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Cine-Traffic in the Air: the Geographies of Inflight Movies from a Selection of European Airlines

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Abstract

Airplanes have emerged as less and less peripheral spaces of cinematic fruition. Inflight entertainment, indeed, is currently perceived as an amenity commonly provided onboard aircrafts. On these assumptions, the essay examines on-the-fly cinema primarily in terms of industrial practices and commercial strategies. A theoretical overview will clarify some of the issues most recurrently associated to film consumption within planes, often described as enclosed topological environments featuring a composite social structure dominated by a sense of transience and in-betweenness. Inflight distribution has developed as a crucial stage for the global circulation of hundreds of cinematic titles, as well as a highly-lucrative niche market. First and foremost, such a unique receptive frame implies questions of physical and cultural mobility. Consequently, the study is based on a multivariable data-oriented analysis, conducted on the onboard video-catalogues of five European full-service carriers. The findings derived from comparative assessments indicate that inflight cinema became a sign of the times of civil aviation mainly due to its disruptive role for differentiation among companies. In detailing this, tensions between local and global stances have necessarily to be taken into account. Given that the same aggregation of contents may be regarded as a process of branding, the exaltation of various geographies, both on a suvra-national and hyper-domestic level, is identified as the main factor driving the airlines within the filmic selection.

Keywords: Cinema; Inflight; Global; National; Branding.

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1 Airplane mode: a theoretical overview

The hold door is secured, passengers are requested to fasten their seatbelts, the engines drone prior to take off: aerial cruising has progressively rooted as a somehow accustomed experience, perceived with the same naturalness permeating the human attitude upon a vast range of technological interventions in everyday life. Whether this sense of familiarity aboard commercial aircrafts should also be attributed to the presence of in-flight entertainment is still to be verified. What is more certain is that, finally free from the habitual hassles, the few hours in the sky provide an unparalleled sequence of spare moments and a rare opportunity to unplug, although the on-going expansion of air-to-ground and satellite based wi-fi systems designed for on-the-fly consumption is gradually re-delineating the contours of what has long been regarded — and repeatedly acclaimed — as an unattainable reserve of quiet (Gemini 2008; Iyer 2011). Hence, it is not a case that, in his essay dedicated to the pervasiveness of entertainment in contemporary society (2003), Wolf noticed that the choice of a certain airline implies also the decision on how to spend each's own time, assumption which the carriers themselves promptly integrated within their commercial positioning and corporate strategy. Accordingly, it should not appear improper to include aeronautical cabins among those environments of communication recurrently indicated as the agents of the advance of globalization (Appadurai 1996; Tomlinson 1999).

Today, indeed, civil aviation does not exclusively deal with the movement of travellers: air traffic also entails the circulation of a conspicuous sample of audiovisual material, diffused to customers during medium and long-haul flights via over-the-head monitors, seatback screens or, more rarely, on portable electronic gadgets. Fluxes of crowds, handling of goods, transmission of stories: aircrafts have mutated into special *loci* of video-filmic exposure, modern access points to images, in parallel with the relocation of cinema devices (and related digital platforms) in once uncontaminated settings (Casetti 2008, 2012 and 2015; cf. also Mingo 2003). Besides, several common qualities have regularly been recognised to cinema and aviation as two somehow interconnected entities, from a multitude of different levels (cf. Groening 2013; Iordanova 2017; Phalen 2012). They are *vectors* and *vehicles* of movement, globalization and, to some extent, of over-the-border mobility, tailoring an experience of transit within spaces of flow made of velocity, immateriality and imageries (Castells 1996; Virilio 1995). Indeed, it is believed that in the case of aeroplanes it was the seventh art to re-establish a sense of dynamism inside the cabin, activating a panoply of alternate temporalities by virtue of its constituent *in motion* pictures (Groening 2014b).

The aim of this paper is to assess the assortment of global and local cinemas within a selection of inflight entertainment videocatalogues, in consistency with precise branding techniques. In particular, a brief theoretical framework will draw attention to the space-time qualities attributed to aeroplanes, crucial to speculate on the territorialisation outcomes of those film collections. The focal point of the essay will be expanded in the second section, through a commented multi-criteria analysis of the monthly programmes of five different European airlines responding to a set of pre-determined parameters. As far as multichannel and personally controlled systems are taken into account, conclusions will be derived from specific benchmarking evidence. The attempt to demonstrate how the transnational dissemination of audiovisual works relies primarily on promotional, commercial and even geopolitical compromises, rather than editorial concerns, will be fostered across the whole investigation, focusing on the supposed tension between contents driven by the paradigm of cosmopolitanism and titles credited for their regional and national calibre.

Inflight entertainment (commonly abbreviated into "IFE") has been mostly examined under the spotlight of audience studies, due to the unique fruitive assets it presupposes. Reflections on the receptive practices and the visual aspects connected to this phenomenon, as well as endeavours to model the spectatorial classes it calls into question (first of all, the ideas of "transumer" and "separated spectator") are addressed by specialised literature (Govil 2004; Groening 2013, 2014b, 2016). It is also Groening who insisted on the phased shift of aeroplanes from "multiplexes in the air" to "concentrates of console televisions and personal sonic spaces." In all respects civil jets established themselves as peculiar in-transit exhibition sites, repositories of entertainment oscillating between "home-zone" and "destination-area" (Moss, 2009). On-the-go cinema therefore became a typical component of flying, with the aircraft's headrests finally transformed into surfaces of mediatic convergence (Gitlin 2002). The celerity of this mode of transport imposes the physical confinement of passengers inside the fuselage, at an average altitude of 30.000 feet: IFE is to be primarily meant as an expedient to ease the tedium of aeroplane-users, relieving and diverting them from the psycho-corporeal discomfort endured during long-distance crossings, especially in an age when technical automations against atmospheric pressure fluctuations were not fully available.

The eventful timeline of in-the-air screenings dates back to the Roaring Twenties America, when in 1921 *Howdy Chicago* (director unknown), an expressly disposed mute short, was projected on a trial basis inside an Aeromarine Airways hydroplane on circle over Illinois' main metropolis. From that occasion, the trend got irreversibly launched. Eight years later TAT signed the first agreement with Universal Pictures to show on the American fleet some of the studios' A-list hits. It was not before the early Sixties that screenings were programmed over TWA's regularly scheduled transatlantic routes, following what had happened with the "enrichment activities" aboard overseas liners, ever since the time zone scheme started to synchronise the planet (Corbin 1995). It was David Flexer, the founder in 1958 of Inflight Motion Pictures, who first had the intuition to produce cinema audiences instead of leading them into the theatres: convinced that air travel was "both the most advanced form of transport and the most boring," he patented a system which enabled film reels and extractable Bell&Howell projectors to fit compactly on Boeings 797 (Volpe 2018).

Figure 1: TWA Print Advertisement, 1961 (source: airspacemag.com)

At this stage it should be made clear that the success of IFE is on the first instance to be ascribed to the technological progress that cinema of attractions implicated since its beginning, well before that aerospace engineering, pocket electronics and miniature circuits paved the path to video systems (1964), 8 mm film cassette (1971), personal embedded LCD displays (1988), live television (1996) and audio and video on demand digital interfaces (2004) (Reed 2006). Looking back at its origins, the perspective reducing IFE as a form of survival cinema which made airspace habitable and navigable (Groening 2014b) may sound hyperbolic. However, it is not surprising that eminent thinkers suggest an association between the cabin forced immobilism and the visual expansivity of IFE, with the consequent refunctionalisation of a dead time span. Among the many, Virilio (1977, 1994 and 1997) worked on the figure of the “terminal citizen” and on the concept of “teletopia” alongside carceral technologies, while Augé (1995, 1997 and 2009) concentrated on authority degrees and conditional freedom within transport environments.

