

Compartmentalisation and its Influence on Film Distribution and Exhibition in The Netherlands, 1934-1936

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Dutch society was strongly compartmentalised¹, with four major religious and ideological movements each commanding their own social infrastructure, including trade unions, schools, media and governance. Social interactions of members were supposed to be confined to their counterparts and only at the highest levels of society would representatives of these movements meet and work together. Though additional research from Blom and his co-editor Talsma has shown that this compartmentalisation was not always as strict as it was supposed to be, in general it is, as Knippenberg and Van der Wusten stated, still considered a strong explanatory model for the way Dutch society was organized during this period.

Such compartmentalisation may well have influenced the distribution of films. As its stories, characters and setting often relate to particular social groups and issues, reflecting or even challenging current status quo in a society, films likely have their appeal limited to particular compartments in a society. Holbrook and Grayson, and Kozinets provide some interesting examples from this in their work on film consumer behaviour. In our case, the Christian struggle in Nero's Rome of DeMille's *Sign of the Cross* (1932) is likely deemed more appropriate for the Catholic compartment than dancing beauty and lion tamer Mae West in Ruggles' *I'm No Angel* (1933). With Dutch regions strongly differing in the prominence of particular compartments, such influence should be evident in specific geographical distributions: films only to be shown in particular cities and/or cinemas, depending on the dominant compartment in that location. On the other hand, as suggested by Dibbets in the *Dutch Journal for Media History*, film exhibitors might try to stay away as much as possible from any ideological connotation, as this would limit financial success. In such cases, distribution patterns would reveal films being shown in any cinema, regardless of their contents. In sum, we conjecture that a historical analysis of the geographical distribution of films in The Netherlands in this period may serve as an appropriate testing ground to gain more insight into the role of compartmentalisation on film distribution and exhibition.

1 The Dutch word for this is 'verzuiling' and has also been referred to in English texts as 'pillarization'.

In this paper, we first discuss the nature of compartmentalisation in The Netherlands and the stance of the various compartments on films and film attendance. We then introduce our dataset of 23,674 film programmes over a three year period of 143 cinemas spread across the country and propose a method for analysing such data for patterns in distribution. While subsequent analyses indeed reveal particular patterns in the distribution of films, the interpretation of the results suggest that these are more likely attributable to general business economic motivations. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and propose avenues for further research.

Compartmentalisation in The Netherlands

From 1900 until 1930 Catholics and Protestants had emancipated and formed political parties that gained more and more power. The fear of a socialist revolution stimulated the strengthening of the own group even more. In the thirties four compartments crystallized: the Catholic, Protestant, Liberal and Socialist compartments. In hindsight, the Catholic and Protestant compartments not only were the largest compartments, each three times larger than either the Socialists or Liberals, but also are regarded as the best examples of true compartmentalisation. Both consisted of a cross section of all the different social layers in Dutch society, which was not the case with the Socialists (lower social classes) and the Liberals (higher social classes). But in terms of organization as unions, educational and cultural institutes, the Socialists were a good example of a compartment as well (Schuursma 2000: 190).

Ideally, this compartmentalisation meant that one would spend his/her life within a certain group. So if a man was a Catholic, his children went to a Catholic school, he bought bread at the Catholic baker's from the same parish and of course he would marry a girl of the same faith. But there was more to it. People wanted to spend their leisure time somewhere. To prevent that a youngster, a workman etc. would search his/her pleasures in the 'wrong' places, a dynamic club life came into being in the early teens and twenties of the twentieth century, with Catholic amateur theatre groups, Protestant camping societies, Socialist reading clubs etc. In 1924, the Socialists and the Nederlandse Verbond van Vakverenigingen (Dutch Employee's Organisation) founded the Instituut voor Arbeiders Ontwikkeling (Institute for Labourer Education). To raise the intellectual level of its members, it offered lectures, theatrical performances and film screenings.

