

# SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG FILM PRODUCTION WORKERS IN LITHUANIA

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper attempts to reveal the creation of a sense of community among film production workers in two historical periods – during the Soviet era and after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. The communality of film production workers is presented through the following aspects: the case of a localized/delocalized community, sense of belonging through “family feeling”, occasions that unite film production workers. Film production workers who worked in the Soviet era and the first years of independent Lithuania expressed a stronger sense of belonging to the community compared to those who worked later, or are currently working in the film industry.

**Keywords:** film production workers, community, sense of community, Lithuanian film industry.

## INTRODUCTION

The Lithuanian film industry, described as a small and peculiar community, compared to other film industries, where people may not know each other, has favourable conditions for the film community to appear (Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Šalaj 2019, 87). However, a group of people working together and naming themselves a community for that reason still does not justify application of this term, if it does not refer to at least a few characteristics of sense of community. What creates that sense of community and what components of it allow a certain group of people to be called a community? In David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis

(McMillan, Chavis 1986) theoretical discussion, not only the concept, but also 4 elements of sense of community were born: membership; influence; integration and fulfilment of needs; shared emotional connection (McMillan, Chavis 1986, 9). Later, the same four elements were rearranged and renamed, as follows: Spirit, Trust, Trade, and Art, explaining that sense of community as a spirit of belonging together, a feeling that there is an authority structure that can be trusted, an awareness that trade, and mutual benefit come from being together, and a spirit that comes from shared experiences that are preserved as art (McMillan 1996, 315). Meanwhile, Amitai Etzioni described sense of community based on three characteristics: 1) a network of emotional connections that intertwine and strengthen each other; 2) faithfulness to common values, norms and meaning; 3) relatively high level of responsibility (Pilipavičius, 2012, 27). Finally, based on the definitions of scientists, it turns out that sense of community is accompanied by such words as feeling, sensation, emotion, value, commitment, quality (Nefas 2021, 51).

The purpose of this article is to reveal the sense of community building of film production workers in two periods – during the Soviet era and after the restoration of Lithuania's independence.

When it comes to Lithuanian cinema in general, we often find the distinction or comparison of these two historical periods – the Soviet era and after the restoration of Lithuania's independence (Valainis 2018; Mikonis-Railienė and Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė 2015; Jankauskaitė 2012)<sup>1</sup>. One of the needs to discuss or compare the two aforementioned periods also arises because Soviet films were made under completely different conditions than the films are made nowadays. During the Soviet era, cinema, which served as one of the most effective propaganda tools, received a lot of attention from the state. 1990s was a turning point in Lithuania – the centralized and fully state-financed film production underwent upheaval and the creation of a new phase, which inevitably affected the film production workers, as well.

The article is based on the data of the field research conducted in 2020–2022, which was collected using the qualitative interview method with 120 film production workers in Lithuania. To present the holistic picture of the professional group selected for the study, the informants were chosen from various departments of film production (camera, make-up, art, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.). To maintain proportionality, participants from the young, middle, and older generations were included in the research (see Figure 1).

The sense of community of film production workers is presented in this article based on the following aspects: a) as a case of localized/delocalized community; b) sense of belonging through “family feeling”; c) occasions that unite film production workers.

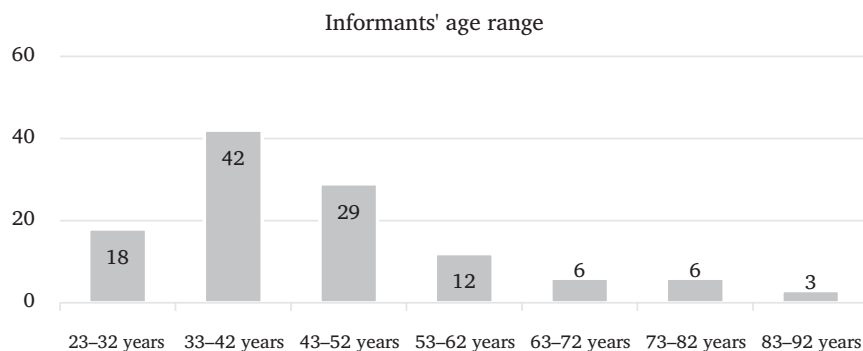


Figure 1. Informants' age range

1. attēls. Informantu vecuma diapazons

## THE CASE OF A LOCALIZED / DELOCALIZED COMMUNITY

In this part, we will focus on the Lithuanian film studio, which, evaluated not only from the perspective of the place defined by geographical perimeters, but also through the aspect of creating and maintaining social relations, influenced the creation of a sense of community among film production workers.