The room constraints of Flexer’s apparatuses no longer concern the distributors of airborne films. Because of the advancements in avionics, in the contemporary scenario everything is delivered digitally to the fuselage servers. Hence, today airplane companies can rely on a sophisticated media service, forging the emersion of a specialized multibillion industry (Durston 2017). Currently, IFE in its broadest conception includes films, tv-like contents, videogames, music, e-books, animated geolocation maps and a plethora of additional amenities (Fuhrt, 2008), to the point that airlines came to be the final players of an extremely complex production and distribution chain which involves manufacturers, content providers, dealers and editors. As IFE video hardware got more sophisticated and capable of storing vast libraries of contents on demand, the business of sourcing, screening and curating the whole variety of this offering has arisen also due to the interests of the national film committees (Seguin 2007).

“The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves [...]” (Augé 1995: 34): in the backdrop of Foucault’s heterotopias, the highly symbolic nature of airplanes lead them to be variously defined as non-places, inter-/hyper-/counter-spaces, *terrain vague*, interstices (Gasparini 1998). The various perspectives by which the ecological connotations of aircrafts have been approached seem all to revolve around their structure of elsewhere, threshold of the modern era and putative agents of an autonomous temporality, strongly flattened on the *hic et nunc* of flyers (Pagano 2011). And as far as IFE is concerned, the scene appears increasingly intricate: in-the-air cinema may indeed act as a form of hypertopia within a heterotopic *milieu* (Casetti 2015), an *enclave* subject to a space-time short circuit.

It is the effect of self-relativization often ascertained amid the visitors of those spatial grey areas to be here emphasized, especially for the idiosyncratic mental response it originates within such aggregates of moving crowds. The territorial and psychological liminality of captive passengers is quintessential to outline the singular status of media viewership observable aboard scheduled flights. In fact, as noted by Groening (2014a), the transcendence of the “sense of place” (Meyrowitz 1985) seems to raise an emotional intensification among travellers: accordingly, the prevalence of certain genres within on-the-fly video collections should be scrutinized also in terms of such a topical mood disposition. It is yet to be determined whether the presence of cinema and television does definitely subvert the presumed identity emptiness that long was imputed to vectors (Augé 2009). Despite the space-qualifying results that screens may stimulate within the different venues where they get housed, what is more evident is that IFE ended up organizing and narrating the anonymity of a self-contained temporal window and geographical capsule. Through an analysis of a number of specific cases, this research intends to shed light on the composition of IFE film catalogues, with particular concern for means of content provision, the competitive logics among airlines, their affinities with National cinemas, as well as their actions directed to reward and satisfy very diverse audiences. The final purpose is to demonstrate how the permanence of such onerous entertainment commodities within onboard services, along with the growth forecasts of the entire industry, can no more be dismissed in full as an ancillary (and negligible) extravaganza. The thesis proposed, indeed, is that IFE-related investments are primarily justified by issues such as corporate identity and image, travellers’ perception and trans-territorial branding, clearly traceable in airlines’ filmic selections and in the cultural patronages underlying.

2 Postcards from the atmosphere: an analysis of five continental onboard libraries

The multi-layered relation between the video contents provided to travellers and the mediated geographies displayed on the screens challenges different questions, from the variable of national segmentation applicable to the flying audiences, to the opportunities of strategic development and the addressal of certain epics advantageous to the industry. To investigate on this point, the research grounds on a data sample consisting of the monthly screened cinema catalogues of five Europe-based airlines (namely Lufthansa, Air France, KLM, SAS and Alitalia). As shown in the listed data set, November 2018 was established as the reference month. The aforementioned companies were chosen in compliance with self-definite guidelines. Primarily, according to the applicable regulations (Button et al. 2005), they are rated as "major civil commercial airline" and included in one of the leading commercial coalitions in place among global players (Sky Team, One World, Star Alliance). The quality of their service offered onboard is also acknowledged, as certified by prizes awarded by specialized organisations (i.e. SkyTrax, Skift, APEX, Inflight). They all meet the condition of belonging to diverse continental macro-areas (central Europe, the Mediterranean, the Nordic Countries), both concerning their registration Countries and the extension of their international and transoceanic networks. In the same way, the selected airlines maintain a substantial relationship with the main affiliated States (former flag carriers and/or current beneficiaries of public capital). Finally, an additional parameter was the online availability of IFE complete schedules and/or accessibility of in-depth information for each of the companies, through digital and/or print inflight magazines and/or other in-house publications.

Furthermore, the combination of airlines advanced here complies also with the commitment to encompass a pair of parent carriers, Air France and the subsidiary KLM, as well as to enclose all three principal content service providers operating worldwide (Global Eagle, Global ONE Media, Spafax), in line with the expected outcomes about product differentiation and purchase strategies. Especially for the latter intent, the possibility to attend the Aircraft Interior Expo (Hamburg, April 2017), an annual business-oriented event partly devoted to IFE, in addition to various contacts with organisations in the sector, has proved to be fundamental in order to collate documents normally inaccessible.

For each of the investigated airlines the collection of data was limited to the whole batch of audiovisuals proposed under the classification of "cinema" by the aviation companies themselves (and their third-party programming experts), thus omitting any other video option, including television. The derived *corpus* deals exclusively with on-demand video titles viewable by means of single stand-alone rear-seat LCD displays and run individually by passengers via personal remote controls or fingertap technologies: contents transmitted on shared mainscreens mounted to the ceilings of the most outdated fuselages or delivered via streaming on travellers' electronic devices are therefore not comprised among the items considered below. Indeed, despite its exponential gain of attention within the industry (cf. Alamdari 2009; Kemp 2016), the prototype of the branded portal modelled on over-the-top platforms' systems of recommendation still appears as an ancillary feature of the case studies, due essentially to the reluctance of producers and distributors to affranchise their most profitable short-window blockbusters from fixed and securely controllable embedded monitors (Serafini 2016).

The huge economical turnover of airborne entertainment has thus gradually carved out a proper niche market, whose value is by now unparalleled within the nontheatrical and out-of-home cinema distribution share (Phalen 2012). As confidentially revealed by an inflight media executive in service for one of the examined airlines, 5% of Hollywood's total profits would derive from the rights management of onboard movies, along with sea cruises, military facilities and detention areas (personal interview, June 2017). The related industry exceeded USD 3 billion in 2017, of which almost 400 million for content licensing, with growth projections up to 70 billion USD in 2022 (SITA reports; APEX industry resources). Airspace is a further place through which films can circulate, targeting passengers *de facto* transformed into accidental spectators (Govil 2014). Accordingly, the business has facilitated Hollywood's alleged universalistic claims, resulting in an enlargement of the potential audiences, the viable exportation of audiovisuals in otherwise hardly penetrable contexts, as well as an increase in market awareness and publicity for a consistent (and notably lucrative) segment of consumers (Barry 1999). Although being a generally understudied field, the tracking of such a vast heritage of movie titles, quantifiable in 1422 unities, assumes chief importance in respect to the almost 212 million passengers carried together by the scrutinised airlines in 2018, on hundreds of routes (IATA annual audits). Those films, in fact, acquire an unexpected relevance by virtue of their extent, impact and visibility.

Getting back to the information retrieval process, this was primarily facilitated by the consultation of designated applications hosted on the observed airlines' websites.[1] Such IFE dedicated Internet sections are

1. Reference URLs, last accessed 20-12-18, are the following:
https://www.lufthansa-inflightentertainment.com/en/ (Lufthansa), https://www.airfrance.it/IT/it/common/ife/dispatch/all_movies.

marked by easy-to-navigate menus, as well as responsive design templates reproducing the architecture of the IFE computerised interfaces usable onboard the aircrafts. These full-fledged mini-sites allow passengers to learn in advance the video assortment at their disposal on their trip ("What's on my flight" button), as well as the whole fleet's programming archives, updated on a monthly basis.

When necessary, as in the case of Alitalia, the information sheets provided online have been integrated with other pertinent news supplied by transportation or programming companies. At that point, for each of the firms taken into account it became possible to map out a full picture of their cinema libraries, with a *compendium* of material ranging from movie line-ups, synopses, multilanguage versions, exact durations, credits, trailers, slideshows and critical assessments.

