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The Place of Polish Films on German market between 1920s and 1930s, with special emphasis on Borderlands

In the last few years there were few publications on Polish-German film collaboration during the interwar period, especially regarding years 1934–1939 when these mutual relations served political agenda.¹

Special emphasis has been put on coproduction and distribution of German films in Poland. This paper considers reverse side of these relations, which is the presence of Polish films in Germany during the interwar period. The main source for this study will be the diplomatic and governmental correspondence of both countries during the mentioned period.

In order to situate the place of Polish cinema in Weimar Republic and the Third Reich one must keep in mind huge disproportions between the two cinematographies, in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In 1918 Germany was second film industry in the world market, with the production of 340 films,² whereas slowly developing Polish branch reached only seven movies.³ During the next few years these numbers changed, but the proportions still reflected great differences in the potential of both cinematographies. After the World War I many countries boycotted German films. As a response the government of Weimar Republic blocked import of these states national production. German cinematography not only survived almost three years of isolation, but ended up more powerful than before. In order to fulfill the programmes of cinema theatres the production of national cinema increased from 470 films in 1919 to 510 in 1920.⁴ In 1921 Berlin opened up to other countries movies, but finding way to Reich's screens was still very difficult.

¹ U. Biel, *Polsko-niemiecka wymiana filmowa w latach 1933–1939*; K. Pryt, *Polsko-niemieckie koprodukcje "August Mocny" i "Dyplomatyczna żona" w służbie nazistowskiej polityki wschodniej w latach 1934–1939*, [in:] *Polska i Niemcy. Filmowe granice i sąsiedztwa*, ed. K. Klejsa, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2012; U. Biel, *Kino w obszarze szczególnej troski: filmy niemieckie na ekranach województwa śląskiego w latach 1932–1939*, [in:] *W drodze do sąsiada. Polsko-niemieckie spotkania filmowe*, ed. A. Dębski, A. Gwóźdź, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2013.

² H. Prinzler, *Chronik des deutschen Films 1895–1994*, Metzler, Stuttgart 1995, data from 1918.

³ M. Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii polskiej 1895–1997*, Ars Nova, Poznań 1999, p. 66.

⁴ H. Prinzler, *Chronik...*, data from 1919, 1920.

The gateway which could clear the passage from Warsaw to German market seemed to be the Polish minority being the largest national Group in Weimar Republic. This part of German audience might want to watch Polish movies because of cultural reasons. A survey conducted in 1925 indicated that even though a part of eastern territories together with Polish speaking population were lost, among the German population of 60 million, 900 thousand knew Polish language, which meant that it was the most frequently used foreign language in Germany. The second foreign language was French, used by only 10 thousand people. On the other hand region with the biggest percentage of population using language other than only German, was Upper Silesia. Among these 900 thousand more than a half – 542 thousands – live here, and at the beginning of the twenties this population outnumbered German-speaking people.⁵

If we take into consideration also issues regarding 1922 plebiscite – that was meant to judge to which country will Upper Silesia be annexed (consequently homogenic region was divided between Poland and Germany, see the map) and heavily influenced the awakening of national identity among inhabitants – it becomes obvious that this region can be seen as mostly absorptive of Polish films. This is why in the analysis of the mentioned problem I will concentrate mainly on Upper Silesia.

Plebiscite period (1918–1922)

German audience could see Polish movies for the first time in 1919–1922, the time when Polish-German borders were *in statu nascendi*. Young Polish cinematography, thanks to the government support, produced few films that were meant to awake the national spirit. There were three short movies (*Tańce polskie*, *Tam na błoniu błyszczy kwiecie*, *Zakochałem ci się aż po same uszy*, probably made in 1920) and a fiction film *Pan Twardowski* (1921), all made by popular actor and director Wiktor Biegański.⁶ As an answer to German cinematic propaganda, there were also two longer feature films produced considering Upper Silesia: *Nie damy ziemi, skąd nasz ród* (also known as *Męczeństwo ludu Górnos Śląskiego* or *Krwawa walka na Górnym Śląsku*, dir. Władysław Lenczewski, 1920) and *Dwie urny* (dir. Cezar Rino-Lupo, 1921).

It is difficult to determine if and eventually where films mentioned above were screened on daily basis. There is a possibility that the cinema owners in Upper Silesia and east Germany could order them in Aurora film-booking office. Its owner, Konstanty Wysocki had his shares in a few Silesian cinemas (in

⁵ *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, Band 1928, p. 20; *Historia Górnego Śląska*, ed. J. Bahlcke, D. Gawrecki, R. Kaczmarek, Dom Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej, Gliwice 2012, p. 203.

