THE KAISER-PANORAMA AND TOURISM IN BELGIUM AROUND 1900

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Abstract

The Kaiser-Panorama is a cylindrical stereo-viewer offering series of 50 topographic coloured stereo photographs to multiple viewers simultaneously. It was conceived, patented and commercialised in the 1880s by the German August Fuhrmann who subsequently developed it into a longstanding transnational media enterprise. Because of its focus on topographic imagery, the Kaiser-Panorama has often been marketed as a medium for virtual travel. So far, the Kaiser-Panorama has mainly been studied in the German context and little is known about its development in other countries. This article focuses on the presence and meaning of the Kaiser-Panorama in Belgium. It will consider this from two perspectives. First, it maps the introduction and development of the Kaiser-Panorama in Belgium where it emerged at a point in time when urban entertainment transitioned from mobile to fixed exhibition. Second, the heyday of the Kaiser-Panorama in Belgium coincides with the increasing democratisation of travel. The article will demonstrate how, in the Belgian franchise, an enterprise whose core business was the promotion of virtual travel, developed into a medium promoting real travel.

Keywords: Kaiser-Panorama, stereo photography, tourism, travel, Diorama International, Belgium.

Introduction

In December 1897, a local newspaper from Liège (Belgium) advertised the latest novelty in town: "All those who love nature and the arts and attach importance to interesting and highly useful things, will certainly not neglect to visit the Diorama International". This so-called "Diorama International" was in fact a Kaiser-Panorama, a cylindrical stereo viewer offering geographically organised series of coloured stereo photographs to multiple viewers – usually 25 – simultaneously.[1] Seated around the Kaiser-Panorama, visitors viewed series of 50 images at individual viewing stations through fixed binoculars. Each show lasted about thirty minutes. What was advertised in the Belgian paper as "a novelty", had in fact been around for quite a while. In the 1880s, the German entrepreneur August Fuhrmann (1844–1925) conceived, patented and commercialised the device and developed an international network of franchises.[2] According to Fuhrmann's own statement, there were about 250 Kaiser-Panoramas in operation by 1910, in Germany but also in Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, Serbia, Switzerland, Italy, the Scandinavian countries and Belgium

(Lorenz, 2010). In principle, these subsidiaries operated as independent companies but, in practice, they relied heavily on Fuhrmann's marketing instructions and largely depended on his firm for their content. His enterprise revolved around a system of permanent exhibition of a viewing apparatus that not only attracted visitors because of its technological novelty (wherever it was shown for the first time), but assured a long-term engagement of the audience based on its ever changing, strictly formatted content. Even more than on producing and selling Kaiser-Panoramas, Fuhrmann's business concentrated on the production and international distribution of stereo glass slides. Any exhibitor who bought a machine from him could simply subscribe to this paying service. Every week, Fuhrmann sent new series of 50 pictures from the headquarters in Berlin to his customers around Europe. The *Kaiser-Panorama Firmen Katalog* from 1907 listed 661 series. By 1915, Fuhrmann already had over 1000 series on loan. The photographs were made by professional photographers, individually coloured,[3] printed on glass plates of 8.5 x 17 cm and stored in wooden boxes (Fuhrmann, 1907, 1909, 1915). Fuhrmann's focus on the distribution of images, his business model working

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1) The device is known by various names: Kaiser-Panorama (Kaiserpanorama), International Diorama (Diorama International), Panorama, Welt-Panorama (Weltpanorama), Photoplastikon... Fuhrmann favoured 'Kaiser-Panorama' but dropped this name after the First World War in favour of 'Weltpanorama'. In this article I will use the term Kaiser-Panorama (spelled as Fuhrmann spelt it) as a generic term when speaking about the technology as developed by Fuhrmann. When referring to specific franchises, I will use the names under which these businesses operated at the time.

2) Fuhrmann patented the Kaiser-Panorama under the name of 'Revolving Stereoscope' in Britain 1888 and as 'Selbsteinkassirendes Wandelpanorama' in Germany in 1889 (British Patent Office. Patent GB7067, Complete Specification: Fuhrmann's revolving stereoscopic panorama, 1888; Kaiserliches Patentamt. Patentschrift D52.946, Selbsteinkassirendes Wandelpanorama, 1889).

3) To approximate "natural colours", Fuhrmann developed a special colouring process for his stereo photographs. He described this as "indirekt durchschimmernden Polychromierung" ('indirectly shimmering through polychromy'). This method, which resembled somewhat the procedure used in the so-called *French tissue stereos (Flores, 2019, p. 259)*, consisted of applying the translucent paint in specific shades not to the glass plate with the black-and-white photo positive, but to an opposing frosted glass. Both glass plates were then joined together (Fuhrmann, 1915, p. 5). This procedure gave the glass slides their unique colouring palette and visual quality.

with subsidiaries, his approach to marketing and his choice of content have many similarities with the working methods of the large international stereo view companies that emerged in the United States and the United Kingdom around the same time, such as Underwood & Underwood and Keystone Stereo Views. These firms mostly targeted consumers directly and worked with canvassers who sold their wares (Darrah, 1977; Malin, 2007; Plunkett, 2008). Fuhrmann's operation, in contrast, was a centralised rental system aimed at the professional market (his clients were exhibitors). His curated series had mainly topographic and tourist subjects and were arranged by country or region in the catalogues.[4] In the advertising material Fuhrmann used for his own Panorama in Berlin and made available to his franchisers, the Kaiser-Panorama was first and foremost praised and promoted as a cheap and simple way to travel (Fuhrmann, 1907, 1915).

Despite the international character of Fuhrmann's enterprise, most of the research so far has focused on the German context (Burckhard, 1998; Hälbich, 1992; Karge, 2008; Lorenz, 2001, 2010; Oettermann, 1997; Rauschgatt, 1994, 1999; Senf, 2003).[5] In this article, I will look at the presence and specific developments of the Kaiser-Panorama in Belgium. I will consider it from two perspectives. First, I will map the introduction and evolution of the Kaiser-Panorama in Belgium against the background of the transition from travelling novelty to permanent urban entertainment. Second, I will assess the development of the Kaiser-Panorama in relation to the increasing democratisation and popularity of tourism and railway travel. I will demonstrate how an enterprise whose core business was the promotion of virtual travel, in the Belgian franchise, developed into a medium promoting real travel.

