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ARTKINO PICTURES ARGENTINA: A WINDOW TO THE COMMUNIST EUROPE IN BUENOS AIRES SCREENS (1954–1970)

Valeria Galvan - Michal Zourek*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to study a specific aspect of the Communist foreign propaganda policy in Latin America: its cultural influence through the export of films. Renewed after Stalin's death, Soviet cultural propaganda concentrated on gaining the favour of foreign public. Particularly in Argentina, several propaganda techniques were implemented. Although the export of films was just one of them, it soon became very successful thanks to the collaboration of a local cultural mediator, the film distribution company Artkino Pictures, as well as its owner and founder, Argentino Vainikoff. His expertise in the field actually gained him a new business deal with Czechoslovak filmography, which somewhat contested USSR imagery. In all, here –with the aid of oral history as well as contemporary press analysis– we argue that Artkino's role in the import of an idealised imaginary of Communism was crucial and had a particularly strong impact on middle-class citizens of the cultural and artistic regional centre that Buenos Aires was in the 1950s and 1960s, and from where all Latin America, as the Soviets soon acknowledged, could be reached.

Key words: Cold War, Latin America, Communist Foreign Propaganda, Film Industry, Cultural Mediators

Introduction

By the end of the 1950s, Latin America became one of the main battlefields of the Cold War, and the cultural field was particularly engaged in this attempt of

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the USA and the USSR to spread their own visions (Franco, 2002; Jannello, 2013/2014; Calandra, Franco, 2012). On the Soviet side, this tendency was strengthened after the death of Stalin in 1953, when a more sophisticated and restructured propaganda apparatus was deployed.

Despite some pioneering studies of the Soviet cultural diplomacy (Riza, Quirk, 1972; Barghoorn, 1976), the general issue as much as the specific topic of the cultural relations with Latin America are only recently being addressed by the historiography (Rupprecht, 2015; Petra, 2013; Pedemonte, 2010). However, most of these last studies tend to consider Latin America as a relatively homogeneous region, veiling thus relevant aspects of the peculiar political, economic, social and cultural contexts of each Latin American country. The peculiarities within the general term "*Latin America*" are decisive to understand the actual impact of the Soviet propaganda on Latin America.

Bearing this in mind, this paper concentrates on the cultural relations between the USSR and Argentina. The Communist country always awarded the South American nation a privileged position. Not only was the Argentinean Communist Party the most loyal, but also the country's economic structure allowed an unprecedented commercial exchange between both countries. Specifically on the cultural side, the USSR acknowledged Argentina's capital city as an influential editorial and artistic centre in the Latin American region. Because of this, the Russians intended to establish propaganda headquarters in Buenos Aires, in order to extend their influence to the rest of the subcontinent from there. A step forward in this direction was to settle new East European legations in the city: the Czechoslovak, the Polish, the Hungarian, the Bulgarian and the Romanian (Zourek, 2015, p. 21).

In this context, the local branch of the Soviet apparatus unfolded several propaganda techniques in order to communicate an idealised and positive image of the Eastern Bloc, especially of the USSR. These techniques involved, among others, artistic exhibitions, conferences, scholarships offering to study at universities in the USSR, visits of several artists and showmen, the publication of general magazines in Spanish, the broadcasting of Radio programmes in Spanish and exporting literature and films. These also involved local cultural agents, such as immigrant associations and clubs, intellectuals, travel agencies and cultural businessmen. Their role was to mediate and translate the varied Soviet cultural topics for the very different Argentinean public. One of these local cultural agents was, of course, **Argentino Vainikoff**, owner and founder of the film distribution company Artkino Pictures.

Although Artkino was not the only Eastern European film distributor in Argentina, it was mainly through its work that the renewed socialist imaginary reached the cinemas of the city. Thus, the exportation of Soviet films contributed to cultivate the taste of a particular local cultural consumer. The cultured middle-classed *porteño*, regular *flâneur* of the local artistic scene, was the main spectator of the so-called “Artkino films”. Even when the Soviet films were moderately successful, the USSR was unable to monopolise the *porteños*’ representations of the Socialist Democracies in Europe. By the mid-1960s, Czechoslovakia signed a contract with Artkino in order for them to distribute and promote the New Czechoslovakian Cinema, characterised for its modern and western aesthetic.

