



D3.1 Report on the Lux Audience Award & European Film Festivals

Project: Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness - REBOOT

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Description	This deliverable combines research from two tasks: T3.2: Analysis of EU initiatives promoting the European Film Industry (EFI): The case of the European Audience Film Award (LUX Audience Award) (M27-M32). This task focuses on the EU's contribution to film awards that seek to



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	impact European film viewers. The annual LUX Audience Award was introduced in 2020. It seeks to build bridges across Europe by shedding light on films that go to the heart of the European public debate. The task explores its impact on the EFI and the latter's competitiveness as well as audience development and media recognition of the awarded films. It also analyses the contents of the awarded films and how they address cultural diversity and other EU values. Methods: Desk research and analysis of secondary sources regarding the award and awarded films; analysis of the style and content of the awarded films; interviews with selected stakeholders from national film institutes. T3.6 Analysis of EU delegations' role in promoting the EFI: The case of the EU Film Festivals (M7-M12). A European Commission initiative, launched in 2018 and managed by the Goethe-Institut, Institut Français and Cineuropa, helps EU delegations in third countries to organise European film festivals. The task focuses on selected third countries (covering North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia) and explores how the film festivals have been organised in these countries and with what aims and effects. The country case studies focus on linguistic and cultural differences that the festival organisers perceive as impacting on the competitiveness of European cinema. The task also analyses the contents of the films shown and the ways in which the films represent cultural diversity and other EU values. Methods: Desk research and analysis of secondary sources regarding the European film festivals; analysis of the style and content of the selected films; interviews with selected representatives of EU delegations and festival organisers; triangulation of the results vis-à-vis the European External Action Service's approach to strategic communications.
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Project summary:

This project aims to connect existing strengths, identify and overcome weaknesses and plan for future competitiveness in the fields of policy, practice and experience. More concretely, the project's objectives are, firstly, to explore the long-standing strengths and pervasive gaps in European competitiveness and policies for competitiveness. This includes ways of measuring, analysing and evaluating the impact of policies and strategic pathways. Secondly, the project aspires to pay attention to the active preparation for future audiences by exploring audience preferences and their generation, as well as modes of film content production. The latter are elements which today's youth will engage with in the coming decades as makers and consumers, as well as industry and policy leaders. Therefore, the consortium interrogates not only "what is" but also "what has been" and "what will be" from fresh perspectives.

REBOOT's ambition is to provide a full set of knowledge of the European film industry, which maximises its existing strengths, combined with strategic and tactical dimensions of action for the optimisation of the potential held in European youth publics, understood both as emerging audiences and as citizens. Specifically, the ambition of the project combines several dimensions, which reinforce each other but are listed separately for analytical purposes (and in no particular order): a) increasing support for young people's engagement with European film; b) strengthening the place of the EU in the global audiovisual economy, particularly in light of the rise of video-on-demand (VOD); c) supporting cultural diversity in the EU film industry; d) addressing the need for a different understanding of competitiveness and relevant indicators in this context; and e) recognising and supporting the importance for the EU of film and, more broadly, of the cultural and creative sector as a geopolitical asset.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The REBOOT project explores the competitiveness of the European film industry (EFI) and its diverse actors and stakeholders at various levels, from local to global, both in Europe and beyond. The exploration of competitiveness is closely connected with the aim of understanding attempts at building audiences for European cinema. Key ambitions of the project include to strengthen the place of the EU in the global audiovisual economy; recognise and support the importance of film as a geopolitical asset; and address the need for a different understanding of competitiveness and relevant indicators in this context (REBOOT, 2023, p. 3).

This report is based on REBOOT Work Package 3, which focuses on the institutional context of the EFI. The work package comprises two intertwined work streams, one examining the laws and policies governing the EFI within the EU, and the other examining the laws and policies governing the presence of the European film sector on the international scene. Both streams seek to understand the contribution of the EU to the competitiveness of European cinema and the promotion of EU values such as cultural diversity.

The report is a combination of two case studies of two EU film initiatives aimed at promoting and building audiences for European films in Europe and beyond. The first initiative is the former European Parliament's LUX Prize, which became the LUX European Audience Film Award in 2020 when the European Film Academy, in partnership with the European Commission and Europa Cinemas, began to run the prize jointly with the Parliament. This initiative is particularly aimed at European audiences for new European films, as the winners of the prize are chosen through a combination of public voting and a ranking by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The latter initiative is the EU Film Festivals (EUFF), a European Commission initiative launched in 2018 and managed by the Goethe-Institut, the Institut Français and Cineuropa, which supports EU delegations in third countries in organising European film festivals. The initiative draws on the



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experience of several EU delegations, which have been organising such festivals independently for decades.

The first case study examines the impact of the LUX on the EFI and its competitiveness, as well as audience development and media recognition of the winning films. It also briefly analyses the content and style of the winning films and how they address cultural diversity and other EU values. The study is based on desk research and analysis of various databases and secondary sources on the winning films. It also draws on findings from interviews with experts from selected national film institutes conducted in Work Package 2 (Ramos Arenas et al., forthcoming).

The second case study explores how a number of EU Film Festivals (EUFFs) have been recently organised in selected third countries (covering North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia) and with what aims and effects. The country case studies discuss the organisers' notions of European film, its competitiveness, the linguistic and cultural differences that the organisers perceive as impacting on such competitiveness, and the role of the EUFF in terms of public diplomacy. The study also analyses the contents of the most screened films and the ways in which they represent cultural diversity and other EU values. Methodologically, the study draws on desk research and the analysis of secondary sources regarding the EUFF and interviews with selected representatives of EU delegations and festival organisers, as well as with EU policy officials. The concepts of feel-good film (Hjort, 2010) and middlebrow film (Jones, 2024) are used to analyse the style of the selected films. Finally, the study includes the triangulation of the results vis-à-vis the European External Action Service's approach to strategic communications.

The aim of the report is to shed new light on these two EU initiatives and the EU's contribution to the promotion of European film and the competitiveness of the EFI via them. The report starts with the case studies summing up their results separately. The report ends with joint conclusions from both



studies and policy recommendations for developing both initiatives as well as EU policy making and regulation on the competitiveness of the EFI.

2. CASE 1: THE LUX PRIZE / AUDIENCE AWARD

2.1 Introduction to the analysis of the LUX

Over the last two decades, the European Union (EU) has become increasingly interested in film and developed policy in this regard. The EU has recognised the potential of European film as a cultural and market policy instrument. Several scholars have explored these instruments (e.g., Herold, 2004, 2007, 2018; Irion & Valcke, 2015; Jäckel, 2005; Sarikakis, 2007; Stjernholm, 2016), highlighting the EU's attempts to regulate the EFI both as an economic asset and as identity politics. The EU wants to increase the competitiveness of the EFI and expand the markets for European films inside and outside Europe. At the same time, the EU aims to promote linguistic and cultural diversity throughout Europe and to foster European cultural identities in European films. These interests encompass a range of conflicting objectives. "The audiovisual policy at the EU level is characterised by a contradiction between the economic logic of market integration and the goal of preservation of cultural diversity", as Herold (2004, p. 3) observed two decades ago. These objectives, whether seen as conflicting or aligned, continue to underpin the EU's film policy interests today.

The EU seeks to influence the EFI through regulatory policies, funding and awards. Creative Europe, with its MEDIA strand, is the main funding programme through which the EU supports the EFI based on bottom-up funding applications. In addition to financial support, the EU also rewards European films with a special prize, the LUX Film Prize, which was transformed into the LUX European Audience Film Award in 2020. The LUX (which we use to refer to this award in general) is one of many cultural awards, such as those for architecture, literature, music and cultural heritage, through which the EU seeks to promote its cultural policy principles (Lähdesmäki, 2024). The LUX winners



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are expected to “successfully portray equality, diversity and inclusion through the film’s topics and characters” (European Parliament, 2023a), “illustrate [...] topics at the heart of European debate”, “promot[e] and encourag[e] public debate on European daily life and on Europe’s future” (European Parliament, 2023b), and “engage audiences in debates about Europe” (European Parliament, 2023a).

Previous research has explored the implementation and cultural governance of the LUX Prize by analysing its cultural policy goals, awarding processes, and the different forms of capital created within it (e.g. Stjernholm, 2016; Baschiera & Di Chiara, 2018; Foret & Calligaro, 2019; Lähdesmäki & Hiltunen, forthcoming). While this research provides a clear picture of the award as a cultural policy instrument, a deeper examination of it as a market policy instrument is still lacking. In this report, we focus on the LUX as an instrument for promoting the EFI regarding ticket sales and revenues, distribution and availability on video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, other film awards received and media recognition. We have analysed such promotion indicators with a twofold approach. Firstly, we conducted an internal comparison between LUX winners before and after the change in the awarding process in 2020 when a wider audience was allowed to participate in the voting. Secondly, we compared the LUX winners with other award winners, namely the winners of the Palme d’or and the Oscar for the Best Foreign Feature Film. Our main research questions are: How does the LUX help films to become more competitive? How has the competitiveness (in terms of visibility, accessibility, box office success, prizes at big festivals, etc.) of the titles awarded with the LUX developed since its establishment? We also summarise the genre, content, and style of the winning films to give an overview of how they represent European cinema and thus better understand the results of our analysis.

There are many challenges involved in analysing competitiveness. The LUX may have an impact on the EFI through the success of individual winning films, but the impact may not be easy to measure



and may only become apparent in the long term. The LUX is awarded at the end of the year, which means that some films considered have had time to reach audiences, circulate at festivals and win other awards. This makes it difficult to assess the role of the LUX in promoting the film. In order to at least partially counteract this, we looked at the post-award life of the films and their directors, and comment on this briefly at the end of the analysis.

Competitiveness is a buzzword in today's marketing research and business analysis, but it is much more difficult to measure in the creative industries. In the film sector, competitiveness has often been understood as the ability to effectively position films in the marketplace in order to achieve financial success, audience engagement, media recognition and positive attention and visibility, thus emphasising business/industry driven assumptions (Ranger, 2020). Recent research, however, has pointed to the need for a broader understanding of the concept and criticised its economic focus (Vlassis, 2022; Sarikakis et al., forthcoming). Such views have framed film competitiveness through the production chains in the industry (Vlassis & De Beukelaer, 2019) or emphasised its relationship with various cultural and social policy priorities, such as artistic excellence, cultural diversity, societal well-being, social cohesion and innovation (Psychogiopoulou, Samaras & Comerma, forthcoming). In this report, therefore, we examine the competitiveness of the LUX through various economic and non-economic indicators, noting its ambiguous role as a market and cultural policy instrument.

We begin by discussing the EU's motives for promoting European film through awards and contextualising the key challenges of the LUX identified in previous research. We then present the functioning of the LUX, the winning films and the data and methods used in our study. The analysis that follows is divided into subsections focusing on each of the promotion indicators mentioned above and a joint correlation analysis. Finally, we interpret our results and discuss how the LUX responds to the EU's efforts to increase the competitiveness of the EFI. We conclude this section of



the report by summarising our findings and suggesting how the LUX could be further developed as a market policy instrument.

2.2 Context: The challenge of audience development

To increase the productivity of the EFI, the EU has launched several strategies and policies since the mid-1980s. One of these is the EU Strategy for European Cinema in the Digital Age. In it, the Commission notes that 63% of all films released in the EU in 2012 were European, but only 33% of cinema admissions were to European films, while US productions accounted for 20% of releases and 65% of cinema admissions (European Commission, 2014). The productivity of European films has not changed significantly since this strategy. In 2021, for example, the market share of US productions in EU cinemas was 58%, while European films fell from a record high of 39% in 2020 to 27%, back to the level before the Covid-19 pandemic (Cabrera Blázquez et al., 2023, p. 49). Two years later, in 2023, the market share of European productions in cinemas was 26.4%, while the market share of US productions reached “a new high of 70.1%”. Yet, 66% of all films released in European cinemas were European and only 19.7% American (OBS, 2024).

The number of films produced in Europe has steadily increased, but audience numbers for European films have not (Baschiera & Di Chiara 2018, p. 248; Crusafon, 2015, p. 88). In 2023, a total of 2,347 feature films were produced in Europe (OBS, 2024). Several studies point out that the major challenge for the EFI is to channel funds into distribution and promotion. Most public support still goes to production (see Crusafon 2015, p. 90), but more funds should be allocated to distribution, as few European films are distributed in more than ten countries (Baschiera & Di Chiara, 2018, p. 248). Crusafon (2015, pp. 88–91) has pointed out that the budget of the MEDIA programme is insufficient, as it is the same amount as the annual budget of the French CNC (Centre national de la cinématographie et de l'image animée), the main financier of the French film industry. Crusafon



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has also noted that the five largest film-producing countries (Germany, Spain, France, the UK, and Italy) receive two-thirds of the MEDIA programme's financial support, which prevents small and medium-sized countries from developing their industries.

The LUX is one of the ways in which the EU has sought to promote quality European cinema, but it is a difficult task because European viewing habits seem to be deeply entrenched. According to Jones (2024, p. 4–6, 220), Europeans watch few films from other European countries and when they do, they are mostly “mainstream British or English-language productions, with stories that offer limited insights into the realities of European life”. British-American co-produced blockbusters, such as James Bond films, are examples of the most popular “European films”. Two-thirds of the admissions to non-national European films in 2005–2015 were for English-language films and only 8% were for films in “non-hegemonic European languages”.

For Jones (2024, pp. 25–26, 220), European cinema has the potential to help people understand other European cultures, but audience preferences and tastes are a barrier. This poses a serious challenge to the European Parliament's objectives for the LUX, which were referred to by Mike Downey, Honorary President of the LUX Selection Committee and Chair of the European Film Academy, at the 2024 LUX ceremony:

All of the nominees were winners in our view, and all of the films draw attention to the fact that cinema not only enhances the imagination but also shows our entire world in multiple perspectives, and has the power to broaden our vision and thinking. We just have to look at the five candidates for this year's award – great works of art which are diverse, entertaining and socially engaged in the world in which we live.
(Eurofilmfest, 2024, no page)



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Jones (2024, p. 223) argues further that EU audiovisual policies may have even contributed to the decrease in audiences for non-national films because “by simply increasing the supply of NNE [non-national European] films, the EU’s MEDIA programme has contributed to the decline in NNE film admissions by further saturating the market and making it harder for individual titles to stand out, particularly for smaller independent films”. He claims that interest in European arthouse cinema seems to have declined recently, and among “Euro-million films” [films with more than million viewers] there are fewer arthouse films (Jones, 2024, p. 229). Only a small minority of his focus group interviewees reported feeling more European after watching a European film (Jones 2024, p. 211). In some cases, the interviewees said that watching a European film made them more aware of cultural differences and consequently made them feel less European. However, those who had seen four or more NNE films in the previous year were more likely to say they felt European.

There is not much research on the impact of film awards on the film industry in general, and the EFI in particular. Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018, p. 249) have analysed the LUX Film Prize as a tool for building transnational audiences for quality European art cinema, but they do not present any statistical evidence to support their findings. Their pessimistic conclusion is that the LUX Film Prize has not succeeded in arousing the audience and that it largely promotes the same kind of films that have already received institutional support through film festivals, that is, the LUX repackages the “existing forms of marketing of art cinema”. A similar conclusion was reached by Stjernholm, whose study focused on what the Parliament gains from celebrating European culture through the LUX Film Prize. Stjernholm was also interested in how the LUX as an institution aims to support European cinema and build shared European culture and identity. He concluded that the benefits of the prize seem to be “primarily symbolic” because many of the nominated films highlight “tensions within the European project”, i.e. instead of pro-EU views and harmonious encounters of people in Europe, the films deal with various cultural, economic, social and political challenges in Europe (Stjernholm, 2026, p. 27). According to him, it remains unclear whether the critical voices expressed in the films



have some actual impact on the Parliament's policy (Stjernholm 2016, pp. 27–29). Stjernholm's starting point seems to be that the winning films could have an actual influence on the Parliament's policies. Similarly, Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018) found that award-winning films tended to focus on the tensions between the centre and the margins. Both these studies predate the transformation of the LUX into an audience award. We will return to these studies later, bearing in mind that the award no longer reflects the aspirations of the European Parliament in such a straightforward way.

2.3 The LUX: Selection practices

Like other EU cultural prizes, the LUX combines cultural, social and economic interests with political ambitions. Through it, the EU has sought to promote European film as an art form, an industry and a tool for building cultural bridges across Europe and a better understanding of its diversity. Today, it is one of the few transnational audience awards in Europe that allows citizens from 27 countries to vote for their favourite film.¹

The European Parliament established the LUX Film Prize in 2007 as a symbol (and as a political gesture) of the Parliament's commitment to culture. For the first 13 years of the scheme, MEPs voted for their favourite film from those pre-selected by a panel of film professionals and approved each year by the Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education. The LUX Film Prize became the LUX European Audience Film Award in 2020, when the European Film Academy, in partnership with the European Commission and Europa Cinemas, began to administer the prize jointly with the Parliament. The change reflects the EU's broader goal of supporting democratic culture and citizen participation in society (Lähdesmäki & Hiltunen, forthcoming). After the change, the panel select the

¹ Another transnational European audience award is the Young Audience Award that has been awarded annually to the best European youth film since 2012. It is a category of the European Film Awards. Young people aged 12 to 19 from all over Europe vote for the best youth film from a preselected shortlist of three (see a closer analysis of the Young Audience Award in Hiltunen & Lähdesmäki, 2023).



nominees from the pool of films submitted to the European Film Awards (although additional films can be proposed), and the winners are chosen through a combination of public voting via a rating platform and rating by MEPs, with each group weighted at 50%. With this change, the LUX became one of the 24 award categories in the European Film Academy's annual film awards. Since 2007, seventeen European feature films have been awarded (Figure 1).

Today, the LUX eligibility criteria include geographical and visibility dimensions. Entries must be European: the concept of a European film is based on a list of EU and selected non-EU countries in which the eligible films must have been produced or co-produced, or in which the professionals involved in the making of the film must be from or affiliated to (European Film Academy, 2023a). In addition, the entries must "have received an award, or notable attention, at a major festival" (European Parliament, 2023a).

The LUX Prize is not a festival tied to a specific location. The films competing for the prize are screened in different countries in cinemas that belong to the Europa Cinemas Network. The awarding ceremony takes place in the European Parliament's hemicycle in Brussels. Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018, p. 240) characterise LUX as "an 'anyplace' or as 'a nowhere' film festival". One may ask whether it is a festival at all. LUX is a special category of the European Film Awards and its organisation resembles that of the other European Film Awards in that instead of an actual festival only the awarding ceremony is organised. The voting takes place after the films have been in circulation, and possibly awarded, at film festivals around the world. Thus, the films may have already gained prestige at these festivals (see Baschiera & Di Chiara, 2018, pp. 239–240). As mentioned above, the films competing for the LUX Prize can be from any European country. As a transnational European prize it is different from national European prizes such as the French César Award, the Spanish Goya Awards or the Deutscher Filmpreis in Germany. It is also different from the international festivals such as the Berlinale, Cannes Film Festival and Venice Film Festival in



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which films from all over the world compete for awards. LUX is a newcomer to the tradition of European film festivals and awards. The oldest festival, Venice, was founded in 1932, Cannes in 1946 and Berlin in 1951.

The value of the LUX is based on its expected brand value (Lähdesmäki & Hiltunen, forthcoming; Lähdesmäki, 2024): it does not include any financial reward for the winners. However, the scheme provides subtitles in the 24 official EU languages for the nominated films. The winning film will receive further support in the form of adaptations for the visually and hearing impaired. This investment in the accessibility of the films represents an economic contribution from the EU aimed at helping the film find a distributor in different European countries (Baschiera & Di Chiara, 2018; Stjernholm, 2016). As envisaged by the European Parliament (2023b): “The award gives the nominated films visibility and helps them find audiences allowing people to watch films that would not be screened in their countries otherwise.”

Voting for the LUX Audience Award takes place on the LUX rating platform. The numbers of voting people have greatly varied. In 2023, the platform received around 45,000 ratings (European Film Academy, 2023), while in 2024 around 22,000 people gave their vote (European Parliament, 2024).

2.4 Data and methods

The seventeen LUX-winning films form the basis of our study. The films were viewed on DVD, via streaming services or through a viewing link provided by the production company. The following sources were used to gather more specific information about the films: Box Office MOJO for the films' box office performance and distribution outside Europe; Lumiere database for admissions and distribution in Europe; Lumiere VOD for distribution and availability on VOD platforms in Europe; Internet Movie Database (IMDb) for other awards, number of reviews by critics and IMDb users, and



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average rating by IMDb users ("user review"); [Metacritic.com](https://www.metacritic.com) for average rating by critics ("Metascore"); Focus reports from the European Audiovisual Observatory (OBS) on the top 25 films in Europe and North America and audience shares; and International Index to Film and Television Periodicals (FIAF; Proquest database) and International Newsstream (Proquest database) on media recognition. We also searched the websites of the awarding institutions (European Parliament, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and Festival de Cannes) for information on the LUX, Oscars, and Palme d'or.

As these sources provided comprehensive and comparable information on the winning films, it was not necessary to gather further information through interviews with the national film institutes. In WP2, REBOOT conducted extensive interviews with experts working in European film institutes in Finland, Poland, and Spain (Ramos Arenas, forthcoming), and the results of the analysis of these interviews are used in this report to contextualise the analysis of the LUX and the competitiveness and promotion of LUX-winning films at the national level.

Our criteria for examining the success of the LUX in promoting the competitiveness of winning films are similar to those used by Dean Keith Simonton (2009) to evaluate the success of films. He used three criteria: critical evaluations (film reviews), financial performance and film awards. Simonton also examined various predictors of these "success criteria", including production (budget and screenplay), distribution (release season and main distributor), and psychological issues, such as social influence and creative talent. In this study, we do not implement Simonton's method but use similar criteria to define success. Of the predictors mentioned by Simonton, we examine distribution. We have excluded production budgets from the analysis because data on the budgets of most films are not available to researchers. Simonton (2009, p. 407) also makes this observation and adds that budget "has an ambiguous relation with the three success criteria" that he used.



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The data was analysed by comparing statistics collected in thematic tables and deepening the statistical comparison with correlation analysis with selected variables. In addition to the quantitative analysis, the films were analysed for their style and main themes. Our study focuses on internal and external comparisons, comparing the LUX Prize winners before 2020 with the LUX Audience Award winners after 2020, and the LUX winners with winners of the Palme d'or and the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film. The Palme d'or is one of the most, if not the most prestigious, film awards in Europe. The Oscars are the best known film awards internationally and, according to Simonton (2004, p. 163), good indicators of “cinematic creativity and achievement”. It should be noted that the Palme d'or can be awarded to non-European films, but we have excluded them from our study.

2.5 Analysing the success of the LUX in promoting the competitiveness of the winners

2.5.1 The style and themes of the LUX-winning films

The current eligibility criteria of the LUX states that diversity of genre is encouraged. Almost all the films fall under the broad category of drama (Figure 1). Only *Toni Erdmann* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* have been defined first as comedies in IMDb, but they can also be described as dramas with comic elements. The other categories that IMDb uses for LUX winners, often in addition to drama, are romance (*The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *The Broken Circle Breakdown*), music (*The Broken Circle Breakdown*), history (*Quo Vadis, Aida?*), and war (*Quo Vadis, Aida?*). *Collective* is the only documentary film that has won the LUX Prize. Altogether fourteen documentaries (or semi-documentaries) have been selected to compete for the prize. We are aware that IMDb's genre definitions are often vague and that the category of drama tends to be overused, sometimes diluting differences between films. Therefore, we have created our own more specific genre categories for some of the films. In most cases, this means giving an additional definition to the category of drama, for example migrant drama (see Table 1). The category of drama may be considered too general,



but in many cases it is difficult to assign another, more explanatory category to the LUX-winning films.

The LUX winners focus on divisive topics, as noted by Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018, p. 248), who studied the winners from 2007 to 2016. In particular, these earlier LUX winners feature stories of (im)migrants from Eastern Europe and the Middle East struggling to improve their lives in Western Europe. Films that deal with immigration or migration include *Lorna's Silence*, *Welcome* and *When We Leave*. Migration is a controversial issue that has sparked political debate and disagreement in European societies over the past decades. However, scholars have proposed other interpretations on the topics of the LUX winners. For example, Muhamed (2015) has argued that the LUX Prize provides a platform for discussing migration and thus contributes to reinforcing a more inclusive European society.

Recent films have moved away from (im)migration but still focus on controversial social and political issues such as corruption, war, genocide, racism, prejudice, environmental crises and gender inequality. *The Teachers' Lounge* addresses implicit racism in a Western European society through a story set in the school world. Stories from areas considered peripheral, either because of their geographical location or their political history, feature strongly in all LUX winners. The differences between the periphery and the centre (of Europe) are poignantly highlighted, for example, in *Collective*, a film about the catastrophic state of medical care in Romania. Like *Collective*, most of the films are contemporary stories from the recent past. For example, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* explores the events surrounding the 1995 Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia, and *Sami Blood* is the story of a teenage girl's attempt to break away from the Sami community in Swedish Lapland at a time when the Sami were subject to racialising biology.



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In terms of film style, the LUX winners have been described as art cinema (Stjernholm, 2016, p. 22; Baschiera & Di Chiara 2018, p. 249). Art cinema is a broad category, but based on our qualitative analysis of the winning films, the term fits most of the LUX winners: They are not popular, mainstream films, but neither are they heavyweight art films with a difficult or experimental style. In most cases, it is the topic that makes them sometimes difficult to watch, not a challenging style or narration. However, stylistic differences within the category of arthouse can be big. The black and white cinematography and slow-paced narration of *Ida* is very different from the dynamic narration of *Quo Vadis, Aida?*

Twelve of the seventeen LUX winners are European co-productions (Table 1). The first five winners (2007–2011) have been produced by one country, but since then all but the 2024 winner, *The Teachers' Lounge*, have been co-productions between European countries (see also Baschiera & Di Chiara, 2018, p. 243). The most common countries of production are France (eight films) and Germany (seven films). The winning films typically feature multilingual dialogue: in eleven films, the characters speak between two and four different languages.

Table 1. The core information on the LUX winners in 2007–2024. Source for languages Wikipedia; for production countries: Lumiere; and for genres: IMDb.

Awarding year	Title/original title, production year	Director	Production country	Language	Genre IMDb	Genre refined by KH
2007	<i>The Edge of Heaven/Auf der Anderen Seite</i> (2007)	Fatih Akin	Germany, Turkey, Italy	German, Turkish, English	drama	immigrant drama
2008	<i>Lorna's Silence/Le Silence de Lorna</i> (2008)	Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne	Belgium	French, Italian, German	drama	



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2009	<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	Philippe Lioret	France	French, English, Kurdish, Turkish	drama	migrant drama
2010	<i>When We Leave/Die Fremde</i> (2010)	Feo Aladag	Germany	German, Turkish	drama	immigrant drama
2011	<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro/Les Neiges du Kilimandjaro</i> (2011)	Robert Guédiguian	France	French	comedy, drama, romance	working class drama
2012	<i>Shun Li and the Poet/Io sono Li</i> (2011)	Andrea Segre	Italy, France	Italian, Mandarin	drama	
2013	<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2012)	Felix Van Groeningen	Belgium, Netherlands	Dutch	drama, music, romance	
2014	<i>Ida</i> (2013)	Paweł Pawlikowski	Poland, Denmark	Polish, French, Latin	drama	historical drama
2015	<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	Deniz Gamze Ergüven	France, Germany, Turkey	Turkish	drama	
2016	<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	Maren Ade	Germany, Austria, Switzerland	German, English, Romanian	comedy, drama	
2017	<i>Sami Blood/Sameblod</i> (2016)	Amanda Kernell	Sweden, Denmark, Norway	Swedish, South Sami	drama	historical drama
2018	<i>Woman at War/Kona fer í stríð</i> (2018)	Benedikt Erlingsson	Iceland, France, Ukraine	Icelandic, Spanish, English, Ukrainian	drama	environmental comedy
2019	<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija/Gospod postoji, imeto i' e Petrunija</i> (2019)	Teona Strugar Mitevska	North Macedonia, Slovenia, Belgium, France, Croatia	Macedonian	drama	
2021	<i>Collective/Colectiv</i> (2019)	Alexander Nanau	Romania, Luxemburg, Germany	Romanian	documentary	
2022	<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2020)	Jasmila Žbanić	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Austria,	Bosnian, English, Serbian, Dutch	drama, history, war	



			Netherlands, France, Poland, Germany, Norway, Turkey			
2023	<i>Close</i> (2022)	Lukas Dhont	Belgium, France, Netherlands	French, Flemish, Dutch, English	drama	youth drama
2024	<i>The Teachers' Lounge/Das Lehrerzimmer</i> (2023)	Ilker Çatak	Germany	German	drama	school drama

2.5.2 Distribution and admission

The statistics on LUX winners show that the distribution of the films has not changed much over the years. However, following the transformation of the LUX into an audience award, the number of countries in which the winning film was distributed decreased slightly. During the LUX Prize, the average worldwide distribution included 28.1 countries, while the distribution of the LUX Audience Award winners dropped to an average of 22.3 countries. This is because the two post-2020 winners, *Collective* and *The Teachers' Lounge*, had a more limited distribution, with the former going to only twelve countries and the latter to fifteen. This is surprising, as both films were nominated for Oscars. In Europe, the LUX winners have been distributed to an average of 22 countries ranging from 10 to 32. The European distribution could be higher as the EU provides subtitles to the films in 24 EU languages.

Previous research on the LUX shows similar results. Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018, p. 249) conclude about the distribution of LUX finalists between 2007 and 2016 that most of them “found widespread distribution across Europe” while “6 films out of 30 failed to find a theatrical distributor in ten or more countries, with *Občan Havel* (Citizen Havel, Miroslav Janek, and Pavel Koutecký), the 2008 finalist, having only been screened in three nations”.



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Based on the calculation of averages from the data presented in Table 2, the distribution of LUX winners outside Europe is rather modest with an average of 4.7 countries. Comparing the average distribution countries of LUX winners (26.7), European Palme d'or winners (28.9), and European Oscar winners of best foreign feature film (30.4) between 2007 and 2024 (based on the calculation of averages from data gathered from Lumiere and MOJO Box Office), there is no significant difference in distribution. This suggests that the distribution of LUX winners cannot be considered poor compared to films that have won much better known and more branded film awards.

Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018, p. 249) claim that “with the exception of France, the distribution of the winning films in nations not directly involved in their production does not generate significant admission numbers, showing once again the fragmented regional nature of the European ‘quality cinema’ and, indirectly, underlining some of the shortcomings of the LUX Prize itself”. Our study paints a more nuanced picture of the relationship between countries of production and admissions. The statistics show that for seven films – *When We Leave*, *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, *Ida*, *Woman at War* (no admission data from Ukraine), *God Exists*, *Her Name Is Petrunija* (no admission data from Slovenia) and *Collective* (no admission data from Germany) – more than 50% of admissions came from countries other than the country of production. To pinpoint some examples more in detail: *Close* had more admissions from Denmark (not a producing country) than from the Netherlands (a co-producing country), and *Quo Vadis, Aida?* had more admissions from Italy than from most of the co-producing countries. All LUX winners received a good percentage of admissions from non-production countries, although in many cases admissions were quantitatively very low. *Quo Vadis, Aida?* for example received less than a thousand admissions from six non-production countries. The critical question here is: what can be considered a good number of admissions in Europe?



As in the case of distribution, the number of admissions for LUX winners drops slightly when comparing the situation before and after its transformation into an audience award. In the first 13 years, the average number of admissions was 1,001,895, compared with 434,610 for the last four winners. *The Collective* has had by far the smallest audience of any LUX winner. It should be noted that these figures refer to cinema audiences. As VOD audience figures and television screening figures are not available, it is difficult to estimate the total audience for these films.

