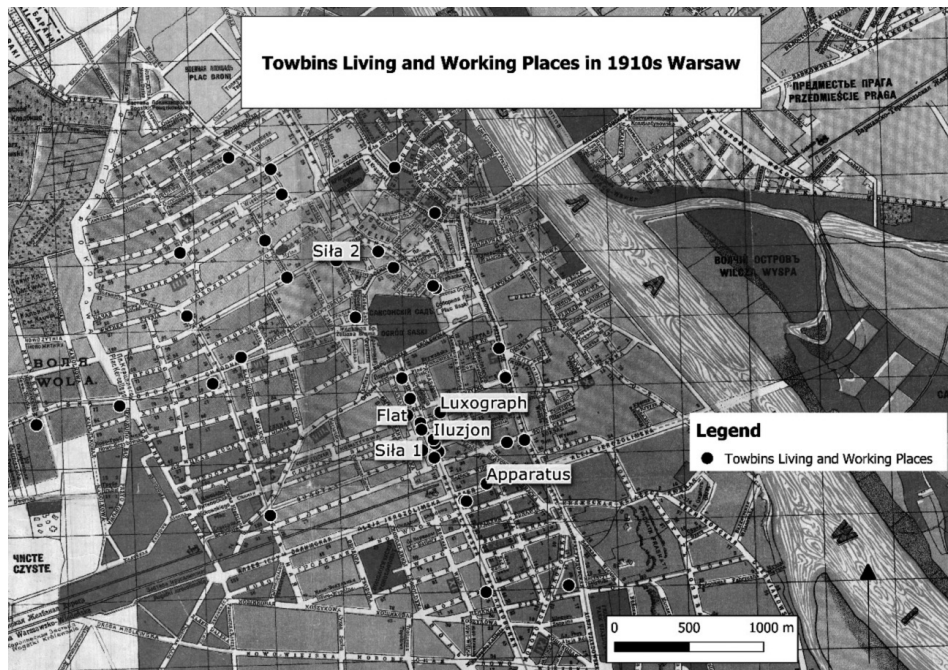
Fig. 3. Topography of Towbins Living and Working Places in Warsaw (Source: Author's own design)

marily lived. Most of them were Christian, while Jews settling there were striving for cultural and linguistic adaptation to the Christian majority society. They either did not know Yiddish or preferred not to use this language in public. Regarded widely by both Christian and these acculturated segments of the Jewish population as "jargon" of lesser social value, this vernacular was excluded from the public space in the city center.[35] Native in Yiddish, Towbin adapted to these local socio-linguistic norms in his business activities. He spoke Russian with local authorities and many of his partners, only occasionally adding short sentences in Polish for Polish interlocutors when this seemed helpful.[36]

In total, he ran five enterprises, four of which were located within walking distance of his home in the neighborhood around the railroad station, which had become the center of the city since 1870. According to the first mention in the Polish press, he must have started his career as the director of the *Iluzjon* movie house, which opened at 118 Marszałkowska Street, only two houses down from the first permanent cinema, on 31st January 1907.[37] A driving force in this establishment, Towbin soon became co-owner and, three years later, sole owner. After more than two years, in the middle of 1912, he sold the cinema but remained in business contact with its new holder. In addition, from autumn 1909 to autumn 1910, Towbin ran another company, the Society of the United Cinematographic Factories *The Luxgraph*, that screened films in respected venues in the open air

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35) Weiser, "The Capital of 'Yiddishland'?"; Alina Molisak, *Żydowska Warszawa, Żydowski Berlin: Literacki portret miasta w pierwszej połowie XX wieku* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN — Wydawnictwo, 2016).
36) Jan Skarbek-Malczewski, *Byłem tam z kamerą* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1962), 19.
37) "Otwarcie Teatru Illusion," *Kurier Warszawski: Dodatek poranny*, January 30, 1907, 4.

and in the hall of the National Philharmonic.[38] With two other partners, Towbin opened the first distribution office on Polish soil called *Kantor Zjednoczonych Kinematografów Siła*, on 1st June 1910. Becoming soon its only holder, he rented premises for this on the western side of Marszałkowska Street, at 14 Złota Street. Further to the southeast, he also had a shop with projection equipment at 29 Jerozolimska Street.[39]

After his debut as a producer in 1908,[40] Towbin released short films and also made features from the autumn of 1911 to the end of 1912. In total, he is believed to released nine features. Except for one work, they were based on dramas by Yiddish authors Zalmen Libin, Jakub Gordin and Jakub Waksman, with artists from Warsaw's Jewish theatres, such as Ester Rachel Kamińska, the mother of the Jewish theatre, her husband Abraham Izaak Kamiński and Marek Arnsztejn, who also took over as director. Sold also to other Jewish settlement areas in the Russian Empire, these adaptations of Yiddish dramas were very profitable.