In all, the imported Communist films had an impact on the Argentinean representations of the countries behind the “*Iron Curtain*”. Therefore, it is the purpose of this paper to begin to untangle the yet unexplored role of Artkino as a local agent of the Soviet Diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s.

For this reason, we will first present a brief characteristic of the origins of Artkino and its evolution, in the context of the break of the Argentinean cultural modernisation in the 1960s. We will also refer to the ever-tense relationship between Artkino and the authoritarian Argentinean governments of the period. Secondly, we will describe the interstices of the circuits of distribution, promotion and exhibition articulated by Artkino. Finally, we will argue for the relevance of Artkino’s role as cultural mediator through a brief description of the quantitative impact of its films on the screens of Buenos Aires.

1 The Origins of Artkino Pictures

During the Second World War, Argentines were in need of the latest news from the European fronts. In this respect, Argentinian newspapers were flooded with war reports (Tato, Romero, 2002). Still, this was not enough. Argentines were eager to see pictures, in particular moving pictures, of Europe in flames. In an effort to satisfy this demand, **Isaac Argentino Vainikoff**, a son of Russian immigrants with socialist tendencies, realised the business opportunities the situation had to offer. He followed the advice of the editor of the leading newspaper *Crítica*, **Natalio Botana**¹ and founded his own company in 1937 – Radium Films – a distributor of newsreels presenting war reports (Vainikoff, 2016).

¹ As a businessman focused on culture, **Natalio Botana** did not ignore the emerging cinema industry in Buenos Aires.

This first step into the film industry was aimed exclusively at a working class audience and represented a promising niche for permanent commercial development. **Vainikoff** was later allowed to connect his political ideas² and his work through the import and distribution of Soviet films (Vainikoff, 2016). Artkino Pictures Argentina was thus born and soon became the official distributor of Soviet cinematographic works in Latin America.

Artkino Pictures was responsible for releasing the most successful Soviet films as well as prosperous Czechoslovak cinematography, which enticed large audiences of *porteños* in the 1960's. This cultured and middle class Artkino audience differed significantly from the audiences that Radium Films attracted. In the 1960s, the cultural scene in Buenos Aires was being influenced by radical social and political changes (Sarlo, 2007; Sigal, 2002; Terán, 2013). The emergence of youth as a leading cultural and political factor, together with modernisation and cultural changes, saw the advent of a decade characterised by renewed language and aesthetic criteria in the artistic and cultural values of Buenos Aires. Argentinian art and culture began to expose itself to the global scene through festivals, competitions, scholarships and cultural visits from abroad (Galván, 2015; Giunta, 2008).

As a result of this deep aesthetic and social renewal, as well as the efforts to gain the international recognition and respect in artistic circles, the cultural demands of the *porteños* changed. Their tastes became more sophisticated not only in terms of artistic quality, but also with regards to being kept informed about current affairs. The public in Buenos Aires, therefore, wanted to be a part of what was going on in the rest of the world from their seats. For this reason, Artkino screens in the 1960s gained considerable audience, which not only wanted to be informed about the latest events on the other side of the Iron Curtain, but also to know the latest developments in the film industry in the East (Vainikoff, 2016).

Notwithstanding the elitism associated with **Vainikoff's** films, his work was also significantly affected by the enduring local censorship. As **Vainikoff's** son recalls, censorship existed independently of the political orientation or constitutional character of the government. In relation to this, after the military

² **Argentino Vainikoff** had been an active member of the Communist Party in his youth. However, after returning from exile in Chile in the 1940's, due to strong disagreements with the leader of the local Communist Party, **Victorio Codovilla**, Vainikoff officially left the Communist Party.

coup in 1943, Artkino Pictures was shut down and all its activities were banned. **Vainikoff** himself was arrested and finally exiled to Chile. **Vainikoff** returned home during the democratic Peronist era, and even though he was persecuted by **Perón's** propaganda chief, **Raúl Apold**, he was asked to take part in the organisation of the first edition of the Mar del Plata Film Festival (De Vita, 2014).

