

## SERBIAN FILM FROM JOURNALISM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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**Marija Vujović, Marta Mitrović**

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Serbia

**Abstract.** *Journalism students from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, are studying film as the first audio-visual mass communication medium, so the authors wanted to explore their relationship with Serbian (domestic) films, which is the main goal of this paper. In January 2023, 138 journalism students from all four years of undergraduate study participated in the study. Data were collected for the study using a specific questionnaire, which was then processed using SPSS, a program for statistical data analysis. The findings of the study indicate that journalism students visit theaters to see Serbian films. The presence of quality actors is both their initial association with Serbian movies and the most popular reason for going to the movies to see them. Lack of habit is frequently cited as the primary excuse for students who don't watch Serbian films at the movies. Although a bigger percentage of students say that Serbia creates exquisite movies that are popular abroad, they also believe that movies from earlier times were superior. The majority of the students believe that Serbian films are superior to those from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, two neighbouring countries.*

**Key words:** *Film, Serbian film, journalism students, film preferences*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the definition in the *Komunikološki leksikon (Communication Lexicon)*, film is the first audio-visual mass communication medium. Film is also a message that is distributed to the audience through film or other media, such as television or computers (Miletić & Miletić 2021, 375).

The official year of the birth of cinema is 1895 when Louis and Auguste Lumière, the inventors of the *cinematograph*, a device for filming and projecting movies, organized a screening of short films at the Grand Café in Paris. The following year, in 1896, these

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**Corresponding author:** Marija Vujović

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18105 Niš, Serbia

E-mail: [marija.vujovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs](mailto:marija.vujovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs)

films were shown in Belgrade by the representative of the Lumière brothers, Andre Carr, who soon started making films in Belgrade (Jovičić 2010, 23).

Belgrade received its first permanent cinema in 1908. It was located in the hotel Pariz's brewery, owned by Svetozar Botorić. Soon, other cities in Serbia also acquired cinemas due to the audience's interest. "Throughout all these years, there has been a connection between cinemas and the audience, where cinemas are a place for the most popular and affordable entertainment, but also a place for cultural and artistic experiences, as the cinema is a necessity for the modern person" (Ranković 1997, 314).

From the very beginning, film has been accessible to people as it speaks a universal language and, unlike print media, does not require literacy or preparation to decode messages (Vujović & Mihajlov Prokopović 2019, 138).

Although films were made earlier, the history of Serbian film production began in 1911 when Svetozar Botorić, mentioned earlier, produced feature-length films in Belgrade. These included two fictional films, *Život i dela besmrtnog Vožda Karađorđa* (*The Life and Deeds of the Immortal Leader Karađorđe*) (1911, Ilija Stanojević), *Urlih celjski i Vladislav Hunjadi* (*Ulrich of Celje and Vladislaus the Danubian*) (1911, Ilija Stanojević), and one documentary film, *Ciganska svadba* (*Gypsy Wedding*) (1911, Ilija Stanojević) (Ranković 2005, 251; Jovičić 2010, 25).

The most significant film, which has been preserved in the Yugoslav Film Archive, was *Život i dela besmrtnog Vožda Karađorđa* (*The Life and Deeds of the Immortal Leader Karađorđe*). "Partially based on the national poem 'Početak bune na dahije' (The Outbreak of the Uprising against the Dahis), it was directed by Ilija Stanojević from a screenplay co-written with Ćira Manok and Savković, and cinematography was done by Louis de Beri. The film, with its manner of filming, numerous mass scenes, and, for its time, great length, represents a significant achievement not only in Serbian cinematography" (Jovičić 2010, 25–26).

Despite the import of primarily Hollywood films to Serbia, from the early years, there has been a desire to create films with domestic themes, adapt domestic literary works, and feature local actors. In this paper, domestic film refers to all the films that are entirely produced in Serbia, as well as minority or majority Serbian co-productions. According to the Law on Cinematography, a domestic cinematographic work is defined as "a work produced by a domestic producer that meets at least three of the following conditions: it is filmed in Serbian or the language of national minorities in the Republic of Serbia; the majority of the members of the creative team (director, screenwriter, composer, director of photography, dramaturge, and editor) are citizens of the Republic of Serbia; at least 90% of the film crew (actors and film workers) are citizens of the Republic of Serbia; the work deals with topics from the cultural space of the Republic of Serbia; the work is entirely or predominantly filmed on the territory of the Republic of Serbia" (Law on Cinematography, Article 4).

