

# Cinema at the 5th World Festival of Youth and Students in Warsaw (1955)

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The article examines the cinematic aspects of the 5th World Festival of Youth and Students, held in Warsaw in 1955. It discusses initiatives related to the presence of filmmakers hosted in Poland, film events accompanying the Festival, the repertoire and screenings, as well as the logistical challenges associated with cinema infrastructure during the event. The study is based on an extensive collection of archival materials, primarily from the Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in Warsaw. Among the analysed documents are correspondence, plans, and reports from the bodies responsible for organising the Festival's cinematic components, which shed light on planning processes, the organisers' ambitions, and the outcomes of their efforts. The corpus is complemented by press materials, enriching the analysis with additional contexts not available in the archival documentation.

**KEYWORDS:** Polish culture after 1945; Film Import, Film Culture, World Festival of Youth and Students

## Introduction

The 5th World Festival of Youth and Students, held in Warsaw from 31 July to 14 August 1955, was one of the most significant events in the socio-cultural landscape of the Polish People's Republic in the 1950s. The event, organised

under the slogan "For Peace and Friendship", was unmistakably a propaganda-driven spectacle rooted in the traditions of Stalinist rituals. As Piotr Osęka aptly points out, the Festival was intended "to obscure the true image of communism in the eyes of international opinion (mainly Western), while portraying the communist bloc to its own society as a Mecca of freedom, attracting pilgrims from all over the world."<sup>[1]</sup> However, as acknowledged by historians who have studied the event,<sup>[2]</sup> its significance cannot be reduced merely to its propagandistic nature. The Festival took place during the decline of Stalinist rigidity and served as one of the visible markers of the liberalisation of the system associated with the political thaw.

The Festival brought together young people from diverse cultures and nations, serving as a symbolic opening of Polish society to the world after a period of heightened repression and isolation. With tens of thousands of participants, Warsaw became a hub for sports competitions and artistic performances, framed by political slogans promoting socialism, opposing imperialism, and advocating nuclear disarma-

[1] Piotr Osęka, *Święto inne niż wszystkie. Propaganda i rzeczywistość V Światowego Festiwalu Młodzieży i Studentów w Warszawie*, [in:] *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, Warszawa 2001, p. 352.

[2] Besides Osęka's paper, the most notable work in this field is Andrzej Krzywicki's comprehensive monograph on the Festival. Another compelling analysis can be found in Pia Koivunen's book, which identifies the Warsaw edition as a blueprint for the 1957 Moscow Festival. Andrzej Krzywicki, *Poststalinowski karnawał radości: V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów o Pokój i Przyjaźń, Warszawa 1955 r.; Przygotowania, przebieg, znaczenie*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2009; Pia Koivunen, *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin and Boston 2022, pp. 68–78.

ment. Among the various forms of artistic expression featured during the Festival, cinema played a particularly significant role. The Festival introduced the Polish audience to a new level of variety and number of films, marking it an initiative of unprecedented magnitude that exceeded any cinematic ventures in post-war Poland. Nevertheless, it has been relatively underexplored in film studies, with existing literature providing only limited references to it.<sup>[3]</sup>

This article examines the scale and nature of the Festival's cinematic dimension – this includes activities involving visiting filmmakers, supplementary film events, screenings and their curated repertoire, as well as the logistical challenges associated with cinema infrastructure. The analysis draws on extensive primary sources, including correspondence, plans, and reports from the divisions overseeing the event's cinematic elements, providing insights into the planning processes, the organisers' aspirations, and the resulting outcomes. Press materials are also incorporated to offer further context and enrich the perspective. Given the heavily controlled nature of public discourse in 1950s Poland, these materials – produced under state censorship and political oversight – reflect not only the event itself, but also the regime's efforts to shape its perception and representation.

The study is structured to reflect the administrative organisation of the Festival, in which multiple bodies with limited coordination oversaw different areas of responsibility. The Polish Festival Committee, established in November 1954,<sup>[4]</sup> executed the event in collaboration with the International Festival Committee, under the authority of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the principal organiser. Within this framework, specialised sections managed distinct operational domains such as logistics, medical support, and guest services. Two parts of the paper analyse the roles and activities of key film-related entities embedded in this structure: the Film Centre (*Ośrodek Filmowy*), established in early 1955 to coordinate the production of films about

the Festival, support visiting filmmakers, and assisted foreign film crews documenting the event<sup>[5]</sup>; and the Film Section (*Sekcja Filmowa*), active in various forms since March 1955 and formally gaining autonomy in July 1955, which managed the programming and operations of Warsaw cinemas.<sup>[6]</sup> Both entities were staffed by personnel delegated by the Central Office of Cinema (CUK), which had been collaborating with the Polish Festival Committee since the beginning of 1955.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Visiting Filmmakers and Accompanying Film Events

The majority of filmmakers accredited to the Film Centre belonged to the film crews active during the event. Of the 20 accredited groups, the largest contingents came from Poland, the USSR, France, and Czechoslovakia.<sup>[8]</sup> Smaller teams showcased a wide array of countries, spanning both the socialist bloc – such as Albania, Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Mongolia, North Korea, and Romania – and non-socialist nations, including Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, West Germany, and

[3] Jarosław Grzechowiak, *Rozpowszechnianie na tle ustroju kinematografii pierwszego dziesięciolecia Polski Ludowej: Wprowadzenie*, [in:] Krzysztof Jajko, Konrad Klejsa, Jarosław Grzechowiak et. al, *Rozpowszechnianie filmów w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1944–1956*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2022, p. 84.

[4] Andrzej Krzywicki, op. cit., p. 81.

[5] *Zadania i organizacja Ośrodka Filmowego*, The Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych, hereafter: AAN), collection: V World Youth Festival in Warsaw (V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży w Warszawie, hereafter: V Festival), file: 140, p. 1.