2 Communist films in Argentine film industry

The first edition of the Mar del Plata Film Festival took place one year after **Stalin's** death. As a result, the Soviet film industry had a great opportunity to present its films to the Argentine public. The festival held in March 1954 in Mar del Plata was meant to promote the development of the Argentine film industry (Galasso, 2005, p. 652).

As previously mentioned, even though **Apold** himself had signed a decree which prohibited Soviet films from public screening between 1950 and 1951, by 1954 the Peronist government was forced to find new markets for its products and therefore made great strides to improve relations with Communist countries (Zourek, 2014, p. 54). It is against this background and **Vainikoff's** known contacts beyond the Iron Curtain, that he was put in charge of organising the Soviet delegation.

The founder and owner of Artkino managed to organise a deputation of 50 persons from the USSR. This resulted in Artkino eventually being permitted to screen a certain number of films (Vainikoff, 2016). The start of the Mar del Plata Film Festival also represented the starting point of international cooperation within the film industry. This “*first step*” was quickly followed by a project to select some Argentinian films for screening in socialist countries.

From a broader perspective, the Festival can be linked to the X Pan-American Conference that took place in Caracas, where the United States submitted a proposal for all American republics to take joint action against Communism. Whilst Venezuela's capital resounded with the rhetoric of anti-communist speeches, **Perón** welcomed the Communist delegations to the land of the *gauchos*. Soviet, Polish and Czech actors alike, talked, laughed and toasted their Argentinian, British and American colleagues. Within this context, the Mar del Plata Festival can only be interpreted as a stand against American pressure to intervene in the Cold War and a confirmation of Perón's “*Third Position*” (autonomy from the belligerent dispute between the USA and the USSR).

In 1955, the Liberating Revolution (Revolución Libertadora) overthrew the Peronist government. This saw the advent of a new period in Argentine history started (Galván 2013, pp. 45–73). Under the new regime, the policy of the previous government towards the film industry remained unchanged, whereby films from communist countries did not face any serious problems. However, the Festival was suspended until 1959, the period during which the democratically elected President **Arturo Frondizi** was in office. Between the years 1959 and 1970, when the last edition was held, Mar del Plata Film Festival was the only “A” listed Latin American film festival, ranking with the likes of Venice, Cannes, Berlin and San Sebastian.

The delegations of the communist countries, shrouded in mystery, attended this event regularly and aroused curiosity of the Argentinian public. When it became competitive, the Festival award winners were usually films from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary.³ Czechoslovak, and on occasion Polish, animated films were also very successful (Neveleff, Monforte, Ponce de León, 2013). Notwithstanding this artistic success of the Eastern Bloc, the Argentine press remained focused on the delegations details related to their ideology and possible incongruences in their attitudes or personal style.

Whereas the Festival was seen as an important means of promotion and distribution for Artkino, the most important factor for the promotion of the Eastern European film industry was, according to **Vainikoff**, the distribution circles in Buenos Aires. In fact, the cinemas where the films were screened and the visits of Soviet actors and actresses had a direct influence on film attendances.

Artkino screened films in all the cinemas situated on Lavalle Street (downtown Buenos Aires) owned by local show-businessman **Camilo Lococo** (España, 1996). In 1956, however, **Vainikoff** acquired his own cinema, Cataluña, which ten years later was renamed Cosmos 70 in reference to the important role the Soviet Union played in the Space Race and the imagery that surrounded it.

The Cosmos over the following years became a true symbol for successive generations of modern young people and well cultured middle-class audiences,

³ Two films from the Eastern Europe were awarded the Jury's Special Award for best film: in 1963, it was *The Land of Angels* (Angyalok földje), director György Révész and three years later, Karel Kachyňa's film *Long Live the Republic!* (Ať žije republika).

surviving until its final closure in 2009. Despite the prestige that Artkino (and later Cosmos) commanded among the cinephiles of Buenos Aires, the screening of films did not always comply with strictly artistic criteria. In fact, in some cases, the selection of films presented to the Argentine public was somehow influenced by additional aesthetic reasons. This was the case with regards to Czechoslovak films.