Film production in Serbia was at its peak in the early 1930s during the implementation of the Film Traffic Law. "According to the Film Traffic Law, cinemas were required to have 15% domestic films in their repertoire. This provision led to a rapid increase in domestic production. In 1932, 326 domestic films were realized, more than had been produced in all Balkan countries until then" (Jovičić 2010, 31). Additionally, this law facilitated the establishment of the first institutions in the field of filmmaking.

Milošević explores the production of Serbian cinema after World War II. He emphasizes the significance of the socio-economic context in studying film "due to its specific nature as an activity that is both artistic and industrial, as well as a means of reflection, analysis, and

critique, but also of entertainment, consumption, persuasion, and even hegemony" (Milošević 2019, 107). He concludes that especially in Serbia during the transition, there has been an opening of film art and industry, democratization, and more efficient film production, which shows a trend of growth. However, expectations have not been entirely met, particularly in the context of contemporary technological processes (Milošević 2020, 113–115).

A Serbian film's success can be determined by a number of variables, such as the number of tickets sold, awards received at film festivals, and favorable media reviews. According to (Fafulić 2013, 134), "In the history of cinematography, the perception of film has led to its diverse treatment, ranging from being solely an artistic piece to being a marketable product subject to the fundamental laws of supply and demand. This has made evaluating its success diverse as well".

Daleore emphasizes the role of actors in the development of domestic films and their significance as magnets for attracting audiences to cinemas in Serbia. "Our audience has always had a special trust and affinity for domestic films, showing greater attendance in cinemas, even during times when domestic cinematography could not offer significant film achievements to the viewers. However, it remains a fact that the audience has shown a certain type of sympathy for both domestic films and domestic actors... The connection between domestic cinema-goers and domestic films lies in the specific communication between the audience and the themes and characters from our reality. If viewers had a greater opportunity for identification through the treatment of topics and issues from their own environment, the level of their trust in domestic films became more significant, often tied to the successful performances of individual actors" (Daleore 2005, 176–177).

The key institution when it comes to domestic films in Serbia is the Serbian Film Center<sup>1</sup>. According to the latest presented data for the year 2022, the total number of film viewers in Serbia was 3,710,603, which is an increase of 10.57% compared to 2021. However, the share of domestic films was 20.69%, which is a significant decrease of 45.81% compared to the previous year. This trend was also reflected in the lower number of viewers for domestic films – 767,756, which is a decrease of 40.41% compared to 2021. This decrease could be explained by the success of blockbuster films like *Toma* and *Južni vetar: ubrzanje (South Wind: Acceleration)* (2021, Miloš Avramović) both of which had over a million viewers. Nevertheless, in 2022, there were more domestic film premieres in cinemas compared to the previous year. According to the data, the most-watched domestic film in 2022 was *Leto kada sam naučila da letim (The Summer I Learned to Fly)* (2022, Radivoje Andrić) with 193,611 viewers (Serbian Film Industry in 2022; Film Statistics in Serbia for 2021).

According to the data from the *Statistical Yearbook* of the Republic of Serbia for the year 2022, in the structure of screened films in 2021, the share of domestic films was 15.0%, while foreign films constituted 85.0% (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia 2022).

The publication *Culture, 2021* by the Republic of Serbia's Statistical Office provides an overview of data from 2017 to 2021 concerning the production and origin of films. The results show a constant increase in the number of domestically produced feature-length films, from 16 in 2017 to 34 in 2021, with 100% being domestic, 17 as minority

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<sup>1</sup> The Film Center of Serbia is a cultural institution responsible for professional activities in the field of cinematography. It is established by the Republic of Serbia, and its founding rights are exercised by the Government. For information on the competencies and activities of the Film Center of Serbia, please refer to the following website: <https://www.fcs.rs/o-fcs/o-nama>.

Serbian co-productions, and 5 as majority Serbian co-productions. The publication also provides data by regions in Serbia. In the southern and eastern regions of Serbia, in 2021, 84.1% of the films shown were foreign, while 15.9% were domestic, which is higher compared to the regions of Belgrade and Vojvodina (Culture 2021).

