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Abstract

Gender disparities are still a prevalent and persistent topic in the European film industry despite the current social discussions on gender equality. The goal of this paper is to support this continuous progress amid a slow and structural change process. That is why this study wants to look at the changes the evolution of gender distribution within the European film industry has gone through across eight different countries – Austria, France, Poland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Finland – from 2000 to 2024. This research utilizes a feminist film theory and gender studies framework combined with a retrospective, qualitative content analysis design of secondary data to evaluate the involvement, acknowledgment, and commercial success of women in the film industry, aiming to examine how structural barriers and traditional gender roles limit the ability to achieve prominent positions. The research is centered around the following question: How has gender distribution evolved in the film industry across Austria, France, Poland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Finland from 2000 to 2024, and what impact does gender have on participation, recognition, and commercial success in this sector?

The study shows that while the participation in collaborative professions like producing and screenwriting is increasing, women are still underrepresented in creative and technical departments like directing, cinematography, and film composition. Combined with barriers in form of lower funding allocations and smaller box office performances, female filmmakers tend to have a harder time getting access to higher-budget projects, festival nominations, as well as prestigious awards. Although national policy interventions, such as mentoring programs, gender-parity bonuses, and initiatives for early-career professionals have led to some improvement, there are still long-term structural issues that need to be addressed. To promote a more inclusive future, the study illustrates the necessity of extensive structural reforms.

Zusammenfassung

Im Kontext der weiterhin anhaltenden Debatte über die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter steht die europäische Filmindustrie weiterhin vor tief verwurzelten geschlechtsspezifischen Ungleichheiten. Genau hier will die vorliegende Arbeit ansetzen, in dem sie sich in den Rahmen des kontinuierlichen Fortschrittes und Forschungsstandes eingliedert und diesen unterstützt. Die Studie untersucht die Entwicklung der Geschlechterverteilung in der europäischen Filmindustrie in acht verschiedenen Ländern – Österreich, Frankreich, Polen, Griechenland, Spanien, Belgien, Italien und Finnland – über einen Zeitraum von 24 Jahren (2000 – 2024). Geleitet von einem theoretischen Konstrukt, dass feministische Theorien sowie Gender Studies integriert, wird eine retrospektive, qualitative Inhaltsanalyse von sekundären Daten durchgeführt. Betrachtet werden dabei die Anteile von Frauen an Positionen in der Filmbranche, deren Anerkennungen auf Filmfestivals sowie kommerzielle Erfolge, um zu analysieren, inwiefern strukturelle Barrieren und traditionelle Geschlechterrollen diese Diskrepanz aufrechterhalten und den Zugang von Frauen zu einflussreichen Positionen innerhalb der Branche erschweren. Dreh- und Angelpunkt ist dabei die folgende Forschungsfrage: Wie hat sich die Geschlechterverteilung in der Filmindustrie der Länder Österreich, Frankreich, Polen, Griechenland, Spanien, Belgien, Italien und Finnland zwischen 2000 und 2024 entwickelt, und welche Auswirkungen hat das Geschlecht auf Teilhabe, Anerkennung und kommerziellen Erfolg in diesem Sektor?

Die Ergebnisse der Studie zeigen, dass zwar die Beteiligung von Frauen in kooperativen Bereichen des Sektors wie Drehbuch und Produktion vermehrt zunehmen, diese aber weiterhin in führenden Bereichen wie Regie, Kameraführung und Filmmusik unterrepräsentiert sind. In Kombination mit Barrieren wie geringeren Finanzierungszuschüssen und niedrigeren Einspielergebnissen erschwert dies den Zugang zu hochbudgetierten Projekten, Filmfestivals und Auszeichnungen. Obwohl politische Maßnahmen wie Mentoring-Programme, Gender-Paritätsboni und Initiativen für Nachwuchskräfte bereits Fortschritte bei der Entwicklung dieser Verteilung in der Branche gezeigt, bestehen weiterhin langfristige Probleme, die angegangen werden müssen. Die Studie verdeutlicht die Notwendigkeit umfassender struktureller Reformen für eine inklusivere Zukunft.

Statement

All non-English and non-German sources cited in this master's thesis have been translated using the DeepL Translator.

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1 Introduction

Being an important driver in both culture and the economy, the film business is naturally scrutinized for its diversity and representation. Historically, women have been underrepresented in both on-screen roles and behind-the-scenes positions like scripting, directing, and producing. This gender disparity is still a major problem, especially in light of the social focus and the numerous initiatives for female empowerment (Raveney et al., 2016). This imbalance should not only be considered a societal concern. It also extends into the economic realm and should be seen as an opportunity to allow richer narratives through diverse perspectives, and therefore can contribute to more innovative and commercially successful projects. In addition to reducing the artistic variety of the film industry business, the underutilization of potential that results from the absence of female creators further limits the industry's creative and financial potential.

1.1 Background and Context

The debate about gender equality and, by extension, the inequality in the film industry, gained momentum in the past several decades – and as a consequence, has resulted in numerous initiatives to reduce this gender gap (Simone, 2019). However, the information gathered by numerous audiovisual instances still show glaring differences in spite of these efforts. In line with that observation, a research published by the European Audiovisual Observatory issued that women directed just 17 % of European films between 2003 and 2017 (Simone, 2019). These figures remain far from parity, even though there has been a gradual increase in female representation. Even beyond Europe, the research for example on South African film festivals reveals a similar pattern in the persistence of gender imbalances, with male filmmakers dominating both nominations and awards (Engel, 2018).

This gender imbalance manifests in various facets of the industry. Not only are women underrepresented in directing, but they are also underrepresented in important production areas like producing, scripting, and even leading acting parts. The draws attention to a crucial paradox that exists in the industry: while women make up half of film school graduates, their numbers sharply decline at higher levels of the industry (Karniouchina et al., 2023).

Even the kinds of films in which women participate show the differences. Female filmmakers are more likely to work in documentaries than in high-budget fictional productions, which tend

to be more financially rewarding and prestigious. At the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF), only 20.4 % of fiction films screened from 2006 to 2016 were directed by women. In comparison, those rates rose to 33.2 % in non-fiction films (Engel, 2018).

Building upon this foundation, this thesis wants to reassess the gender dynamics in the European film industry through an intersectional lens. By examining Austria, France, Poland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Finland over the period from 2000 to 2024, the research will focus on:

- **Industry Roles:** Investigating overarching trends while examining the representation and career trajectories of female producers, directors, and screenwriters.
- **Film Festivals:** Evaluating numerical data on participation, gender distribution, and genre representation within festival selections, as well as disparities in award nominations and wins.
- **Genres and Topics:** Analyzing participation across different film genres and identifying recurring themes and narrative patterns in productions.
- **Economic Dimensions:** Assessing box office performances, financial backing, and working conditions to expose disparities in revenue generation, marketing support, and access to funding.

1.2 Research Objectives

This paper's main objective is to present a thorough examination of the gender distribution in the film industry. This ultimately led to the division of the thesis into three primary sections: a theoretical framework, an analysis of the European film industry, and a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical foundations. This study will begin by introducing a framework that draws on feminist film theory, gender studies, and media economics. After a short overview of the methodology this thesis will use, the analysis will then start with an overview of the existing disparities and their trends, which builds the foundation of this paper. This aims to provide a baseline for understanding the larger context of gender distribution in the European film industry by gathering relevant numerical indicators on the proportion of male and female filmmakers. This data-driven approach will then be split into different, more specific sub-categories. It includes an examination of role-specific trends, emphasizing women's representation and career

trajectories in key creative roles – namely directing, producing, and screenwriting – over the past 24 years. That way, the study hopes to identify patterns in entry, progression, and attrition of female-led productions and broader female participation in order to expose both advancements and persistent structural barriers that continue to hinder the career development of women in the industry. Following that, it will expand its focus to include film festivals by investigating differences in nominations, award distribution, and participation. The study intends to ascertain if concealed prejudices within these institutions affect the visibility, recognition, and long-term professional prospects accessible to female filmmakers. Additionally, by examining the box office success as well as the financial support and working conditions, the study wants to investigate the economic aspects of the gender difference, in order to determine how financial mechanisms either exacerbate or lessen the gendered inequities in the business. Given those objectives, the study's goal is to reframe gender dynamics in the current European film industry while emphasizing both quantitative patterns and qualitative difficulties. Therefore, the research question that arises will be:

How has gender distribution evolved in the film industry across Austria, France, Poland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Finland from 2000 to 2024, and what impact does gender have on participation, recognition, and commercial success in this sector?

2 Literature Review and Framework

The review of existing literature on similar scopes of studies has identified several common theories that will provide the theoretical framework for understanding the entrenched gender disparities. Perspectives from European research and global analyses – including insights from Hollywood and other major film sectors – provide comparative insights that position the European context within broader transnational patterns, as, “according to Dowd [2023], cinema is a teaching machine, especially the way in which it socializes people in a subtle way and provides informative representations of how people should behave.” (He et al., 2023, p. 206).