Although since the very beginning **Vainikoff** focused on Soviet film industry, from the 1960's Czechoslovak films started to appear on the Artkino programs. Czechoslovak Embassy contacted **Vainikoff** and requested releasing of Czechoslovak films that had already been sent to Argentina. Thus, films like *The adventures of Baron Munchhausen*, *A deadly invention*, *Lemonade Joe* and many others, whose premieres had been negotiated with the previous distributor, were released by Artkino with great success (Vainikoff, 2016).

The late –and very successful – entry of Czechoslovak films into the cinemas of Artkino was mainly because **Vainikoff's** company was the best known and the most important distributor of Soviet films. Due to this fact, Czechoslovaks did not want to be officially linked to an institution so closely connected to the Soviet Union. In fact, the bonds between Artkino and the USSR seemed to be so obvious and clear in the imagery of popular contemporaries (*La Nación*, 26/11/1997) that it obscured the fact that Artkino was established on the basis of the model of American Artkino Pictures, Inc.

It was this American office that formed the international headquarters of Artkino. Years later, other subsidiaries were opened in Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Argentina. When American Artkino Pictures, Inc. lost its central role in the distribution of Soviet films due to the persecutions related to McCarthyism, **Vainikoff** assumed the role of distributor of Soviet films in the neighbouring countries. The majority of Artkino subsidiaries were closely linked to the Communist Party. However, if the links with the party were considered too strong it resulted in the subsidiary becoming vulnerable. In this respect, **Vainikoff's** Artkino subsidiary was the only one that differed. **Argentino Vainikoff**, although an active member of the Argentine Communist Party in his youth, was not willing to give up his professional freedom in favour of the party with whom he had already had differences of opinion. His differences with the Argentine Communist Party meant that he often had to compete with official film distributor companies established by the Soviet Embassy in Buenos Aires, which were usually not very successful (Vainikoff, 2016).

As a result, when Artkino finally entered the Czechoslovak film industry, it discovered a completely new world. In the mid-1960's the New Czechoslovak

Cinema, after its aesthetic renewal, was the most West-oriented of all the Eastern European countries (Kurz, 2010). Despite all its appealing attributes, purchasing new Czechoslovak films was very complicated for Artkino because it was an unregulated and unsubsidised market. The films were too expensive compared to the more favourably priced Soviet films intended for export. It is for the same reason that almost no films were purchased from other Eastern European countries: *“Hungarians and Poles had a different view of business. We basically told them, this was a way of promoting their film industry. If we don’t bring the films to our country, if we don’t screen them, who else will do it? This is not just about bringing films to a new audience, but also about bringing in foreign delegations”* (Vainikoff, 2016).

In this context, the selection of Soviet films was more autonomous. In general, *Vainikoff* selected films during the Soviet film festivals he attended. Nonetheless, a lot of the material was also directly provided by the Embassy at a subsidised price. It can be said that a true intercultural exchange existed with the Soviet Union at that time. Large Argentine delegations – organised by **Vainikoff** – were regularly invited (with all expenses paid) to promote national premieres in all socialist countries and to take part in the film festivals in Karlovy Vary, Moscow or Tashkent. The awards presented to Argentine films abroad also ensured full houses at home in Argentina.

In short, it is possible to state that the interest Artkino showed in Soviet cinema was not only political, but commercial as well.

3 Artkino, symbol of the times

El Heraldo, Argentina's best known and longest published weekly film magazine, provides valuable quantitative information on the role Artkino played in the import of Eastern European films.⁴ The magazine contains reports and articles about all the premieres that were screened week by week, together with information on ratings, release dates, names of the distribution companies which were in charge of the screening of the films, and the screens where the films were released. The magazine also published statistics on the number of films by origin, number of weeks it was screened, number of tickets sold, and so on.