[6] *Plan pracy Grupy Filmów w okresie Festiwalu*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 368, p. 46.

[7] *Wstępne założenia udziału Kinematografii w V ŚFMiS*; AAN, collection: Ministry of Culture and the Arts – Central Office of Cinema (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki – Centralny Urząd Kinematografii, hereafter: MKiS – CUK), file: 11, pp. 35–48.

[8] *Sprawozdanie z pracy Ośrodka Filmowego*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 141, p. 2.

India.[9] Additionally, individual filmmakers represented countries like Brazil, Uruguay, South Korea, Ceylon, and Egypt.[10] From a propaganda standpoint, two teams were of particular importance: the Polish-Soviet film-making group and the team of Polish Film Chronicle (PKF). The first group was led by four directors: Polish documentarian Jerzy Bossak and Soviet filmmakers Ilya Kopalin, Roman Grigoriev, and Iosif Poselsky. The team's efforts resulted in *Meeting in Warsaw* (Pol. *Spotkanie w Warszawie*, Rus. *Varshavskie vstrechi*, 1955), directed by Bossak in collaboration with Soviet colleagues and filmed by over 18 cinematographers from both countries.[11] The film served as a grand propaganda showcase, celebrating the Festival and highlighting the host nation's achievements. In addition to this large-scale production, the team also created smaller films that emphasised the artistic aspects of the event. These included *Songs on the Vistula* (Pol. *Pieśni nad Wisłą*, Rus. *Pesni nad Visloy*, 1955), directed by Poselsky, and *Festival Melodies* (Pol. *Melodie Festiwalu*, Rus. *Melodii Festivalya*, 1955), developed under Kopalin's supervision.

[9] *Wykaz ekip*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 141, pp. 9–10.

[10] Jerzy Peltz, *W festiwalowym Ośrodku Filmowym praca wre*, "Film" 1955, no. 33, pp. 8–9.

[11] Marek Cieśliński, *Poruszyć miliony: Kino Jerzego Bossaka*, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna im. Leona Schillera w Łodzi, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2023, pp. 189–191.

[12] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań do V ŚFMiS*, as cited in Marek Cieśliński, *Piękniej niż w życiu: Polska Kronika Filmowa 1944–1994*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2006, pp. 155–156.

[13] M. Cieśliński, *Piękniej niż w życiu...*, pp. 76–78.

[14] *Sprawozdanie z pracy Ośrodka Filmowego*, op. cit., pp. 7–8.

[15] One exception was the young director Jerzy Passendorfer, who was noted by the organizers for his effective performance in this role. *Ocena polityczna pracy działu obsługi gości zagranicznych*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 141, pp. 17–18.

[16] Ibidem, p. 19.

The PKF's involvement in documenting the Festival was meticulously planned and preceded by several months of recording preparations for the event.[12] During the Festival itself, six newsreels were produced: three thematic editions – *Warsaw Meeting* (*Warszawskie spotkanie*, PKF 32/55), *Peace and Friendship* (*Pokój i przyjaźń*, PKF 33/55), and *Festival Days* (*Festiwalowe dni*, PKF 34/55) – and three special editions: *Welcome the Youth of the World* (*Witamy młodzież świata*), *Forward, Youth of the World* (*Naprzód młodzież świata*), and *Memories of the Festival* (*Wspomnienia z festiwalu*). These newsreels, emblematic of the PKF's propagandistic style, showcased the Festival's vibrant intercultural spirit, underscored the enduring impact of WWII, and amplified anti-nuclear appeals integral to the Festival's message.[13] A logistical task that organisers regarded with particular pride – describing it "as a tremendous achievement of Polish cinema and the Festival" – was the rapid preparation of French, English, and Spanish versions of newsreels, which were presented to 57 foreign delegations prior to their departure from Warsaw.[14]

The Film Centre not only provided technical and logistical support to film crews but also organized leisure activities for guest filmmakers. These efforts were framed as opportunities for "political work", aimed at strengthening ideological influence, boosting the host nation's positive image, and fostering international socialist solidarity, with a particular emphasis on engaging filmmakers from Western countries. Translators assigned to film crews were intended to play a vital role in these efforts, but they often faced criticism for "insufficient political awareness, excessive nervousness, and an overly critical attitude".[15] Official reports noted that poorly evaluated translators were frequently assigned to Western crews, potentially undermining efforts to present communist Poland in a favourable light. At the same time, several filmmakers criticized the Festival's bureaucracy and delays, encapsulated by a rapporteur's remark: "Poles achieve great things but fail in the details".[16] The persistent emphasis on transla-

tors' alleged shortcomings in official documentation suggests an effort to shift responsibility for broader organizational failures onto them.

Archival records show that "political work" included visits to private homes, a trip to a sanatorium near Warsaw, excursions to the Documentary Film Studio (WFD), and private screenings of Polish films arranged upon request for individual filmmakers. While the effectiveness of these efforts is difficult to measure, the records proudly assert: "General sympathy for Poland is fairly widespread and profound, particularly strengthened by recognition of the country's reconstruction achievements and industrial development."<sup>[17]</sup> The activities of foreign film crews were closely monitored, with attention paid not only to the content they recorded but also to their ideological and world-view orientations. Particular attention was given to the Swedish team led by the director Gösta Lewin, with reports highlighting their alleged shift from viewing Poland as poor and underdeveloped to admiring its achievements.<sup>[18]</sup> Opinions on cooperation with film crews varied. Teams from Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, Switzerland, Albania, India, and Sweden were praised for their diligence and friendliness. In contrast, the Romanian and Bulgarian teams faced criticism for being demanding, unfriendly, and occasionally aggressive. One of the two French groups was also criticized for being aloof, superficially polite, mercantile and disinterested in Poland.<sup>[19]</sup>