Since the Protestants did not want to have anything to do with cinema and even forbade cinema right from the start, one would expect to see less cinemas in heavily Protestant oriented regions (Van der Burg/Van den Heuvel 1991:

55). Catholics embraced cinema very early and tried to use the medium to convey the right moral message. When this did not work they were very active in censor committees to prevent their Catholic flock to watch the ‘wrong’ films. When in 1926 the law on national film censorship was finally effectuated it was still possible for local councils to have a local censor redoing the work of the national censor. Especially in Catholic councils this right was extensively used (Van der Burg and Van der Heuvel 1991: 55). Therefore we might expect different film programming in heavily Catholic oriented regions.

As shown in Figure 1, compartmentalisation had a strong geographical aspect. Especially the religious compartments of the Catholics and the Protestants were attached to certain Dutch regions. Figure 1 shows the results of the elections for the Dutch Parliament in 1933. Catholic parties (red shades), were heavily concentrated in the south. Voters of Protestant parties (overlapping blue shades), were more scattered with some strongholds in the centre, in the north and on the Zeeland Islands in the south west, with the so called ‘Dutch Bible belt’ stretching from the mid west through the centre to east and curving to the north. Voters of Socialist parties and voters of Liberal parties were spread in very much the same way (green dots). Both seem to mix rather well with Protestants, except for some parts in the centre. They are mostly concentrated around the large cities and to the north west of The Netherlands. Both groups were much smaller than Protestants and Catholics.

Given the strong geographical aspect of compartmentalisation in The Netherlands, one might expect particular films to be shown in particular cities or cinemas. For instance, DeMille’s *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), if indeed deemed particularly appropriate for viewing by the Catholic compartment, is likely to be programmed primarily in cinemas in the south of the country.

Methodology

Dataset

The dataset used for this article was originally compiled by Pafort-Overduin for her PhD research on the popularity of three Dutch films made between 1934 and 1936: *De Jantjes* (1934, trans. *The Sailors*), *Bleeke Bet* (1934, *Pale Betty*) and *Oranje Hein* (1936, *Orange Harry*). *De Jantjes* was a huge success and beat every other movie from that period. It had 2,605 screenings, followed by *Modern Times* (1936) with 1,778 screenings. The massive success of *De Jantjes* prompted investors to have trust in a Dutch film industry, and after four years of almost no activity, the Dutch film suddenly bloomed.

The dataset contains information on 23,674 film programmes, featuring 2,402 individual films, shown between 1934 and 1936 in 143 cinemas in 18 Dutch towns. For fourteen of these towns, programme information was gathered by scrutinizing cinema advertisements in (local) newspapers between 1934 and 1936. Programme information on four further cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Groningen) was imported from the *Cinema Context Collection*. All together, the cinemas in these 18 towns cover 40% of the total number of cinemas in The Netherlands operating between 1934 and 1936. According to the *Cinema Context Collection*, 359 cinemas were operating between 1934 and 1936. The dataset used here covers 143 cinemas. Three cinemas were removed from the dataset because only a very small part of their film programmes could be reconstructed. Figure 1 shows the location of all cinemas that could be traced with the help of *Cinema Context* in yellow and the cinemas from the dataset in red. Although the selection slightly favours cinemas in the centre as compared to those in the south and north east of the country, the dataset covers most of the different parts.

The full dataset contains information on:

- the programming of fiction films: the date a film was shown, how many times a film was shown during a week, whether it was a Double bill or not;
- the film itself: year, country, production company, director and main stars;
- the exhibition place: location of the cinema in GIS code, the number of seats available;
- the advertisement of the film: was the director mentioned, was the production company mentioned and which stars were mentioned.²

For the present purpose, we compiled a dataset of screening incidence, with one line for each of the 2,402 films and one column (dummy variable) for each of the 143 cinemas to indicate whether the particular film was screened at this cinema or not.