During the Soviet era, the Lithuanian film industry was concentrated in Vilnius. Beyond defining the local place where Lithuanian film production workers worked, Lithuanian Film Studio in the long run, as a social structure, served to draw official boundaries of belonging to the community, establishing hierarchy and certain roles within the organization. According to the stories of those who worked at the film studio at that time, the activities of the film production workers at the studio were not limited only to work. For example, in the first film studio located in Žvėrynas (Vilnius) district, the employees liked to pass time in the studio yard. In it, employees not only shared creative or non-creative plans, but also spent a lot of time chatting and playing chess (Pocevičius 2019, 205).

In the long run, the number of film studio workers grew. Naturally, the need for larger premises became more and more imperative. In 1964, part of the Lithuanian film studio moved to newly constructed buildings in another district of Vilnius – Antakalnis. In 1974 a dormitory was also built for families of workers, singles, and guests of the studio (Pocevičius 2018, 208). As in a film studio, film production workers engaged in common activities in a dormitory. According to the make-up artist, who lived in the dormitory for two years, during the downtime at work “in the dormitory of the film studio, dice were played all the time, everyone gathers. Once in one room, another time in another” (VDU ER 2725/112). The life of

the café / buffet as a gathering place in the film studio at the time is also brimming with funny stories (VDU ER 2725/74; VDU ER 2725/104).

Communities may share a sense of place within a particular geographic area, but at the same time, the place may be constructed in the social world of community members. According to Doreen Massey, “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (Massey 1991, 28). Based on the anthropological approach, each person gives certain meanings to different places and evaluates how important those places are to him (Astikienė 2022, 143). Some informants liken the workplace to home. For example, the respondent, who has been working as a film art director for 21 years, said that when he entered the film studio, he compared it to the feeling of home. The feeling of home came from the fact that a lot of time was spent in the studio, everyone hung out there, all the projects took place in the film studio, it was a base, a workplace, a meeting place, and a place for all communication (VDU ER 2725/74).

After Lithuania regained its independence and the political, economic, and social situation in the country changed, the film production system also underwent radical changes. There was no more state film funding, private film studios began to emerge. The Lithuanian film studio, which played a big role in the locality of the community, was also going through an upheaval: creative workers were fired, while technical workers and the film studio, as a technical base, began to provide services in film production by private and foreign film studios. In 2004, the film studio was privatized, and in 2010 it was demolished. The physical collapse of the film studio emotionally affected film production workers. For example, Algimantas Mikutėnas, a cinematographer who worked in Soviet times and still works today, said, “I came back from Moscow and saw half of the cinema studio demolished. I cried and that’s it, what other feelings can there be” (Ziminaitė 2010). During the final demolition works in 2010, about four hundred persons related to the life of Lithuanian cinema gathered for a “last supper” at the Lithuanian film studio, where they shared memories, took photos, and signed on the walls of the studio.

The community of film production workers localized in the Lithuanian film studio easily created and maintained sense of community by gathering at each other’s offices, dormitory or in the cafeteria, celebrating important occasions related not only to work, but also to personal life. Meanwhile, the demolition of the film studio not only physically separated, but also emotionally affected the film production workers. To this day, there is no film studio in Lithuania that unites most film production workers. Labour relations in the Lithuanian film industry are based on the principle of freelance employment.

## SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH “FAMILY FEELING”

“There will never be a normal family if you work in cinema” (VDU ER 2725/14), thus, one of the main disadvantages of working in film production was named by a film art director. Devoting most of the day to work in the cinema, people very often do not have much time for family, relatives, or friends. Paul J. Salamoff claims that a good movie set becomes an extended family, where people work together for the well-being of the group and a common good (Salamoff 2018, 13). According to the responses of the informants, we can say that sometimes it is purposeful to create a sense of family. For example, an older generation film director who worked mainly in the Soviet period claims that he tried to create a friendly and family-like atmosphere during the making of his films. The director also emphasized the fact that during the filming, their communication was not limited only to the filming set, very often it extended after working hours, especially during trips, living together in hotels, etc. (VDU ER 2725/88). Meanwhile, a producer currently working in the Lithuanian film industry, who is often responsible for assembling a team to implement a film project, claims that one of the goals of the project is to create that family, to be in it, to be happy, because of the kind of team you create, the way you go to work (VDU ER 2725/55).