Kaiser-Panoramas in Belgium: from travelling entertainment to solid businesses

The Kaiser-Panorama can be situated on the verge of the transition from travelling shows at fairs to urban entertainment offered in permanent buildings. Fuhrmann himself had a background as an itinerant showman and explicitly conceived his Kaiser-Panorama as a fixed-venue type form of entertainment. Before he started his Kaiser-Panorama business, he toured German cities as a lantern projectionist: with his Agioskop lantern (a model with three lenses) and coloured slides, he presented series of dissolving views. His shows had titles such as "Eine Reise in die Schweiz" (A trip to Switzerland) or "Allerlei aus Aller Welt" (All kinds of things from all over the world), that foreshadow his later focus on stereoscopic travel images. His shows were accompanied with live music (Fuhrmann, 1907, p. Appendix IV; Fuhrmann, 1925a).[6] While touring he also gave demonstrations with new visual and acoustic media such as Edison's phonograph or the Bell telephone (Fuhrmann, 1925a, 1925b; Hick, 1999, p. 290; Lorenz, 2010, pp. 19, 38). His trajectory indicates he was media-savvy and had a nose for scientific novelties, showmanship and business opportunities. Looking back on his early career in 1925, Fuhrmann indicated that it was mostly the travelling aspect of his work that he found tiresome:

> Posters, advertisements, leaflet distribution, the printing of tickets and the like, the salaries of the staff, the travel expenses with luggage weighing tens of kilos, life in the guest houses, in sum: the expenses, costs of all kinds, required enormous expenditure every month. It is understandable that with the weight of the material to be carried, I had to impose great restrictions on myself, so that usually only a few performances could be given in the same place, and so business drove me from place to place. It was indeed a hard, exhausting life, the pure nomadic life (Fuhrmann, 1925a, pp. 306–307).

It might have been during his time on the road that Fuhrmann first came across public attractions that featured stereo images. In the late 19th century, the stereoscope was one of the most popular optical recreations in the domestic as well as the public setting (Flores, 2019; Plunkett, 2008). After it had been introduced to the public at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, stereoscopic recreation gained popularity as a homely pastime. At the same time, it was also showcased throughout Europe in travelling attractions. They went under a variety of names, such as *The Animated Polystereoscope* of Francisco Dalmau (1850s), Mr. Patyal's *Stereoscope* (1860s), Ferrier's *Stereogramm-Salon-Apparat* (1860s), Alois Polanecki's *Glas-Stereogramm-Salon* (1860s), Boix Jovani's *Salão Americano* (1870s) or the *Cosmorama* by the German Théodore Metz (1860s and 1870s) (Borges de Araújo, 2019, p. 293; Cuenca, 2018; Lorenz, 2010, pp. 18, 39; Pellerin, 1995; Rauschgatt, 1999). Little is known about the exact technologies and designs of these attractions. They probably all offered stereo views for several viewers at the same time, but it's likely that many of them simply used multiple individual viewers. In addition, certainly not all the views were photographic.[7] After a period of relative decline in the 1870s and 1880s, stereoscopy went through a revival that lasted until the beginning of the First World War. In this period, stereo viewers of different kinds became a staple in educational contexts such as schools, libraries and exhibitions (Good, 2019; Malin,

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4) Series on Germany (almost 200) and Austria-Hungary (over 100) were well represented in Fuhrmann's catalogue: they focused on tourist sites and major cities, but also highlighted the infrastructure of empire, such as harbours, ships and military fleets, aviation, railways, troops and military camps and royal residences. Among the other European countries, France, Spain and Italy were common subjects. For the readers of IJSIM it might be of interest there are eight series on Portugal in the main catalogue. The majority are general series on Portugal or Lisbon. One series includes slides of Belem and Montserrat Palace; another one includes images of Sintra (Fuhrmann, 1907, p. IX (403)). A smaller number of series focused on other continents such as Asia with series depicting, for example, Palestine, China, India, Japan, and North-Africa displaying images of Algiers, Tunis and Egypt (Fuhrmann, 1907, 1915).

5) The hybrid technology of the Kaiser-Panorama has also caught the interest of media archaeologists and historians of technology. As an apparatus, the Kaiser-Panorama brought together elements from a variety of media developed either before (such as the diorama, the panorama, stereoscopic entertainments, stereo-photography) or afterwards (such as the Kinetoscope or the Mutoscope). It was a visionary medium that synthesised the past and foreshadowed the future of visual media and connected viewing regimes (Crary, 2001, pp. 134–138; Hick, 1999, pp. 187–195; Peselmann, 2016).

6) Although he gave up the illustrated lectures when his Kaiser-Panorama business took off, Fuhrmann continued to sell lantern projectors (*Fuhrmann's Cosmos*, *Cosmos 'Imperial'* and *Verwandlungs-Cosmos*) and offered a limited number of series of glass slides for schools, families and popular education until he sold his business in 1923. After he left his Panorama business, Fuhrmann returned to this *Nebelbilder* (Fuhrmann, 1907; Fuhrmann, 1925a; Fuhrmann, 1925b).

7) Most likely only Ferrier and Polanecki developed machines that closely resembled the Kaiser-Panorama: circular constructions for up to 20 viewers with an automatic mechanism for moving series of stereo photographs. For a detailed account of these and other precursors of the Kaiser-Panorama, see Rauschgatt (1999).