2 Since this information is not available in the *Cinema Context* database, it has not been used for analysis yet.

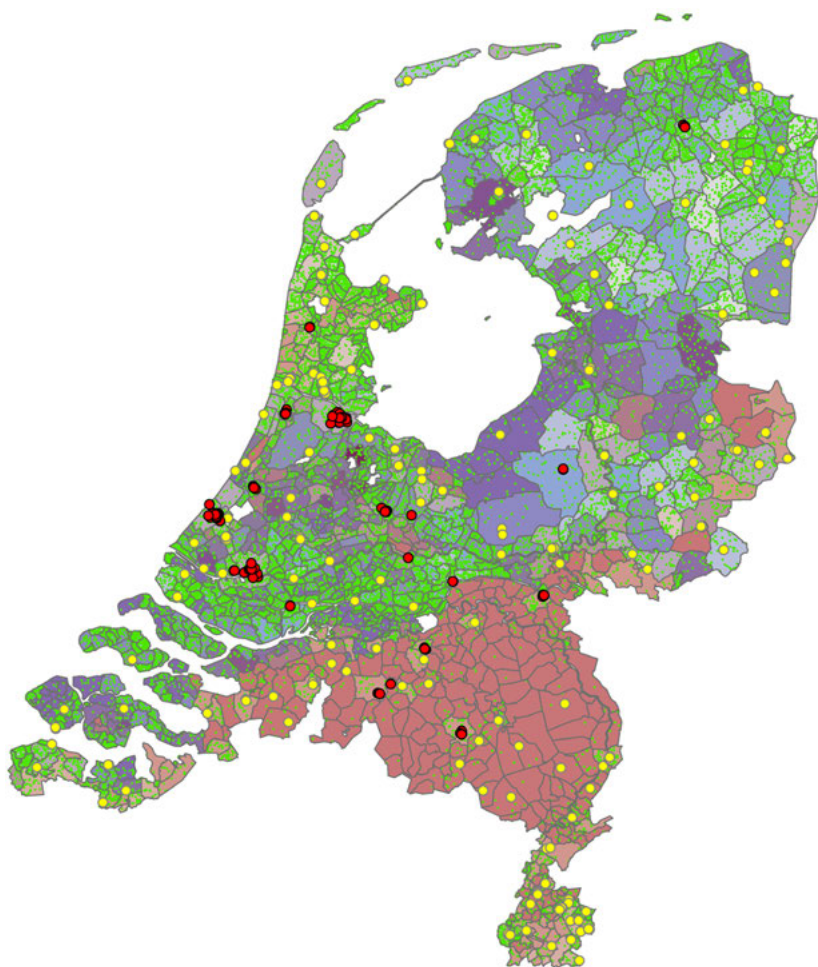


Figure 1. Distribution of compartments and cinemas across The Netherlands (1934-1936). In red areas voters voted mainly for Catholic parties, in blue areas voters voted mainly for Protestant parties, green dots show areas with voters for Socialist and Liberal parties (based on the 1933 General election; darker shades or higher density denotes greater dominance). Red dots denote the cinemas represented in our dataset; yellow dots denote other cinemas listed in *Cinema Context*.

Analysis

As outlined in our review of compartmentalisation in The Netherlands, we expect this dataset to show particular patterns, with individual films shown in specific regions and cinemas, depending on whether the compartment it was most suited for dominated in the region. Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is well

suited for analysing such patterns as it simultaneously clusters both cases (films) and variables (cinemas). Also, as a form of ‘fuzzy clustering’ or mixture modelling, it addresses uncertainty in its output. For instance, it will assign films to clusters with a particular degree of certainty; a film may have a likelihood of 80% of belonging to cluster 1 and a likelihood of 20% to cluster 2. This is particularly apt for data with some degree of uncertainty, as historical data often can be. Finally, contrary to conventional forms of clustering (e.g., hierarchical clustering or k-means) there are straightforward statistical measures to determine the optimal number of segments and the quality of the solution.³

Note that our proposed methodology only looks at incidence and does not account for potential order effects. For instance, more complex models may account for the fact that film copies may travel in particular routes, with some cities or cinemas serving as typical opening night places whereas others focus on reruns of older films. In this first, exploratory research, we only look at whether a particular film has been screened at which cinema during the three year period.

Results

The proposed method results in seven clusters (Table 1), which can be divided into two categories: different types of ‘filler’ films (clusters 1, 2 and 3) shown in any cinema, and films screened at particular cinemas (clusters 4, 5, 6 and 7).⁴

Cluster 1 is the largest cluster with 1,147 titles and shows the most scattered collection of films, some very old films appear in this cluster that downsize the average year of production of this cluster. Almost 10% of the titles were produced in 1931. The films from cluster 1 were ‘filler’ films in the truest sense of the word as can be seen from the very low average number of screenings. This means that they were part of a very fast changing program; shown as a second film when a double bill was on or only screened at special children matinees. Most films came from European countries and small European production companies. Examples are *Bitter Sweet* (1933), directed and produced by Herbert Wilcox from Great Britain, or the German film company Nero Film that produced Pabst’s *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929).

