



Film Festivals and Sustainability Communication

The Contribution of Web and Social Media Analysis

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The challenge of sustainability and “greenness” requires adopting a holistic perspective—one capable of interpreting phenomena and guiding processes from environmental, economic, and social points of view.

In this context, culture—as a resource of identity, a tool for negotiation, and a vehicle for diplomacy—represents a fundamental instrument to be employed. At the same time, achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda can serve as a key driver of growth for cultural and creative enterprises, particularly those in the film sector.

When referring to film enterprises here, we are mainly speaking about film festivals—entities that present specific challenges of analysis, starting with the lack of a universally accepted definition of what constitutes a festival. Furthermore, given that film festival research is a relatively new field (emerging in the early 1990s), the literature remains fragmented and incomplete, with various subfields but little cohesion. The intersection of two crucial areas for this study—film festivals and environmental sustainability—is particularly underexplored. Discussions about greenness in the context of festivals are often limited to organization-

al aspects of the events, which, while important, overlook a complementary dimension: the meaning behind sustainability-related communication practices.

For these reasons, the festival as an object of study is of particular interest in this work. It seeks to answer the following questions: What is the current state of the film industry in terms of sustainability? How are actors, spaces, narratives, values, and technologies related to environmental sustainability reflected in European film festivals? In what ways do festivals, as formal and informal spaces of exchange, contribute to the creation of transcultural communities characterised by existing and future sustainability practices? Moreover, how can web and social media analysis contribute to digitally integrating reflections on the interconnectedness between film festivals and sustainability (not only environmental)?

Given this complex research question, the project proposes three general objectives: first, to examine the current state of the film industry in terms of sustainability and sustainability communication management; secondly, to develop monitoring and evaluation tools aimed at, on one

¹ Ph.D. thesis supervised by Professor Alice Cati (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan).

hand, assessing the effectiveness of communication actions by film enterprises; and on the other, improving them by establishing self-assessment tools that promote full awareness of the sustainability culture; in the end, to contribute to the development of a new generation of professionals and audiences in the film industry who are fully aware of “green” issues.

The methodological framework adopted will be a multi-phase process based on the analysis of the communication strategies of festivals, a subsequent socio-ethnographic investigation of selected case studies, and web and social media research.

Initially, the project involved a systematization of Italian and English literature, focusing on academic articles, scientific texts, and key reports in this field, drawn from the following databases: Web of Science; JSTOR; ProQuest Arts & Humanities; Scopus, FIAF; Sage; Opac Unicatt; WorldCat Utrecht University. A wide range of results emerged, leading to a selection process that narrowed the material down to 165 contributions, forming two literature review frameworks focused on the project’s two major themes. Following the selection of primary sources, a mapping of the current state of film festivals in Italy and across Europe was conducted, with particular reference to the Netherlands—a country of interest due to its known challenges in connecting local cinema with the concept of environmental sustainability.

The creation of a festival database—proposed here for the first time—aimed to reconstruct the network of currently active film festivals in the two countries, based on criteria such as geographic location, event mission, characteristic film genre, and the size of the festival. A total of 80 film festivals were mapped in the Netherlands, still active as of 2025, compared to 172 in Italy during the monitoring period of 2023–2025.

From this broad corpus, two semantic maps were created to identify a sub-sample of European festivals to focus on, working along two directions: on the one hand, explicitly green-themed

festivals (e.g., CinemAmbiente in Turin) were deliberately excluded; on the other, attention was placed on a smaller group of festivals (45 in Italy, 20 in the Netherlands) whose missions referenced sustainable festival policies, with particular emphasis on small-to-medium-sized festivals—those in continuous growth.

Based on the well-known distinction between “business-oriented” and “audience-oriented” festivals (Peranson 2008), the project focused on the latter—festivals geared toward their audiences and thus generally developing—rather than A-list festivals (e.g., the Venice Biennale), which are business-focused and already well established globally.

This selection process ultimately led to the identification of two case studies most aligned with the research question: the Lago Film Fest (Revine Lago, Treviso, Italy) and the Leiden International Film Festival (Leiden, South Holland, Netherlands), both promoters of independent cinema.

In addition to the literature review and case study analysis, it was deemed appropriate to integrate a research methodology centred on social listening (Galli 2018)—a valuable tool for marketing professionals and research institutes to understand online discourse around specific topics and to formulate strategic actions.

In this study, the methodology was provided by Blogmeter, a Milan-based research institute and project partner. Its Social Suite platform includes several components designed to listen to online discussions through sentiment analysis and to assess the influence of influencers and opinion leaders across sectors. This tool enabled a deeper exploration of digital discourse surrounding the European cinematic landscape. More specifically, it allowed for the collection of public opinions regarding the two case studies, with the ultimate goal of enriching the understanding of the relationship between film festivals and sustainability communication—complementing data already gathered through qualitative investigations (structured interviews and life stories) conducted on-site at the two festivals in 2024.

Space, discourse, practice: these are the keywords used to explore the dimension of film events, viewing the festival event as a network of social discourses, spaces, actors, practices, and rituals related to environmental sustainability.

Based on these considerations, the research aimed to reconstruct a new kind of ecological practice, offering an alternative perspective to the typical managerial focus of festivals on environmental matters (such as recycling, green transportation, energy saving, etc.). Instead, it seeks to highlight a deeper level: the meaning of ecological practice for festival audiences, as interpreted through the communication strategies employed by the management teams of European film festivals.

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