⁴ Magazine founded in 1931 with the name *El Heraldo Cinematografista*. From 1967 until its closure in 1988 it was published under the title *El Heraldo de Cine*.

This data gives an impression of what was happening in Buenos Aires cinemas at the time. Between 1954 and 1970, 7.829 films were released in Argentina. Of these films, 260 (plus 7 co-productions) were made in socialist countries, which represents only 3.3%. Despite these small numbers, those films, as previously mentioned, received an enthusiastic response in society, with some achieving great commercial success.

Table 1: Number of premieres by country (1954–1970)⁵

Country	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
USSR	8	10	15	23+1C	25	5	11	6	3
Czechoslovakia		1	2	6	2		4 +1C	4	
Poland	1	1	1	1	2	5 +1C	3	5	1
Yugoslavia	1			1	+1C	1	1	2	2
Hungary		2		3		2	1		1
Bulgaria				1+1C			+1C		
GDR									
Romania									
In total – Eastern European	10	14	18	36	29+1C	13+1C	21	17	7
In total – worldwide	368	336	623	700	560	472	533	492	453

Country	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	In total
USSR	9	11	5	5+1C	9	7	5	7	164+2C
Czechoslovakia	1	5	2	2	3	3	1		36+1C
Poland	1	1	1			1	1	2	27+1C
Yugoslavia	1	3 +1C	4		+2C	+1C	1		17+5C
Hungary					1		2		12
Bulgaria		1							2+2C
GDR									0
Romania				1		1			2
In total – Eastern European	12	21+1C	12	8+1C	13+2C	11+1C	10	9	260+7C
In total – worldwide	450	456	348	384	457	423	345	429	7.829

Source: Authors

⁵ This refers to feature films; re-releases are not included. The data were taken from the weekly magazine *Heraldo* (1954–1970). It should be noted that some of the numbers are approximations.

The years 1957 and 1958 saw the largest number of screenings. This marked the start of the Soviet cultural penetration in Latin America initiated by **Khrushchev's** government, which, from a local point of view, was accompanied by the Argentine government's relative tolerance of film production from communist countries. After this peak in screening, in the following years the number of screened movies significantly decreased due to the growing number of repressive military interventions which affected daily life and as a part of it, also the cultural production of the country.⁶

The large majority of films from Eastern Europe (almost two-thirds) were Soviet films: 164 and 2 co-productions. The production from other countries lagged far behind: 36 films and one co-production from Czechoslovakia, 27+1 from Poland, 17+5 from Yugoslavia and 12 films from Hungary. There were almost no films from Bulgaria and Romania, while GDR films were not screened, although they were bought and imported through **Vainikoff**.

In this light, it can be said that Artkino held a dominant position. The company brought to the country almost all the Soviet films screened there, as well as those from Czechoslovakia in the 1960's. Between 1955 and 1970 it screened 168 out of the 250 films (plus 7 co-productions) screened in Argentina. This means that 2 out of every 3 films from Eastern European countries were distributed by Artkino. Other companies that distributed Eastern European films included Elga (11), Orbe (7+1), Norma (7), Dasa (4+1) and Clase (4), as well as América, and the official distribution company of the Soviet Embassy (13 films distributed between 1955–1970).

Table 2: Distributors with the largest number of films, 1955–1970

	USSR	Czechoslovakia	Poland	Yugoslavia	Hungary	Bulgaria	In total
Artkino	148	20					168
América	5 +1C		2		4	1+1C	13
Elga		2	8	1			11
Orbe			5	+1C	2		7+1C
Norma		1	4	1	1		7
Dasa				4+1C			4+1C
Clase	1		3				4
In total							250+7C

Source: Authors

⁶ Both **Vainikoff's** family and Artkino, which existed during both eras of censorship (1930–1966 and 1966– 1983) and during the repressions that accompanied especially the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983), seemed to be affected by those traumatic experience (Vainikoff, 2016).