3 For a more in-depth introduction to mixture modeling in general of LCA in particular, see Wedel/Kamakura 2000.

4 Further (statistical) details of the results and the choice for seven clusters are available from the authors.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Size in %	47.7	17.0	15.5	7.2	5.0	4.4	3.2
Avg. year of release	1931	1933	1934	1934	1934	1934	1934
Dominant origin	EUR	US	EUR	EUR	DE	US	US
Production company	Small	Large	Small	Small	UFA	3 major US	MGM
Avg. # of screenings per film	26	114	158	510	234	268	321

Table 1 Cluster analyses of the film programming of Dutch cinemas 1934-1936

Cluster 2 resembles very much cluster 1 where age and programme schedule are concerned. The films are slightly more recent but still some very old ones appear: production years range from 1915 till 1936. Almost a third (32%) of the titles was produced in 1932. As in cluster 1 they were part of programmes that changed very often or consisted of double bills. On the other hand, these films could cover up to 73% (ABT in Alkmaar), 58 % (Olympia and Asta in Rotterdam) of a single programme. So although these were ‘filler’ films as well, some cinemas relied heavily on them for their programming. While cluster 1 is dominated by European productions, cluster 2 is dominated by US productions (78%). The larger US companies Paramount, Fox, Universal and Columbia take an almost equal share each. The famous Charlie Chan films (Fox) are part of this cluster. MGM is underrepresented.

Cluster 3 is Europe-oriented again, with a remarkably large portion of French films (12%; for example *Le dernier milliardaire* (1934, René Clair), produced by Pathé Natan). As in cluster 1, most films are from small production companies. But the films in cluster 3 are more recent. The oldest one is from 1930 and average production year is 1934. Almost one quarter of the films was produced in 1935. As in cluster 2, the titles in cluster 3 could be the mainstay for a cinema’s programme. Up to 68% (Studio 32 in Rotterdam) of a cinema’s programme could consist of films from cluster 3.

Cluster 4 stands out as a special case since it holds the highest number of screenings per film. *De Jantjes* and *Modern Times* are part of this cluster. Films in this cluster are mostly from European countries and produced by small companies. Seventeen from the twenty most screened films are part of cluster 4. Interestingly, the percentage of Dutch films in the top 20 of most screened films is equal to that of the US (35% each). This is remarkable since Dutch films only make up 1% of the films offered on the Dutch market against 52% US films.

Cluster 5 is very clear-cut. It consists mainly of German films (87%), 49% of which were produced by UFA. *Die Czardasfürstin* (1934, Georg Jacoby) and *Viktor und Viktoria* (1933, Reinhold Schünzel) are examples of these. Four

UFA theatres owned by UFA relied for more than 80% on these films. The Luxor theatre in Rotterdam and the Rembrandt theatre in Amsterdam programmed 89% films from cluster 5; similar values were reached by the Asta in The Hague (85%) and the Scala in Utrecht (82%). These cinemas were very much Germany-oriented in their programming.

Clusters 6 and 7 are both dominated by US films (93% and 96% respectively). Both consist of films from major US film studios. In cluster 6 Warner Bros. has the largest share but is not clearly dominating (30%). *Front Page Woman* (1935, Michael Curtiz) is in this group. RKO Radio Pictures (18%), First National Pictures (15%) and co-productions from First National Pictures and Warner Bros (11%) have the largest other shares. No MGM films are part of cluster 6; they dominate cluster 7 (78%). Films from cluster 6 have no particularly distinguishing quality, if one looks at the highest share in programmes: 36% for the Savoy in The Hague is the highest value. 92 of the total of 143 cinemas in the dataset showed less than 10% of films from cluster 6. Seventeen cinemas did not show a single one. Cluster 7 shows the same pattern even sharper. 96 cinemas showed 10% or less from cluster 7, from which 41 did not even show a single one. MGM films were distinguishing in so far as only few cinemas could get hold of them.

