

CULTURAL AUDIOVISUAL HERITAGE FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD AND EUROPEAN COMPETITIVENESS

REVIVING, BOOSTING, OPTIMISING, AND TRANSFORMING EUROPEAN FILM COMPETITIVENESS (REBOOT) WORKSHOP, 22 JANUARY 2025, 15:00–19:00 ZACHĘTA – NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, CINEMA ROOM, STANISŁAW MAŁACHOWSKI SQUARE 3, 00-916 WARSAW

On January 22, 2025, the Cinema Hall of Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki (The Zachęta National Gallery of Art) in Warsaw hosted a workshop titled „Cultural Audiovisual Heritage for the Public Good and European Competitiveness” to discuss the film and media industry. The aim was to explore how various European film markets operate with a focus on the making of film policies and the role of public institutions in supporting the film industry.

Researchers in the REBOOT project consortium organised the event in collaboration with their peers from both the Public Service Media in an Age of Platforms (PSM-AP) project and the Zachęta, alongside the Creative Europe Desk Poland and FINA – National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute. This workshop was part of the REBOOT (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising, and Transforming European Film Competitiveness) project funded by the European Commission under Horizon Europe. Katharine Sarikakis, University of Vienna, leads the REBOOT. For more information about the project, please visit <https://thereboot-project.eu/>. This three-day REBOOT Horizon Europe workshop in Warsaw was held under the aegis of the Knowledge Exchange, setting the scene for public service media to thrive in the Age of Platforms.

The goal of Poland’s REBOOT workshop was to support the audiovisual and film industries by bringing together scholars, filmmakers, producers, and key state institutions. Participants discussed the concepts of Public Good and European Competitiveness in the context of global media platforms. The REBOOT initiative focused on research, societal impact, and policy-making contributions aimed at exploring the audiovisual heritage of Poland and Europe. Additionally, REBOOT sought to enhance access to archives from the pre-internet era, addressing the integration of production and distribution.

The workshop began promptly at 3:00 p.m on January 22, 2025. Approximately 60 people attended the workshop, actively engaging in the debate for almost two hours. The workshop, structured as a debate, was led by Michał Głowiak.

from the University of Warsaw, who heads the Polish research team for the REBOOT project. Several experts participated in the discussion, including Tadeusz Kowalski from the National Broadcasting Council, Jacek Mikucki from the University of Warsaw, Gentiana Ramadani from the University of Vienna, Fernando Ramos Arenas from Complutense University of Madrid, Elżbieta Wysocka-Koerber from the National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute (FINA), and Anita Zawisza from the University of Warsaw. Unfortunately, just before the event, Elżbieta Wysocka-Koerber cancelled her participation, so five panellists took part in the debate.

Photo 1. Cultural Audiovisual Heritage for the Public Good and European Competitiveness Workshop. Author: Paweł Brzeziński (UW).



The event started with a welcome address by Michał Glowacki, who provided a brief overview of the workshop and the objectives of the Reboot research project. The guests were then welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, Dariusz Kuźmina, as well as Agnieszka Pindera, the Director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, and Małgorzata Kiełczewska, the Director of Creative Europe Desk Poland. These institutions, along with the National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute (FINA), were co-organizers of the event. Following a brief introduction of the panellists by Michał Glowacki, the expert debate segment of the meeting commenced.

The debate began with a critical question, posed by Michał Glowacki, aimed at offering a modern understanding of competitiveness in the film market.: "Let's try to speak about the lenses of today's competitiveness. What does the competitive mean to you in terms of film, audio, visual and in terms of history?

