

Report from Odense Workshop

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Eight of us, from seven countries, managed to meet for the day in Odense. We spent the entire day discussing issues arising from the first analyses of the project's materials, and could have gone on a great deal longer! The following notes are not intended to cover everything said, but to pull out some of the most interesting and potentially productive topics which emerged.

1. We began by sharing ideas on the recruitment processes, reflecting on things which had aided or restrained this. Main points covered included:

- The relative lack of hype around *The Hobbit* compared to *The Lord of the Rings* which reduced people's interest overall in contributing to the survey.
- The role of accident (forging links with particular people who were able to promote the survey among their 'followers'). The same is true of particular websites/online portals.
- Attempts to work with local cinemas and the film's distributors appear to have generally been difficult, if not impossible.
- Traditional media outlets, perhaps because of the lower hype, often showed unwillingness to mention/promote the research.
- The unwillingness of Tolkien Societies (apart from the UK and Germany, both of which appear to have been relatively friendly) to publicise the research – perhaps feeling defensive over the movies.
- There appear to be imbalances between countries also around the strength of existing cultures around fantasy.
- Some national teams appear to have worked in more unified ways than others, with effects on results.

Because of all these, we have the odd combination of an extraordinary overall figure across the world, but real unevennesses by country, language, etc. Our analytic tactics may have to take account of this (see below). We noticed the issue of those people who refused to see at least some parts of the trilogy – we have certainly recruited some who refused to see the third film, and even a few who only saw the first. But inevitably we have not really recruited outright refusers.

2. Reflecting on the overall profile of respondents, inevitably we have more committed/enthusiastic people than non-committals – but have enough of each to be able to make statements about their differences. The crucial importance of remembering that we do not have a sample, we have a 'population' – but we can sample purposively within the total. We should be aware of the fact that roughly 27.000 of the 36.000 responses come from European countries. We did note some variations between countries in the kinds of respondents members had managed to attract. Of particular interest, perhaps, is Denmark since they managed to recruit both opportunistically, and by a relatively controlled national sample of cinemagoers – the comparison between the two sets is going to be valuable. Germany has noted a strong presence of refusal of 'Fairytale' and 'Family film', while in Denmark the opposite was the case: a strong preference for 'fairytale', and relatively few who picked 'fantasy'. For some of these, we are going to have to consider whether, despite our

best efforts, our translations (or indeed the floating definitions), as well as national cultural traditions (in Germany and Denmark, respectively, the Grimm versus the Hans Christian Andersen traditions) may have steered respondents. For some of these, we are going to have to consider whether, despite our best efforts, our translations (or indeed the floating definitions) may have steered respondents (in regards to the floating definitions or the national linguistic differences). Germany and Denmark for example noted a distinct difference in the results towards "fairy tale" depending on a) the translation and usage in each language and b) the national tradition of what is considered a fairy tale (Grimm vs. Andersen). Finland on the other hand, because of its particularly strong fantasy fan traditions, has a complex array of terms for the idea, which are likely to be reflected in choices and open answers.

We reflected at length on the issue of an overall change in the visibility and status of fantasy as a genre, partly following the global success of *The Lord of the Rings*. This is affecting everything from bookshop practices of shelf-organisation, to Netflix categories. We do have questions which will allow us, to some extent, to tap into this. But we may also need to look into the qualitative questions as well, to learn more about this change.

We discussed the risk of seeing our project as a 'snapshot'. We don't think it is, rather, within the range of our answers we can hope to tease out *histories of interest* (what people came to the film with, from what backgrounds, and what they went away with) – see in particular Q2 and Q22. We also discussed the importance of the final two questions, which ought – suitably analysed – to allow us to explore taste-categories (Bourdieuian in broad terms). The same could be true of our 'interpretive communities' question – which asked people to think in terms of the *kind of person* they are.

We noted the strong take-up of 'World of fantasy' across the world, wondering if this was performing the same function as 'Epic' in the *Lord of the Rings* project, as a kind of 'lowest common denominator'. We will need to consider where within qualitative answers we might get inside this concept to see what it means concretely to audiences. There is a potential link to the notion that some audiences who awarded 'Excellent' did so by setting the measuring bar lower than others (MB reported on some evidence of this which emerged as he was preparing his presentation for the Odense Conference).