In addition to the film crews, the Festival hosted a group of filmmakers as honorary guests. The initial plans in this regard were ambitious: over 130 invitations were sent to prominent figures,<sup>[20]</sup> including Charlie Chaplin,<sup>[21]</sup> envisioned by the WFDY as the star of the event. Western invitees<sup>[22]</sup> were selected not only for their achievements, but many were also known for their progressive political views, including prominent Italian filmmakers such as Giuseppe De Santis, Vittorio De Sica, Cesare Zavattini, Luchino Visconti, Gina Lollobrigida,<sup>[23]</sup> and Michelangelo Antonioni.<sup>[24]</sup> From France, invitations were sent to filmmakers and critics

such as Alain Resnais, René Clair, Marcel Carné, Jean Renoir, and Georges Sadoul. The UK was to be represented by Thorold Dickinson and David Lean, among others, while from the USA, invitees included Bette Davis and Dalton Trumbo.<sup>[25]</sup> The curated list of distinguished names sought to boost the event's international prestige and promote socialist ideals through cultural diplomacy. However, these efforts fell short, as none of the aforementioned high-profile figures ultimately attended the Festival.

Among the honorary guests who did attend – though fewer than initially anticipated – was a select and diverse group of filmmakers. Polish directors Aleksander Ford and Jan Rybkowski<sup>[26]</sup> were joined by internationally recognized artists such as Brazilian director Alberto Cavalcanti and Dutch documentarian Joris Ivens. The group also included Kiyohiko Ushihara, a Japanese director; Tikhon Khrennikov, a Soviet film composer; Rosaura Revueltas, a Mexican actress; and Eleonore Pine, a little-known actress from the USA. Additionally, the Festival hosted film critics like Antonín Brousil, a scholar from Czechoslovakia, and Pio Baldelli from Italy.<sup>[27]</sup> Despite the limited number of

[17] *Sprawozdanie z pracy Ośrodka Filmowego*, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

[18] Ibidem.

[19]  *Ocena polityczna pracy działu obsługi gości zagranicznych*, op. cit., p. 19.

[20] *Sprawozdanie z pracy Ośrodka Filmowego*, op. cit., p. 1.

[21] *Lista zaproszeń filmowców*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 145, p. 26.

[22] Invitations to socialist bloc filmmakers were managed by national youth organizations, resulting in scarce records. – *Sprawozdanie z pracy Ośrodka Filmowego*, op. cit., p. 1.

[23] *Notatka dla tow. Kleszcza* p. 435, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 140, p. 36.

[24] *Lista wysłanych zaproszeń*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 145, p. 13.

[25] Ibidem, pp. 10–13.

[26] *Polscy goście honorowi na V Festiwal*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 235, p. 45.

[27] *Wykaz gości honorowych*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 235, pp. 48–57.

film-related honorary guests,[28] the organizers emphasized their presence through extensive media coverage, particularly in the magazine

[28] A. Krzywicki includes French actor Gérard Philipe among the Festival's attendees, but this claim appears inaccurate. While he was invited, no evidence confirms his presence, and the press, which reported on other guests, omits him. It is likely Krzywicki confused Gérard Philipe with Philippe-Gérard, the composer who did attend as an honorary guest. The confusion may have been reinforced by Gérard Philipe's later visit to Warsaw in November 1955, alongside René Clair and other actors, to promote *The Grand Manoeuvre* – Andrzej Krzywicki, op. cit., p. 51.

[29] Alberto Cavalcanti w Warszawie, "Film" 1955, no. 34, p. 2; Jerzy Bereda, *Alberto Cavalcanti: Krótka historia jego pracy*, "Film" 1955, no. 36, pp. 9, 14; Lew Bukowiecki, *Alberto Cavalcanti: Dziesięć minut rozmowy*, "Film" 1955, no. 36, p. 8.

[30] Jerzy Bereda, *Rosaura Revueltas: Bohaterka filmu "Sól ziemi"*, "Film" 1955, no. 33, p. 4; Lew Bukowiecki, *O Dylu Sowizdrzale*, "Film" 1955, no. 34, p. 6; idem, *Rozmowa z reżyserem japońskim*, "Film" 1955, no. 34, p. 7; Jerzy Giżycki, *O muzyce filmowej mówi radziecki kompozytor Tichon Chrennikow*, "Film" 1955, no. 33, p. 5.

[31] Andrzej Rumian, *Spotkanie z Eleonorą Pine*, "Film" 1955, no. 34, p. 6; Adam W. Wysocki, *Ze sceny nowojorskiej – na ekran warszawski*, "Życie Warszawy", 9.08.1955, p. 3.

[32] *Zadania i organizacja Ośrodka Filmowego*, op. cit., p. 1.

[33] Extensive excerpts from it were reprinted in the press – see: Jerzy Toeplitz, *Bohater filmowy naszych czasów*, "Film" 1955, no. 34, pp. 8–9.

[34] *Seminarium młodych filmowców*, "Film" 1955, no. 33, p. 3.

[35] An account of the discussion was published in "Przegląd Kulturalny" and "Trybuna Ludu" – Jerzy Płażewski, *Bohater twojego filmu*, "Przegląd Kulturalny" 1955, no. 32, p. 8; Irena Merz, *Bohater filmowy naszych czasów*, "Trybuna Ludu", 9.08.1955, p. 3.

[36] Zbigniew Gadomski, *W parlamencie młodych filmowców*, "Film" 1955, no. 35, p. 6.

[37] *Lista filmów zakwalifikowanych w międzynarodowym konkursie filmowym*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 282, pp. 8–9.

[38] Bolesław Michałek, *Festiwalowy konkurs filmów dokumentalnych*, "Przegląd Kulturalny" 1955, no. 34, p. 7.