Gentiana Ramadani emphasised that defining the concept of competitiveness in today's rapidly changing world, influenced by technology, is challenging. This is the reason the Reboot project was initiated, aiming to redefine this concept and understand the dynamics of the contemporary film industry. Focusing

on the European film market, Ramadani pointed out that competitiveness relies on finding a balance between regulation and creativity. She also highlighted the importance of a shared understanding of competitiveness and public good among both filmmakers and audiences. Fernando Ramos Arenas noted that contemporary film competitiveness should be viewed from a historical perspective to identify both commonalities and differences. It's important to remember that the film industry is constantly evolving, affecting film production, distribution, and exposure. Consequently, the concept of competitiveness in the film market has also changed, taking into account the cultural and social differences among various film markets worldwide. Arenas also referenced research findings to support his points: "We started the conversation with our stakeholders with this idea of asking them about competitiveness, and we ended usually talking about sustainability." Thus, it is crucial to maintain a balanced presentation of content in the era of global streaming platforms such as Netflix. Jacek Mikucki pointed out the multiplicity and diversity of film markets, which also makes it difficult to have one holistic definition of competitiveness in the audiovisual sector: "Plenty of people from South America are coming to Europe to study, for example, film direction, camera operation and so on but in the end, they don't follow exactly the same path which Europe promotes." Thus, the concept of competitiveness should be considered through the lens of regions around the world.

Tadeusz Kowalski, an audiovisual policymaker for more than 40 years, stressed that due to his experience and knowledge, it is extremely difficult to define contemporary competitiveness in the film industry saying: "I think that we had to think about a very wide concept of competitiveness." He noted that at the end of the day, all film entities are competing to keep the attention of audiences, which in turn affects economic competition in the film market. This emphasis on the audience's role in shaping competitiveness not only underscores their importance but also makes them feel valued and influential in the industry. Anita Zawisza spoke about the important role of diversity in the film industry: "When it comes to the stakeholders, when it comes to the subject of the movie, of the TV series, it is very important to remember about diversity." She pointed out that the largest markets in the world are the US and China. Especially the film market in China has a completely different approach to competitiveness, because they don't consider the European or American market, due to China's internal values and policies, which differ from those of, for example, Europe. Besides, the target group is the Chinese citizens themselves, and it is for them that film policy is created.

Later in the conversation, Fernando Ramos Arenas referred to the enormous role of new communications solutions: "you have this aspect concerning production of the huge impact of VOD platforms, which amasses automation you have like this useful suspects over production, huge impact of the VOD platforms,

it amasses automation.” He added that Hollywood productions heavily influence the European film market, consequently competitiveness is often only considered by these two film markets. In turn, Tadeusz Kowalski cited data showing the European market’s significant role, which in 2023 produced 3300 films. He also pointed out that an average of 30 feature-length films are produced annually in Poland. Ramos Arenas acknowledged the problem in film distribution by independent filmmakers: “if you talk to them, to the producers, they may be independent producers, and they may say that’s a problem of distribution, or people are not reaching the audiences because somebody’s not making the job correctly.” Gentiana Ramadani, on the other hand, pointed out the key role of film policies, especially European ones: “European countries provide a lot of support, of course, to their film industries, but they are motivated from an economic perspective as well. Cultural objectives and this are related.” Ramadani stressed that film policies depend on cultural factors and the government’s understanding of them. In doing so, she cited the example of Austria, which is in the top five European countries that subsidise the film industry with public funds. She attributed the reasons for this result to the film industry’s sustainable support programs: “There are twenty-two public funding institutions in Austria, with six operating at the national level and sixteen at the regional level.”

Photo 2. Cultural Audiovisual Heritage for the Public Good and European Competitiveness Workshop. Author: Paweł Brzeziński (UW).



Although a debate between the experts and the audience was scheduled for the second part of the debate the latter group had already started asking questions during the first part. A Polish film producer who was curious about the Netflix data posited: “It’s a question about the methodology you used for your financial data, and I was actually really intrigued by what Professor Kowalski said”. The producer added that Netflix invests large sums of money to produce films and series in Poland, perhaps even more than in other European countries. One reason

may be the existence of the large audience market (38 million citizens) in Poland. Tadeusz Kowalski noted that Netflix is reluctant to share its statistics. Still, based on conversations with policymakers and Netflix employees, it can be concluded that the streaming platform's annual budget is larger than the public budget dedicated to the development of the film industry in Poland. A media researcher from Romania, Ioana Avadani from The Center for Independent Journalism, spoke next, outlining the experience of the film industry in Romania. Ioana Avadani also referred to the creative process itself, which has changed, citing the example of a Romanian film shot with a smartphone. She noted that technological changes affect not only the film industry but also the media industry: "Photojournalism failed. The Chicago Tribune got rid of all the photo departments because reporters can take pictures with their phones. Secondly, we were so happy to support citizen journalism, but now it blows-up in our faces." With that, Avadani started discussing the role of information and communication technologies, which radically affect the labour market.