On a methodological side, the variables presented in the tables enclosed, treated in both volume (numerical, percent rounded to the nearest whole digit and average) and value terms, may be identified as follows:

- distribution of titles in each of the video catalogues' macro-categories scheduled by the airlines, with special emphasis on the latest additions of November 2018;
- average age of the cinematic contents, on a per category standard (the median was preferred as a more adapt statistical tool);
- distribution of titles within thematic selectors, as indexed by the carriers themselves (being the integration of a same title in more than one rubric a procedure extensively adopted, these classifiers are net of multiple occurrences and do normally differ from the ones relating to first point);
- available languages, both for audio-tracks and subtitles (combined trans-genre data);
- prevailing Countries of (co-)production, divided into relevant clusters[2] (significantly, not always these entries are tagged directly by the airlines; therefore, IMDb has also been checked).

For either the airline-set classifiers, the genre-like selectors, the applicable languages and subtitles or the Country of origin variables, the charts do frequently imply more than one entry per title (i.e. in the cases of cross-categories movies, multiple language options and/or more than one Country of production are involved). As a general rule, quantitative data are sorted in descending order, while Nation-specific language and Country of production table cells have been coloured. The entry "Others," with the corresponding specifications detailed in the related footnote, is used to refer to those classifiers connected with no more than one item within the data set of the single airlines.

Indicators have eventually been aggregated on a cross-airline level, so to obtain an overall transnational snapshot. It is worth nothing that the final computations may not be totally exhaustive: aeropolitical diplomacy, in fact, imposes to discard from any promotional media those data relating to motion pictures exclusively reserved to specific routes, also due to foreign censorship issues (Cornick 2010).

2.1 Lufthansa

Lufthansa (Germany) is part of the Lufthansa group and the Star Alliance coalition; its main content service provider is Spafax (Tenthavenue division, WPP Group).

htm (Air France), https://entertainment.klm.com (KLM), https://inflightentertainment.sas.se/e (SAS), https://www.alitalia.com/en_en/fly-alitalia/in-flight/entertainment.html (Alitalia).

2. A legend of the International Naming Convention Country abbreviations used in the charts is here provided:

AE (United Arab Emirates), AR (Argentina), AU (Australia), BE (Belgium), BF (Burkina Faso), BR (Brasil), CA (Canada), CH (Switzerland), CN (China), CO (Colombia), DE (Germany), DK (Denmark), EG (Egypt), ES (Spain), FR (France), GB (United Kingdom), HK (Hong Kong), IE (Ireland), IN (India), IT (Italy), JP (Japan), KR (Korea), NG (Nigeria), NL (Netherlands), NO (Norway), RU (Russia), SE (Sweden), TN (Tunisia), US (United States of America), ZA (South Africa).

2.1.1 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set categories

Tab. 1 – Categories percentages and release year median[3]

	% of titles assigned the tagged category out of the total library entries (no.)	*Release year: median*
Recent Hits	24% (157)	2018
Drama	18% (116)	2017
Comedy	12% (78)	2018
Action&Thriller	11% (72)	2017
New this Month	8% (52)	2017
World Cinema	7% (45)	2018
Arthouse	6% (41)	2017
Euro Cinema	5% (32)	2017
German Film	4% (27)	2016
Family	3% (17)	2018
Science Fiction	2% (14)	2017

As its first priority, Lufthansa tries to comply with the promise to "offer an outstanding entertainment from the best in film and tv, worldwide" (taken from the promotional IFE trailer of November 2018) through an extensive recourse to brand-new movies not only in the "New this Month" section, but notably among the "Recent Hits" classified contents, resulting in a clear reduction of the corresponding release year median. Consequently, the library bursts with big-budget Hollywood hits and large-scale productions which traditionally intercept the preference of passengers for brand new cinema and first run films (cf. Amaro Mugnaini 2010; Kemp 2016; Ku 2018). Given the fact that in Europe, differently from the US pricing models, the main parameter to structure inflight licensing fees is the movie's date of production (in parallel to the aircraft's model and its technologies, the number of flights planned and the expected number of transmissions, cf. Hazelton 2011 and Phalen 2012), evidence suggests that Lufthansa assigns substantial allocations to its IFE program. Here, indeed, the freshness of the cinematic selection offered onboard, as displayed in tab. 1 in its median release years, is likely to justify the high expenditures in IFE of the carrier, assumption confirmed by the corporate outlooks consulted.

In addition to this, Lufthansa seems also to adopt a director-led strategy, as emerges in the Spielberg retrospective of November 2018, with the filmmaker being described in the teaser as "one of the world's best loved and most innovative storytellers." In the same way, classics like Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) or Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) could function as onboard well-wishers for the most nostalgic travellers.

2.1.2 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set genre labels

Tab. 2 – % of titles assigned to the tagged genre out of the total itemised genre entries (no.)

Drama	39% (116)
Comedy	26% (78)
Action&Thriller	24% (72)
Family	6% (17)
Science Fiction	5% (14)

In June 2018 Lufthansa has significantly upgraded its IFE programme on long haul flights, with a roughly 30% increase in content variety based on feedback from travellers (cf. HMG monthly reports). This heterogeneity is rather detectable in the main genre labels set by the carrier on the basis of its content provider's indexing and

3. Total of titles excl. multiple occurrences: 215 [A.1], of which November 2018 new acquisitions: 52 (24%) [B.1]

tagging standards (tab. 2), on a broad balance between “Drama,” “Comedy” and “Action&Thriller” categorised entries.

Assumed that airlines are called upon to scout a mix of titles to cater to the diverse needs of customers on very disparate itineraries (Hazelton 2011), the attention given by the carrier to Oriental cinema (39 of Chinese, Indian, Korean and Japanese contents) is not accidental. The Frankfurt based carrier boasts a flying network particularly developed in Eastern Nations, and its on-the-fly services are clearly projected to accommodate the passengers’ most diverse cultural sensitivities (cf. tab. 4). Likewise, the incorporation among soundtrack and subtitles idioms of no fewer than three languages from China (Cantonese, Mandarin and traditional, see table below), together with Tamil and Thai, should be firstly interpreted as an attempt to design a truly multicultural library in the interest of multinational passengers. Arguably, such reduction of physical and cultural distances ends up positioning concepts of openness to the world profitable for the German carrier and the Country it represents to cultivate their network of commercial and diplomatic relationships with partner (or subordinate) economies.

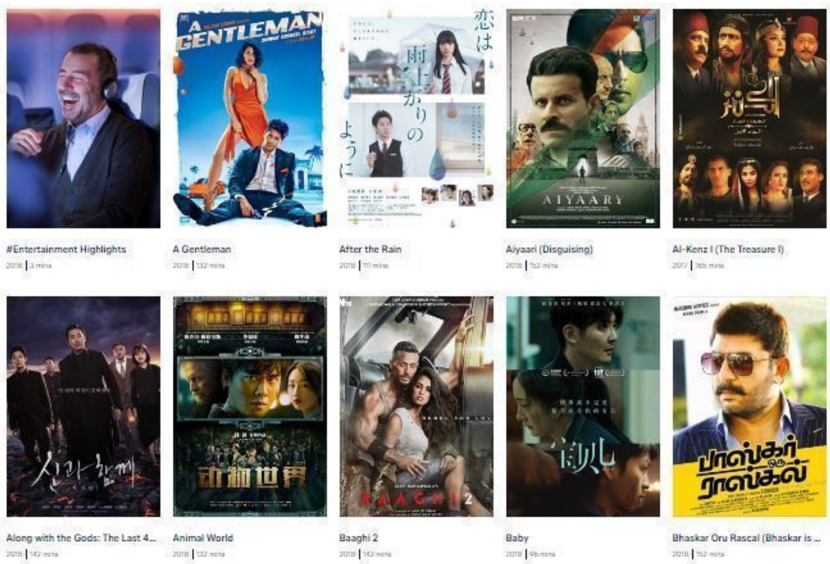

Figure 2: Lufthansa World Movies Selection (capture from Lufthansa.com)

2.1.3 Available languages

Tab. 3 – % of titles available in the tagged language out of item *A.1* (no.)