"Film", which highlighted Cavalcanti as the most prestigious filmmaker at the event.[29] Other guests were featured in brief press interviews,[30] with their achievements sometimes exaggerated, as in the case of Eleonore Pine.[31] Notably, most honorary guests came from capitalist countries, underscoring the organizers' effort to portray the Festival's cinematic segment as committed to international diversity rather than dominated by the Eastern Bloc, even amid challenges in the broader invitation campaign.

The meeting place for filmmakers from around the world was the venue of the Union of Polish Stage Artists (SPATiF), where Jerzy Toeplitz, later rector of the Łódź Film School, organised the Filmmakers Club.[32] It became a hub for networking and creative exchange. Another platform for intellectual discussion was a three-day seminar at Warsaw's Pac Palace, inaugurated by Toeplitz's keynote address.[33] The event brought together over 200 filmmakers, educators, and students from dozens of countries, with the majority representing Polish, Soviet, and Czech film schools.[34] The seminar centred on two key themes: the portrayal of protagonists in contemporary cinema and the challenges of film education. Lively discussions also highlighted another pressing issue – the infrastructural and material struggles faced by film industries in post-colonial nations.[35] Concluding the event, Aleksander Ford emphasized: "The seminar revealed an unexpected but clearly articulated issue: the need for film-related assistance from more prosperous countries to those underdeveloped in cinema".[36] His remarks echoed the Festival's broader role as a platform for the socialist bloc to influence the emerging nations of Africa and Asia.

Another initiative for young filmmakers was the international film competition, showcasing a selection of documentaries across student, amateur, and professional categories.[37] The competition awards predominantly honoured films from socialist countries, along with Western productions reflecting the Festival's progressive, anti-imperialist themes.[38] In the professional category, the top award went

to Joachim Hadaschik from East Germany for *Vietnam* (1954), a film about the country's post-1945 history. Gold medals were awarded to Wiktor Janik of Poland for *We Were in Bucharest* (*Byliśmy w Bukareszcie*, 1953), a retrospective of a previous Festival; Jiří Lehovec from Czechoslovakia for *The Colorful World of Otakar Nejedlý* (*Barevný svět Otakara Nejedlého*, 1954), a documentary on the renowned painter; and René Vautier from France for the anti-colonial *Africa 50* (*Afrique 50*, 1950). One of the silver medals in this category went to Andrzej Munk from Poland for *Sunday Morning* (*Niedzielny poranek*, 1955), a film celebrating the newly rebuilt city of Warsaw. In the amateur competition, Australians Jerome Levy and Keith Gow won the top prize for *The Hungry Miles* (1955), a documentary on harsh waterfront working conditions, and a gold medal for *Pensions for Veterans* (1953), highlighting struggles of retired dock workers. An equal award was given to a team from Waseda University in Japan for *Infinite Eyes* (*Mugen no Hitomi*, 1955), the story of a Tokyo teenager who died of leukaemia a decade after surviving the Hiroshima atomic bombing. The main student award went to Bruno Šefranka of Czechoslovakia for *The Puppets of Jiří Trnka* (*Loutky Jiřího Trnky*, 1955), a tribute to the iconic puppet-maker. Additionally, non-competitive prizes honoured experienced filmmakers, including Jiří Trnka himself, who received a lifetime achievement award for his youth-focused works. Special recognition went to André Cayatte's *Before the Deluge* (*Avant le déluge*, 1954) and Aleksander Ford's *Five Boys from Barska Street* (*Piątka z ulicy Barskiej*, 1954) for capturing the aspirations of young people.<sup>[39]</sup>

### Film Programme and Cinematic Infrastructure

The development of the film programme encountered major challenges in the early stages of the Festival preparations, primarily due to a dual-track planning approach. The international leadership proposed a programme deemed "unrealistic" by Polish planners, as it was neither

based on a catalogue of films available in Poland nor supported by confirmed commitments from foreign delegations.<sup>[40]</sup> An October 1954 document offers insights into the early Festival plans, detailing proposals submitted to the Secretariat of the WFDY. To outshine previous editions, a strong emphasis on cinema was proposed, including a retrospective of "the greatest films in the history of cinema," with titles like *Battleship Potemkin*, *The Blue Angel*, *The Grand Illusion*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. As mentioned earlier, the plans also included inviting Charlie Chaplin and showcasing his works.<sup>[41]</sup>

The Polish team proposed a modest programme based on films available domestically through the national distributor, the Film Rental Office (CWF). Rejected by the international leadership, it led to weeks of negotiations. The joint plan, finalized in June, included 111 feature films from 20 countries – 60% from People's Democracies and 40% from other states<sup>[42]</sup> – along with 70 documentaries sourced from Polish collections, primarily Eastern Bloc productions.<sup>[43]</sup> However, these plans underwent significant revisions, as organizers lacked complete information about the films foreign delegations would provide until the last moment.<sup>[44]</sup> Many of them failed to respond to inquiries or brought unannounced films,<sup>[45]</sup> leading, as one rapporteur noted, to "a sponta-

[39] *Wyniki festiwalowego konkursu filmowego, "Film"* 1955, no. 33, p. 2.

[40] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych w czasie V ŚFMiS, AAN*, collection: V Festival, file: 370, p. 23.

[41] *Druga propozycja w sprawie treści programu V Festiwalu*, AAN, collection: MKiS – CUK, file: 3, pp. 61–79.

[42] *Notatka dot. projektu repertuaru filmowego w okresie Festiwalu*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 369, pp. 53–54.

[43] *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

[44] *Krótkie dane o organizacji pokazów filmowych w czasie V Festiwalu Młodzieży i Studentów w Warszawie*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, p. 18.