Another aspect emphasized by the respondents is that work in the cinema is often equated with a way of life when the boundary between work and personal life disappears. The internal communication of the team is especially strengthened during trips, when filming takes place in other cities or foreign countries. At that time, team members work, live, eat and sometimes sleep together in the same rooms. Informant from the camera department describes it as a camp: “if you go for six weeks on a business trip, you know that everyone is sitting with the same people all the time. But, well, it’s nice, that’s how the camp turns out” (VDU ER 2725/1). In his memoirs, actor Juozas Budraitis describes his work in the cinema, as follows: “shot a film for three to four months, sometimes even half a year, during that time we managed to get to know each other, make friends, fall in love, and even get married” (Budraitis, Matulytė 2015, 35).

Expression of the feeling of family on the set is found in the responses of all generations of informants. Many respondents whose work experience allows to compare the circumstances of different eras, often refer to the fact that during the Soviet era and the first year of independence, they felt a stronger connection and a sense of family amongst the film crew. The informant, who has worked in the film industry for thirty years, claims that at that time all those trips, being together, were like a family

substitute (VDU ER 2725/111). Her thought is complemented by actor Juozas Budraitis, who claims that it “is true that cinema is different now, previously we used to exist in it as a family, as a group of like-minded people” (Budraitis, Matulytė 2015, 35). The attempts to explain it resort to the fact that now there is a lot of filming, and filming is very fast, you do not even have time to get to know each other, everyone quickly disperses after finishing filming and there is an emptiness. Considering the interviews with informants who worked in the film industry during the Soviet era, it should not be forgotten that the ideology of the Soviet period regime was significantly based on the ideas of collectivism, which could influence the communality. Research by other scientists shows that collectivistic attitudes of members of an organisation are related to the strength of the emotional and cognitive ties with the organisation. For example, the sense of community at work and employees who support collectivist values or norms are positively related to certain behaviour directed towards their work environment, helping a colleague in case of work-related problems, interpersonal support, loyalty (Vedina, Vadi 2007, 130).

The sense of family mentioned by film production workers is created by colleagues and their relationship when working – not in the general sense of the film industry in Lithuania, but when working on a specific project, during which everyone inevitably spends a lot of time together. The experienced “temporarily created family” relationships are strengthened by joint trips and spending time not only on the set, but also after working hours.

## **OCCASIONS THAT UNITE FILM PRODUCTION WORKERS**

It is obvious that for individuals who share a common culture, feel connected to a specific territory, have a common past and a vision of the future, it is important to occasionally confirm their sense of community, for example, create occasions (moments) during which everything that connects them is defined, named, common ideals are restored and revived (Giubernau 1996, 83). As McMillan observes, strong communities are those that offer members positive ways to interact, important events to share and ways to resolve them positively, opportunities to honour members, opportunities to invest in the community, and opportunities to experience a spiritual bond among members (McMillan, Chavis 1986, 14).

In this part, we will divide the occasions that unite the community of film production workers into a) official and unofficial events; b) traditions on the film set.

### **Official and unofficial events**

According to anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner, one of the distinguishing features of a community are ritual occasions when the community comes together to celebrate itself (Sherry B. Ortner 2009, 176). Events or occasions that gather the film community, have changed over time. During the Soviet era, events taking place in the Soviet Union and other European countries created conditions for the film community to gather. These are various conventions and plenums (Lithuanian SSR Cinematographers' Conventions, LTSR Cinematographers' Union administration), meetings of Lithuanian film workers, where attention was paid to the discussion of general cinema policy issues (Visockaitė 1987, 5–11). Various union festivals (e.g., those held in Kyiv, Minsk, Vilnius, Tbilisi), film festivals of different genres – educational films, sports films, agriculture, young cinematographers, etc. At that time, international festivals were also held in Cannes, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, Moscow, Sanrems, etc. Lithuanian cinematographers were often awarded at the mentioned festivals. Historical publications also revealed that there were seminars, film days and film celebrations organized during the Soviet era (Visockaitė 1987).

