The Cinema Cities Index: the potentials of engagement-led research

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INTRODUCTION

There is a long tradition of list making among film enthusiasts. Movie Top Tens and Top 100s proliferate in the popular media. These lists are not often data intensive, yet they still allow us to quantify and compare subjective thoughts and opinion. Where data is abundant, lists offer us a way of transforming data down to a manageable format. Cities are often the focus or act as a strong base of comparison for many lists that are created using an index. The EIU's Liveability Ranking, GaWC, and the Mercer Quality of Living Report are popular examples of these. These indexes have a great impact, but what these measures often choose not to engage with is the input from those living in the cities, or the debate at the specific level of calculation and modelling.

CINEMA CITY INDEX

The Cinema City Index (cinemacities.com) is an online tool that allows film lovers to create their own rankings of Top Ten Cinema Cities. Using a commercially procured, global dataset, the site measures the 'cinemability' of cities, the ability for a city to support cinemagoing according to a range of criteria. The data is sourced primarily from a database of cinema showtimes, covering 48 countries and resulting in over 120 million records within a single year. Together with GDP, film festivals, and the ticket pricing data, we have a detailed comparative dataset for 311 cities. The index is currently based around five main concepts for measuring cinemability:

1. access to venues including a diversity of venue types
2. film variety
3. screening volume
4. the presence of film festivals within the city, and
5. the monetary cost associated with seeing a film

The Cinema Cities application is not designed to capture a separate or prior reality, but rather to open up avenues for public speculation about the relationship between cities and the cinema. Visitors are encouraged to engage with acts of ranking by creating their own algorithms to describe the relative importance of a number of cinema related variables, such as number of screens per capita, or the variety of films shown. We also collect this user-produced 'transactional' data. By collecting data on the rankings that individuals give to each variable and therefore the importance they place on different aspects related to cinemagoing, we can inform our own understanding of the value of cinemagoing.

As the production of film industry data becomes increasingly automated (and consequently ever more prolix), the capacity of cinema scholars to single-handedly manage the entire process of data collection, collation and analysis becomes increasingly challenging. As a result, new intersections between commercial and academic research are emerging. The kinematics project is a case in point, demonstrating how third party commercial data can be used to do film distribution and exhibition research.

To date there is very little critical debate about those cinema research methods that exist outside the academy and how powerful these might be in terms of doing scholarly cinema research. As Savage suggests from a different disciplinary perspective, we now have an opportunity, 'to broaden our repertoire and recognize the changing stakes involved in the circuits of 'knowing capitalism'' [1].

This paper examines the use of online technologies to create public engagement with scholarly research. More specifically, it explores the opportunities and challenges presented by transactional or by-product datasets for a data-

driven cinema studies. Limitations such as confidentiality issues, *a priori* data models, and technical challenges will be canvassed as well as the limitations and challenges of crowdsourced evaluations. For the Cinema Cities Index, the combination of commercial and crowdsourced user-data, respectfully handled, can warrant an extended and innovative basis for research engagement with expanded communities.

REFERENCES

1. Savage, M. Against Epochalism: An Analysis of Conceptions of Change in British Sociology *Cultural Sociology* July 2009 3: 217-238.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Deb Verhoeven
Professor Deb Verhoeven is Chair and Professor of Media and Communication at Deakin University, Deputy Director of the Centre for Memory, Imagination and Invention and a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries & Innovation. She is the Project Director of Humanities Networked Infrastructure (HuNI), a two-year project funded by NeCTAR (National eResearch Collaboration Tools and Resources). She served as inaugural Deputy Chair of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (2008-2011) and as CEO of the Australian Film Institute (2000-2002). In 2013 Professor Verhoeven initiated *Research My World*, a collaboration between Deakin University and the crowdfunding platform pozible.com to pilot the micro-financing of university research. Deb is a leading proponent of the Digital Humanities in Australia. Her recent research has addressed the vast amounts of newly available 'cultural data' that has enabled unprecedented computational analysis in the humanities.

Alwyn Davidson
Dr Alwyn Davidson is an early career researcher specialising in the digital humanities and geovisualisation. Alwyn's research interests include the visualisation of humanities data, the application of GIS and spatial techniques, the analysis of cultural datasets, and working within an interdisciplinary environment. Alwyn in currently a research assistant at Deakin University.

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Dr Bronwyn Coate is an early career researcher specialising in cultural economics. She currently holds a Research Fellowship with the Centre for Memory, Imagination and Invention at Deakin University. Bronwyn's research explores different aspects of art and culture with a focus on economic implications using quantitate techniques. Key areas covered in Bronwyn's research include the creative industries, Indigenous cultural production, cultural consumption and film economics.

Colin Arrowsmith
Colin is Associate Professor in the School of Mathematical and Geospatial Sciences at RMIT University. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy from RMIT as well as two masters' degrees and a bachelor's degree from the University of Melbourne, and a Graduate Diploma of Education from Hawthorn Institute of Education. Colin has authored more than 40 refereed publications and 6 book chapters in the fields of GIS, tourism analysis and film studies. Colin's research interests include the application of geospatial information systems, including geographic information systems (GIS), geospatial science education, investigating the impact of tourism on nature-based tourist destinations, tourist behaviour, as well as investigating the issue of managing micro-historical data within GIS utilising cinema data.