⁶ W. Rzepka, *Film na Śląsku w okresie powstań i plebiscytu (1919–1921)*, "Zaranie Śląskie" 1979, no. 2, p. 243–254.

Katowice, Gliwice, Nysa, Jelenia Góra) and published a magazine “Kinematograf Polski”. The journal was addressed to the developing Polish cine-market, but its multilingualism – information were also put in English, German, French and Italian – indicated the ambition to reach allied soldiers that stationed than at Upper Silesia region, and who could visit cinemas for military (Feldkinos).

In May 1919 issue of “Kinematograf Polski” Aurora published an advertisement of Polish film called *Halka* (director unknown, 1913), with annotation: “exclusive right on prewar German Reich territory”.⁷ Another proof that Wysocki’s agency made efforts to reach German market was his own announcement bought in an address-book of cinema theatres which was published in Berlin (Reichs-Kino-Addressbuch) and distributed to all kinds of cinematic companies in whole country.⁸

Aurora had also in its offer local actualities like *Powstanie Polskie na Górnym Śląsku*.⁹ Even though there is no evidence that these films were a part of daily programmes, they were certainly screened in Upper Silesia, for example as a part of travelling screenings organized by Cultural and Educational Department of a Polish Plebiscite Committee (Wydział Kulturalno-Oświatowy Polskiego Komitetu Plebiscytowego).¹⁰

***Land unterm Kreuz* cesura (premiere: March 1927)**

If we believe in available statistics, spectators of Weimar Republic lost contact with Polish films after laying out borders. Alexander Jason claims that after 1925 only one feature film (2,000 m length) was bought (which stood for 0,2% of a German market).¹¹ Unfortunately we don’t know its title, although it could be *Iwonka* (dir. Edward Puchalski, 1925), because in the correspondence of Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1926 there is a request to the consultants asking them to help distributor in communication with local cinemas regarding conditions of screenings.¹²

It is possible that some Polish films, not necessarily fictional feature, but travelogues or short films, emerged on the screens of the Upper Silesia province even though there is no sign of it in the statistics. The November revolution of 1918 abolished censorship in Germany for a while so the state lost its control over cinemas repertoire. Indeed, the cinematic act from 1920 restored

⁷ AURORA department commercial, “Kinematograf Polski” 1919, no. 4, p. 23.

⁸ AURORA department commercial, Reichs-Kino-Adressbuch, Berlin 1918/1920, p. 456.

⁹ Advertisement, “Kinematograf Polski” 1921, no. 2, p. 24.

¹⁰ U. Biel, *German and Polish Agitation through Travelling Cinemas in the 1920s in Upper Silesia*, [in:] *Travelling Cinema in Europe*, ed. M. Loiperdinger, “Kintop 10”, Frankfurt 2008, p. 157–161.

¹¹ A. Jason, *Handbuch des Films 1935/36*, Hoppenstedt, Berlin 1935, p. 109–110.

¹² National Archive in Opole (further: ANO), Records of Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Opole (further: CGORP), sign. 191 (microfilm), Political Department from 6.03.1926.

the censorship, but for few more years release prints from the previous period could circulate in cinemas. Polish-German border at the Upper Silesia was traced late, that is in 1922. Previous to that moment it was untight which made smuggling very easy. A lot of German films prints were left in Poland. Similarly, there could be some Polish films left in German part of Upper Silesia where they did find their way to the screen.¹³ But even if such incidents did happen, they were a part of what we would today call a “grey market”.

In the legal realm cinema followed a complete stagnation. Private producers and distributors of Polish films were unable to sell their titles. Their poor offer didn't survive concurrence with powerful German cinematography. Finally it became clear that the government had to begin participation in promotion of domestic production abroad.

This necessity was proved by world-wide resonance following premiere of *Land unterm Kreuz* (*Kraj pod krzyżem*, dir. Ulrich Kayser, 1927). This famous Kulturfilm's production was Upper Silesia presidents' private initiative. He convinced mayors of the main local cities and national authorities to finance this film. Realisation of this project was undertaken by the large company Deulig Film based in Berlin. The context of this enterprise launch was of great importance – fifth anniversary of plebiscite which was associated with the loss of the part of the region on behalf of Poland. The movie alone was meant to publicize negative consequences of the division of Upper Silesia. Additional importance was granted by the success of Weimar Republic at the international conference in Locarno in October 1925 where inviolability of border with Poland was not admitted. Germany intended its revision from Upper Silesia and *Land unterm Kreuz* proved to be the perfect propaganda tool of this policy. Numerous, solemn screenings of this film transformed it into a specific tournée all over Reich's cinemas, German speaking countries and those befriended, which lead not only to the international renown of the movie alone but of the whole region, and what is most important – the cause.¹⁴