[45] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., p. 24.

neous, voluntary influx, resulting in a random arrangement of the programme.”<sup>[46]</sup>

The unexpectedly large inflow of foreign films allowed the organisers to fulfil their long-stated ambition of surpassing the 1953 Budapest Festival’s record, which featured 102 feature films from 17 countries and 52 documentaries from 22 countries.<sup>[47]</sup> Particularly notable was the number of documentaries received – 24 delegations brought a total of 122 films, predominantly shorts. Official reports noted that the sheer volume of submissions made it nearly impossible to review them all before screening, adding that it was only by “pure chance” that no ideologically unacceptable titles ended up in the programme.<sup>[48]</sup> Ultimately, alongside a smaller number of works from national collections than initially planned, 157

documentaries were shown. Additionally, 11 delegations submitted 30 feature films, 27 of which were approved for screening. Most were already familiar to Polish audiences, with only three from non-socialist countries: Switzerland, Finland, and Algeria. The programme also included 82 titles from the CWF, 30 of them new to Polish viewers. Altogether, it featured over 40 feature-length premieres, only four of which failed to enter regular distribution after the Festival. This result far surpassed Poland’s quarterly average for new film releases.<sup>[49]</sup> In total, the Festival showcased over 260 films, representing the output of 35 countries (Table 1), thereby establishing itself as a truly diverse film event that connects Poland with cinema from around the globe.

The Festival’s documentation offers little insight into the significance organisers placed on specific titles. However, the press coverage highlighted the most anticipated and discussed films.<sup>[50]</sup> The standout works were mainly feature films debuting in Poland, with documentaries receiving less attention.<sup>[51]</sup> Among the most notable were Western films with socialist themes, such as *Salt of the Earth* (1954), an American drama by Herbert J. Biberman, a filmmaker blacklisted during the McCarthy era. Made outside the Hollywood system, the film portrays a miners’ strike in 1950s New Mexico. Beyond its political context, its significance was further heightened by the in-person appearance of Rosaura Revueltas, who played the lead role. The film symbolically opened the Festival’s screenings,<sup>[52]</sup> inaugurating the ceremonial gala at the “Moskwa” cinema on 2 August.<sup>[53]</sup> Another standout from the USA was the independent film *Little Fugitive* (1953), directed by Ray Ashley, Morris Engel, and Ruth Orkin, praised for the genuine performances of its young cast.

French cinema had the strongest presence among Western countries, with 11 titles previously unknown to Polish audiences. Leading the selection were *Beauties of the Night (Les Belles de nuit)*, 1952 by René Clair and the previously mentioned *Before the Deluge* by André Cayatte.

[46] *Krótki ocena festiwalowych pokazów filmowych*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, p. 20.

[47] *Plan wyświetlania filmów podczas V Festiwalu*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, p. 1.

[48] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., pp. 24–25.

[49] *Ibidem*.

[50] See *Jakie filmy zobaczy Warszawa w dniach V Światowego Festiwalu Młodzieży*, “Film” 1955, no. 30–31, p. 2; J. L., *Z X Muzą na Festiwalu*, “Film” 1955, no. 34, p. 3, 13; *Na ekranach Festiwalu (1)*, “Przegląd Kulturalny” 1955, no. 32, p. 8; *Na ekranach Festiwalu (2)*, “Przegląd Kulturalny” 1955, no. 33, p. 7; *Na ekranach festiwalowych (3)*, “Przegląd Kulturalny” 1955, no. 34, p. 7; *Na festiwalowych ekranach*, “Życie Warszawy”, 9.08.1955, p. 6; Bronisław Wawroński, *Jakie filmy ujrzymy na festiwalu*, “Młodzież Świata” 1955, no. 7, pp. 13, 24.

[51] Zbigniew Pitera, *Na festiwalowym ekranie: Wśród filmów dokumentalnych*, “Film” 1955, no. 35, p. 4.

[52] Film screenings had already been taking place for three days at the time.

[53] That evening, audiences also watched a newsreel of the Festival’s opening alongside *Varsovie, quand même...* (1954, dir. Y. Bellon), a French documentary about Warsaw’s wartime destruction and post-war rebirth. *Otwarcie festiwalowego pokazu filmowego*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 369, pp. 75–77.

**Table 1.** Films Screened at the Festival by Country of Production

	Country	Feature Films	Documentaries	Total	% of the Programme	
1	communist countries	Poland	14	26	40	57.89%
2		Czechoslovakia	9	10	19	
3		Soviet Union	8	11	19	
4		Romania	4	14	18	
5		East Germany	9	7	16	
6		Hungary	6	9	15	
7		North Korea	1	8	9	
8		Bulgaria	3	4	7	
9		China	5	2	7	
10		Vietnam	0	3	3	
11		Albania	0	1	1	
12	capitalist and non-aligned countries and territories	France	15	4	19	42.11%
13		Italy	11	8	19	
14		India	2	9	11	
15		Norway	0	9	9	
16		Japan	4	3	7	
17		Canada	0	7	7	
18		United Kingdom	4	1	5	
19		Finland	1	3	4	
20		USA	3	0	3	
21		Mexico	3	0	3	
22		Israel	0	3	3	
23		Uruguay	0	3	3	
24		Australia	1	2	3	
25		Austria	1	2	3	
26		Denmark	1	2	3	
27		Luxembourg	0	2	2	
28		Argentina	1	0	1	
29		Algeria	1	0	1	
30		Sweden	1	0	1	
31		Switzerland	1	0	1	
32		Egypt	0	1	1	
33		Iceland	0	1	1	
34		Iran	0	1	1	
35		Netherlands	0	1	1	
		<b>Total</b>	109	157	266	

Source: Compiled based on AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 369 and file: 370.