According to the Report of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media for the year 2021, *Public Media Service Radio-Television of Serbia - Methods of Meeting Legal and Program Obligations*, the film program experienced a slight decline in its share compared to the previous year but retained its third place in terms of representation in the total broadcasted program, accounting for 13.83%. Most of the films were from European independent productions, making up more than half of the total film program at 55.77%, with domestic films from various years being predominant among them. Non-European production, which constitutes 27.60% of the total film program, is dominated by Hollywood hits and classics, but there were also Russian, Japanese, and Australian titles. The public media service's own productions accounted for 9.02% of the total film program, consisting of reruns of films produced from 1961 to 2019 and premieres of films *Vojna akademija 3 (Military Academy 3)* (2016, Slaviša Ivanović, Dejan Zečević) and *Vojna akademija 5 (Military Academy 5)* (2019, Dejan Zečević). European productions had a share of 5.62%, and their structure included domestic feature films as well as films from French, Spanish, Russian, Croatian, Danish, and Italian cinema. Unfortunately, more than three-quarters of the broadcasted film program during the period consisted of reruns, making up 85.45% (Public Media Service Radio-Television of Serbia – Methods of Meeting Legal and Program Obligations 2022).

Through the project *Cultural Participation of Citizens of Serbia* carried out in 2019 by the Institute for the Study of Cultural Development, an empirical survey was conducted on a national sample of approximately 1500 citizens of Serbia. The aim of the research was to explore cultural interests and habits of the citizens. The results revealed that the most prevalent cultural activities were going to the cinema, reading books, watching movies, and attending theater performances. On the other hand, the least favorite activities were listening to jazz and classical music, reading e-books, and engaging in any artistic activity. The largest audience segment was the active cinema-goers, constituting 56.6% of the respondents, with the majority of young people aged 15 to 30 years (40.1%), and students accounting for 7.3%. The research also showed that cinema attendance had the highest growth rate, with a 30% increase in the last ten years. As far as film genres are concerned, the survey found that the favorite genre among the respondents was *thriller* (17.4%), followed by *romance* (11.9%), *domestic films* (10.2%), *comedy* (9.3%), and *drama* (8.7%). In the context of this study, a significant finding is the strong statistical correlation between the gender of the respondents and their preferred film genres. Men showed more interest in domestic films, with 13.2% of men compared to 8.0% of women, regardless of the genre. The results also indicated that citizens with lower levels of education and older respondents more frequently chose domestic films as their favorites (Cultural Participation of Citizens of Serbia 2022).

Turković believes that film is a product primarily intended to stimulate the experiences of viewers, emphasizing the communicative process. Film creators craft a cinematic work that is received by the audience, the members of the film-going public (Turković 2021, 17). Similarly, Kosanović defines film art as the deliberate and systematic use of cinematic expressive means, framing, and editing, aimed at eliciting predetermined impressions, associations, and emotions of cinema viewers (Kosanović 2003, 214).

Research on cinema audiences and viewing habits is rare in Serbia. Ranković conducted a study on the structure of cinema audiences at Balkan cinema in Belgrade, which had an evening film screening at 10:30 PM. The aim of the research was to maintain the existing cinema audience and explore potential ways to increase it. The results showed that the cinema audience in Belgrade for the 10:30 PM screenings mainly consisted of individuals between the ages of 18 and 35, particularly students, who often came to the cinema in groups. The study found out that this audience "does not differentiate between domestic and foreign films, or between genres, and places emphasis on the story or content of the film, as well as its artistic quality. They decide to watch a film based on recommendations from friends or television commercials and programs about the film. Going to the cinema is considered a cultural experience, and this group visits the cinema less than once a week" (Ranković 1997, 325).

Research on cultural participation among students is also scarce. In a study conducted by the Institute for the Study of Cultural Development, ten universities in Serbia and 1500 students were included. The results revealed that students who were dissatisfied with the cultural offerings in their cities primarily felt the lack of film-related content. Films were the top choice for students, especially those attending the University of Niš. The research demonstrated that films were also the favorite television program among students in Serbia. More than half of the respondents (59.1%) ranked films among the top three most frequently watched types of programs, indicating that films were the preferred type of program for the student population (Mrđa 2011, 105). Based on these findings, the authors aimed to determine the specific attitude of journalism students at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, toward Serbian films.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

During their studies, journalism students at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, explore film as the primary audio-visual medium of mass communication. Hence, the authors aimed to investigate their attitude towards domestic films, which is the main goal of this paper. The research methodology is based on a project conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, titled *Film Viewing Habits and the Perception of Domestic Films*, which was carried out by the public opinion research agency Promocija plus in 2013. The project's objective was to determine film viewing habits, with a particular focus on domestic films. The research was conducted in Croatia, using a stratified random sample of approximately one thousand respondents (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013).