Research on Hollywood has pointed to gender imbalances in hiring, representation, and decision-making power. He et al. (2023) identified disparities in salaries and leadership roles. This extends not only to behind-the-scenes, but the author stated that female characters occupied just 36 % of total screen time in Hollywood films. According to the research, women remain vastly underrepresented in high-profile creative positions, with female directors accounting for not even five percent of the top 1,200 box office films that were released between 2007 and 2018 (He et al., 2023). This gendered power dynamic is not exclusive to Hollywood but extends to global film industries.

Verhoeven et al. (2019) highlight those in their research following Hollywood’s #MeToo scandal:

“#MeToo has been a powerful event in the film industry for bringing to light the shared nature of women’s experiences of misogyny. What might have once been dismissed as subjective anecdote has, through the sheer force of repetition and collective recognition, added up to something much greater.” (Verhoeven et al., 2019, p. 136)

To shed further light on this situation, the authors conducted extensive research on “over 130 million cinema showtimes to consider the impact that the gender of a film’s director has on the screening prevalence “(Verhoeven et al., 2019, p. 136). Their research revealed, that while women directed approximately 15 % of films during the study period (2012-2015), these productions comprised not even 5 % of total screenings. This imbalance underscores the inadequacy of merely increasing the number of female directors as a corrective measure. Systemic barriers embedded within marketing, distribution, and exhibition processes continue to restrict the visibility and commercial viability of female-led projects (Verhoeven et al., 2019). “Female directors have collectively experienced significant and multiple barriers to industry entry and sustainable success in a way that men have not. “(Verhoeven et al., 2019, p. 151).

Looking beyond just Hollywood, Liddy (2020) contrasts that in some Scandinavian countries, as a result of those dynamics, policies that are trying to shape the gender representation across the global film industry have been established, such as gender quotas in an attempt to foster equality. Verhoeven et al. (2019) critically assess dominant policy initiatives aimed at the advancement of female filmmakers. In particular, they challenge programs that emphasize additional training, arguing that such interventions fail to tackle the structural foundations of gender inequality within the industry. By centering on skills development, these policies are implicitly “suggesting[,] that women themselves are the cause of their own statistical failure. Individual women are not the architects or the operators of their own industry-wide inequality,” (Verhoeven et al., 2019, p. 151). But this draws the attention away from the dynamics that sustain those exclusionary practices in the first place. Therefore, the underrepresentation of women in the film industry is a result of larger industry-wide disparities rather than personal shortcomings (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

In a comparable study, Coles et al. (2018) examine gender-based labor segmentation in Canada's cultural and artistic sectors. In line with the aforementioned insights, the authors provide data that advances the understanding of this problem as a whole. Even while women make up 52 % of the workforce in cultural sectors and 51 % of artists, they still remain substantially underrepresented in positions of leadership. Rather, women are overrepresented in marketing and administrative tasks, whereas males are more likely to hold technical and decision-making positions. In addition to limiting women's opportunities for promotion into positions of authority, this also continues to sustain wage disparities.

Engel (2018) looks at these differences in the South African film industry in more detail, and a more nuanced way. The author concentrates on the difficulties that Black female filmmakers encounter. The study looks at how racial and gender prejudice connect to produce systemic hurdles that limit their access to financing and distribution. Their isolation from mainstream film is thus further reinforced by these limitations, which also restrict their audience and the exposure of their work. Those studies served as a baseline for establishing the foundation of the literature framework. This incorporates feminist film theory and gender studies to critically assess gender representation in the European film industry. By placing European tendencies in a global framework, this thesis may investigate whether industry-wide discrepancies are consistent with more general international patterns.

2.1 Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theories provide a lens to examine the gender disparities embedded in the film industry. In attempting to deconstruct how cinema and films both reflect and reinforce social gendered dynamics, feminist film theories are essential in revealing underlying mechanisms that essentially dictate not only who get access to the storytelling but also how the narratives shape society's perspectives and dominate mainstream discourses. This system influences industry norms, audience reception, and patterns of professional recognition, perpetuating a cycle that limits female participation in key creative roles. (He et al., 2023; Mulvey, 1975; Smith et al., 2013; Verhoeven et al., 2019)

The underrepresentation of women in directing, screenwriting, and producing is connected to structures that perpetuate cinematic traditions and influence institutional decision-making. By applying feminist film theory – for example Laura Mulvey's (1975) concept of the male gaze – this study wants to illuminate how historical biases continue to marginalize female filmmakers and restrict their visibility and professional advancement.

Mulvey (1975) states that mainstream cinema is fundamentally constructed for a heterosexual male spectator and maintains a deeply entrenched gender hierarchy: while men drive the storylines, women primarily function as visual objects of desire. Combined with the studies of He et al. (2023), Smith (2013), and Verhoeven et al. (2019), this dichotomy extends beyond cinematic aesthetics. It is embedded in the industry's structural fabric which influences the perception of female filmmakers and professionals, and ultimately reinforces their marginalization.

This happens through specific visual and narrative strategies. Films frequently position women as passive spectators rather than active narrative agents, which reinforces a male-centered cinematic framework.

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visuals and erotic impacts (...). Mainstream film neatly combined spectacle and narrative.” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 808f.)

Mulvey's (1975) framework differentiates three main points:

- **Point-of-view alignment:** Camera techniques that adopt the perspective of male protagonists, foregrounding their experiences as central to the narrative.
- **Visual objectification:** The framing and aesthetic portrayal of women as objects of desire, reducing them to their physical appearance rather than granting them narrative agency.
- **Gendered narrative roles:** Story structures that cast male characters as active agents driving the plot, while female characters primarily function to support or validate male trajectories.

Mulvey (1975) also applies Freudian psychoanalysis – particularly the concept of scopophilia, or the pleasure derived from looking – to shed light on how mainstream films construct and eroticize the female body. The cinematographic techniques already discussed reinforce these dynamics, especially in action, thriller, and romance films. Coincidentally, these genres are predominantly made by male filmmakers – genres often linked to greater commercial prestige – while female filmmakers are more actively engaged in dramas, comedies, and documentaries (Simone, 2019). “An active/passive division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure.” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 810f.)

This theory is essential for understanding how films construct and represent gender identities. Additionally, feminist film theory critiques the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, where traditional gender roles are often perpetuated through cinematic narratives and characterizations. Applying this theory will help analyze the portrayal of gender roles and dynamics in films from the selected countries, focusing on both on-screen representation and behind-the-scenes roles (Raveney et al., 2016).

2.2 Gender Studies

The Social Role Theory (Eagly & Kite, 1987) and Gender Studies (Butler, 2000) both offer a deeper insight into the formation and perpetuation of gender roles, but from different perspectives. While Eagly and Kite (1987) attribute the dominant gender differences to society's structures, Butler's (2000) Gender Studies – especially the author's theory of gender performativity and the Social Construct of gender – establish gender as a fluid construct that is shaped through repeated behaviors and cultural expectations. This theory will help with gaining a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers that women face in the film industry and to explore how these roles are both mirrored and challenged through cinematic representation.

The Social Role Theory posits that gender roles emerge from the division of labor, wherein men and women are assigned distinct societal functions. Historically, women have been socialized into roles that are more often associated with caregiving, passivity, and domesticity, while men have been linked to leadership and decision-making positions (Eagly & Kite, 1987). This division is mirrored in the film industry, where men have traditionally dominated directing, producing, and cinematography, whereas women have been more prevalent in costume design, makeup, and administrative roles (FERA-FSE, 2018, Loist, 2018, Simone, 2019). Loist (2018) describes this as gendered stereotyping: Where industry-specific criteria for success are more often attributed to men than to women, and certain roles – such as directing and production – are generally viewed as more masculine.

The author proposes the theory that, although most viewers do not explicitly consider gender when selecting a film to watch, they do believe that a director's gender influences the execution of a film's theme. Furthermore, Loist (2018) provides evidence that productions with a greater representation of women in creative leadership roles tend to feature a higher proportion of female protagonists. This adds a difference in the qualitative storytelling, as a more gender-balanced team encompasses a broader range of figures and characterizations, which results in greater depth for both female and male characters (Loist, 2018).