Subsequently, Towbin and two other business partners opened a separate producing studio also named Siła in November 1912. It was located further to the north at 16 Rymarska Street closer to the district with a higher percentage of the Jewish population. With a joint capital of 51,000 roubles, this company was the largest in Warsaw more than four times stronger than 29. the Sphinx company run by Aleksander Hertz and his partners.[41] However promising, the Siła production studio was already dissolved by mid-1913.[42] Towbin got out of the production business, though kept his distribution office and established an additional cinema in the same premises at 14 Złota Street.[43] He may have left Warsaw after the outbreak of the First World War or more likely a year later, i.e. after the invasion of German troops in August 1915.

The legacy of Towbin's production business was overtaken by a newcomer Henryk (Chaim) Finkelstein (1876– ca. 1942) in August 1913 who renamed the studio as „Kosmo-film" (Frydman, Józef 1929).[44] Like his predecessor, Finkelstein belonged to the group of wealthy Litvacs. He was born into a merchant family in Brest Litovsk (in today's Belarus), and left his home city at a young age. It was not possible to determine where he lived in Warsaw, but it is certain that he attended the II State Philological Grammar School at 11 Nowolipki Street, which belonged to the residential area preferred by Litvacs. After graduation in 1897, he studied at the Technical University of Berlin and then changed to the Technical University of Munich for the summer semester of 1902. He stayed there for seven years and finished his higher education with a diploma in electrical engineering in March 1909.[45]

38) M. Towbin, "Wielka sala Filharmonji Warszawskiej: Luxograph," *Nowa Gazeta*, May 5, 1910, 1.

39) *Kalendarz Handlowy* (Warszawa, 1911), 171.

40) Małgorzata Hendrykowska and Marek Hendrykowski, "Pierwszy polski film fabularny: 'Les martyrs de la Pologne' — 'Pruska Kultura' (1908)," *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 31, no. 67–68 (2009), 212–229.

41) "Spółki handlowe ogłoszone w Warszawskim Sądzie Handlowym," *Organ: dwutygodnik artystyczny*, November 17, 1912, 19.

42) "Z Sądu Handlowego. Upadłości," *Nowa Gazeta: Dod: Gazeta Handlowa*, May 10, 1913, 213.

43) *Kalendarz Handlowy* (Warszawa, 1914), 143.

44) Józef Frydman, "Pierwsze kroki kinematografji polskiej," *Kurjer Filmowy: Ilustrowany tygodnik dla wszystkich*, December 15, 1929, 10.

45) Königliche Bayrische Technische Hochschule in München, Zeugnis über die Diplom-Hauptprüfung für Elektroingeniuere, May 15, 1909, PA.Stud Finkelstein_C, TUM.

It is not known whether he tried to find a profession in the German Reich or in War-
saw that corresponded to his education. However, it can be assumed that as a Jew he had
difficulties embarking on this career due to anti-Semitically driven restrictions. Apparent-
ly, in search of an alternative, he made use of his capital to buy out Towbin's legacy in the
production line. Equipped with the best production studio on the local market, Finkel-
stein quickly overtook his competitors releasing over twenty feature films until the union
with Sfinks in 1915, which was related to distribution problems in the conditions created
by the war. Before the war cut his Kosmofilm off from markets in the east, it paid off that
his production activities were based on both cultural circles, as it enabled him to reach dif-
ferent parts of film audiences. There were fundamental differences in the marketing and
distribution of the films in these two categories, as exemplified in the trajectories of select-
ed productions on the local market in Warsaw.