Polish consulates carefully observed this actions, passing detailed accounts to the MFA Ministry and after observing how Germany realize its policy through cinema they started to take up similar actions. Since the export of feature films seemed to be difficult, they decided to reach for travelogues with positive image of the country. In 1927 the Interministerial Touristic Board was created. A special sub-commission worked on selecting films from domestic production eligible to be screened abroad. Next to the movies about Wilanów, Puławy, Łowicz and Warsaw, the chosen titles included *Polska Odrodzona* (dir. Zygmunt Wesołowski, 1924) and *Śląsk żrenica Polski* (dir. Włodzimierz Wyszomirski, 1927). What is worth mentioning, the last title – recognized by the commission as the best among all proposed films – was produced as a response to the

¹³ U. Biel, *Śląskie kina między wojnami, czyli przyjemność upolityczniona*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, Katowice 2002, p. 236.

¹⁴ Eadem, *Plonące premiery. Z dziejów polsko-niemieckiego pogranicza filmowego na Górnym Śląsku*, [in:] *Kino niemieckie w dialogu kultur*, ed. A. Gwóźdź, Rabid, Kraków 2004, p. 315–332.

Land unterm Kreuz.¹⁵ It has been recommended to the General Consul in Bytom, however its screening in Upper Silesia province seems rather unlikely considering Polish the very perspective in depicting Upper Silesia which was undermined by the Reich.

At the end of 1929 MFA continued promoting Polish national character through film and send detailed inquiries to diplomatic missions in Germany asking what has been done to this date, did Polish films found their way to the local cinemas repertoires and if so, what was their reception. There was also a request for some data on specific consultant expectations – what kind of scenes they prefer: exclusively Polish, folk with traditional dresses, traditional forms of entertainment, hunting or rather capturing the development of fatherland, including images of harbour in Gdynia, expansion of air transportation, radio in trains, more neutral ones, considering sport activities, or maybe completely different that take into consideration specific needs of Polish micro-communities. This reconnaissance meant to be discrete, preparing ground for activities of private film companies.¹⁶

The response that came from Opole¹⁷ revealed the local post office have no Polish films, however they plan to apply for such, including prints with Polish subtitles in order to show to the members of the Union of Poles in Opole. Local cinemas screened two travelogues about Polesie, one about duck hunting and the other about Warszawa and Wilno. The second picture was criticized by the one of consultants because. In his opinion it didn't have any artistic value and its content could have had detrimental effects (the poverty and backwardness of eastern borderlands could negatively influence the audience feelings). In contrast to the similar German Kulturfilms that glorified prosperity and progress of filmed locations, emphasizing lack of material culture in this Polish film had depressing effect on Polish minority.¹⁸

However Ufa cinemas screened one fiction feature film, *Policmajster Tagiejew* (dir. Juliusz Gardan, 1929) based on Gabriela Zapolska novel. The reception of this movie by German critics was very positive including those from Upper Silesia. Although, as noted in the correspondence, subtitles were intentionally prepared in a way that made it very difficult to guess that it is actually a Polish movie.¹⁹ It can be confirmed by advertisement published in widely read daily paper "Der Oberschlesische Wanderer". Film was screened under the title *Polizeimeister Tagejef*, but had also the undertitle *Der Sittenpaß*. In

¹⁵ ANO, CGORP, sign. 191, Minister of Public Works from 30.07.1927.

¹⁶ Ibidem, MFA Political Department from 3.12.1929.

¹⁷ During the interwar period Consulate General of Upper Silesia at first operated in Opole (1920–1922), than it was moved to Bytom (1922–1931), just to be moved back to Opole; Lech Krzyżnowski, "Kondycja narodowa" ludności polskiej na Śląsku Opolskim w latach 1922–1931 w opinii urzędników konsulatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Bytomiu, [in:] *Konsulaty na pograniczu polsko-niemieckim i polsko-czechosłowackim w latach 1918–1939*, eds. Marek Masnyk, Ryszard Kaczmarek, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2004, p. 74–89.

¹⁸ Archive of New Acts (further: ANA), MFA, sign. 8369, Consulate General in Opole from 17.10.1930.

¹⁹ ANO, CGORP, sign. 191, Consulate General to MFA from 24.01.1930.