Butler (2000) argues that gender is not a stable identity but rather a performance that is staged through repeated actions aligned with societal expectations. When women are confined to supporting or secondary roles, it reflects an institutionalized performance of gender that perpetuates existing power structures. However, as Loist (2018) and Butler (2000) suggest, diversifying the creative leadership in projects can result in more innovative, complex, and

audience-validated storytelling. That is why media, and particularly film, functions as both a site of reinforcement and subversion of gender norms. Social Role Theory explains how audiences internalize gendered expectations through cinematic portrayals, which often reflect real-world gender divisions (Eagly & Kite, 1987). For example, classic Hollywood cinema has traditionally depicted men as active protagonists and women as passive love interests, thereby reinforcing occupational and behavioral gender stereotypes. (Eagly & Kite, 1987; He et al., 2023; Karniouchina et al., 2023)

Beyond representation, Social Role Theory helps explain why women continue to face systemic barriers in the film industry. The industry's historically male-dominated leadership structures create a cycle wherein men predominantly hire other men, reinforcing gender disparities in access to resources and opportunities. Women who challenge these structures – whether as directors, screenwriters, or producers – often find their work marginalized and are excluded from being considered as just a part of mainstream cinema. (Eagly & Kite, 1987; He et al., 2023; Loist, 2018; Verhoeven et al., 2019)

From a Gender Studies perspective, this exclusion is not merely a result of discrimination but a consequence of gender as a performative institution. The industry's preference for narratives and production styles that align with the dominant – in this case male – perspective exemplifies how gendered power structures are being maintained throughout the different global film industries through repetition and reinforcement (Butler, 2000). Expanding the discourse on gender in the film industry also requires an intersectional approach, as Crenshaw's (1989) framework suggests. Overlapping identities such as gender, race, and class create compounded barriers. As Crenshaw (1989) argues, despite the evidence that women—both in front of and behind the camera—are linked to successful film productions, they are often seen as a greater risk due to what Loist (2018) identifies as an “unconscious bias” (p. 152). This reveals an industry steeped in gendered stereotypes and labelling effects, that favors an established, male-centered benchmark (white, heterosexual, cis) as the measure of success and sees men as the default norm (Loist, 2018).

Furthermore, as documented by Loist (2018), this bias is not solely confined to the binary concepts of maleness and femaleness; it extends beyond that and includes a wide range of minorities—such as individuals associated with the LGBTQIA+ community, filmmakers with a migration background, as well as individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The

groups face additional layers of marginalization, who face the duality of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989), as Loist (2018) adds a third level with sexual orientation. Still, Crenshaw (1989) critiques that traditional gender analyses often center the perspectives of white, middle-class women. The intersection of gender and race within the film industry reveals barriers that are interwoven, compounding the structural obstacles to success. Women of color, for example, navigate a landscape in which both gendered and racialized exclusions collide, which only adds further constraints for their opportunities in Hollywood (Karniouchina et al., 2023).

To expand the Gender Studies framework, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is applied as well. This theory suggests that gender is not a natural quality; rather, it is a construct shaped through repeated behaviors and institutionalized practices. These practices include specific actions, gestures, and behaviors, which Butler (2000) refers to as performance, aligning with societal norms. To provide a different perspective, the author defines gender not as something one possesses but as something one performs. Thus, when performed over time, it creates the illusion of a binary gender identity. As these performances mimic certain sets of norms and expectations defined as female or male, individuals inadvertently reinforce the social structures that delineate and limit those gender expressions. This also implies that every act of gender performance both recreates and subverts the established norms. (Butler, 2000)

This theoretical lens can be directly applied to the film industry, where institutional practices and entrenched hierarchies serve to perform and thereby legitimize the masculine paradigm (Butler, 2000). Empirical research supports this perspective: prestigious, high-budget genres are almost exclusively helmed by men, thereby reinforcing a sort of myth that commercially viable filmmaking is a male prerogative (Loist, 2018; Smith et al., 2013). Combining those two perspectives, this illustrates a self-reinforcing cycle of the industry's gender bias. By confining women to lower-budget or as perceived feminine productions, the industry not only limits their creative opportunities but also reproduces the very gendered performance that Butler theorizes, perpetuating a self-reinforcing cycle of gender bias (Butler, 2000; Loist, 2018; Smith et al., 2013).

“Talented filmmakers miss out on directorial projects that could further their career, the public misses out on creative output that will never come to fruition, and the studios and exhibitors miss out on profits that could have been made from successful movies. Unfortunately for those trying to break into the business, hiring in Hollywood depends on previous success” (Karniouchina et al., 2023, p. 42)

The industry's structural constraints remain pervasive even when women break into the directing bubble. Female directors are often found within genres such as documentaries, romantic comedies, and family films, while the high-budget, commercially dominant genres – like action, science fiction, thriller, and horror – remain an overwhelmingly male domain (Loist, 2018).

That means the institutional bias works as a sort of limitation as to the types of stories women can and are able to tell and at the same time reinforces the notion that high-budget or masculine genres are less accessible to female directors, thus sustaining a self-reinforcing hiring cycle in which women are seldom entrusted with high-budget productions. This reinforces the prevalent notion that commercial film entails male directors (Butler, 2000; Karniouchina et al., 2023; Loist, 2018; Smith et al., 2013).

Films directed by women generally receive less financial and promotional support than those directed by men, which dispels the myth that female-directed films are inherently unprofitable. Karniouchina et al. (2023) and Loist (2018) argue that this lies in the root of systemic differences in budget allocation, marketing tactics, and distribution methods. So rather than it being a lack of audience appeal, it is due to established industry practices and that the projects are viewed as risky investments (Karniouchina et al., 2023; Loist, 2018). Karniouchina et al. (2023) concluded in their research, that the “results indicate that women and POC direct films [] generate similar revenues to films directed by male, nonminority directors when they are given the same opportunities.” (Karniouchina et al., 2023, p. 42).

Financial disparities are therefore more a consequence of a structural exclusion than they are of the consumer demand in general. Even though they make up 40 % to 50 % of film school graduates, women are often restricted to entry-level positions or lower-budget films, which makes them face barriers in their career advancement. These limitations eventually show themselves as economic inequality – for example, female directors in Germany earn 88 % less money (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2024; Loist, 2018).

In order to obtain a certain legitimacy in the sector and to be seen as equals, women in decision-making roles are forced to engage in stereotypically masculine behaviors. Because of this, they are in a challenging position where failure is closely examined and interpreted as an indication of more widespread female inadequacy (Loist, 2018; Liddy, 2020). While male directors navigate the industry with relative ease, women have trouble landing follow-up projects, which

can hinder their career long-term (Loist, 2018). The notion that female filmmakers “cannot ‘open’” a film is another source of this belief, which studies indicate is based more on an industry bias than on actual audience preferences (Karniouchina et al., 2023, p. 25).

The gender segregation is not limited to just creative leadership positions; it extends to various film professions, with women disproportionately concentrated in supportive departments. They comprise 80 % of roles such as costume design and makeup artistry yet remain largely excluded from technical and executive positions (Loist, 2018). In addition to preventing women from obtaining higher-paying, decision-making positions, this gap perpetuates industry-wide views that portray women as contributors rather than leaders in the film industry (Karniouchina et al., 2023; Liddy, 2020; Loist, 2018; Smith et al., 2013).

3 Methodology

This study's next section explores the empirical research approach and builds upon the theoretical foundation. This study looks at broad distribution in the film industry in a few European nations using a comparative, retrospective design.

3.1 Research Design

A comprehensive methodological approach is needed when choosing the research design for a retrospective examination of previous studies on cinema roles, including the career paths of female directors, genre distributions, box office performance, and gender factors. In order to identify patterns and connections that are relevant in today's discourse, retrospective studies offer a chance to look back at previous developments (Chassein & Hippler, 1987). This approach was chosen as this study is based on secondary data, and so the focus can be more on analyzing current findings and creating fresh viewpoints from this.

One of the scientific approaches to methodically examining and understanding texts is qualitative research. Qualitative research emphasizes contextual awareness to gather a better understanding and acknowledging subjective opinions, in contrast to quantitative approaches that rely almost solely on numerical data and statistical analysis. The goal for this is to not only depict social phenomena, but also to delve into their profound meanings within their historical and cultural background (Mayring, 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014).

The content analysis is one of the fundamental methods in qualitative research, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Combined with other methodologies, it is used in social sciences in order to gain a deeper understanding to complex phenomena and achieve a more detailed understanding of the subjects being examined (Mayring, 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). Additionally, this method enables the analysis of different types of communication across both print and digital media.

The following section first explains the fundamental principles of the methodology developed by Mayring and Fenzl (2014), which is based on a simplified communication model. These principles are then directly linked to the context of the present study.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

This study examines the gender representation in the European film industry from 2000 to 2024 using Mayring's qualitative content analysis as a methodical and theory-driven framework. This organized approach follows a rule-based process to ensure replicability and analytical rigor, as opposed to just interpretative techniques (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). By using this methodology, the study aims to identify trends in the distribution of genders across a range of production positions, festival participation and economic dimensions. To ensure a targeted research, the categories were predefined and based on the research question, which Mayring and Fenzl (2014) describes as deductive category formation.

This method is dynamic and iterative by nature since the material is subjected to multiple examinations, each of which is intended to extract crucial elements while also maintaining the conceptual clarity. This way, the focus of the study can be retained on the important, recurring themes by limiting repetition and guaranteeing that only pertinent findings are included in the final analysis (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014).

