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DOSSIÊ: FRENCH CINEMATOGRAPHY: FROM THE LUMIÈRES & MÉLIÈS TO VR & AI

Film digital archives and urban cultural creative clusters: the reproduction and communication of visual culture

Archivos digitales cinematográficos y clusters creativos culturales urbanos: la reproducción y comunicación de la cultura visual

Arquivos digitais cinematográficos e clusters criativos culturais urbanos: reprodução e comunicação da cultura visual

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Abstract: Cultural and creative clusters (CCC) have gained significance in urban development, but the role of digital media within them has received limited attention. This study focuses on the impact of digital archives on cultural communication in Paris' urban CCC, with emphasis on French film history. The research highlights the importance of French film digitalization in preserving cultural relics and creating communication centers. Despite the contrast between the scattered media audiences and the emerging cultural industry center, a new digital connection is gradually emerging.

Keywords: film digital archives; french film; cultural creative cluster; urban cultural communication; geographic information system.

Resumen: Los clústeres culturales y creativos (CCC) han ganado importancia en el desarrollo urbano, pero el papel de los medios digitales dentro de ellos ha recibido una atención limitada. Este estudio se centra en el impacto de los archivos digitales en la comunicación cultural en el CCC urbano de París, con énfasis en la historia del cine francés. La investigación destaca la importancia de la digitalización cinematográfica francesa para preservar las reliquias culturales y crear centros de comunicación. A pesar del contraste entre las audiencias de medios dispersos y el centro emergente de la industria cultural, está surgiendo gradualmente una nueva conexión digital.

Palabras clave: archivos digitales cinematográficos; cine francés; clúster cultural creativo; comunicación cultural urbana; sistema de información geográfica.

Resumo: Os clusters culturais e criativos (CCC) ganharam importância no desenvolvimento urbano, mas o papel dos meios digitais dentro deles tem recebido atenção limitada. Este estudo focaliza o impacto dos arquivos digitais na comunicação cultural no CCC urbano de Paris, com ênfase na história do cinema francês. A pesquisa destaca a importância da digitalização do cinema francês na preservação de relíquias culturais e na criação de centros de comunicação. Apesar do contraste entre as audiências de mídia dispersas e o centro emergente da indústria cultural, uma nova conexão digital está surgindo gradualmente.

Palavras-chave: arquivos digitais de cinema; cinema francês; cluster criativo cultural; comunicação cultural urbana; sistema de informação geográfica.



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Introduction

Over the past few decades, cultural and creative clusters (CCC) have been used as an integrated model for cultural industries (Porter, 1998) and have become one of the important paths for the development of some urban areas. It includes a variety of media industries, such as film, music, and journalism, and is also considered one of the important ways to solve the transformation of old urban industrial areas, cultivate the cultural industry economy, or protect regional cultural heritage (Lazzeretti, 2003; Currier, 2008). However, the use and communication of digital media in urban cultural and creative clusters and the social transformations they induce have not been thoroughly examined. This paper aims to bridge this gap by examining the influence of digital archives on cultural communication within urban clusters, with a specific focus on films shot in Paris, France.

Based on previous studies by Bassett *et al.* (2002), this paper focuses on films in urban cultural and creative clusters and discusses the impact that digital archives have on their cultural communication. Using the research method of case analysis, this paper links the urban cultural creativity cluster of Paris, France, with the history of French film. In the database of "OpenDataParis"

and the geographic information system (GIS), digital media audiences can find the scenes of French films on the map of French urban areas and obtain the information of nearby cultural clusters, linking the film memory with the city and urban culture. The digital archive acts as an important intermediary and serves as a digital counterpoint to the reality of the industry cluster.

Film-making and Cultural Creative Clusters in Paris

Film-making plays a significant role in the cultural and creative clusters of Paris. The city has a rich history in the film industry and has been a popular location for filmmakers from around the world. The presence of cultural and creative clusters in Paris, such as production companies, studios, film schools, and related industries, contributes to the city's vibrant film-making scene. For this study, the focus is on the digital archive of films shot on location in Paris, France, between the years 2016 and 2021 (see Figure 1). The archive provides valuable information about the film production company, the director, the specific location within the city (captured accurately through the postcode), and the duration of the filmmaking process.