Helios cinema announcement in Zabrze, the titles were switched presenting the undertitle as the main one.²⁰

The consultant also shared his opinion on images that would be best for local audience. For Polish minority he suggested films showing actual conditions of life in the country, also national appeal and films presenting its development as a great power (that is reinforcing sense of national spirit), whereas for German spectators advisable would be travelogues and films depicting sporting successes (that is neutral ones, at most promoting physical strength and beauty – motifs popular in Weimar Republic).²¹

Much more active was the consultant operating near the border area, in Bytom. Despite the tense situation after each of the *Land unterm Kreuz* screenings, during autumn of 1927 the agency attempted to show in Ufa theatres few travelogues about Tatry Mounatins and Zakopane city.²² Back than Ufa had seven theatres in the four biggest cities of Upper Silesia (Bytom, Gliwice, Opole, Zabrze). Despite concern-type structure during Weimar Republic period Ufa's managers had relative freedom in terms of directing their units according to local specificity. Even though programmes were determined in Berlin, cinema owners could include other titles as long as it followed by additional costs. It was also encouraged by fairly liberal censorship. After the cinematic law entered into force in 1920 the right to give permission on distributing films was entitled only to departments in Berlin and Munich, possessing equal rights. However local authorities (district) could give entrance to newsreels commercials and travelogues. Consultant in Bytom took advantage of this opportunity. Because of the prestige Ufa shared – not only in Germany but in the whole Europe – screening films in its theatres ennobled them and could function as an example for other cinema owners.²³

Also consultant from Bytom perfectly understood the nuances that had to be taken into account if he wanted to screen the movies in German part of Upper Silesia. The office searched for the adequate pictures independently of collections prepared in Warsaw. In 1929, together with Chorzów-based production company Pegaz they compiled an offer including sport materials shot among beautiful Polish landscapes: ski races in Zakopane, rowing races in Warsaw and international motorcycle races in Upper Silesia. Regarding the last theme, showing Silesian province in German part of the region was particularly undesirable but because the race was won by German competitor, it gave a great pretext to show the film.²⁴

Summing up, both offices independently worked out on inscribing promotional content into the frame of Weimar Republic's concept of leisure as physical

²⁰ Helios cinema advertisement in Hindenburg [Zabrze], "Oberschlesischer Wanderer", 22.10.1929, no. 247; Schauburg cinema advertisement in Gliwice, "Oberschlesischer Wanderer", 1.08.1930, no. 178.

²¹ ANO, KGORP, sign. 191 (microfilm), note to MFA from 24.01.1930.

²² Ibidem, letter to Polish Union of Cinematographic Industry from 12.09.1927.

²³ Ibidem, Consulate General in Bytom to MFA from 9.11.1927.

²⁴ Ibidem, W. Wyszomirski to Consulate General in Bytom from 26.11.1929.

culture.²⁵ They advanced with great care in order to avoid being accused of disseminating propaganda. In consequence of “*Land unterm Kreuz* incident” in August 1928, during an international congress of cinema-owners in Berlin, delegation from Warszawa announced project of declaration against screening of inciting films (*Hetzfilme*), which was supported by representatives of all European countries that came to the congress.²⁶ This is also why Poland couldn’t afford any actions that would risk accusation of spreading confrontational propaganda.

Introduction of sound (beginning of 1930s)

Subsequent attempts to show Polish films on German screens came in the sound introduction period. When actors begun to speak loud film traders had to look for new technical solutions in order to be make them understood by international audience. On the other hand, for the governments of nationally conflicted Europe language in cinema became a political issue. After sort time of experiments and problems solving efforts it was decided that films are going to be shown in original versions with additional subtitles or dubbing. The latter practice was especially popular in countries where totalitarian tendencies spread (Germany, Italy, Spain)²⁷ or in rich countries, since sound-synchronization appeared extremely expensive and technically difficult. Although in Poland distributors were encouraged with tax reliefs,²⁸ dubbing was did not meet acceptation. We can see its consequences in today’s cinemas where films are projected in subtitled versions.

In 1932 Germany initiated discussions on increasing movie export to Poland in order to help domestic companies to extend their markets. But the issue wasn’t only to show movies in cinemas, but to screen them in German-speaking versions with subtitles. The majority of European countries, including Poland, perceived Weimar Republic as a thread and bought German films in French or English dubbed versions. The beginning of negotiations between Berlin and Warszawa was widely commented by press. German expectations that spectators in Poland will watch movies with German dialogues was immediately followed by the same condition on Polish side. Negotiations were heated by sanatory circles of Silesian province. They demanded that Berlin should not only buy Polish movies, but also present them in original speaking

²⁵ A. Gwóździ, *Obok kanonu. Tropami kina niemieckiego*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2011, p. 117–119.

