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The Sinterklaas Effects

During the last weeks of November and the first week of December, a very serious subject is being at the centre of passionate discussions in most of the Dutch and Belgian schools playgrounds. Generally the conversation starts along the walls by a pair of kids. Then a third classmate joins into the talks. The points of views of the small group are generally illustrated with the kids' own experience. But there want be any final conclusion at that stage. This is left for further research to do at home. "Do you believe that Sinterklaas, really exist?" is a question that will haunt many dreams these next days. On the market-side, the highly anticipated children tradition in the Benelux does not leaves any place for questioning. Sinterklaas also known as Saint Nicolas - The Saint patron of children and sailors (in the French speaking part of Belgium), or Santa Claus in the UK - is a dreamful event that is prepared long in advance. Because it boosts every years the sales with the same frenzy, everybody from the candy-shop tenant to the Senior Media Planner of the local advertising company can answer in one-voice: "Yes! He really exists"! Filmmakers who produce for children can sometime also expect to earn Sinterklaas sympathy. A just released Dutch-Belgian family drama co-production starring a little Chinese girl is breaking the box office of both kingdoms. The movie "*HET PAARD VAN SINTERKLAAS*" translated in English into "*WINKY'S HORSE*" is in the top five and has generated over € 700.000 after just three weeks, well before December the 6th, which is Sinterklaas day! The story adapted from "Winky's Horse" written by Tamara Bos is about Winky Wong (played by Ebbie Tam), the daughter of a Chinese family who runs a Chinese restaurant on the Dutch seaside. There is only one thing Winky wants: a horse, a real horse to ride. But horses are expensive. Fortunately it is the season of Sinterklaas; Winky just asks a horse for Sinterklaas. Than everything will work out all right. Or will it? Winky's parents don't know anything about the Dutch tradition of Saint Nicolas. Discovering the Belgian - Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas through the eyes of a Chinese family is the smart idea at the centre of the film directed by Mischa Kamp. The idea might soon inspire an equivalent where a Western family will discover the stories behind the Thai "Loy Krathong festival", or the Vietnamese Mid-Autumn Festival. During the last month, the [Bos Bros Productions](#) movie co-produced in the Belgian Flanders by [MMG](#) got already two awards: a Golden Calf for the Best Screenplay at the [Utrecht Film Festival](#) and the Public Award at the latest [Flanders International Film Festival-Gent](#). It is now expected that the film will double its sales with the market events that are coming with the kid tradition.

The success of the locally produced children movie in Holland and Belgium contrasts with the overall cinema attendance, which in Europe shows a decline in 2005. The most recent figures for Dutch films tickets sales show an upward-tendency. October alone saw the total ticket sales increased by 10% compare to the same period last year. How to explain the good health of these movies in a market that shows signs of hibernation? Cineuropa explain the situation by the effect of a strong line-up of children titles. European cinemagoers are also showing less unconditional passion to American imports. With Harry Potter in the back, there is a place to take for national productions. And these films that are speaking to the family as a whole have an even better chance. Bos Bros reveals its strategy to be one of the most successful production company; their mission statement says "*We use a special three-way-approach: First of all we produce films aimed for a small, mostly young target group (for instance Winky's Horse) which are basically released only in Dutch cinema's in spring or fall time.*"

Secondly, the category where *BosBros.* has got a very good reputation, are the major Dutch family films (*Abeltje*, *Minoes*, *Yes Nurse No Nurse*, *Pluk and his Tow Truck* and *The Horror Bus*) which are released in Dutch and Flemish cinema's around the Christmas holidays. Finally we make films for an international audience (for instance *The ZigZag Kid*). These films are recorded in English and are distributed in as many countries as possible". In 2004 - 2005, Danish film production companies have worked not far from these strategy lines. The Danish Film Institute has just announced similar surprising attendance numbers. With breaking records not seen since 1981 for Danish films, there is another question that can soon reach the Danish schools playgrounds: "Do you think that Sinterklaas will also visit the rest of Europe?"

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Admission figures in Europe

The [database LUMIERE](#) provides a systematic compilation of available data on admissions of the films released in European cinemas since 1996. The database is the result of the collaboration between the European Audiovisual Observatory and the various specialized national sources as well as the MEDIA Programme of the European Union.

Admission figures in Denmark

[Admission figures for national films released in 2004 - 2005 screened in Danish cinemas.](#) The figures are provided by distributors and Statistics Denmark.

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