For the purposes of this paper, the research was conducted in January 2023 among journalism students across all four years of undergraduate studies. A total of 138 students completed the questionnaire, representing 81.7% of the total number of students enrolled in the 2022/2023 academic year. A total of 23.2% were male and 76.8% were female. Regarding the year of study, 20.2% of the respondents were first-year students, 29% were second-year students, 23.9% were third-year students, and 26.8% were fourth-year journalism students. A specialized questionnaire was created as a data collection instrument for the research, consisting of eight close-ended questions, with four using the Likert scale model. The data obtained from the questionnaire were processed using the statistical analysis software SPSS. All results presented in tables are expressed in percentages rounded to one decimal place.

## 3. RESULTS

The results of the conducted research show that journalism students at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, watch Serbian films in movie theaters, with as many as 73.9% of them doing so, ranging from very frequently to very rarely (Table 1). This result contradicts the findings of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre in 2013, which served as the methodological foundation for this paper. According to that research, as many as 61.4% of the respondents never watch domestic films in movie theaters (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 56).

**Table 1** "Do you go to the cinema to watch Serbian films?"

|  | Percent |
|--|---------|
| Yes, very often.                               | 8,0     |
| Yes, often.                                    | 15,2    |
| Yes, rarely.                                   | 23,2    |
| Yes, very rarely.                              | 27,5    |
| No, I never watch Serbian films at the cinema. | 21,7    |
| I don't know.                                  | 4,3     |

Journalism students could choose up to three answers for the following questions.

When it comes to the term "Serbian film", the first thought that comes to the minds of journalism students is actors –47.1%, a good film – 36.9%, and then comedy – 29.7% (Table 2).

**Table 2** "When you hear the term 'Serbian film', what is the first thought that comes to your mind? "

|                            | Percent |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Actors                     | 47,1    |
| A good film                | 36,9    |
| Comedy                     | 29,7    |
| War film                   | 15,2    |
| I don't like Serbian films | 12,3    |

In response to the question about the reasons for going to the cinema to watch Serbian films, the students predominantly mentioned good actors (47.1%), followed by recommendations from friends (36.9%), and then the love for Serbian films in general (29.7%) (Table 3). In the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, the respondents also listed recommendations from friends as the primary reason (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 56).

**Table 3** "Can you please state the reason why you go to the cinema to watch Serbian films?"

|                             | Percent |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Good actors                 | 47,1    |
| Recommendation from friends | 36,9    |
| I love Serbian films        | 29,7    |
| A good movie plot           | 15,2    |
| Curiosity                   | 12,3    |

When asked to state the reasons why they do not go or go less often to the cinema to watch Serbian films, the largest number of students mentioned that they do not have the habit – 30.4%, that foreign films are better – 18.8%, or that there are not enough Serbian films available – 18.1% (Table 4). The respondents of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre cited lack of interest as the most common reason for not going to the cinema to watch domestic films (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 56).

**Table 4** "Can you list the reason why you don't go to the cinema to watch Serbian films?"

|  | Percent |
|--|---------|
| I don't have the habit                 | 30,4    |
| Foreign films are better               | 18,8    |
| There are not enough of them available | 18,1    |
| I watch them online                    | 15,2    |
| I find them uninteresting              | 13,0    |

Students were asked to rate statements on a three-point Likert scale for the following questions.

Regarding the statement "In recent years, our country has been producing quality films that achieve international success", the largest number of students were undecided – 45.7%, followed by those who agree – 37.0%, and those who disagree – 17.4% (Table 5). These results do not match the findings of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, where the majority of respondents mostly agreed with the statement (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 57).

**Table 5** The statement: "In recent years, our country has been producing quality films that achieve international success":

|                            | Percent |
|----------------------------|---------|
| I agree                    | 37,0    |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 45,7    |
| I disagree                 | 17,4    |

Regarding the statement "Serbian films are now worse than they used to be", the largest number of journalism students agree – 42.0%, followed by those who are undecided – 31.2%, and then those who disagree – 26.8% (Table 6). This result shows that nearly half of the journalism students believe that films made in the past were of higher quality, which indicates that students watch Serbian films through other platforms since they are not part of the cinema repertoire. These results do not match the findings of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, where the majority of respondents mostly disagreed with the given statement (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 58).

**Table 6** The statement "Serbian films are now worse than they used to be":

|                            | Percent |
|----------------------------|---------|
| I agree                    | 42,0    |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 31,2    |
| I disagree                 | 26,8    |

As for the statement "The majority of Serbian films are boring and unwatchable", the results show that the largest number of students disagree with this statement – 44.2%, followed by those who are undecided – 39.1%, and finally those who agree – 16.7% (Table 7). These results are in line with the findings of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 58).