The results of the clustering show no very clear pattern that can be linked to compartmentalisation. At least not if we look at the following factors: country of origin, production company, year of production, and average number of screenings. Even two films so different from each other like *I'm No Angel* and *Sign of the Cross* turn out to be part of the same cluster (4). This might be explained by their production company. Both were produced by Paramount, and it seems that Paramount worked on product differentiation. *Sign of the Cross* was shown in 20 cinemas and had 231 screenings. *I'm No Angel* had 411 screenings and was shown in 32 cinemas, 9 of which also had shown *Sign of the Cross*. For these 9 exhibitors at least, film content obviously didn't matter that much. Of course, these are still tentative observations and it is necessary to take a closer look at the films themselves, but we can safely state that business strategies seem to be a more important factor for film distribution and exhibition in The Netherlands between 1934 and 1936 than compartmentalisation.

Additional Analyses: Amsterdam 1934-1936

Although these results show that cinemas differed in the composition of their programs, these differences do not seem to be related to geographical regions where specific compartments were dominant. Instead, results suggest that programming was governed more by business economical principles of competi-

tive positioning, with some cinemas resorting almost entirely to filler films (e.g., cluster 2: ABT Alkmaar), and others profiling themselves with a more exclusive program (e.g., the UFA cinemas in cluster 5, or the cinemas showing the latest US films of cluster 6 and 7). This echoes findings by others: Jancovich, Faire and Stubbings (2003) demonstrate how film consumption can be studied as an activity and argue with David Morley that the context of viewing is as important as the object of viewing (3). They refer to Greg Waller, who showed in his work on Lexington that "... different modes of exhibition, performance and reception came to be associated with different locations. In this way, audiences built up identifications and disidentifications with places of exhibition ..." (Jancovich et al. 12). Oral history interviews conducted by our students confirm this idea.⁵ Certain cinemas were known as peanut cinemas because in the first row peanuts were peeled and the peels were thrown on the ground. This was a cinema a more sophisticated lady (like the interviewee) would not visit. Newspaper advertisements, too, show the varied ways in which cinemas tried to convince cinemagoers about the respectability of a programme or the sensational character of a new film. Additionally, price differentiation and the age of the films would most likely have been distinguishing factors for cinemagoers.

Such variety in competitive positioning of cinemas is most likely to be found in larger cities where multiple cinemas are contending for the same market. To explore such differences further, we repeated our analyses for a smaller sub sample, selecting only cinemas located in Amsterdam, the city with the highest number of cinemas, and the films shown here. The resulting subset contains 1,347 films programmed at one or more of 35 Amsterdam cinemas. Again, Latent Class Analysis was used to test whether this large number of films and cinemas may be effectively summarized into a few, homogeneous segments. Results reveal three types of films, each with a different distribution pattern:

Cluster 1 (75.0%); 49% of the films from this cluster comes from the U.S., 44% from European countries. Films from the Soviet Union and East European countries like Hungary and Czechoslovakia take 2%. Another small portion (4%) of the film titles is obscure, no further information could be found on them. Almost half of the films from the U.S. (49%) is made before 1933, so there is a relatively large portion of older U.S. film in this cluster. MGM and Paramount are the largest suppliers for the U.S. part of the cluster. For the European part of the cluster Germany leads with 28% of which a quarter is produced by UFA.

5 This work was done by students in several courses on the history of film taught by Pafort-Overduin and is available upon request.

Cluster 2 (13.8%); this cluster is dominated by U.S. films (72%). Only 28% come from other European countries like Germany, France and Great Britain. No more than 7% of the film titles are made before 1933. Hitchcock's latest films like, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Secret Agent* (1936) belong to cluster 2, while his slightly older films *Number Seventeen* (1932) and *Waltzes from Vienna* (1933) are part of cluster 1. This is even more pronounced with the films of Charles Chaplin. While *Modern Times* (1936) is part of cluster 2, *The Bank* (1915), *Burlesque on Carmen* (1916) and *City Lights* (1931) are part of cluster 1.