3. Mapping the local film circulation

Although Jews were strongly represented in the film industry and in local cinema culture,
their language and culture were not accorded equal status. Adapting to the usual nonwrit-
ten socio-cultural norms, Towbin accordingly prepared advertising strategies and distri-
bution channels for his films. His film imports presented by his "Iluzjon" movie house,
Luxgraph company and Siła cinema, targeted as a rule, wealthier segments of the popula-
tion from all communities. For that purpose, Towbin placed advertisements on the front
pages of Polish, Russian and Yiddish newspapers. His imported masterpieces and hits of
French, German, and Russian cinema were accompanied by classical music performed by
an orchestra. The intertextual subtitles were in four languages: Polish, Russian, German
and French, while those in Yiddish were not to be found in the venues in the city center,
although Jewish moviegoers were definitely among the patrons.

Due to the same unwritten rules, Towbin had his features announced only in the Yid-
dish dailies. Conversely, their existence was hardly noticed in the non-Jewish local news-
papers. The survey of cinema programs confirmed that none of his features was shown in
his cinema on Marszałkowska Street, while their circulation was strongly related to the so-
called *Northern District*. Hence, if one wished to see acting by Ester Rachel Kamińska and
other Jewish actors on the screen, one had to go to the heart of Yiddish Warsaw and visit
Trianon, *Stella*, *Feniks*, *Paris* or *Sport* (Fig. 4). Of note is the film based on *Mirele Efros* by
Jacob Gordin, which was the single most widely shown piece in the Yiddish theatrical can-
on.[46] Set in turn-of-the-century Grodno (in today's Belarus), this stage classic is about the
encounter of traditional Jewish life with modernity. This is depicted in the conflict be-
tween *Mirele Efros*, a wealthy widow from Grodno, and her daughter-in-law, who has ac-
quired a higher education in a big city. Mirele rejects her because her parents are not only

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46) James Hoberman, *Bridge of Light*: *Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*, Updated and expanded edition, 1st
Dartmouth College Press edition, Interfaces, studies in visual culture (Hanover, N.H. and London: Dart-
mouth College Press and University Press of New England; Published in association with the National Cent-
er for Jewish Film, 2010).

poor, but also cheats, while her son is torn between his love for his wife and love for his mother. Like its literary original, the film *Mirele Efros* (Andrzej Marek [Marek Arnstein], 1912) was a great success with audiences in Warsaw and was the longest shown of any of Towbin's productions. It ran in Trianon at 18 Karmelicka street, owned by Ch. Złoczewski, who later took over Towbin's sales office.[47]

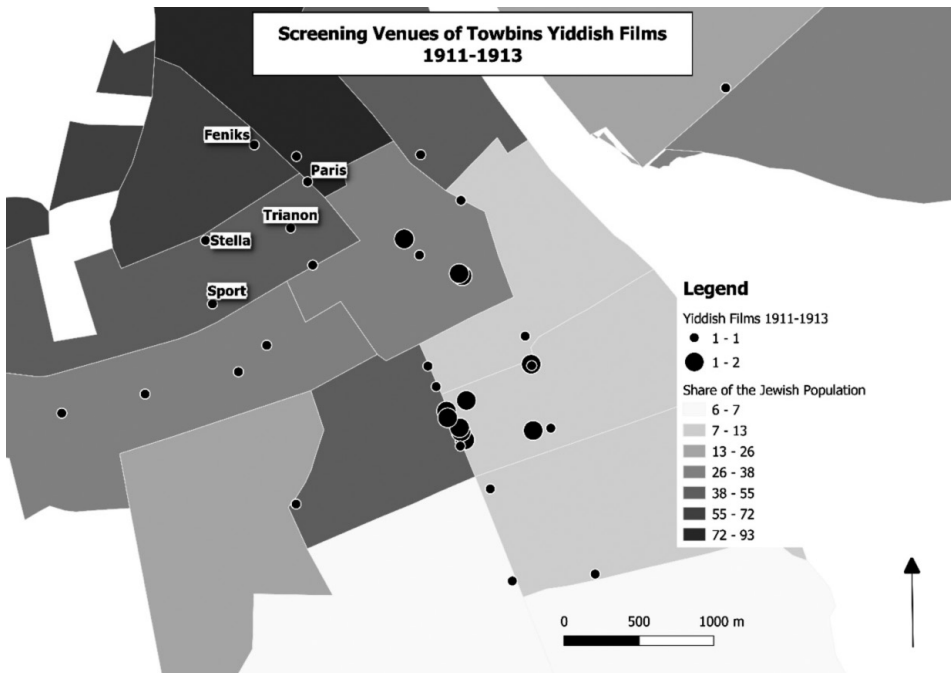
Fig. 4. Venues marked with names visulise screening locations of Yiddish films 1911–1912 (Source: Author's own design)

The trajectories and circulation of Finkelstein's Yiddish films on the local market was quite similar to Towbin's productions. Conversely, marketing strategies for his films based on the Polish culture were broadly conceived transgressing the boundaries between the three local national communities. Advertised in Russian, Polish, and Yiddish dailies, these films were also shown to a wider audience, as illustrated by the example of the film adaptation of the most popular Polish opera, *Halka* (Edward Puchalski, 1913).