	Soundtracks	Subtitles
German	**71% (153)**	**11% (24)**
English	63% (134)	58% (126)
French	51% (110)	0.5% (1)
Italian	35% (75)	0.5% (1)
Spanish	46% (98)	-
Portuguese	34% (73)	-
Japanese	31% (67)	-
Korean	16% (34)	-
Russian	13% (28)	-
Hindi	5% (11)	-
Mandarin	5% (10)	10% (22)
Polish	2% (5)	-
Chinese	2% (4)	34% (73)

	Soundtracks	Subtitles
Arabic	2% (4)	31% (66)
Turkish	1% (3)	-
Hebrew	0.5% (1)	20% (43)
Others[4]	3% (7)	-

After all, if the carrier invested to include Hebrew subtitles in its videocatalogue, a unique case amid the examined libraries, this is to be primarily linked to the commercial value of its routes to Israel, which must arise as much open and welcoming to Israeli travellers as possible. Furthermore, the ostentatious consideration for minorities is here reflected in the presence of the Swiss dialect Romansh among the audio track languages, as well as Iran's Farsi which is not usually findable onboard European civil jets; the movie *Negaar* (*Negar*, R. Javan, 2017) is even proposed exclusively in the Persian language. With the same aim, Polish and Russian speaking flyers can enjoy a very restricted selection of cinema in their languages, somehow attesting the supremacy of Lufthansa as the Central Europe air transportation leader, as shown by third-party ample evidence (cf. market analyses compiled by ATW, Aviation Week, IATA and ICAO). The appearance of the Paris French dialect amidst the audio track languages (see footnote 3) adds instead a touch of wordliness to the whole video package, with a certain sarcastic intent.

2.1.4 Countries of production

Tab. 4 – % of the titles involving the tagged Country of production out of item *A.1* (no.)

US	52% (113)
GB	15% (32)
DE	**9% (27)**
FR	7% (14)
IN	6% (13)
CN	6% (12)
JP	5% (11)
Others[5]	2% (4)
EG	2% (4)
KR	2% (4)
IT	1% (3)
IE	1% (2)
CA	1% (2)
AE	1% (2)
AR	1% (2)

By virtue of its flagship role within the Lufthansa Group, the airline maintains a somehow deliberate German-centric profile also for what concerns the in-cabin motion pictures: being the entertainment curated by the same WPP division Spafax, it is the subsidiary companies (Swiss Air, Austrian Airlines, Brussels Airlines...) that draw fully from their mother firm's videocatalogue, and not *vice versa.* Consequently, as verified through a brief double check monitoring, Lufthansa's controlled companies are the ones featuring a large assortment of German films transmitted over their flights, whereas Lufthansa itself, apart from one Swiss original content, does present neither Austrian nor Belgian works. Such scheme is slightly different for the Air France-KLM case, mainly due to their less defined relation of subordination

However, it should be emphasised that the share of German movies aboard Lufthansa flights is not as high as the other nationally-produced movies exhibited by the remaining companies featured in the present paper (9%

4. Others: Cantonese, Farsi, Paris French, Romanish, Tamil, Thai.

5. Others: Iran, Poland, Spain, Switzerland.

against an average of 25% obtained from the data of Air France, KLM, SAS and Alitalia). It could be argued that this mirrors how much scant is German cinematic production in number, even if some of the latest reports point out that the average percentage of home-grown titles in movie theatres across Germany stands at about 22% of the overall cinematic choice (Meza 2018; Vivarelli 2019). Nevertheless, within the European filmic assortment of the carrier, German cinema appears still predominant: this continental supremacy is obtained through a (deliberate) conspicuous reduction of the overall allotments of Europe-made movies, with the exception of the UK rate, tightly correlated to US productions. Consequently, titles categorized under the label of "World Movies," in some measure promoted also on diplomatic bases, appear to be finally prioritised by the airline.

The case of Lufthansa shows ultimately how multi-layered classifications, an accurate labelling and an equally meticulous *mise-en-page* become the key elements of quality for in-the-air cinema catalogues. Thanks to its horizontal expansion in more than one category, Lufthansa corporate library does at first sight impress for its apparent limitlessness; only a careful scanning reveals how the device of multiple occurrences – here applied to the totality of the 215 titles, inventoried in 651 different entries – is likely to enhance its general perception and judgment.

2.2 Air France and KLM

Air France (France) and KLM (Netherlands) have merged in 2003 in the Air France-KLM group; they are part of the Sky Team coalition and their common main content service provider is Global Eagle.

2.2.1 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set categories

Tab. 5 – Categories percentages and release year median[6]

Air France	*% of titles assigned the tagged category out of the total library entries (no.)*	*Release year: median*
World Movies	39% (137)	2017
Recent Movies	19% (66)	2017
The Collection	17% (58)	2017
Latest Releases-New	8% (27)	2018
Short Films	6% (22)	2015
Kids	5% (17)	2016
Animated Movies	5% (16)	2015
Cannes Festival	1% (5)	2012

Tab. 6 – Categories percentages and release year median[7]

KLM	*% of titles assigned the tagged category out of the total library entries (no.)*	*Release year: median*
World	46% (96)	2017
Latest	25% (52)	2018
The Collection	20% (40)	2009
Family	9% (22)	2015

As far as the French and the Dutch cases are concerned, a combined examination of the data grids obtained is to be preferred, firstly in consideration of the logistical and infrastructural procedures underlying Air France and KLM common provision of IFE materials. In particular, such conjoined analysis seems to validate the

6. Total of titles excl. multiple occurrences: 259 [A.2], of which November 2018 new acquisitions: 27 (10%) [B.2]

7. Total of titles excl. multiple occurrences: 210 [A.3], of which November 2018 new acquisitions: 52 (25%) [B.3]. Share of titles in common with parent-company Air France: 40% (83 movies)

hypothesis that programming-specialised agencies (i.e. the content service providers in charge of conducting deals and supplying entertainment products to carriers) are able to leverage volumes across multiple airline customers, achieving economies of scale for airlines and studios (Groening 2008; Knittel 1999, Phalen 2012). Effectively, in November 2018 the Dutch carrier shared more than 40% of its on-the-go cinema (83 movies, see tab. 6) with the company that in 2003 absorbed it. Among the five examined cases, it should be acknowledged that Air France hold the record for the overall highest number of entries (259 titles, see tab. 5), while KLM stands substantially in line with the competitor Lufthansa (210 titles, cf. tab. 6), in spite of its distance in terms of fleet size, turnover and load factor. Moreover, if Air France reduces by far the resort to multiple occurrences, KLM is not deploying them at all. Rather than the "Recent Movies or"Latest releases" rubrics (this latest occupying only 8% of the airline-set categories), non-Western films are on a quantitative level the most represented (39% in Air France, even 46% in KLM).

Evidently, world cinema is not the unique resource of such videocatalogues: the vertical expansion of Air France, for instance, leans on a massive amount of *à la française* products (84 titles, see tab. 7), ranging from global arthouses, middlebrow comedies, short films and Cannes Festival exclusives (cf. tab. 5), promoted as an added value for the brand positioning (Kemp 2016). Air France IFE commitment, as announced in the advertising campaign ("[...] Every genre imaginable, for the young and young at heart"), seems therefore to have successfully proved itself in practice.

2.2.2 Countries of production

Tab. 7 – % of the titles involving the tagged Country of production out of item *A.2* (no.)

Air France	
US	35% (91)
FR	**32% (84)**
GB	10% (26)
Others[8]	8% (20)
CN	5% (13)
IN	5% (12)
DE	4% (11)
JP	4% (10)
BE	4% (10)
KR	3% (9)
IT	2% (5)
BR	2% (5)
RU	1% (3)
BF	1% (3)
NG	1% (3)
TN	1% (2)
CO	1% (2)
EG	1% (2)
CA	1% (2)

8. Others: Argentina, Australia, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Denmark, Hong Kong, Iceland, Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela.