Figure 1 – Cinematography in Paris (by postcode)

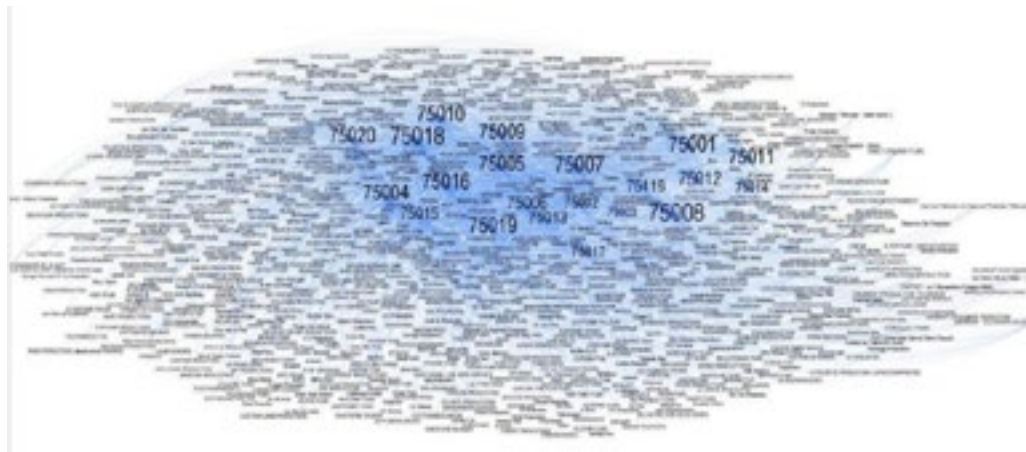


Source: Open Data Paris.

Using this data, the study aims to create a co-occurrence map that visualizes the intricate relationship between the films and the city of Paris as captured in the digital archive. By analyzing patterns of co-occurrence, such as the frequency of certain production companies or directors

choosing specific locations or the duration of filming in different areas of the city, the study seeks to uncover and present the complex connections and interdependencies between the films and the urban environment they were created in.

Figure 2 – Co-occurrence map of Parisian cinematography and urban areas²



Source: Open Data Paris.

² The number of days the film was shot is involved in the network of relationships analysis, presented as a weighting of a particular relationship. The number of days is calculated as a full day and a filming period of less than one day is considered as one day. The different postcode numbers of the 16th arrondissement of Paris are counted separately.

This co-occurrence map (see Figure 2) will serve as a visual representation, offering insights into the relationships between film production and the city of Paris. It will highlight the dynamics of location choices, the influence of production companies and directors, and the temporal aspect of filmmaking, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between the film industry and the urban landscape.

During the period of 2016–2021, the twenty districts within the Paris metropolitan area, specifically the 1st to 20th arrondissements, actively participated in the creation and filming of movies. Each district captured a unique part of its cityscape on film. Among these districts, the 18th, 19th, and 10th arrondissements emerged as popular choices for filming, with more than 20% of films opting to shoot in these areas. This trend has also led to the relocation of French film creators and the growth of cultural and creative clusters in the urban periphery.

Analyzing the statistics, it is evident that the 9th arrondissement was the preferred location for film creators in 2016, with a total of 165 films shot there, accounting for 6.2% of the year's total. However, in 2021, the number of films shot in the 9th arrondissement decreased to 87, representing only 4.7% of the year's total. In contrast, the 18th arrondissement has become the most sought-after filming location for film creators since 2021, with nearly 10.8% of all films choosing to shoot in this region.

Geographically, the 18th arrondissement serves as an extension of the 9th arrondissement, located towards the outskirts of the city. This geographical proximity establishes a connection that extends beyond just the physical borders. It has fostered an film industrial development connection between the 9th and 18th arrondissements. The film industry's shift towards the 18th arrondissement has influenced the growth and development of creative industries, including film production studios, post-production facilities, and related bu-

sinesses. This industrial development connection has resulted in a collaborative ecosystem where film creators, technicians, and other professionals can easily collaborate and support each other's work. The presence of these industries in close proximity has created a cluster effect, attracting further investments, talent, and resources to the area. Consequently, this connection between the 9th and 18th arrondissements has contributed to the overall expansion and vibrancy of the film industry in the Paris metropolitan area.