Since its premiere in *Teatr Wielki* in Warsaw in 1858, the Stanisław Moniuszkis musical opus with libretto by poet Włodzimierz Wolski, celebrated success on the Polish stages and beyond. Condemning social injustice and the divide between Polish nobility and peasantry, the opera is still understood as a plea for national unity and resistance against the partitioning powers. At the same time, however, the work conveys a universal message that went beyond Polish national affairs and was hence comprehensible and attractive to others.

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47) "Z żałobnej karty," *Wiadomości Filmowe*, August 15, 1934, 16 (33), 4.

Its action takes place in Podhale, in the region of the Tatra Mountains, at the end of the 18th century. *Halka* is a village girl who is seduced by a wealthy gentleman, Janusz. She becomes pregnant and gives birth to his child. However, *Janusz* abandons her, as he intends to marry a noblewoman who comes from the same social class. In despair, Halka arrives at their wedding to set fire to the church, but she is unable to do so. She leaves her small child in a roadside shrine and then commits suicide by throwing herself into a river.[48]

Taking up the theme of unwanted pregnancies that lead to child abandonment, or infanticide, and eventually suicide, *Halka* addressed exactly what was on the minds of many young women at this time. Thus, the work centrally overlapped with many other social dramas of early cinema that depicted the inferior position of women in a male-dominated society. With this film adaptation, Finkelstein was able to appeal to both the educated classes who knew the original, and to the masses of the population who, like *Halka*, belonged to a lower social class and could also be personally touched by her fate. The film circulated in Warsaw according to the social hierarchy of cinemas and was advertised accordingly in the local press. Announced in both the Russian *Varshavsaja Misl* and the Polish *Kurier Poranny*, *Halka* had its premiere on 4th of November 1913 in *Iluzjon Wielki*, a cinema that was arranged in the spacious and noble premises of the famous Aquarium Cabaret at 9 Chmielna Street in the city center with a primarily Christian population. Only 10 days later, the film was shown in the two cinemas Irydion and Sport simultane-
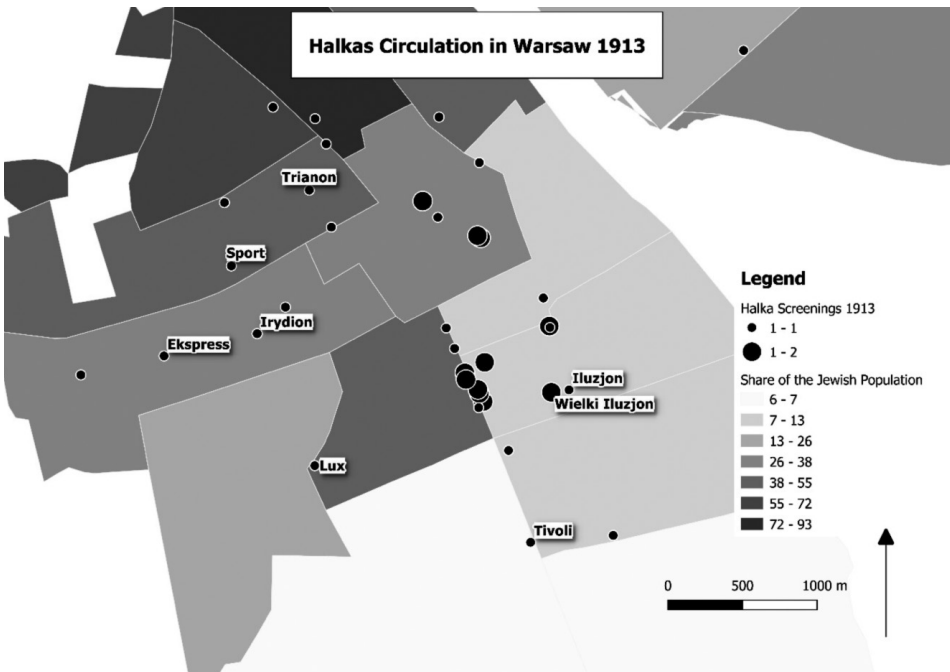