Tab. 8 – % of the titles involving the tagged Country of production out of item *A.3* (no.)

KLM	
US	51% (108)
GB	13% (27)
NL	**10% (20)**
Others[9]	9% (18)
FR	8% (17)
DE	6% (12)
CN	5% (10)
KR	5% (10)
JP	5% (10)
IN	3% (7)
BR	2% (5)
EG	2% (4)
SE	2% (4)
RU	2% (4)
IT	1% (3)
ES	1% (3)
AR	1% (3)
AU	1% (3)
HK	1% (3)
AE	1% (2)
BE	1% (2)
DK	1% (2)
ZA	1% (2)

Given some relevant communalities, a distinction should in any case be made between the two brands. With respect to Air France, the international collection seems to be assorted in the manner of a flying festival (Groening 2014b: 185 and Iordanova 2017: 77), legacy of an intense colonial past and a fervid cultural production. Indeed, apart from a conspicuous swath of European motion pictures (surprisingly enough, made also of Belgian and Monegasque works), various are the French and Tunisian co-productions, alongside a mixture of cinema from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Nigeria and Senegal (10 titles, see footnote 5). The "beyond the West" cinema *bouquet* also includes sparks of South American contents from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru and Venezuela, generally reflecting the ramification of routes. All in all, it is probably not a case that on inflight magazines cinema programming is displayed next to the airline's destinations map, as if this were the way carriers wish the passengers to look at the world (Giaccardi 2003).

As regards the Dutch case, it has been written how much relevance the "World" cinema section assumes for KLM. Despite their mutual source of provision (Global Eagle Entertainment) resulting in a high number of common titles with Air France, more than 70% of the material contained under KLM's "World" classifier is completely independent from the French parent company (against a share of 62% of reciprocity within the "Latest" labelled movie category). For instance, KLM travellers can come across works from Austria, Ghana, Hungary, Iceland, Lebanon, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan or Tunisia (see tab. 8 and footnote 6). Consequently, it may be deduced that differentiation strategies are well visible in the choice of non-Western titles, according primarily to the network of routes, while less possibilities of personalization and stratification affect the more recent and Country non-specific movie segments, composed of a more homogenous assemblage of titles between the various players (cf. Taylor, 2018).

9. Others: Austria, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Hungary, Iceland, Lebanon, Malaysia, Niger, Peru, Senegal, Singapore, Taiwan, Tunisia, Venezuela.

2.2.3 Available languages

Tab. 9 – % of titles available in the tagged language out of item *A.2* (no.)

Air France	Soundtracks	Subtitles
French	**64% (165)**	**15% (38)**
English	44% (115)	36% (129)
Spanish	30% (77)	-
German	22% (57)	-
Portuguese	21% (55)	-
Japanese	21% (54)	-
Korean	19% (48)	-
Italian	14% (36)	-
Russian	9% (23)	-
Chinese	7% (18)	6% (16)
Hindi	4% (11)	-
Arabic	3% (8)	-

Tab. 10 – % of titles available in the tagged language out of item *A.3* (no.)

KLM	Soundtracks	Subtitles
English	56% (117)	55% (115)
French	45% (94)	-
Spanish	34% (72)	-
German	27% (57)	-
Portuguese	27% (57)	-
Japanese	20% (41)	-
Italian	18% (37)	-
Korean	18% (38)	-
Dutch	**12% (25)**	**36% (76)**
Russian	10% (22)	-
Chinese	6% (13)	20% (43)
Hindi	5% (11)	-
Arabic	4% (8)	1% (3)
Danish	1% (2)	-
Others[10]	1% (2)	-

Such a wide spectrum of diversity and cultural exchange does not seem to find a likewise marked correspondence among audio-tracks and subtitles' available languages. These, for example, are normally proposed only in a couple of options (Chinese and English) both by Air France and KLM, while French is by far the privileged idiom, due also to the low impact of Dutch as a national language. The fact that, sometimes, the different episodes of the same sagas recurring within "The Collection" category (i.e. *Harry Potter* franchise, Chris Columbus, various directors, 2001–2011 and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, P. Jackson, 2001–2003) are featured in languages differing from one film to another is possibly attributable to rushed block bookings at the hand of the content scouting branch (cf. Phalen 2012).

10. Others: Norwegian, Swedish.

2.2.4 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set genre labels

Tab. 11 – % of titles assigned to the tagged genre out of the total itemised genre entries (no.)

Air France	
Drama&Romance	29% (109)
Comedy	24% (88)
Action	8% (31)
Thriller	6% (24)
Arts&Culture	6% (22)
Animation	6% (21)
Family	6% (21)
Biography	3% (11)
Adventure	3% (10)
Crime	3% (10)
Sci-Fi	2% (9)
Documentary	2% (8)
Musical	1% (5)
Fantasy	1% (4)

Tab. 12 – % of titles assigned to the tagged genre out of the total itemised genre entries (no.)

KLM	
Drama	27% (84)
Comedy	18% (56)
Action	17% (54)
Adventure	13% (41)
Thriller	8% (25)
Animation	7% (21)
Romance	5% (15)
Sci-Fi	3% (8)
Documentary	2% (6)

It has already been presumed that package deal brokerings are widely adopted in the process of inflight content licensing, rather than cherry picking solutions. Clues of this business plan, due also to Hollywood's aggressive attempts of reducing the number of slots available for independent fare (Hazelton 2011), may for instance be identified in KLM "Kids" library. Among more than 20 animation movies, most of all produced or distributed by Disney, a couple of old classics stand out from the collection: it is the original version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Disney's first full-length animated feature, and *Dumbo* (1949). Being imminent, as announced, the releases on the market of these cartoons' remakes, it is plausible to suppose that Disney pushed to include the original versions of the long-awaited films among the list of titles ordered by KLM, as a means of calling attention to them.

The stories revolving around flying and air terminals are then inevitable: onboard Air France flights, a puppet lost in an airport is the narrative hook of *Looking for Teddy* (*Le Doudou*, J. Hervé and P. Mechelen, 2018),[11] while the Icelandic-Belgian animation *Poley. You Never Fly Alone* (A. Ásgeirsson, 2018) is featured onboard KLM, together with a special episode of *The Adventures of Bluey* (director unknown, 2017) in which KLM funny mascot approaches for the first time the world of aviation. Interestingly enough, being the topic of the

11. Similar storytelling devices have also been used by Alitalia (2008), Delta (2013) and Lufthansa (2010) as part of their corporate campaigns.

journey always central, these contents end up forging a common sense of belonging within the community of travellers and tourists (Gemini 2008; Mascheroni 2007), under the seal of the carrier firm. The intertwining between diegesis and reality is thus brought up to its highest level, activating dynamic of dramatization and mediatization particularly valuable for the airlines' strategic policies.

Figure 3: KLM's Bluey, Kids Library, November 2018 (source: klm.com)

2.3 Scandinavian Airlines (SAS)

SAS (Denmark-Norway-Sweden) is part of the Star Alliance coalition; its main content service provider is Spafax (Tenthavenue division, WPP Group).

2.3.1 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set categories

Tab. 13 – Categories percentages and release year median[12]

	% of titles assigned the tagged category out of the total library entries (no.)	*Release year: median*
Last Chance to Watch	16% (25)	2018
New Releases	15% (22)	2018
Drama	14% (21)	2018
World Cinema	13% (20)	2017
Comedy	13% (20)	2018
Action	11% (17)	2018
Recent Hits	9% (13)	2015
Family	5% (8)	2014
Thriller	3% (5)	2018

2.3.2 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set genre labels

Tab. 14 – % of titles assigned to the tagged genre out of the total itemised genre entries (no.)