²⁶ W. Jewsiewicki, *Historia filmu polskiego. Wprowadzenie do historii polskiej kinematografii*, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna i Filmowa im. L. Schillera, Łódź 1959, p. 233.

²⁷ J. Garncarz, *Untertitel, Sprachversionen, Synchronisation. Die Suche nach optimalen Übersetzungsverfahren*, [in:] *Babylon in FilmEuropa. Mehrsprachen-Versionen der 1930er Jahre*, Hrsg. J. Distelmeyer, Edition text + kritik, München 2006, p. 9–18.

²⁸ Cinemas who’s programme consisted of 10% of Polish films a year could recon on reduction of dubbed foreign films tax even by half. *Film News Calendar*, Warsaw 1938, p. 48b–48c.

version, especially in regions inhabited by Polish minority like Rejencja Opolska (Regierungsbezirk Oppeln).²⁹

In January 1933, after broad consultations with departments in Opole and Katowice German embassy in Warsaw noted in report to Auswärtiges Amt (German Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that if it is a common priority to show German films in their original versions and to normalize Polish-German relationships than German government should not only be prepared to import all language versions of Polish films, but also to protect their screenings with police units if necessary.³⁰ Similar instructions were given to police units in Katowice, when first Austrian films in German speaking versions were projected to the audience.³¹

First years of the Third Reich (1933–1935)

Hitler's rise to power begun extremely confrontational politics against Poland. Consequently, negotiations were interrupted and as a result not even one Polish film was bought in 1933. After signing non-aggression pact in 1934, which also resulted in Reich's cultural policy turn, negotiation process was reopened straightaway and it seemed that intense discussions will finally lead to the agreement on mutual exchange of films. Finally it resulted with unofficial agreement (25.05.1934), according to which the exchange had to be preceded with 5:1 proportions, that is for export of five movies to Poland, Germany obliged to buy one.³² Further course of events exposed how instrumentally this whole deal with Polish film trade was treated. Every political swing casted a shadow on the openness declared officially.

As a result the number of Polish films in German cinemas didn't increase. Big advertising campaigns (like for *Wyrok życia*) organized in best cinemas in Berlin didn't increase the number of spectators because even if Germany bought some film it didn't mean that it will be widely distributed in cinemas. In May 1936 Ministry of Propaganda made an evaluation of the Polish films presence on German market. Since the starting of negotiations there were only five films distributed in Germany which brought very little income: *Czy Lucyna to dziewczyna?* (dir. Juliusz Gardan, 1934) – 50,500 RM, *Śluby ulańskie* (dir. Juliusz Gardan, 1934) – 50,000 RM, *Wyrok życia* (dir. Juliusz Gardan, 1933) – 44,350 RM, *Pieśniarz Warszawy* (dir. Michał Waszyński,

²⁹ *Podstępna oferta, która musi być odrzucona*, "Polska Zachodnia", 24.12.1932.

³⁰ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt (Political Archive of International Affairs Department in Berlin, further: PA), folder Warschau 196, report from discussion of Deputation to Auswärtiges Amt, 17.01.1933.

³¹ National Archive in Katowice (further: NAK), Lublinieckie Starosty, sign. 125, telephonogramm to District Police Headquarters, 1.03.1934.

³² PA, folder Warschau 196, reports from travel of German delegation to Poland, 20.04.1934, 2.06.1934.

1934) – 6,600 RM, *Czarna perła* (dir. Michał Waszyński, 1934) – 8,600 RM.³³ Bearing in mind that the average price of a ticket was 0.73 German RM, one could assume that the best selling title was seen by approximately 69,000 patrons, whereas average German film was seen at that time by two or three million spectators.³⁴

This data indicates how limited was the resonance of Polish films, even though the distributor Rejo Film took care to prepare German dubbing. Beside Berlin, where Polish premiers were widely advertised in order to convince Poles of German's good will and realization of the contracted agreement, Polish movies were screened for a short time and in a few places.³⁵ We know that in Breslau there were two of the mentioned films: *Wyrok życia* and *Czy Lucyna to dziewczyna?*,³⁶ and in 1935 *Śluby ulańskie*.³⁷ In "Oberschlesischer Wanderer's" Kunstleben column article about *Wyrok życia* premiere in Berlin informs that even though the movie wasn't dubbed, this festive screening was conducted in original Polish version with German subtitles. It was presented in the same way in Upper Silesia and police in Opole instructed their local units to check where exactly the screenings took place.³⁸