We noted and discussed the significance of the overall refusal of 'Children's story' in the broad survey. This has several sources: partly (for enthusiasts) a sense that it is not *just* for children, since it has more important issues; partly (for critics) because it is seen as having too many battle scenes for children. We also noted the high rejection rate for 'coming-of-age', thinking this may be because the actors simply look older, and don't seem to 'mature' in quite the way they did in *Lord of the Rings*. We noted the broad opposition that seems to be emerging between seeing the films as *genre* and seeing them as *commerce*.

Lots of questions were occurring to us, as we talked, for instance: where within the answers might we particularly expect to find the playing out *gender differences, political positions, and general cultural taste patterns*. We also talked about the possibility that the sense of the films being 'authored' might throw up some important insights. Where people give 'Tolkien' (or 'Jackson') as their reasons for seeing the films, do they mean the same things by the term? There are signs that

they may not – enthusiasts for the films may be working with a different ‘image’ of Tolkien than Tolkien Society purists.

At the other end of the scale, we reflected on the differences that might show up if we explore systematically how audience experiences are affected by (a) watching in the original language (whether or not that is their national language); (b) watching subtitled; and (c) watching dubbed. We also noted the need to be aware that in countries that subtitle films, audiences would typically see themselves as watching in the original language AND watching subtitled. With e.g. the interesting case of Germany where apart from the dubbed version, there was also the original non subtitled version in the cinema. These can be equally as interesting questions as the larger ones about transformations of fantasy. (And we twitched our eyebrows at the odd result that, while they are the smallest group overall, those saying they would prefer to watch the films on mobile devices had the highest levels of appreciation of the films ...)

3. We asked: how might we most effectively move from data to qualitative materials? This occasioned a lot of debate – especially in relation to the joint issues of coding and translating answers. Before coming to that, the following ideas were floated:

- can we think of ways to explore the implications of high/low levels of fandom (springing from levels of response to the Other Activities question) (Finland)?
- specific areas of interest might be exploring the responses of those who engage in fan fiction(USA)
- could we learn a lot from isolating and comparing the Very Positive (excellent ratings) and Very Negative (awful ratings) and comparing their answers to qualitative questions (Russia)?
- could we explore the final two questions (favourite activities and most common activities) to open up taste cultures in relation to responses (Denmark)?
- could we group countries above the national level, given unevennesses in recruitment, according to some agreed principles (eg dominant religions, or languages) (Belgium)? Eg, a grouping by continent (north America, south America) or part of continent (eg northern, southern, eastern Europe).

From this discussion, came the very important topic of how best to form a pool of selected answers which could be translated into English, so everyone can access them. Two opposite models emerged, in response to a very detailed set of proposals from our German colleagues, who have developed and tested a model for coding responses. On one approach we would ask people to code a sample of answers in their own languages, in order to ensure that the particular meanings and connotations in that language are attended to by its native speakers (and a way would have to be found to insert additional columns in the database, to hold these codings, for search purposes). On the other approach, we would agree on the principles of selecting a sample of particular kinds of answers, and translate those – so that those who are particularly interested in and good with coding could do them across all translated sets. The meeting couldn’t resolve these – not least because they have work-implications for everyone in the network.

4. Presentations and Publications. We discussed the possibilities of getting the project heard at some of the big forthcoming events (eg WorldCon 2017) as well as the kinds of conference that have already been circulated. Mostly we discussed routes to publication. We noted *Participations* November 2016, for which a call will go out shortly from MB. It was felt to be worth exploring the

possibility of other Sections/Special Issues – eg among the fan journals. It was broadly felt that we should be going for a book with a significant academic publisher – but that the book needs to have a clear unity (more than was achieved with the *Lord of the Rings* book) and that the theme might be that issue of transformations in the status, meanings and purposes of fantasy today, as demonstrated and exemplified through the results of the Hobbit Project. (We noted that the ‘competitor’ project, from New Zealand and using Q-Methodology, has announced a forthcoming book of its results.) We reiterated the principle that *everyone* in the network owns the database and has the right to present and publish, but we wanted to reiterate the consequent principle that *everyone shares what they do with everyone else*. [[To this end, MB is attaching his Powerpoint from the Odense Conference.]]

For another opportunity to meet for a workshop, the German team has proposed the international conference of the Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung, held in September 2016 in Münster (near the Netherland-German border). Call for Papers is open till end of January for the conference, an additional day for the workshop could be added.

Another possibility to meet would be NECS 2016 in Prague (end of July).

Weary, but feeling pleased with ourselves, we stopped talking at around 4.20pm.