2007; Plunkett, 2008). It is clear that when he patented his Kaiser-Panorama in the late 1880s, Fuhrmann was familiar with a diversity of apparatuses for the public exhibition of stereo photographs. This is also subscribed by the patent itself which presented the Kaiser-Panorama as 'an improvement of existing systems with multiple stereoscopes.[8]

Itinerant exhibitors crossed each other at fairs and festivals. These quickly became places of international knowledge exchange on the part of exhibitors and visitors alike (Convents, 1994; Toulmin, 2003; Wynants, 2020). It is most likely also through such itinerant showmen that Belgian audiences were first introduced to the Kaiser-Panorama. Between 1889 and 1892, the Swiss showman Friedrich Wilhelm Düll (°1847–?) visited several Belgian cities with his "Diorama Suisse" or "Diorama Artistique".[9] Although there is no reference to Fuhrmann or the Kaiser-Panorama in the advertisements and articles about his performances, circumstantial evidence suggests that the Diorama Suisse was a Kaiser-Panorama, or at least a very similar device. What we know from the descriptions of the Diorama Suisse in the press is that he showed series of 50 photographic stereo views in colour; that each performance would last about half an hour and that visitors could start their session whenever there was a chair available. In addition, the

themes and titles of most series of photographs on display at the Diorama Suisse are very similar to the series Fuhrmann offered: series on the Paris World Exhibition of 1889, Switzerland, Algeria and Egypt, Spain, Monaco-Nice-Italy… were all available in Fuhrmann's catalogue as well (Fuhrmann, 1915, pp. 12–35). In the press, Düll was frequently mentioned as the inventor of the Diorama Suisse and was said to have made improvements to the lenses and lighting system.[10] It is well-known that Fuhrmann had several imitators and competitors (Lorenz, 2010, pp. 32–34) Düll might have been one of them or he may have procured his Diorama from one of them. The rental and distribution system as envisioned by Fuhrmann was not devised for travelling showmen such as Düll. The weekly programmes didn't suit them as they needed to change their programme more often to attract returning visitors during their short stay in each city. While touring in Belgium, Düll only had a limited number of series which he alternated in every location. His programme changed several times a week and sometimes even daily. Logistically, sending series back and forth was problematic for entrepreneurs who were on the road all the time. Most likely, Düll bought (or constructed) a 'Kaiser-Panorama' and some image series, but worked independently. This gave him the liberty to mix his series if needed, to buy from different photographers

and to make technical alterations to the apparatus. Düll went to several big cities, such as Antwerp and Charleroi, but also called at smaller towns such as Aalst, Kortrijk and Lokeren.[11] Surprisingly, there is no indication that he also called at Brussels (cfr. Infra). In several towns, he returned on a yearly basis, possibly on occasion of an annual fair or festival.[12] Apparently Düll did not have his own barrack. He exhibited in a variety of fixed venues: from cafes and hotels to the meeting places of societies and interest groups.[13] In every venue he stayed between a one and seven weeks; the bigger the town, the longer he stayed. The press generally praised the performances and repeatedly mentioned their popular success. The quality of the images, their depth and the feeling of immersion they induced were applauded.[14]

In 1889, at the time Düll toured in Belgium, a professor (Otto) Witter[15] opened a "Panorama International" on the first floor of the Alhambra theatre in Brussels.[16] The "Panorama International" was the first official Fuhrmann franchise to open its

doors in Belgium in a permanent location. Its presence may explain why Düll did not call at Brussels on his tours in Belgium. The Kaiser-Panorama technology was again presented as a novelty in the local press. Commenting on the opening of the Panorama International, a journalist wrote: "The old form of panoramic views with glasses that appear at the fairgrounds has been rejuvenated, and the crudely coloured engraving has been replaced by extraordinarily sharp photographs, in which everything appears, even the details".[17] It is clear that the Kaiser-Panorama was considered an upgrade from fairground entertainment.

The exploitation of the Panorama International in Brussels followed the Fuhrmann blueprint: the programme changed on a weekly basis and consisted of stereo series from Fuhrmann's catalogue. Offering its customers the chance to virtually visit all the cities in the world was its main goal. The first series showed monuments, museums, parks, rivers, coast and warehouses in England and London.[18] The Panorama

8) British Patent Office. Patent GB7067, Complete Specification: Fuhrmann's revolving stereoscopic panorama, 1888; Kaiserliches Patentamt. Patentschrift D52.946, Selbsteinkassirendes Wandelpanorama, 1889.

9) The information on Friedrich Wilhelm Düll and his tour in Belgium is based on research in the contemporary press. The information was gathered from the following newspapers: *Het Handelsblad*, *Le Courrier de L'Escaut*, *De Denderbode*, *Gazette de Charleroi*, *Gazette de Louvain*, *Gazette van Kortrijk*, *La Meuse, Gazette van Lokeren* en *Gazette van Beveren-Waas*. Part of the information on the Diorama by Wilhelm Düll was collected by Michiel Demaeght for the Directory of Belgian Photographers. I wish to thank him for sharing his source material with me (https://fomu.atomis.be/index.php/diorama-artistique;isaar).

10) 'Diorama', in *De Denderbode,* 23 October 1890. In his immigration file, he indicated that he was a technical engineer ('ingénieur et constructeur'). See: FelixArchief (City Archive Antwerp), Immigration dossier Frédéric Guillaume Düll, 481#65962.

11) "Het Diorama Düll", *Het Handelsblad,* 8 August 1889; "Het Diorama Dull", *Gazette van Lokeren*, 21 September 1890; *Gazette van Beveren-Waas,* 12 October 1890; "Diorama", *De Denderbode*, 23 October 1890; "Diorama Artistique", *Gazette de Louvain*, 19 December 1891; "Kunst-Diorama", *Gazette van Kortrijk*, 5 February 1891; "Diorama", *Gazette van Kortrijk*, 8 February 1891; "Diorama Artistique", *La Meuse*, 8 August 1891; "Diorama Artistique", *Gazette de Charleroi*, 6 June 1891; "Diorama Artistique", *Gazette de Charleroi*, 9 June 1891; "Diorama Artistique", *Gazette de Charleroi*, 21 June 1891; *Le Courrier de L'Escaut*, 25 February 1891; *Le Courrier de L'Escaut*, 8 April 1892; "Diorama Artistique", *Gazette de Charleroi*, 8 June 1892; "Diorama Artistique", *Le Courrier de L'Escaut*, 31 March 1892.

12) For example, he went to Courtrai in March 1891 and returned in March 1892 and to Charleroi in June 1891 and June 1892.

13) For example, the venues of the "Artistic Circle" (*Cercle Artistique*) in Antwerp or the "Catholic Society" in Antwerp and Alost (*Katholieke Kring*) "Katholieke Kring", *Het Handelsblad*, 2 April 1890; "Cercle Artistique", *Het Handelsblad*, 21 February 1890.

14) See for example : «Diorama Artistique", *La Meuse*, 27 August 1891 ; "Diorama Artistique", *Gazette de Louvain*, 19 December 1891.