According to the European Audiovisual Observatory's Focus (AOB) reports, some of the LUX winners appear in good positions in the Top 25 European films by admissions in the Europa Cinemas Network. *Ida* was ranked 14th (2014), *Mustang* 24th (2015), *Toni Erdmann* 2nd (2016) and 5th (2017), *Quo Vadis, Aida?* 21st (2021), and *Close* 7th (2022). They have not fared equally well in the other AOB lists. The lists consulted for this article were: Top 25 films by admissions in the European Union and GB; Top 25 European films (including EUR inc²) by admissions in the European Union and GB; top 25 European films by admissions in the Europa Cinemas Network, Top 25 European films (including EUR inc) by admissions in the US & Canada, and the top 10 films by admissions of the production and co-production countries. Not surprisingly, the LUX winners do not appear in the first list, the top 25 films in the EU and UK, which is almost entirely populated by US films. Perhaps more significantly, none of the LUX winners were among the top ten films in their main country of production in the year of release. *Ida* is the only LUX winner to appear in the Top 25 European films (including EUR inc) by admissions in the US & Canada, coming 9th. Not all these listings have been available since the start of the LUX competition.³

² In these lists, EUR inc means European films produced in Europe with incoming US investment.

³ These two lists have been available since 2013: Top 25 European films by admissions in the Europa Cinemas Network and Top 25 European films (including EUR inc) by admissions in the US & Canada.



However, the following LUX nominees made it onto these lists: *Druk/Another Round* (Thomas Vinterberg, Denmark, 2020), *Triangle of Sadness* (Ruben Östlund, United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Mexico, France, Turkey, Denmark, United States, Switzerland, Greece, 2022), *Boze cialo/Corpus Christi* (Jan Komasa, Poland & France, 2019), and *Alcarràs* (Carla Simón, Spain & Italy, 2022), the first two even taking the first place in the Europa Cinemas Network (OBS Focus Reports, 2017–2024).

Table 2. The distribution and admission of the LUX winners in 2007–2024. Source for release in Europe: Lumiere, summer 2024. Source for release outside Europe MOJO Box Office and The Numbers, summer 2024. MOJO Box Office data is not comprehensive in terms of distribution countries.

Title and awarding year	Release in Europe (no. of countries)	Release outside Europe (no. of countries)	Worldwide release (no. of countries)	Total admission in the EU & the UK	Total admission in Europe incl. non-EU markets	Domestic admission (in all co-producing countries)
<i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007)	27	13	40	1,542,845	1,897,934	568,011 (DE); 289,696 (TR); 92,847 (IT)
<i>Lorna's Silence</i> (2008)	21	10	31	633,333	660,891	63,321 (BE); 360,583 (FR); 87,657 (IT)
<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	17	5	22	1,496,366	1,517,577	1,187,323 (FR)
<i>When We Leave</i> (2010)	12	3	15	110,583	146,882	7,741 (DE)
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (2011)	20	2	22	1,066,077	1,100,964	716,327 (FR)
<i>Shun Li and the Poet</i> (2012)	16	-	16	266,955	266,955	93,756 (IT); 107,334 (FR)
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2013)	25	5	30	1,020,491	1,045,222	427,135 (BE); 53,321 (NL)
<i>Ida</i> (2014)	30	6	36	1,388,021	1,431,575	243,472 (PL); 44,405 (DK)
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	31	10	41	1,329,014	1,389,176	746,481 (FR); 138,098 (DE); 25,419 (TR)



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<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	32	10	42	2,135,223	2,227,835	906,827 (DE); 75,733 (AT); 56,489 (CH)
<i>Sami Blood</i> (2017)	18	-	18	296,056	364,468	197,437 (SE); 2,821 (DK); 64,031 (NO)
<i>Woman at War</i> (2018)	30	3	33	797,089	855,125	20,063 (IS); 292,699 (FR); N/A (UA)
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija</i> (2019)	19	-	19	108,637	120,036	3,067 (MK); N/A (SI); 1,266 (BE); 34,874 (FR); 712 (HR)
<i>Collective</i> (2021)	10	2	12	36,058	37,425	21,501 (RO); 207 (LU); N/A (DE)
<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2022)	24	4	28	171,281	193,019	11,757 (BA); 121 (RO); 7,975 (AT); 22,763 (NL); 45,234 (FR); 24,551 (PL); 7,182 (DE); 3,113 (NO); N/A (TR)
<i>Close</i> (2023)	29	5	34	1,081,782 (11.6.24)	1,127,398	333,228 (BE); 208,943 (FR); 109,059 (NL)
<i>The Teachers' Lounge</i> (2024)	13	2	15	366,767	380,599	266,169 (DE)

2.5.3 Revenue

The revenue of the LUX winners varies considerably (Table 3). The three films with the best international returns were *The Edge of Heaven*, *Lorna's Silence* and *Toni Erdmann*. The fourth, *Ida*, the only LUX winner to also win an Oscar, had the highest return in the US. Besides *Ida*, two other films, *Mustang* and *Women at War*, did better in the US than in their main country of production. Being an Oscar nominee (Table 5) did not increase the films' revenue in the US compared to non-nominated LUX winners. The four highest-grossing films are pre-2020 winners. The average



revenue for LUX Prize winners was \$6,553,034, while the average revenue for LUX Audience Award winners was \$2,983,549.

Although none of the LUX winners can be classified as an international box office hit, their main revenues tend to come from abroad. On average, 62.0% of the winners' revenues came from countries other than the country of their main production. However, there were significant differences between films in terms of their domestic versus foreign revenues, ranging from 27.1% foreign revenues for *Welcome* to 98.3% for *Mustang*.

Compared to the European Palme d'or winners, the LUX winners had much lower worldwide revenues. Six European Palme d'or winners from the same period have grossed more than *The Edge of Heaven*. Six European Palme d'or winners and five Oscar winners from the same period have grossed significantly more than *The Edge of Heaven*, but there are also significant differences among the winners of the latter two awards.

Table 3. The revenue of the LUX winners in 2007–2024. Source: Box Office MOJO, summer 2024.*

Title and awarding year	Domestic revenue (lifetime gross in the production country)	Revenue in the US	Worldwide revenue
<i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007)	\$5,102,332	\$742,349	\$17,804,565
<i>Lorna's Silence</i> (2008)	\$475,226	\$338,795	\$5,123,676
<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	\$9,903,224	N/A	\$13,578,009
<i>When We Leave</i> (2010)	\$946,745	\$19,631	\$1,338,132
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (2011)	\$4,037,368	N/A	\$6,726,049
<i>Shun Li and the Poet</i> (2012)	\$617,850	N/A	\$890,487
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2013)	\$3,413,827	\$175,058	\$6,041,503
<i>Ida</i> (2014)	\$333,714	\$3,827,060	\$11,156,836
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	\$89,837	\$845,464	\$5,274,664
<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	\$4,832,090	\$1,479,387	\$12,002,864



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<i>Sami Blood</i> (2017)	\$160,949	N/A	\$442,416
<i>Woman at War</i> (2018)	\$244,435	\$847,495	\$4,463,133
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija</i> (2019)	N/A	N/A	\$347,113
<i>Collective</i> (2021)	\$92,484	N/A	\$200,041
<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2022)	N/A	N/A	\$813,253
<i>Close</i> (2023)	N/A	\$1,100,113	\$5,216,044
<i>The Teachers' Lounge</i> (2024)	\$1,778,517	\$628,218	\$5,704,857

*The numbers from the main production country are missing for the following films: *God Exists*, *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, *Her Name Is Petrunija* and *Close*.

2.5.4 VOD availability

At the time of writing this report, all LUX winners were available in an average of 71.1 VOD catalogues and an average of 14.9 countries. There were, however, major differences between the films (Table 4). The number of distribution countries for the winners was generally higher than the number of countries where the films were available on VOD. Only for two LUX Audience Award winners, *Collective* and *The Teachers' Lounge*, was the reverse the case.

One of the LUX winners won an Oscar for the Best International Feature Film and seven were nominated for an Oscar (Table 5). The Oscar-nominated or Oscar-winning LUX winners were more widely available on VOD than the non-nominated or non-winning LUX winners. The former were available in an average of 88.1 VOD catalogues and an average of 18.9 countries, while the latter averaged 55.9 catalogues and 11.4 countries.

The limitations of the VOD data challenge a comparative analysis of the LUX Prize and LUX Audience Award winners. The Lumiere VOD database only lists the number of service countries and VOD catalogues on which the films are currently available and is updated every three months. As figures are not available retrospectively, it is not possible to compare the VOD distribution of films. Moreover, the number of VOD platforms has multiplied since the launch of the LUX scheme in 2007.



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However, the VOD figures can be interpreted to reflect the long-term impact of the films: All the films are still available, but there are big differences in the number of countries and catalogues.

We included in our analysis two major VODs with the largest number of subscribers worldwide, Netflix and Amazon Prime. Most of the LUX winners (13) were available on Amazon Prime at the time of the study, but only one was available on Netflix. However, the number of countries in which these films were available on these VODs was relatively small, ranging from one to seven (Table 4).

The situation was similar for the European Palme d'or winners, with only nine available on Amazon Prime and three on Netflix. The European winners of the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film had a similar situation with Amazon Prime, where nine films were available, compared to seven on Netflix. LUX winners were available in fewer catalogues (71 on average) than European Palme d'or winners (170 on average) and European winners of the Best International Feature Film Oscar (163 on average). In the case of Oscar winners, the figure was skewed by *Another Round*, which was available in up to 1,170 catalogues – many times more than the other Oscar winners. LUX winners were available in fewer countries (14.9 on average) than Palme d'or winners (17.3 on average), but in more countries than Oscar winners (13.6 on average).

Table 4. The VOD availability of the LUX winners in 2007–2024. Source: Lumiere VOD, 8 August, 2024.

Title and awarding year	Countries of service	VOD catalogues	Netflix (no. of countries)	Amazon Prime (no. of countries)
<i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007)	21	45	0	3
<i>Lorna's Silence</i> (2008)	7	120	0	0
<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	5	54	0	0
<i>When We Leave</i> (2010)	6	32	0	0
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (2011)	12	27	0	0



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<i>Shun Li and the Poet</i> (2012)	10	23	0	3
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2013)	15	48	0	2
<i>Ida</i> (2014)	16	78	0	1
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	19	110	0	1
<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	23	120	3	4
<i>Sami Blood</i> (2017)	16	80	0	3
<i>Woman at War</i> (2018)	17	87	0	3
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija</i> (2019)	9	35	0	4
<i>Collective</i> (2021)	22	58	0	3
<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2022)	16	99	0	5
<i>Close</i> (2023)	18	102	0	4
<i>The Teachers' Lounge</i> (2024)	22	90	0	7

2.5.5 Film festivals and other awards

The film industry is in a constant state of competition. Although the competition for audiences, funding, recognition, awards, etc. is different from the broader competitiveness of the film industry, these dimensions are intertwined. The ability to compete in festivals and win awards forms the practical foundation of the film industry's competitiveness in the global film markets. Film awards and success in winning them are thus a part of this foundation.

In the film sector, award ceremonies and film festivals conjoin. Both impact the development of the film industry through competition. As Enverga and Tangco (2018, p. 827) note, international film festivals are sites of competition, with films being compared with one another, and winners being selected. At the same time, the events compete with one another to be the first to premiere films by famous directors, to attract celebrities and to draw media attention. Similarly, Anand and Watson (2004, p. 60) have described the ways in which film awards and award ceremonies are seen as “tournament rituals” that shape the evolution of the sector: For the authors, “participation in tournament rituals is both a privilege endowed upon influential social actors in an organizational field and an instrument of status contests among them”. Film awards have a broad impact on the film



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industry, including professionals, media, audiences and what is considered valuable, high quality, or exceptional in the field (Lähdesmäki & Hiltunen, forthcoming). They are, thus, important indicators of competitiveness.

A recognition or award at a major film festival is one of the criteria for a LUX nomination. The data on the total number of awards received by LUX winners show that all of them have received many awards in Europe and abroad, an average of 31.1 worldwide, although most in Europe (Table 5). However, there is a wide variation between films, ranging from 3 to 68 awards. One of the LUX winners won an Oscar for the Best International Feature Film and seven were nominated for an Oscar (Table 5). As in the case of VOD availability, Oscar-nominated and Oscar-winning films have on average received notably more awards (44.8) than other LUX winners (19.0). LUX Prize winners received slightly fewer awards (29.4 on average) than LUX Audience Award winners (36.8 on average).

In addition to the Oscars, we examined the success of LUX winners in winning awards at the world's five major film festivals, namely Berlin, Cannes, Sundance, Toronto and Venice. LUX winners had won awards at all these festivals except Sundance. None of the films managed to win an award at more than one of these festivals, although seven of the films won more than one award at one of these festivals.

Four European winners of the Palme d'or and three winners of the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film have won awards at Toronto and Cannes (other than Palme d'or), three films (*Amour*, Michael Haneke, France, 2012; *Anatomy of a Fall/ Anatomie d'une chute*, Justine Triet, France, 2023; *The Zone of Interest*, Jonathan Glazer, UK, Poland, US, 2024) at both festivals.



Table 5. The total number of awards won by LUX winners in 2007–2024, including Oscar nominations and Oscars, as well as the number of awards won at the world's four major film festivals.

Source: IMDb, Wikipedia. Data collected in November 2024.

Title and awarding year	Total number of awards (non-European in brackets)	Oscars	Venice	Cannes	Berlin	Toronto
<i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007)	37(11)			2 (best screenplay, prize of the ecumenical jury)		
<i>Lorna's Silence</i> (2008)	3(0)			1 (best screenplay)		
<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	13(3)				2 (prize of the ecumenical jury; Label Europa Cinemas)	
<i>When We Leave</i> (2010)	30(9)				1 (Label Europa Cinemas)	
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (2011)	6(0)					
<i>Shun Li and the Poet</i> (2012)	20(2)		3 (FEDIC Award; Lina Mangiacapre Award; Laterna Magica Prize)			
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2013)	38(16)	Nomination			2 (Label Europa Cinemas; Panorama Audience Award)	
<i>Ida</i> (2014)	68(30)	Winner				1 (International Critics'



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						Award FIPRESCI)
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	46(13)	Nomination		1 (Label Europa Cinemas)		
<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	59(26)	Nomination		1 (FIPRESCI Prize)		
<i>Sami Blood</i> (2017)	25(9)		2 (Label Europa Cinemas Award, Fedeora Award)			
<i>Woman at War</i> (2018)	29(9)			1 (SACD screenwriting award)		
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija</i> (2019)	8(1)				2 (Prize of the ecumenical jury, Guild film prize)	
<i>Collective</i> (2021)	37(16)	2 Nominations				1 (Best document ary)
<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2022)	40(8)	Nomination				
<i>Close</i> (2023)	58(20)	Nomination		1 (Grand Prize jointly awarded)		
<i>The Teachers' Lounge</i> (2024)	12(3)	Nomination			2 (Label Europa Cinemas, C.I.C.A.E Award Panorama)	

2.5.5 Media recognition

2.5.6.1 Reviews by film critics and audiences

To analyse the media recognition of the LUX winners, we looked at how often the films were reviewed by film critics and audiences (Table 6), as well as in selected trade magazines and



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newspapers (Table 7). For the reviews, we looked at which countries the audience, i.e. users, were most active in writing reviews for the LUX winners. We also compared the frequency of reviews by film critics and users and their numerical rating of the LUX winners with the European winners of the Palme d'or and the European winners of the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film.

In general, LUX winners have received positive reviews from both critics and audiences, with slightly better reviews from critics. On IMDb, film critics' reviews are expressed on a scale of 1–100 with a Metascore: it is an average of reviews from "a diverse group of highly respected critics" (Metacritic, 2024). Ten of the seventeen LUX winners have a Metascore of 80 or above. *Collective* and *Quo Vadis, Aida?* have the highest scores. Two films, *Sami Blood* and *Broken Circle Breakdown*, have a Metascore between 70 and 79. Only three films, *Welcome, When We Leave* and *God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija*, have received a Metascore below 70. Two films, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *Shun Li and the Poet*, do not have a Metascore, which may indicate that some of the most respected critics consulted for the Metascore have not reviewed these films.

In the case of *Collective* and *Quo Vadis, Aida?* audience and critic ratings are closest to each other. However, the number of user reviews for *Collective* is below the average for all the films. The highly original *Toni Erdmann* has the highest number of critics' reviews and a good number of user reviews. Its Metascore is the third best, but its user rating is below average. *Quo Vadis, Aida?* has received the most user reviews. The second film in both categories is *Ida*. A comparison with the European Oscar winners for the Best International Feature Film shows that they have generally received more reviews in both categories, with two films having more than a thousand user reviews.

The average number of critics' reviews is almost the same for the pre- and post-2020 LUX winners, averaging 143 and 145 reviews respectively. However, the average number of user reviews for the post-2020 winners has increased, but this is in great part due to the large number of user reviews



for *Quo Vadis, Aida?* which is almost twice as many as for the second-best, *Ida*. All but one of the European Oscar winners have more than 100 user reviews while only four LUX winners have more than 100. Similarly, fifteen out of seventeen European Palme d'or winners, i.e. all but two, have 100 or more user reviews. Fifteen out of eighteen Oscar winners and fourteen out of seventeen Palme d'or winners have more than 200 critic reviews. Only three out of the seventeen LUX winners, *Ida*, *Mustang* and *Toni Erdmann*, reached this number.

In eight of the seventeen cases, the largest number of user reviews came from outside the country of production, including the USA for five cases. Of the most successful LUX winners, only *Ida* is among these five films, the others being *Lorna's Silence*, *Woman at War*, *Collective* and *Close*.

Table 6. The number of film critics' and users' reviews for LUX winners in 2007–2024 and the Metascore of film critics' reviews (1–100) and user ratings (1–10). Source: IMDb and Metacritic.com, summer 2024.

Title and awarding year	Reviews by film critics	User reviews	Metascore/user rating	The country with the most user reviews
<i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007)	151	68	85/7.7	Turkey
<i>Lorna's Silence</i> (2008)	135	24	80/7.1	US*
<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	71	49	61/7.5	France
<i>When We Leave</i> (2010)	64	22	65/7.5	Germany
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (2011)	72	9	-/7.2	Greece*
<i>Shun Li and the Poet</i> (2012)	46	6	-/7.2	Italy
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2013)	176	78	70/7.7	Turkey*
<i>Ida</i> (2014)	308	169	91/7.4	US*
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	265	94	83/7.6	Turkey
<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	324	162	93/7.3	Germany
<i>Sami Blood</i> (2017)	63	25	79/7.3	Sweden
<i>Woman at War</i> (2018)	121	53	81/7.4	US*
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija</i> (2019)	83	13	50/6.8	Italy*
<i>Collective</i> (2021)	117	69	95/8.1	US*



<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2022)	136	321	97/8.0	Bosnia & Herzegovina
<i>Close</i> (2023)	162	133	81/7.8	US*
<i>The Teachers' Lounge</i> (2024)	156	74	82/7.5	Germany

*The country with the most reviews is not one of the production countries.

2.5.6.2 Trade magazines and newspapers

Media recognition of LUX winners was studied using two major print media databases: the International Index to Film and Television Periodicals (FIAF), which indexes articles from 150 film and television periodicals around the world, and International Newsstream, which indexes articles from over 660 leading international and national newspapers outside the USA and Canada. The following search terms were used in both databases: a) film title in English and director's name OR film title in original language and director's name; b) same as a) but including the search term LUX; c) same as a) but including the search term Oscar (for films nominated or awarded an Oscar). The search results are presented in Table 7, excluding a few irrelevant hits in the case of LUX films whose title is a common noun.

A comparison of Tables 6 and 7 shows that the same films, *Ida* and *Toni Erdmann*, have received the most reviews from film critics on IMDb and are the most written about films in FIAF magazines and international newspapers. Table 7 shows that there has been a slight change in the media recognition of LUX winners over the history of their awards. In FIAF periodicals, the average number of articles mentioning the title of the winning film and its director before 2020 is 717.3, while after 2020 the average is 778.5. In International Newsstream newspapers, the average number is 350.8 before 2020 and 373.3 after. There is a big difference between hits with and without the search term LUX. On average, 5.5% of the articles about the LUX winners in FIAF and 5.9% in International Newsstream mention LUX. The frequency of mention of the LUX in articles in both databases was not affected by the change in the awarding procedure.



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The number of awards seems to predict the amount of media recognition. *Ida* and *Toni Erdmann* won the most awards and received the most media recognition and film critics' reviews. However, LUX winners have received much less media attention than those LUX winners that have also won or been nominated for an Oscar. The term "Oscar" multiplied hits in both databases.

Table 7. Number of hits for LUX winners 2007–2024 in the two databases International Index to Film and Television Periodicals (FIAF) and ProQuest International Newsstream (IN), collected in August 2024. A) Hits with film title and director name; B) Same as A but including LUX; C) Same as A but including Oscar.

Title and awarding year	FIAF; A	FIAF; B (C)	IN; A	IN; B (C)
<i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007)	1,444	21	585	6
<i>Lorna's Silence</i> (2008)	87	2	107	2
<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	407	29	239	14
<i>When We Leave</i> (2010)	250	22	115	9
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro</i> (2011)	103	2	137	2
<i>Shun Li and the Poet</i> (2012)	105	16	43	5
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2013)	499	16 (252)	181	7 (64)
<i>Ida</i> (2014)	2,532	40 (1,533)	1,126	9 (700)
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	1 096	65 (485)	489	33 (200)
<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	2,362	62 (1,100)	1,338	41 (629)
<i>Sami Blood</i> (2017)	179	24	43	8
<i>Woman at War</i> (2018)	331	37	138	24
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija</i> (2019)	33	2	19	1
<i>Collective</i> (2021)	536	27 (318)	215	13 (114)
<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2022)	818	28 (441)	455	14 (223)
<i>Close</i> (2023)	1,293	30 (609)	578	12 (218)
<i>The Teachers' Lounge</i> (2024)	467	17 (307)	245	9 (164)

2.5.7 Correlation analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of the seventeen LUX-winning films and the statistics discussed above, we performed a correlation analysis on the selected variables. Correlation analysis is a



quantitative research technique used to measure the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two or more variables. It determines how changes in one variable are related to changes in another variable at a constant rate. Our correlation analysis compares all seventeen films and their nine variables using multivariate correlation analysis: this technique examines relationships among multiple variables simultaneously.

The correlation analysis of the statistics discussed above shows a significant or highly significant correlation between most of the factors examined (Table 8). This indicates that the factors selected for statistical analysis are closely interrelated in the film sector, and that the promotion of these factors is likely to increase the other factors in most cases. Table 8 shows that the factors that do not always correlate with others are the number of countries where LUX winners are available on VOD platforms and, in a few cases, the number of other awards received by LUX winners, the number of reviews by film critics on IMDb and the Metascore value of the films.

Unsurprisingly, the worldwide release of LUX winners correlates highly significantly with the films' worldwide revenue ($r = .612$, $p < .001$) as well as with their admission in Europe ($r = .805$, $p < .001$). In addition, the increase in films' worldwide release correlates significantly with the increase in LUX winners' other awards ($r = .594$, $p < .005$) and highly significantly with the increase in LUX winners' recognition in FIAF magazines ($r = .707$, $p < .001$), International Newsstream newspapers ($r = .680$, $p < .001$), and film critics' reviews on IMDb ($r = .757$, $p < .001$). In general, the increase in media recognition of LUX winners in FIAF and International Newsstream correlates significantly or highly significantly with all other factors except the increase in the number of VOD countries. Similarly, the number of reviews by film critics on IMDb correlates highly significantly with all other factors, including VOD countries, except with the films' worldwide revenue. This may indicate that journalists and critics write more about films that are successful according to the various measures of the film industry, and that recognition in some media increases recognition in others. The results may also



indicate that film critics on the IMDb may be basing their reviews on films viewed on VOD platforms.

The increase in the Critics' Metascore for LUX winners correlates significantly with the films' increased media recognition, critics' reviews, other awards and availability on VOD platforms. The critics' scores are therefore not influenced by the success of the films in terms of distribution, audiences or profits.

Correlation analysis does not tell us which of the factors affects which. Thus, we cannot conclude whether, for example, high media recognition increases LUX winners' revenues, admissions, and other awards received or vice versa. We suggest that the impact is multidirectional, as all the competitiveness factors are part of the intertwined ecology of the film industry.

Table 8. Correlation between the competitiveness factors of LUX winners 2007–2024.

	Worldwide revenue	Admission in Europe	Worldwide release	VOD countries	Awards	FIAF	International Newsstream	Reviews by critics	Metascore
Worldwide revenue	1								
Admission in Europe	.892**	1							
Worldwide release	.612**	.805**	1						
VOD countries	.089	.277	.555*	1					
Awards	.258	.455	.594*	.376	1				
FIAF	.596*	.701**	.707**	.429	.861**	1			
International Newsstream	.585*	.708**	.680**	.466	.794**	.978**	1		
Reviews by critics	.457	.642**	.757**	.618**	.747**	.878**	.874**	1	



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Metascore	.114	.201	.362	.597*	.582*	.565*	.553*	.540*	1
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** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In addition to the competitiveness factors discussed above, we examined the LUX winners by the population size of their production countries and the worldwide number of “native speakers” of the languages spoken in the films (Figure 9). In the case of co-productions and multilingual films, we first summed the numbers. As a result, the total population of the countries of production ranges from 11,763,650 (*Lorna's Silence*, produced in Belgium) to 329,963,441 (*Quo Vadis, Aida?*, co-produced in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Austria, the Netherlands, France, Poland, Germany, Norway and Turkey). The number of native speakers of the languages in the films ranges from 2 million (*God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija*, Macedonian) to 1053 million (*Shun Li and the Poet*, Italian and Mandarin). We conducted a multivariate correlation analysis with these numbers and variables in Table 8. The results do not indicate any correlation between the competitiveness factors and the total population size of the producing countries or the total number of native speakers or all languages spoken in the films, nor between them. The multivariate correlation analysis with the competitiveness factors and the population size of the first-mentioned production country in the Lumiere database (designated as the “main” production country in Table 9) and the first-mentioned language of the film in Wikipedia (designated as the “main” language in Table 9) yields a statistically significant result. The population size of the “main” production country ($r = .520$, $p < .005$) and the number of native speakers of the “main” language in the films ($r = .491$, $p < .005$) are significantly correlated with films' worldwide revenues. This is not surprising: larger countries and language areas have larger potential audiences. Interestingly, increasing the number of countries of production and languages used in films does not increase their admissions and revenues.

Researching the population size of production countries and the number of “native speakers” of languages in LUX films is challenging for several reasons. Our data for this information is based on



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the most recent official census and native speaker estimates, and thus does not represent the time of the films' release. Many of the languages used in the films are widely spoken as additional languages around the world, making it difficult to compare the success of the films in terms of the languages used. For example, English is spoken as an additional language by 1.1 billion people worldwide (Wikipedia, 2025). However, the use of English in multilingual LUX films did not make the films more watched or recognised. Identifying the “main” country of production or the “main” language of the film is complicated for co-productions and multilingual films. Reliable budget breakdowns for co-productions are rarely available, and for multilingual films, the length of time a language is used in a film does not necessarily indicate how important that language is to the film's dialogue, narration and story.

Table 9. LUX winners 2007–2024, their production countries and population (based on the latest official census from 2020 to 2024), and the languages spoken in the films and the number of their current native speakers worldwide. Source for countries of production: Lumiere; for languages and their native speakers: Wikipedia.

Title/original title, production year	Production country	Population in production countries in total	Population in the main production country	Language s used in the films	Native speakers of languages world wide (millions)	Native speakers of the main language world wide (millions)
<i>The Edge of Heaven/Auf der Anderen Seite</i> (2007)	Germany, Turkey, Italy	227,857,760	83,510,950	German, Turkish, English	548	73
<i>Lorna's Silence/Le Silence de Lorna</i> (2008)	Belgium	11,763,650	11,763,650	French, Italian, German	210	74



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<i>Welcome</i> (2009)	France	68,513,000	68,513,000	French, English, Kurdish, Turkish	575	74
<i>When We Leave/Die Fremde</i> (2010)	Germany	83,510,950	83,510,950	German, Turkish	158	73
<i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro/Les Neiges du Kilimandjaro</i> (2011)	France	68,513,000	68,513,000	French	74	74
<i>Shun Li and the Poet/Io sono Li</i> (2011)	Italy, France	127,487,433	58,974,433	Italian, Mandarin	1053	63
<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown</i> (2012)	Belgium, Netherlands	29,768,792	11,763,650	Dutch	25	25
<i>Ida</i> (2013)	Poland, Denmark	43,511,464	37,552,000	Polish, French, Latin	117	43
<i>Mustang</i> (2015)	France, Germany, Turkey	237,396,327	68,513,000	Turkish	85	85
<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (2016)	Germany, Austria, Switzerland	101,596,770	83,510,950	German, English, Romanian	488	73
<i>Sami Blood/Sameblod</i> (2016)	Sweden, Denmark, Norway	22,107,243	10,576,145	Swedish, South Sami	10	10



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<i>Woman at War/Kona fer í stríð</i> (2018)	Iceland, France, Ukraine	109,870,755	396,960	Icelandic, Spanish, English, Ukrainian	907	0 [0,35]
<i>God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija/ Gospod postoji, imeto i' e Petrunija</i> (2019)	North Macedonia, Slovenia, Belgium, France, Croatia	88,099,617	1,836,713	Macedonian	2	2
<i>Collective/Colectiv</i> (2019)	Romania, Luxemburg, Germany	103,220,756	19,064,409	Romanian	25	25
<i>Quo Vadis, Aida?</i> (2020)	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Austria, Netherlands, France, Poland, Germany, Norway, Turkey	329,963,441	3,219,415	Bosnian, English, Serbian, Dutch	424	3
<i>Close</i> (2022)	Belgium, France, Netherlands	98,281,792	11,763,650	French, Flemish, Dutch, English	495	74
<i>The Teachers' Lounge/Das Lehrerzimmer</i> (2023)	Germany	83,510,950	83,510,950	German	73	73



2.6 Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we have examined the competitiveness of the LUX on the basis of various economic and non-economic indicators and have shown that the indicators examined, namely revenues, admissions, countries of release, awards, professional criticism, newspaper journalism, online criticism and online rating by critics, are significantly correlated with each other: An increase in one of the indicators is likely to increase the others. While the study suggests such a correlation, the statistics of these indicators and their comparison with the European winners of the much more prestigious film awards, the Palme d'or and the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film, show that the LUX winners are not very competitive in the global or even European film scene. In fact, some of the films have very low admissions and are not widely distributed or recognised by film critics and newspapers.

Although LUX winners have rarely been transnational box office successes, they have received numerous awards at major film festivals. Several scholars have shown that established film awards affect film production and the competitiveness of the film industry more broadly, by acting as a sign of quality that helps film audiences and other value system actors to consume certain films (Anand & Watson, 2004; Deuchert et al., 2005; Gemser et al., 2008). Gerda Gemser et al. (2008) investigated why some awards are more effective signals of quality than others; they found that expert-selected awards were more effective than consumer- or peer-selected awards. This finding supports the argument that the LUX, which is selected by MEPs and the public, may be less effective in branding the winning films within the film industry than expert-selected awards (see Lähdesmäki and Hiltunen, forthcoming). On the other hand, Petar Mitrić and Tamara Kolarić (2023, p. 89–90), who analysed why ambitious European co-produced films, despite winning many major awards and critical acclaim, struggle to find audiences, argue that not enough resources are devoted to developing strategies at production and distribution stages to reach potential audiences. They use *Quo Vadis, Aida?* to illustrate their argument.



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It is important to remember that in the long term, several of the LUX winners have attained the status of modern classics, with the majority available in various editions on DVD and Blu-ray. Among such films are the first two LUX winners, Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven* and Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *Lorna's Silence*.⁴ These directors have continued to be prolific to this day.

Our examination of LUX-winning films shows that they tend to be contemporary dramas dealing with serious social and societal issues. This reflects the EU's criteria for the prize, which emphasises debate on current European issues. Based on viewing all the films and analysing their style and content, we argue that the LUX winners stylistically draw on the tradition of European arthouse films, thus reinforcing a certain image of European cinema by highlighting its artistic quality and socially engaging stories (Lähdesmäki & Hiltunen, forthcoming). Such an arthouse image could be better used to increase the competitiveness of the EFI – not necessarily in terms of admissions and revenues, but in terms of brand. Commercial success could even weaken this brand and thus reduce its value within the film sector. Similarly, Baschiera and Di Chiara (2018, p. 249) note that the LUX seeks to "repackage existing forms of marketing art cinema [...] offering an institutional, supranational intervention in its promotion, with the clear goal of becoming a quality label". Strengthening the LUX as a brand for quality films has its downside: "these interventions continue to marginalise European production in the 'art' realm and do little to address the impossible competition with the vertically integrated Hollywood majors as well as to promote new policies to shift the attention of state aid from production to marketing/distribution" (Baschiera & Di Chiara 2018, p. 249).