The migration of film production and the emergence of cultural and creative clusters have not only impacted the internal connectivity of the film industry within the Paris metropolitan area but have also influenced the creation of films in Paris by global film creators. Although the total number of films filmed in Paris since 2016 has been declining due to various factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, it must be acknowledged that the number of creators actively involved in local film production has not significantly decreased annually.

For instance, in 2016, there were 203 directors engaged in the actual production of films, resulting in a total of 1,779 films being produced. In comparison, in 2021, there were 194 directors involved in film production, resulting in a total of 892 films (including streaming films) being produced. These figures demonstrate that despite the challenges faced by the film industry, the development of the film industry and the creative environment in the Paris region remains appealing to creators.

The resilience and attractiveness of the film industry in Paris can be attributed to various factors, including the presence of cultural and creative clusters and a favorable environment for filmmaking. However, the development of a vibrant creative ecosystem relies not only on these elements but also on a combination of factors such as the availability of a large pool of film creators and the improvement of local infrastructure within the film industry.

The emergence of cultural creative clusters in Paris is closely linked to the ongoing participation of directors in film production. This dynamic un-

derscores the inherent strengths and advantages that draw filmmakers and contribute to the growth of the film ecosystem in the city. This study has identified the emergence of new directors and the sustained presence of small film companies like Curiosa Films Productions between 2016 and 2021. This continuity reflects the enduring allure and opportunities offered by the film industry in the Paris region. Despite fluctuations in film production, the commitment of directors to engage in film production affirms the enduring appeal of the industry in Paris. While a city's cultural tolerance and diverse environment contribute to its attractiveness, they are not the sole factors influencing skilled talent, including directors, to choose of long-term residence and working place.. Other crucial considerations such as local policies, immigration issues, the job market, and interculturalism also play significant roles in shaping a favorable environment for filmmakers (Brow, 2015).

Urban memory and the reproduction of visual culture

In the age of global internet distribution and its impact on cultural influence, the physical location of a film creator may seem less significant. The concept of the "media city" highlights how cultural production has transcended geographical boundaries and become part of global cultural diffusion. However, the emergence of cultural and creative clusters has repositioned the focus on the producers, recognizing the continued importance of the industrial system and environment.

Major centres within the urban system are often the production locations of material and symbolic cultural commodities for a global market. Moreover, a whole series of world cities, especially from the group of global media cities, are places where certain lifestyle images are 'filtered out' from the local living and working worlds and distributed globally via the culture industries (Krätke, 2003, p. 623).

In the case of Paris, the cityscape and the daily lives of its citizens, as depicted in films, take on the role of Parisian cultural symbols in their dissemination. These images contribute to the transmission of global culture. Particularly in

non-documentary communication, the real life of Paris become powerful symbols of the city, weaving into the visual culture of cinema.

The relationship between the film creator and the urban space holds significant cultural importance as they serve as the "weavers" of visual culture. While locations in Paris are just one visual element in films, their portrayal is based on the personal experiences of the creators. These personal experiences then become cultural memories for the film's audience, and eventually collective memories through the dissemination of the film.

For instance, the film "Paris - When It Sizzles" depicts the Eiffel Tower as a symbol of love. This portrayal becomes ingrained in the cultural fabric of the city as the audience's memory of watching the film extends to form a "memory" of the city itself. The creators silently embed their personal experiences with the cityscape into the viewers' engagement, ultimately contributing to the formation of a cultural memory. It is important to note that while this cultural memory may not reflect the full reality of the city's culture, the weaving of visual culture becomes particularly significant in certain genres like science fiction films.

Such as "Dans la brume," which belong to the apocalyptic genre, extensive use of special effects and visual experiences can make it challenging to pinpoint specific eras or regions within the film. However, as the audience need to actively participates in the apocalyptic narrative, the inclusion of real city scenes becomes essential. The presence of cityscapes, urban cultural symbols, and iconic visual scenes immediately allow the audience to situate and identify the fictional time and space environment of the film. Furthermore, the "urban memory" woven by urban culture awakens the audience's recollection of previous films, contributing to a new production of visual culture through comparison and connection. The relationship between the film creator and the urban space plays a crucial role in the cultural significance of visual culture. The personal experiences of creators shape cultural memories that are transmitted through film dissemination. The inclusion of cityscapes, urban cultural symbols,

and iconic visuals provide immediate recognition and contextual understanding for the audience. Ultimately, the weaving of visual culture contributes to the production of new visual narratives and memories within the realm of cinema.