Cluster 3 (11.1%); this cluster is slightly dominated by European films (59%), especially German films (31%). Only 4% of the titles of this cluster were produced before 1933. Dutch films hits like *De Jantjes*, *Bleeke Bet* and *Het Meisje met den Blauwen Hoed* (1934) (The Girl with the Blue Hat) join this cluster.

Apparently, films were indeed likely to be shown at specific cinemas, depending on their age and country of origin. However, not all cinemas exclusively programmed just one of the three types of films. Cinema owners chose various levels of specialisation, and some offered a more diverse programme. In economics, a common ratio to describe a level of specialisation or concentration is the Hirschman-Herfindahl Index (HHI). This relatively simple formula sums the squared shares of the various options to return a score between 0 (total diversification) and 1 (total specialisation). Here, we use the shares of each of the three types of films in the total programming of a cinema to describe its programming strategy in a single value. So, a cinema's HHI score may range from 0 (all three clusters are equally present) to 1 (only one cluster is present).

Figure 2 shows the geographical position of each cinema and its level of specialisation (the HHI score), with dark green markers representing cinemas with a low HHI score (diverse programming) and red markers representing cinemas with a high HHI score (specialising in one of the three clusters). The particular pattern in the spatial distribution of HHI scores suggests that the different screening strategies may be dependent on the location of cinemas.

Cinemas marked green, with an equal share of the three clusters, are clearly situated outside the centre and at relative distance from each other. These cinemas may have been catering for their specific borough and been forced by their local monopoly to cater the tastes of a differentiated audience. Cinemas in the city centre, on the other hand, are more likely to have attracted crowds from all over Amsterdam. Closely positioned together in main entertainment districts such as the Kalverstraat and Rembrandtplein, these cinemas commanded a large enough market to afford some sort of specialisation and would have been forced to such strategies with several competitors in their direct vicinity.