Comedy	23% (20)
Drama	23% (20)
Action	21% (18)
Family	14% (12)
Thriller	10% (9)
Romance	8% (7)

Founded in 1946 as a consortium to pool the transatlantic operations of Scandinavia's flag carriers, SAS has been described as "an icon of Norwegian-Swedish-Danish cooperation" (Heimann and Silver 2016: 119). As a general assumption, SAS is with all evidence the airline with the highest percentage of Euroimages cinema, in line with its mainly domestic and medium-haul routes. "Last Chance to Watch" films occupy also a large part of the stock, along with the "New Releases" section (see tab. 13). Curiously, the carrier seems thus to consider movies that are likely to be soon discarded from the catalogue as an added value for the customers, enough to stress them graphically with a certain emphasis. Furthermore, the quantity of contents in common with Lufthansa (same video supplier) is fairly high, with 37 movies and almost 63% of the overall proposal also trackable aboard the German fleet.

By aggregating "Action" and "Thriller" labelled titles (tab. 14), SAS' first thematic category in terms of numerical entries can be obtained (27 titles, 31% of the overall genre-like classifications). Based on their extensive exploitation by airlines, it may be theorized that highly spectacular films are commonly preferred by carriers (and acclaimed by passengers) for their being deeply codified fillers appealing to very diverse non-Anglophone audiences (Taylor 2018; Volpe 2018). Accordingly, this preponderance of action and suspense titles results in a very high dependence of the airline to American end English producers.

2.3.3 Available languages

Tab. 15 – % of titles available in the tagged language out of item *A.4* (no.)

	Soundtracks	Subtitles
English	68% (40)	88% (52)
German	56% (33)	-
French	42% (25)	-
Japanese	39% (23)	-
Italian	37% (22)	-
Spanish	30% (18)	-
Swedish	**17% (10)**	**-**
Danish	**13% (8)**	**-**
Norwegian	**12% (7)**	**-**
Mandarin	7% (4)	3% (2)
Russian	7% (4)	-
Cantonese	3% (2)	-
Chinese	-	52% (31)

12. Total of titles excl. multiple occurrences: 59 [A.4], of which November 2018 new acquisitions: 22 (37%) [B.4] Share of titles in common with Lufthansa (same content curator): 63% (37 movies)

2.3.4 Countries of production

Tab. 16 – % of the titles involving the tagged Country of production out of item *A.4* (no.)

US	59% (35)
GB	13% (8)
SE	**10% (6)**
DK	**8% (5)**
CN	8% (5)
JP	7% (4)
Others[13]	5% (3)
NO	**5% (3)**
NL	3% (2)
FR	3% (2)

SAS' afference to a geographical macro-region rather than to a single-defined Country seems to complicate the assortment of its videocatalogue, resulting in more than one national affiliation. This emerges both in the language availabilities (see tab. 15) and the cinema-library prevalent Countries of production (tab. 16).

In the first case, a strong concentration of titles in English, French and German can be ascertained, with only 25 of them proposed in at least one language among Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, while a certain payoff in cultural cachet is pursued through the inclusion in the collection of as much as 14 titles from the three Countries (23% of the overall catalogue), thus ensuring a fair share of national representativeness. As long as mediatised geographies are concerned, the constant alternation between Danish, Norwegian and Swedish contents boosts a commercial positioning necessarily driven by a "flag handover" logic. The presence of each one of the three production Countries is thus required, with as equal as possible proportions within languages and contents of reference.

2.4 Alitalia

Alitalia (Italy) is part of the Sky Team coalition; its main content service provider is Global ONE Media.

2.4.1 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set categories

Tab. 17 – Categories percentages and release year median[14]

	% of titles assigned the tagged category out of the total library entries (no.)	*Release year: median*
Italian Movies	21% (13)	2017
Action-Thriller	16% (10)	2016
World Movies	14% (9)	2018
Drama	14% (9)	2013
Comedy	13% (8)	2018
Kids	13% (8)	2010
Classics	8% (5)	1995

That of Alitalia is a quantitively limited programming which repeatedly claims its talianness, primarily through a clear division between Italian-made and non-National materials. Italian manufactured contents, indeed, reach 21% of the overall videocatalogue's assortment, mainly condensed within the devoted category ("Italian

13. Others: Canada, Germany, Italy.

14. Total of titles excl. multiple occurrences: 62 [A.5], of which November 2018 new acquisitions: 22 (35%) [B.5]

Movies," see tab. 17), while tab. 19 shows that 83% of the movies available in-transit are offered with an Italian audio track (no other national language of those examined scores such high data). The Italian way of flying has thus to be glorified through the on-the-go video portfolio: in this, Rome's ex-flag carrier is facilitated by direct licencing contracts with national producers such as Rai Cinema, Medusa and Filmauro which bypass Global ONE Media, the airline accredited content provider. These unparalleled agreements allow Alitalia to accomplish economic advantage and larger opportunities of choice on the titles to be featured on-the-fly. On several occasions, company sources have confirmed the meticulous attention necessitated to finalise the selection. Such extreme caution can also be attributed to the fact that Alitalia is the official carrier of the papal delegation on the outbound apostolic visits, preventing any content shown onboard to offend one's religious sensibility (personal meetings, April–July 2017). A large part of these movies is presented under their original Italian titles, thus underlining the determination in tailoring an "Italian-sounding film collection" and a representation of a postcard-like, idealized and typified Country.

2.4.2 Distribution of catalogued movies within airline-set genre labels

Tab. 18 – % of titles assigned to the tagged genre out of the total itemised genre entries (no.)

Comedy	39% (24)
Action-Thriller	24% (15)
Drama	24% (15)
Kids	13% (8)

With reference to some of the classifiers proposed by Luca Barra and Paolo Noto as far as Italian cinema circulating out of its national borders is concerned, it may be argued that most part of Alitalia's home-grown films are those "middlebrow productions [...] with good domestic performances but with limited success abroad," anyhow esteemed for their ability of portraying a certain image of the Country (2019). A couple of titles signed by well-recognised filmmakers — including Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* (*La grande bellezza*, 2013) and Paolo Genovese's *Perfect Strangers* (*Perfetti sconosciuti*, 2016) should be added to these, restricting high-budget blockbusters, *auteur*-like movies or "Italian World Cinema" to sporadic appearances. Because of specific fiscal reductions, Alitalia has also financially supported the realization of some national films, especially those supposed to find a certain favour across the Atlantic: it is this the case, for example, of Gabriele Muccino's *Kiss Me Again* (*Baciami ancora*, 2010) or *Summertime* (*L'estate addosso,* 2016), long visible onboard and promoted especially on US-direct flights.

2.4.3 Available languages

Tab. 19 – % of titles available in the tagged language out of item *A.5* (no.)

	Soundtracks	Subtitles
Italian	**83% (52)**	**-**
English	64% (40)	21% (13)
French	31% (19)	-
German	27% (17)	-
Japanese	24% (15)	-
Spanish	21% (13)	-
Portuguese	19% (12)	-
Korean	16% (10)	-
Arabic	3% (2)	-
Chinese	-	2% (1)

2.4.4 Countries of production

Tab. 20 – % of the titles involving the tagged Country of production out of item *A.5* (no.)

US	66% (41)
IT	**21% (13)**
Others[15]	11% (7)
JP	5% (3)
GB	3% (2)
DE	3% (2)

In regard to world movies, Alitalia adopts a selection of African and Asiatic filmography on a rotation basis. In November 2018, for example, films from Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Hong Kong, India, Korea and Mexico were displayed, and the absence of Chinese titles was healed only in the following months (see tab. 20). All-time favourites consist instead of particularly dated titles, with no equals among the competitors' catalogues: this makes the "Classics" labelled category (median release year: 1995, see tab. 17) a cornucopia for genuine enthusiasts of yesterday's cinema, thanks also to the contribution of editorial staff from the cinema critique website cinematografo.it, in charge of the reviews published on the inflight magazine. A further demonstration, therefore, of how the geographies of the routes play an essential role in relation to the composition of IFE videocatalogues.