Fig. 5. Venues marked with names visulise circulation of *Halka* 1913 (Source: Author's own design)

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48) Anne Swartz, "Moniuszko's 'Halka' and the Revival of the Noble Traditions at the Teatr Wielki," *The Polish Review* 51, no. 3–4 (2006), accessed September 25, 2022, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25779633.

ously, and later changed screens every two weeks as follows: *Expres, Tivoli and Lux*. Apart from the *Tivoli* located to the south, all other venues announced the screenings in both Kurier Poranny and Heynt. Announced also in both newspapers, *Halka* was finally shown in *Trianon* on 28th of December 1913 (Fig. 5).

The fact that *Trianon* was at the end of *Halkas* local tour in 1913 is not due to its standard, as this was considered good by contemporary observers.[49] The reasons are therefore more likely to be found in its social environment and its local reputation. Located at Karmelicka Street with a predominantly Litvacs population, *Trianon* was the premiere cinema of Jewish cinema masterpieces. It was thus associated with the Yiddish Varshe, which was considered foreign and inferior by the Christian majority society.

Summary and Conclusion

Taking the 1910s Warsaw as an example, this local study demonstrated how digital tools may be productively implemented in the research on early cinema in the Polish lands. On the level of data search and collection, the relevant online databases were presented. Likewise, it was explained how computer software citavi and excel might be used for arranging and structuring data collected from the daily press printed in three languages enabling efficient and systematic creation of an empirical basis for new kinds of research at the interface with other related disciplines. Thanks to the search capabilities provided online, it has been possible to add new information about the local cinema market and the both most prolific producers, Mordechaj A. Towbin and Henryk (Chaim) Finkelstein. Furthermore, the mapping in QGIS has made it possible to embed the cinema topography in both the urban infrastructure and the local social context of the city with Russians, Poles, and Jews living largely side by side. Against this backdrop, Towbin's living and working areas have been mapped shedding new light on the local film business with its position in the local social setting.

Furthermore, the mapping in QGIS has visualized how the circulation routes of the domestic film productions varied depending on the culture they had been based on. Although there were no official boundaries, the anti-Semitism of the Christian majority and subsequently the bias against the Yiddish language and culture shared by parts of the Jewish population, set the limits for screening of Towbin's productions. Consequently, their distribution remained spatially constrained to the so-called *Northern District*. The film adaptation of the Polish opera *Halka*, on the contrary, was not subject to such constraints and could be shown throughout the city, clearly crossing the social and cultural boundaries of the local population.

The implementation of digital tools is already reinvigorating cinema history, and mapping with QGIS makes it possible to locate entrepreneurs, venues, and film screenings in the political, social and cultural geographies. This approach also gives insight into the complex and often conflicting relationships between local communities. Hence, this kind

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49) Alexander Leonsky, "Po goradam i teatram," *Sine-fono: zhurnal, posviashchennyi sinematografam, govoriashchim mashinam i fotografii*, June 1, 1912, 18.

of research can be applied to further studies at the local or regional level contributing correspondingly to the social and economic history of cinema in the Polish lands and beyond.

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Filmography

Halka (Edward Puchalski, 1913)
Mirele Efros (Andrzej Marek [Marek Arnstein], 1912)

Biography

Karina Pryt studied German literature and modern history at the Albert-Ludwigs-University in Freiburg im Breisgau. She received her doctorate in history on cultural diplomatic relations between Germany and Poland (Befohlene Freundschaft. Die Deutsch-Polnischen Kulturbeziehungen 1934–1939, Osnabrück 2010). Her main areas of interest also include the film policy of the National Socialists and the economic and social history of cinema.

Currently, she is working at the Institute for Film Studies at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. Funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), she examines local cinema culture in Warsaw 1895/6–1939 from a transnational perspective utilizing a variety of sources in different languages (Polish, Yiddish, Russian and German). In line with the interdisciplinary New Cinema History (NCH), she also deals with the use of digital tools, such as geographic information systems (GIS), in historical research.