⁴ We thank Jaakko Seppälä for these observations.



A study of selected European film agencies shows that artistic quality and cultural diversity are seen as the main strengths of European cinema and as qualities that should be promoted. The prevailing view is that each country should promote its own cinema, as this helps to promote diversity. At the same time, there is a recognition of the need to make European films more competitive and to turn them into phenomena. This reflects a deep-rooted tension in European film policy between industry and art. Awards at major international festivals are considered a sign of international competitiveness, but it seems that only a few of the most prestigious festivals can increase the competitiveness of films. LUX or other EU supported awards did not come up in discussions with the agencies (Ramos Arenas et al., forthcoming).

In this study, we also examined the evolution of the competitiveness of the LUX by comparing the winners before and after the change of the initiative from a prize selected by MEPs to an audience award combining both MEPs and audience voting. The results show that the change did not have a major impact on its competitiveness indicators nor on the content or style of the winning films. The continuity in the content and style of the films may result from the pre-selection of the nominees by a panel of film professionals. The change in the voting system did not affect the role of the film professionals in the awards process. While the pre-2020 winners had better revenues and admission rates, the post-2020 winners received more awards and better media recognition. However, this is difficult to assess as only four films have been awarded since the change. The 2024 LUX winner, *Flow* (Gints Zilbalodis, Latvia, France & Belgium, 2024), was announced in April 2025, but it was too late to incorporate it into the analysis.

Our analysis shows that the most successful LUX winners in terms of the competitiveness indicators examined in this study were *Toni Erdmann* and *Ida*. The former was nominated for, and the latter won the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film, and received significantly more media attention for the Oscar than for the LUX Prize. On average, the LUX winners that have enjoyed the



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most success and visibility are those that have won or been nominated for an Oscar. The statistics show that the LUX award does not significantly increase the media recognition of films. Since LUX winners have been screened at major festivals before entering the competition, and may have won several awards before the LUX, their media exposure builds on these other awards and the publicity they generate.

Through the LUX scheme, the EU has sought to promote cultural, social and political motives. None of these motives can be achieved unless the LUX winners attract public interest and media recognition, are distributed internationally in cinemas and are available on VOD platforms. If the EU wants to increase the competitiveness of the LUX scheme and its winning films, much more should be done to promote them, for example by increasing the films' international distribution and media recognition. On a more general level, filmmakers should direct more resources into researching potential audiences, as Mitrić and Kolarić suggest. They see this as particularly important for co-productions, which make up the majority of LUX winners. To be able to do this, filmmakers need support firstly from national film institutes, but the EU could also help in this, for instance through the MEDIA programme. The award itself needs to be made more visible so that people can participate in the selection process and contribute to the debate on the European issues addressed by LUX films. If people do not know that such an award exists, they cannot vote. At the moment the possibility to see the films during the voting period is limited. In Finland, for example, the films can be seen only in a few major cities in cinemas belonging to the Europa Cinemas Network. The LUX has a potential unique selling point, as there are not many audience awards in Europe. This selling point has not been fully exploited in the promotion of the award.

3. CASE 2: EU FILM FESTIVALS



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3.1 Introduction to the EU Film Festivals

Cinema is an asset that can be used for communicating diverse cultural and social meanings, negotiating political ideas and values, and promoting economic development. Since its establishment, the EU has recognised and sought to utilise the potential of cinema for such goals. One of the ways in which the EU tries to achieve these goals is through an audience development strategy, which includes different types of measures such as funding for marketing, subtitling and dubbing, film education and film festivals. Within these measures, film festivals stand out as an interactive social and cultural activity with ambitious aims of communicating curated programmes of European films for diverse audiences and promoting the encounter between film professionals and cinema consumers. The EU has facilitated and funded European film festivals for decades both in the EU Member States and beyond. While the festivals in the EU Member States seek to build European markets for European cinema and shape a European community through the celebration of European films, the EU has other aims for festivals outside Europe, such as increasing the competitiveness of the EFI in global markets and building cultural relations with non-European countries and communities. This case study focuses on the latter festivals, seeking to map their implementation and scrutinise the variety of motives in organising them.

The EU's interest in supporting film festivals of European cinema reflects the evolution of the Union's broader political objectives. In the 1990s, the EU's interests in the film sector focused on developing internal film markets and building audiences for European cinema within its Member States. The key tools in this work were the EU's MEDIA programmes, which aim at supporting the growth of the EFI in a context of intense international competition and transforming production and distribution environments. Via the first MEDIA programme, running from 1991 to 1995, the EU also "aimed at supporting the development of the European dimension of film festivals and audiovisual programmes, in order to encourage the circulation within Europe of audiovisual works" (EC, 1994,



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p. 11). During the centenary celebrations of cinema in 1995 and 1996, such festivals were the subject of an exceptional promotional effort (CofEU, 1994).

EU-funded film festivals celebrating European cinema have not only been organised in EU Member States. EU-affiliated actors outside the EU had organised such festivals even before the establishment of the Union. EU delegations, and the EU's diplomatic missions preceding the Union, have organised various cultural activities, including film festivals, to promote cultural relations between the EU and third countries. For example, during the Eastern enlargement process, such events got a new political meaning in candidate countries as they were explained as indicators of ongoing cultural preparation for EU membership (EC, 2002).

In the 2000s, the EU's growing interest in using culture to strengthen its external relations, public diplomacy and role in the global power game (EC, 2016a; Helly & Galeazzi, 2016; Dâmaso, 2021; Dâmaso & Murray, 2021; MacDonald & Vlaeminck, 2020; Trobbiani & Pavón-Guinea 2020) has been reflected in EU policies and actions on European cinema. Besides developing internal film markets, the Union has sought to reach global consumers for and communicate European values via European cinema. Such attempts have brought film festivals into the spotlight. The EU's new Media Plus programme, launched in 2001, included specific measures to finance the participation of European works and professionals in film festivals organised in third countries to support the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual production (EC, 2003a). At the same time, the EU started to see such festivals as having strategic value in building partnerships between the Union and countries on other continents (e.g. EC, 2003b, p. 27). This development continued in the EU's cultural agendas and actions seeking to position culture, such as European films and film festivals, as an asset for public diplomacy. More precise goals for strengthening the EU's external relations through culture originate from the "European agenda for culture in a globalising world" proposed by the European Commission in 2007 (EC, 2007).



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The growing interest in external relations was also reflected in the MEDIA programme. After 2008, the scope of the programme was extended to increase cooperation between audiovisual industry professionals from Europe and third countries, and through the MEDIA Mundus programme (2011–2013), the EU sought to promote cultural exchanges with non-EU countries (Crusafon, 2015, pp. 91–93). In addition, the Commission's working paper *The External Dimension of Audiovisual Policy* (2009) proposed that the Commission establish a more outward-looking strand to its audiovisual policy (Crusafon, 2015, p. 93).

Following the Treaty of Lisbon (that came into force in 2009), the EU set up a new unit, the European External Action Service (EEAS), that includes EU officials and contracted temporary actors and diplomats, EU delegations, to strengthen and facilitate the EU's foreign policy and to promote international cultural relations. The EU's interest in developing such relations was pinpointed in the European Commission's *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, launched in 2016. The strategy identified "cultural diplomacy" as one of the new fields of the EU's "joined-up external action" (EC, 2016b, p. 49). In the same year, the Commission explicitly envisioned film festivals as tools for cultural diplomacy, now renamed as cultural relations. The communication *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations* sought to enhance the role of EU delegations and support joint cultural events, namely by organising "EU film festivals in a more coherent and strategic way" (EC, 2016a, p. 14).

The communication suggested setting up a new two-year funding scheme with a budget of EUR 1.5 million for EU delegations to organise EU Film Festivals (EUFF). The idea drew on a feasibility study noting how more than half of the EU delegations "around the world are involved in the organisation of film festivals and other film events with a view to promote the European Union, showcase European culture and use film as a cultural diplomacy tool" (EC, 2015, p. 6). Special support was, however, seen as necessary since "a number of obstacles prevent the diversity and excellence of European films from being shown in the best conditions in many third countries: lack of



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professionalism, limited budgets and shortage of human resources” (EC, 2015, p. 6). Drawing on the suggestions in the feasibility study, the European Commission launched in 2018 a Support to European Film Festivals scheme, run by the EEAS and managed by the Goethe-Institut, the Institut Français, and Cineuropa, an online information portal funded by the EU’s MEDIA programme and dedicated to the promotion of European cinema. The support scheme enables EU delegations to apply for funding to organise EUFF. Moreover, it provides a practical guide for EU delegations for setting up these festivals and their side events, information on European films and their directors, a common visual identity and a film repository with tens of European features and short films with subtitles in several languages. The scheme has been continued after its first funding round.

The feasibility study, the practical guide, the website of the EEAS and a recent external evaluation report of the support action identify various goals for organising the EUFF. The goals served by the festivals can be divided into two overlapping strands: the EUFF function as “key vehicles for European cultural diplomacy” (Buresi & Rosant, 2018, p. 7) and as “cultural assets of significant economic importance” (Buresi & Rosant, 2018, p. 11), as the festival guide notes. As cultural assets and diplomatic tools, the festivals are seen as able to sustain “spaces for intercultural dialogue”, create “stronger trust between the EU and its partners”, “contribute to a more positive image of the EU in third countries” (Helly & Chandran, 2023, p. 8), “put forth European ideas and values” and “empowering and mobilising these partners to work together to improve the perception, understanding and legitimacy of the EU and its policies” (Buresi & Rosant, 2018, p. 7). The festivals have, thus, a strong political underpinning. Moreover, the EU uses them to give a vibrant cultural image of itself. For instance, the EEAS website describes how “since first beginning in 1985, the European Film Festival (EUFF) has grown into one of the largest and most popular film festivals in the world” (EEAS, 2024).

This case study builds on the complex goals set for the EUFF. We explore how the goals of increasing the competitiveness of European cinema and developing international relations between



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the EU and third countries are understood and dealt with by EUFF organisers. Our study is motivated by the ambiguity of approaches to international relations included in the discourses of the EUFF. The policy documents, reports, guides and websites on the festivals refer to cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, external cultural relations, international (cultural) relations, soft power or envisage the EU as a stronger global actor. The EEAS funding criteria for the festival include: “engagement with local audiences in the long term” and “encouraging people-to-people dialogue and mutual cultural understanding”, but also “connections with the planned national cultural strategy (and EU strategy, if exists)” and “bolstering Europe’s image abroad, promoting its values and ideas” (EC, 2024). The approaches to international relations vary also among the festival organisers. Our research questions in the first part of this case study are: How are EUFFs organised and their programmes curated? How do EUFF organisers understand the goals of the festival and explain the rationale behind their organisation?

The case study starts with a literature review focused on key aspects in our theoretical framework, namely competitiveness, international relations and festivalisation. After this, we introduce our data and methods. The analysis is divided into two parts, first delving into the organisation of the EUFFs via eight country reports followed by a comparative discussion on their results, and second, exploring the promotional material of the festivals and the most screened films therein. The case study ends with the summary of results, a discussion on the limitations of the study, and policy recommendations to develop the EUFFs.

3.2 Literature review and theoretical framework

3.2.1 EU policy research

Film festivals are all-encompassing socio-cultural events and essential instruments for cinema as an industry, and as such, they form a film festival ecosystem (Vallejo & Peirano, 2022), “in which



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various stakeholders play specific roles along the film circulation value chain” (Helly & Chandran, 2023, p. 6). These chains are crucial for the competitiveness of the industry since, in these chains, films turn into commodities and economic assets. During the past decades, the EU has sought to impact on these value chains with policies aiming at increasing the competitiveness of the EFI by funding film productions, promotion activities and more efficient circulation of European films in the European and global market to compete with its implicit, and sometimes also explicit, threat: the American television and film industry (Gordon, 2007; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019).

Several scholars have explored the role of film in EU cultural policy and the policy instruments through which the EU impacts and regulates the sector (e.g., Herold, 2004, 2007, 2018; Irion & Valcke, 2015; Jäckel, 2005; Sarikakis, 2007; Stjernholm, 2016). Their studies generally underline the EU's interest in European film both as an economic asset and as an instrument of cultural and identity politics. These interests encompass a variety of potentially controversial objectives. As previously indicated, “the audiovisual policy at the EU level is characterised by a contradiction between the economic logic of market integration and the goal of preservation of cultural diversity” (Herold, 2004, p. 3). The EU seeks to make the EFI more competitive against Hollywood films and to increase the markets for European films both in Europe and beyond. Simultaneously, the EU seeks to celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe, communicate EU values and foster European cultural identities in and through European films.

The EU film policy can be perceived as a balancing act between these manifold and partly contradictory aims. In the European Commission's policy discourse, the EFI, as well as more broadly the European audiovisual sector, are perceived as fragmented in terms of both production and cultural context. On the one hand, this fragmentation is explained as resulting in culturally and linguistically diverse expressions and independent production industries that positively characterise European film and the European audiovisual sector. On the other hand, and due to diversity (or



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fragmentation), this sector “struggles to match the high competitiveness of its American counterpart”, as the European Commission (2004, p. 3) notes in its proposal for the MEDIA programme.

During the past decade, the aims of EU film policies and actions have further expanded. Today, these aims not only attempt to find a balance between “art and commerce” (Herold, 2004) or cultural and linguistic diversity and shared European identities, but also promote the twofold aims of strengthening the competitiveness of the industry and utilising European film as a conveyor of social values and, in that way, as an instrument in the EU’s foreign affairs (Liz, 2016).

The EU's external action is based on several diplomatic strands. In the case of EUFF, one of the explicit policy goals that they serve is to showcase European film and, by doing so, European culture. This aligns it with the paradigm of cultural diplomacy, a top-down approach that focuses on disseminating pre-existing cultural artefacts to third audiences to strengthen their (positive) views towards the origin of such diplomatic efforts, with origins in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Paschalidis, 2009).

However, since the publication of the European Commission’s Strategy for International Cultural Relations (ICR) in 2016 (EC, 2016a), the EUFF’s policy has been in tension with the EU’s broader policy for culture in its external and global affairs: cultural relations, a bottom-up, collaborative approach that has the goal of supporting trust and understanding between the EU, Europeans and the population of third countries. This being said, the ICR is not supposed to replace cultural diplomacy. Rather, the cultural diplomacy of EU Member States is to be accompanied by the EU’s joint approach (ICR) (EC, 2016a, p. 4). In other words, the EU’s approach to cultural relations (and ICR) does not reject cultural diplomacy; however, it sees cultural diplomacy as the domain of action of Member States. Rather, through ICR, EU stakeholders (representatives of the EU, its Member States and occasionally, civil society actors) are expected to engage in dialogue, mutual listening and learning from a position of equality. This explains why scholars have described ICR as a model



“primarily concerned with cross-border and transnational ‘people-to-people’ interactions” (Murray & Lamonica, 2021, p. 14). Hence, the publication of the Strategic Communication

has led to a multiplication of the models that are available to embed culture in foreign affairs.

Diplomats can now choose between two main paradigms: cultural diplomacy [...] and cultural relations [...]. This situation provides multiple challenges for cultural actors [...], who must navigate the demands of a not yet well-known policy with a complex governance model that serves ambitious, long-term foreign policy goals. (Dâmaso, 2021, p. 9)

This is why previous research has shown that in practice there is a “lack of a coherent doctrine on a world scale” in the EU’s foreign affairs and “coordination could be improved at different levels [...] or through better exchange of information between the EEAS and the EU delegations” (EP, 2022, p. 17).

In the case of the EUFF, this situation is heightened by its governance, which requires the collaboration of EU delegations with the national institutes of the EU’s Member States. Therefore, the managers of EUFF programmes must aim for success regarding competing policies and approaches. Indeed, a similar point has been made in the external evaluation of the EUFF commissioned by the European Commission. In it, experts identified the need “to fully align the action with future policy priorities, presentation and debate of the results of this evaluation in the short-term OMC [Open Method Coordination] group on EU international cultural relations, to provide a clearer strategic level of ambition and guidance to film festivals writ large” (Helly & Chandran, 2023, p.15).

In this regard, the authors of this report triangulated the results of the interviews against the aims of the EU Strategy for ICR, a method that not only recognises the tension arising from the coexistence of the EUFF’s alignment of cultural diplomacy alongside the ICR as a broader policy framing the EU’s external action, but also aims to support the identification of policy recommendations that could contribute to addressing this tension.



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3.2.2 Film festival research

Film festival research, currently claiming a significant space in film studies, began to emerge as a burgeoning field towards the end of the 2000s (De Valck & Loist, 2009), following some early studies mostly focusing on individual festivals (Dayan, 2000; Ethis, 2001; Ethis, 2002; Hardy, 1992; Philippe, 1987; Toubiana, 1997; Turan, 2002; Willemen, 1981/1985). Growing interest in studies of film culture and cultural frameworks allowed disciplinary approaches with the public sphere in mind, such as cultural policy, cultural diplomacy, and translation (Iordanova, 2016). Several edited volumes have appeared around this time, defining a field that utilised a broad scope of interlocking disciplines and approaches (Iordanova, 2008; Iordanova & Cheung, 2010; Iordanova & Cheung, 2011; Iordanova & Rhyne, 2009; Porton, 2009; Wong, 2011). The breadth of these approaches is what makes film festival research an appealing field for scholars from various disciplines, as well as industry players and policy makers.

A useful taxonomy suggested by Marijke De Valck and Skadi Loist in their extensive online bibliography maintained on the website for the Film Festival Research Network (<http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/>) is as follows, with each heading divided into subcategories:

1. Film festivals: film festival studies, histories and political aspects of film festivals, general academic studies on festivals (other than “film” festivals)
2. Festival time: awards, juries and critics
3. Festival space: cities, tourism and publics
4. On the red carpet: spectacle, stars and glamour
5. Business matters: industries, distribution, markets, funds, service guides for professionals, festival (as) organisation



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6. Trans/National cinemas: literature focusing on particular geographies
7. Programming: issues in programming, gatekeeping and aesthetics
8. Reception: audiences, communities and cinephiles
9. Specialised film festivals: identity-based festivals, genre-based festivals, social concern festivals and activism, national and regional showcases, film festivals and new media platforms, TV festivals
10. Publications dedicated to individual film festivals

For the purposes of this report, we will concentrate on research that has focused on the industrial aspects of film festivals, particularly highlighting work that deals with European film festivals and European films at festivals.

Film festivals have been seen as “an alternative distribution network [...] providing audiences with opportunities to enjoy commercially unviable films projected in a communal space” (Peranson, 2008, p. 37). Initially however, festivals were designed to showcase national cinemas, starting with Mussolini’s Italian cinema at the first film festival in Venice in 1932. In the post-war period, festivals became a symbol of rebuilding Europe, while at the same time attempting to redefine film form in contrast to the dominant Hollywood studio film (Harbord, 2002). This latter aim aligns with Thomas Elsaesser’s (2005) conceptualisation of European cinema as constructed and defined in opposition to its other, Hollywood.

Marijke De Valck (2007, p. 81) divides the festival phenomenon into three major historical phases: “the incipient European phase of festivals as showcases for national cinemas” mentioned above; “independent” festivals after 1968, when festivals steered away from the nation-based selection policies; and the worldwide festival boom “in the 1980s and 1990s, when the international film festival circuit was created and festivals were firmly embedded in the system”. Particularly this last period is transnational in nature, as festivals became sites that allow for “transnational encounters and



exchanges”, as nodes in cultural and commercial transnational infrastructures (Iordanova, 2016, p. xiv). Lucy Mazdon (2007, p. 13) underlines the importance of festivals as a space where “a non-Hollywood ‘transnational’ cinema, or more specifically a ‘European’ cinema” might grow.

One must keep in mind however, that most of the festivals discussed here are closer to the festival model Mark Peranson (2008) has termed “business festivals”, aimed at industry players and featuring film markets, with limited access to the regular cinemagoing public. This is opposed to the “audience festivals” model, which prioritises the audiences and most often survives on a smaller operational budget that comes largely from ticket sales. Within this scope, EUFFs lie much closer to audience festivals in terms of their targets, as well as their close ties with governments.

More recent research on film festivals – in addition to a panoply of studies focusing on detailed individual festival case studies – has been addressing the recent challenges to the film festival ecosystem. The unforeseen and massive impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the growing climate crisis have been the primary concerns within this more recent output (Erkilic, 2022; Krainhöfer & Kurz, 2022; De Valck & Damiens, 2023; Osztrowska & Falicov, 2025).

3.3 Data and methods

The first part of the case study draws on combined desk research and qualitative content analysis of interviews with the organisers of the EUFFs in eight non-EU countries that hosted the festival in 2023. The desk research data consists of diverse grey literature, such as EU policy documents, found from the EUR-Lex database, referring to film festivals; the European Commission’s feasibility study and external evaluation of the EUFF; the websites of the EEAS, Cineuropa, EU delegations and the local festival organisations; Cineuropa’s interim and final reports of the EUFF; the practical guide for organising the EUFF; and local festival report from the UK. Moreover, our desk research



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data included feedback responses of the festival organisers from 27 countries, gathered by Cineuropa in 2023. The desk research of this material provided useful information on the development of the scheme, its current implementation and its goals in official policy and communication discourses.

The desk research was supplemented by semi-structured interviews focusing on the practicalities of running the EUFFs and the organisers' opinions and experiences of the festivals, perceptions of the competitiveness of the EFI and views on the role of the festivals in the EU's public diplomacy. The aim of the data collection was to provide a multifaceted perspective of EUFFs with a small but diverse sample of countries. Therefore, the sample included countries covering all continents where the festivals were organised in 2023, countries with both a long and a short history of organising the festivals, and countries with both small and large festivals. The countries selected were Argentina, Canada, Chile, Indonesia, South Africa, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.⁵ From each country, between one and four experts involved in managing the organisation of festivals were interviewed. The interviewees represented the countries' EU Delegations,⁶ partner embassies and foreign cultural institutes, as well as local film or festival organisations. The interviews were divided into two parts. The first part consisted of a series of organisational questions sent by email, followed by a video conference interview. In a few cases, the second part was also conducted by email. In addition, two European Commission officials specialising in EU cultural relations policies and activities, including the EUFF, were interviewed. The interview data comprises a total of nineteen interviewees.

⁵ Despite many attempts, the representatives of only one African EUFF responded to our request to participate in our research.

⁶ Despite many attempts, we did not manage to interview or get comments to our research from the representatives of the EU delegations Indonesia and the UK.



The interviews were held in English, recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised. In this report, we refer to the interviewees as experts representing their organisations, as agreed with the interviewees. The researchers of this study, as well as many of the interviewees, are using English as an additional language. In order to do justice to these interlocutors, the quotes from their interviews in this report are sometimes slightly revised for syntax or grammar.

The interview data was subjected to two stages of qualitative content analysis. First, descriptive country reports were written focusing on the implementation of the EUFFs and identifying the interviewees' views on the competitiveness of the EFI and the EUFFs as public diplomacy. Secondly, a comparative analysis of the country reports was carried out in order to get an overview of the implementation of the EUFF scheme and the curation of the programmes, and to identify the organisers' different conceptions of the objectives and rationale of the festivals. The comparative analysis was carried out as an interactive teamwork in which key observations from the country reports were jointly discussed, critically reviewed and finally structured into the findings of the study.

The second part of the case study draws on the analysis of the EUFF programmes and the most screened films in the selected festivals. The data include the festival programmes and their promotional and communication materials at the festivals' websites and Cineuropa's interim and final reports of the EUFF. This data were enriched with the feedback responses of the festival organisers from 27 countries, gathered by Cineuropa in 2023,⁷ and an interview with Cineuropa's representative. Moreover, the data include three films that were the most screened in our case festivals and four films that were identified as the most borrowed from the Cineuropa's repository for the EUFF organisers.

⁷ The feedback survey included two of our case countries, namely Indonesia and Vietnam.



The qualitative content analysis focused on the notions of Europe, European values and European cinema in the EUFF programmes and their promotional and communication materials. The contents of the films were analysed by focusing on their key themes and values pinpointed in their stories and, thereby, identifying the representations of Europe and European values constructed in the films.

Table 10. Gender aspect of the interview data and the EUFF programmes in the case countries.

Country	Total number of interviews	Number of male interviewees	Number of female interviewees	Total number of films	Number of films with female directors or co-directors	Other gender aspects in the EUFF programmes
Argentina	1	none	1	19	11	The general festival coordinator was a woman. The festival curator was a man.
Canada	4	2	2	28	7	1 out of 3 executive directors responsible for organising festivals in Canada were women. The European guest director at the Ottawa and Toronto festivals was a man.
Chile	2	none	2	47	30	Based on the festival Instagram's page, 2 out of 3 speakers in side events were women.
Indonesia	2	1	1	73	38	Based on the festival catalogue, 2 out of 3 jury members of the short film pitching project were women; the 2 group mentors for the pre-festival event (Road to EoS) were women; the 2 festival guests (invited directors) were men; 3 out of the 4 speakers at Film Talk were women.
South Africa	4	1	3	16	7	Based on the festival website, 3 out of the 6 speakers in the special



						programme were women; in filmmaker Q&As, 4 out of the 9 interviewed filmmakers were women.
Türkiye	1	none	1	63	23	Based on the festival website, the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition organises the gender equality subsection in the competition.
The UK	2	1	1	24	15	The festival coordinator and curator were women. 2 out of 3 speakers in the opening ceremony in London were female. The festival in Leeds included Q&A sessions with the filmmaker of which 7 were women and 7 men.
Vietnam	1	1	none	19	6	A male reviewer was invited to host the post-screening discussions. The same critic acted as a judge in the film reviewing contest.
EEAS	2	none	2	-	-	-

3.4 Country case studies

3.4.1 Argentina

3.4.1.1 Organising the festival

The European Film Meeting in Argentina, Encuentro de Cine Europeo (ECE, <https://cineueargentina.com/>) was held from 5 October to 11 November 2023 in the following 12 cities: Buenos Aires City, Córdoba, General Pico, Mendoza, Morón, Neuquén, Rosario, San Francisco, San Juan, San Miguel de Tucumán, Ushuaia and Vicente López. This was the nineteenth edition of the festival. The festival gathered an audience of 5,200 people, and nineteen films were screened in 119 shows. Virtual screenings, which were implemented due to Covid-19, continued in



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the nineteenth edition of the ECE. Five films were available online between 12 October and 12 November 2023.

The festival was organised in collaboration with the festival organisation, the EU Delegation in Argentina, European embassies and cultural institutes. The festival was financed by the collective financial contributions of these three partners in the following ratios: "70% European Delegation Argentina, 16% European embassies and cultural institutes, 14% European Film Festival (EUFF)" (Email interview AR). The festival involved collaboration between the participating EU countries' consulates, European cultural centres, other film festivals in Argentina, local cultural organisations, the provincial and municipal institutions of cities of Argentina, alternative screening venues, and film universities in several cities (Email interview AR). In 2023, the festival did not receive support from the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts of Argentina (INCAA) due to political complexity during the national elections. The interviewed festival coordinator stated that they aim to forge relations with INCAA to "continue to get the support received in previous years" (Email interview AR). For the first time, ECE collaborated with Cinépolis Recoleta, a privately owned cinema chain, which "opened doors for them to meet local distributors" (Email interview AR).

For the first time, the festival worked with a curator who guided EU embassies and cultural institutes in choosing the film to represent their countries. However, the festival director noted that they faced challenges in obtaining the rights for the films suggested by the curator due to exchange rate differences. Therefore, they had to "compromise between what is desired and what is feasible" (Email interview AR). The festival's "extensive" marketing campaign was managed by three specialised agencies, with a special focus on inclusivity targeting "young professionals, established industry professionals, the general public (across a wide age range), and journalists" (Email interview AR).



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The screenings and side events were held in eighteen venues in twelve cities across Argentina, aiming to reach provincial towns outside the capital city and diversified audiences. The festival organisation team wanted to choose "democracy" as the theme of the nineteenth edition, referring to the 40th anniversary of democracy in Argentina. However, they decided it was too restrictive and chose "European values" instead. (Interview AR). The festival programme consisted of nineteen feature films from eighteen participating European countries, including comedies, dramas, romance films and documentaries.

The festival homepage of the EUFF in Argentina addresses the aim of the nineteenth edition as "promoting dialogue and intercultural understanding of various EU's fundamental principles, including human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, justice and human rights" (ECE homepage 2024). This aligns with EUFF's main aim of "creating cultural exchanges on values prevalent in the culture of the EU such as diversity, inclusivity, LGBTQ+ rights, human rights and more" (EUFF homepage 2024). Moreover, the interviewed festival coordinator, without speaking on behalf of the EU Delegation in Argentina, stated that their general aim as festival coordinators is to bring to audiences European films that are unlikely to be screened in Argentina (Interview AR).

In addition to festival screenings, many side events were organised before and during the festival. The EUFF consortium financed these side events. Since 2021, the European Film Meeting in Argentina has collaborated with Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema (BAIFIC), one of the biggest film festivals in Latin America, to organise training and industry-related activities. This collaboration aims to "create decontracted space for meeting and exchange" between young people and professionals to develop cinema in Argentina (ECE homepage, 2023). In this regard, ECE collaborated on travel arrangements for Triin Tramberg, programmer and curator of the First Features Competition at the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival. Tramberg served as a jury member for the Official Argentine Competition of BAFICI and participated in two roundtables with



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Argentine professionals during the festival in Buenos Aires. Another side event, the European Film Fest Argentina 2023 Goes to School, was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires as part of the "Medios en la escuela" and "Hacelo Corto" programmes. *La traversée / The Crossing* (Florence Mialhe, France, 2021) was screened for students in public middle schools. Moreover, in the context of Buenos Aires Pride Week 2023, the EU in Argentina through the ECE, together with the Undersecretariat of Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism of the City of Buenos Aires, presented *Dating Amber* (David Freyne, Ireland, 2020). Apart from these side events, post-screening discussions were held during the festival (Email interview AR).

The interviewed organiser considers the support of Cineuropa "important and crucial" for organising the EUFF in Argentina. Besides contributing to the festival's budget, 40% of the films showcased were from Cineuropa's repository. "These films were highly appreciated by the audiences" (Email interview AR). In addition, the interviewee addressed the problem of devaluation in Argentina, which makes obtaining the screening rights of European films very hard. Therefore, expanding Cineuropa's repository in the coming years would help them access and show more various European films. In this regard, the festival organisers proposed to the consortium to "building a net" between Latin American countries to negotiate about sharing the cost of obtaining screening rights of European films. Another suggestion for the future is creating an initiative for EU festival organisers in Argentina to visit film festivals in Europe. They have not been able to attend these events for several years due to financial situations. Therefore, an initiative in this field "will help festival organisers in Argentina to get to know the European cinema industry more closely" (Interview AR).

3.4.1.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

Argentina's box office is dominated by Hollywood films occupying the top ten slate of 2023 (Box Office MOJO, 2023). Apart from a couple of films from Spain, France, Portugal and Italy, European



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films cannot be seen in cinemas in Argentina (Interview AR). The interviewed festival coordinator addressed European films as "artistic films" that "have no distribution in Argentina" (Interview AR). So, the EUFF in Argentina is an essential venue for showcasing European films. Besides ECE, there are, however, other international film festivals in Argentina screening European films, such as Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema, Mar del Plata International Film Festival and International Documentary Film Festival Buenos Aires Argentina, which the EU Embassy of Argentina also supports. There are also country-specific festivals, such as Kino Federal, which is organised by the Goethe Institute in Argentina, where one German film per month travels to different cities in Argentina. Some other EU embassies have programmes that show films from their own countries.

