

## Age or Content Based Film Ratings: A Solution Discussed in Poland

Lucyna Kirwil, University of Warsaw, Poland

Poland's different media do not have a common standardized film rating system. Film distributors, broadcasters, video shops, and Internet providers use their own different policy.

Cinemas usually follow age-based suggestions of Polish producers or translate ratings attached to foreign film productions into the Polish age based classification. Actually the rating systems' categories of age used in cinemas are: "no age limit", "over 12 years", "over 15 years", and "over 18 years". In fact this is the classification "inherited" from the past.

Because Poland does not have any clear rules, video shops try to follow the instructions, they found on the packages of videocassettes, CDs, DVDs, etc., which were produced outside of Poland. Polish films do not come with any special rating for videos, however some owners of video shops use their own intuitive content-based ratings. Typically, with these Polish films, they differentiate between film contents appropriate for children or adults.

The Internet providers do not limit children's access to any content films and messages. Only one content filter, "Family Filter" is available to Poles.

Broadcast television is the only media in Poland with a system of films classification. It consists of three colorful, graphical labels: (1) a square in a green circle is assigned to films directed to general audience; (2) a triangle in a yellow circle warns parents that children need their parents' permission to watch the film, and (3) a red circle with horizontal line (or a square) inside indicates that the film is for an adult audience, usually due to extremely violent or erotic content and bad language. All shapes in the circles are transparent. Both public TV stations and commercial stations use this labeling system for films, TV shows and other TV programs. Broadcasters are responsible for assigning these labels.

This system resulted from a compromise between age and content based rating system proposed to the Polish broadcasters by the National Broadcasting Council on the one hand and some American and Canadian solutions based on parental and producers ratings proposed to the National Broadcasting Council by the voluntary Association of Polish TV Broadcasters, "*Friendly Media*", on the other hand.

There are two laws, which protect children against harmful impact of broadcasting on their development included in the "Statement on TV and Radio Broadcasting". The first law prohibits broadcasting an adult content between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. The second law (since

2002) obligates broadcasters to label broadcasted films and shows with graphical symbols (pictograms) classifying film or TV show according to its harmfulness to particular ages of juvenile viewers. Broadcasting of any message or scene harmful for psychological development of children, and violence, pornography, or bad language in particular, is prohibited by law. The National Broadcasting Council monitors TV and radio programs, detecting broadcasters, which violate law.

The Polish labeling system is not fully effective in protecting children of harmful impact of TV - according to opinion of Broadcasters, children, parents, and media psychologists studying, how this labeling system functions, think that it is not fully effective. Broadcasters do not keep watershed very often. Debate on a films labeling system in Poland, and its age or content basis, continues.