Albert Lamorisse's Cannes-winning short film *White Mane* (*Crin-Blanc*, 1954) also earned high praise for its cinematography and poetic atmosphere. In contrast, Italian cinema was represented mainly by familiar neorealist masterpieces already well-known to Polish audiences. Of the four Italian premieres, Carlo Lizzani's war drama *Attention! Bandits!* (*Achtung! Banditi!*, 1951) garnered the most interest. Meanwhile, Arne Mattsson's Swedish production *One Summer of Happiness* (*Hon dansade en sommar*, 1951) stood out among films from smaller European industries. Reports on Asian cinema centred on the premieres of Japanese films. Festival audiences saw *The Cannery Boat* (*Kanikōsen*, 1953) by Sō Yamamura, based on Takiji Kobayashi's anti-capitalist novel. Kaneto Shindō's *Children of Hiroshima* (*Gembaku no ko*, 1952), with its strong anti-nuclear message, and Tadashi Imai's anthology *An Inlet of Muddy Water* (*Nigorie*, 1953) also attracted significant attention. In contrast, Chinese films garnered minimal coverage, with only Sang Hu and Huang Sha's adaptation of the opera *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (1953) earning some recognition in the press.

Unsurprisingly, films from other communist countries, making up over half the lineup (Table 1), received more prominence. Leading the segment were USSR productions, though fewer were shown than initially planned, as Soviet officials insisted only their latest works be included.<sup>[54]</sup> Highlights featured the Cannes-awarded cinematic ballet *Romeo and Juliet* (*Romeo i Dzhulyetta*, 1955) by Lev Arnshtam and Leonid Lavrovsky, *A Big Family* (*Bolshaya semya*, 1954) by Iosif Kheifits, based on Vsevolod Kochetov's novel *Zhurbiny*, and

[54] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych..., op. cit.*, p. 25.

[55] *Ibidem*, p. 28.

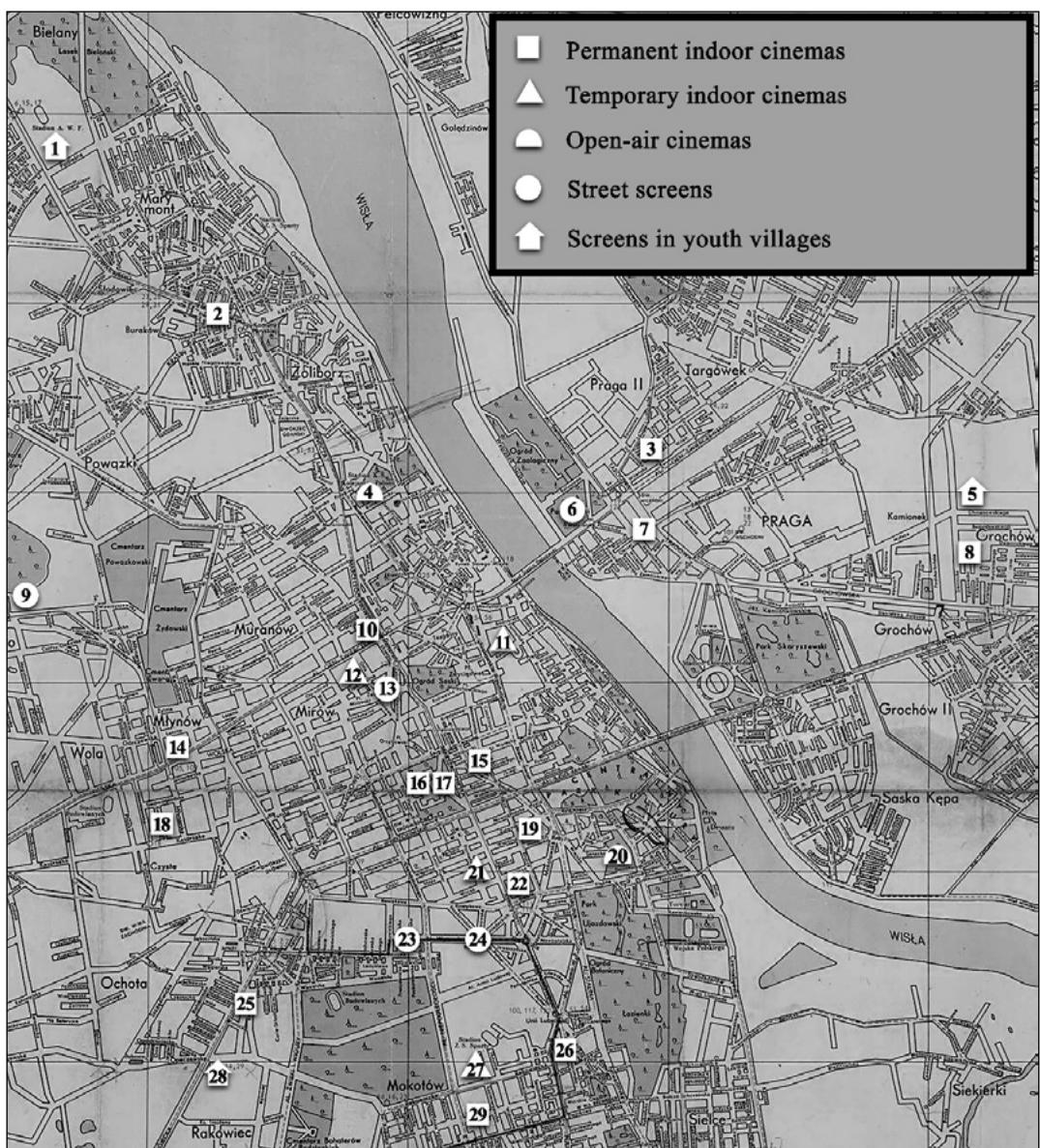
[56] Jerzy S. Majewski, *Historia warszawskich kin*, Agora S.A., Warszawa 2019, pp. 61–71.

[57] Jerzy Toeplitz, *Drogi rozwoju kinematografii*, [in:] *Historia filmu polskiego*, vol. 3: 1939–1956, ed. idem, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1974, p. 200.