The interviewed festival organiser credited these screenings yet addressed barriers to the competitiveness of European film. One barrier is Argentina's economic condition (exchange rate), which makes obtaining screening rights for European films too costly for local distributors. For this reason, many European films are not shown in Argentina. In this regard, the festival organisers have been working on initiatives to expand European cinema's visibility. These initiatives include proposing to the consortium to create a network between Latin American countries to negotiate about sharing the cost of obtaining screening rights of European films. They also asked Cineuropa for a budget for organising a meeting with Argentinian industry professionals to introduce them to European films and discuss obtaining film screening rights. Another initiative is the collaboration of ECE and Cinépolis Recoleta, a privately owned cinema chain whose owners support the expansion of European cinema visibility in Argentina. These initiatives demonstrate the festival organisers' commitment to promoting European films in Argentina despite the existing barriers.

The representative of ECE did not see cultural and linguistic differences as impacting the competitiveness of European cinema at their festival. All films are shown with Spanish subtitles.



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Moreover, Argentina has a "big cinema culture" that attaches importance to the arthouse cinema (Interview AR). However, despite the festival allocating a significant portion of the budget to the campaign and having significant media coverage, people generally prefer to go to cinemas only if they want to see a Hollywood blockbuster (Interview AR). The interviewed festival organiser interpreted the situation as part of a post-Covid phenomenon worldwide that not only concerns European cinema and Argentina: people prefer to watch films at home instead of going to the cinemas (Interview AR).

3.4.1.3 The festival and public diplomacy

The EUFF of Argentina, as highlighted by the interviewed representative of the festival organisation, holds a unique position in the "cultural agenda of Argentinian cinema". It is a platform that engages in public diplomacy at various levels, serving as a vital bridge for fostering connections between national, international, private, and public institutions and partners (Interview AR). One of its key strengths is its collaboration with other international film festivals in Argentina, which not only amplifies its presence in the cultural scene but also enhances its visibility. For example, the festival's side event, ECE Goes to School, is a Programme of the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires that collaborates with Media in the School. The aim of the programme is:

on the one hand, to share with students the mechanisms of media production. On the other hand, develop the necessary tools so children and young people can create their messages through photography, radio and film workshops. In this way, it seeks to promote the analytical understanding of students and critical autonomy that allows them as readers, viewers and producers to review the images and models built from the media. Hacelo Corto is a festival of short films made by children and young people, organized by the Program. (ECE Homepage, 2024)



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In this regard, the festival screened *The Crossing* to middle school students, familiarising young viewers and future media makers with European cinema and values. Another example is the festival's collaboration with the General Directorate of Coexistence in Diversity and the Undersecretariat of Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires. This partnership resulted in the screening of *Dating Amber* during Argentina's Pride Week. This side event was in line with EUFF's public diplomacy goal of fostering "cultural exchanges on values prevalent in the culture of the EU such as diversity, inclusivity, LGBTQ+ rights, human rights and more" (EUFF homepage 2024).

The interviewee underlined that the festival's one of most critical stances in terms of public diplomacy is taking the festival to neighbouring cities with limited film screenings. This initiative plays a crucial role in improving cultural relations within the country as well as with European culture. The festival's screenings and side events extend beyond the borders of Buenos Aires, reaching provincial towns. This allows European films to reach places where they have not been seen before. As the interviewee noted, "The country, as well as provincial small towns, are isolated from the rest of the world. Films are bringing Europe to us, which is a significant cultural exchange for Argentine society" (Interview AR). Thus, the festival promotes "the intercultural dialogue through films" (ECE homepage, 2023).

The EU Delegation is visible in the festival and side events. The Ambassador of the European Union to Argentina attends and gives speeches at festival openings and side events. The festival's openings bring together representatives of participating embassies and cultural institutes that present their countries' films showcased at the festival (ECE Homepage 2024). The interviewed festival coordinator stated that their work with the EU Delegation is progressing smoothly. The EU Delegation in Argentina provides "openness to create and improve" for the festival organisation



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team. They would be happy to hear suggestions from the EU Delegation and the consortium to improve the festival further (Interview AR).

3.4.2 Canada

3.4.2.1 Organising the festival

The European Union Film Festival in Canada (<https://www.euffonline.ca/>) took place in-person in Ottawa and Vancouver from 16 to 26 November and in Toronto from 16 to 30 November 2023. The festival was the 38th edition in Ottawa, the 26th in Vancouver and the nineteenth in Toronto. After the in-person festival, the event continued online with a smaller selection of films – nineteen in total – that were available online across Canada. It was the fourth edition of the online festival.

The EUFF was organised by the EU Delegation to Canada, the Canadian Film Institute (CFI), the Toronto European Union Film Festival, and the Cinematheque in Vancouver. The EU Delegation coordinated as a liaison or facilitator the cooperation with the representatives of the EU Member States, embassies, consulates, national cultural institutes, and the above-mentioned three festival organisers, and oversaw the implementation of the festival's marketing and promotion strategy together with them. The festival organisers were responsible for festival curatorship, programming, technical operations, venue rentals, online management, and marketing implementation (Email interview CAN1). Moreover, several Canadian local and regional organisations and corporations functioned as partners or sponsors of the festival. The financial responsibilities of the EUFF in Canada aligned with the organisational responsibilities: the three organisers had the financial responsibility of putting on the festival, while the EU Delegation covered the promotion costs, and the EU Member States were in charge of the costs of screening rights, unless the films were obtained through Cineuropa's repository.



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Besides the EUFF for full-length feature films, the CFI organises in Ottawa the separate European Union Short Film Festival in collaboration with the EU Delegation to Canada and participating EU Member States. The short film festival has taken place annually in May since 2014. In this festival, the embassies select all screened films, and they are shown to the audience without admission fees. In 2023, the festival screened 22 short films, including dramas, documentaries, animation and experimental films.

In 2023, the EUFF screened 28 feature films, including comedies, road movies, dramas, thrillers, and documentaries, one from each of the EU Member States and Ukraine. The initiative to include Ukraine in the festival came from the EU Delegation after Russia's attack on the country, with the full support from the festival organisers (Interview 2). The initiative sought to "show solidarity with the people of Ukraine" (Canadian Film Institute, 2023), and proceeds from ticket sales from the Ukrainian film were channelled to war relief efforts in Ukraine through the Maple Hope Foundation (EU Delegation to Canada, 2023). The programme of the festival aimed at "showcasing both emerging filmmaking talents as well as recent works by established directors" (Canadian Film Institute, 2023). The festival did not have a specific theme.

An expert from the Canadian Film Institute curated the festival programme in collaboration with an expert from the Toronto European Union Film Festival. Each year, the Canadian Film Festival provides a list of two to three films to the embassies of the EU Member States, who, then, suggest a film to be included in the festival programme. The EUFF in Canada has eligibility criteria that the films need to fulfil: they need to be produced over two to three previous years; they have to have their premieres in the three organising cities; they must not be available for streaming online during the run of the festival; and they must be in the original language with English subtitles (Email interview CAN1). The interview with one of the organisers revealed that the curation of the programme is a balancing act between the organiser's professional views on interesting films



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suitable for the festival programme and the proposals from the embassies and cultural institutes based on their various (non-professional) priorities to select a film for the festival (Interview CAN2).

The interviewed representative of the EU Delegation to Canada found Cineuropa's support much appreciated and the repository a great source of films. The interviewee noted, though, that in the future Cineuropa should consider securing rights for the films' online screenings (Email interview CAN1). For the festival organisers, the repository benefits mostly those embassies that do not have enough film competence to propose any other films or that would not like to use funds for covering the screening rights (Interview CAN2). Free films in the repository are, thus, an easy choice. In 2023, six films were borrowed from the repository. All the organisers noted that they do not need any other support or help from Cineuropa due to their long experience of organising various festivals.

The EUFF in Canada has included some side events but is limited in terms of film industry participation. In 2023, the Embassy of Greece organised Q&A sessions with a Greek filmmaker in Ottawa and Toronto. Individual Member States have occasionally hosted post-screening receptions, offering, for instance, wine and cheese. Moreover, representatives of embassies and consulates have participated in the festival, with some of them introducing a screened film from their country. A similar practice, the Tastes of Europe Reception, provided by EU embassies, has also been organised as part of the EU short film festival in Ottawa.

The target audience of the EUFF in Canada is Canadian moviegoers, European film fans, and European immigrant communities in Canada (Email Interview CAN1). In 2023, in-person screenings drew 7,879 moviegoers in the three cities. The screenings in Ottawa and Vancouver had admission fees, but in Toronto, the majority of seats were available for free, offered on a first-come-first-served basis at the venue, and a limited number of in-person tickets could be purchased in advance to guarantee seating.



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3.4.2.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

Even though the EUFFs in Canada have not had a particular theme, the organisers identified from the screened films various common features and topics that they considered to be characteristic of European cinema more broadly. These features build on various social and societal topics. As one of the organisers noted: “there are social stories”, “there are political scenes”, “there are a lot of human rights things”, “things you don't really see in North America; you always have films dealing with refugees, with racism, with social classes”, “and this year I have seen a lot of them coming about women's stories” (Interview CAN3). Compared to Hollywood films, European cinema was seen as attracting “a niche audience”: “Canadians perceive European cinema as an alternative to more readily available and widely promoted Hollywood movies, the latter enjoying mainstream viewership” (Email interview CAN1).

The website of the Canadian Film Institute described the festival programme as including “a strong line-up of diverse, diverting, and provocative films” (Canadian Film Institute, 2023). Also, the organisers saw that the festival programme had “room for everything” (Interview CAN2) and screening both “festival niche films and [...] very mainstream films”: “it is a kind of mix-match and there is an audience for all of them” (Interview CAN3). Due to such a profile, one of the organisers considered that the festival was “a little bit more middle of the road in terms of the programming” and “not quite as daring as our other festivals” in which “we don't have to worry about the ambassador of whatever country getting upset” (Interview CAN2).

The interviewees noted that the EUFF in Canada attracted generally slightly older viewers than films shown in cinemas and appealed to a particular audience niche: immigrants from Europe or their descendants. This might open up a special market for European films in Canada since “the whole



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history of Canada is generally speaking about European immigration”, as one of the organisers (Interview CAN2) noted. The other organiser described the interests of these viewers as follows:

We see a lot of Latvian people coming to the Latvian films, a lot of Lithuanian people coming to the Lithuanian films, and French and so on and so on. It is a way for people to connect with their heritage, their identity, their language, and culture and also for other people to learn about those cultures and identities, etc. In terms of demographics, [the audience] is very diverse, very much depending on the film; we attract people not only from the surrounding [area] of the cinema, but [...] people who sometimes drive more than an hour because it is the only opportunity to see a film from their country. (Interview CAN3)

European film has thus better potential for attracting bigger audiences in multicultural cities with strong ties to European emigration and diaspora communities. For this reason, the interviewees did not see linguistic or cultural differences as any barrier to European films in a festival context. All interviewees noted how the festival goers are generally interested in and curious about specificities of cultures and languages; they are willing to read subtitles; and some, particularly the immigrants, “just want to hear their language again for two hours in the theatre” (Interview CAN2).

The interviewees, however, recognised a major difference in attitudes towards linguistic diversity and subtitles between a festival context and mainstream cinemas. One of the organisers emphasised the impact of the US film industry and estimated that the number of people who watch films with subtitles is extremely low: “There is just a blockage when the film is not in English because by default people just watch American films in English, not only in English, but in their English” (Interview CAN3). Another organiser was even more straight-talking, noting how cinema is “dominated in Canada by Hollywood” and even “completely colonised” by the US with its English-



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language film industry (Interview CAN2). Therefore, the EUFF could be considered “our little guerilla warfare” since “there is no access to the market for these films anyway” (Interview CAN2).

Beside language, the organisers identified various other barriers hindering the competitiveness of European film. First, the audience does not know anything about the directors or actors of the films due to poor or non-existent promotion (Interview CAN2; Interview CAN3). Second, there is no distribution for these films since local distributors do not want to take any economic risks (Interview CAN3). Third, film rights for European films are often much more costly than comparable films from North America (Email interview CAN4). Such barriers emphasise the role of the EUFF: it is the only occasion to see European films since “pretty much the only film you can see out there in cinema and commercial theatre would be American films – even Canadian films are not represented” (Interview CAN3). This gives the EUFF a special profile: it can be considered “a privilege space for a film to arrive in”, and the audience is “predisposed to think of the films as being of quality because they are in the festival” (Interview, CAN2). The festival organisers recognised their key role in the promotion of European film in Canada. As one of them described:

We are also trying to show that European film is very universal, even though it is different because of different culture, different stories, different background, and context [...] and that European film can be as entertaining as American films. That is the goal. Sometimes entertaining, gripping, thrilling or any of the above. We want to break barriers to what people see as European film: as a foreign language film, as putting them in a special category. It is important not to put it in such a category. (Interview CAN3)



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3.4.2.3 The festival and public diplomacy

The interviewees considered film an effective medium for public diplomacy. The interviews revealed, though, various diplomatic approaches to the EUFF. First, the interviews constructed the EUFF as a high-profile, prestigious diplomatic event with distinguished diplomatic partners and guests. Since embassies, consulates and national cultural institutes participate in the selection of the films and create content for the programme, their representatives are present at the festival. The festivals have included a special programme only for high-level guests. For instance, in Vancouver, the organisers and partners “worked together to help promote the festival and specifically to support the nation holding the EU Presidency to plan and host an EUFF Opening Night gala for the local EU Consulates” (Email interview CAN4). The EUFF in Canada functions as a platform for diplomats to meet each other, foster the “embassy community” in the city, “reeducate each new diplomat that arrives [in the city]” (Interview CAN2), and “show collaboration between EU consulates in the city” (Interview CAN3). These high-level partners have also been interested in promoting their countries and cultures by setting up receptions offering food and drinks at the EUFF. The high-level guests and such promotional activities create a special atmosphere for the festival that also appeals to regular festival goers.

Besides presenting the festival as a high-profile event, the interviewees described its aims as aligning with cultural diplomacy approaches. As the representative of the EU Delegation noted:

EUFF is at the heart of the EU’s public diplomacy activities in Canada and aims to highlight the EU’s rich cultural diversity (films presented in the original language) and film heritage while showcasing both emerging European filmmaking talents and recent works by established European film directors. (Email interview, CAN1)



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Such an approach was, however, mixed with cultural relations and people-to-people approaches.

For instance, the above-quoted interviewee continued to describe the aims of the festival as follows:

EUFF provides a safe space for intercultural exchanges and dialogues. It connects people from different parts of the world and different walks of life. It nurtures people-to-people contacts and facilitates mutual understanding and acceptance of different cultures while promoting artistic expressions and freedom of expression. The transformative power of cinema, of the arts in general, is undeniable. Films open up a world of possibilities, enabling us to stay connected, explore and reflect. (Email interview, CAN1)

For the organisers, too, grassroots cultural exchange was at the heart of the EUFF. The festival and its pre- or post-receptions were seen as bringing people together and enabling the exchange of views, experiences and ideas about the topics of the screened films. Due to such encounters, spontaneous conversations between attendees, and dialogue on stories that may be controversial or touching, one of the organisers identified “a social role behind the festival” (Interview CAN3).

The interviewees in Canada thus saw that the EUFF combines various diplomatic goals. As the representative of the EU Delegation noted: “Cultural cooperation, including film festivals, is a policy priority within the EU and abroad. In external relations, culture represents a soft power tool that supports and complements our diplomacy efforts at the political level” (Email interview, CAN1). For the organisers, too, the festival “creates this mosaic effect” by promoting simultaneously “the idea of the EU as political structure [...] and all of the ideas of tolerance, understanding, cultural exchange – all of those” (Interview CAN2).



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3.4.3 Chile

3.4.3.1 Organising the festival

The European Film Fest in Chile (<https://festivalcineeuropo.cl/>) was held from 15 to 29h June 2023 in Chile in the following 20 cities: Arica, La Serena, Vina Del Mar, Quilpue, Santiago, Rancagua, Curico, Talca, Constitucion, Licanten, Chillian, Conception, Temuco, Pucon, Valdivia, Puerto Montt, Chiloe Island Ancud, Chiloe Island Castro, Coyhaique and Punta Arenas. This was the 25th edition of the festival. The festival gathered an audience of 5,142 people, and 47 films were screened in 36 venues.

The festival was organised in collaboration between the EU Delegation in Chile, European embassies in Chile, Cineuropa and the Chilean Ministry for Culture. The festival was financed by the collective financial contributions of these four main partners. The festival involved collaboration between the participating EU countries' consulates, European cultural centres, local cultural centres, alternative screening venues, universities, and schools in several cities (Email interview CH1). Since many actors were involved in organising the festival, the EU Delegation in Argentina and Embassies worked with a production firm to coordinate all activities. However, due to the difficulties faced in the 23rd edition, the festival decided to take a significant step towards progress and improvement by continuing with a new and more experienced production company in the coming years. A challenge in organising the festival is that, due to a lack of staff, the Goethe-Institut in Chile's film programmer handles the relations between the festival and the ministry alone, creating a specific burden in terms of workload (Email Interview CH1).

The European Film Fest operates without a curator. Each EU embassy selects a film for the festival, with the cultural attachés at embassies usually managing the selection process. Spanish subtitles are a necessary condition, ensuring the festival's accessibility. The films are also selected from Cineuropa's repository. The production firm makes the programme that determines the places and



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times of screenings. The European Film Fest in Chile's marketing campaign is designed to reach a broad audience, including the general public, film students, and children in Santiago and other cities (Email Interview CH2).

The screenings and side events were held in 36 venues in twenty cities across Chile, aiming to reach provincial towns outside the capital city and diversified audiences. For the first time, the festival had a theme of profound historical significance: Memory and democracy, marking the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état by Pinochet and the subsequent overthrowing of democracy in Chile (Interview CH). The festival programme consisted of 47 mainly feature films from twenty participating European countries with various genres, including dramas, comedies, romances, biographies and documentaries.

The festival homepage of the EUFF in Chile emphasises the festival's commitment to cultural exchange and inclusivity. It aims to “explore the cultural diversity of Europe with different focuses such as diversity, sustainability, cooperation, community, heritage and human rights through its different cinematographic perspectives [...] which allows to know and appreciate European films that would otherwise be impossible to see in our country” (European Film Fest Argentina homepage, 2024). This aligns with EUFF's main aim of “creating cultural exchanges on values prevalent in the culture of the EU such as diversity, inclusivity, LGBTQ+ rights, human rights and more” (EUFF homepage, 2024). Moreover, since many cultural activities take place in the capital city, Santiago, one of the festival's main aims is to extend the screenings to peripheral cities and regions to introduce a broader audience to European cinema. “It is important for us to reach out and speak to people who normally do not have the notion of Europe” (Interview CH). The fact that the festival screenings are free of charge makes this feasible.



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Alongside the festival screenings, various side events were organised throughout the year. These included masterclasses and workshops led by European guests and people from the Chilean film industry (Interview CH). To name a few, in the 25th edition, Spanish actress Arantxa de Juan delivered a talk on “Emotional Memory for Character Preparation”, offering insights into character preparation for films. Another masterclass was by the screenwriter and lecturer Vladimir Rivera, who explored the integration of artificial intelligence in the creative process of a screenplay. These sessions and more are available on the festival's YouTube channel and are accessible to the public. In addition to workshops and masterclasses for film professionals and film students in Chile, side events for children are organised, such as special screenings of European films for children at schools in different cities. In the 25th edition, a side event for children was organised with Maria Ignacia Casas, where an interactive workshop encouraged children to visualise nature-related controversies through the engaging medium of short films (European Film Fest Argentina Instagram page, 2023).

The interviewed representative of the EU Delegation to Chile addressed the essential role of Cineuropa that “supports the EU Film Festival in Chile with budget, films and training for the production company that organises the festival” (Email Interview CH2). The interviewed representative of the festival organisation team defines Cineuropa as a “great partner” that is always helpful through the process of the festival (Interview CH). The interviewee exemplified their fruitful working experience with Cineuropa with 22th edition in 2020 almost cancelled due to the pandemic. “In four to six weeks Cineuropa helped us transform the festival into an online event, by providing the platform and the know-how [...] and providing us with films from countries that have no embassy in Chile. The EU Film Festival was the very first online event of this sort in Chile, and it was a huge success” (Interview CH).



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3.4.3.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

With a relatively small film industry, Chile's box office is dominated by Hollywood films (Box Office MOJO 2023). Only a few European films from France, Italy and Spain occasionally visit the Chilean cinemas. Since Chile has a small market, sales agents are reluctant to buy films, failing to cover the costs. Mostly, Argentinian companies buy films for Latin America's South Coast to share the cost and the income (Interview CH). This situation is likely to change in the coming years. Chile has signed co-production agreements with Italy and Germany, intending to grow its film industry (Interview CH). Thus, the presence of the EFI is likely to grow in the country.

The interviewed representative of the festival organisation team distinguishes European films from Hollywood movies that are considered commercial and only offering mere entertainment, “Europe has another mindset than the US and Marvel films [...] Hollywood is Hollywood and it always will have success if it comes to entertainment [...] but there are many people in Chile who cherish having European films to see where they can understand situations that are not our everyday life” (Interview CH). The EUFF in Chile is an essential venue for showcasing European films that “open dialogue with people” (Interview CH). The interviewed representative of the festival team addressed the audience numbers as the weak spot of the festival; however, there is a conscious community that considers the festival “an opportunity to have a week or two to watch something different” (Interview CH). These audiences are primarily middle-aged and older people “who have travelled to Europe or have a special bonding with places” (Interview CH).

The interviewed representative of the festival team did not see cultural and linguistic differences as impacting on the competitiveness of European films and added if the film has a universal story, it engages the audience: “if it's a strong film about women, you'll always have an audience wherever it comes from” (Interview CH). For example, although there is no Turkish population in Chile, a German film about violence against a Turkish immigrant woman “hits people so deep here because



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it's so universal... when you have someone with a touching story, it will always come through"
(Interview CH).

3.4.3.3 The festival and public diplomacy

The EUFF in Chile is an essential platform where the EU Delegation and representatives of participating embassies and cultural institutes come together in openings, screenings and side events. Besides, EU embassies and cultural representatives are present at the first screenings to introduce their countries' films, engaging in cultural relations with audiences (European Film Fest Facebook page, 2023).

For the festival organisers, the value of the workshops and seminars in expanding the notion of film and film jobs for young film students in Chile is at the heart of the festival's public diplomacy agenda. The festival organises face-to-face or online workshops about filmmaking and the industry. "That is something we do actively [...] that was something important because of [learning] know-how that we need. It's a valuable tool for students here as these seminars are expanding our notion of film and film jobs" (Interview CH). These workshops also help students who are "thinking of doing a master's degree in Europe" (Interview CH).

The interviewed festival organiser stated that films are essential tools that communicate European culture to Chilean audiences since "Europe is very far away [geographically] and [distance] also implies a way of living that is not always in our reach" (Interview CH). Participating countries choose films that "speak about their country, economy, the way they live there, culture, language, landscapes" (Interview CH). To increase grassroots cultural engagement, the interviewed festival organiser emphasised the importance of extending the festival screenings to cities outside the capital, aiming to reach people from different classes and social backgrounds. "There is always an



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elite that goes to Europe and enjoys European films. We would like to reach out to other people that are not in the elite and that's why we want to be outside of Santiago and other places" (Interview CH).

The interviewed festival organiser approached the question "should the long-term diplomatic goals of the film festival be maintained or revised?" with caution: "There are no official messages that we have let the audience keep and bring home." However, the interviewee suggested that "diplomatic goals of EU visibility in the country and the region, promoting peace and understanding between countries and also promoting democracy should be maintained and maybe we should emphasise these goals a bit more" (Interview CH). Yet, the interviewee thought this should be done without overtly emphasising the political messages in promoting festivals and films. In Chile's highly polarised social and political atmosphere, "sometimes people say, I'm going to the movies because I'm tired of politics" (Interview CH). Therefore, "we would have to think about a way of speaking about a set of values and democracy [...] touching to universal views and values that are not having a political discourse because that would not be so well received, I think" (Interview CH). The interviewee considered films as fruitful tools to engage with global challenges, such as wars, climate change and democracy at risk, without pushing the viewer away, "European countries are finding answers that we still need [...] European films have a lot to say there" (Interview CH1). So, films showcased in the festival "open up dialogue and make people think and feel for each other" (Interview CH).

3.4.4 Indonesia

3.4.4.1 Organising the festival

The Europe on Screen (EoS, <https://europeonscreen.org/>) festival was held from 16 to 25 June 2023 in Indonesia in the following seven locations: Jakarta, Bekasi, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Bali and Medan. This was the 23rd edition of the festival. After three years of hybrid and online editions,



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the festival returned to in-person screenings, but some side events still took place online or in a hybrid format. The festival gathered an audience of 37,053 for whom 73 films were screened. In addition to this there were the Road to EoS screenings before the festival during which 41 films were screened. According to the representatives of the festival's organising committee, the festival was "quite a success" (Interview ID; email interview ID; EoS catalogue, 2023; EoS report, 2023).

The festival was organised in collaboration between the festival organisation, which involved seventeen staff members, the EU Delegation in Indonesia and all participating EU Member States and European non-EU countries. The festival was financed by the collective financial contributions of these partners. The festival's two co-directors oversaw the operation and curation of the festival programming and liaised with the participating countries. The festival involved collaboration between the participating countries and local cultural organisations, such as European cultural centres, Indonesian government bodies, alternative screening venues and universities in several cities (Interview ID; email interview ID). The festival was marketed "for a local Indonesian audience in hopes to introduce great European films and culture" (Email interview ID). The festival has a Facebook page with 4,500 followers, an Instagram account with 20,300 followers, and a X/Twitter account with 16,700 followers.

The festival directors selected the films after having negotiated with the diplomats and staff members of the embassies and other participating European institutions. The festival organisers described this practice as their "curatorial independence" (Interview ID).

The screenings and other events were held in seventeen different venues, while more than half of the screenings took place in Jakarta. In the festival catalogue, the festival programme was divided into eight categories: Festivities (feature-length films); Festivities: family fare (family themed fiction films); Festivities: released flicks (feature films that have been released in local commercial



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cinemas); Realities (feature-length documentaries); Retrospective: Costa-Gavras (early films and a mini-exhibition of the filmmaker); Specialties: Shorts (compilations of short films); Pre-Festival events (Instagram live sessions with film experts, online film workshops, offline screenings); and Festival events (opening ceremony, film talks, workshop, pitching session, closing ceremony). The Festivities section gathered the biggest audience with 10,018 viewers (Interview ID; EoS catalogue, 2023).

The general – and main – aim of the EoS, which is similar to other EUFFs, “is to showcase the diversity of European film products” and the development of contemporary European film (Interview ID). This aim is in line with “the policy of outreach from all of the embassies and the EU itself” (Interview ID). In addition to this general aim, the EoS is used to find new talents of Indonesian film (Interview ID). Regarding this aim, short film pitching projects for emerging filmmakers and film students have been organised since 2018. Three winners of the pitching project are partially financed by the festival and screened at the next year’s festival. “So, apart from showcasing [what] the best European cinema has to offer every year, we also aim to nurture and develop the next generation of talent” (Interview ID). The festival organisers were also hoping to create bridges between Indonesian and European film industries. Some winners of the pitching project have already been screened at film festivals in Europe (Interview ID).

In addition to festival screenings and the above-mentioned pitching project, many side events were organised before and during the festival. Road to EoS was a pre-festival event with offline and online events. Online events included live Instagram sessions with a total of 26 film experts as speakers and two workshops on “scoring for short films” and “film archive”. In offline events eight films were screened in four European cultural centres in Jakarta just before the start of the festival. Side events organised during the festival included Q&A sessions with film directors Marco Martani (Italy) and



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Alexander Sagmo (Denmark), a film talk with the title “Our pets, our mental health” (EoS catalogue, 2023; EoS report, 2023).

EoS has never had a specific theme for feature films. According to the festival organisers this is a conscious decision. The festival must incorporate films from every EU Member State that has representation in Indonesia and in addition from some European non-EU countries. A specific theme would restrict the participation of those countries that have very small film industries and only a few films to choose from. In the worst case, some countries would not be able to participate if their films did not fit the theme. However, for the compilations of short films the organisers select a theme together with the representatives of the participating embassies and institutions. Last year the theme was sport, and earlier themes include music and “our sea and our land” (Interview ID).

The organisers consider the support of Cineuropa useful. Because the festival screens around 70 films each year, the possibility to get some films from the film repository eases their work as the screening rights for those films have already been cleared (Interview ID). According to Cineuropa’s feedback survey, in 2023 EoS screened six films from the repository. To Cineuropa’s survey question “What kind of support could enhance the quality of the festival?” the organisers answered: “More variety and updated short film packages, as well as more updated feature-length fiction film” (Cineuropa, 2023a).

Despite general satisfaction, the organisers of EoS mentioned one challenge in working with Cineuropa, namely the format of the films. They would prefer to receive the films as file transfers rather than as BluRays, but assumed that this was not possible at the moment. On the other hand, they were glad that the films were not in DCP format, because the cultural centres where the films are screened do not have the equipment to play DCPs. Cineuropa has also helped the organisers get film professionals from Europe to speak and conduct workshops at EoS. In 2023, two European



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filmmakers were invited as guests to the festival as mentioned above. In addition, Cineuropa has helped with the operational aspects of the festival (Interview ID). In Cineuropa's feedback survey the organisers gave an affirmative answer to the question "Did you use the PR and Communication toolbox provided by 'Support to EU Film Festivals' to enhance visibility of your Film Festival?" (Cineuropa, 2023a).

3.4.4.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

Film festivals are the best way to see European films in cinemas in Indonesia. According to the organisers, the kind of films screened at EoS cannot be seen on any other big screens in the country. Besides EoS, there are, however, several other festivals that screen European films, not only fiction films but also documentaries. Such festivals include Jakarta Cinema Week and World Cinema Week. There are also country-specific festivals, such as Kino Fest organised by the German embassy and the Goethe-Institut. In addition, Dutch, French and Italian cinema have their own festivals. European films can also be watched via streaming platforms, but in that case, they are more difficult to access according to the festival organisers (Interview ID).

Despite the many festivals focusing on European cinema, the overall visibility of European films is still very limited, and Hollywood productions dominate the commercial cinemas in Indonesia. In the commercial cinemas, Indonesian films have the biggest market share (56%), followed by US, Korean, Japanese and Indian films. Local streaming platforms are dominated by Korean films and series, local productions coming second. According to the interviewees, of the European films screened in the commercial cinemas of Indonesia, the audience is most likely to see French, German or Scandinavian titles and the most popular genre is horror, action coming possibly second. In general, genre films are the most popular. To sum, the organisers thought that film festivals are crucial in making European cinema known to Indonesian audiences (Interview ID).



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The representatives of EoS did not see cultural and linguistic differences as impacting on the attractiveness of European cinema at their festival at least. All films usually have English subtitles, and the majority of the audience are younger generations who speak and understand English well, because they have studied English at high school and are exposed to English a lot, for example through social media. Similarly, they did not think that cultural differences are an obstacle either. According to them, even comedies travel well. If a film has good English subtitles, audiences can understand jokes. Subtitles are thus a way of overcoming cultural differences (Interview ID).

The festival organisers thought that their audiences consider seeing cultural differences portrayed in films interesting rather than disturbing. They mentioned as an example a scene in which a pig was slaughtered. It aroused discussion about a similar ritual being also performed in some parts of Indonesia. The organisers did not consider cultural issues so much as distinguishing factors, but rather as a way to notice similarities. Nevertheless, they acknowledged their efforts to find audience-friendly films, facilitating the establishment of the aforementioned connections. Essentially, the young audience's familiarity with diverse cultures and languages, coupled with high-quality English subtitles, serve as significant explanatory factors for mitigating the potential emergence of cultural and linguistic disparities (Interview ID). The EoS report for Cineuropa states that the festival saw an increase in young visitors who attended a film festival for the first time. Therefore the organisers strive to develop the festival: "Bringing in newer and younger audiences is one of several aspects necessary to strengthen the continuation of the festival, and the festival team also strives to have programs and means of communication that can attract future audiences" (EoS report, 2023).