In this context, the primary material that was used included academic research on gender studies in the film industry, official reports and policy documents as well as statistical data on gender representation across different production roles.

To identify the sources relevant for the study, firstly, core institutions and organizations that regularly publish reports on gender-related issues within the film industry were identified, such as the European Audiovisual Observatory and the European Women's Audiovisual Network. Additionally, national film authorities such as the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (CNC) in France and Association of Women Filmmakers and Audiovisual Media (CIMA) in Spain, which conduct industry assessments and organizations like FERA-FSE Audiovisual Authors and the European Parliament which release reports on gender equality in the audiovisual sector.

The examination of materials was followed by a structured approach that included targeted searches in academic databases as well as institutional repositories, an analysis of publicly accessible reports published by relevant organizations, and bibliographic references from previously examined studies to expand the dataset. This systematic review was conducted to incorporate a variety of relevant sources and broaden the empirical foundation of the study.

In order to adequately provide a structured method for the investigating of communication structures and interactions, Mayring and Fenzl (2014) implemented analytical rules as well as units. At the heart of this method is the coding unit—the smallest piece of content being analyzed. Words, pictures, sentences, and other content components can all be used as coding units. For this particular study, the coding units included thematic segments, statistical data, content-specific statements, and direct quotations from various sources. These units play a crucial role, as they structure the classification process and ensure a systematic and coherent interpretation of the data (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014).

The context unit offers the broader perspective needed to properly understand the coding units, which might range from sentences and paragraphs to entire articles or thematic sections. It also includes relevant background information and contextual references that enhance the accuracy of classification. To facilitate a more thorough integration and perceptive interpretation of the data, the context units in this study are matched with each nation's analytical framework (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). To allow multiple coding rounds, the evaluation unit outlines the full range of content that is analyzed throughout the category system. This can encompass the entire dataset, specific parts, or specific elements. In this research, the evaluation unit comprises the academic literature, official reports, statistical publications, and theoretical texts. Each source was analyzed within its national framework, which was established in the first review of the data, was country-specific, ensuring a structured and comparative analysis (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014).

The different types of the content analysis are distinguished by Mayring (2020) and Mayring and Fenzl (2014). By combining contextual and prior knowledge for a more nuanced interpretation, the explanatory content analysis aims to provide a deeper understanding of textual meaning. This is done to reveal concealed connections and recurrent themes by identifying the underlying textual patterns and structures (Mayring, 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). In contrast, the structuring content analysis concentrates on particular elements found in a text. This method ensures a coherent and structured representation of content that allows for additional comparisons by employing a systematic analysis using predetermined categories. It also makes it possible to categorize and identify different textual elements to enhance the clarity and consistency of the analysis (Mayring, 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). By concentrating on the key ideas and thematic frameworks, the summarizing content analysis helps to condense and distill the textual content. This allows for handling large amounts of

datasets with this method, since it makes it possible to find underlying trends and more general patterns in the data.

This study used a summarizing content analysis to investigate gender-specific patterns in the European film business. In order to do this, the research process starts with a preliminary review of the materials in order to understand both content and structure. During this process, the key pieces of information are condensed through a paraphrasing process to retain the essential statements and is sorted relating to either a country or a general European information. After this, in another review of the condensed and sorted material, the study emphasizes the important analytical findings by sorting them into the deductive categories that were generated from the research question (Mayring, 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). In the analysis process afterwards, the eight selected nations are examined individually as predefined analytical units (Mayring, 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2014).

The thematic categorization within this study focuses on four key areas:

- **Industry Positions:** Everything relating to the representation of women in key roles such as directing, producing, and screenwriting, and others.
- **Film Festivals:** Everything relating to the gender distribution in festival submissions, nominations, and awards and trends.
- **Genre & Narrative Themes:** Everything relating to thematic and genre-based trends in female-led film productions.
- **Economic Factors:** Everything relating to the financial aspects, funding disparities, and box office performance in relation to gender.

This procedure guarantees intersubjective comprehensibility by allowing the investigation to retain methodological standards while simultaneously integrating an interpretative viewpoint (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014). Furthermore, it guarantees a cross-dataset comparability by means of accurate classification and methodological coherence. Since the content analysis is interpretive by nature, a methodological transparency is necessary to guarantee the quality and dependability of the research. By using an this organized, rule-based method for classification and analysis and placing a strong emphasis on intersubjective transparency to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the results, this study maintains its research rigor (Mayring, 2020).

4 Results and Analysis

The following chapter presents the key findings of this study and offers an analysis of gender disparities in the European film industry. The analysis is structured thematically, beginning with an overarching view of gender representation in European filmmaking, followed by country-specific assessments. This approach allows for an exploration of regional trends and variations, offering a comparative perspective on national policies, funding structures, and career trajectories of female filmmakers.

4.1 Overview of Gender Disparities in European Filmmaking

The evolving picture of female representation in the European film industry shows an increasing advancement in technical, managerial, as well as creative roles. Between 2003 and 2012, only 16.3 % of the 9,072 films produced in Europe were directed by women, while the remaining 82.4 % were helmed by men (Talavera, 2014). For instance, Talavera's (2014) findings illustrate that between those years, the percentage of films directed by women increased by approximately 35 %, “compared to a 16.5 % increase for films by male directors” (p. 6).

There were some early indications of improvement between 2012 and 2015. The average percentage of female-directed films in Europe during this time was 19.4 %, according to data from the Festival de Cinéma Européen des Arcs (2017). A detailed examination of generational trends shows that women are more likely to be emerging directors, or those directing their first or second film. However, as directors gain experience (with three or more films), the proportion of women declines. On average, male directors helmed about 3.7 films compared to 2.7 by female directors (Festival de Cinéma Européen des Arcs, 2017).

A mid-2010s study by Raveney et al. (2016) provided a more detailed snapshot across several European countries. The research found that only about 21 % of films in seven studied countries were directed by women. The active pool of female directors varied widely – from as low as 18.2 % in Austria to as high as 36.4 % in Sweden – with an overall European average of roughly 24.4 %. Eight out of ten films are still directed by men, according to this figure by Raveney et al. (2016).

Women made up 22 % of all active directors between 2015 and 2018, however their weighted share – which accounts for films with several directors – slightly decreased to 20 % (Fontaine

& Simone, 2020). For debut films, the weighted share increased slightly to 24 %. Nonetheless, only 18 % were helmed by female-led teams, defined as those consisting of at least 60 % women. The presence of female directors varied notably by country, with weighted shares varying from just 4 % to as high as 34 % (Fontaine & Simone, 2020; Raveney et al., 2016). A somewhat similar trend was seen in the screenwriting industry. Women wrote 36 % of feature films and made up 25 % of active screenwriters. However, their weighted contribution dropped to 24 % when team size was taken into account (Fontaine & Simone, 2020).

More recent data from 2019 to 2023 indicates a steady, albeit modest, improvement in gender representation across various industry roles. Women make up approximately 27 % of active directors and hold a 25 % share of director assignments. The representation of women in debut films remains slightly higher, at 28 %, compared to 22 % in later projects (Fontaine, 2024).

In screenwriting, women currently make up about 30 % of active screenwriters and 29 % of assignments. They are increasingly comparable to their male counterparts in terms of total activity levels, which is indicated by the average number of films they write (Fontaine, 2024). The representation of women now comprises 33 % of active producers and 31 % of assignments, which indicates a growth in their participation as well (Fontaine, 2024).

Still, gender disparities in technical roles persist despite those advancements. Now, women only account for 14 % of cinematographers (up from 12 %) and 12 % of assignments in general. The same is true for film composition, where women handle 10 % of assignments and make up 12 % of active composers (Fontaine, 2024).

Furthermore, composition teams led by women appear in just 11 % of films. On the other hand, female editors are marginally more represented, accounting for roughly 30 % of active editors and 31 % of assignments (Fontaine, 2024). In 2013, female professionals accounted for only 21 % of the overall workforce in key off-screen roles – in 2022 they are up to 22 % (Simone, 2023). Encouragingly, female-driven teams have seen a notable rise, increasing from just 6 % in 2015 to 11 % in 2023 (Fontaine, 2024).

Despite a promising start in film education – with women comprising 50 % of film school graduates in 2019 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019) and before that 44 %, as reported by Raveney et al. (2016) – this balance has not translated into equal professional representation; rather Raveney et al. (2016) state that there is a pronounced “[l]oss of female directors from the workforce” (p. 8).

From 15 % in 2019 to 25 % in 2024, the percentage of women directing feature films in Europe is still much lower than men (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020, 2024). According to projections based on the current growth rate by Talavera (2014), it might take more than 50 years to reach gender parity in production volume. Furthermore, according to the career-stage analysis, women direct about 34 % of short films, but only 24 % of first feature films and 15 % of films after the third feature (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020). Similar discrepancies are seen in audience involvement; according to Talavera (2014), female-directed films only contributed to 8.9 % of all admissions, amid fluctuations over time. While female-directed films have admittance growth rates that are about 25 % higher than those of male-directed films, which are less than 7 %, it will likely take more than 75 years to close this difference completely (Talavera, 2014).