Meanwhile, in the second decade of independence, the film culture began to take shape, including various film festivals, events, organizations, and education (Vyšniauskaitė 2017). Naturally, after the historical upheaval, it took a lot of time not only to create a new film production system, but also for it to take new steps and create a unique, Lithuanian cultural life of the film community. Many such initiatives have become annual and traditional, continuing to this day. Awards are one of the most important official evaluation events for film production workers (“Silver Crane”, National Lithuanian Film Awards). Professional excellence evaluations and awards are also organized by organizations and associations uniting film production workers (Lithuanian Filmmakers Union, The Association of Lithuanian Cinematographers, Alliance of Cinema Auteurs). Film festivals (European Film Forum Scanorama, Vilnius International Film Festival Kino Pavasaris, etc.) and the premieres of individual films, during which the team that made those films, the entire film community and other parts of society are convened, supports, and strengthens sense of community among film production workers.

Unofficial gatherings among workers have been relevant since the beginning of the formation of the professional group of film production workers. Both in Soviet times and nowadays, film production workers often spend time together after filming by going to bars, cafes, and restaurants. The main unofficial event uniting all film production workers is the annual “Kinošnikų žiburėlis”, which has been organized since 2011 between

Christmas and New Year (after Corona virus disease COVID-19, organization of this event was suspended). The organizers invite to this event not only long-time film professionals, but also people who have recently joined the ranks of film production workers to meet, chat and celebrate together.

Parties organized during the project should also be classified as unofficial events. This is a very important part of team building, uniting, and celebrating the overall result. Projects characterized by higher financing often organize opening, middle and closing parties.

### **Traditions on the film set**

Traditions form a sense of affection, just like a sense of dependence (or restriction), help members of society to understand the importance of unity, sense of community in the life of the community. In this article, we will view “tradition” as activities and actions that promote the community of people, transmitted not only from generation to generation, but also temporarily created and maintained during one or more projects.

We can say that most of the traditions were created and passed on by the film production workers who worked back in the Soviet era. For example, one of the most popular traditions on the film set is the smashing of the plate on the camera tripod to symbolically mark the start of filming, recorded both in the Soviet era and in today’s film production in Lithuania.

Another tradition on film set is associated with clapperboard or film/movie slate. This tool marks the beginning of the shooting process. When a hundred, two hundred and other hundreds appear on the film slate, the number is marked at that moment. The celebration of “hundreds in a film slate” is also mentioned in the responses of different generations of informants. In the Soviet era, the film crew usually sat down with glasses of champagne, whereas these days, with every hundred, sometimes even the entire department (e.g., art, costumes, make-up) is chosen, which has to come up with ways to please and surprise the entire film crew (e.g., buy sweets, drinks for everyone, or organise a party).

Traditions that came to the professional group of film production workers only after the restoration of independence are also recorded. For example, the first American film production companies brought the tradition of exchanging gifts between workers (for example, actors give souvenirs to costume or make-up departments), which is extremely popular in Hollywood.

Both in the Soviet era and in Independent Lithuania, film production workers were united by basically similar official and unofficial events and occasions. It is also noticeable that most of the traditions supported during the production of the film are passed down from generation to generation.



## CONCLUSIONS

Film production workers who worked in the Soviet era and the first years of independent Lithuania expressed a stronger sense of belonging to the community compared to those who worked later or are currently working in the film industry. There are some reasons for the weakening of the sense of community amongst film production workers.

First of all, along with the historical upheavals, the film production system also changed. The Lithuania cinema studio played an important role for those who worked in the film industry during both historical periods and its demolition affected film production workers both emotionally and financially. In contrast to the Soviet system, which cultivated collectivism, the involvement of the work collective in the private life of workers and vice versa, individualism among employees is also increased by the fact that now, film production workers in Lithuania are freelancers and everyone is responsible for themselves.

Secondly, we should not reject the factor that such statements by the informants are based on the factor of youth, and youth is usually remembered nostalgically, often romanticizing it and painting it in bright colours.