15) Witter (1853–1925) who was born in Moresnet also went by the name of Otto Witter or Professor Witter. While he was the director of the Panorama International, he also regularly gave lectures on geography and topography with lantern slides. See for example: *Journal de Bruxelles*, 27 March 1895 and Journal de Charleroi, 5 June 1901.

16) The Alhambra Theatre was located on the then Boulevard de la Senne, now Avenue Jacqmain.

17) *Journal de Bruxelles*, 1 April 1889.

18) *Journal de Bruxelles*, 1 April 1889.

International stayed open until November 1898. In April 1893, Witter probably opened a second Panorama International at the Boulevard Anspach 7 in central Brussels.[19] Witter advertised his weekly programmes in the entertainment section of the local newspapers. From this source we learn his Panoramas changed address regularly. While unstable rental contracts may have been the reason for this, it certainly helped to attract the widest possible audience and help retain their status as a novelty.[20]

In the 1890s, additional Kaiser-Panoramas popped up in various Belgian cities. They advertised under names such as "Diorama International", "Panorama International", "Panorama", "Panorama Universel" or "Wereld Panorama". Compared to the very German "Kaiser-Panorama", these names had a more cosmopolitan flavour that appealed to an audience eager to learn about the world through new visual media. In 1894, the 'Diorama International' opened in Antwerp. It was located at the Schoenmarkt 41. This was a busy square in the centre of the city with numerous shops and small businesses. The Diorama International was run by the German Paul Langer (1862–?) during the first months.[21] Langer arrived in

Belgium in November 1894. He quickly disappeared and from 1895 onwards, French-born Marcel Richard (1844–?), previously an artist in the variety theatre, became the new manager. The building was owned or rented by Eugène Geurts, who was also involved in the management, at least in the early years.[22] The first performance organised – in December 1894 – was "Picturesque Tyrol", a series that would later also be shown in the other Belgian branches. The *Goldenes Buch der Zentrale für Kaiser-Panoramen* published by Fuhrmann for promotional purposes includes three testimonials about the Schoenmarkt Diorama International. They are written between October 1902 and March 1905. In line with the concept of the *Goldenes Buch*, the diorama was praised by "people of distinction" for its educational and entertaining character. The theatre director O. Buys, a self-declared regular visitor of the Antwerp diorama, wrote: "In my opinion, the installation of the diorama is not only an instructive and recreational diversion, but also a real pleasure to which I invite the intelligent audience in the halls of the theatre to go regularly" (Fuhrmann, 1909, p. 10). Besides their names, nothing is known about the people who wrote these endorsements. Nevertheless, they were framed as men with a certain standing. Next to the

theatre director O. Buys, the letters were written by a "Graff" (Count) von Fraysses and a "professor" Fritz Hanno.[23] These endorsements helped exhibitors to advertise their enterprise in learned environments and appeal to audiences looking for self-improvement.

The Antwerp Diorama International was the first branch of a chain of Kaiser-Panoramas under the directorship of Eugène Geurts. The business model promoted by Fuhrmann made upscaling quite easy. Exhibitors could simply buy a second (or third, or fourth) Kaiser-Panorama and shift the stereo series from one branch to another without sending them back for Fuhrmann first. To manage his different venues, Eugène Geurts worked together with his brother Léonard Geurts and with business partners Marcel Richard and Victor Portielje from Antwerp.[24] In 1897, Geurts also opened the "Diorama International" in Liège, at the Passage Lemonnier, a shopping arcade in the city centre.[25] This was operated by his brother Léonard Geurts. A branch in Brussels followed in 1901: first at the Boulevard Anspach 8 in another arcade, the Passage des Postes, then in the Nieuwstraat 109 next to the brand-new department store *Grand Magasin Innovation* built by Art-Nouveau architect Victor Horta. From then on, the Brussels branch functioned as the head office and was managed

by Eugène Geurts himself. In the following years, the chain further expanded with branches in Namur (Grand' Place), Ixelles (Chaussée d'Ixelles 50) and Ghent (Zonstraat). The configuration of the chain changed over the years as branches opened and closed or came under different ownership. They operated under different names from "Diorama International" to 'Panorama' and 'Wereld-Panorama' but regularly referred to the other branches in their promotional material. The publicity of these branches was done through weekly announcements in the local newspapers and flyers. Closer research of the programmes advertised in the press and on the weekly flyers shows that nearly all series came from the Fuhrmann catalogue and that the same series circulated between the branches. Stereo series could easily be transferred from one venue to the next within Belgium. Operating more than one Kaiser-Panorama certainly had advantages.

In 1902, a second chain of panoramas emerged in Belgium. In December two Kaiser-Panoramas opened in Mechelen (Onze Lieve Vrouwstraat 40) and Leuven (Diestsestraat) respectively, under the name of "Wereld-Panorama".[26] Both towns are considerably smaller than the cities where we find the Kaiser-Panorama in the 1890s. The new subsidiaries were obviously connected to each other since they operated under

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19) In July 1893, this operation moved to the Jules Van Praet Street, where it was exhibited together with a variety of other entertainments. See: *Le Peuple*, 8 July 1893.

20) It is difficult to track the exact trajectory of the Panorama International, especially after the opening of the second Panorama International in 1893. Based on advertisements in the press, we can state that in June 1889 the Panorama International moved to the Wolvengracht 14. In November 1892, it moved to the Boulevard du Nord 88. In December 1896 – after being closed for approximately 2 years – it reappears at the Wolvengracht (this time at number 12). In December 1898, it definitively closed its doors (*Journal de Bruxelles*, 28 March 1889, 26 June 1889, 14 November 1892, 18 January 1895, 25 December 1896, 15 February 1898).

21) Paul Langer was born in Breslau in 1862. In 1880, Breslau was the first city where Fuhrmann presented his Kaiser-Panorama. Before he arrived in Belgium, he was staying in Bielefeld, where there was also a Kaiser-Panorama (Lorenz, 2010, pp. 21–22). Langer may have been an envoy of Fuhrmann sent to Belgium to implement the Kaiser-Panorama in new territory.

