

Gender Equality in the Public Financing Framework of the Italian Film Industry

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The research project aims to investigate the system of public funding for the film industry, with the goal of providing an overview of gender equity practices within the public support mechanisms for contemporary Italian cinema.

The project follows two parallel lines of research: on the one hand, it reconstructs gender policies, best practices, and gender-based criteria adopted by the main public institutions which allocate funding for film production, allowing a clearer understanding of the context in which projects apply for funding. On the other hand, the film analysis of selected movies that received one or more public grants during the chosen timeframe (2019–2023) serves as a tool to understand how this context takes shape in practice.

The research focuses on three territorial levels that structure the film industry's organizational framework. The supranational level is examined through the analysis of the two main European programs: the MEDIA program of Creative Europe (with a focus on its development schemes) and the Eurimages program of the Council of Europe (specifically the co-production fund).

The national level is investigated by analyzing the funding allocated by the Italian Ministry of Culture through the General Directorate for Cinema and Audiovisual (DGCA), with particular attention to funds dedicated to the development and production phases. The subnational level is addressed through an examination of the funding provided by two regional Film Commissions operating in Italy, which represent the research's case study.

The theoretical framework of the research adopts an approach that increasingly combines the dimension of gender with that of labor in the cultural industries. As demonstrated, among others, by the special issue of *Comunicazioni Sociali*, titled *Gender and Labour in the Italian Audiovisual Industries: Critical Research Approaches and Methods*, edited by Rosa Barotsi, Gloria Dagnino, and Carla Mereu Keating (2023), and by the *CineAF* project, curated by Rosa Barotsi and Mariagrazia Fanchi², studies of gender representation (female and beyond) are being integrated with research on film production and the media industry.

The dual nature of the project requires a set

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of theoretical and methodological tools drawn from different research areas: film economics, production and media industry studies, film and media studies and cultural analysis with gender studies, providing a privileged perspective to investigate the dynamics at the heart of this research.

This transdisciplinary approach allows an analysis of audiovisual products not only as creative artifacts but also as part of industrial routines, shaped by hierarchies and dynamics (in this case, gender-related) that tend to replicate the broader socio-cultural systems in which they operate.

The initial phase of the research focused primarily on mapping the regulatory framework that structures public intervention in the audiovisual sector in Europe and Italy, with specific reference to gender equality. In this respect, Italian Law no. 220/2016 (the so-called *Cinema Law*) and its implementing decrees have represented one of the primary objects of study. From there, the investigation moved on to a more detailed analysis of funding activities carried out by key public institutions both at European and national levels, through a review of individual calls and the application forms made available by funding bodies. The aim is to identify any adopted gender policies—when present. In this context, reports from the European Audiovisual Observatory³ and the annual *Valutazione di impatto della Legge Cinema* by the DGCA⁴ provide valuable resources for contextualizing data on gender dimensions within public funding—especially regarding the main professional roles in the audiovisual sector.

At regional level, the research is currently analyzing the grants provided by the selected Film Commissions. This part of the work involves

collecting quantitative data on professionals involved in the projects that applied for one or more funding calls during the specified time frame. To this end, the application forms of each project submitted to the relevant fund(s) are being examined. Particular attention is paid to data concerning direction, screenwriting, editing, production, and the age of the director—which are among the key indicators used in the “Gender Equality and Diversity” section of the *Valutazione d’impatto* report.

Harmonizing these indicators as much as possible allows the results from regional data collection to be placed within a broader context that also includes the national level.

From these initial research phases, some critical issues emerge, mainly concerning the collection and processing of data. First, the volume of data to be managed is substantial, and access to certain information is challenging, especially for non-digitalized documents.

Another highly relevant issue concerns the very nature of the available data and, inevitably, how they are collected. The binary categorization of “gender” is extremely limited and limiting: it excludes any other subjectivity from the statistics (and beyond), denying them visibility and recognition, and it distorts binary gender data by including individuals who do not identify within male or female categories. Keeping this in mind, the research explicitly frames this as a methodological limitation in its foundational premises.

In conclusion, the research project’s goals concern two distinct yet converging aspects of the public funding system, which together help outline the national—and broader—landscape in which Italian cinema is situated.

On the one hand, the project aims to provide

³ The European Audiovisual Observatory is part of the Council of Europe. The Observatory was created in 1992 in order to collect and distribute information about the audiovisual industries in Europe. Among other, it produces reports on female professionals working in European audiovisual productions, all of which are available for download on the website <<https://www.obs.coe.int/en/web/observatoire/publications>> [accessed 5 June 2025].

⁴ All the reports are available for download on DGCA website <<https://cinema.cultura.gov.it/comunicazione/pubblicazioni-dgca/valutazione-di-impatto>> [accessed 5 June 2025].

a tool which improve access to information on gender equity within the public funding system for the audiovisual sector (particularly in Italy) by mapping—albeit not exhaustively—the gender policies that shape public funding at the three territorial levels described above. The goal is to gain a general overview that highlights any shortcomings or gaps concerning gender equality, which might, hopefully, be addressed.

Alongside this structural objective, two guiding questions have emerged during the research,

functioning as a subtext to the film analysis of funded works. The first concerns the role that gender dimension plays within what Giacomo Manzoli and Marco Cucco call '*cinema di Stato*' (2017), that is, films that are at least partially funded by public resources. The second, closely tied to the first, considers which films represent the identity of our Country and what role gender plays in that representation—for instance, in terms of characters portrayed, storyline and the representational models employed.

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