The digital archive of cinema as an urban cultural heritage

The reproduction of visual culture becomes even more significant in the realm of internet communication. The dispersed nature of online media audiences contrasts with the emergence of integrated cultural industry centers in cities, creating new digital connections. The "urban memory" constructed through cinema offers the potential to establish cultural markers for internet-mediated audiences.

For instance, Notre Dame, which became inaccessible to the public in 2019, may have faded from the urban memory of tourists visiting Paris, but it remains a prominent symbol in the urban memory of internet-mediated audiences. It has become a representative icon of Parisian urban culture. After being regularly used as a film set, different scenes featuring Notre-Dame de Paris from various time periods have been captured on film, contributing to a personalized "urban memory." This sparks discussion about the relationship between physical reality and virtual memory, the preservation of disappearing or vanished real-life scenes (particularly cultural heritage sites), and the enduring cultural memories embedded within visual images.

Cultural and creative clusters, as a significant trend in the cultural industry, were initially regarded as a means of revitalizing old neighborhoods (Mommaas, 2004) and were explored as a means of conserving cultural monuments (Teo; Huang, 1995; Lazzarotti, 2003). However, the digital archives created by urban cultural and creative clusters have received limited attention from scholars in comparison to discussions on urban area re-planning or the repurposing of unused land and buildings. Specifically, the digital archival of film creation itself are not fully recognized in contemporary film discourse.

Ricky Lawton's (2022) study re-examines the cultural value of film history when transformed into digital archives, highlighting the genuine demand for digital archives in cultural consumption as the main impetus for the transition from film to digital archives. The recording and depiction of cityscapes and urban culture through visual impact breathe new life into cultural relics through the medium of film. Perhaps Notre-Dame de Paris continues to feature in numerous films daily from the perspective of internet-mediated audiences. Its visual documentation, symbolic reproduction, and the shaping of urban memory through visual culture serve as important guarantees for the perpetuation of cultural values in the present era, regardless of the physical existence of the building itself.

Conclusion and discussion

This study investigates the significance of a digital film archive encompassing films shot in Paris between 2016 and 2021. The archive provides valuable insights into film production companies, directors, specific city locations, and filmmaking durations. Through the analysis of co-occurrence patterns, including production companies' location preferences and filming durations across different areas of the city, the study unravels the intricate connections between films and the urban landscape. A co-occurrence map visually illustrates these relationships, shedding light on location choices, the influence of production companies and directors, and temporal aspects of filmmaking.

The findings underscore that specific district within the Paris metropolitan area, particularly the 18th, 19th, and 10th arrondissements, have become sought-after filming locations, fueling the growth of cultural and creative clusters in the urban periphery. The study demonstrates how the film industry's shift towards the 18th arrondissement has influenced the development of creative industries and fostered a collaborative ecosystem. Furthermore, the migration of film production and the emergence of cultural and creative clusters have not only impacted the internal connectivity of the film industry within Paris but also attracted global film creators to produce works in the city.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the enduring allure of the film industry in Paris, despite fluctuations in film production. It acknowledges the importance of cultural and creative clusters, a favorable filmmaking environment, a diverse pool of film creators, and enhanced local infrastructure in sustaining a vibrant creative ecosystem. The research also highlights the significant cultural role played by film creators, who infuse visual culture with their personal experiences and memories of urban spaces, contributing to the formation of cultural memories for both individual viewers and collective audiences.

This study reveals that digital media and digital archives play a crucial role in the development of urban clusters. The digitization of humanities and historical archives represents a social change driven by cultural and creative clusters, expanding beyond a focus solely on material content. Moreover, the paper argues that urban cultural and creative clusters should extend into the digital communication of culture, as clustered cultural production offers the potential for the creation of communication centers. Digital archives play a vital role in preserving cultural relics, such as films, effectively marking them and ensuring their relevance to the culture.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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