3.4.4.3 The festival and public diplomacy

The organisers thought that the festival helps promote international cultural relations through the films:



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if the public diplomacy is aiming at raising awareness towards diversity, towards cultural issues, towards human rights, towards other social aspects. I do not know whether we could measure that, but I do believe that if the film is being watched by people and people still talk about it and there was, like ongoing talk about it in our social media about the films, I think somehow the message could get delivered. (Interview ID)

The organisers did not feel very comfortable talking about public diplomacy, which they thought was outside the scope of their work. However, they did think that the festival helps create connections between Indonesian and European filmmakers. In 2023, European film professionals visited EoS in person for the first time. Workshops and Q&A sessions provided an opportunity to share information about film industries in Indonesia and Europe. Local filmmakers and other film professionals were involved in the workshops as moderators and the pitching project offered emerging filmmakers an opportunity to promote their projects (Interview ID). In Cineuropa's feedback form, they agree that the EU Delegation is "recognised as key operator and focal point for cultural diplomacy" mentioning that the representatives of European embassies are invited to give comments before film screenings and discuss with audiences after screenings. The EU Delegation is also given visibility in the promotional materials of the festival "as the key operator of the festival" (Cineuropa, 2023a).

3.4.5 South Africa

3.4.5.1 Organising the festival

The EUFF in South Africa (<https://www.eurofilmfest.co.za/2023-home/>) took place both in Johannesburg and Cape Town from 12 to 20 October and in Durban from 13 to 22 October 22 2023. This was the seventh edition of the EUFF in the country, but the first time that it was extended to Durban. In 2023, the in-person festival was accompanied by selected online screenings, as is briefly discussed later.



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The organisation of the EUFF in South Africa is more complex than usual. Its website states that it is a partnership project of the Delegation of the European Union to South Africa; the participating European embassies of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine; and the cultural agencies of British Council, Camoes Institute of Portugal, Diplomatic Representation of Flanders, French Institute in South Africa, Goethe-Institut and Italian Cultural Institute. The festival is organised in cooperation with Cineuropa, supported by Ster Kinekor, The Labia and coordinated by Creative WorkZone. The programmes in Eswatini and Lesotho are organised in partnership with the Delegations of the European Union to the Kingdoms of Eswatini and Lesotho respectively, and the Alliance française in Maseru and Mbabane. (EUFF SA website)

In practice, according to an email interview with the EU Delegation in South Africa, the main partners were identified as, besides the EU Delegation itself, the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and a joint steering committee (with representatives from the EU Delegation, the Institut Français South Africa, Switzerland, the British Council, and the Goethe-Institut), which provided strategic guidance and managed the curators of the festival. The opening night itself was co-organised jointly by the EU Delegation and the curators. Moreover, the representatives of all EU Member States were invited to participate – as well as Ukraine, whose inclusion in the festival was coordinated through the EU Delegation and the Cultural Counsellor group (Email interview with the EU Delegation to SA). Indeed, the festival also showcased a film from Ukraine, as had already been the case in 2021 and 2022. It should also be noted that the collaboration with the Kingdoms of Eswatini and Lesotho transforms the EUFF in South Africa into a particularly complex and transnational festival.



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As for the curation and the organisation of the festival, it was led by directors Magdalene Reddy and Peter Rorvik, who were directly contracted by the EU Delegation, following a decision of the EUNIC steering committee within it (Interview SA3). Reddy and Rorvik work independently under the banner of a company named Creative WorkZone. They selected the theme of the seventh edition of the festival based on the selected line-up – which, “as in previous years [...] features the most recent and award-winning films from across Europe” (EUFF SA website, 2023). Crucially, although Reddy and Rorvik worked independently, they consulted nonetheless with the Member States involved (Email interview with the EU Delegation to SA). Both are cinema industry professionals – one is the former director of the Durban Film Market and the other the current director of the Durban Film Institute. The independence of this team is valued by interviewees – supporting high-quality festivals, facilitating the inclusion of a European-African co-production and overcoming national-centric logic. This goal, that is, the attempt to shift from a national to a European logic, is evident in the following quote: “It was actually a film from Africa co-produced with Europe, so it was not an Italian or French film” (Interview SA3).

In practice, interviewees highlighted the fluid and collaborative approach taken in the development of the EUFF, described as being “developed in the frame of EUNIC in a very open cluster [...], which proves to be very efficient [...] because the governance is within EUNIC. There is a steering committee based on the volunteering people, including one representing the EU Delegation. And this steering committee gives a contract to the service provider” (Interview SA3). The steering committee, which includes five members and meets monthly, is currently chaired by the EU Delegation – despite it only holding observer status (Interview SA4). Meetings report back to EUNIC and occasionally to EU Member States, who are consulted and may ask for changes to the selection made by the curators if there are serious concerns for political reasons. This leads to moments of negotiation between the EU Member States and the independent curators.



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However, mostly the communication with EU members is “made through the EU Delegation in South Africa and EUNIC” (Interview SA3). Besides selecting the service provider and discussing with them broad issues regarding the festival (such as whether there are online screenings), the steering committee takes on a role of liaison “with the other countries involved in the EU Film Festival” (Interview SA3) namely by sending out invitation letters alongside the EU Delegation. Applications for seed EU funding are also made jointly between the steering committee and the EU Delegation. Funding is a combination of seed EU/EEAS funding, EU delegation funding, contributions by participating countries, Cineuropa and ticketing (Interview SA3), as well as surplus funds from the previous festival. This collaborative approach can also be seen in the fact that the EUFF is scheduled in order to avoid competing with screenings organised by the Institut Français and, more broadly, with the Film Festival in Durban.

Communication is led by the service provider, who is supported by each institution participating in the festival with promotion through their own channels, namely of images and text created by the service provider. This ensures that even embassies of participating countries without communication services can contribute to these efforts. The steering committee aims “to communicate, not as a country, let's say, not as France, but as a very European festival [...] as a bigger entity [...] the idea is that the French level is lower than the European level” (Interview SA3). Nonetheless, the festival is also communicated and marketed via the involved embassies, as well as in partnership with a major South African newspaper (*Daily Maverick*). The festival has a strong social media following on Instagram (more than 1,300 followers), Facebook (almost 7,000 followers), YouTube (more than 400 subscribers), X/Twitter (more than 1,000 followers; figures from July 2024).

In practice, despite its limited role in official terms, the EU Delegation is a key facilitator. It drafts, consults and signs off the application to Cineuropa to “safeguard a bit EU interests” (Interview SA4).



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It was also central to including Ukraine (and, previously, Georgia), both in terms of arguing for it and in terms of convincing other EU Member States to sponsor it. The EU Delegation leads opening nights with the presence of the ambassador to “make sure that as a delegation and as Team Europe, we get as much as possible out of the Film Festival in terms of public diplomacy, and I also see my role [as] bridging the gap between cultural counsellors of the EU” (Interview with the EU Delegation to SA). This role requires mediating between the curatorial team, EUNIC decisions and the steering committee, while also “pushing for the fact that, you know, it’s a joint ownership” (Interview with the EU Delegation to SA).

The support received from Cineuropa was deemed positive by all interviews. Besides the financial support and a responsive approach whenever assistance is needed, however, the repository is used in a limited manner because it is deemed to not have the latest films: “Because South Africa has a very discerning home audience and strong film festivals in the country, we need to ensure that, in order for us to attract our audiences, we have to give the latest films” (Interview SA2). Cineuropa also supported a number of side events. In the case of Eswatini and Lesotho, the repository was used and Cineuropa’s support was deemed crucial (Interview SA3). However, future funding will require joint applications between different countries and, while the relevance of this approach from a funder perspective was understood, the relevance in the specific context of a model that works, i.e. in which South Africa has an existing and trusted contract provider, is not necessarily doable: “If we have to apply for three countries for one funding for instance, it’s making it more difficult to implement the festival” (Interview SA3).

In 2023, the in-person festival showcased sixteen feature films, one from each of the EU Member States involved and Ukraine, as well as an African-European co-production between Sudan, Egypt, Germany, France, Sweden and Saudi Arabia. The programme of the festival aimed at “delivering a showcase of salient new films; issue-based stories that are informative, inspiring and usually



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provocative in nature; they are designed to touch you, move you, and make you think” (statement by Festival Directors Magdalene Reddy and Peter Rorvik on the website). It included six community screenings of *Nayola* (José Miguel Ribeiro, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium & France, 2022), four of *Close* (Lukas Dhont, Belgium, Netherlands & France, 2022), and two of *EO* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Poland & Italy, 2022) across South Africa. Alongside the EUFF, a satellite programme of special events took place in Eswatini (20–22 October) and in Lesotho (26–28 October) without admission fees. This screening programme took place for the second time.

The target audience of the Film Festival in South Africa is multiple. The festival is successful at reaching knowledgeable audiences but could strengthen its engagement with “young people who do not access the cinema” (Interview SA3) and local audiences without access to specialised cinemas or platforms besides multiplex cinemas, “which basically play a lot of movies for children and teenagers and the Hollywood blockbusters” (Interview SA3). In fact, one of the interviewees noted that some audience members of screenings “were genuinely saying: ‘But are you really making films in Europe?’” (Interview SA1). However, there was some debate as to whether the organisers are “reaching new audiences or are we reaching those who are already fans of European cinema” (Interview SA4). Whereas screenings tended to focus on the latter, the side events targeted “a very specific group like the film students” (Interview SA4).

As in other EUFFs, the Film Festival in South Africa included several side events across the country, and industry participation characterised some of these events. Indeed, the festival website highlights “a series of engagements with practitioners, audiences and communities” (EUFF SA website). This included an online webinar in which filmmaker Mohamed Kordofani and Vice Dean of Research in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg, Professor Pragna Rugunanan, discussed two films, *Goodbye Julia* (Mohamed Kordofani, Sudan, Sweden, Germany, Saudi Arabia, France & Egypt, 2023) and *The Old Oak* (Ken Loach, UK, France & Belgium, 2023) and used them



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to examine “the causes and impacts of migration, its current escalation around the world, very much including South Africa where xenophobia is also escalating. What do these films tell us about our world? Very importantly, how should we as individuals be understanding and responding to it all?” (EUFF SA website). The events also included two iterations of a cinematography workshop in collaboration with Wits Film School Theatre and Baxter TV Studio in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The workshop for budding cinematographers was led by Pierre de Villiers, whose “film *Goodbye Julia*, which opens the festival, had its World Premiere in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival 2023 and went on to win the Prix de La Liberté prize (Freedom Award)” (EUFF SA website).

Finally, the special events also included a film screening and discussion hosted by the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender at the University of Pretoria. In the last case, the conversation focused on *Close*, “an Oscar-nominated drama about two 13-year-old boys whose friendship is shattered by the pressures of masculinity” seen as a “moving portrait of identity and independence, heartbreak and healing, and love” (EUFF SA website). This reflects a commitment to finding “new ways of attracting audiences, working with community organisations” (Interview SA2). As the festival organiser notes: “It is not easy. The infrastructure in disadvantaged communities is very weak, so we have to look at ways in which we can create spaces for cinema in these communities” (Interview SA2).

Special events also took place in Lesotho and in Eswatini. A scriptwriting workshop and a lecture were organised. The scriptwriting workshop was run by Zornitsa Sophia, who has written, directed and produced four feature films, two documentaries and directed seven TV series, one theatre performance and an opera and directed at budding scriptwriters. As for the lecture, it was given by theatre director, academic and cultural activist Elena Panayatova; the festival's opening film, *Mother* (Zornitsa Sophia, 2022, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany & Poland) was based on her story and experiences in Kenya. The session was called Performing Arts for Social Change and it was



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facilitated by performing artists, educators and social workers. In Lesotho, both events took place at the Alliance française in Maseru. These events also took place in Eswatini; twice in the case of the workshop, and once in the case of the lecture. The Alliance Française also hosted these special events in Eswatini (Alliance Française in Mbabane). It should be noted that the events in both countries were very noteworthy for the local context. As one festival organiser noted:

In Eswatini there is no other film event [...]. There are two multiplex cinemas in the country, which basically play a lot of movies for children and teenagers and the Hollywood blockbusters. But let's say for European cinema, local cinema, there is nothing. But of course the challenge is that there is not really a film culture and there is basically zero awareness of European cinema. (Interview SA1)

The main audiences of the festival were “South Africans [...], the South African film industry, film lovers, expats, and Europeans living in the country” (Interview SA2). According to the EU Delegation, close to 10,000 people participated both offline and online (Email interview with the EU Delegation to SA). The screenings in Johannesburg and Cape Town had subsidised admission fees (80 and 70 rand, respectively). In Lesotho and Eswatini, seats were available for free.

3.4.5.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

Interviewees disagreed with the idea of (ir)relevance or lack of competitiveness. For some, the traditional market definition of the term does not cover the value of the EFI. Rather, “the strengths of the EFI are its diversity, the big number of co-productions, the richness of content” (Interview SA1); “the European film culture is a strong culture” associated with “very independent arthouse films” (Interview SA1). This understanding of value influences the content of EUFF in South Africa in that it inspires requests for the inclusion of “films from newer members of the EU to have a different



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perspective [and so that it] does not have just French content, Italian content, Spanish content. Let's try to have Romanian content, Bulgarian content, Polish... to really account for this diversity" (Interview SA1). This value is understood as something that is sustained through active policies.

Other issues mentioned as central to European film are the openness of the EFI onto the world (Interview SA1), which differs from its internal diversity, the broad topics of films, which allows the industry to speak about issues that are also "topical to the African continent" such as "about the rising Islamism about extremism" (Interview SA1), and artistic freedom. As a festival organiser noted: "Culture practitioners are also among the most engaged for human rights, for the rule of law, so this is something really important [...]. Support to independent cultural practitioners is also supporting European values" (Interview SA1).

The discussion of competitiveness highlighted the need to consider in a more long-term and contextual manner the relation between the EU, Africa and other continents and film industries – which are "not on the same playing field" (Interview SA2) and focus on different audiences (Interview SA2, referring to Hollywood and European cinema).

Two interviewees suggested reframing competitiveness beyond existing market trends and seeing the EFI as potentially competitive as long as there is an effort to build audiences and markets. Cinema audiences are also decreasing in South Africa, and they concentrate on US films, which have a central role in the local market: "most of the films that are screened are from America. In a way, you cannot compete with that" (Interview SA3). In this context, festivals are key to building audiences and markets – "it's also through this kind of festival that films can find their public" (Interview SA3). This work is accompanied by the work of national cultural institutes, who occasionally send South African buyers to their European national markets (Interview SA3). The EUFF in South Africa reveals a positive impact of these efforts. While "the first year was quite



disappointing in cinema numbers [...] this year we had much better numbers from the cinema screenings [...] whatever was shown at the time, our films outperformed [it] on average” (Interview SA4).

The promotion of linguistic diversity is seen by interviewees important to “counterbalance a host of content” (Interview SA1) that circulates from Hollywood. However, there is disagreement about whether providing subtitles would be a further barrier. Some stated that local audiences “are not used to subtitles and the subtitles are of course in English [which] is not their native tongue” (Interview SA1). However, dubbing would require vast resources and “would remain a barrier” (Interview SA1). Other interviewees believed that local audiences are indeed used to watching subtitled films (Interview SA2) and that subtitles do not add a further barrier to viewers. The key barrier lies in the price of tickets, which remain high for locals despite being subsidised.

This being said, two interviewees mentioned the lack of cultural diversity in EUFF films as an important issue, particularly in terms of representation – one of them remarking that “we had a trailer last in 2022 and [...] there was not a single person in the trailer that wasn't white” (Interview SA4) and in terms of the broad narrative that is portrayed of the EU as a model. As a festival organiser noted:

I think we have a tendency, in our public diplomacy, to be like “look at us. We're so great. We do your democracy, we do human rights. You know, we're a model”. And I feel like that's where the Film Festival actually can play a big role as trust-building to also show some of the dark sides of Europe and the issues in our society, whether it's racism or migration or you know the war. (Interview SA4)



3.4.5.3 The festival and public diplomacy

There was some disagreement regarding the goals of the festival and the place of public diplomacy in this context. When asked about such goals, one interviewee stated the following: “the first is to show what is the latest creation of European cinematography [...] And the other objective is to show the diversity of European cinematography and to raise awareness on specific challenges” (Interview SA3). A different interviewee agreed with the first objective but there was disagreement regarding the following ones. “We do have objectives for the festival. One is to showcase the best cinema of Europe. The other is to reach audiences from communities that do not have cinema facilities. The other is to reach out to the youth. And the fourth one is to ensure that the festival is a cultural event on the South African film calendars to attract the local film industry to this event” (Interview SA2). A similar situation is evident in statements by another interviewee:

First of all, what the European Film Festival is intended for is to promote European culture and European cultural diversity, of course, much of the selection was meant to include films which are relevant for local audiences. A lot of films focus on African issues. Secondly, the most successful were the side events. The workshops with producers, with film professionals. It's another cultural landscape [...]. It was extremely important from a public diplomacy point of view. (Interview SA1)

First, the interviewees described the aims of EUFF in South Africa as aligning with public diplomacy and people-to-people approaches. As one of the interviewees noted:

We work with the community. Community organisations, not so much in the film industry, but in the cultural sector. With theatres, we work with them to put on the films. In the communities where there are no cinemas [...] we work with schools where we screen the films in schools. With the local film industry, we invite them to the opening night. (Interview SA2)



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Another interviewee noted that:

the goal of public diplomacy is to build trust between people by use of culture and that's exactly what the European Film Festival is aiming to do. For instance, we have this workshop we had, I only speak for the 2023 edition. We had two Bulgarian film professionals, the director and the producer, who was also a theatre director. So they conducted this workshop for professionals. They also engaged with the local audience. It was perhaps the best part of the Film Festival because the exchanges were really intense and rich. (Interview SA1)

Indeed, the festival makes possible exchanges around discussions that link to local topics but from a new angle with new communities: "The festival brings films that are rarely seen in South Africa. It confronts the audience with films that they don't know. I think the idea from these screenings is to hear how people react" (Interview SA3). In particular, the side events provide "an opportunity to be in townships and places that we rarely go to" (Interview SA4). This supports efforts to develop a common "shared response to global issues and a display of shared human challenges and emotions" which supports trust-building (Interview SA1). Indeed, one interviewee stated that they use the EUFF "to create awareness around Ukraine or how can I use it to have difficult discussions on migration and xenophobia. That's my entry point now" (Interview SA4).

Additionally, screenings support the effort of trust-building by opening up critical acknowledgement by EU actors of the EU's shortcomings. As one of the interviewees noted: "It's easier to have discussions about human rights and the violations and issues if we can say look here is where we messed up" (Interview SA4). It should also be noted that this work of trust-building with local communities is enabled by the existing local networks of the two directors of the festival. In the case of Lesotho and Eswatini, however, despite an attempt to consult the local industry, a debriefing



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meeting with the local cinema sector after the festival resulted in the request for the EUFF to finance co-productions, which is not something that the EUFF can currently support.

However, this exchange element remains something that is associated mostly with side events of the EUFF. Moreover, the language used by the EU in terms of the EUFF serving the goal of sharing European values was seen as colonial and in opposition with the approach of “cultural diplomacy of working together as opposed to me coming with my values and showing you what my values are” (Interview SA2). A tension was also identified between this language and the lack of balancing in terms of films between EU and local films. Moreover, a further tension was identified between the goals of Member States and the European dimension of the festival:

They're looking at it much more from a public diplomacy angle [...] not about whether this is cinematographically the most exciting film or if it's showcasing something new of what European cinema is. Does it put my country in a good light with South Africa? Does it put across the messages that I want to put across? Will it buzz on social media? Will it give my ambassador a nice photo op? (Interview SA4)

Such an approach was, however, mixed with a more traditional cultural diplomacy approach, as illustrated by events combining the director of a film from Bulgaria with a visit of the ambassador. This approach is reflected both in external and in internal events. The EU Delegation organised a closed screening for staff and family of Team Europe (that is, the EU Delegation, Member States and other European entities in the region) on the situation in Ukraine, to which they also invited human rights organisations and people working for peace. Although it was a closed event, it nonetheless became an “opportunity to engage on issues around human rights and peace and security” (Interview SA4) which was communicated on social media too.



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Finally, some interviewees acknowledged the EUFF as a high-profile diplomatic event. For example, one screening was discussed as putting together in the same room diplomats from different countries, namely one from Russia, which had not yet recognised its responsibility for the issue depicted in the film. While recognising that watching the film was a difficult experience, screening it served a purpose from a political point of view (Interview SA4).

Interviewees particularly agreed with the need to scale up the community and audience engagement work: “In the far-off places there is really limited knowledge of European cinema and the European Film Festival would need to be part of a greater public diplomacy effort” (Interview SA1). Moreover, “the EU and the Member States could do a lot more in working with the locals” (Interview SA2). In particular, “one of the big challenges is to bring [the films] to audiences and particularly young audiences, Black audiences [...] from remote areas” (Interview SA3). In general, “more [efforts] could be dedicated to bringing the cinema where it doesn’t go” (Interview SA3). Another interviewee also recognised this issue, linking it to the need for further engagement from different partners:

it’s not like we’re facilitating too many exchanges now [...]. You could go as an embassy and put up a banner outside and talk to audiences before and after. But that has not been done. It’s a bit of an unfair approach where you want the curators to do everything and you sit back and watch and then you complain when you didn’t get the numbers. (Interview SA4)

Although the number of partners who engage in this kind of work is limited, the result of those who do it is very positive. In the case of an event with the engagement of Flanders, an interviewee noted that “it was so appreciated, you know, from those communities [...]. And for some it may have been the first person they meet from Europe” (Interview SA4).



Therefore, the interviews in South Africa suggest that the EUFF supports several diplomatic goals but that there is an issue of capacity and concerted effort to tap into its potential. As one of the interviewees notes: “I think that it is a huge missed opportunity, all the kind of work and money that goes into this in terms of what we then get out on the public diplomacy side” (Interview SA4). Moreover, some interviewees suggested that supporting the local industry to grow in a more consistent manner would also indirectly build trust and support the EU’s diplomatic goals (Interview SA1). This would also require reflecting on and potentially expanding the short to medium-term goals served by the EUFF. As the interviewees question: “You can also debate [whether] we are reaching new audiences or are we reaching those who are already fans of European cinema?” (Interview SA4) and “Is the purpose [that] these people will all walk away and love Europe or is the purpose that we’ve built more capacity through these engagements and supported the local industry? Or is it a purpose that we promoted [...] European cinema?” (Interview SA4).

Finally, the choice of the films would require rethinking so that a higher percentage of them would support community engagement: “I see this big mismatch of how it’s set up and then what Member States want on the ground. Most of them want to do this community screening thing and township screenings” (Interview SA4). Finally, it should be noted that the promotion of European film was secondary to all interviewees – “it’s not at the top that we really have to promote European cinema” (Interview SA4). However, one interviewee suggested that Member States with stronger resources for the film industry are nonetheless more likely to see the value of the EUFF than smaller countries, which “look at they kind of look at the investment versus audience and then it’s not good value for money. It’s different for [the] Goethe [Institut] and the Institut Français and all these well-resourced [members]. They see a value of the entire festival” (Interview SA4).



3.4.6 Türkiye

3.4.6.1 Organising the festival

The EU Delegation to Türkiye has organised the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition and EU Human Rights Film Days since 2010. The European Delegation initiated another festival titled European Cinema Week in Your City in 2023. This event will be continued with the new title European Cinema Days in 2024 (Email Interview TR). The EU Human Rights Short Film Competition called for the hashtag #StandUp4HumanRights in 2023. Besides human rights, the EU Delegation “encouraged short film directors to think about gender equality and the climate crisis” (EEAS Türkiye homepage, 2023).

The finalist short films were screened in the EU Human Rights Film Days, held from 7 to 17 December 2023 in Istanbul and Ankara. This was the thirteenth edition of the festival. The festival gathered an audience of 2,300 people, and fifteen feature-length films and six short films were screened. The festival also organised a children's film section and screened five films. As part of the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition, nineteen shortlisted films were also screened. Virtual screenings were available online between 8 and 17 December 2023. The European Cinema Days was held from 16 April to 12 May 2024 in the following ten cities: Ankara, İstanbul, Antalya, Denizli, Diyarbakır, Edirne, İzmir, Samsun and Trabzon. This was the second edition of the festival. Eighteen feature-length films were screened.

The festival was organised in collaboration with the festival organisation, the Delegation of the EU to Türkiye, the EU Member States, and the EU National Institutes for Culture in İstanbul and Ankara. The EU Delegation is cooperating with the local municipalities “for the announcement and screenings of this event” (Email Interview TR). The EU Delegation and EU Member States fund the festival. “The Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye does not receive any financial support from local companies, institutions and public funds” (Email Interview TR). The European Cinema



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Days is organised in contributions of “EU Member States and at the kind hosting of 8 EU Information Centres” (Email Interview TR).

The Information and Communication Officer of the Delegation of the EU Türkiye is the organiser and coordinator of the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition, EU Human Rights Film Days, and the European Cinema Days. The interviewed coordinator “forms up the screening programme with the assistance of a technical team, carrying out film search from the current world, especially European film festivals” (Email Interview TR). Festival marketing campaigns targeted the general public in Türkiye. They were conducted over “the European Delegation social media accounts, supported by the EUMS, EUICs (European Union Information Centre Collection) and EUNIC; in addition, via paid digital advertising” (Email Interview TR).

The EU Human Rights Film Days screens films focusing on human rights issues with films from eighteen participating European countries, including comedies, dramas, romance films, documentaries and animations. As part of the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition, nine shortlisted films in the human rights section, five in the gender equality section and five in the ecology crisis section were screened. A three-person pre-jury and a five-person main jury selected these films. Awards were distributed to the first prize-winning films from each section in a ceremony held during the EU Human Rights Film Days. The European Cinema Days do not have a particular theme. The festival programme consisted of eighteen feature films from eighteen participating European countries, including comedies, dramas, romance films, documentaries and animations.

The EU Delegation homepage of the EU Human Rights Film Days addresses the aim of the thirteenth edition: "On its 75th anniversary, this invitation is for you to think and share together through art on the inalienable and indispensable human rights set forth by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; #StandUpForHumanRights!" (EEAS Türkiye homepage, 2023). This aligns with



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EUFF's main aim of "creating cultural exchanges on values prevalent in the culture of the EU such as diversity, inclusivity, LGBTQ+ rights, human rights and more" (EUFF homepage, 2024). In the online catalogue of the other EUFF, European Cinema Days, the Head of the Delegation of the EU to Türkiye states that "The European Cinema Days in Türkiye is an opportunity to embark on a European journey through the recent cinematic works of Europe. The event promises to be an experience highlighting the diversity of European culture and the multiplicity of voices, inviting you to delve into our shared heritage, and the realms of creativity, imagination and storytelling" (European Cinema Days electronic catalogue, 2024). This also aligns with the EUFF's main aim of organising film festivals, as mentioned above.

In addition to screenings, side events were organised during the EU Human Rights Film Days. The Q&A sessions with the directors have been held. Moreover, panels were organised after the screenings, featuring expert panellists who shared their knowledge and insights. The interviewed coordinator stated that "these interactive panel sessions covered crucial human rights topics, bringing together experts and viewers for meaningful discussions" (Email Interview TR).

The interviewed coordinator stated: "European Delegation is content with the chance of having access to the FPI [Foreign Policy Instrument] Film Repository, which provided a bunch of films within the selection" (Email Interview TR).

3.4.6.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

The Turkish film and TV industry is a vibrant sector, closely tied with the EFI. This connection is evident in the screening of European films and the numerous co-production opportunities with European countries. The question of competitiveness in the Turkish case is not a simple one. As the interviewed festival coordinator stated this question falls outside their area of expertise: "The efforts



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of the EU Delegation to Türkiye are within the cultural diplomacy objective; therefore the EU is not in a position to comment on this question. Film critics in Türkiye can give a better answer” (Email Interview TR).

This answer resonates when considering Türkiye’s specific relationship with the EFI, characterised by geographic proximity and long-standing co-production relations. Scholars have noted that:

European films have significant theatrical releases in Türkiye, but the number of releases does not tend to translate into box office success. Specifically, 13% of the films released in 2022 were European productions, constituting only 1% of ticket sales. In 2023, European film theatrical releases rose to 15.24%, and European film ticket sales doubled, reaching 2% of all ticket sales. (Dâmaso et al., forthcoming)

In addition to releases in cinemas, Turkish audiences watch examples of European cinema at various festivals and film days held throughout the year (Dâmaso et al., forthcoming). Furthermore, Türkiye has the most active users and engagement in countries where MUBI (the streaming service that mainly showcases European cinema) operates (Interview with MUBI Türkiye programmer). Türkiye’s special and somewhat precarious relationship with Europe is also reflected in its filmmaking relations. Turkish arthouse filmmakers have long engaged in co-productions with their European counterparts, having been part of Eurimages since 1990. For instance, “from 1990 to 2021, Eurimages supported the production of 98 films in Türkiye” (Dâmaso et al., forthcoming).

Co-production relations between European countries and Türkiye have become two-way in recent years. Türkiye’s national public broadcaster (TRT) has recently started co-producing European films. So far, TRT co-produced *Triangle of Sadness* (Ruben Östlund, United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Mexico, France, Türkiye, Denmark, United States, Switzerland, Greece, 2022), *Klondike* (Maryna Er



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Gorbach, Ukraine & Türkiye, 2022), *It Must Be Heaven* (Elia Suleiman, France, Qatar, Germany, Canada, Türkiye, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2019) and *Quo Vadis, Aida?* (Jasmila Žbanić, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Austria, Netherlands, France, Poland, Germany, Norway, Türkiye, 2020). Co-productions play a significant role in the film industry, and these films return from prestigious festivals with multiple awards. However, with the exception of *Klondike*, Türkiye has a very minor share in these productions, therefore we doubt co-productions will have a major impact on the film industry of the country.

3.4.6.3 The EUFF and public diplomacy

The interviewed festival organiser stated that the EU Human Rights Film Days and the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition are integral parts of the EU Delegation's cultural diplomacy:

These events not only promote Europe's values and ideas but also give visibility to the EU's involvement in human rights and also serve as a powerful tool to build bridges between people, notably the young, to raise awareness, promote debate and reinforce mutual understanding with an emphasis on human rights issues. (Email Interview TR)

For the festival organiser, the EU Delegation to Türkiye "gives great importance to announcing the EU Human Rights Short Film Competition (EU HRSFC) in the universities" (Email Interview TR). In this regard, "the jury members of the EU HRSFC are selected from prominent names in the fields of cinema and arts, media and news, academia and human rights defenders in Türkiye" (Email Interview TR). The EU Human Rights Short Film Competition organises face-to-face meetings with jury members for the finalists: "Finalists get the chance to meet them in person and exchange experiences, ask questions at a closed session reserved for them. In this way, finalists' initial business network is created" (Email Interview TR). Thus, the competition aims to facilitate the access of young professionals to the industry.



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Against this background, the interviewed festival organiser stated that the EU Delegation to Türkiye conducts public surveys to measure the impact of activities: “Both the EU Human Rights Film Days and EU Human Rights Short Film Competition are amongst outreach and advocacy activities, which by surveys, acknowledge a positive change in their perception of the EU and/or international policies and standards” (Email Interview TR).

Since many cinema and festival screenings are held in two big cities in Türkiye, namely Istanbul and Ankara, the new initiation of the EU Delegation to Türkiye, the European Cinema Days, travels to other cities where it is hard to access European films “which creates synergies between municipalities, local administration, local representatives, experts and the locals” (Email Interview TR). The interviewed festival organiser stated that “EU Delegation’s aim in organising the European Cinema Days was cultural dialogue and the promotion of European culture and European films in Türkiye” (Email Interview TR). The interviewed festival organiser emphasised the importance of films to promote grassroots cultural engagement:

Films are the most convenient way to invite people to different perceptions and convince them to change positively. When the directors and actors visit the country where their film is screened, the film and its producing country gain more attention in the eyes of the public because the person is there live and there is a chance for talk and exchange of ideas. (Email Interview TR)

To the question “should the long-term diplomatic goals of the film festival be maintained or revised?” the interviewed festival organiser answered that “the main framework of the long-term diplomatic goals of EUFFs is to increase visibility of the EU and cultural dialogue; and yet, some themes may be highlighted according to the requirements that may be seen over the years” (Email Interview TR).



