**Revolutionary Road?**

**Looking back at the position of the European film sector and the results of European-level film support in view of their digital future. A critical assessment.**

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**Abstract**

In this PhD thesis, Sophie De Vinck sets out to investigate what "going digital" means in terms of achieving a more diverse, pan-European, film landscape and to what extent European film policymakers can influence this potential effect.

While the digital transition has affected all traditional media and cultural industries, the different sectors, of which the film industry is one, each face a distinguishable set of particular digital challenges. The particularities for each sector depend on their economic-industrial, socio-cultural, technological and regulatory background and history.

Taking on a pan-European approach, a prominent observation is that, while European film industries harbour significant cultural (and economic) strength on a localised basis, they remain largely confined to national and regional borders. This fragmentation of European film industry structures and markets continues to be a prominent weakness of the sector, despite the establishment of a number of European-level film support instruments in the 1980s (MEDIA and Eurimages being the most prominent). Focusing on the European level and taking on a policy-oriented approach, the main research problem confronted in this dissertation is therefore whether, looking back on the sector's and these policy instruments' strengths and weaknesses, we can expect a more economically and culturally diverse European digital film future. In other words: to what extent will the opportunities and threats associated with "going digital" actually bring about change?

In order to address these questions, the dissertation takes on a "looking back to look forward" perspective. As such, the research is structured around three building blocks, being 1) a historical-descriptive analysis of the European film sector, 2) an evaluation of European-level film (support) policies and 3) a prospective analysis of the impact of digitisation.

To organise the research, the author applies a SWOT approach to outline the sector's strengths and weaknesses and to confront them with the digital opportunities and threats it is facing. At the policy level, objectives diagrams are used to clarify the goals of MEDIA and Eurimages film support. From these, a set of evaluation questions and criteria is derived that guides the evaluation of both funds' results. Moreover, both the sector and policy analysis are guided by the conceptual notion of 'diversity'.

By combining a variety of qualitative information sources and quantitative data (including literature and documents, expert interviews and statistical data), this PhD research results in a nuanced overview of this sector in transition and the results achieved by the European policy instruments targeted at it. Looking back, there are indications that digitisation indeed offers European film professionals and European film policymakers the chance to foster a more competitively and culturally diverse European film landscape. Yet at the same time, there are also indications that inject a sense of reality into the scale of the potential digital transformations. In a context of continuous prioritising of national concerns at the policy level and a digital reinforcement of established (Hollywood) market players' power, European sector players and policymakers risk reinventing the past. Nevertheless, even if technological change is not sufficient to alter the path-dependent characteristics of the European film sector, it does impose a renewed sense of urgency to address the challenges and obstacles that are hampering the development of a pan-European, diverse film landscape. The final conclusions reached at the end of the dissertation thus form the basis for a number of European-level policy recommendations, including a triple focus on digital cinema, digital distribution and demand development.