Anita Zawisza raised the issue of following new generations and their ways of using media tools: "TikTok, social media in general, video platforms, that's all changing. We are living in platform driven landscapes." Jacek Mikucki added that the Reboot project is also studying the preferences of young people – generation Z. The study is at the stage of developing results, but one visible results is the use of smartphones to watch all kinds of audiovisual content, including VOD platforms. So, one can see a shift from using large screens to the mobile and compact screens that smartphones offer. Mikucki also stressed the significant role of special effects in films, which are often expected by young filmgoers.

Michał Glowacki then steered the conversation towards the role of European cultural heritage in the field of European film. He also referred to the process of archiving audiovisual productions in the era of digitisation, which may also affect the dissemination of national films in the online sphere. Tadeusz Kowalski mentioned the difficulties of digitising films due to the copyrights of filmmakers as well as co-creators, for example, in the area of film music. He said: "If you want to do anything with old films, silent film is the one," highlighting the legal problem associated with digital archiving. Fernando Ramos Arenas referred to the key role of cultural institutions that are responsible for the dissemination and digitisation of film heritage. Given the development of streaming platforms, digitising older audiovisual productions is advisable. He added that access to digital cultural heritages for the public is important. In turn, Gentiana Ramadani stressed the important role of public service media in film exposure: "Public service media should distribute films that reflect societal challenges and identities and values, and of course, serving the public interest. It's very important."

The audience also spoke in the last part of the debate in discussions with the panellists. One of the questions was asked by Milica Pesic, director of the Media

Diversity Institute from the UK, who pointed out that film diversity in Europe is very culturally diverse. In doing so, she gave the example of the UK, which culturally differs significantly from continental Europe. Jacek Mikucki also said that budgets for film productions vary considerably due to the economic situation in each country. He cited the results of a survey, which indicates that Polish producers have to save on many elements when making a film, citing the term “Ikea Glass productions,” which was used by a respondent during the study. Mikucki said: “We want to make better quality movies, but the reality is different.” He added that one solution is international co-productions, which increase the quality and value of films and foster European ties.

Another audience member, Alicja Waszkiewicz-Raviv of Warsaw University, referred to the younger audience: “About creating a link between this tension of technology that we see as accessible for youngsters (while) their approach to movies is something else.” She also emphasised the role of film education among young people. Later in the debate, Bissera Zankova of the Media 21 Foundation from Bulgaria spoke, stressed the need for audiovisual education for young people. She also referred to the key role of public service media in distributing and exposing films. She noted that Hollywood productions often dominate many European public service media. In contrast, public service media should follow their principles and values more closely, promoting indigenous and European productions. One of the last to speak was Tadeusz Kowalski, who summed up the debate with the following sentence: “I think that maybe we should also bear in mind that it’s not only about competitiveness. It’s also about the protection of diversity, of language, of history, of culture, of each generation.”

The debate moderator, Michał Glowacki, thanked all the workshop participants and panellists for coming and sharing their knowledge and experience. After the event, all participants were invited to a short tour with a curator of the art collection at Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Then, it was time for networking and sharing insights. Participants and panellists had a lively discussion, expanding on the topics raised during the debate.

The workshop was an excellent place for practitioners, academics, researchers, policymakers, and workers from the film industry who want change and improve the film industry in Europe to come together. The arrival of people from public institutions that support film production, filmmakers, researchers, and experts from the audiovisual sector created a common and safe space for presenting research results and exchanging insights on good and bad practices in the creation of audiovisual productions.

Jacek Mikucki
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW, POLAND