Quoted income of *Wyrok życia* clearly indicates that even screening the film in Polish language version did not stimulate the minority to actually watch the movie. How to explain such a low market demand for Polish movies in a region inhabited by the biggest group of Polish people in Germany? Perhaps president of the Upper Silesia province, asked for opinion by the Berlin MFA, was right when he predicted this situation back in 1932? In an extensive report he stated that there is no need to show films in Polish language versions since in the cities in Opolszczyzna region there aren't many Polish-speaking citizens and so cinema owners don't include such films in cinema programmes.³⁹ Even putting aside political pressures, president's assumptions were still accurate. In Opolszczyzna province it was usually in the village and administrative districts where people spoke Polish, while in the cities – where cinemas were concentrated – German language was dominant. Potential spectators for whom Polish movies, irrespectively of their artistic standards, should be important because of their cultural value, did not demonstrate their will and determination to see them which would work on frequency success and finally – prepare ground for another Polish titles.

It also seems that occasional presence of Polish films in Opolszczyzna province didn't encourage native population to search for Polish films behind the border, while such practice might be seen in Silesian province. Pro-sanatory

³³ PA, folder Warschau 197, report of Ministry of Propaganda, 22.05.1936.

³⁴ See H.H. Prinzier, *Chronik des deutschen Films 1895–1994*, Stuttgart 1995.

³⁵ K. Pryt, *Polsko-niemieckie koprodukcje...*, p. 82.

³⁶ A. Dębski, *Polskie wątki filmowe w prasie wrocławskiej w okresie polsko-niemieckiego zbliżenia 1934–1939*, [in:] *W drodze do sąsiada...*, p. 287–289.

³⁷ Cinema programme, "Oberschlesischer Wanderer," 22.10.1935, no. 246.

³⁸ ANO, Krapkowice City Files, sign. 2018, Police in Opole, 7.02.1935.

³⁹ PA, folder Warschau 196, *Oberpräsident der Provinz Oberschlesien*, 4.11.1932.

daily paper “Polska Zachodnia” criticized people of Katowice, that during boycott of German films they travelled to Bytom, Zabrze or Gliwice to see them.⁴⁰ The only example of “spectators emigration” that was observed here was in case *All Quiet on the Western Front* (dir. L. Milestone, 1930), movie that was initially blocked by German censorship. Cinema owners in Katowice and Chorzów knew it very well, so that when the movie turned up in the repertoire they bought larger advertisements in “Oberschlesischer Wanderer” published in Gliwice.⁴¹ This succeeded not only among Opole province inhabitants. German Consulate General, in a report to Auswärtiges Amt, wrote that he heard from trustworthy person that 500 tickets for this title were ordered from Wrocław.⁴²

After Józef Piłsudski’s death (II half of the 30s)

Seeing hard it is for Polish films, in spite of German Declarations, to cut through German market, Warsaw changed its tactics. Titles mentioned above not only didn’t succeed but also caused some iconic concerns. Those poor quality comedies encountered such a critic that consul of Königsberg suggested they shouldn’t even be screened abroad.⁴³ Polish MFA decided to promote only selected films which content corresponded with Polish reason of state. MFA also instructed individual offices to discreetly help in reaching those titles to minorities abroad in order to strengthen national spirit, especially in the face of growing activity of Hitler’s party.

Consequently Berlin censorship agreed on distribution of *Młody las* (dir. Józef Lejtes, Pl 1933), *Płomienna serca* (dir. Romuald Gantkowski, Pl 1937) and *Sztandar wolności* (dir. Ryszard Ordyński, Pl 1935). The biggest response followed the last title projected in Germany in slightly different version and modified title *Marshall Piłsudski*. Berlin premiere of this film took place in Ufa am Kurfürstendamm cinema on 19.12.1935.⁴⁴

It is possible that Nazis’ respect for Marshall contributed to organizing few months later, on the first anniversary of his death. On 10.05.1936 *Marshall Piłsudski* was screened in Opole. Adjusting to instructions prepared by Polish MFA ambassador Józef Lipski and authorities of I District of Union of Poles in Germany (Związek Polaków w Niemczech, ZPwN) together with Arka Bożek. Ufa made available one of their halls in Kammerlichtspiele cinema in Opole. It was decorated with white and blue roses and over 20 flags of minority unions; scouts came with banners, Polish eagle was placed on the wall

⁴⁰ *Nieobywatelskie postępowanie naszych obywateli*, “Polska Zachodnia”, 15–16.02.1932, no. 37.

⁴¹ Rialto cinema advertisement in Katowice, “Oberschlesischer Wanderer”, 16.03.1931, no. 63.

⁴² PA, folder Warschau 198, Consulate General in Katowice to Auswärtiges Amt, 21.03.1931.

