

University of Theatre and Film Arts Doctoral School

Analysing the Social Impact of Documentary Films concerning a Film Collection

Theses of the Doctoral Dissertation

Orsolya Komlósi

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Supervisor: Lóránt Stőhr, associate professor

In my doctoral dissertation, I deal with the social impact of documentaries and the development of social distribution. I examine domestic antecedents and contemporary international trends. The main research questions of the dissertation are the follows. What makes the effect of the film a social impact? How did the concept of social distribution develop in Hungary in the 1970s? What is relevant to this day? What is the key to its popularity? What is the professional invention of the *Strangers in My Garden film collection* created by the Palantír Film Foundation? In what sense can the creation and distribution of a film collection be considered social distribution? What are the elements of the *Film School*, a documentary high school program? What is the importance of the program for measuring social impact? How is an *impact campaign* can be related to social distribution? What do we mean by social distribution? What is the role of the impact producer in documentary distribution?

In my dissertation, in connection with the study of the creation and distribution practice of the *Strangers in My Garden film collection*¹ created by the Palantír Film Foundation², I review the domestic antecedents and international, contemporary initiatives of social distribution.

In my research, I attempted to show the impact of a given film on the students participating in the *Film School*³ program. In my detailed analysis, I present the method and the results obtained.

I introduce the new categories used in international *impact distribution*.

As follows, I present in four major questions the main problems and statements of my dissertation.

1, What makes the effect of the film a social impact?

The documentary director wants to achieve an impact, which means that the director wants to make an effect on the audience with the film. This effect also depends on the intention of the

¹ <http://eng.palantirfilm.hu/strangers-in-my-garden-film-collection/>

² The Palantír Film Visual Anthropological Foundation is a non-profit founded in 2000. Responsible for development is Zoltán Füredi.

The foundation aims to promote intercultural dialogue through documentaries.
<http://palantirfilm.hu/az-alapitvany/>

³ <http://palantirfilm.hu/film-school-program/>

director. The supposed director's intention (explanatory, participatory, persuasive, reflexive)⁴, the position of the director determines how the director (creator) turn to his audience. This intention affects the impact campaign and therefore has an influence on the social impact of the campaign. That film achieves significant results in a social campaign, the focus of which is the processing of a social problem, the search for a solution to the main problem. The issue of the film also has an influence on the social impact of the film, so in the case of each film, it is necessary to analyse the director's intention, relationship to the issue, and their appearance in the film.

2, What are the popularity and professional invention of the *Strangers in My Garden film collection* created by the Palantír Film Foundation? In what sense can the creation and distribution of a film collection be considered social distribution?

We can talk about a social campaign about the *Strangers in My Garden film collection* created by Palantír Film and the *Film School*, a high school project related to the film collection. *Strangers in My Garden* includes a collection of films that were distributed in Europe and have achieved festival success. The curatorial team for the selection of films to be included in the film collection consisted of experts (subject matter experts, high school teachers, film distribution specialists). Although it is a collection of films, the method of preparation is the same as that used by the creators to prepare their films for social distribution on the BBS with the help of research workers (sociologists). The collection was designed specifically for educators (with the need to be applicable in both adult and university education), so the target group of the film collection could be precisely defined. The content in the *Pedagogical Manual*⁵ prepared for the film collection helps the teachers to prepare for the lesson with background information, lesson task ideas and additional exercises and case studies related to each film. In compiling the film collection, we not only validated the film distributor's aspects, but also considered the needs and possible expectations of the target group and tried to find solutions to the objections of the film collections' films and accompanying materials, either among the target group or in a broader sense in the society. Our goal was to provide the most accurate and complete information possible. The film collection was promoted through a social campaign.

⁴ Zsuzsanna Gellér-Varga: *Chronicler or Storyteller? Document and/or Film? The Tools of Storytelling in Documentary Film*. Budapest, University of Theatre and Film Arts Doctoral School, 2018. 28.

⁵ Bognár Katalin (szerk.): *Idegenek a kertemben, bevándorlás és integráció Európában – Módszertani kézikönyv a filmgyűjtemény használatához*. Palantír Film Vizuális Antropológiai Alapítvány, Budapest, 2011.
<http://palantirfilm.hu/idegenek-a-kertemben-modszertani-kezikonyv/>

The films of the collection were presented at an independent festival and a workshop was organized for professionals working in the media to develop their film plans⁶ and for teachers how to use documentary films during school lessons.

With the help of the teachers who participated in the workshop, we organized a nationwide tour⁷ in secondary schools with the participation of actors from short films dealing with cases in Hungary. We trained and reached out to educators who could use the film in the collection on their own, for this purpose we placed the DVD packages in libraries and then we made the films available online along with the methodological recommendations.

3, What are the elements of the *Film School*, a documentary high school program? What is the significance of the program for measuring social impact?

In the *Film School* project, the focus of my interdisciplinary research was an impact assessment of a film selected from the film collection for this purpose. I conducted a survey among 184 high school students aged 17-19. The research combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods with alternative data collection methods such as observer videography and socio drama.

Each occasion was visually registered which allowed for a full analysis of students' reactions. Socio drama replaced the focus group survey because the socio drama session is based on activity, in addition, you can't lie in the drama, so the feelings and opinions of the students involved in the research are honest and direct. I used this method because I was curious about their emotional reaction. Socio drama sessions were held by a dramatist each time and although they took place in a compulsory classroom, participation was voluntary. We used the socio drama session for the first time, in an unusual way to measure the effect and analyse the data to turn it into impact measurement.

The results shed light on the fact that the socio drama method is suitable for demonstrating the effect of documentaries. We also found that with socio drama it is possible to involve many students in the work, an activity-based session gives a wide space for involvement from participation to activation. The affective-based method provides honest, large-scale, and well-

⁶ Idegenek a kertemben media project plan development workshop, 15–17. November 2012.
http://idegenekakertemben.hu/idegenek-a-kertemben-workshop/ik-workshop_katalogus_3.pdf

⁷ Idegenek a kertemben Filmtúrné blog: <https://oktassfilmmel.blog.hu/>

evaluated responses in the context of impact assessment. One of the conditions for this is the presence of a skilled dramatist and a well-formulated research question.

4, How is the *impact campaign* related to social distribution? What do we mean by social distribution or distribution for social purposes? What is the role of the impact producer in documentary distribution?

Since 2010, the role and function of documentaries have been changing. Documentaries on social issues have been published, which can achieve social impact and social change. The tools are the social campaign's elements associated with them, and thus represent an added value that was not previously typical of film distribution. These documentaries are looking for new opportunities and ways to distribute. In addition to the distribution in the traditional sense, the social distribution with traditions in Hungary continues to live on, the distribution for social purposes appears, to which the impact distribution abroad corresponds. The film team is complemented by a new actor, the *impact producer*. The *impact producer's* job is to maximize the film's potential for change.

The main concepts introduced in the dissertation:

Impact producer: his task is to maximize the film's potential for change.

Impact campaign: is an action necessary to achieve the social impact of a film, which is designed individually for each film.

Impact distribution: is a new way of distribution that aims to reach a wider audience through a conscious campaign beyond the traditional film distribution channels.

Social distribution: the traditional Hungarian initiative from the 1970s to today's changing political-cultural environment.