22) FelixArchief, 481#82729 Foreigners' Dossier Paul Langer; FelixArchief, 481#85295 Foreigners' Dossier Richard, Marcel Mathieu Joseph Marie ; *Livres d'adresses de la ville et de la Province d'Anvers.* Antwerp: Ratinckx frères, editions from 1894–1914.

23) Working with recommendations by well-situated citizens such as professors, priests and other educators, was a staple of Fuhrmann's marketing strategy. Despite our efforts to find further information on the particular individuals recommending the Diorama in Antwerp, we have not been able to find any traces of them.

24) The agreement with Portielje is mentioned in *Jurisprudence du port d'Anvers*, 1896, p. 20. Portielje was also a photographer and occasionally made stereo photographs for the Diorama International (*Gazet van Antwerpen*, 19 December 1897). Many thanks to Michiel Demaeght for providing these references.

25) The Passage Lemonnier (built in 1836–1838) is the oldest arcade in Belgium (Micha, 2010).

26) *Gazet van Mechelen*, 21 December 1902; *Gazet van Mechelen*, 10 May 1903; *De Vrijheid: Nieuwsblad van het arrondissement Leuven*, 13 December 1902, 20 December 1902; 10 January 1903; 24 January 1903; 31 January 1903; 7 February 1903 (advertisements in this publication continue until 27 June 1903); *Journal des petites affiches*, advertisements published between 14 December 1902 and 3 December 1905.

the same name and advertised the same series, two weeks apart from each other. The Leuven venue remained open in the same location until 1905. In January 1904, a (presumably) third branch opened in Charleroi (36 Rue de la Montagne) in francophone Belgium (Wallonia).

Most of the Kaiser-Panoramas were only active for a few years (whether or not at the same location) and then closed their doors. Around 1905, most of the branches described above had disappeared. The Antwerp Diorama International – managed solely by Marcel Richard after Geurts left for Brussels in 1901 – was by far the most persistent. It would remain in operation continuously between 1894 and October 1914 – when the Schoenmarkt was almost completely destroyed in the bombing of Antwerp ("De toestand in Antwerpen", 1914).

The heyday of the Kaiser-Panorama in Belgium can be situated between roughly 1890 and 1905.[27] After making a successful transition from travelling entertainment to fixed venues, The Kaiser-Panorama became a staple in the Belgian urban entertainment life in the mid-1890s. In a more or less stable from, it continued to be popular until approximately 1905.

In what follows, I will demonstrate how the Belgian franchises of the Kaiser-Panorama adopted Fuhrmann's travel trope, but also took it one step further.

Travel tropes and travel trips

Following Fuhrmann's directions, Belgian exhibitors frequently stated that offering virtual travel was the main goal: "the panoramas will be renewed every week, so that all the cities, all the countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and America can be conveniently visited by the audience."[28] The Kaiser-panorama offered travels to faraway places, with ease, in comfort and for a relatively small amount of money. In this endeavour it constantly faced competition from other forms of recreation proposing similar experiences, such as painted panoramas and home stereoscopes (Goldsborough, 2007; Mathias, 2016; Parmeggiani, 2016). Several specific travel tropes can be connected to the Belgian franchises of the Kaiser-Panorama. In part these were pre-manufactured by Fuhrmann, but they found fertile ground among Belgian exhibitors. From its beginnings in the 1880s, the aspect of virtual travel was highlighted as a selling-point by Fuhrmann. Not only in the advertisements for the Kaiser-Panoramas he managed himself, but also in his recommendations for subsidiaries, Fuhrmann promoted the "travel trope". He went as far as indicating what vocabulary suited the Kaiser-Panorama best: "**Good** advertising is the **soul** of the business – (...) One '**travels**' in this **travel institute** in the most **comfortable** and **cheapest** way imaginable – that is why special attention is to be paid to a professional service at the ticket booth, and one invites the visitors to '**travel**'".[29] This recommendation was certainly taken to heart by the Belgian managers.

In 1889, the then recently opened Brussels' Panorama International announced its weekly-changing programme as a "*Voyage autour du monde*" or a voyage around the world.[30] A short article in one of Brussels' main newspapers explained this feature: "Visitors can comfortably tour the world sitting on a chair. The panorama is mounted on a mobile pivot, the views pass successively before the eyes of the spectator. This is how we saw England and London yesterday: monuments, museums, parks, rivers, coasts, warehouses, all are admirably represented."[31] The Belgian promotional material also mimicked the travel terminology Fuhrmann used in his catalogue. Here, the series were described as "Reise" (travel or a voyage) or "Besuch" (visit), but often also as a "eine Wanderung" (a stroll), "eine Spaziergang" (a walk) or even "eine Kletterpartei" (a climbing party). The descriptions were often completed with adjectives such as "bequem" (comfortable), "Interessant" (interesting) or "Malerisch" (painterly or picturesque). In this example from the Panorama in Ghent, the picture series about the French Savoy region was described as a "excursion pittoresque" (picturesque excursion). Other examples made reference to a "voyage inédit" (unseen voyage), "picturesque voyage" (picturesque voyage), "eene nieuwe reis" (a new voyage), "eene rondreis" (a tour)...[32] Many of these descriptions convey a sense of motion. These convey a deeper connection between the Kaiser-Panorama as an apparatus and the way people travelled. On the one hand, there was the idea of walking and taking in the landscape and the surroundings, closely connected to slow travel in

Grand Tour-fashion. This was in tune with the contemplation of the image stimulated by the Kaiser-Panorama. Each image was presented to the viewer for a fixed amount of time, allowing the visitor to take in the general atmosphere as well as the details of each image. On the other hand, the Kaiser-Panorama resembled modern ways of travelling and tourism. By the late nineteenth century, making a tour abroad had become available for a larger share of the population. Agencies and intermediaries of the likes of Thomas Cook offered readymade tours and tourists were guided by detailed descriptions in guidebooks by Baedeker and Murray. Travellers had become tourists and private transportation was replaced with railways and passenger steamers (Buzard, 1993, pp. 18–79). Tours were becoming pre-packaged commodities aimed at inexperienced travellers with limited time (and reasonable means). These tours synthesised geographic regions or whole countries into a sequence of stops: 'doing Italy' meant going to a specific set of cities and visiting a rather well-defined set of monuments. These stops were largely determined by the railway network. Here also, there were some striking similarities with the travels offered by the Kaiser-Panorama. Countries and regions were covered in series of 50 images or stops. As such, they promised a synthesis and condensation of an entire country or area that would allow the viewer to comprehend and consume it. To allow 'travel' between these stops, the Kaiser-Panorama was operated by a cast-iron rail-system, not unlike the then rapidly developing railway lines. The fifty glass stereos

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27) After 1905, only two new panoramas opened. Inspired by the longevity of the Antwerp Diorama International, a new Kaiser-Panorama opened in Ghent in April 1907 where it remained until the early 1910s. In 1915, the German Army opened a Kaiser-Panorama for its military personnel in occupied Brussels. The venue probably closed again in 1917.