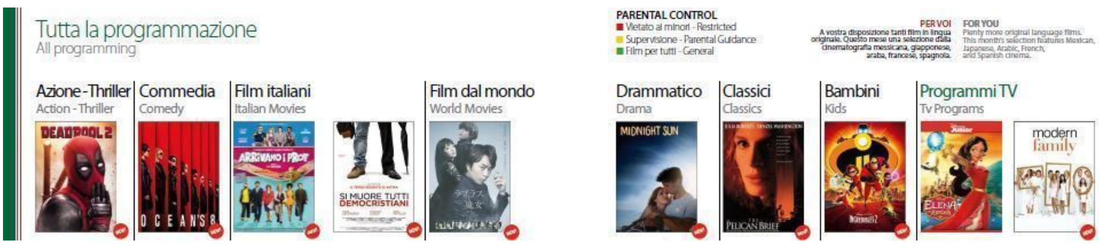

Figure 4: Alitalia Cinema Highlights (capture from Alitalia.com)

3 Vision'air: aggregated data and common trajectories

The below featured data, elaborated on a larger scale with the aim of aggregating the various per-airline information derived through the research, do fundamentally expand on an incremental basis the results of the previous single analyses, corroborating most of the hypotheses formerly advanced.

By means of their rather self-explanatory graphs, tables 21–24 may help in tracing some common lines among the IFE libraries under inquiry, as well as in identifying the major constants and the operative principles which could have intervened across their genesis.

3.1 Monthly new acquisitions (cross-airlines)

Tab. 21 – % of the titles involving the tagged Country of production out of item *A.5* (no.)

26%

The first variable to be noted is the one relating to the average percentage of the monthly new acquisitions within the sample month of November 2018: the correspondent numerical entry (26%, see tab. 21) denotes a

15. Others: Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Mexico.

certain commitment, also on an economical level, of the selected European carriers in varying and updating their onboard cinema collections. Air France seems to deviate from this value, on which the other operators do substantially converge, thus attenuating its lower film replacement rate with a consistent number of "Recent Releases" classified works (cf. tab. 11): the two indicators, in fact, may not necessarily coincide, as shown by the median release years of the materials tagged under the different "Recently-added" categories (cf. in particular tab. 1).

3.2 Distribution of catalogue movies within macro-genre labels (cross-airlines)

Tab. 22 – Average percentage obtained by entries itemised in tabs. 2, 11, 12, 14 and 18

Drama&Romance	31%
Action&Thriller (incl. also "Science Fiction"/"Sci-Fi," "Adventure," "Crime" and "Fantasy")	29%
Comedy (incl. also "Musical")	26%
Family&Kids (incl. also "Animation")	10%
Documentary (incl. also "Arts&Culture" and "Biography")	3%

The predominance of the romantic comedy among the airline-set genre groupings (see tab. 22) is a second communality to be underlined. Given that almost the entirety of the catalogued titles falls in more than one thematic category, it is the crossing over between "Comedy" and "Drama&Romance" the most applicable genre-like definition for the overall examined cinematographic assortment, at least on a quantitative basis (Ku 2018; Peltier 2014). If it is true that onboard video-programmings should be shaped upon the dominating tastes of passengers (Durston 2017), heart-warming comedies must intercept a deep appreciation among on-the-fly audiences, thus fully confirming what was suspected by Groening (2014a). This shows how relevant the pre-understanding of an audience of reference is through the process of content selection. However, audiometric analytics are currently widely adopted by airlines: the few tracking and demographic documents at disposal attest a factual inclination of passengers for the genre.

Against this backdrop, the abundance of movies recognizable as sentimental comedies may be explained in various terms: firstly, as the case of light action works has partly pointed out, such reassuring, pastel shaded and feel-good motion pictures seem with no effort enjoyable by the interested spectators, by virtue of their formulaic storylines. Additionally, the scarce prominence given to violence, nudity and eroticism does possibly appeal to transversal audiences, exempting the content editors from heavy censorship mediations (indeed, IFE contents are normally subject to "cutthroat politics of cutting," according to what has been defined as the "sanification of skies"; cf. Chariton 2005, Cornick 2010, Groening 2013). Moreover, APEX — the Airline Passenger Experience Association, an international airline consortium born in 1958 to develop globally-acceptable standards for anything concerning IFE — has recently elected romantic comedies as the "ideal video products" to be included in the cabins (cf. the 2017 report), imputing this firstly to *screen ratio* reasons. Their factual lacking of visual inserts or other special effects, indeed, would make them particularly suitable for a fruition on the small rear-seat monitors, also while the refreshment service is ongoing. Within an emotionally dense background, the power to create a sense of intimacy and discharge with the viewer is also typically acknowledged to amorous dramas, as well as their supposed ability to accentuate those moods which are more likely to be experienced during aerial crossings (Groening 2014a; Heve and Lamont 2010). Such action of emotional reward is notably pursued by carriers, which culminate in taking advantage of this for experiential marketing finalities.

As a third common line, the regular occurrence of animation movies aimed for junior travellers (overall 10%)

seems to imply similar passenger management needs: as widely demonstrated (Durston 2017; Gitlin 2002; Groening 2014b), on-the-go cartoons are systematically called upon to pacify and distract the youngest on-board, not without some forms of parental controls, to be intended as means of legal protection (especially for Alitalia and KLM).

3.3 Available languages (cross-airlines)

Tab. 23 – Average percentages obtained by entries itemised in tabs. 3, 9, 10, 15 and 19

	Soundtracks	Subtitles
English	59%	52%
French (inc. Paris French)	47%	3%
German	41%	2%
Italian	37%	<0.5%
Spanish	32%	-
Japanese	27%	-
Portuguese	20%	-
Others[16]	12%	11%
Korean	14%	-
Chinese (incl. Mandarin and Cantonese)	6%	25%
Russian	5%	-
Hindi	3%	-
Arabic	2%	6%

Chart no. 23 proves how English maintains its status of "hypercentral lingua franca" (De Swaan 2001), as far as in-cabin cinema is considered. Assumed to be the global language, in line with the "anglo-globalism" theorised by Jonathan Arac (cf. Mikanowski, 2018), it remains the first choice for airlines both among dubbing options and subtitles (respectively 59% and 52% of the total entries), before French (47%), German (41%), Italian (37%) and Spanish (32%). Conversely, Chinese and its variations are mainly widespread among the subtitles' languages (25%). Fundamental to the multitude of routes to and from the Dragon Country and as a gesture of inclusion towards its native speakers, subtitles are often the most cost-effective solution to air carriers. While English appears to be the "currency of the universal" (Appadurai, 1996), thus, the pluralism of a multitude of national idioms (see footnote 11) has also to be accounted (in this, Asian languages seem to play a somehow leading role within the examined videolibraries).

3.4 Countries of production (cross-airlines)

Tab. 24 – Average percentage obtained by entries itemised in tabs. 4, 7, 8, 16 and 20

US	53%
Others[17]	18%
GB	11%
FR	10%
CN	5%
DE	5%
IT	5%
JP	5%
IN	3%

16. Others: Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Hebrew, Norwegian, Polish, Romanish, Swedish, Tamil, Thai.

Tab. 24 – Average percentage obtained by entries itemised in tabs. 4, 7, 8, 16 and 20

KR	2%
BE	1%
BR	1%
CA	1%

These observations are likewise mirrored by the preeminent geographical belongings of the same audiovisuals included onboard (see tab. 24), a composite flow dependent on several drivers, in a seamless tension between differing premises. On the one hand there is Hollywood, "anywhere and nowhere" (Bird, 2003: 48), "a place you can't geographically define" according to Miller (2001: 129, with reference to John Ford), with its worldwide circulating productions, generally proposed in multiple languages and on a supra-territorial degree (Iordanova 2017). On the other hand of this complex exercise of intercultural communication, a vast mixture of minor local and non-Western movies is featured as well. Moreover, the propensity towards coproduction movies may be read as an endeavour made by airlines to bridge the gap between local and international contents, contenting global palates without disappointing national appetites. From the data extracted, the first major category in which in-the-air movies may be classified according to their prevalent Countries of production is the one including mainstream global-reach films. These, thematically ecumenical, do largely fit to heterogeneous audiences, thanks to their scarcely objectional contents; mainly US made hits, they are sometimes shorn of Country-specific references within a rather usual procedure of domestification.