[58] Jerzy S. Majewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 326–327.

*Restless Youth* (*Trevozhnaya molodost*, 1955) by Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov, about young people after the October Revolution. Other notable entries were Lev Atamanov's animation *The Golden Antelope* (*Zolotaya antilopa*, 1954), inspired by an Indian folktale, and Aleksandr Ivanovsky's comedy *Tamer of Tigers* (*Ukrotitelnitsa tigrov*, 1955). In contrast, Polish productions, though numerous, attracted less attention, as most were already familiar to audiences. Only two films – Andrzej Munk's *Men of the Blue Cross* (*Błękitny krzyż*, 1955) and the anthology *Three Starts* (*Trzy starty*, 1955) by Stanisław Lenartowicz, Ewa Petelska, and Czesław Petelski – were presented as pre-premiere screenings, introducing fresh content. Other Eastern Bloc countries, like the host nation, were mostly represented by previously known films, prompting organisers to voice frustration that many of these took up screen time that could have been allocated to more engaging works.<sup>[55]</sup> Nonetheless, a few notable premieres drew press attention, including comedies such as the Czechoslovak *The Circus Will Be* (*Cirkus bude!*, 1954) by Oldřich Lipský, the Hungarian *Lily Boy* (*Liliomfi*, 1954) by Károly Makk, and the Romanian *Our Director* (*Directorul nostru*, 1955) by Jean Georgescu. East German cinema also left an impression with two films exploring the Nazi era: Kurt Maetzig's *Marriage in the Shadows* (*Ehe im Schatten*, 1947) and Slatan Dudow's *Stronger than the Night* (*Stärker als die Nacht*, 1954).

Providing venues for screenings proved even more challenging than organising the film programme. With most of Warsaw's pre-war cinemas destroyed, rebuilding was a slow process involving the restoration of surviving cinemas and the construction of new ones.<sup>[56]</sup> By late 1954, the city had only one cinema seat per 106 residents, compared to one per 30 in 1939.<sup>[57]</sup> A slight improvement came in July 1955, just before the Festival, with the opening of cinemas in the newly built Palace of Culture and Science.<sup>[58]</sup> Nevertheless, the city's cinema capacity remained well below pre-war levels. Given these constraints, it is unsurprising that the



**Permanent indoor cinemas:** 2. Tęcza; 3. Syrena; 7. Praha; 8. 1 Maj; 10. Muranów; 14. W-Z; 15. Palladium; 16-17. Przyjaźń and Młoda Gwardia (in the Palace of Culture and Science); 18. Mazowsze; 19. Śląsk; 22. Polonia; 25. Ochota; 26. Moskwa; 29. Stolica.

**Temporary indoor cinemas:** 11. The Citizens' Militia Club; 12. Warsaw House of Culture; 21. Headquarters of Metro-Projekt; 27. The auditorium of the Main School of Planning and Statistics.

**Open-air cinemas:** 4. Cinema at the "Kolejarz" Stadium (nowadays "Polonia"); 20. Jutrzenka.

**Locations of street screens:** 6. Praga Park (Park Praski); 9. Koło district; 13. Iron Gate Square; 23. Courtyard of the TPD school; 24. Workers' Unity Square.

**Screens in the youth villages:** 1. Bielany; 5. Grochów; 28. Rakowiec.

**Figure 1.** Cinematic Infrastructure of the Festival

Source: Compiled based on AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370.

Central Board of Cinemas (CZK), in its January 1955 proposal to the Polish Festival Committee, outlined a modest plan for the Festival's cinema infrastructure. The proposal included just three indoor cinemas and ten outdoor screens to be installed at various locations across the capital.<sup>[59]</sup> However, it quickly became clear that demand far outstripped initial expectations.

By spring, a revised plan proposed 35 screens, comprising permanent and temporary indoor venues as well as open-air screens, with a combined capacity of over 26,000 seats.<sup>[60]</sup> The press lauded the "dizzying" number of cinemas, suggesting they could host over a million viewers.<sup>[61]</sup> This ambitious vision, though slightly scaled down, laid the groundwork for future plans.

By the start of the Festival, the Film Section managed 29 screens, including 15 permanent in-

door cinemas that had been renovated in preparation for the event,<sup>[62]</sup> with one equipped for widescreen films.<sup>[63]</sup> Most of these venues were built between 1949 and 1955, with only a few – "Palladium", "Polonia", "Syrena", and "Tęcza" – dating back to the pre-war era. During the Festival, four temporary halls were set up in auditoriums and halls of various municipal and state institutions. The infrastructure was further expanded with outdoor screens, including two summer cinemas, six street screens in parks and public squares, and three in youth villages on the city's outskirts, offering film screenings for Polish youth staying there during the event (Figure 1). While indoor and open-air cinemas required paid tickets (except for documentaries), street screens and those in youth villages were free of charge.<sup>[64]</sup>

Although the records lack precise attendance figures for specific screenings, they clearly indicate that audience numbers were often disappointing. This was partly attributed to insufficient poster promotion<sup>[65]</sup> and the scheduling of screenings at excessively late hours.<sup>[66]</sup> Another indicator of attendance issues was the low turnout for special evening screenings of films from socialist countries, presented in English, French, German, and Spanish for Western delegates. In response to the lack of interest, organisers improvised by arranging screenings in individual delegation quarters, using mobile projectors for more intimate, tailored presentations.<sup>[67]</sup> For Polish audiences, a significant barrier was the screening of films exclusively in their original languages, without Polish subtitles or dubbing, affecting up to 35% of the programme.<sup>[68]</sup> Reports highlighted that "the incomprehensibility of dialogues and action deterred Polish audiences from even the most appealing films."<sup>[69]</sup> Although summaries of the films were read aloud before the screenings, this solution had only a minimal impact on improving the situation.<sup>[70]</sup> Despite these challenges, which likely contributed to the press's prediction of one million viewers not being met, the final attendance of nearly 640,000 should be considered a significant achievement (Table 2).