28) *Journal de Bruxelles, 28 March 1889.*

29) Highlighted as in the original. *Anweisung für Filialbesitzer,* in: Lorenz (2010, p. 59 (Annexe 52)).

30) See for example the announcement in *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 20 December 1889.

31) Le Journal de Bruxelles, 1 April 1889.

32) See numerous examples in the Ghent University Library, Ephemera Collection (Vliegende Bladen): HF.I .A.028.20; HF.I.B.140.2; HF.I.D.027.10; HF.I.PGD.004.04; HF.II.P.005.09; HF.II.P.005.10; HF.III.P.001.22; HF.II.D.005.05 and HF.III.D.002.26.

Fig. 1 Program of the Diorama in Ghent, 24 May - 30 May 1903. (c) Ghent University Library (ephemera collection)

the binoculars installed at each viewing station. Instead of moving the traveller (as the railway did), this system moved the destinations.[33] The succession of images presented a circular narrative. Travelling became a reassuring loop: the visitor always ended up again where he started.

The Kaiser-Panorama can be associated with both the proclaimed advantages and disadvantages of railroad travel. Advocates of railway travel claimed that travelling by rail brought about a new mode of perception. Not only did the speed of the train offer a dynamic and panoramic view on the landscape, it also offered a privileged view: riding through mountains, high up on ridges or through the tree tops, crossing valleys; speeding through deserts and barely populated areas (Schivelbusch, 1986, pp. 59–60). In many cases, this privileged perspective was also offered to the visitors of the Kaiser-Panorama for which photographers tried their best to capture interesting scenes and find the best vantage points. In their attempts to create depth of field through a meticulous mise-en-scène and perspective, the photographers went way beyond merely documenting interesting sites and events.)

Early critics of railroad travel, on the other hand, claimed that the speed of the train prevented real contemplation of the landscape in between stations: once the train started moving, the landscape was blurred and objects in the foreground became invisible (Schivelbusch, 1986, pp. 55–60). The space between the images of the Kaiser-Panorama, or rather the moment they passed on while the observer was still looking,

were mounted on a circular iron rail connected to a clock mechanism that moved the images at a certain pace before
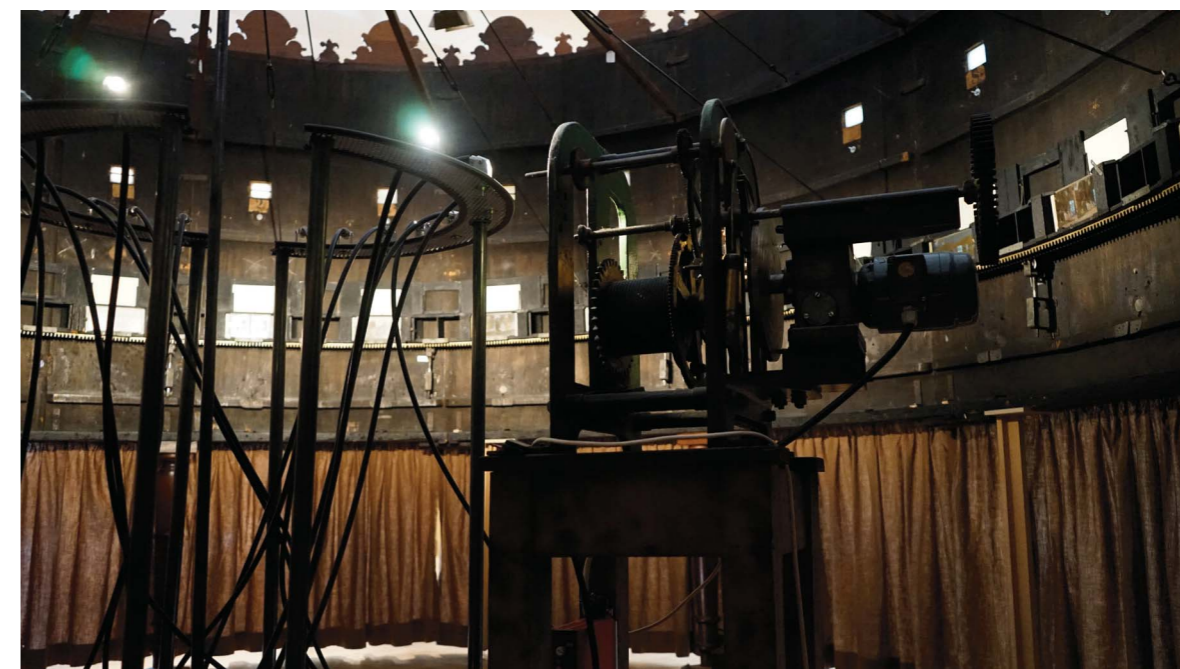

Fig 2 Photograph of the interior of a Kaiser-Panorama showing the circular iron rail and mechanism used to move the glass stereos

was in fact rather similar. As described by Walter Benjamin, an enthusiast of the Kaiser-Panorama in his youth: 'the picture would sway away in its little frame and immediately trundle off to the left, as I looked on' (Benjamin, 2006, p. 43). The ringing of a bell was a prelude to the disappearance of the image.[34] Karl Baedeker mentions a similar experience in relation to railway travel: 'A bell indicates the start and the locomotive begins to groan and the wheels revolve first slowly and then

faster and faster, and then the train flies with its twenty-three coaches. What fun travelling is now!' (Karl Baedeker, quoted in: Buzard, 1993, p. 14). The easy and comfortable virtual travel offered by the Kaiser-Panorama was now more and more available as real travel as well.