On a second instance, airlines ensure to feature those that could be exemplified as "globally diffused local contents" (i.e. that 18% of titles encompassed by the "Others" selector in tab. 24). Such movies are primarily included in the catalogues with respects to the airlines' network extension. The characteristic cosmopolitan attitude of this myriad of materials, along with the enthusiasm for cross-cultural encounters and for a borderless world strictly within airplane reach, seems specifically functional to the transportation market. This does often generate what was defined as the "flag handover" effect, a constructed impression of a ceaseless passing the (cinematographic) torch from one nation to another. The international assortment of indigenous cinematographic works follows the geographical macro-divisions into being among the biggest multinational companies, regarding goods and services global distribution (EMEA – Europe, Middle East, Africa, LATAM – Latin America and APAC – Asia Pacific).

Thirdly, this cinematographic horizon is normally enriched by flag branding and home-grown movies, namely the ones produced in the Country where the airline is formally based. Mainly used as a device of national branding and qualification, this core section is often reduced to folkloristic and archetypical icons, in accordance to "fakelore" logics (Thiesse 1999; cf. also Anderson 1991) and almost up to jingoism.

4 "The answer blows in the wind": conclusions

In the light of the analysis undertaken, some conclusions are drawn. The main factors which affect the composition of the inflight videocatalogues provided by the five companies under investigation clearly depict that the whole topic can be disentangled only focusing on the issue of the mediated geographies. Given that "the relationship of audience to media contents is always mediated by culture or cultural identity" (Livingstone 1998: 22), inflight entertainment seems to engage constitutionally with the expression of manifold cultural tastes, due to the impression of cosmopolitanism on which the ideas of mobility, travel and tourism are commonly constructed.

Onboard cinematic assortments are shaped on a strong geopolitical drive. Such an artefact semblance of multiculturalism and reciprocal inclusion contribute to carve the image (and self-representation) of a globally mobile and cosmopolitan audience (cf. Jancovich 2003; Iordanova 2017), enabled by air travel to transcend

17. Others: Australia, Austria, Argentina, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Egypt, Ghana, Hungary, Hong Kong, Iceland, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Netherland, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Peru, Russia, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela.

Figure 5: "Flag-Handover Effect" Aboard Qatar Airways Aircraft (source:APEX Experience)

national boundaries among cabin upholsteries decorated with globes, local culinary delights and aircraft liveries modelled after State ensigns. An intense international vocation has thus to intertwine with an equally grandiose Country-typical representation, as the geographical coefficients traced among the filmic portfolios examined clearly suggest.

According to the information so far collected, it seems that the entire onboard service challenge is rooted in those "uninterrupted negotiations between global and local" (Massey and Jess 1995: XX). With all evidence, on-the-fly cinema is a practice where those tensions are more visible and accentuated than in other media contexts. Indeed, local flavour has here to mix with a more global taste, as well as with contents exalting the airline's registration Country, the one which the carrier, as the technicalities impose, "flies the flag" (Button 2005; Fazzini 2007).

The relevance given to national cinemas (i.e. German works for Lufthansa, Dutch productions for KLM, Made in France cinema for Air France) is thus to be credited to that normative "meaningful linking" (Hoon Oum et al. 2000: 44) that each airline entertains with a certain State, of which it becomes not only a logistical driver, but also an economical (and somehow cultural) ambassador. After all, international regulations broadly assimilate aircrafts to supra-territorial consulates by epitomizing their Country of reference, underlined by continuous metonymical interplays, commonly used as marketing gimmicks. It could be therefore argued that IFE acts also as a territorialising agent for those autonomous geographical provinces that planes embody, in balance with an indispensable magnification of cosmopolitanism (the ideas of a "world-class entertainment" and of a "world view") fully observable in rhetoric such as "Say Yes to the World" (Lufthansa), "Think the World Differently" (Air Italy), "Your Window to the World" (South African), "Visit Places You Won't Find on a Map" (Emirates), "Service Without Borders" (Air China). *Vectors* of physical and symbolic mobility, airplanes are called upon to convey a value system founded on a sense of universalism and openness to the world. It was demonstrated that this internationalism is mainly due to the persistence of a strong relationship between inflight cinema and the airline's network of routes, as well as to the routine of adopting a geo-linguistic criterion defined on the passengers' most diverse backgrounds.

IFE is designated to *inter-tenere* a highly variegated segment of audience, arduous to be reified or objectified. Here, the traditional paradigm of audience profiling — gender, age and habitual location — has to be integrated with more peculiar customer clusters ("leisure," "business," "VFR Visiting Friends Relatives" and their different subclasses, cf. Maeran 2006), in their turn corresponding to precise spectatorial prototypes. In this sense, either the theorisations on the "constructed viewers" (Hartley 2002) or those on the "implied audience" (Ang 1991; Deuze 2007; Livingstone 1998) could prove to be appropriate to frame the process which led airlines to figure their passengers-spectators and consequently to design the best possible user experience.

The transnational circulation of cinema above the clouds seems conceivably to have been received with an excessive utopian outlook. IFE has with all likelihood facilitated a certain exchange of cultural contacts inside aeronautical cabins, placing at the travellers' disposal assorted collections of movies otherwise scarcely available outside of their national borders (Iordanova 2017). However, this has often occurred more for commercial, professional and industrial reasons than due to effective editorial concerns or *stricto sensu* cultural commitments. Considering the huge turnover of the sector, especially in terms of technological upgrading and rights management, the role played by producers, distributors and content providers has always to be borne in mind. In addition to such actors, strict legal regulations, for instance the one related to pricing models and post-theatrical distribution windows (Knittel 1999), limit strongly the freedom of airlines during the contents' selection processes, as well as some market requirements (i.e. box office performance, recognisability, capacity of generating buzz).

Most of all, inflight cinema line-ups are built upon carriers' commercial strategies. Inflight cinema, indeed, constitutes a worthwhile investment as long as it continues to be intended as "part of the total brand experience and identity" (Phalen 2012). Given the lack of hard products within a service-based business as that of aviation, IFE therefore represents a rare opportunity to establish a value-driven touchpoint with customers (Rosati 2018: 78–9; cf. also the "ing-the-thing" theory, Pine II and Gilmore 1999).

As David Flexer wrote in 1957,

> airlines [...] are so much alike — they fly similar planes, over similar routes, on similar schedules, at exactly the same fares — they have to lure us aboard with all sorts of not very significant fringe benefits, such as red carpets, national culinary specialties or maybe even sarongs. The latest seduction wrinkle up wonder is movies in flight [...] (1957: 24–25)

It is evident that inflight cinema established itself as a tool to devise differentiation among companies, employed more with purposes of competitive advantage than as a revenue-generating service. It was noted that differentiation is usually pursued more in the well measured selection of world movies, rather than in the inclusion of Hollywood-revolving titles.

Consequently, the case analyses prove the insistence through which airlines strive to develop a distinctiveness of their onboard IFE platform, that coherency to a certain "framework identity" usually accomplished by the traditional tv broadcasters (cf. Barra 2015). This is in the first instance aimed to lend visibility, significance and attractiveness to their same presence on a highly combative marketplace, leveraging on their corporate awareness as well. IFE video libraries, thus, have progressively emerged as *vehicles* of symbolic and experiential promises through a subtle, but innovative enough, commercial scheme. Such expedient perpetuates each time the cabin gets darkened, the roller shades are down and new stories run on the screens: with the risk of culture lag kept to the minimum, it will indeed be love at first flight.

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