According to data from a 2013 sample, female-directed films are not necessarily less successful in festival circuit performances, despite their underrepresentation. In actuality, these films frequently had participation rates and award successes that exceeded their numerical proportion, all while having lower overall numbers (Raveney et al., 2016; Simone 2019). However, according to Raveney et al. (2016), women filmmakers continue to be significantly underrepresented in renowned A-list festivals. Simone (2019) contends that female-directed films were disproportionately positioned in non-competitive categories despite being chosen, which limited their chances of receiving critical acclaim and industry recognition.

Additionally, according to Raveney et al. (2016), the genre choice can affect the financial backing and exposure of female-directed projects. There is a substantial difference in the funding and representation of female filmmakers across various film genres, and data from 2016 shows that the proportion of fiction to documentaries varies by nation, reflecting varying national financial objectives (Raveney et al., 2016).

This variation is also observed among female directors, who, as indicated by the same report, perform better in documentary filmmaking than fiction, regarding participation and funding share (Raveney et al., 2016). Children's films feature a higher proportion of female directors than other categories (EENCA, 2020). The European Audiovisual Observatory (2018) observed that while high-budget productions display clear gender differences – especially in directing and scripting – documentaries, short films, and low-budget productions typically show a greater gender balance in the creative areas.

These findings are supported by genre-specific observations. According to a 2019 survey, women directors are far more active in dramas and documentaries, accounting for 34 % of their output (Simone, 2019). Compared to fiction or animation, documentary filmmaking has a higher proportion of female directors (EENCA, 2020; Simone, 2019) with a focus on topics such as social issues, gender equality, family dynamics, mental health, and human rights (EENCA, 2020).

Comparative yearly data from 2020 to 2023 illustrate a steady, though slow increase in female representation across genres. In 2020, women accounted for 20 % of feature film directors, 28 % of documentary directors, and 17 % of fiction directors (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020). According to a report of the Le Lab Femme de Cinéma (2024), these percentages increased to 33 % for documentaries, 21 % for fiction, and 21 % for animated fiction by 2023. Similar patterns of representation are also seen in related professions, such as screenwriters, producers, cinematographers, and editors (Fontaine, 2024). Additionally, women are found more in debut films than in subsequent ones, which could be taken as an indication that prospects for early professional advancement are comparatively easier to obtain (Fontaine, 2024). Additionally, women who work in important production positions – such as scripting, directing, or producing – receive about one-third less money than men (Bartosiewicz & Orankiewicz, 2020; Brau et al., 2015; Fontaine, 2024).

On average, national film funds allocate 16 % of their resources to female-directed films; the amount spent on each female-directed fiction film is consistently lower than that of male-directed films, ranging from 6 % to 34 % less (Raveney et al., 2016). According to Raveney et al. (2016), the documentary industry has also shown a higher average expenditure on female directors.

Across the European continent, data “shows that 29 % of MEDIA funding applicants were women (between 2014-2018)” (EENCA, 2020, p. 41), they had a 52 % success rate. However, compared to their male counterparts, women-led projects receive about 20 % less money, with female screenwriters receiving 27 % less funds and female producers receiving 47 % less budgets (EENCA, 2020; Collectif 50/50, 2020; Rollet, 2014; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016, 2018, 2022; Barrallon & Kopp, 2019).

Financial disparities depending on gender also show up in box office results. In 2014, female-directed films made up under 10 % of all admissions, while male-directed films made up the

rest (Talavera, 2014). Between 20023 and 2012, a film directed by a man received an average of 388,097 admissions, while a film directed by a woman received an average of just 191,954; this results in a ratio of over 2:1, which rises to 3,5:1 among the highest-grossing motion-pictures (Talavera, 2014). Even so, some female-directed films have performed similarly or even better at the box office despite having smaller budgets (Raveney et al., 2016). However, “films by female directors only accounted for 8 % of total admissions” in European theaters in 2017 (Simone, 2019, p. 26).

With 85 % of audiovisual authors working as freelancers and 60 % of directors' and 56 % of screenwriters' labor during development phases going unpaid, job insecurity is pervasive (FERA-FSE, 2018). Additionally, according to FERA-FSE (2018), just 30 % of audiovisual authors are confident about their professional future, and only 13 % are satisfied with their job security. Although older female workers typically experience greater financial hardship, it is noteworthy that both male and female audiovisual authors reach their peak earnings around age 50, and male directors made almost about 50 % more than female filmmakers in 2018, demonstrating a glaring gender pay disparity that still exists in the film industry. Even though some jobs, like writing scripts, occasionally give women an 18 % premium, these are still uncommon (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2018).

4.2 France

The distribution of gender within the French film industry is indicative of broader inequalities, particularly with regards to representation in technical professions, long-term career paths, and funding availability. After the 2000s, the French film industry recorded a nearly doubled number of films that were directed by women (Rollet, 2014). This period of growth was reflected in different areas as well. In 2006, women occupied only 17.2 % of key film roles. Between 2006 and 2015, the number of films realized by women grew by 80 %, whereas men's production only grew by approximately 40 % (Barrallon & Perraut, 2017). And between 2008 and 2017, the amount actual realized films by female director grew 62 % (Barrallon & Kopp, 2019)

Women's employment in film production climbed by over a fifth over the next ten years, compared to a 5 % increase for men (Barrallon & Perraut, 2017). Women made up over 40 % of the workforce in production by 2014 (CNC, 2017). Between 2012 and 2015, only 24.7 % of films in French theaters were directed by women, placing France tenth among European

countries in terms of female representation (Festival de Cinéma Européen des Arcs, 2017). Between 2011 and 2015, films directed or co-directed by women accounted for 22.3 % of theatrical releases in France (CNC, 2017). Recent data from 2023 indicates that women now account for 26 % of directors, 27 % of producers, and 34 % of screenwriters in France (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019, 2023; Collectif 50/50, 2020). To contrast those result: 93 % of the costume department were women (Collectif 50/50, 2020). While women are relatively well represented in the early stages of their careers, their visibility diminishes as they advance professionally (Barrallon & Perraut, 2017; Simone, 2019; Fontaine, 2024). “In a decade the number of women directors has increased by 70.7 %, whereas the number of films produced is up by 47.8 % over the same period.” (CNC, 2017, p. 1).

Women in 2024 direct over 30 % of debut films – however, this momentum does not carry forward into later career stages. Although there are some female filmmakers in the early phases of their careers, their percentage drops to less than 20 % for three films and up, which could be taken as an indicator for structural obstacles that hinder long-term viability (CNC, 2017; Collectif 50/50, 2023; Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2014, 2023, 2024). Furthermore, the production volume among female directors remains lower than that of their male counterparts. In 2018, male directors averaged 3.87 films per director, whereas female directors only reached 2.6 (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2019). In technical roles, gender disparities are still noticeable. According to a report of Collectif 50/50 (2020), women make up 47 % of film editors – so are almost at parity –, although they are far less prevalent in important technical fields: just 18 % of cinematographers, 14 % of sound engineers, 11 % of special effects supervisors, and 8 % of film composers are female.

While production roles have shown gradual progress, the representation of women in film festivals, selections, and awards does not reflect that progression of numbers. Women continue to participate at a disproportionately low rate in important events like the Cannes Film Festival and the César Awards. For instance, less than 25 % of films submitted for selection included female filmmakers, while women continuously made up less than 20 % of the nominees for the Cannes Palme d'Or competition (Brau et al., 2015; Lauzen, 2016). Historically, Jane Campion remained the sole female Palme d'Or winner for over three decades, having achieved this milestone in 1993 (Lauzen, 2016). Even so, only about 10 % of nominees in the Best Director category at the César Awards features female directors (Brau et al., 2015). Data from Cannes between 2010 and 2015 further reveal a rather fluctuating pattern: while 2011 saw a peak of

four female-directed films in the main competition, other years such as 2010 and 2012 recorded none, and 2013 included only a single entry. Only two of 19 films were directed by women by 2015 (Lauzen, 2016).

In French cinema, the narrative of gender is also intricately linked to thematic and genre decisions. Female involvement in genre choices was less noticeable before 2000. However, the number of films examining feminist viewpoints increased in the early 2000s, especially in independent cinema, which progressively expanded the French film industry's thematic depth (Rollet, 2014). With a strong focus on drama and documentary stories, women made up 28.6 % of active cinema directors in 2012 (EWA, 2016). In contrast to the 20 % action film shares among projects directed by males, 45 % of films directed by women during the 2012–2015 period were dramas, compared to just 5 % in the action category (Festival de Cinéma Européen des Arcs, 2017). Furthermore, women made up about 31 % of French documentaries between 2012 and 2017, which is more than the number of directors at that time. These documentaries tended to focus on themes of social justice, family dynamics, autobiographical narratives, female identity, and empowerment (CNC, 2017; EWA, 2016; Festival de Cinéma Européen des Arcs, 2017; Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2018).