It is not easy to single out the most successful films in terms of the number of viewers. We would need to rely on figures that are inaccurate or are not available in the Argentine archives. The information on box office incomes as well as the prices of the tickets started to be registered since September 8, 1963.⁷ Since then, having these figures available, it is possible to find out the approximate number of spectators. The number of visitors to cinemas started to appear in the statistics in March 1967. Although these figures have only illustrative character, it is a convenient way to find out which films were best received by Buenos Aires public. Unlike distribution companies in other countries, before September 1963, distribution companies in Argentina did not allow their incomes to be released. Therefore, for this period there are not even approximate figures available.

Taking into consideration the quantity it is not surprising that among the Eastern European films with the largest number of spectators there are also the Soviet ones. However, Czechoslovak films were also very successful. Among 14 films, which were seen by 50.000 and more spectators, five films are from this country. This is particularly relevant to our analysis because these successful Soviet and Czechoslovak films were brought to cinemas of Buenos Aires by Artkino. Films that were distributed by other companies were significantly less successful. Among 40 movies seen by 15.000 and more viewers, there are only two Polish, one Hungarian, one Romanian and one Yugoslavian.

Thus, five films from the socialist countries, 3 Soviet and 2 Czechoslovak ones, reached 100.000 viewers in the Buenos Aires cinemas. In this context, the first great commercial success came in 1964, when Czechoslovak film *The Cassandra Cat* was released. According to *Heraldo*, “a millionaire success of that film in the Metropolitan may represent an important step towards an opening of the most prestigious cinemas for the films from the non-traditional countries” (*Heraldo*, 8/7/1964, p. 205). Even **Argentino Vainikoff** himself admitted the importance of this film for his company. “Czechoslovakia recognized the way Artkino works with its material, especially when the success of *The Cassandra Cat* in Argentina was not achieved worldwide. Because of this

⁷ To single out the films that were commercially most successful in the long term period is almost impossible. As a result of inflation, tickets prices were unstable. While in 1963 the price was 50–70 pesos, in 1969 it was 250–375 pesos, and after monetary reform in 1970, it was only 2–3 pesos.

our company was authorized to distribute all Czechoslovak films from that moment on” (*Heraldo*, 2/9/1964, p. 290).

Soon enough several new films also achieved commercial success because of their international film awards. The Academy Awards (Oscar) were especially influential. This could be proved by the Oscar-winning films' local success, such as *The Shop on Main Street*, *Closely Watched Trains*, *War and Peace*, as well as the Oscar nominated ones, i.e. *Pharaoh*, *Loves of a blonde*). Triumphs at film festivals in Cannes (*The Cassandra Cat*, *The Lady with the Dog*, *Chronicle of Flaming Years*), San Sebastian (*Lemonade Joe*, *or the Horse opera*) or Mar del Plata (*Last Month of Autumn*, *The Girls*) played an important role as well. Musicals and ballet performances were also very popular (*Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*). Of all these, only 2 of them occupied the first position in the highest-ranking film lists of the week (*War and Peace* and *Closely Watched Trains*, both for two weeks). Some of them occupied the second position (*War and Peace*, 6 weeks, *Last Month of Autumn*, 2 weeks, *The Shop on Main Street*, *Closely Watched Trains*, *The Cassandra Cat*, *Pharaoh* for 1 week).

Despite this optimistic picture, from a broader perspective not even the most commercially successful films could compete with Western cinematographies. For example, when comparing the highest-ranking films of 1968, *Closely Watched Trains* occupied the ninth position (34.930.737 pesos), while the American *Guess who's coming to dinner* occupied the first position and earned 87.790.770 pesos. In 1964, *The Cassandra Cat* was in the 16th place (8.325.080 pesos), while the American *Cleopatra* earned 25.699.130 pesos. This probably reflected the change in the social and cultural quality of **Vainikoff's** audience, caused firstly by Peronism and secondly by the cultural modernisation of the Buenos Aires scene. Artkino's spectators were basically elitist ones.