Instead of focusing on the virtual traveller only, the Belgian subsidiaries gradually included aspiring and even experienced

33) The discontinuous movement of the Kaiser-Panorama foreshadowed the advent of cinema technology: each image was moved before a lens (binoculars) and lit from behind, it was halted for a certain time (so it could be observed by the viewer) and then transported onwards.

34) This was also described by Walter Benjamin: "(…) This was the ringing of a little bell that sounded a few seconds before each picture moved off with a jolt, in order to make way first for an empty space and then for the next image" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 43).
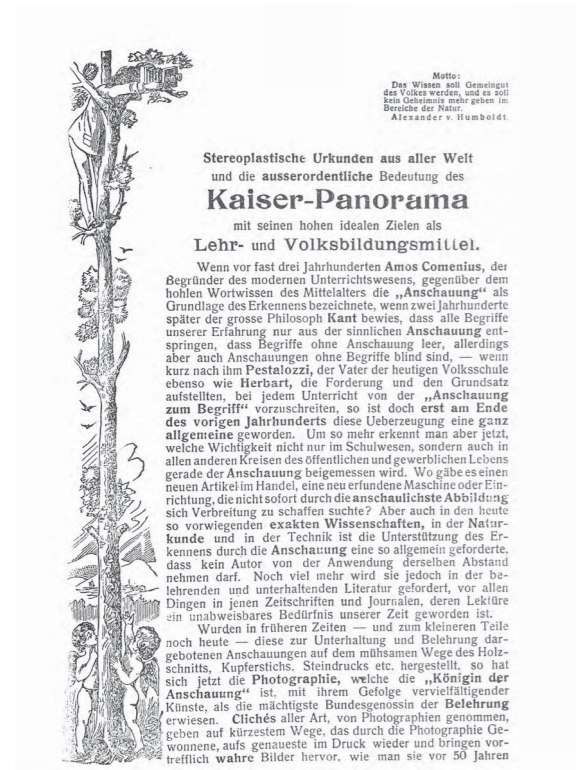
Fig. 3 A cameraman working for Fuhrmann making an effort to get the best stereo photograph (Fuhrmann, 1907)

travellers in their communications. An article in *La Meuse* of 1897 advertises the soon to be opened Diorama International

in Liège: "The characteristic note, the typical details in each place have been skilfully chosen and even those who have been on the glaciers of the Alps and visited the renowned museums, the princely salons, feel a new charm in recalling glimpsed landscapes, memories of yesteryear".[35] Another article acknowledged that travelling (in this case to Lourdes and the Pyrenees) was indeed not yet for everyone: "for sure not everyone has the opportunity to travel to this picturesque region and still, all our readers have expressed the wish to admire the wondrous grotto in Lourdes. Others, who had the opportunity to see their wish fulfilled, always feel attracted to this place. With pleasure our readers are notified that the *Internationaal Diorama* of Brussels, 109 Nieuwstraat, will show a wonderful series of 50 sights of this beautiful area which appears in true perspective and colour for the eyes of the audience."[36]

On a few occasions, Belgian exhibitors went the extra mile to provide "personal travel accounts" and give their performances a stronger local aspect. In 1897, the Diorama International in Antwerp, showed a programme titled "A tour by some people from Antwerp in the South of Switzerland and Northern Italy" (Rondreis van eenige Antwerpenaren in 't Zuiden van Zwitserland en Noord-Italië). The coloured photographs were taken by Victor Portielje, the partner of Geurts and Richard.[37] In the summer of 1898, Richard commissioned

the Belgian Lieutenant Georges Gilson (1873–1950)[38] to make stereo photographs of his upcoming trip to Congo on the occasion of the inauguration of the railroad.[39] It was the first long distance railway to be completed in equatorial Africa and a prestige project for the Belgian investors as well as the Belgian government. Not least, it was considered a major step in the further economic exploitation of Congo.[40] The inauguration was widely covered by the press. Over 60 Belgian officials and journalists, and a number of foreign representatives participated in the maiden voyage of the train[41] (Etambala, 1993; Huybrechts, 2019, pp. 11–13; Lorin, 1898). In combination with the already well-established steamer line from Antwerp to Congo, this railway made travelling to Congo much easier. The stereo series that resulted from this trip supported Belgian colonial policy and – by showing Congo as an easily accessible country – promoted further economic exploitation. With some delay, Gilson's stereo photographs were shown in the spring of 1899 in the Diorama International in Liège and Brussels under the title "Inauguration du chemin de fer du Congo" (Inauguration of the Congo Railway).[42] Engaging locals such as Gilson not only permitted exhibitors to try out a "personal account" trope, but also

enabled them to bring topics that specifically mattered to Belgian audiences.

The chain of Kaiser-Panoramas led by Eugène Geurts was closely connected to the emerging travel business. When he opened a branch in Brussels, he combined this enterprise with a travel agency: the *Agence de voyage Eug. Geurts* or the *Service de Propagande Pour le Touring International*. International travel agencies were still a relative novelty in Belgium. Initially these agencies had mostly promoted domestic train travel to developing tourist sites such as the seaside or natural history monuments and to major cities. Due to the excellent rail and tramway infrastructure in Belgium, different travel classes and relatively cheap holiday tickets, domestic travel was increasingly promoted for the middle-classes: "Fifteen days are more than enough time to undertake a beautiful journey, for those who cannot sow dollars like an American banker, or for those who are as curious about their own country as they are about the faraway places" (Wodan, 1894). In the final decade of the 19th century, the focus shifted to affordable international travel, with tours in Italy and Switzerland as favourite destinations. These voyages were offered as packaged deals:

35) *La Meuse*, 21 October 1897.

36) *Het nieuws van den dag*, 8 June 1901.

37) *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 1 December 1897.

38) Gilson was a well-known figure in Antwerp, not least because his father, Major Gilson, as a member of the Antwerp Club Africain was a fierce promotor of the Belgian project in Congo. This was Georges Gilson's second term in Congo and in the years that followed, he would make a military career in the Congolese Force Publique. The latter was a military police force established in Congo by the Belgian King Leopold II in 1885. It was entirely steered by Europeans (Belgian military and mercenaries from other countries). The soldiery was entirely African.

39) *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 24 June 1898.