However, despite these innovative developments, economic disparity has remained. Production budgets for female-directed films were consistently lower from 2006 to 2015, averaging “€3.50 [million] compared to €4.70 [million] for men directors” (CNC, 2017, p. 1). This disparity has traditionally been around 1.6 times larger (CNC, 2017). By 2017, the average budget for films directed by women was recorded at €3.47 million (Barrallon & Kopp, 2019). Moreover, female directors earned 42.3 % less per hour than their male counterparts (Barrallon & Kopp, 2019). This disparity in income persisted into 2019, as films directed by men made almost 30 % more money in France and had a larger distribution, as evidenced by their release in more theaters. Budgets for sound engineering, costume design, and cinematography for projects led by women were 41 %, 49 %, and 49 % lower than those for projects led by men, respectively, according to recent data from 2023, which further emphasizes the differences within technical departments (Collectif 50/50, 2020). Furthermore, films directed by women opened in an average of 118 theaters, whereas those directed by men opened in 170 (Barrallon & Kopp, 2019). In addition, women continue to be underrepresented in important manufacturing decision-making roles. Despite making up 42 % of the production workforce and running only

about a third of production companies, they only made up 27 % of producers in 2023 (Barrallon & Perraut, 2017; CNC, 2017).

Beyond financial constraints, structural issues also occur in education and policy. Women make up over half of the graduates of La Fémis' directing program – however, many of them struggle to secure funding for their subsequent projects (EWA, 2016; Rollet, 2014).

The goal of recent governmental initiatives has been to address these disparities. In 2019, the CNC started offering a 15 % financing incentive for productions with balanced gender representation in important roles, along with mandated measures including harassment prevention training and a gender-parity bonus (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020, 2021). Public financing organizations have also increased their assistance for female filmmakers. For example, in 2015, 70 films made by women were sponsored by the CNC, an over seventy percent increase from the preceding ten years. However, continuous monitoring in 2023 showed that despite these efforts, female directors still only receive half of what their male counterparts make (CNC, 2017; Collectif 50/50, 2020; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020, 2021).

4.3 Poland

At the start of the millennium, female directors, producers, and screenwriters in the Polish film industry were significantly underrepresented, respectively. This carried into the next decade, where only 14 % of feature films from 2006 to 2017 were directed by women (Talarczyk-Gubała, 2018). But there has been considerable improvement over the recent years. The proportion of women directing films that were released in theaters increased to almost 20 % between 2017 and 2022. Furthermore, a newer collaboration pattern emerged, with women producing 64 % of films directed by women (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej 2023).

Through targeted financing mechanisms, the Polish industry was able to raise the percentage of co-financed films directed by women to 38 % after the publication of the Talarczyk-Gubała research in 2018. This percentage was again reaffirmed in 2022 (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023). While their involvement in long narrative films remained modest at about 28 %, women demonstrated a fable for short-form storytelling, directing over 50 % of short films and 66.7 % of documentaries (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019). Longitudinal data illustrate variations in the representation of women in directorial roles. From 2016 to 2020, women constituted an average of 19.6 % of directors (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2021), although this

percentage witnessed a slight decline to 18.2 % between 2017 and 2021 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2022). According to more recent data from 2019 to 2023, women-directed films made up 20 % of all output, with a peak of 27 % in 2022 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024). The percentage of female directors in the industry was 21 % by 2024, while the percentage of female producers and screenwriters was 32 % and 24 %, respectively. Nonetheless, younger female directors now represent 18 % of productions, an increase from the 12 % of older generations (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023; Talarczyk-Gubała, 2018; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019). In spite of these developments, male filmmakers make an average of 4.2 films throughout the course of their careers, whereas female filmmakers only make 3.3 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2017). Furthermore, the share of debut films by women dramatically increased from 13.6 % in 2013 to over 50 % by 2018 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018, 2019, 2021).

In 2016, the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia faced criticism when its main competition failed to include any films directed by women, igniting debates over potential structural biases (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023). Between 2017 and 2022, only 28 % of films in major competitions were directed by women. The award results reflected this disparity: just 22 % of the total honors went to female directors (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023). Only 98 of the 482 nominations for the Polish Film Academy's Orły awards were for female-directed films, yielding an 18 % conversion percentage as opposed to 28 % for male-directed films. Furthermore, female directors have yet to secure wins in major categories such as directing, screenwriting, or music composition (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024). Nevertheless, in 2022, the Gdynia Festival appointed an all-female jury for its short film competition, marking a historic first for the event (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023).

The genres in which women work and the themes they explore align with broader European trends, diverging from those traditionally dominated by male filmmakers. Female filmmakers have been better represented in non-narrative genres such as documentaries and animation, where their share was approximately 30 % (Talarczyk-Gubała, 2018; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019). By 2018, this trend had solidified: 66.7 % of documentaries were directed by women, yet they represented only 12 % of feature films and a mere 8 % of action films (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2019, 2020). This highlights the fact that films directed by male filmmakers received approximately 70 % of the total funding allocated by the Polish Film

Institute for feature films, whereas those directed by female filmmakers only obtained 13 % (Talarczyk-Gubała, 2018).

4.4 Greece

Historically, the representation of women in film production roles within Greece has been markedly limited. Prior to 2015, women directed 16.9 % of films; however, this percentage experienced a decline to 13.2 % in the period preceding 2016 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016, 2017). Between 2016 and 2020, there was a slight recovery, with films directed by women constituting 15.2 % of the overall production (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2021), and 18 % directors between 2018-2023 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024).

Participation levels in film festivals and award circuits remain lower than the European average (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016, 2017, 2021). It is believed that only 16 % to 18 % of films made by Greek women receive official recognition through awards, despite the lack of detailed data on nominations and wins (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2017, 2023, 2024).

Although detailed genre-specific statistics for female directors in Greece are scarce, it may be inferred that the statistics for female directors in Greece do not deviate much from the broader European trends, despite the lack of precise genre-specific data. Regardless of having a vast narrative potential, the genres that women filmmakers typically work in typically receive less funding and have less commercial appeal than mainstream projects.

This may explain why, on average, male directors in Greece direct more than four films over the course of their careers, whereas their female counterparts manage just over two (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018). For first- and second-time filmmakers, female representation stood at 17.0 % until 2015 and fell to 13.5 % by 2016; among those with three or more films, representation dropped further to 9.8 % by 2016 (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2016, 2017, 2019).

Until 2021, Greece's film industry operated with minimal formal support for gender equity. The disparities were not addressed by mentorship programs, targeted funding initiatives, or comprehensive gender-disaggregated data gathering that was seen in other countries until 2020 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020).

The Greek Film Center first implemented gender-sensitive funding guidelines in 2021. This was the start of a number of initiatives to improve female representation, such as the Location

Scouting Support Program as well as additional funds for short films from 2022 to 2024 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2023, 2024). This could help to explain why more recent data shows that the funding landscape is changing. Women made up 37.3 % of screenplay funding applications, 37.1 % of directing submissions, and 40 % of production applications between May 2021 and May 2022 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2022). In the subsequent period from 2023 to 2024, these figures shifted slightly – with screenplay applications increasing to 39 %, while directing and production funding applications declined to 33 % and 30 %, respectively (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024).

4.5 Belgium

The representation of women in the Belgian film industry has displayed fluctuations over the years, occasionally lagging and at other times surpassing European averages. Between 2012 and 2017, a mere 20.7 % of films produced in Belgium were directed by women, slightly above the European average of 19.8 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018). A more comprehensive analysis covering the period from 2000 to 2019 revealed that among the 1,379 films produced in Belgium, only 14.5 % were under the direction of female filmmakers (Van Beek & Willems, 2022). More recent trends, however, show some improvement: the percentage of films directed by women rose to 27.6 % between 2017 and 2021, exceeding the European average of 22.36 % (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2022; Sepulchre et al., 2022). Women directed 30 % of debut films, compared to 70 % directed by men, indicating a smaller gender difference among debut filmmakers. Analysis conducted in 2018 found that although 23.1 % of debut films were directed by women, the number of female directors dropped to 10.4 % for films beyond a director's third feature. Among active directors, more than half of women gave their debut in 2017 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018).

The representation of women within Belgium's film industry exhibits variability across different roles as well as regions. Women make up between 23 % and 26 % of screenwriters, but their participation is significantly higher in co-written projects, where they contributed to 41 % of the scripts. On the other hand, just 15 % of films had a only single female screenwriter (Brau et al., 2015; Sepulchre et al., 2020, 2021). Interestingly some regional disparities exist, with women comprising 40 % of Francophone and 32 % of Flemish producers in production, for a total of 38 % female representation (Sepulchre et al., 2020, 2021).