[59] *Udział CZK w organizacji imprez złotowych*, AAN, collection: MKiS – CUK, file: 11, p. 42.

[60] *Plan wyświetlania filmów...*, op. cit., pp. 1–8.

[61] Adam Kulik, *Film na Festiwalu*, "Przegląd Kulturalny" 1955, no. 22, p. 6.

[62] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., p. 22.

[63] It was the "Śląsk" cinema, where just before the Festival, on 30th July, the first widescreen film screening in Poland was held. See *Pokaz pierwszego w Polsce filmu panoramicznego*, "Film" 1955, no. 33, p. 2.

[64] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., pp. 26–27.

[65] *Krótkie dane o organizacji pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., p. 18.

[66] Initially, all indoor cinemas hosted four daily screenings, but by 3 August, low attendance at 10:00 p.m. shows led to their cancellation. *Protokół nr 38 z posiedzenia sztabu w dniu 3.08.1955 r.*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 4, p. 16.

[67] *Krótkie dane o organizacji pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., p. 17.

[68] *Krótką oceną festiwalowych pokazów filmowych*, AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, p. 20.

[69] *Sprawozdanie z przygotowań i przebiegu pokazów filmowych...*, op. cit., p. 35.

[70] *Krótką oceną festiwalowych pokazów filmowych*, op. cit., p. 20.

**Table 2.** Viewers at Screenings by Type of Venue

Place of Screening	Number of screenings	Number of Viewers	% of Total Viewers
1 19 Indoor Venues	1,206	343,732	53.83%
2 2 Open-Air Cinemas	26	23,635	3.70%
3 5 Street Screens	75	151,400	23.71%
4 3 Screens in Youth Villages	36	119,800	18.76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,343</b>	<b>638,567</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, p. 29.

Although the available records do not provide information on the audience numbers for individual films, aggregated data on screenings and viewer figures for productions from various countries (Tables 3 and 4) provides a valuable basis for analysis. Notably, Soviet and Polish films achieved disproportionately high audience shares as a percentage of total viewers, exceeding their respective proportions of total screenings. While this outcome could partly reflect overreporting by officials eager to highlight the success of communist cultural policy, a closer analysis reveals a more nuanced explanation rooted in the dynamics of the Festival's screening venues and programming.

**Table 3.** Screenings by Country of Film Production

Country of Production	Number of Screenings	% of Total Screenings
1 France	225	16.75%
2 Soviet Union	139	10.35%
3 Italy	131	9.75%
4 Czechoslovakia	121	9.01%
5 Poland	96	7.15%
6 Hungary	73	5.44%
7 East Germany	71	5.29%
8 Japan	69	5.14%
9 Mexico	67	4.99%
10 China	56	4.17%
Others	295	21.97%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,343</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, pp. 30–31.

A key insight emerges from analysing attendance across screening locations (Table 2). Despite relatively few showings, street screens significantly contributed to overall viewership. Their open-air format, combined with favourable weather, free access, and the absence of seating restrictions, likely drew large and diverse audiences. The estimated nature of attendance figures for these venues may have further amplified their share of total viewers. In contrast, open-air cinemas, which required tickets and were limited by seating capacity, attracted noticeably smaller numbers. The film selection for street screens, therefore, appears to be crucial and strategic in shaping the ultimate viewer-

**Table 4.** Viewers at Screenings by Country of Film Production

Country of Production	Number of Viewers	% of Total Viewers
1 Soviet Union	97,648	15.29%
2 France	91,365	14.31%
3 Poland	79,907	12.51%
4 Italy	61,269	9.59%
5 Czechoslovakia	47,396	7.42%
6 Mexico	37,814	5.92%
7 Hungary	36,637	5.74%
8 East Germany	31,825	4.98%
9 Japan	27,520	4.31%
10 USA	25,097	3.93%
Others	102,089	15.99%
<b>Total</b>	<b>638,567</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: AAN, collection: V Festival, file: 370, pp. 30–31.

ship numbers. Polish productions accounted for 32.5% of the repertoire, with Soviet titles adding another 30%. By comparison, only one French and two Italian films were included.<sup>[71]</sup> This stark imbalance suggests a deliberate effort to highlight Polish and Soviet cinema in the final attendance figures. This approach was less evident in the programming of screens in youth villages, which offered a more balanced and diverse selection.<sup>[72]</sup> Thus, although other factors may have contributed to the strong performance of Polish and Soviet productions – such as the novelty of most Soviet films, which enhanced their appeal, and the potential support for Polish films from local audiences, particularly given that many screenings lacked Polish-language versions – it can be assumed that the relative popularity of Western films might have been higher than suggested by the official statistics.

### Conclusion

Given the outlined evidence, it is unequivocal that the cinematic aspect of the Festival represented one of the most ambitious and multifaceted film initiatives of its time within Polish borders. It encompassed a broad array of activities, including attracting filmmakers from around the globe, organising a film competition and an academic seminar, curating a diverse film programme, and establishing infrastructure that, even by contemporary standards, would be considered impressive. Taken together, these elements positioned the Festival as a pivotal moment in the post-war history of Polish film culture – an achievement unmatched for decades. Operating within the confines of a heavily propagandistic socialist framework, the film elements of the Festival provided early glimpses of cultural liberalization – a process that would eventually culminate in the transformative events of October

1956. This nascent openness was evident in the enthusiastic audience response, drawn by the appeal of new foreign films, as well as in the unique opportunities the Festival created for dialogue between visiting filmmakers and their Polish counterparts. In this way, the event not only reflected the cultural shifts of the era but also played an active role in fostering them.

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