Thirdly, although certain community-solidarizing aspects are passed down from generation to generation, the modern way of life, political, social, cultural processes undoubtedly change the feeling of togetherness in the social world of film production workers.

## ABBREVIATIONS

VDU ER – Vytautas Magnus University, Depository of Ethnologic *Manuscripts* of Department of Cultural Studies

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- <sup>1</sup> To explain why the comparison often begins from the Soviet era, it should be emphasized that the question of the beginning of Lithuanian cinematography still remains complicated. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cinematography appeared in Lithuania only as an activity with utilitarian value: chronicles were created, episodes of Lithuanian life were recorded, which could be shown in overseas Lithuanian colonies (Pipinytė 1993, 7). Professional national cinematography began to develop late – only in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pipinytė).

# LIETUVAS FILMU RAŽOŠANAS NOZARES DARBINIEKU KOPĪBAS IZJŪTA

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## ANOTĀCIJA

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Raksts mēģina atklāt kopības izjūtas veidošanu filmu ražošanas darbinieku vidū divos vēstures periodos – padomju laikā un pēc Lietuvas neatkarības atjaunošanas. Filmu ražošanas darbinieku kopiena tiek prezentēta caur šādiem aspektiem: lokalizētas / delokalizētas kopienas gadījums, piederības izjūta kā ģimenē, gadījumi, kas vieno filmu ražošanas darbiniekus. Filmu ražošanas darbinieki, kas strādājuši padomju laikā un neatkarīgās Lietuvas pirmajos gados, pauda spēcīgāku piederības izjūtu kopienai, salīdzinot ar tiem, kas strādāja vēlāk vai pašlaik strādā filmu nozarē.

**Atslēgvārdi:** filmu ražošanas darbinieki, kopiena, kopības izjūta, Lietuvas filmu industrija.

## Kopsavilkums

Šī raksta mērķis ir atklāt filmu ražošanas darbinieku kopienas veidošanas izjūtu divos periodos – padomju laikā un pēc Lietuvas neatkarības atjaunošanas. Raksta pamatā ir 2020.–2022. gadā veiktā lauka pētījuma dati, kas apkopoti ar kvalitatīvās intervijas metodi ar 120 filmu ražošanas darbiniekiem Lietuvā. Filmu ražošanas darbinieku kopības izjūta šajā rakstā ir atspoguļota, pamatojoties uz šādiem aspektiem: a) kā lokalizētas / delokalizētas kopienas gadījums; b) piederības izjūta caur “ģimenes sajūtu”; c) norises, kas vieno filmu ražošanas darbiniekus.

Filmu ražošanas darbinieki, kas strādājuši padomju laikā un pirmajos gados pēc Lietuvas neatkarības atjaunošanas, pauda spēcīgāku piederības izjūtu kopienai, salīdzinot ar tiem, kas strādājuši vēlāk vai šobrīd strādā filmu nozarē. Filmu ražošanas darbinieku kopības izjūtas vājināšanās iemeslu ir daudz. Pirmkārt, līdz ar vēsturiskajiem satricinājumiem mainījās arī filmu ražošanas sistēma. Lietuvas Kinostudija bija nozīmīgs darba devējs gan padomju periodā, gan pēc tā, tāpēc studijas likvidēšana ietekmēja filmu ražošanas darbiniekus gan emocionāli, gan finansiāli. Atšķirībā no padomju sistēmas, kas kultivēja kolektīvismu, darba kolektīva iesaistīšanos strādnieku privātajā dzīvē un otrādi, mūsdienās individuālismu darbinieku vidū vairo arī tas, ka šobrīd Lietuvā filmu ražošanas

pārstāvji ir ārštata darbinieki un katrs ir atbildīgs par sevi. Otrkārt, nevajadzētu noraidīt faktu, ka šādi informantu izteikumi ir balstīti jaunības faktorā, jo jaunību parasti atceras nostalgiski, bieži romantizējot un krāsojot košās krāsās. Treškārt, lai gan daži kopienu solidarizējoši aspekti tiek nodoti no paaudzes paaudzē, mūsdienu dzīvesveids, politiskie, sociālie, kultūras procesi neapšaubāmi maina kopības izjūtu filmu ražošanas darbinieku sociālajā vidē.