40) The construction of the railway took almost nine years and cost considerable lives, mainly among the Congolese workers. This was however not mentioned by the press that paid a lot of attention to the inauguration.

41) The inaugural trip took approximately two months and would take attendants from the port of Matadi to Léopoldville and then by boat to Stanley-Pool (Pool Malebo) and back.

42) *La Meuse*, 27 May 1899; *L'Indépendance belge*, 12 June 1899. In June 1901, a second series by Gilson under the title "Congo as seen by the Captain Gilson" (*Le Congo par le capitaine Gilson*) was programmed in the Brussels' Diorama International (Le Vingtième Siècle, 16–24 June 1901). It is not sure whether this was a new series or rather a re-issue of the first series.

Fig. 4 Postcard promoting railway tourism to the Caves of Han (collection of the author)

Italian lakes, Luzern and St.-Gothard this trip resembled the Kaiser-Panorama tour advertised by the Brussels' Diorama in June 1902.) The latter consisted of stereo-images of Hyères, Grasse, Antibes, Nice, Monaco, Menton, Ventimigla and San Remo. In June 1902, Geurts' travel agency offered a six-day 'luxury trip' to London on the occasion of the coronation of Edward VII.[43] In his catalogue, Fuhrmann offered three copies of a series titled 'Die Krönungsfeier König Edward V. (sic!) in London' combining images of the ceremony (and the many prominent guests attending) and the decorated city of London (Fuhrmann, 1907).[44] A press account of a trip to Switzerland Geurts offered in 1901 highlighted the benefits of an organised tour:

> So here we are, and in order to be free of all worries, not to be cheated or to lose precious time in drawing up our itineraries or looking for our route, we sign up with an excellent excursion agency which we cannot recommend enough to those who read us, the Diorama International (...) The director of the Diorama and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Geurts, take charge of the trip in person, take care of everything, provide for everything, and reduce any inconvenience to a negligible amount, so that all we have to do is to let ourselves be driven around and admire the sights. (XX., 1901)

Like the Kaiser-Panorama, group travel was advertised as easy, comfortable and carefree. Geurts' function as the manager of a Kaiser-Panorama now shifted to providing the same experience

Fig 5 Flyer promoting a tour in France, Italy and Switzerland organised by Service de Voyages du Diorama, February 1902 © Ghent University Library, HF I.D.027.10(73)

passengers were ticketed through on a network of boats, trains, trams and coaches. The deals included (guided) excursions, accommodation and meals (Mackintosh, 2012). This was also the market segment Geurts aimed at. In the early years of the 20th century, he organised international group trips, individual travels and honeymoons. He represented several foreign railway companies in Belgium (and sold their tickets). At the same time, he continued with his Kaiser-Panorama. There are striking similarities between the actual trips his agency offered and the Kaiser-Panorama series shown at his Diorama located at the same address. In February 1902, for example, his agency offered a 12-day guided tour to the carnival in Nice. With other stops in Menton, Cannes, Ventimiglia, San Remo, Monaco, Monte Carlo, Milano, Pavia, the

as a travel organiser and guide of actual travel. Geurts used his

43) The trip started on 24 June 1902. The actual coronation took place on 9 August 1902 in Westminster Abbey.
44) In 1915, he still had one copy of this series which he now advertised under the title 'Interessante Szenen vom Festzuge der Krönungsfeier König Edwards VII und London im Festschmuck' (Fuhrmann, 1907, pp. series 505 a–c; 1915, p. series 505).

Fig. 6 Programme of the Diorama in Brussels for a series on the French Riviera, 6–12 July 1902 © Ghent University Library (ephemera collection)

Trips could be booked through the subsidiaries as well as in the head office. The entanglement between the Kaiser-Panorama and the travel agency was such that sometimes it was even difficult to distinguish between real and virtual travel in the publicity material. The information about both was intertwined and often similar typefaces and layouts were used. For instance, a flyer announcing the diorama series "Voyage en Riviera" consisting of 50 "stops" also advertised an 11-day trip to Switzerland, including a minute description of the stops on the travel schedule. Several of the weekly flyers of the diorama also promoted the *Journal des touristes*, a weekly paper published by Geurts (from 1904 onwards) announcing new travel deals. In addition, the entry tickets for the diorama advertised the travel agency on the verso. All this indicates that after 1900, the audience of the Kaiser-Panorama was making the shift to real travel: thanks to the democratisation of tourism, those who had previously only travelled virtually could now afford actual travel. Some of the Kaiser-Panorama series were even supported by travel companies. In 1903, the showing of a series on the Gothard railway, connecting Luzern with Milan, was "sponsored" by the *Compagnie du Chemin de fer du Gothard*. The Gothard Railway Company, of which Geurts' travel agency was an official representative, offered six photo albums to be drawn among the visitors of the Diorama. When Geurts closed his Diorama International in 1906, he continued and expanded his travel business. Real travel had now definitively replaced virtual travel.

This strong entanglement between the Kaiser-Panorama and the travel industry seems unique to the Belgian case. The shift from virtual travel to real travel shows that the function of the Kaiser-Panorama changed significantly over the

Fig. 7 Entry tickets to the Diorama International advertising the travel agency *Agence de Voyage Eug. Geurts / Diorama's Tours* © Ghent University Library (ephemera collection)

chain of Kaiser-Panoramas as satellites for his travel business. They allowed him to advertise his real travel packages throughout the country while keeping one central office in Brussels.

years. Ultimately its longevity was not only assured by its ever-changing content, but also by its local adaptations to a new and potentially threatening context. The local organisational structure (the development of chains) and the entrepreneurial savviness of individual managers played a major role in this. Initially the Kaiser-Panoramas offered a virtual alternative for a travel experience that was out of reach for most of the audience. Especially in the days of the mobile exploitation, it

brought surrogate cultural encounters to the audience's doorstep. This tradition continued in the permanent venues which aimed at regularly returning customers. In a way, they warmed up visitors for real travel. Locally produced travel series were certainly instrumental to this. A decade later, Kaiser-Panoramas in Belgium actively promoted the real experience and became a meeting place for aspiring and returning travellers. Instead of being threatened and pushed out of business immediately by the growing tourism industry, the Belgian Kaiser-Panoramas adapted to the new situation and became instrumental to the development of tourism.

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