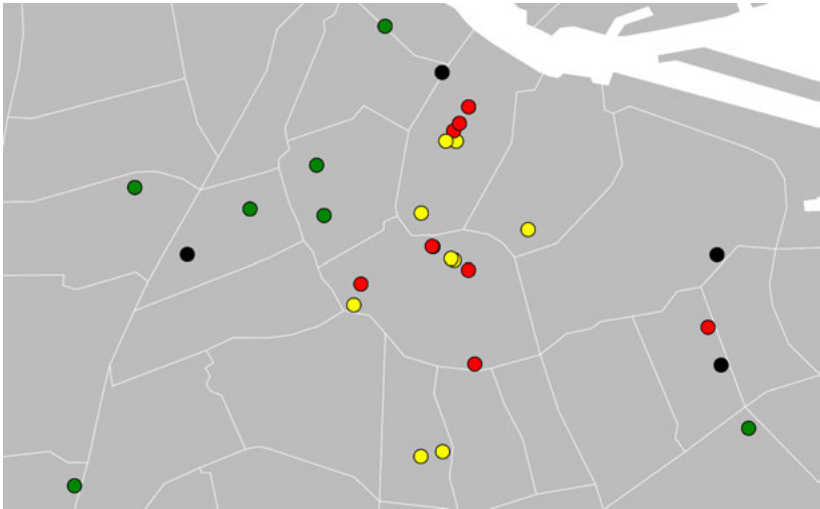


Figure 2. Level of Program Specialization in Amsterdam Cinemas 1934-1936

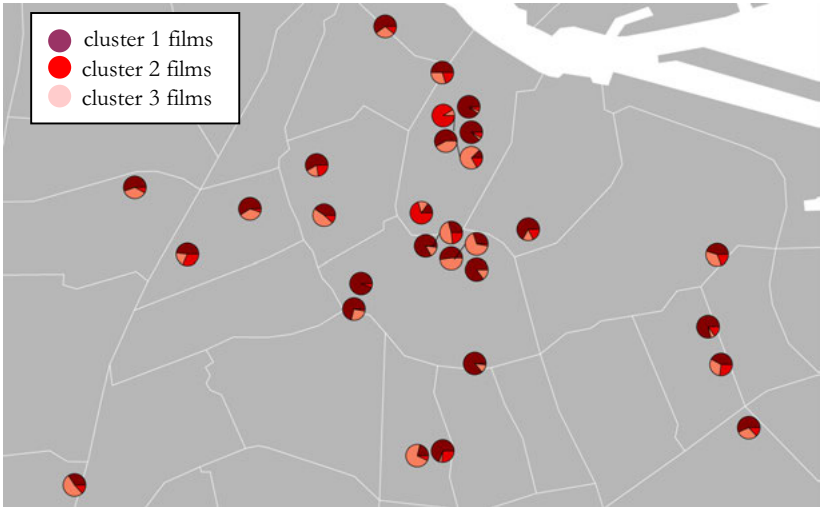


Figure 3. Program Strategies of Amsterdam Cinemas 1934-1936

Apart from choosing a particular level of specialisation, cinema owners also have to choose which type of film they wish to specialise in. E.g., while two closely situated cinemas may both opt for a specialisation strategy, this most likely would be a specialisation for different types of films. Figure 3 explores this specialisation vs. diversification strategy dimension in more detail by plotting the relative share of each cluster for each cinema.

Only two cinemas have a dominant cluster 2 programme: Cinema Royal (1,400 seats) and Corso (400 seats). Both are positioned in the centre of the city, surrounded by cinemas offering a programme with no or very few recent cluster 2 films. Cinema owners apparently often opted for a supplementary way of programming instead of direct harsh competition. Also, contracts with distributors may have had clauses with some form of exclusivity.

Conclusion and Discussion

Of the four compartments making up Dutch society in the 1930s, particularly the Catholics had clear opinions on which films were judged (un)suitable for their herds, voiced through multiple channels, such as magazines and mass. Living in specific geographical regions, one would expect films to show specific distribution patterns, based on the suitability for each compartment. However, analysing a dataset of 23,674 film programs over a three year period of 143 cinemas spread across the country, we found no indication of any influence of compartmentalisation on cinema programming in the Netherlands between 1934 and 1936. Business strategy, distributions contracts and plain economical factors seem to have been much more important.

This is not to say that compartmentalisation had no effect on the Dutch film market. For instance, there may have been an indirect effect, with compartmentalisation influencing the number of cinemas in an area, which, in turn, because of the associated business economic consequences, influenced programming strategy. A cursory glance at Figure 1 suggests there are indeed fewer cinemas in protestant regions. But is population density not of equal or more importance in the spreading of cinemas? Clearly, cinemas are concentrated in urban areas; where the population density is low, so is the number of cinemas. The one exception – the region between Hardewijk and Apeldoorn, south of Kampen and Zwolle – however, suggests that the Protestant compartment in particular may have had some influence on the number of cinemas. This populated area of potentially sufficient market size for multiple cinemas is also the largest continuous orthodox protestant area in The Netherlands. In Apeldoorn, with 65,179 inhabitants the largest city of that region, there was only one cinema for every 32,590 persons. One cinema seat had to be shared by 85 people. This is the lowest ratio in the dataset. The average rate in the dataset is 22,075 persons on one cinema or 38 people who had to share one cinema seat. This indicates that Protestants only may have been able to suppress the spreading of cinema in a homogeneous environment, and were not strong enough to do so in urban areas and areas where the population density was high enough to provide an adequate amount of customers for a

cinema to make a profit. So far, the literature has not paid much attention to the role of Protestants in the development of Dutch cinema, since this compartment did not want to have anything to do with cinema. However, precisely because of their rejection of cinemas, their influence may have been more significant than presumed to date.

In sum, there may be a more complex, indirect effect of particularly Protestant dominance interacting with market size as driver for launching a cinema. Even though, as Dibbets (2006: 61) made plausible, local taxes, censorship committees and the national Cinema Union have been important determinants in the development of the Dutch cinema market. Although compartmentalisation cannot be linked directly to the screening of particular films, we believe the underexposed influence of Protestants constitutes an important avenue for further research on the role of compartmentalisation on the Dutch film market. While in-depth case studies have revealed interesting perspectives, we conjecture that quantitative analyses of preferably multiple sources, such as the present, make an indispensable contribution to the understanding of the development of a national cinema market. Such datasets can show us large patterns and make our findings comparable with that of others. However, for the explanation we also need to dig into local archives, to study individual films and collaborate internationally.

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