Beyond production positions, the underrepresentation of female filmmakers extends to award recognition and film festivals. Only 13 % of Belgian films between 2010 and 2015 were directed by women, and the award system primarily rewarded male filmmakers. The win rate for female filmmakers over this period was 18 %, with men making up 85 % of Best Director nominations (Brau et al., 2015). A retrospective analysis conducted in 2017 evaluated 50 Belgian films and ascertained that only 16 % were directed by women (Sepulchre et al., 2020). By 2021, female representation was slightly improved among award nominations, reaching approximately 22 % (Sepulchre et al., 2022). The gender representation at the 2021 Magritte Awards underlined those inequalities in several film genres. Men made up 55 % of screenwriters and 67 % of directors in fiction film. On the other hand, women directed 62 % of documentaries and wrote 54 % of documentary screenplays (Sepulchre et al., 2021). Gendered trends in character representation were also discovered via an extensive study conducted in 2021. Only 34 % of fictitious characters in fiction films were female, which translates to a two-to-one male-to-female ratio and a masculine bias in on-screen presence. Additionally, the majority of fictional characters were men (68%) although the distribution of secondary characters was slightly fairer, with 65 % of them being men and 35 % being women (Sepulchre et al., 2021). This gendered division within film genres persisted into 2022, with a mere 8 % of fiction films being exclusively directed by women, whereas women constituted 53 % of documentary directors and 47 % of documentary screenwriters (Sepulchre et al., 2022).

While documentaries reached overall gender balance in 2021, the economics field lags behind. In Belgium, male-directed films averaged €3.2 million at the box office between 2000 and 2019, while female-directed films made about €1.9 million. Male-led initiatives received almost 30 % more money than female-led projects, which may be partially explained by financial disparities (Van Beek & Willems, 2022; Sepulchre et al., 2019). Additionally, compared to their male-led counterparts, female-led production businesses usually obtain 25–30 % less funding (Centre du cinéma et de l’audiovisuel, 2023; Sepulchre et al., 2022). While the percentage of female-submitted film projects stayed steadily at 30–35 % between 2015 and 2019, the financial success rate for these projects rose from 29 % in 2015 to 39 % in 2019 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020).

4.6 Austria

Austria has made significant strides in gender representation within the film industry, especially in recent years. From 2012 to 2018, approximately 26 % of films were directed by women (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019). From 2017 to 2021, women directed 35.4 % of films in Austria, greatly exceeding the European average of 22.36 % during the same timeframe (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2022).

Raveney et al. (2016) state that only 23.5 % of cinema releases were directed by women, which starkly contrasts with the roughly 40 % representation of female film school graduates. However, more recent data indicates an upward trend. In some periods, the percentage of female-directed films has risen to approximately 35 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020, 2021). However, this improvement is balanced uneven: established feature films fall far behind at approximately 6 % of them being directed by women, but developing films are almost balanced, with 41 % of them being female led (Moldaschl & Kunz, 2021).

Women's representation in producing and screenwriting has steadily increased. From 2012 to 2016, women accounted for 28 % of screenwriting fundings and 25 % of producing fundings (Zappe-Heller et al., 2019). By 2021, these figures had risen to 41 % for screenwriters and 35 % for producers (Moldaschl et al., 2024; Raveney et al., 2016). Technical roles remain significantly imbalanced. Recent research indicates that only 8 % of lighting jobs, 14 % of sound positions, and 20 % of camera roles are occupied by women (Modalschl et al., 2024). Nonetheless, films with a female-led core team employ women in 46 % of the remaining crew roles, compared to 38 % for male-led films (Zappe-Heller et al., 2019), and direction roles leapt up to 43 % (Modalschl et al., 2024).

Between 2012 and 2016, approximately 20 % of films at major festivals were directed by women, while male-led projects overwhelmingly dominated funding and selection (Zappe-Heller et al., 2019).

“Among all feature-length films at the Austrian film festivals between 2012 and 2016, 72 % were realised by male directors, 23 % by female directors and 6 % by mixed-gender directing teams. According to genre, women directors were involved in 30 % of the documentaries and 17 % of the feature films.” (Zappe-Heller et al., 2019, p. 27)

Interestingly, as soon as a certain awareness was brought to women, they received a higher percentage in screenings (Zappe-Heller et al., 2019). Adding to that, data from 2020 to 2021 shows a change: 76 % of films with female-led core teams participated in festivals, and among

these, 67 % secured at least one award, especially in the documentary category (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2021).

In Austria, women directors predominantly focus on socially engaged genres. According to the Third Austrian Gender Report 2024, women lead nearly 48 % of documentary films, while only 20 % of feature films feature female directors (Modalschl et al., 2024). Furthermore, women's films typically address themes of social justice and cultural identity, whereas male directors are more likely to engage in action and thriller genres (Raveney et al., 2016). Despite these developments, recent data indicates that women continue to have limited opportunities for speaking roles and general screen time. In documentaries, for instance, women only make up about 38 % of the speaking time (Modalschl & Kunz, 2021).

According to Raveney et al. (2016), just 12.3 % of production budgets for federally financed film releases go to female directors. Even with screenplay development financing schemes, men obtained 72 % of the funds while women received 28 %; 75 % of project development funding went to men, and 76 % to 92 % of production funding allocations went to projects managed by men (Zappe-Heller et al., 2019). For films directed by women, these disparities usually result in lower domestic box office revenues and reduced overall economic returns (Modalschl et al., 2024).

Initiatives like gender budgeting have been put into place as a response to these disparities. Women-directed films are eligible for funding from the Austrian Film Institute (Raveney et al., 2016; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018). The promotion of female participation in filmmaking has been greatly supported by initiatives like ProPro – The Producers' Programme for Women, a mentoring program, and Austria's Gender Budgeting policy, which has been in effect since 2009 and provides a €30.000 bonus for a subsequent project if women are working in specific key roles (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018, 2021; Zappe-Heller et al., 2019).

4.7 Italy

In the Italian film industry, gender inequality is still a major problem – when it comes to directing positions and production output. Just about ten percent of Italian films were directed by women between 2012 and 2018, and this number continued to fall, reaching 8.56 % in 2018 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020). In a more comprehensive perspective, women made up only 15 % of all Italian film directors between 2000 and 2017 (Rinaldi & Tagliazucchi, 2022), which the authors contributed to following reasons:

“Italy had very few women directors until a very recent time. However, a major change was triggered by the introduction in 2011 of mandatory gender quotas for the boards of listed firms and of firms that are participated by the state or by another public authority. In a few years, this led to an unprecedented opening up of board rooms to women which involved, although at a lesser extent, also firms that were not affected by the new legislation.” (Rinaldi & Tagliazucchi, 2022, p. 3).

Although there have been some minor improvements, the numbers are still far from equal: the proportion of films directed by women increased to 14.3 % from 2017 to 2021, 15 % from 2018 to 2022, and 17 % from 2019 to 2023 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024). In 2015, only 12 % of publicly funded films were directed by women. For debut and second films, the percentage of female directors was 15.6 %, and from the third film onward the percentage dropped to just 8.9 % (Demurtas et al., 2016).

In addition to being underrepresented, women generally make fewer films than men. In Italy, male filmmakers made an average of 5.7 films between 2012 and 2017, whereas female directors made an average of only 3.4 films (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2017). Biases in education and selection make the problem even worse; for instance, women made up only 17 % of applications for directing courses at Italy's National Film School (EWA, 2016).

In Italy, female filmmakers predominantly work in drama and documentary films, mirroring broader international trends in gendered genre specialization. Since the implementation of a new law that encompasses a sort of awarding system to teams that have a certain percentage of women, “there has only been a slight increase in the proportion of films directed by women: between 2019 and 2022 in documentary filmmaking, women will have risen from 17 % to 25 % of directors, and from 11 % to 13 % in feature-length fiction films.” (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2023, p. 53)

Gender inequities in the Italian film business are further reinforced by an economic inequality. Even after adjusting for comparable production expenditures, female-directed films typically perform worse at the box office than their male-directed counterparts, bringing in about 30 % less money (Demurtas et al., 2016). Another factor is funding mechanisms; films that received selective funding with gender-based incentives had a female involvement rate of 29 %, whereas projects that received tax incentives had a female participation rate of 21 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024).

4.8 Spain

Despite a slow growing trend in recent years, the representation of female directors in Spanish film has lagged behind European averages. Between 2012 and 2015, only 14.1 % of films were directed by women, which was lower than the European average of 19.4 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016). In 2016, female directors held just 19 % of directorial positions, with only five women among the 34 directors of mainstream releases (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2020). From 2012 to 2018, female representation in directing averaged 14.66 %, before declining to 10 % in 2017 and then peaking again at 17.08 % in 2018. (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2023) Between 2016 and 2020, the average percentage of female directors reached 17.7 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2021). However, by 2023, this figure increased to 29 % (Cuenca Suárez, 2023; Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2023). Among established directors, female representation was 9.8 %. In contrast, for those directing their first or second films, the share rose to 17.2 %, indicating a 64 % increase (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016).