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3.4.7 The UK

3.4.7.1 Organising the festival

The fifth edition of the EUFF was organised in the UK in London from 12 to 13 May 2023, and for the first time also outside London in Leeds from 22 to 23 April 2023, in collaboration with the EU Delegation to the UK, EUNIC London, LEEDS 2023, Leeds International Film Festival, and the Institut Français du Royaume-Uni (<http://europe.org.uk/event/in-short-europe-awakening/>). In practice, EUNIC London, the network of the EU national cultural institutes in London, and one of its employees were responsible for organising the festival. The Institut Français in London and the LEEDS 2023 project in Leeds provided the venues, staff and technical support for implementing the festival programme. LEEDS 2023 was a Year of Culture project in the UK compensating for the cancellation of the UK's participation in the European Capital of Culture competition due to Brexit. Moreover, the Leeds International Film Festival provided a curator for the festival and knowledge of the local scene in Leeds for the implementation of the festival. The festival in London was funded mainly by the EUNIC with its member national institutes, based on a participation fee for all EUNIC member countries, while the EU Delegation to the UK funded the Leeds edition of the festival and supported the organisation in terms of communications (Interview UK1).

The EUFF in the UK differs from most of the other EUFFs since it screens only short films. In 2023, the festival, entitled "In short, Europe", included 24 short films from 22 EU Member States, Ukraine and Scotland. The festival films were proposed by EUNIC's national cultural institutes by consulting film agencies from their respective countries. From the three films proposed by each EUNIC member, the curator of the festival, the Film Programmer at Leeds International Film Festival, selected one film per country that fitted best to the overall theme of awakening. Under this broad and general theme, the curator organised the films into four screening programmes with broad



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thematic titles of Explore, Grow, Surround and Dream, each featuring six films including fiction, animation and documentaries.

As in other case countries, the key principle of the EUFF in the UK has been to engage the national cultural institutes in the selection of the screened films and not to make top-down suggestions for them. Therefore, Cineuropa's film repository has been used less; in 2023, only one film included in the festival programme was acquired via the repository. The interviewed festival organiser described the principle as follows:

It's basically our approach of being inclusive and having our members having a say because one of the values of the network is co-creating. So, you know, if they don't have a say in what they want to show from their country, then they are less likely to also bring the filmmaker to the UK. (Interview UK1)

The main challenge for the curator of the festival was, thus, to build thematic slots and organise the variety of films into a coherent programme.

The EUFF in the UK reflects the general mission of the EUNIC London: promoting and bringing European arts and culture to the UK. In this regard, film was considered an easy instrument. As the festival organiser (interview UK1) noted: "We find that film is a very easy way to connect with a broader audience, easier than literature, for example. It is more accessible to a more general audience." Moreover, short films were seen as having less competition compared to other branches of culture; there aren't many short film festivals in the country. This was also one of the reasons why EUNIC wanted to extend the festival outside London. The interviewed organiser from Leeds confirmed this view, noting how "the festival was completely new to Leeds audiences" (Interview UK2). While in London, the main motivation for organising the festival drew on EUNIC's general



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mission, in Leeds, the motivation also reflected local needs. For the local organiser, the EUFF was “like a dream project” as it brought an international EUNIC-coordinated and prepared festival package to Leeds and enabled training local staff members, developing local audiences, and piloting such an international event (Interview UK2).

The side events of the festival build on the filmmakers’ visits and public Q&A sessions. The festival gathered 533 attendees in Leeds and 510 in London. The attendees were mostly young or middle-aged adults, whose feedback to the organisers was very positive in both cities (Mina, 2023, p. 24; also Interview UK2).

3.4.7.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

The festival brochure of the EUFF in the UK approached European film by emphasising its cultural diversity and differences that “reflect on what unites us” (Beverly, 2023, p. 40) and show “how diversity can rhyme with harmony” (Buchwalter, 2023, p. 41). The festival curator described the content of the festival films by bringing out environmental differences in Europe and the ability of film to transport the spectator to another place:

From the comfort of a beautiful Croatian forest to the bustling streets of Glasgow on a Saturday night, from an isolated summer house in the French countryside to an apartment block in the bitterly cold Romanian winter. These films transport you to another country, expose you to a different culture and serve as a reminder that although we all have so many differences, we all have the same ability to dream. (Hales, 2023, p. 3)

The interviews with the festival organisers revealed a similar approach to European film. It was considered to have “a certain aesthetic” and “overall atmosphere” and to be “something unique and



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something very different than in the UK or US” – or, as the organiser described it: “there is like a simple... there is no kind of, you know, decoration around it or like any sort of access or anything, it is just like simple and direct, and it speaks more directly to the soul” (Interview UK1). Such views reflect understanding European film as arthouse cinema rather than commercial blockbusters.

The organiser in London emphasised the impact of the multiculturalism of metropolises on the competitiveness of European film. In such multicultural metropolises, such as London, inhabitants are interested in films from different countries due to their own or their friends’ cultural roots or their multicultural living environment. In such metropolises, the diversity of cultural offerings is extensive, but simultaneously, the competition for audiences is tough. Moreover, the European national film industries compete for attention against each other. As the organiser noted:

In London, the competition is insane. Even finding the right timing to put the festival on is not possible in October, when you have the British Film Institute festival. There are so many kinds of festivals; even our members have their own festivals, like there is the French Fest Film Festival, there is the Italian festival, there is the Spanish...Everyone has their own. (Interview UK1)

According to the organiser from London, the difference between London as a multicultural metropole and less multicultural smaller cities in the UK impacts the reception of foreign language films. In London, schoolchildren are exposed to different accents and languages, so linguistic differences should not be an issue (Interview UK1). In contrast, the organiser from Leeds admitted that “it’s difficult for younger children to follow subtitles”, and thus in their other film festivals they “wish a lot of them were dubbed because they will be more accessible to younger children” (Interview UK2). In the EUFF, the organisers did not see foreign language as any barrier; some of the films were wordless, while others included subtitles. Both interviewed organisers emphasised how the festival



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audience was interested in both cultural and linguistic diversity in the films; this is what brought many of them to the festival. The EUFF audience may not, however, represent a “regular” film audience in the UK. While non-English films raise curiosity at festivals, they may not find their audience in cinemas.

Moreover, the other organiser identified poor communication and circulation as barriers to the competitiveness of European film: while European film itself might interest audiences in the UK, they do not get enough information about them or are unable to see them outside the festival context (Interview UK2). There is little funding available for supporting the promotion and circulation of European films.

The focus on short films makes the EUFF in the UK less connected to the EFI and film festivals as a means to increase the promotion and economic success of European films. Short films rarely reach broad audiences or yield major profits. They often represent “experimental strands of filmmaking”, as the UK’s EUFF brochure (Tornau, 2023, p. 4) notes. The screenings at the EUFF in the UK were free. It was probably the only way to organise the festival since “short film programmes are really hard to market”, as the other organiser noted (Interview UK2).

3.4.7.3 The festival and public diplomacy

The EUFF has been organised in a special political context in the UK: Brexit has impacted many collaborative EU projects planned and implemented there. Both interviewed organisers recognised this context and emphasised how “for us, the most important thing is to maintain the relations built between the UK and Europe” (Interview UK1) and how “we have really missed working on a larger scale since Creative Europe funding stopped for the UK, so we were thrilled to be able to work on the [EUFF] event” (Interview UK2).



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The festivals, both in London and Leeds, included several types of diplomatic activities. On the one hand, the festivals served as a platform for bringing forth high-level diplomatic connections: the opening speech was given by Pedro Serrano, the EU Ambassador to the UK, and many national cultural attachés, representatives of embassies and high-level cultural managers from the UK, such as from the Arts Council England, participated in the programme. Such representatives have an agenda and different priorities for their attendance, reflecting their institutional background (Interview UK1). The festival can thus be interpreted as a combination of a venue for political, social, and cultural appearances and a place where enthusiasts of European alternative film can immerse themselves in novel movies.

The impetus for the EUFF is to showcase European film to audiences in third countries at festivals initiated by the EU, and thus it includes a top-down cultural diplomatic underpinning. The interviewed organisers, however, wanted to emphasise the people-to-people connections at the festivals and their potential to create and strengthen cultural relations between foreign and local filmmakers, film professionals and local audiences. The organiser in London underlined particularly the cultural relations approach by referring to spontaneous collaborations grown from encounters at the festival, attempts at “building trust and understanding” between attendees, enabling “partnerships” and “people-to-people exchange”, “co-creation”, and the “bottom to the top approach” (Interview UK1).

Neither of the organisers saw the links to the EU in the EUFF initiative as uncomfortable. The interviewee from EUNIC London noted, however, that their role is not to promote the EU, nor are they interested in exposing any political commitments. The interviewee from Leeds noted that for them, “anything that can help maintain European partnerships in this way in the UK is really, really positive” but “it was very difficult to explain in social media what this festival meant, what the exact title was, or how the EU was involved” (Interview UK2). The interviewee considered, however, the



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EU connection as signalling a merit to the festival: “It gave the event, you know, a stamp of approval and of professionalism” (Interview UK2).

3.4.8 Vietnam

3.4.8.1 Organising the festival

The EUFF in Vietnam (<https://engage.eu/euff-vn-2023/>) was organised for the 22nd time from 19 May to 4 June 2023. Nearly 7,000 spectators attended 57 screenings in the cities of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hue (Interview VN; email interview VN). This was the biggest audience in the history of the festival. In the two big cities, the screenings were 90% full while in the small town of Hue approximately 30% of the capacity of the screening hall was in use (Interview VN). A total of nineteen films, all of them feature-length fiction films, were shown at the festival (Cineuropa, 2023a).

The festival was organised by the Press & Information section of the EU Delegation to Vietnam in close collaboration with the embassies and cultural institutes of the EU Member States in Vietnam as well as the embassy of Ukraine. The festival was supported and funded by “an EU regional funding programme for public diplomacy”, the EU Policy and Outreach Partnership initiative (EUPOP) as during the past four or five years. In addition, an event agency helped with the festival’s organisational aspects. In Vietnam’s EUFF, collaboration between organising countries and local cultural or film industry organisations has been limited. In the most recent festival, local media was, however, involved in the festival activities. The festival was also promoted widely in the internet:

Promotional activities reached over 500,000 people, generating around 10,000 reactions via the Facebook page of the EUDEL to Vietnam. A dedicated sub-page on the portal engage.eu saw more than 8,500 unique visits and over 13,000 page views. Media coverage, with 41



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articles published and broadcast, further increased the festival's visibility and impacts to the general public in Vietnam. (Interview VN)

In addition to screening two kinds of side events, a film reviewing contest for the audience and post-screening discussions were organised. The audience was invited to submit reviews of any of the films they had seen at the festival. A renowned Vietnamese critic chose the five best reviews that were published on EUDEL's Facebook page. The three post-screening discussions were organised in collaboration with the above-mentioned film critic and representatives of the Goethe-Institut Hanoi and the Dutch Consulate General. According to the representative of the EU Delegation, these events were "highly appreciated and well received by the audience, a large majority of whom stayed for said discussions" (Email interview VN).

Despite the limited collaboration, according to the representative of the EU Delegation, the festival has become a staple in the cultural scene in the country and it has been well received by the audience. The key audiences of the festival are the youth interested in culture and the arts as well as the "film community" including filmmakers and other film experts. In addition, "there's always also a considerably-sized cross section of general audiences who follow activities implemented by the EU in Vietnam" (Email interview VN).

In 2023, as well as in the previous editions of the EUFF in Vietnam, each participating EU Member State selected their own entries for the festival. The only curatorial decisions left for the representatives of the EU Delegation were "to do with a loose overall framing of the festival (to a certain degree), and in terms of the running order of the films across the festival". During the past few years, many of the countries have made use of Cineuropa's film repository. Of the nineteen films screened at the last festival, eight were from the repository (Email interview VN).



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In Vietnam, all the festival films must go through censorship by the Ministry of Culture. In practice this often means that some scenes need to be removed from a film and more rarely the whole film is rejected. Unwanted scenes may include politically sensitive content. Typically, negative representations of the communist system, nudity or violence is censored. In 2023, the censorship authorities asked for a couple of scenes to be removed from four to five films. The participating countries agreed with this, and the films could be screened at the festival (Interview VN).

The main aim of the festival is to showcase the diversity of European culture and the social and political situation in Europe. According to the representative of the EU Delegation, the festival is a good way for doing public diplomacy. In the future, they hope to include in the festival more exchange activities, such as inviting film professionals from Europe to hold workshops for Vietnamese film students and to give talks (Interview VN).

So far there have not been any specific themes at the festival, mainly because the participating EU Member States select their own films and the organisers do not want to limit their choices. On the other hand, the organisers would like to change this system and possibly have themes in the future (Interview VN).

The organisers were generally satisfied with the support provided by Cineuropa. The only thing that could be improved has to do with the time when the films are made available. The representative of the EU Delegation explained that last year the films were not available at the time they had to start planning the programme of the festival and “there was a bit of headache” (Interview VN).

3.4.8.2 European film and its competitiveness

In terms of competitiveness, European cinema does not have a very strong position in Vietnam yet, but it has its own audience, including film students and other people interested in arthouse,



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independent and experimental cinema. Particularly French films have gained visibility in local cinemas. The festival organiser thought that the situation is improving now that the ways to watch films are increasing. Especially non-mainstream films can be watched through various streaming platforms (Interview VN).

Because people in Vietnam are used to watching films with subtitles, language is not a concern as regards the competitiveness of European cinema. Films in which European languages are spoken are thus easily accessible to the general audience (Interview VN).

3.4.8.3 The EUFF and public diplomacy

The interviewed representative of the EU Delegation saw that the festival is a “very useful means to showcase European cultures in all their differences and diversities”. For the interviewee, the festival helps audience understand the political situation of Europe and its social issues. It opens up various stories that have been told in Europe, and shows what kinds of things Europeans are concerned about and interested in. According to the representative this applies to cinema in general, and films are a good way to understand other cultures. As the representative noted, the festival is “a good way basically for public diplomacy” (Interview VN).

In the future, the EU Delegation to Vietnam would like to increase the amount of two-way exchange activities between local and European film professionals so that European films and culture would not just be brought to Vietnam but that Vietnamese film professionals would have more opportunities to engage in collaboration with their European colleagues and get concrete support from them. As the interviewed representative noted:

So, the festival wouldn't be only about showcasing European films, but also about trying to actively engage the film community in Vietnam. And doing other things and not only showing



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films, but also doing workshops or talks [...] and trying to basically provide more concrete support to the film sector in the country. (Interview VN)

In addition, they would like to organise Q&A sessions with directors and producers. To properly fulfil these aims, more financial support from the EU is needed. The EU Delegation to Vietnam does not have a budget of their own for cultural activities but they are funded with the resources of the Press and Information section. Those funds are not always enough to cover all wished-for cultural activities. Although changes tend to happen slowly in the EU, according to the interviewee they were optimistic that they would be able to explore some new possibilities already in 2024 (Interview VN; email interview VN).

3.5 Comparative analysis of the case studies

3.5.1 Organising the festival

Comparative analysis of the data reveals a wealth of festivals organised with different names, sizes, budgets, organisational practices, partnerships and histories (also Helly & Chandran, 2023). Despite the many differences, the data also reveal common patterns of festival organisation. Typical of the EUFF is a complex organisational structure involving: high-level official actors such as communication or cultural officers in EU delegations and European embassies and consulates with their cultural attachés; experts from European cultural institutions; various national, regional or local government bodies; local cultural centres or institutions; and local film festival organisations and associations. Many of the festivals collaborated with various local educational institutions, such as universities and schools. Despite the complex structure involving different actors with little or no expertise in film or film festivals, the EUFFs were professionally organised, as the organisational responsibility is usually delegated to an existing film festival or film agency and its film experts. Typically, these experts took over the festival curatorship, programming, technical operations, venue



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rentals, online management and marketing implementation. In addition to seed funding from the EEAS support programme, festival costs were typically funded by EU delegations, partner EU Member States and, in some countries, local sponsors. Ticketing was only used in South Africa and partially in Canada.

The complexity of the festival's organisation is reflected in the curation of its programme. As the festival is an EU initiative that aims to involve all EU Member States through their embassies and consulates in "bolstering Europe's image" (EC, 2024), the curation of the festival programme is a balancing act between representation of all countries and a cinematographic ambition and theme. In all our case countries, the Member States were involved in the selection of films. In the case of Chile and Vietnam, the Member States selected films for the programme without any curation. In the other case countries, the Member States suggested a few films for the programme, of which the curator selected one, or the curator suggested a few films to the Member States, of which they selected one. In general, the role of the curator was to communicate with the Member States and help their embassies or cultural institutions to select a film or films. Such communication was a balancing act between the curator's professional views on interesting films suitable for the festival programme and the proposals of the embassies and cultural institutes based on their different (including non-professional) priorities for selecting a film. Here, too, the curators had to balance various practical organisational issues.

Curating the festival programme typically meant deciding on the screening order for a heterogeneous group of films and creating loose thematic slots for the programme. Most of the case festivals did not have a common theme, but where they did, the themes were fluid and abstract, such as "European values" in the case of Argentina or "awakening" and its sub-themes of "explore", "grow", "surround" and "dream" in the case of the UK. The festival programmes, the side events included in them and the communication of the programme and side events at the festival websites



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typically emphasise various social agendas, such as promoting diversity, sustainability, human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and inclusivity.

As a result of such curatorial practices, the EUFF programmes were described as diverse but mainstream. The festival programmes included feature films of various genres, including drama, comedy, romance, biography and documentary. The UK festival showed only short films. The programmes in our case countries included on average 30 films, of which five were borrowed from the Cineuropa repository (see Table 11), while the Cineuropa feedback survey on 27 EUFFs in 2023 gives an average of fifteen films, of which nine were borrowed from the repository (CineEuropa, 2023). Our research underlines the importance of the repository for festivals. It was seen as crucial in host countries where screening rights for European films are expensive, and as important for embassies with limited capacity to select films and finance their screening rights. In the Cineuropa feedback survey, 24 out of 27 respondents were satisfied with the repository.

Table 11. Key markers of the case EUFF organised in 2023. Source: festival websites and interviews.

Country	Name of the festival	Edition in the country	Participating cities	Films	Films from the repository	Attendees in-situ	Online screenings
Argentina	The European Film Meeting	19	12	19	8	5,200	yes
Canada	The European Union Film Festival	38	3	28	6	7,879	yes
Chile	The European Film Fest	25	20	47	several	5,142	no
Indonesia	Europe on Screen	23	7	73	6	37,053	no



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South Africa	European Film Festival	7	3	16	2	10,000	yes
Türkiye	EU Human Rights Film Days (including EU Human Rights Short Film Competition)	13	2	26(19)	several	2,300	yes
	European Cinema Week in Your City (changing its title to European Cinema Days in 2024)	2	10	18	several	no information	no
The UK	The UK – In Short, Europe	5	2	24	1	1,043	no
Vietnam	European Film Festival	22	3	19	8	7,000	no

The EUFF are festivals that seek to address a diverse audience, including film professionals and people working in the industry. As the festivals show a wide range of new European films, they attract European film fans. The festivals also seek to reach out to the general public and in some of our case countries, such as Chile, Argentina and South Africa, the festivals have implemented a social agenda of bringing the films to remote areas where people have limited access to such films. In Chile, Canada, the UK and South Africa, festival organisers have identified an audience segment that has a personal connection to Europe through travel, migration or family inheritance. In Canada and the UK in particular, interviewees noted that the festival appealed to a particular audience niche: immigrants (Lähdesmäki, 2025). The festivals have a high-profile audience, as the opening and closing ceremonies and screenings are attended by representatives of the EU Delegation, embassies, consulates and European cultural institutions.



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In addition to film screenings, the EUFF includes various side events aimed at promoting the film industry and the diplomatic underpinning of the initiative. For the case festivals in this study, the side events focused mainly on capacity building for students or young people aspiring to or working in the field, or on socially engaging collaborations addressing some of the EU values mentioned above. The capacity building events were typically masterclasses or workshops led by a European guest and/or local film professionals, or competitions for local film students or young professionals. The Cineuropa feedback survey indicates a similar observation. Socially motivated side events included, for example, in Argentina, a screening of the film *Dating Amber* in collaboration with Buenos Aires Pride Week and the Undersecretariat for Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism of the City of Buenos Aires, and in South Africa, an online webinar with filmmaker Mohamed Kordofani and Professor Pragna Rugunanan, exploring migration and xenophobia. The side events combining the social rationale and capacity building included the EU Human Rights Film Days, with its Human Rights Short Film Competition, in Türkiye. In addition, the Human Rights Short Film Competition aimed to facilitate the access of young professionals to the industry.

3.5.2 Notions of European film and its competitiveness

The festival organisers' view of the challenges and strengths of the EFI is based on their concept of European film. All the descriptions of European film in our interview data are based on the notion of arthouse films. European films were often compared to Hollywood films, which were seen as commercial and entertaining. Many interviewees highlighted the social and societal aspects of storytelling as a typical feature of European film.

The two interviewees from the EEAS shared this view of European film. According to the interviewee, European films "describe a society in a problematic approach" and "have a critical eye" to the issues



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they deal with (interview EEAS1). In European films, “there is not very much celebration like you sometimes find in [US] American [film]. Just to give an example, in American film, for instance, you find a lot of celebration of American values, the American nation, American strength and in Europe, even when you have an action [film], there is always some psychological problematics that make the situation a bit less easy to interpret in a universal way” (Interview EEAS1). On the one hand, this was perceived as creating a challenge for public diplomacy, but on the other hand, “this is the value that the European Union brings to the world” as it “allows for different perspectives, which allows for diversity” (Interview EEAS1).

Although the interviewees generally found the described characteristics of European film interesting and a unique selling point, they also recognised that the competitiveness of such film faces several challenges. European cinema was seen as dominated by Hollywood films. Festival organisers identified several barriers to the competitiveness of European film. First, screening rights for European films are often much more expensive than for comparable films from the US. Second, there is a lack of distribution for these films, as local distributors are reluctant to take economic risks. Co-production agreements were mentioned to address this challenge, since they likely increase the presence of the EFI in the country. Among our case countries, Türkiye already has a specific relationship with the EFI, characterised by geographic proximity and long-standing co-production relations (Dâmaso et al., forthcoming).

Thirdly, due to limited or non-existent promotion, audiences do not know about the directors or actors of European films. Many of the interviewees noted that film festivals such as the EUFF are the best, if not the only, place in their country to see European films. For example, the festival organiser in Indonesia emphasised that film festivals are crucial for introducing European cinema to Indonesian audiences. Among our case countries, Türkiye is an exception with significant numbers of European films screened, although the number of releases does not tend to translate into box office success.



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For the festival organisers and EEAS officials, the main purpose of the EUFF was not to approach the competitiveness of the EFI in terms of “selling” European film, but rather to see it as a platform for cooperation. On the one hand, the EEAS officials recognised European film as a product in terms of the market economy, noting that “of course we want to sell our products; we want to be a competitive industry; [...] it [European film] is an industry and it gives work to a lot of people, to a lot of young people” (Interview EEAS1). On the other hand, the same official stressed that it is less interesting to approach the competitiveness of European film in terms of “beating other film industries” (Interview EEAS1). According to EEAS officials, the competitiveness of the EFI is based on cooperation, for example through co-productions “among many stakeholders”, based on “a strong mutual support between different countries, regions” and co-financing with “the national funds for films, regional funds, and European Union funds” (Interview EEAS1). In general, EEAS officials and festival organisers approached the competitiveness of the EFI by emphasising its diversity, co-productions, the industry’s “capacity to be in intercultural dialogue” (interview EEAS1) and the value base of European film in addressing, for example, gender and contemporary social and societal issues. The data thus intertwined discussions on the competitiveness of the EFI and the use of European film for public diplomacy.

Although Hollywood film dominates the global cinema scene, European film may have a potential market niche in multicultural non-EU metropolises with a high percentage of inhabitants of European descent (Lähdesmäki, 2025). Festival organisers in the UK and Canada have recognised the impact of metropolitan multiculturalism on the competitiveness of European film. In multicultural metropolises, such as London, residents are interested in films from different countries because of their own or their friends’ cultural roots or their multicultural living environment. In such metropolises, the diversity of cultural offerings is extensive, but at the same time the competition for audiences is fierce.



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In the EU policy discourse, linguistic and cultural differences have been identified on the one hand as an asset of European film and on the other hand as a cause of fragmentation in the industry and a challenge to its competitiveness (EC, 2004). The festival organisers tended to see the linguistic and cultural diversity of European film as an asset that stimulates the curiosity of festival audiences. Organiser could find it interesting rather than disturbing to see cultural differences portrayed in film, and strong stories were seen as universal, regardless of their country of origin. The interviewees' perceptions of linguistic differences were more diverse. For festival audiences, linguistic differences were usually not seen as a barrier. Festival audiences could follow the films through subtitles, whether in their native language or in English, as was the case at the Indonesian and South African EUFFs. The Indonesian festival organiser noted that the young audience's familiarity with different cultures and languages, coupled with high-quality English subtitles, mitigated the potential emergence of cultural and linguistic disparities. In South Africa, however, the festival organiser noted that local audiences are not necessarily used to reading subtitles. Language could also be seen as a major attraction for immigrant audiences, as was the case in Canada and the UK.

The EUFFs, like film festivals in general, are a special environment for consuming film. This was noted by some of the festival organisers: The EUFF audience may not represent a “regular” film audience and while non-English films may attract curiosity at festivals, they may not find their audience in cinemas. Such views were expressed in the UK and Canada, where English is an official language.

3.5.3 The festival and public diplomacy

Although the EU discourses in all policy sectors, including the EFI, have long stressed the importance of strengthening competitiveness, during the past decade the discourse of promoting



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external relations, global collaboration and exchanges has gained stronger ground. Such transformation is reflected on the implementation of the EUFF and the discourses through which our interviewees talked about its goals. Both the EEAS officials and festival organisers stressed the role of the film festival for collaborative and diplomatic attempts. The interviews revealed, however, the ambiguity of approaches to international relations.

Firstly, the interviews constructed the EUFF as a high-profile, prestigious diplomatic event with distinguished diplomatic partners and guests. As embassies, consulates and national cultural institutes are involved in the selection of films and the content of the programme, their representatives were present at the festival. In many of our case countries, embassy representatives introduced their country's films and engaged with the festival audience. At the festivals, these high-profile partners and guests were also able to interact with each other, and the festivals could even include special programmes for them.

Secondly, in addition to highlighting the festival as a high-profile event, interviewees described its objectives in a way that is consistent with cultural diplomacy approaches. The impetus for the EUFF is to present European film to audiences in third countries at festivals initiated by the EU through its delegations. The festival aims to promote Europe's image, values and ideas, as stated in the EEAS funding criteria. It therefore includes a top-down cultural diplomacy component with an element of public diplomacy.

Thirdly, the interview data reveal a more nuanced diplomatic approach embedded in the aims and implementation of the EUFFs. Alongside the top-down aim of showcasing European film, festival organisers emphasised the cultural relations approach and people-to-people diplomacy of the festivals through their potential to create and strengthen exchanges between European and local film professionals, stakeholders and audiences. This ICR ethos was also expressed on the festival



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websites. The attempt to promote dialogue was generally emphasised as a key aim of the festival in our case countries. Furthermore, the IRC ethos was reflected in the interviewees' aims to involve grassroots and civil society actors in the festivals. In particular, many of the side events focused on grassroots cultural exchange, involving schools, students, young people, civil society actors and people living in remote areas.

The responses to Cineuropa's feedback survey point to three similar diplomatic approaches. Most respondents agreed with the questions "Do you have the impression that the EUD[elegation] is recognised as a key operator and focal point for cultural diplomacy?" and "Do you have the impression that EU bilateral, regional, inter-regional and multilateral cooperation partnership strategies have been enhanced thanks to the event?" Respondents to the question "How did the event support your general cultural diplomacy strategy?" described how the festival helped to showcase the EFI and EU values, as well as to create new partnerships between participating countries and local film stakeholders. In general, the questions in the survey were leading, and both the questions and the answers typically reflected the official discourse of the EUFF as presented on the EUFF website and in the festival guidelines.

The interviews with the EEAS officials included a strong ICR emphasis against the traditional top-down cultural diplomacy approach. The interviewees even criticised some Member States for being "old-fashioned in their approach" by tending to "only promote productions that support the spread of their language around the world" or "are completely directed by European stakeholders, while the global partner actors are considered as people we need to mentor" (Interview EEAS1). Interviewees condemned the objectives of investing in the international cultural scene "with a propaganda attitude" (interview EEAS1). The EEAS official recognised the history of the EUFF initiative within a broader framework of EU policies and changing diplomatic attempts. In the beginning, the EUFF was seen as a "showcase initiative" "where we could make our films and film industry better known abroad"



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(Interview EEAS1). The officials highlighted the changes in the ethos of the festival, reflecting changes in EU foreign policy and global strategies. The official described this change as follows:

Yet, it is characteristic of the European Union that also makes our positioning on the international scene a bit difficult: We don't want to go around imposing; We don't want to go around recolonising. Also, because we have a stigma, we have a problem. We reorganised our societies and our political system after the Second World War with the idea that we would never be a colonising space again. It is not easy because we have to build a reputation in that sense. [...] We don't have to give up telling the world that we have beautiful things and interesting things to offer. But we also have to act on the international scene in a way that we become credible, trustable and our reputation becomes more solid. (Interview EEAS1)

The EEAS officials identify two tools here: renewing and relaunching relations with third countries through dialogue on creative industries, including the film industry, and, in the case of the EUFF, developing the thematic content of the festivals. This is why the current EUFF programme emphasises gender, inclusion and diversity (Interview EEAS1).

The burden of a patronising attitude towards third countries was also recognised by some festival organisers in non-Western countries. In particular, interviewees in South Africa criticised the top-down cultural diplomatic underpinning of the festival, for example in its explicit aim to promote the image, values and ideas of Europe. Such an approach was seen as colonial and in contrast to the ideas of dialogue and mutuality in cultural relations. The non-Western case countries generally hoped that the EUFF would involve more two-way exchange and thus take the people-to-people approach and IRC ethos more seriously in their diplomatic efforts. For example, festival organisers in Indonesia and Vietnam hoped to build bridges between the local and European film industries by increasing collaboration and screenings of local films in Europe. The EEAS officials also recognised



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two-way exchange as a key goal for the EUFF in the future, particularly "the exchange between industries, especially between independent actors in the industry who cannot get strong support from big institutions or big companies to do their thing" (Interview EEAS1). Without financial support, however, the exchange of such independent actors is extremely challenging, both in the EUFF context and beyond.

3.6 EU Film Festivals: Programmes and exhibited films

3.6.1 Analysis of the festival programmes and promotional materials

Screening programmes, special events, and information about the European films shown in the EUFFs in our eight case countries are published mainly online. Most of these festivals are quite established and have been organised on average for about two decades (see Table 10). They have their own active websites and social media accounts, while others are smaller in size, are part of larger festivals, or associated with cultural institutes, and their main activities of publicity and promotion are handled through the delegation's website (Table 12). Promotional materials include press releases, screening programmes and festival catalogues, which are all digitally available, along with digital video content in some countries.

Before we move onto an analysis of the most screened films in the EUFF in detail in the next section, we want to give an overview of the differences and similarities of the ways in which each case EUFF is organised and promoted. Films screened are mostly fiction, with a few documentaries, animations and shorts. Canada, the UK and Türkiye have specific programmes devoted only to short films. The youngest festivals are the ones organised in the UK, South Africa and Türkiye. The UK and Türkiye do not have websites dedicated uniquely to the event; announcements on the EUFF are delivered via the delegation's official website. It is difficult to find information about these festivals on the web



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and they are the least attended ones amongst our cases. Even though new, the EUFF in South Africa is very active on the web and social media, and reached a wide audience in 2023. Canada's EUFF is the oldest one in our cases, spreading out to three cities. While the one in Toronto is now among the largest film festivals in the city, the ones in Vancouver and Ottawa are supported by the CFI and Cinematheque Canada, both of which have a strong community of film enthusiasts. They have an updated and user-friendly web site and active social media allows interested parties to reach information quickly. Indonesia's Europe on Screen is the largest running international film festival in the country. It also hosts the largest number of films, side events and highly popular social media. Information and working links can be found quite easily for all EUFFs except the ones in the UK and Türkiye; they are the least known and publicised cases.