⁴³ ANA, MFA 8367, Consulate General in Królewiec [Koenigsberg], 20.12.1935.

⁴⁴ ANA, RP Embassy in Berlin, sign. 2461, correspondance from 1935–1936.

and singing groups “Lutnia” and “Echo” under the baton of Polish conductor performed occasional songs. Ceremony was completed with speeches about Józef Piłsudski and documentary footage from funeral ceremonies in Warsaw, Wilno and Cracow. Over 600 people took place in this event. It was definitely an unprecedented spectacle of Polishness in the whole interwar period in German part of the region.⁴⁵

Movies about Marshall were also presented in Zabrze, Bytom, Dobrodzień and Strzelce Opolskie (here visited by consul Bohdan Ostoja-Samborski). Unfortunately, it can't be confirmed if the screenings were held in cinemas or other kind of facilities. However they were all organized by ZPwN, and they always attracted few hundred spectators. They were also monitored by secret police, whose reports are one of our primary sources of information. Names of activists taking part in specific projection were always mentioned together with the most important issues of their speeches, titles of performed Polish songs and the course of the event.⁴⁶

The willingness of cooperation declared by Third Reich, followed by obstacles meet by Polish films on German market, motivated by German's with their poor artistic quality, resulted in some co-productions initiated by German side and even few German films which included Polish plots: *Walc pożegnalny* (*Abschiedswalzer*, dir. Géza von Bolváry, 1934), *August Mocny* (*August der Starke*, dir. Paul Wegener, Stanisław Wasylewski, 1935/1936), *Der Bettelstudent* (*Student żebrak*, dir. Georg Jacoby, 1936), *Ku wolności* (*Ritt in die Freiheit*, dir. Karl Hartl, 1936/1937) and *Dyplomatyczna żona* (*Abenteurer in Warschau*, dir. Carl Boese, 1937), to name just a few. They were produced in order to neutralize grown conflicts, at least at the governmental level. However, when they entered the cinemas in 1937, in short periods of time, the ignited a lot of controversies in various circles. It resulted, at least partly, from chill in Polish-German relations which came after expiration of Upper Silesian Geneva Convention. One of the most important paragraph of this document signed in 1922 for next 15 years was legal protection of minorities on both sides of the border, protection which expired. In order to keep privileged status of Germans settled in the region, Third Reich started haunting Poles living in the province to show what effects lack of this protection could have. Silesian sanitation hit back intensifying anti-German course, for example by polonization of all aspects of life. Significant illustration of local mood of that time became a mass procedure of changing spelling of names on both sides of the border.

This atmosphere was encountered by movies mentioned above. What's interesting, just like in Upper Silesia where conciliatory politics of Warsaw towards Germany was not approved, province also represented different

⁴⁵ ANO, Opole Region: General Department, sign. 2150, Preussische Geheime Staatspolizei report, 14.05.1936

⁴⁶ Ibidem, report from 24.07.1936.

perspective on Polish-German relationships than Berlin. Its expression became opinions in secret police's reports. Officers penetrating whole province maintained that German part of local community is irritated by projections of *Bettelstudent*, which run was repeatedly extended. Also *Abschiedswalzer* seemed very inappropriate in boarder area. The most harmful politically of all Polish-German Gemeinschaftsfilme was however *Ritt in die Freiheit* about the November Uprising. Additionally irritating for Germans were commentaries in Polish daily paper "Nowiny Codzienne" published in Opole. Account from premiere of the last of above mentioned films was entitles "Berlin lernt polnishes Heldentum kennen" (Berlin learns Polish heroism).⁴⁷

Appeals of local security services achieved positive effect. Even though mutual relationships seemed to be warmed up again as a result of signing minority's law and concluding an official cinematic agreement (28.02.1937), according to reports of Polish MFA from Upper Silesia, Prusy Wschodnie and borderland territories starting from 1938 all German productions containing Polish threads disappeared.⁴⁸ Of course it also concerned Polish movies. Warsaw-Berlin conflicts culminated to such a degree, that on 1.10.1937 Poland terminated recently signed film contract.⁴⁹ On December same year Germany leads to resigning it.⁵⁰ It didn't help much. Although they bought 2 films, *Jego wielka miłość* (dir. Alicja and Anatol Stern, 1936) and *Znachor* (dir. Michał Waszyński, 1937), only the first title was actually distributed in whole Germany, together with regions inhabited by Polish minority.⁵¹ It was probably projected only near Rhineland-Westphalia, where Polish people also lived.⁵² Polish diplomatic and police services reported in 1938 that there wasn't any screenings of domestic movies in the region of Opolszczyzna.⁵³

