

Small Cinemas Conference in Zagreb sparks dialogue between scholars and film industry leaders

By Gentiana Ramadani

From November 5th to 7th, the 15th Small Cinemas Conference in Zagreb hosted an insightful cluster panel titled „Approaches to Competitiveness in Small Film Industries.“as a connecting minds, this panel brought together leading voices from three prominent EU Horizon Europe projects, REBOOT, SCENE, and CresCine, to discuss how small film industries in Europe navigate the complexities of international competitiveness.

Moderated by Petr Szczepanik from Charles University in Prague, the panel featured:

- Antonios Vlassis, University of Liege (REBOOT project)
- Anastasios Drosou, Information Technologies Institute, Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH), Thessaloniki (SCENE project)
- André Rui Graça, CICANT, Lusófona University, FilmEU European University, Lisbon (CresCine project)

The discussion explored what competitiveness means for the film business in smaller countries and how small film industries in Europe can enhance their international reach. The panelists shared insights on challenges such as limited resources, distribution obstacles, and global competition while emphasizing the unique strengths of small markets, including cultural diversity, regional storytelling, and supportive policy frameworks.

REBOOT: Rethinking Competitiveness

Antonios Vlassis presented the work of the REBOOT project, highlighting its comprehensive approach to understanding competitiveness in the European film industry. He emphasized that focusing solely on market and economic metrics falls short of capturing how institutions, stakeholders, audiences, and citizens relate to the film industry. Instead, he argued for exploring political and social dynamics to fully grasp the complexities of competitiveness. Vlassis stressed the importance of considering Europe's socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape to build a more inclusive and competitive film industry.

SCENE: Leveraging AI for Global Reach

Dr. Anastasios Drosou, coordinator of the SCENE project, introduced innovative AI tools designed to support small film industries by increasing efficiency in production, distribution, and market analysis. He showcased how these AI-driven solutions enhance international reach, optimize workflows, and create new opportunities for collaboration and innovation within the European cinema industry. Dr. Drosou emphasized the importance of digital transformation and international networking to foster competitiveness.

CresCine: Innovating Across the Value Chain

André Rui Graça presented an overview of the CresCine project, which aims to increase the international competitiveness of the film industry in small European markets. The

project takes a comprehensive approach by addressing the entire film production, distribution, and consumption ecosystem. It seeks to innovate at all levels of the value chain, from policy frameworks to data management, new business models, and distribution modes. Graça highlighted the achievements of the project to date and its potential to reshape small film markets through strategic innovation.

Paving the way for competitive small film industry, the panel concluded with a consensus on the need for tailored strategies that combine digital transformation, international networking, and supportive policy frameworks. By integrating diverse perspectives and innovative solutions, small film industries in Europe can effectively navigate global markets and enhance their international competitiveness.

On behalf of the Reboot Project, two insightful papers were presented in the same conference, shedding light on crucial aspects of the European film industry. The presentations explored the roles of film festivals in fostering alternative cinema and public service media in promoting public value through film productions.

Gentiana Ramadani presented research results of the paper by Katharine Sarikakis and Ramadani herself, “The Role of Public Service Media in promoting Public Value through film productions” and talked about how public institutions support the film industry to enhance public value. Focusing on the three-year period following the pandemic (2021-2024), the study examined the evolving concept of public value, tracing its roots from Moore's 1995 definition in public administration to its application in media, beginning with the BBC in 2004. The paper emphasized the importance of public funding in fostering a competitive film industry that contributes to societal enrichment. By analyzing investments and initiatives from three countries, Greece, Austria, and Albania, it showcased the strategic role of public service media in promoting public value and competitiveness within the sector.

Meanwhile, Angeliki Chatziefrimidou presented the paper she co-authored with Katharine Sarikakis, „Film festivals as support mechanisms for alternative cinema“, examining how film festivals in Austria, Belgium, and Greece create platforms for alternative and innovative films. By offering specific awards for experimental works and dedicating space to unconventional narratives, these festivals encourage non-commercial productions and the exploration of extraordinary, sometimes uncomfortable topics. The presentation highlighted the role of small film markets in nurturing creativity and giving voice to filmmakers who challenge mainstream cinematic norms.