All EUFF programmes have specific themes that emphasise EU values. Cultural diversity, multiplicity of identities and differences in voices are highlighted in festival organisations, calling attention to freedom of speech, intercultural dialogue and human rights. For instance, for its 2023 edition, the motto of Argentina's European Film Meeting was "Diversity Unites Us", and in Chile's European Film Fest it was "The Stories That Unite Us". Argentina's end report describes the films of the festival as "offer[ing] a captivating insight into the fundamental values and cultures that make up the EU. The leitmotif of this edition revolved around the various themes that have reflected the evolution of these values over time" (Email interview AR). A message from the Head of the EU Delegation to Türkiye in the catalogue of the festival titled Human Rights Film Days reads that this event "promises to be an experience highlighting the diversity of European culture and the multiplicity of voices" (Online catalogue of HRFD, 2024). Similarly, the representative of the EU Delegation to South Africa comments upon the festival on its website: "This year's line-up reminds us that freedom, in all its forms, is a universal pursuit that transcends borders and speaks to the very core of our shared humanity" (European Film Festival South Africa, n.d.).



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In some cases, topics around these values are raised in special events recalling the festivals' overarching themes. Many of the explored EUFFs hold side events such as post-screening discussions and workshops, which feature European filmmakers in conversation with local professionals. The richness of European co-productions is highlighted, along with opportunities for local filmmakers and enthusiasts to meet and learn. Post-screening discussions are common side events in most EUFFs. Pressing issues relevant to the country or its neighbours are referred through the screen films' themes. In South Africa, for instance, one side event in 2023 consisted of the screening of two European films to discuss causes and impacts of migration and the rise of xenophobia in the country, with a focus on the situation in Sudan. In Argentina, Chile, Canada and South Africa, LGBTQ+ issues are raised through side events. Argentina's The European Film Meeting collaborates with the Buenos Aires Pride Week, while in South Africa there is support from Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender at the University of Pretoria. Most EUFFs also make room for activities with youth. The Media in School and Make it Short programmes in Argentina are aimed at middle school children in public schools, and involve screenings and classes on media production. EUFFs in Chile, Indonesia and Türkiye have special screenings curated for children, families and youth. Overall, EUFFs aim to promote specific EU values via the organised events and activities as well as the selected films.

Table 12. Promotional activities of the case EUFF organised in 2023. Source: festival websites and social media accounts.

Country / festival	Website	Social media	Side events	Promotional materials
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Argentina / The European Film Meeting	https://cineueargentina.com/	YouTube: @encuentrocineeeuropeo enarge9171 (700+ followers) IG: @ueenargentina (56.4K followers) Posts shared via official account of the EU Delegation in Argentina. X: @UEenARG (13K+ followers) Posts shared via official account of the EU Delegation in Argentina.	Post-screening discussions; talks with professionals; screenings for school children.	Catalogue; two promotional videos with 16K and 26K views; end report.
Canada / The European Union Film Festival	https://www.euffonline.ca/ Toronto: https://euffto.com/ Ottawa & Vancouver programmes published via the CFI and The Cinematheque.	Only Toronto EUFF has social media accounts LinkedIn: @european-union-film-festival IG: @eufilmfestto (800+ followers) Fb: @euffto (4.4K followers) Ottawa & Vancouver post via partner institutes' accounts.	Post-screening discussions; talks with professionals; European foods and drinks receptions.	Catalogue; promotional video (views unavailable); newsletter; archives of past festivals.
Chile / The European Film Fest	https://festivalcineeeuropeo.cl/	YouTube: @festivaldecineeeuropeo chile4356 (500+ followers) IG: @ festivaldecineeeuropeo (8.5K followers) Fb: @ FestivaldeCineEuropeo (8K followers) X: @ festcineeeuropeo (1.6K followers)	Post-screening discussions; talks with professionals; screenings for school children.	Catalogue; promotional video with 450+ views.
Indonesia / Europe on Screen	https://europeonscreen.org/	YouTube: @EuropeonScreen1 (400+ followers) IG: @europeonscreen (20K followers) Fb: @europeonscreen (4.5K followers) X: @europeonscreen (17K followers) Tiktok: @europeonscreen (1K followers)	Post-screening discussions; talks and workshops with professionals; festival section for families and school children.	Catalogue; promotional video with 176K views; IG Live Talks; newsletter; Archives of past festivals.



South Africa / European Film Festival	https://www.eurofilmfest.co.za/	YouTube: @europeanfilmfestival (500+ followers) IG: @euffsa (1.4K followers) Fb: @euffsa (7K followers) X: @ eu_fest (1K followers)	Post-screening discussions; talks and workshops with professionals; community screenings in arts and community centres and schools.	One promotional video with 1.1K views.
Türkiye /	No own website. Catalogue and schedule shared through an announcement on delegation's official site.	No social media account. Posts shared via official SM accounts of the EU Delegation in Türkiye.	Film discussions; screenings for school children.	Survey; catalogue; four promotional videos, one with 2.6M views; press release.
European Cinema Week in Your City	No own website. Catalogue and schedule shared through an announcement on delegation's official site.	No social media account. Posts shared via official SM accounts of the EU Delegation in Türkiye.	No side events.	Catalogue; two promotional videos, one with 200+ views.
The UK / The UK – In Short, Europe	No own website. Catalogue and schedule shared through an announcement on delegation's official site, EUNIC's website (europe.org.uk/event/in-short-europe-awakening/), and LEEDS2023 website (www.leedsfilm.com/in-short/)	IG: @inshorteuropefilmfest (179 followers) In addition, posts widely shared via official SM accounts of EUNIC (Network of the EU national cultural institutes in London) LIFF, IFRU and participating filmmakers. EUNIC Fb: @euniclondon (2.9K) IG: @euniclondon (1.5K) X: @EUNICLONDON (2.6K) LIFF Fb: @leeds.film (17K) IG: @leedsfilmfest (14.6K) IFRU YouTube: @FrenchInstituteUK (5.3K) Fb: @ifru_london(26K) IG: @ifru_london (16K) x: @ifru_london	Film discussions and talks with professionals.	One promotional video with 60+ views.



		Tiktok: @ifru_london (539)		
Vietnam / European Film Festival	https://engage.eu/euff-vn-2023/ . Catalogue and schedule shared via Engage, a platform hosted by the EU Policy and Outreach Partnership in ASEAN Countries.	No social media account. Posts shared via the official Fb page of the EU Delegation in Vietnam.	No side events.	Catalogue; one promotional video with 450+ views.

3.6.2 Introduction to the most screened and borrowed films

This section presents the results of a thematic analysis of the seven films that were either screened the most often at the case EUFF festivals in 2023 or have been some of the most requested films of the consortium's film repository so far. In the thematic analysis the focus is on the representations of Europe and European values in these films. The films' formal characteristics were analysed, focusing on questions of style and genre.

The six most screened films at the case countries' EUFFs were *Gentle* (László Csujá & Anna Nemes, Hungary & Germany, 2022); *Luxembourg, Luxembourg* (Antonio Lukich, Ukraine, 2022); *Marocco* (Emanuel Parvu, Romania & Czech Republic, 2021); *Miss Viborg* (Marianne Blicher, Denmark & Argentina, 2022); *Ramona* (Andrea Bagney, Spain, 2022); and *Riders* (Dominik Mencej, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, 2022). Each of these six films were screened at four festivals. All except for *Riders* were included in the film repository in 2023, the year this study focuses on. Although these films had the most festival appearances, they were not necessarily the most popular ones as for example the audience report from the Indonesian Europe on Screen festival indicates. However, since audience reports from all the case countries were not available, it was not possible to conclude which films were the most popular with audiences.



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Of these six films, those that were available for watching were chosen for closer analysis. The three films (in alphabetical order) are *Miss Viborg*, *Ramona*, and *Riders* (see Table 13). As the European Audiovisual Observatory's Lumiere database indicates, each of these films has been distributed in only a few countries. Only *Miss Viborg* was available for viewing through a streaming service in Finland in late 2023 and early 2024 when the research was conducted. For the other two films screening links were obtained from the production company or distributor.

To give a broader picture of the European films screened at the EUFFs, four films that have been popular with audiences during the repository's existence according to Cineuropa's representative (Interview 2023) were also analysed. These films are (in alphabetical order) *And Then We Danced*, *Dating Amber*, *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs* and *The Big Hit*. According to Cineuropa (Cineuropa, 2023b, p. 9; Interview 2023), *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs* has attracted the biggest audience. *And Then We Danced* and *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs* were no longer in the repository when the research was conducted. All these films except for *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs* (which the researcher had seen earlier) were available to watch via streaming services.

As Table 13 indicates, these films are a geographically broad sample of European cinema. Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe are all represented in it. Four of the films are co-productions. The big European film-producing countries, France, Italy, and Spain, are involved as main or co-producing countries in five films. The diversity of countries is reflected in the diversity of the films' languages.

Table 13. The seven films that were either the most often screened at the case EUFFs or among the most requested in the film repository. Source for genre and awards: Internet Movie Database; d for admissions and distribution: Lumiere Database. 5 June 2025.

Title	Director	Year	Country	Language	Genre (IMDb)	Gender of director	Awards (IMDb)	Admissions in Europe (Lumiere)	Distribution in Europe
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									(no. of countries)
<i>And Then We Danced</i>	Levan Akin	2019	Sweden, Georgia, France	Georgian	drama	male	29	221,626	21
<i>Dating Amber</i>	David Freyne	2020	Ireland, UK	English	comedy, drama, romance	male	3	20,102	6
<i>Miss Viborg</i>	Mariann e Blicher	2022	Denmark	Danish	comedy, drama	female	12	12,385	5
<i>My Brother Chases Dinosaurs /Mio fratello rincorre i dinosauri</i>	Stefano Cipani	2019	Italy, Spain	Italian	comedy, family	male	3	508,292	10
<i>Ramona</i>	Andrea Bagney	2022	Spain	Spanish	comedy, drama, romance	female	3	19,448	5
<i>Riders / Jezdega</i>	Dominik Mencej	2022	Slovenia , Croatia, Serbia, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina	Slovenian, Serbian	drama	male	5	7,388	1
<i>The Big Hit / Un triomphe</i>	Emmanuel Courcol	2020	France	French	comedy, drama	male	4	468,120	20

Next, the films are introduced with a description of each story, theme and style.



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Miss Viborg is the debut feature film of the Danish director Marianne Blicher. It is a comedy drama about an extraordinary friendship between two women who have had very different life experiences going through difficult times. Solvej is a widow in her sixties who drives around her neighbourhood on a mobility scooter selling prescription drugs to local addicts. She is earning money to be able to move to Spain where her husband died. She drowns her sorrows in unhealthy treats which she has tons of.

In her youth Solvej shone as Miss Viborg and was married to a truck driver, but since her husband's death she prefers to be left alone. Her life changes when someone breaks into her apartment, and Solvej sprains her ankle while chasing the burglar. She reluctantly accepts help from her neighbour, school dropout Kate, who is strangely eager to help her. Solvej soon finds out that the burglar was Kate, who desperately needs money to pay off a drug debt. This is how their friendship starts.

Despite the bad starting point, their friendship quickly deepens. Solvej as a drug dealer is part of the trouble in which Kate finds herself. However, the drug business remains in the background as the film focuses on depicting the friendship. Kate has no future plans except one. She wants to find her father whom she has never met. One day Kate has disappeared, and Solvej goes in search of her with a truck driver she has recently met.

The narrative treats serious social issues with seeming lightness. *Miss Viborg* is a comedy with excessive elements but also a story of depression told through happy colours. Solvej's floral dresses and her pastel-coloured apartment create a contrast to the underlying themes such as the loneliness of older people, eating disorders and drug problems. The story is entertaining but it still reminds the viewer of the dark side of life.

The Spanish film *Ramona*, directed by Andrea Bagney, is a romantic comedy drama about the aspirations of the 31-year-old title character in Madrid. Ramona wants many things in life and a role in a film is one of those. Before her first audition she unknowingly meets the film's director, Bruno



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and spends a long afternoon talking and drinking with him. They start chatting as if they had always known each other. At the end of the day, after having discussed a wide range of topics, Bruno declares that he has fallen in love with her. Next day, they are surprised to meet at the audition. Bruno praises Ramona but she does not want to take the role just because the director is in love with her.

After some persuasion she accepts the role. Her very sympathetic boyfriend soon senses that Ramona is in love with the director. She denies this although she has feelings for Bruno. Ramona performs her part in the film, and when shooting is over, the crew celebrates. The film ends with a new audition scene in which Ramona performs a monologue about her own life, parts of which we have heard in her conversations with Bruno and her boyfriend. She seems to have chosen life with her boyfriend but also life as an actress.

Ramona is a film in the style of French new wave. It is narrated through montage sequences and chapters which have titles such as “Ramona’s boyfriend is Nico”. The film’s arthouse character is emphasised by the film-within-a-film theme as well as references to other films such as Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall*. The elliptic narrative illustrates Ramona’s impulsive character. She jumps from one thing to another not really knowing what she wants. Tragic events from her youth – the death of her parents – are touched on, but not explored any further. Despite its arthouse style *Ramona* is easy to follow.

The city of Madrid plays an important role in the film. Quiet city views and classical music open it in the style of an old Hollywood film. The film is shot in black and white except for the audition and film-within-a-film scenes, which emphasises the nostalgic atmosphere. After the credits sequence the framing tightens, and the focus shifts to human encounters. *Ramona* is a compassionate, non-cynical film about the experiences of today’s global citizen, who is a little lost in the middle of the many possibilities that life in Western Europe has to offer today.



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Slovene Dominik Mencej's *Riders* is a nostalgic coming-of-age drama in which childhood friends, Tomaz and Anton, inspired by *Easy Rider*, embark on a road trip on mopeds transformed into choppers. The location is Slovenia and Croatia in the summer of 1999. Tomaz and Anton live in a small village in the middle of rolling fields, but they want to experience something bigger.

Tomaz is a decent boy living with his religious mother whereas the rebellious Anton is always in trouble. In the first images we see Tomaz accompanying his mother to the church and graveyard whereas Anton gets sacked from his job as a mailman. Once on the road, they encounter first an older motorist who they ask to help with a broken moped. Next, a girl of their age who has run away from the convent joins them and the four continue together. Eventually Anton and the old man leave the group to continue together.

The film is a universal story about finding one's identity and breaking free from stifling surroundings and expectations. Much of the narrative is viewed through Tomaz's mind's eye. He has dreams and hallucinations (caused by weed) about his mother and religious rituals. Tomaz is tense and uncertain unlike Anton, who is not going to return home. Religious objects that can be seen everywhere, even in a local pub, visualise Tomaz's doubts. The emotional trip makes them question their friendship and eventually they go their separate ways. The future remains open.

The turn of the millennium discussed in the beginning of the film frames the story. A sense of expectation and doubt alternate. The beautiful rural landscapes belong to a nostalgic past. Similarly, the religious traditions that are still very much alive are reminders of something that even Tomaz seems to be questioning. The breakup of Yugoslavia, which is not mentioned, is recent in the story and perhaps because of this the film's relationship with places is vague. It is not always clear in which country the boys are riding. Like *Ramona*, *Riders* is closer to arthouse than to mainstream cinema. The flashbacks, ellipses and dream sequences make the narrative nonlinear. The present and the past get mixed and the narrative becomes dreamlike.



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In the Irish comedy drama *Dating Amber*, highschoolers Eddie and Amber are afraid to come out of the closet in a narrow-minded Irish town in the mid-1990s. Their schoolmates brag about their sexual experiences and expect Eddie to start dating someone from the opposite sex. Eddie's father is eager to see him pass the army tests, but Eddie is not very athletic. Amber is planning to leave the town and meanwhile earns money by renting a caravan for teenage couples in love.

To make their lives easier for the rest of the last high school year Amber suggests to Eddie that they pretend to be a couple. Eddie agrees and they, as well as people around them, seem to be satisfied. Then Amber falls in love with a girl and wants to "break up" with Eddie. Eddie, who wanted to continue pretending, is disappointed and almost joins the army as his parents expect him to do. At the last moment Amber persuades him to follow his heart and start a new life somewhere else. In the final images Eddie sits on the train, leaving the hometown behind.

The film balances rakish comedy with more subtle drama. The schoolmates are stereotypical, rude characters familiar from mainstream teen films. Eddie and Amber are portrayed with more depth, but also with humour. When visiting Eddie's home Amber is dressed in an over-feminine dress and garish make up that is completely against her style. The film deals with prejudice and difference through a slightly contradictory narrative. On the one hand it reassures viewers that deep down the world is not such a bad place and there is understanding and support. Although Eddie's mother realises that her son is homosexual, she does not raise the issue but promises to be there for him always. Even the military father admits that the army may not be the place for Eddie after all. On the other hand, Eddie and Amber never get open acceptance from their surroundings. The film ends with the feeling that such a delicate soul as Eddie could never find happiness in this town. The two have made a trip to Dublin, where they have got a taste of what life could be like in a more liberal place.



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The Big Hit (2020), directed by Emmanuel Courcol, is a comedy drama set in a prison. A group of soon-to-be-released prisoners starts to take theatre lessons with the intention to stage Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. Their teacher Étienne is a middle-aged actor who needs to take jobs like this to make ends meet. The journey to the premiere is full of difficulties, as some of the prisoners decide to drop out and some have great difficulties learning their lines. Étienne must negotiate repeatedly with the prison management to get permission to continue rehearsals and most of all to convince them that there is no danger in taking the prisoners to the outside world to perform in real theatres. Against all odds they get the show together and perform many times successfully, although the performances do not always go as planned.

The story is based on real events. In 1985 Jan Jönsson directed *Waiting for Godot* in Kumla prison in Sweden and moments before the last performance, the prisoners escaped. This happens also in the film. As one of the escapees admits by phone, the temptation simply grew too big. When Étienne steps on the stage to explain the situation, he starts to talk about the process, its challenges and successes and the audience listens enthralled. The ending does not reveal the fate of the prisoners.

The Big Hit is a feel-good film in an untypical context. The reality of prison life is left in the background and the narrative concentrates on the interaction between the different personalities during the rehearsals. The characters are amiable and the viewer can rest assured that they will eventually learn the play well enough and get on the stage. It is easy even to forget that these men have committed serious crimes, because they are like big children, who need the guidance of an adult. Étienne wants to demonstrate to the management that cultural activity inside the prison is possible and beneficial to the inmates. He can be said to succeed in this despite the escape before the final, most waited-for performance.

And Then We Danced (2019), directed by Swede Levan Akin, is a romantic drama set in Tbilisi, Georgia, about a young man, Merab, who practises Georgian dance under a strict and conservative



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teacher. When a new boy, Irakli, arrives at the dance school Merab considers him a rival, but they soon connect and feel attracted to each other. They begin a relationship in secret, but Merab's "girlfriend" Mary senses what is happening.

Tension builds up before an audition for which both Merab and Irakli have been chosen. Only one dancer has a chance to be promoted to the national ballet. Suddenly Irakli must leave town, which leaves Merab in shock, because he has fallen in love with him and his life seems to lose meaning. Upon return Irakli admits to having become engaged with his girlfriend from his hometown and that he must return there. Therefore, he is not going to come to the audition. In the final scene Merab dances at the audition despite a sprained ankle. His dance is different now, it breaks the rules of traditional masculine Georgian dance. His movements are softer and more feminine, reflecting his character better than the over-masculine strutting that they have been taught.

This is another film about young people exploring their sexual identity in a conservative environment. Merab parties with the town's gay community, but he is told that it is dangerous to be gay in Tbilisi. A fellow dancer has been sent to a monastery to be "cured" of homosexuality. When word goes out about Merab's homosexuality he is attacked by his dance school fellows. When his brother learns that Merab is gay he tells him that he should leave Tbilisi. At his brother's wedding the priest talks about how love used to be a matter between a man and a woman, but with "globalisation" this has changed. The ending leaves Merab's future open, but his new movements and defiant look at the end of his dance suggest courage and determination. The film is about finding courage to be yourself, because in the end you cannot hide who you are.

My Brother Chases Dinosaurs (2019) is the coming-of-age story of Jack (Francesco Ghoghi), who must accept the fact that his brother Gio has Down syndrome. The Italian and Spanish co-produced film, directed by Stefano Cipani, touches on many themes familiar from teen films: family, school, first love, activism and music. Fourteen-year-old Jack starts at a new school in a bigger city, and his



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life is filled with new things, not least a girl who is a committed environmental activist. Suddenly, it seems to Jack that Gio stands in the way of his happiness and freedom, so he blurts that his brother is dead. However, trying to keep Gio hidden from his new friends gets him deeper and deeper into lies and trouble with his family and friends.

The plot takes a surprising turn when the self-centred boy tries to prevent his brother from making YouTube videos by sending him fake blackmail letters from neo-Nazis. Finally, the lies become too much for him to bear, and he confesses everything in a demonstration that his friends have arranged against neo-Nazis. Through all this, Gio continues to love his brother and be his happy-go-lucky self. In the end, Jack understands how wrong he was. Things turn back to normal, and the most important people in Jack's life forgive him.

The film emphasises the importance of family, which in this case is very tightly knit. The father stands up for Gio when people make negative remarks about his son, and the family has emergency meetings when something acute comes up. Although the film is aimed at teenagers, it is also family-centred and humorous. It has darker tones too, such as the observation that Gio may not live to be old and that people like him have been objects of discrimination and prejudice. The film is based on Giagomo Mazzariol's autobiographical novel with the same title.

3.6.3 Feel-good and middlebrow films with an artistic flavour

Next, the films' stylistic and narrative characteristics are discussed. The films have certain overarching similarities. None of the films is very dark or distressing. They deal with serious themes such as depression, marginalisation and bullying, but most of the time in an audience-friendly, reassuring way. They do not contain graphic violence or sex, and they are not scary, for example. The films do not approach these issues with a social realist style such as in the films of the British film director Ken Loach. There is nothing extreme or disturbing in any of these films either in terms of content or style. Most of them contain humour or other soothing and distancing elements such as



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bright colours, lively narration and uplifting music. The film endings may not be happy, but they are hopeful.

The films can be categorised as comedy dramas (*Dating Amber*, *Miss Viborg*, *Ramona*, *The Big Hit*, and *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs*) or dramas (*And Then We Danced* and *Riders*), some with romantic emphasis (*And Then We Danced* and *Ramona*). Because the focus is on human relationships, emotions play a central role in the narratives. In terms of style, most of the films combine expressive strategies familiar from European arthouse and mainstream films. The main differences from mainstream Hollywood films are the avoidance of a distinct plot, clear narrative arc, or emotionally clear resolution. Ambiguity and open-endedness characterise these films. *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs* differs from the others in the sense that it is a youth or family film designed to appeal to younger audiences and therefore has a clearer closure. To compensate for the rather generic genre classifications, we will describe the films in more detail using two concepts from film theory.

A film theoretical term that fits the above characterisation of these film narratives is *feel-good film*. Ellen Rees (2017, p. 149) describes feel-good films as typically combining features of European arthouse cinema and Hollywood cinema as well as elements of drama and comedy. They tend to be nostalgic and sentimental in relation to the groups and places represented. As the term indicates, they aim to make the audience feel good. As film scholar Mette Hjort (2010, pp. 120–122) points out, the term refers to the dominant role of emotions in a film. According to Hjort, feel-good films tend to be associated with sentimental emotions, which are often viewed critically. With her analysis of the Danish film *Italian for Beginners* (Lone Scherfig, 2000) Hjort aims to show that a feel-good film can be more profound, which means that the aim is not to make the viewer experience positive emotions for their own sake, but for example to encourage the viewer to recognise and value goodness in people. She calls such films ethical feel-good films.



Despite being feel-good films, the EUFF films are not sentimental in the negative sense referred to by Hjort. However, they are not purely ethical feel-good films either. Our intention here is not to adopt either term as such, but rather to give a general characterisation of the EUFF films analysed here. Most of the films contain elements of the ethical feel-good. For example *The Big Hit* shows that people convicted of serious crimes can do good things together, but it does not go so far as to suggest that they will finally improve themselves by taking up theatre. In *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs*, the journey to honesty is through many unethical acts.

In the light of Cineuropa's aims the term feel-good feels appropriate to describe the mood and narrative strategy of these films. The representative of Cineuropa (2023) described the films listed in the repository as entertainment films, that is, films that appeal to large audiences through a clear story, which is not too dark or depressing. According to Cineuropa, they choose such films because the audiences of EUFFs are mainly "normal people", not cinema connoisseurs or enthusiasts, who are interested in good stories.

There is another term that describes these films well. "Bittersweet stories with a reassuring message", is how film scholar Huw D. Jones (2024, p. 167) describes what he calls *middlebrow films* in his recent book *Transnational European Cinema: Representation, Audiences, Identity*. This could be a description of the EUFF films as well. In his book Jones uses three categories to characterise European films: mainstream, arthouse and middlebrow. As Jones (2024, p. 139) points out, these categories are blurry. There is no clear definition of arthouse cinema and as Jones notes, because in recent years many films have combined elements of arthouse and mainstream, scholars have coined the term middlebrow for the in-between category. However, as Mazdon (2016, p. 184) notes, middlebrow is "far from straightforward" as a term. Instead she describes it as fluid and unfixed and as mediating "between high cultural forms and the field of mass production".



If we follow Jones's differentiation, one way of defining the difference between arthouse and middlebrow is that arthouse films pay more attention to visual and narrative style, which is usually not as straightforward as in middlebrow or mainstream films. *Ramona* and *Riders* have elements of arthouse in this sense. They are more interested in exploring the mental state of their characters through expressive techniques such as editing, flashbacks and dream sequences than in presenting a coherent plot. *And Then We Danced* is also more arthouse than middlebrow although it tells the story in a more classical and straightforward manner. However, it is slow-paced and emphasises emotions and atmosphere. *Dating Amber*, *Miss Viborg*, *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs* and *The Big Hit* fit best the category of middlebrow with some elements from mainstream film such as more stereotypical characters and more straightforward humour and no challenging expressive strategies. The queer theme adds an interesting twist to the middlebrow aspect of *Dating Amber*, but does not challenge it. The film deals with sexuality in a comedic but chaste manner. The language may be straightforward, but it is teenage language. The film is set in 1995, two years after the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the Republic of Ireland. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it does not present homosexuality as a realistic option, as Eddie has to leave for England at the end to live more freely. However, neither of these films are what big audiences like to watch, so even these films are more likely to be seen at arthouse theatres.

Middlebrow is a fitting term for the EUFF films also because the directors and actors are not world-famous but known mainly in their native countries. This applies to all the EUFF films analysed here and is true for much of European cinema. As Mariana Liz (2016, p. 53) points out, European actors are usually famous only in their own countries, which highlights the difficulty of defining a European star system and the fragmented state of the EFI. Some of the films (*Miss Viborg* and *Ramona*) are their director's debuts, or the directors are in an early stage of their career (*Dating Amber*).

Most of the films have had very limited distribution. This is no coincidence because the consortium's idea is to include in the repository films that have not been widely distributed, or films that are not



“too sold”, as will be explained in the next section of this report (Interview 2023). *And Then We Danced* and *The Big Hit* have had cinematic distribution in 21 and 20 European countries, respectively, the others in a maximum of ten countries. *Riders* has not been distributed outside the production country Slovenia. In this regard, audiences at EUFFs have a chance to see films that are not widely seen even in Europe and the festival can raise the profile of these filmmakers.

These films have not received many awards and even fewer at the world’s most prestigious film festivals. According to IMDb, *And Then We Danced* has won the most awards, 29, *Miss Viborg* won twelve, the others less than five. *And Then We Danced* is the only film that has been nominated for an award at one of the world’s most important festivals (Queer Palm at Cannes). Judging by the festival nominations, the films have been seen at festivals outside Europe too.

According to Sally Faulkner (2016, p. 1–2) middlebrow is a category above popular. It is a taste category “marked by dynamism and mobility”, which means that popular films may achieve the category of middlebrow. As Faulkner (2016, p. 6–7; see also Galt & Schoonover 2016) explains, the adjective middlebrow is used to refer not only to (film) texts but also to institutions through which films circulate and that can confer a film the middlebrow status, and to audiences. In other words, for example cinemas, VOD platforms, film awards, film reviews, are “institutions” that can bestow a the category of middlebrow on a film.

Mariana Liz also uses the term middlebrow in her book *Euro-Visions*, in which she focuses on how European films reflect the idea of the EU. Commenting European cinema’s position between art and commerce Liz (2016, p. 145) notes: “We thus witness the emergence of an essentially middlebrow cinema as the cinema favoured by EU cultural institutions – a ‘middlebrow-ness’ that, through its inclusive guise (not too ‘popular’ to be disparaged, not too ‘arty’ to be alienating) echoes the notion of universality.” According to Liz (2016, p. 60), the sense of quality that shows in Creative Europe Media programme’s support decisions is an indication of the EU adopting “an essentially middlebrow



vision of contemporary European cinema". Liz (2016, p. 32) notes that other terms with roughly the same meaning have been adopted to describe European cinema. These include "popular European art film" and "quality film". As was noted above, some of the interviewed festival organisers characterised films shown at EUFF as not being as daring as films at other festivals.

On the basis of Faulkner and Liz the EUFF can be seen as an institution that gives films, especially those included in the repository, the middlebrow status that elevates them above the mass of popular European cinema. Yet, this status can also be seen to reflect the fact that the EUFF belongs to a lower category than prestigious festivals such as Berlin and Cannes, which feature mainly arthouse films that appeal to more highbrow taste (see Galt & Schoonover, 2016, pp. 197–198). Nevertheless, Galt and Schoonover (2016, p. 196) note that when films travel to "global audiences" their middlebrow status may be elevated, because recognising a film as middlebrow may require "culturally specific knowledge". This may mean for example that some audiences at the EUFFs do not see these films at all as middlebrow. While we do not have information about how the EUFF audiences perceived the films, the festival organisers generally described European films as "artistic" or "arthouse". The process of acquiring or losing middlebrow status is thus far from unequivocal. It depends not only on the institution but also on the audience. All in all there is a lot of ambiguity around the concept of middlebrow cinema not least because scholars use the term in different ways. For example, we are sceptical about the claim made by Faulkner (2016, p. 7–8) that middlebrow is different from popular cinema because of its ability to slide between the two extremes of art and popular.

3.6.4 Representations of Europe and European values in the EUFF films

Next, we examine how the seven films portray different parts of Europe and how they express European values. Cineuropa (n.d.) describes the mission of EUFF on its website as follows:



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The potential of cinema to convey information about Europe and its creativity has been recognised by a large number of EU delegations in third countries. Today, more than 90 out of the 139 EU delegations around the world organise EUFFs, as this is one of the most effective tools in reaching out and making Europe, its values and its stories known.

A definition of European values is not given in this citation. The values are only referred to as something that should be made known to people living outside the EU. We use the Treaty on the European Union as a point of reference for European values. The treaty declares the values on which the EU is founded. Article two of the treaty (EU 2008, p. 17) states:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

The EU's values regarding audiovisual culture more specifically are expressed for example on Creative Europe's (2024) webpage, according to which the main objectives of the programme in terms of values are to "safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage".

Diversity, which is not mentioned as a separate term in the treaty, emerges as the core value of the EU based on the above sources. In an ideal case, if diversity can be safeguarded, then the many values mentioned in the treaty will be easier to achieve. Diversity can be understood to refer to valuing all the things that make living beings different and that empower them. Cineuropa's description of the EUFF also mentions information, creativity and stories. Displaying the diversity of the EU and its culture through cinema can be said to be the aim of the EUFF.



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The EUFF films analysed above represent different nationalities and cultural traditions, which is expected, because the idea of the EUFF is to have films from all the participating EU Member States. For the same reason they are linguistically diverse. Half of the films are co-productions, reflecting cooperation and transnationality as values advanced by the EU, but also the reality of the EFI where especially for small film industries co-productions are necessary to increase competitiveness.