Certainly because of this lack of Polish titles in regular cinematic circuit ZPwN wanted to proceed with organization of screenings for minority similar to those devoted to Józef Piłsudski. But here appeared an important formal obstacle. Together with creating Reichsfilmkammer (RFK; Film Chamber of the Reich) in 1933, every subject on the market, in order to be an active participant of the cinematic trade, had to join this chamber. As long as ZPwN organized occasional screenings this membership wasn't necessary, but regular activity required full membership. ZPwN didn't agree to this, unlike other micro-societies, for example evangelical or even Jewish. Their organizations decided to be subjected to RFK's control in order to be able to realize their

⁴⁷ *Berlin lernt polnisches Heldentum kennen*, "Nowiny Codzienne", 19.01.1937, no 6.

⁴⁸ ANA, RP Embassy in Berlin, sign. 2467, MFA document, 8.01.1938.

⁴⁹ ANA, RP Embassy in Berlin, sign. 2363, RP Embassy's in Berlin note, 1.10.1937.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, sign. 2464, agreement 22.12.1937.

⁵¹ PA, folder Warschau 197, Ministry of Propaganda from 26.04.1938.

⁵² Ibidem, German Embassy to Auswärtiges Amt, 4.10.1938.

⁵³ ANA, RP Embassy in Berlin, sign. 2464, information from 10.10.1938; ANO, Opole Region, General Department, sign. 1936, police report from 22.10.1938.

statutory objectives through film in the Third Reich.⁵⁴ Without RFK's membership Poles deprived oneself of a possibility of regular screenings. Instead ZPwN returned to lectures with slides (*Lichtbildvorträge*) popular in 10s and 20s. They brought ORNAK's collection of 100 slides presenting various Polish cities and regions. It would be difficult to expect that this form of spectacle would still be attractive for weakly motivated audience. We know from German reports that those lectures didn't enjoyed great attendance.⁵⁵

The only places left where screenings of Polish films could still take place were diplomatic facilities. In 1939 consulate in Opole organized projections twice a month – at first only for activists and later for all members of Polish minority. Only few tens of people could take part in those screenings since space was very limited. They presented not only travelogues but also fiction feature films like *Halka* (dir. Juliusz Gardan, 1937). Information on these events can be found in consul's Jan Małczyński memoirs and secret reports of German police.⁵⁶

Conclusions

How than can we evaluate situation of Polish cinema in Germany during 20s and 30s? Its presence on screens was determined by actual political issues. During the 20s anti-Polish revisionism dominated. After 1933 officially declared cooperation was interrupted time and again under any pretext. It seems though that despite those difficulties during the Third Reich period more Polish films were bought than in times of Weimar Republic (see the table).

Of course politics wasn't the only context in which Polish films can be examined. Their artistic and market potential, or lack of it, also had fundamental importance. Regardless of officials' intentions Polish films had little chance of success in German cinemas and their presence was possible thanks to diplomatic aid. The only name that could be sold on German market was Gabriela Zapolska; *Policmajster Tagiejew* based on her drama found its way to cinemas without any governmental assistance. What's more, two times Germans alone filmed *Warszawska cytadela* (*Die Warschauer Zitadelle*, 1. dir. Jakob i Luise Fleck, 1929/1930; 2. dir. Fritz Peter Buch, 1937), and cinemas screened it eagerly.

⁵⁴ See U. Biel, *Życie kinowe społeczności żydowskiej na terenie Górnego Śląska w okresie międzywojennym*, [in:] *Żydzi na Górnym Śląsku w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. B. Kalinowska-Wójcik, D. Keller, Muzeum w Rybniku, Rybnik–Katowice 2012, p. 243–256.

⁵⁵ ANO, Opole Region, General Department, sign. 2150, Omak's register of film-slides from 10.02.1937; documents of region's president from 8.07.1937, 31.08.1938.

⁵⁶ J. Małczyński, *Moja praca w Konsulacie Generalnym Rzeczypospolitej w Opolu*, Instytut Śląski, Opole 1980, p. 50; ANO, Opole Region, General Department, sign. 2107, secret police report from 30.04.1939.

It demonstrates the role of national specificity and local market as a crucial barriers blocking film's success abroad. It is especially noticeable from contemporary perspective. Over two decades of good Polish-German relations and overcoming political bias didn't lead to the increase of Polish films in cinemas of our neighbours. Number of films distributed in Germany today isn't bigger than before World War II. Only through extending festival infrastructure, organizing retrospectives and conferences which creates a cultural space for films and their potential audience, could Polish cinema succeed abroad.

Trans. Bartosz Zając