**Table 7** The statement "The majority of Serbian films are boring and unwatchable":

|                            | Percent |
|----------------------------|---------|
| I agree                    | 16,7    |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 39,1    |
| I disagree                 | 44,2    |

As for the statement "Serbian films are better compared to films from the countries in the region", the results show that the largest number of students agree with this statement – 47.8%, followed by those who are undecided – 37.0%, and finally those who disagree – 15.2% (Table 8). These results are not in line with the findings of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, where the respondents mostly disagreed with the statement (Croatian Audiovisual Centre 2013, 58).

**Table 8** Tvrdnja "Serbian films are better compared to films from the countries in the region (Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian)":

|                            | Percent |
|----------------------------|---------|
| I agree                    | 47,8    |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 37,0    |
| I disagree                 | 15,2    |

### 3. CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the main objective of this research, which was to determine the attitudes of journalism students at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš towards Serbian films, the authors conclude that 73.9% of the students go to the cinema to watch Serbian films. The first association with Serbian films and the most common reason for going to the cinema to watch them are good actors. This research result confirms Daleore's assumption, highlighting the role of actors in the development of Serbian films and their role as a magnet for attracting cinema audiences (Daleore 2005, 176–177).

Regarding the students who do not go to the cinema to watch Serbian films, the reasons for not attending are cited as lack of habit, preference for foreign films, or simply a lack of Serbian films in the cinema's offering. A larger number of students believe that quality films that achieve international success are being produced in Serbia, but that films made in the past were better. Most students believe that Serbian films are better compared to films from neighboring countries (Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina).

These results are compared with the findings of the research conducted by the Croatian Audiovisual Center, which showed that the majority of respondents (61.4%) never go to the cinema to watch domestic films. Among those who do go, the most common reasons for watching domestic films at the cinema were recommendations from



friends, a love for domestic films, effective film promotion, a compelling film plot, and positive film reviews. On the other hand, the most common reasons cited for not watching domestic films in the cinema were a lack of interest in domestic films, a preference for foreign films, infrequent cinema visits in general, waiting for films to be available on TV, and the perception that domestic films are of low quality (Croatian Audiovisual Center 2013).

Compared to the research on film-watching habits and perceptions of domestic films in Croatia, the results of the research on the attitudes of journalism students towards Serbian films are optimistic. However, there is a clear need for "continuous efforts to bring culture and art closer to citizens and develop systemic solutions that encourage them to develop their cultural needs, habits, and interests" (Kaličanin 2011, 240).

*The Development Strategy of Culture of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2029* also includes provisions for strengthening production resources and encouraging co-productions to improve the Serbian film's presence both in the country and internationally. Support is planned for smaller production companies and civil society organizations engaged in film production, as well as for non-commercial films. The strategy also includes the development of workshop programs that promote film art among children and youth, which is expected to increase the popularity and viewership of Serbian films among students in the future (Development Strategy of Culture of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2029).

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**SRPSKI FILM IZ PERSPEKTIVE STUDENATA NOVINARSTVA**

*Studenti novinarstva Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Nišu izučavaju film kao prvi audio-vizuelni medij masovnog komuniciranja, pa su autorke želele da istraže njihov odnos prema srpskom (domaćem) filmu, što je osnovni cilj rada. Istraživanje je sprovedeno tokom januara 2023. godine i obuhvatilo je 138 studenata novinarstva, sa sve četiri godine osnovnih studija. Za potrebe istraživanja kreiran je poseban upitnik kao instrument prikupljanja podataka, a dobijeni podaci obrađeni su pomoću programa za statističku obradu podataka SPSS. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da studenti novinarstva odlaze u bioskop da gledaju srpske filmove. Njihova prva asocijacija na srpski film, ali i najčešći razlog odlaska u bioskop da ih gledaju su dobri glumci. Studenti koji ne odlaze u bioskop da gledaju srpske filmove, kao razloge neodlaska najčešće navode da nemaju naviku. Veći broj studenata smatra da se u Srbiji prave kvalitetni filmovi koji postižu međunarodne uspehe, ali da su u prošlosti snimani bolji flmovi. Većina studenata smatra da su srpski filmovi bolji u odnosu na filmove iz zemalja regiona (hrvatske i bosansko-hercegovačke).*

Ključne reči: *film, srpski film, studenti novinarstva, filmske navike*