Table 3: Films that achieved audience numbers of over 50,000 in Buenos Aires, 8/9/1963–31/12/1970

	Title	Original Title	Country of origin	Distribut or	Audience numbers	Premiere	Number of days / weeks
1.	Sleeping Beauty	Spyashchaya Krasavitsa	USSR	Artkino	169,591	21/04/1965	157 days
2.	War and Peace	Voyna i mir	USSR	Artkino	159,282	04/06/1969	28 weeks
3.	Closely Watched Trains	Ostře sledované vlaky	Czechoslovakia	Artkino	151,884	02/05/1968	22 weeks

	Title	Original Title	Country of origin	Distribut or	Audience numbers	Premiere	Number of days / weeks
4.	The Cassandra Cat	Až přijde kocour	Czechoslovakia	Artkino	130,695	27/05/1964	78 days
5.	I Bought a Father	Ya kupil papu	USSR	Artkino	122,687	June 1965	69 days
6.	Last Month of Autumn	Posledniy mesyats oseni	USSR	Artkino	93,124	09/05/1967	10 weeks
7.	The Shop on Main Street	Obchod na korze	Czechoslovakia	Artkino	84,849	19/10/1966	23 weeks
8.	Man Follows Sun	Chelovek idyot za solntsem	USSR	Artkino	80,679	24/07/1964	73 days
9.	Pharaoh	Faraon	Poland	Norma	74,825	17/01/1968	13 weeks
10.	The lady with the dog	Dama s sobachkoy	USSR	Artkino	69,331	12/03/1963	57 days
11.	Lemonade Joe, or the Horse Opera	Limonádový Joe aneb Koňská opera	Czechoslovakia	Artkino	64,862	09/09/1965	7 weeks
12.	The Girls	Devchata	USSR	Artkino	57,375	28/03/1963	41 days
13.	Loves of a Blonde	Lásky jedné plavovlásky	Czechoslovakia	Artkino	54,959	16/06/1966; 25/07/1968 (renewal)	11 weeks (renewal)
14.	Chronicle of Flaming Years	Povest plamennykh let	USSR	Artkino	50,925	22/08/1963	55 days

Source: Authors

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Latin America occupied quite a privileged place among the battlefields of the Cold War. The ideological confrontation had grown in intensity since the fifties in connection with the beginnings of the Soviet involvement in the area. Communist states paid increased attention to strategically important Argentina from where they should drive the efforts to advance political goals in other countries in the region; among others, their main instrument to exercise their influence was culture, which in the bipolar confrontation took on the character of an important ideological weapon. It was not surprising that Buenos Aires, a traditional cultural centre not only in Argentina but also in South America, had become a prime destination for eastern artistic ensembles, a place where exhibitions were held and where the socialist states supported the publication of books and periodicals.

Probably the film had become the most effective tool for transmitting what life was like in the "secret" area behind the Iron Curtain to the largest public possible in distant lands. Therefore, the distribution of films in this region, similarly to the USA, became a major issue among cultural policies of the Eastern Bloc. After Second World War, a broad distribution network was created which, in addition to state institutions, also engaged private and semi-private agents. It was Artkino that played a fundamental role in the distribution of Soviet and Czechoslovak films in Argentina. Its founder, **Argentino Vainikoff**, had a number of contacts in Eastern Europe and saw this activity not only as a great business opportunity but also as a means to achieve ideological goals. The importance of Artkino was gradually growing in strength despite numerous obstacles posed by the Argentine governments. The company was in charge of the distribution of the socialist production to neighbouring countries and, through its contacts, also of the distribution of Argentine films to Eastern Europe, i.e. it was a true cultural mediator. The peak of success came in 1966, when **Vainikoff** founded the cinema Cosmos 70, which specialised in films from socialist countries, and which, in coming decades, became a significant phenomenon and an integral part of the lives of thousands of Buenos Aires citizens.

In Argentina, a relatively small number of East European films were distributed, of which Soviet Union films were significantly prevalent. While it is obvious that even the most successful films were not able to compete commercially with the production of capitalist states, there is no doubt that they

left a deep social and cultural footprint. This article represents the first attempt at a scientific analysis of the activities and of the socio-cultural relevance of film distribution company Artkino in Argentina in the 1950s and 1960s, while it aims to show the complexity of the Eastern cultural propaganda and the Cultural Cold War as well.

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