On a more specific level, each of the stories in its own way can be seen as a manifestation of one or several of the (overlapping) values mentioned in the treaty. The films advocate pluralism, non-discrimination, equality between men and women, tolerance and freedom. As was mentioned above, the films rarely refer to the wider society but advocate these values indirectly through their character-driven stories. Tolerance, for example, is a topic in *And Then We Danced*, *Dating Amber* and *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs*, which are all coming-of-age stories. The emphasis in the films is on the experiences of younger generations, with *The Big Hit* as an exception. The stories of young people express the possibility of change in a credible manner.

Because of their diverse origins the films can be said to portray specificities of national cultures, making them “a particularly useful means for the dissemination of cultural ideas”, which according to Mariana Liz (2016, p. 3, 6) is characteristic of cinema in general and important especially in Europe, because the idea of a common Europe needs strengthening. At the same time the films bring out some painful aspects of their cultures. *And Then We Danced* portrays Georgian dance culture and a communal living style, but also the country’s conservative ideologies. In *And Then We Danced* and *Dating Amber* the negative attitudes of Georgian and Irish societies towards sexual minorities are an integral part of the coming-of-age stories. The films take a critical stance on these attitudes suggesting they are backward and defend their protagonists’ right to personal happiness.

Homosexuality was criminalised until 2017 in Georgia, and it was a highly inflammatory topic during the making of the film. The film’s topic had to be kept secret to guarantee the safety of the crew. The



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screenings of the film sparked violent protests by the far right in Georgia and it was denounced by the Orthodox Church of Georgia as “an affront to traditional Georgian values” (Murray 2020). The film also shows more positive aspects of life in Georgia, such as a communal way of living and respect for older people. The beauty of the film’s images – warm and soft colours, for example – also create distance from negative aspects of reality.

Riders depicts rural Slovenia (and Croatia), drawing attention to the strong position of religion in the country’s traditional culture. The film dwells on beautiful natural landscapes, creating a sense of nostalgia. Although Tomaz has some oppressive memories of home, traditional values are not really an object of criticism but rather an object of doubt on his journey towards self-discovery. The protagonists ride through the states of Slovenia and Croatia, which had only recently (1991) gained their independence from Yugoslavia. However, the violent history of the region is not referred to, at least not in a way that would be obvious to an unknowing viewer.

The films are diverse not only because of their national origin, but also because of the stories that deal with diversity issues such as sexuality, and genetic disorder in the case of *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs*. This family film makes a strong case for the right of a person with Down syndrome to live as a full member of the society and condemns neo-Nazism as a dangerous ideology and a threat to a plural society.

However, diversity issues are limited to the experiences of Caucasian Europeans in these films. Non-European cultural backgrounds and ethnicities, including immigrants, are seen only in *Miss Viborg* and *The Big Hit*, but cross-cultural encounters are not a topic in these films. In fact, as previously mentioned, the EUFF representatives in South Africa expressed criticism regarding the cultural diversity of European films selected for screening at the festival. The challenges that Europe has faced with migration are not reflected in these films. Instead, Europeans’ freedom of movement is evident in them. Actual travelling across borders is seen in *Miss Viborg* and *Riders* where it



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presents no problems. In *Ramona* the main character tells of her experiences of living in different countries and in *Dating Amber* the character Amber suggests that Eddie would be better off in the more tolerant London.

Gender equality is moderately realised both in terms of the filmmakers and the films' contents. Two of the films, *Miss Viborg* and *Ramona*, have been directed women, five by men. The main characters and scriptwriters of each film are the same gender as that film's director. Although gender equality in this group of films is not realised very well as regards the protagonists, in almost all the stories both sexes have a variety of roles. For example, female characters are seen in lead positions (as prison managers) in *The Big Hit* and as courageous and insightful friends and girlfriends in *Dating Amber* and *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs*. *Miss Viborg* portrays an extraordinary friendship between women of very different ages while men are seen in minor roles. *Dating Amber* questions traditional gender roles, suggesting that a younger generation has different views on these issues.

In *Riders* and *And Then We Danced* the male and female roles are the most traditional. In the male-dominated road film, a (stereo)typical adventurous female character is encountered on the road and a disappointed and worried mother representing traditional values is waiting at home. In *And Then We Danced*, Merab spends a lot of time with a girl, a dance colleague, but he is not sexually attracted to her. Men play the roles of artists or creative personalities: a filmmaker in *Ramona*, a dance school director in *And Then We Danced* and as a theatre actor turned director in *The Big Hit*.

What kind of picture of Europe emerges from the EUFF films? The films tell mostly reassuring stories of personal growth. They speak for liberal values and express concern towards reactionary worldviews and ideologies especially in stories about young people. Some of the films express nostalgia towards traditional ways of living that may be disappearing. Despite this, national ethos is not emphasised but rather viewed with an evaluative, in some cases even a critical, gaze. These



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human, character-driven stories focus on everyday actions and the experiences of individuals living mainly in urban settings.

From a more critical perspective, judging by the EUFF films European values are not something that can be taken for granted. In different parts of Europe prejudices still complicate the lives of people, especially those belonging to sexual minorities. Clearly, work still needs to be done to secure everyone's human rights. The EUFF films seem to highlight similar issues as the LUX Prize winners, which Stefano Baschiera and Francesco Di Chiara (2018, p. 247) describe as follows: "The LUX Prize mainly focuses on divisive social rights, which are still being debated in the Member States' public sphere, rather than celebrating European ideas that are supposedly being taken for granted by European audiences."

The question about what kind of a picture of Europe emerges from European films is also asked by Mariana Liz. Although her conclusions are based on a much larger number of European films, some of her observations are of relevance here. She notes for example that European films tend to focus on individuals, adding: "This personal dimension allows people to connect with Europe, while showing that individuals are, potentially, all the same." In this manner, according to Liz, in European films the individual is highlighted to represent humanity (Liz 2016, p. 147). A similar observation can be made of the EUFF films analysed here. A look at the repository of films confirms this finding, but it needs to be remembered that a larger sample of films might produce different results. The EUFFs screen many films that are not included in the repository.

3.6.5 Cineuropa's film repository

The film repository is part of the project the European Commission began in 2018 to support the film festivals organised by EU delegations in third countries. The project is managed by a consortium led by the Goethe-Institut. The other members of the consortium are Institut Français, which oversees the negotiation of the films' rights, and Cineuropa, which is a portal for the promotion of European



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cinema. Team leader, project assistant and film curator for the project come from Cineuropa. The first funding period of the project was 2018–2022 and the second one started in 2023 and will run until 2026 (Interview with Cineuropa 2023; Cineuropa, 2023a).

The consortium has established a repository of feature and short films and secured their worldwide, noncommercial rights. At the time of writing this report in early 2024 there were 32 feature-length films and no short films in the repository. Two of the films were documentaries and the rest were fiction films (see the films listed in Table 12). In early 2024 the consortium was planning to buy rights for new short films. The films' rights are bought for two years after which the films are removed from the repository. There are changes in the repository every year, but it usually includes 30–35 films. The repository needs to include films from all EU Member States. The consortium can select fifteen new films per year (Interview with Cineuropa 2023).

Films are selected for the repository in the following way. The project members watch approximately 400 films a year to choose the films for the repository. The team that selects the films consider first the finalists of the European Film Awards and the finalists of various national prizes. They also get suggestions from sales agents and national film promotion agencies, and they travel to film festivals to see films. A jury watches and evaluates 50–70 films. The members of the jury change yearly, and the jury includes both film professionals, such as journalists and festival curators, and ordinary film viewers. The final decision about which films to include in the repository is made in a meeting with the project's steering committee, which is composed of people working at the European Commission (Interview with Cineuropa 2023).

The first criterion for the films is quality. According to the representative of Cineuropa, quality means films that are entertaining and easy to follow – “entertainment you can follow”. The films must have strong stories with a beginning, middle and end, in other words, films with a classical narrative structure are preferred: “We need a history with the classical beginning, middle and end with a



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protagonist which follows the steps and of course, obstacles. Very classical way of telling stories.” Another criterion is that the film must not have been distributed too widely. That is why the consortium often ends up choosing films that are the first or second films of their creators. Other criteria are European values and diversity “even if it is not always possible”. As additional criteria the representative of Cineuropa mentioned that the films must not be too heavy, dark or depressing, because the EUFFs are intended as popular festivals for the public, not for film experts (Interview with Cineuropa 2023).

According to the representative, feedback from the festivals indicates that there is no audience for films that are too heavy. In the beginning of the project, some critically acclaimed films were chosen for the repository, because there was not enough time to watch all the films. According to the delegations, those films turned out to be too heavy and depressing. After having received such criticism the consortium changed its approach. This is why the consortium now attempts to include in the repository many comedies and films with humour. They also attempt to have diverse films, by which they mean different types of films such as documentaries and animations, different genre films (even thrillers) and films with content about minorities, such as LGBTQ+ themes. No genre is deliberately excluded. Family films and comedies are the ones most used for the festivals, but it is a challenge to find both. According to the representative of Cineuropa, because humour tends to be local, comedies do not often travel well and there are not many good quality family films. *My Brother Chases Dinosaurs*, an Italian film directed by Stefano Cipani, was mentioned as an example of a good family film (Interview with Cineuropa 2023).

In a document based on reports from the EU delegations the consortium notes that since the establishment of the initiative and the repository the EUFFs have increased the number of screened films. Now, 65% of the festivals now screen 10–29 films. In the beginning of the initiative most festivals screened less than ten films. Since the establishment of the initiative, 31 delegations have organised their first EU Film Festival. Cineuropa also notes that satisfaction with the repository has



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been high throughout the project, but it has even increased when more comedies and family films, diverse genres and short films on climate change were added to the repository (Cineuropa, 2023b, pp. 4–8). The films included in the repository at the time of writing this report are shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Summary of the films that were included in the repository in 2023. Source: Cineuropa; for genres and awards: Internet Movie Database (IMDb); for admissions: Lumiere. 5 June 2025.

Title	Director	Year	Country	Language	Genre (IMDb)	Gender of the director	Awards (IMDb)	Admission in Europe
1. <i>Any Day Now/Ensilumi</i>	Hamy Ramezan	2020	Finland	Persian, Finnish, English	Drama	male	6	42,624
2. <i>Dating Amber</i>	David Freyne	2020	Ireland, UK	English	comedy, drama, romance	male	3	20,102
3. <i>Dodo</i>	Panos H. Koutras	2022	Greece, France, Belgium	Greek, Albanian, French, Russian	comedy, drama, romance	male	1	24,045
4. <i>Easy Living/Easy Living- La Vita Facile</i>	Orso Miyakawa & Peter Miyakawa	2019	Italy	Italian, English	comedy, drama	male	1	6,201
5. <i>Even Mice Belong in Heaven/Mysi patri do nebe</i>	Jan Bubenicek & Denisa Grimmová	2021	Czech Republic, France, Slovakia, Poland	Czech, English, French	animation, adventure, comedy	male & female	6	491,304
6. <i>Extracurricular/Dopunska nastava</i>	Ivan-Goran Vitez	2019	Croatia	Croatian	comedy, crime, thriller	male	–	6,013
7. <i>Gentle/Szelíd</i>	László Csujá,	2022	Hungary, Germany	Hungarian	drama	female & male	6	4,193



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	Anna Nemes							
8. <i>Gods of Molenbeek/ Aatos ja Amine</i>	Reetta Huhtanen	2019	Finland, Belgium, Germany	French, Finnish, Arabic, Spanish	documentary	female	9	6,951
9. <i>Imad's Childhood/Imad's barndom</i>	Zahavi Sanjavi	2021	Sweden, Latvia, Iraq	Kurdish, Arabic	documentary	male	2	453
10. <i>Io sto bene</i>	Donato Rotunno	2020	Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, Italy	Italian, French, Luxembourgish, English	drama	male	–	4,321
11. <i>Kratt</i>	Rasmus Merivoo	2021	Estonia	Estonian	comedy, fantasy	male	2	23,265
12. <i>Lola/Lola vers la mer</i>	Laurent Micheli	2019	Belgium, France	French, Flemish	drama	male	4	40,505
13. <i>Luxembourg, Luxembourg/ Lyuksemburh, Lyuksemburh</i>	Antonio Lukich	2022	Ukraine	Ukrainian, German	comedy	male	5	1,311
14. <i>Luzzu</i>	Alex Camilleri	2021	Malta, United States	Maltese, English	drama	male	5	17,656
15. <i>Mikado/Marocco</i>	Emanuel Parvu	2021	Romania, Czech Republic	Romanian	drama	male	4	11,487
16. <i>Miss Viborg</i>	Marianne Blicher	2022	Denmark	Danish, German	comedy, drama	female	12	12,385
17. <i>Mitra</i>	Kaweh Modiri	2021	Netherlands, Germany	Persian, Dutch, English	drama	male	1	7,158



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			, Denmark					
18. <i>Murina</i>	Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic	2021	Croatia, Slovenia, Brazil, United States	Croatian, English, Spanish	drama, coming-of-age	female	9	75,971
19. <i>My Father's Demons/Os demónios do meu avô</i>	Nuno Beato	2022	Portugal, Spain, France	Portuguese?	animation	male	11	18,865
20. <i>My Love Affair with Marriage</i>	Signe Baumane	2022	Latvia, United States, Luxembourg	English	animation, comedy, drama, musical	female	14	5,945
21. <i>Never Gonna Snow Again/Śniegu już nigdy nie będzie</i>	Malgorzata Szumowska & Michal Englert	2020	Poland/Germany	Polish, Russian, French, Vietnamese	comedy, drama, mystery	female & male	3	57,346
22. <i>Oskar and Lilli – Where No One Knows Us/Oskar & Lilli - Ein bisschen bleiben wir noch</i>	Arash T. Riahi	2020	Austria	German	drama	male	11	10,607
23. <i>Pause/Páfsi</i>	Tonia Mishiali	2018	Cyprus, Greece	Greek, English	drama	female	9	32
24. <i>Ramona</i>	Andrea Bagney	2022	Spain	Spanish	comedy, drama, romance	female	3	19,448



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25. <i>Runner/Bėgikė</i>	Andrius Blazelevicius	2021	Lithuania , Czech Republic	Lithuanian	drama, romance , thriller	male	3	5,292
26. <i>Sanremo</i>	Miroslav Mandic	2020	Slovenia, Italy	Slovenian, Italian	drama, romance	male	–	3,225
27. <i>Shadow Country/Krajina ve stínu</i>	Bohdan Sláma	2020	Czech Republic, Slovakia	Czech	drama, history	male	8	22,017
28. <i>Schoolgirls/Las niñas</i>	Pilar Palomero	2020	Spain	Spanish, Catalan	drama	female	29	171,466
29. <i>Servants/Služobníci</i>	Ivan Ostrochovský	2020	Slovakia, Romania, Czech Republic, Ireland	Slovak	drama	male	9	16,515
30. <i>Sisters Apart/Im Feuer</i>	Daphne Charizani	2020	Germany , Greece	German, Kurdish, English	drama, war	female	2	457
31. <i>The Big Hit/Un triomphe</i>	Emmanuel Courcol	2020	France	French, Russian	comedy, drama	male	4	468,120
32. <i>The Naked Truth about Zhiguli Band/Golata istina za grupa Zhiguli</i>	Victor Bojinov	2021	Bulgaria	Bulgarian	comedy, drama, musical	male	2	155,687

3.7 Summary of results

The analysis of the EUFF revealed various similarities but also differences in the organisation of the festival as well as in the organisers' understanding of the objectives and rationale behind the festival.

Although the names, sizes, budgets, organisational practices, partnerships and histories vary, the



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EUFF is characterised by a complex organisational structure involving both high-level official actors and local film festival organisations and associations, which usually take on the practical organisational responsibilities and compensate for the lack of film expertise in the EU delegations, embassies and other representations of the EU Member States. This organisational structure is also reflected in the curatorial challenges of the festival. Curating the EUFF programme is often a balancing act between the curators' cinematic views and the broad representation of EU Member States and the film choices made by their (non-professional) representatives. Similarly, an earlier study of the EUFF festival in the Philippines identified tensions between the national interests of the EU Member States involved in the programme and the collaborative efforts of the festival (Enverga & Tangco 2018, p. 835).

Due to these challenges, as well as the EU's objectives for the EUFF, the festival programmes do not have a specific theme, but rather aim to show a wide range of recent European films from different EU Member States in different genres. As a result of these objectives, the festivals are not targeted at any particular audience. In line with the EU's objectives, the discourses of the festival programmes typically emphasise European values such as democracy, freedom, equality, human rights and diversity. This emphasis underlines the social and societal agenda included in the organisation of the EUFFs. Alongside the films and the festival discourses, the side events support such an agenda. These events commonly focus on engaging young and/or underprivileged people in social and societal discussions through film, and on capacity building of young film professionals through workshops, competitions and exchanges with European professionals. Side events are typically based on one-way exchanges.

The organisation of EUFFs is a balancing act between different objectives. This balancing act was not to see European film and festivals as a crossroads between commerce and art, as previous research has done (Herold, 2004; Liz, 2016), but rather to combine the rationales of supporting the



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film industry and using film for diverse social and societal activities, such as strengthening intercultural dialogue and international cultural relations. This balancing act between strengthening the competitiveness of the industry and public diplomacy through film was often unproblematic, as festival organisers were less interested in the former and more focused on the latter. The rationale of public diplomacy was also emphasised in the interviews of the EEAS officials. This, of course, reflects the main policy area of the EEAS. In general, the establishment of the EEAS and its activities are part of the increased foreign policy interest of the EU, which has expanded the EU's interest in film.

The EU's interest in film has long focused on strengthening the competitiveness of the EFI, with the main challenges being the poor circulation of European films abroad and the global dominance of Hollywood productions. The EUFF analysis confirmed that European films are poorly known and rarely screened in third countries, except in Türkiye. Often, film festivals or the EUFF are the only opportunities to see European films in cinemas in these countries. The study identifies several challenges that hinder the competitiveness of European films. These include high screening costs compared to US films, lack of distribution which limits the reach of European films and poor promotion which leaves many audiences unfamiliar with European directors and actors, limiting mainstream success. At the same time, the EUFF seeks to increase cooperation and collaboration between European and third country film professionals and industries. Cooperation, especially in the form of co-productions, is key to increasing the competitiveness of the industry. While the EFI faces challenges in terms of global competitiveness, its unique characteristics of arthouse storytelling with social and societal themes offer opportunities for niche markets and cultural diplomacy. European films have potential appeal particularly in multicultural metropolises, where heterogeneous audiences with different cultural backgrounds are interested in stories and languages that reflect, for example, their personal cultural heritage. In addition, the emphasis on diversity and social and



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societal issues in European films was found to attract certain audiences, such as young people familiar with different cultures.

Our analysis underlines the recent shift in EU policy discourses. Over the past decade, EU policy discourses on the EFI have increasingly emphasised global cooperation, cultural exchange and external relations. This shift is evident in the way the EUFF is organised and perceived. However, our analysis revealed the ambiguity of the diplomatic discourses and practices involved in the EUFF. On the one hand, the EUFF is a high-profile cultural event attended by embassies, consulates and representatives of national cultural institutes. It serves as a platform for diplomatic interaction. According to the EUFF guidelines, the festival's promotional material and the organisers, the EUFF aims to showcase European films and promote European values and culture in non-EU countries. This top-down approach is in line with traditional cultural diplomacy with an element of public diplomacy. On the other hand, the EUFF involves a strong people-to-people approach to diplomacy. The festival aims to promote cultural exchange between European and local film professionals, as well as intercultural dialogue and civil society and grassroots engagement with the social and societal issues addressed in the films screened. While the EUFF seeks to promote inclusivity and diversity, many festival organisers in non-Western third countries have criticised the lack of two-way exchanges that would enable capacity building and development of the local film industry. The EEAS officials and festival organisers in South Africa recognised the colonial attitudes implicit in the traditional approach to cultural diplomacy. The ambiguity of diplomatic positions included in our data reflects broader shifts in EU foreign policy, extending cultural diplomacy to an international cultural relations approach that emphasises dialogue, reciprocity, co-creation and grassroots cultural cooperation. Such relations still need to be strongly emphasised in order to be put into practice.

The analysis of the seven films that either had the most screenings at the case EUFFs or were among the most requested films from the film repository showed that EUFF films are audience-



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friendly dramas or comedy dramas that deal with even serious themes in an uplifting and hopeful manner. The films do not include any disturbing content such as explicit violence or sex. They can be called feel-good films. Middlebrow cinema is another useful term to describe these films, which are neither mainstream nor fully-fledged arthouse films but somewhere in between.

The films exemplify the criteria set by the consortium for the films included in the repository. According to Cineuropa, they must be quality films, which means classical narrative films that are easy to follow and entertaining. The films must not have been distributed too widely, and whenever possible, they should display European values and diversity. Most of the analysed films have been distributed in less than ten European countries, which means that the audiences of EUFFs have a chance to see European films that have not been seen widely in Europe. The directors and actors of these films are not very well known even in Europe and some of the films are first or early-career films of their directors.

According to Cineuropa, during the repository's first funding period, the consortium chose some critically acclaimed films for the repository, but such films were criticised by festival organisers for being too dark and depressing. After this feedback, a decision was made to focus on more audience-friendly films, because according to Cineuropa the EUFFs are meant to be popular festivals for the general public. In their feedback, festival organisers have requested more family films and comedies. The consortium tries to respond to this request, although finding good quality family films and comedies is not easy according to them. Since establishing the repository in 2018, the number of films screened at the EUFFs has increased and 31 delegations have organised their first festival. According to Cineuropa, satisfaction with the repository has been high throughout the project. The positive impact of the repository and other forms of support from the consortium is also noted in an evaluation of the consortium's support to the EUFFs (Helly & Chandran, 2023, p. 33). However, based on the interviews there also appears to be demand for European films with a stronger artistic vision. Several interviewees mentioned film students as a potential audience for the festival. In other



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words, despite past criticism, Cineuropa should not be discouraged from offering a diverse selection of European cinema for the EUFFs in the future.

The seven analysed films are a geographically broad sample of European cinema. The stories are located in various countries and they display the diversity of European languages. The films' diversity illustrates the aim of the EUFF, which is to make European values and stories known in third countries. The stories are character-driven and describe personal growth, but often also include some social criticism. For example, *And Then We Danced* and *Dating Amber* deal with the difficult position of homosexuals in the respective societies, Georgia and Ireland. Many of the stories seem to suggest that much work still needs to be done to make European values a reality.

Our study of the EUFF has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the study lacked contributions from non-European scholars, which limited the diversity of perspectives on the dynamics of EUFFs. Including non-European scholars in the analysis would provide broader insights and potentially enrich the scope of the study. Increased financial support for non-European scholars to explore European policies and cultural practices is recommended to improve inclusivity and global engagement. Second, the research primarily gathered input from festival organisers, EU delegations and EU policy officials, without considering the views of festival participants or local industry players. This narrow focus may miss critical insights into audience experiences and the impact of festivals on the local film industry, which are essential for a full understanding of the impact of festivals. Third, there were difficulties in reaching interviewees from African countries and certain EU delegations, limiting the study's ability to fully represent cross-continental perspectives. Fourthly, many of the films screened at the EUFF 2023 and in the Cineuropa repository were not available on VOD platforms in Finland during the study period. The analysis therefore focuses on the most screened and most borrowed films.



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4. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 EU Film Festivals and the LUX Audience Award as an EU effort in building audiences for European film

The LUX and EUFF are two EU-based film initiatives that support the European film industry from different angles. In both cases, the main focus is on European film and increasing its interest among different audiences. In addition, both initiatives include a strong social dimension that seeks to promote diversity, intercultural dialogue and European values. There are also important differences between the initiatives, with the first focusing more on raising awareness of European film in Europe by involving audiences in voting for their favourite nominee, and the second being used to strengthen collaboration and diplomatic endeavours outside the EU. While the former can be seen as an internal EU cultural policy initiative, the latter is linked to the EU's external policies and actions in international cultural relations. While neither of these initiatives is primarily aimed at selling European films, they are in many ways linked to the promotion of European films and the enhancement of the competitiveness of the European film industry – although not very successfully.

Our study of the LUX examined the competitiveness of the initiative on the basis of various economic and non-economic indicators, namely revenues, admissions, countries of release, distribution on VOD platforms, awards, professional criticism, newspaper journalism and online rating by critics and viewers. The study showed that these indicators are significantly correlated: An increase in one of them is likely to lead to an increase in the others. A comparison of these indicators with the European winners of the much more prestigious film awards, the Palme d'or and the Oscar for the Best International Feature Film, shows that the LUX winners are not very competitive in the global or even European film scene. Some of the films have very low admissions and are not widely distributed or recognised by film critics and newspapers.



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Our study of LUX-winning films shows that they tend to be contemporary dramas dealing with serious social and societal issues. We also examined the evolution of the competitiveness of the LUX system by comparing the winners before and after the system was changed from a prize selected by MEPs to an audience award combining both MEP and audience voting. The results show that the change in the scheme did not have a major impact on its competitiveness indicators, nor on the content or style of the winning films.

Our study of the EUFF showed that the initiative is characterised by a complex organisational structure involving both high-level official actors and local film festival organisations and associations, which usually take on the practical organisational responsibilities and compensate for the lack of film expertise in the EU Delegation and the embassies and other representations of the EU Member States. This organisational structure is also reflected in the curatorial challenges of the festival. In line with the objectives of the EU, the discourses of the festival programmes typically emphasise European values such as democracy, freedom, equality, human rights and diversity. Alongside the films and the festival discourses, the side events support such an agenda. However, side events are typically based on one-way exchanges.

The organisation of EUFFs is a balancing act between different objectives. This balancing act seeks to combine the rationales of supporting the film industry and using film for various social and societal activities, such as strengthening intercultural dialogue and international cultural relations. Our analysis revealed the ambiguity of the diplomatic discourses and practices involved in the EUFF, ranging from the top-down approach typical of traditional cultural diplomacy to a strong people-to-people approach.

The analysis of the seven films that either had the most screenings at the case EUFFs or were among the most requested films from the film repository showed that EUFF films are audience-



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friendly dramas or comedy dramas that deal with even serious issues in an uplifting and hopeful manner. The films do not contain disturbing content such as explicit violence or sex. These films were characterised by the term middlebrow.

4.2 Policy implications

4.2.1 The LUX Audience Award

- **Improve the promotion of the award:** The award itself should be promoted more effectively to make it more visible and to arouse public interest. At the moment it is promoted on the European Parliament's website and social media (Facebook) page as well as on the websites of the selected cinemas that arrange LUX Film Days screenings. However, the general public does not follow these sites widely. As we noted above, people cannot vote if they do not know that such an award exists. Other channels of promotion should therefore be explored.
- **Highlight LUX's aim to involve citizens:** There are not many audience awards in Europe, so this fact should be turned into an attraction for LUX. Currently, the votes of the audience and European Parliament carry equal weight. However, we recommend reconsidering the voting system, given that the audience significantly outnumbers the Parliament's members. In 2025, 33,000 ratings were given, whereas there are only 720 MEPs.
- **Make the nominated films better available for viewing:** To enable the participation of a greater number of people during the voting phase, the nominated films should be made better available for viewing. We propose to organise screenings of the films in more cities. This would also allow for more effective promotion of the award and the films at local level. It would be worth exploring where else besides cinemas belonging to the Europa Cinemas Network the films could be screened.



- **Improving distribution and streaming:** The international distribution of the award-winning films through cinemas and streaming services should be improved. Some resources should be put into developing distribution strategies for the winning films.

4.2.2 EU Film Festivals

Our analysis of the EUFF has led to several policy implications, which we summarise below. The following recommendations are not based on individual comments in our interview data, but draw on the saturation of critical remarks and suggestions for future iterations of the programme expressed by several informants combined with our observations of the shortcomings and weaknesses of the organisation and communication of the festivals.

- **Communicate EUFF objectives continuously:** Clearly define and communicate the objectives of the EUFF to EU Member States in order to build consensus and shared ownership, highlighting the importance of mutuality and the need to eschew instrumentalism.
- **Frame the EUFF within broader public diplomacy efforts:** Better emphasise and clarify for festival organisers the international cultural relations approach in the implementation of the EUFF.
- **Focus on shared values:** Promote shared values rather than exclusively "EU values", avoiding the perception of a neo-colonial approach.
- **Support the engagement of independent film professionals and cultural workers:** Financial support for independent professionals (from both EU and third countries) is crucial for their engagement. Such support is in line with the promotion of European values such as diversity and equality.
- **Strengthen co-productions:** Strengthen existing EU funding for co-productions between EU and third countries and prioritise small-scale projects with local professionals and markets to foster deeper collaboration.



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- **Improve two-way exchanges and highlight side events:** Develop the EUFF to better support two-way exchanges between EU and non-EU film professionals, allowing non-EU professionals to visit the EU, support the screening of non-EU films at film festivals in Europe, aim to systematically include local films in the EUFF programme to promote balance and inclusion, and transform side events into dialogues, supporting co-learning, collaboration and co-productions and using films as a basis for discussions on common challenges.
- **Develop tailored audience engagement, addressing diversity:** Develop strategies to engage with existing and new audiences, and improve festival design accordingly. Address diversity in communications materials to better reflect societal values and inclusivity.
- **Increase funding for Cineuropa and Delegations:** Provide more financial support to EU delegations and Cineuropa to increase the number and diversity of films in the repository and at the festivals and to cover costs in low-income markets.
- **Consider broader indicators in implementation monitoring:** Use non-quantitative and non-market indicators to measure the impact of the EUFF, including cultural and social outcomes, both in Cineuropa's collection of information and when assessing the implementation of the festival, avoiding short-termist analysis of results.
- **Continue to focus on films that have only a limited distribution outside Europe.** The consortium should continue to include in the repository films that are not widely distributed in third countries, because this strategy increases the visibility of a great number of middlebrow European films.

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ANNEX1

Interviews

Country	Code number	Details of the interview (date, place, length in min.)	Description
Argentina	Interview AR	16 January 2024, Zoom, 42 min.	Representative of the festival organisation
Argentina	Email interview AR	4 December 2023	Representative of the festival organisation and Representative of the EU Delegation to Argentina
Canada	Email interview CAN1	18 December 2023	Representative of the EU Delegation to Canada
Canada	Interview CAN2	4 December 2023, Zoom, 57 min.	Representative of the festival organisation
Canada	Interview CAN3	4 December 2023, Zoom, 35 min.	Representative of the festival organisation
Canada	Email interview CAN4	11 January 2024	Representative of the festival organisation
Chile	Interview CH	9 April 2024, Zoom, 54 min.	Representative of the festival organisation
Chile	Email Interview CH1	20 March 2024	Representative of the festival organisation
Chile	Email Interview CH2	8 February 2024	Representative of the EU Delegation to Chile
Indonesia	Interview ID	4 December 2023, Zoom, 37 min.	Two representatives of the festival organisation
Indonesia	Email interview ID	29 November 2023	Two representatives of the festival organisation
South Africa	Interview SA1	19 February 2024, 54 min.	Representative of the EU Delegation to Eswatini
South Africa	Interview SA2	9 February 2024, 38 min.	Representative of the festival organisation



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South Africa	Interview SA3	20 February 2024, 44 min.	Representative of the festival organisation
South Africa	Interview SA4	19 February 2024, 62 min.	Representative of the EU Delegation to South Africa
South Africa	Email interview SA4	11 January 2024	Representative of the EU Delegation to South Africa
Türkiye	Email Interview TR	7 February 2024 9 February 2024	Representative of the festival organisation
The United Kingdom	Interview UK1	29 November 2023, Zoom, 45 min.	Representative of the European Union National Institutes for Culture
The United Kingdom	Interview UK2	8 December 2023, Zoom, 33 min.	Representative of the festival organisation
Vietnam	Interview VN	14 December 2023, Zoom, 31 min.	Representative of the EU Delegation to Vietnam
Vietnam	Email interview VN	13 December 2023	Representative of the EU Delegation to Vietnam
EEAS	Interview EEAS1	16 September 2024, Zoom, 71 min.	Two representatives of the European Union External Action



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Disclaimer

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