In addition to directing, women's representation in key industry positions, especially production, has continuously been below 40 % (Cuenca Suárez, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). While they made about 30 % of independent cinema productions, women's involvement in major studio films fell to less than 15 %. The trend in screenwriting was more positive: women made up 23 % of screenwriting positions overall, rising from 16 % in 2017 to 26 % in 2021 and 35 % by 2023 (Cuenca Suárez, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2023; Cuenca Suárez & Martínez Amado, 2019; Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021).

While creative roles have shown a slow but steady progress, technical areas do still reflect a strong male dominance: Over 85 % of sound and editing positions are occupied by men, and in specialized fields such as cinematography and composition, those numbers are up to 79 % as of 2023 (Cuenca Suárez, 2023).

At the San Sebastián International Film Festival, however, representation improved. Women directed only 23 % of the chosen films between 2000 and 2010, but this percentage increased to 35 % in the subsequent decade (Cuenca Suárez, 2023).

An evaluation of awards for directing and screenwriting from 2015 to 2023 reveals that female filmmakers received roughly 26–27 % of the accolades, whereas male filmmakers claimed about 73–74 % (Cuenca Suárez, 2023). The disparity was particularly stark in 2017, when only 6 % of directing nominees and 10 % of screenwriting nominees were women.

Women were recognized around 37 % of the time in national festivals and 36 % of the time at international festivals. Still, given that only 16 % of women and 13 % of men are acknowledged in relation to their actual representation in the field, this shows a clear disparity (Cuenca Suárez, 2023). Accumulated from the years 2015 to 2019, women received nominations for awards in less than 20 % of categories like directing and cinematography (Cuenca Suárez, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Cuenca Suárez & Martínez Amado, 2019).

On the other hand, those numbers are a sign of a changing environment, as in 2017, only about 5 % of nominees for directing and 10 % of nominees in screenwriting were women – whereas women received 75 % of nominations in costume design. Up to 62 % of male filmmakers were recognized for several contributions, but female filmmakers were frequently recognized for only a single one (82 %) (Cuenca Suárez, 2017, 2018, 2023). Furthermore, according to the data, only 15 % of all wins have gone to female directors, and only one of them has ever won Best Director, compared to 18 male winners (Cuenca Suárez, 2023). Overall, recent years have seen modest advancements. According to Cuenca Suárez (2023), the percentage of nominees at the Goya Awards rose from 19 % in 2020 to 21 % in 2021 and then to 24 % in 2022.

Approximately 60 % of films made by women fall are documentaries. Animation makes up only 5 % of the total, whereas fiction films are 25 %. In contrast, commercial genres including humor, action, and thrillers are dominated by male directors. A more thorough analysis shows that, in contrast to just 18 % of films directed by men, 65 % of films directed by women fall within the drama and documentary genres. Conversely, fewer than 10 % of female-directed films fall into highly commercialized genres like comedy, action, and thrillers (Cuenca Suárez, 2023).

A 2016 study showed that, after accounting for budget size, films directed by women produced an average box office return of €2.5 million, while those directed by men made €3.1 million. A

more extensive analysis of 500 Spanish films indicated that male-directed works earned an average of €5 million, whereas those helmed by female directors brought in around €3.2 million. Additionally, films made by mixed-gender teams generally outperformed those led solely by male or female directors (Cuenca Suárez, 2016, 2017, 2018; Cuenca Suárez & Martínez Amado, 2019).

Spain has addressed the existing funding disparities by implementing targeted financial assistance programs. Up to 75 % of production expenses could be covered for film productions that are deemed as difficult – something that is frequently associated with female-directed productions. This strategy has made things easier financially for female filmmakers and creates a more equitable atmosphere (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2023).

Moreover, legislative actions such as the Ley del Cine (2007) and its updates have instituted point-based funding frameworks that prioritize projects with female creatives. In conjunction with programs like CIMA's mentoring initiative, these efforts have enhanced earnings and work conditions for women in film production. Calderón-Sandoval and Jansson (2024) stated that in 2024, mentoring programs have been especially successful in promoting professional growth and increasing career options for female filmmakers.

4.9 Finland

Gender representation in the Finnish film industry has been steadily improving for the last decades, even if it fluctuated a bit over the years. In 2007, just 20 % of films were directed by women; by 2008, that percentage had dropped to 18 % (Finnish Film Foundation, 2007, 2008). Still, from 2009 to 2012, the numbers have steadily climbed until about 26 % (Finnish Film Foundation, 2009, 2012). According to the Finnish Film Foundation (2011), by 2011, 24 % of directors who received production support were women.

According to reports, between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of female directors for funded projects rose from 29 % to 45 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2021). This was further supported by the most recent Le Lab Femme de Cinéma (2023) report, which found that between 2015 and 2018, the percentage of women in the directorial field was 27 %. From 2019 to 2023, the percentage jumped to 34 %, the highest among the eight countries surveyed, with earlier generations at 17.6 % and subsequent ones at 25.4 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016).

Screenwriting followed a similar trajectory. Women comprised about 35 % of screenwriters in 2007, although the figure dropped to 27 % in 2010. Yet, between 2011 and 2020, the share of women screenwriters climbed from 36 % to 48 % (Finnish Film Foundation, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2021; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2021).

There were changes in the producer's role as well. Women accounted for 25 % of producers in 2007. This percentage rose to 30 % for production-supporting projects by 2012, and subsequent data from 2019 and 2023 show that women were producing at least 35 % of supported projects (Finnish Film Foundation, 2007, 2012, 2019, 2023). According to the Finnish Film Foundation (Finnish Film Foundation, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021; Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021), producer representation increased overall from 28 % to 42 % between 2011 and 2020.

Finland noted differences between the urban and the rural areas: In Helsinki, the participation in directing and producing roles was as high as 40 %, compared to 25 % in the more rural areas (Finnish Film Foundation, 2010). By the year 2011, 70 % of screens in cinemas across Finland had undergone digitization in hopes of promoting a more diverse lineup of films at festivals, particularly in rural regions (Finnish Film Foundation, 2011), which has created more opportunities for female filmmakers (Finnish Film Foundation, 2011): According to the Finnish Film Foundation, by 2022 seventy percent of screened documentaries were directed by women and even directed 41 % of the screened feature-length-fictions (Finnish Film Foundation, 2022).

At the same time, male directors continued to dominate high-budget genres like action, thriller, and science fiction. Now, according to comparative analyses conducted between 2014 and 2018, women directed 62 % of domestic drama films, while men continued to direct the majority of comedies (Finnish Film Foundation, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Still, significant progress was made by 2011, as 24 % of directors and 28 % of screenwriters were receiving production support. Women accounted for over 40 % of production support recipients in 2014, which was in line with gender quota targets (Finnish Film Foundation, 2011, 2014, 2018). With over forty percent of applications being female, directors were almost at parity in production support applications by 2018 (Finnish Film Foundation, 2011, 2018). The data show a connection or rather disparity between direction and funding, with the average share of films directed by women being about thirty percent (2016 – 2020) and forty-five percent receiving production funding in 2020 (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016, 2017, 2021).

Data from 2022 (Finnish Film Foundation) highlights this further: Documentaries that were funded by the Foundation had participation rates up to 53 %, whereas films without funding dropped to 0 %. These figures show both targeted efforts to support women and the continued need to address overall economic inequities, even though female directors received slightly more on average (€640.333) in 2018 than their male counterparts (€605.269) (Finnish Film Foundation, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2018)

Women are frequently placed in roles such as assistants or co-directors, which restricts their chances to lead projects and earn higher salaries. Additionally, technical fields like cinematography and sound design continue to show low levels of female representation. Recent policy measures, including a new requirement for productions funded from 2024 onward to disclose detailed salary data, are aimed to enhance transparency and ultimately reduce the gender pay gap (Finnish Film Foundation, 2012, 2022; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024).

In combination, it can be said that women often excel in niche markets – especially documentaries and dramas – and frequently face hurdles in the mainstream commercial arena. While male-directed films continue to dominate high-grossing international markets, by 2023, female-directed films accounted for 28 % of the total box office revenue, closely matching their 30 % release share (Finnish Film Foundation, 2023).

5 Discussion

The empirical data shows the ongoing persistence of gender disparities in the film industry across different key roles, career paths, genre representation, festival recognition, funding distribution, and policy effectiveness. The analysis of France, Poland, Greece, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Finland in terms of key roles in the film industry indicates an alarming segmentation of female representation. The research was done in the hopes of identifying and articulating differences between the countries, but it can be said that results closely match those of more general observations made throughout Europe, and so there are no broader anomalies in the data.

Despite some improvements in the amount of women in producing and screenwriting fields, respectively, their representation remains disproportionately lower in technical and decision-making positions. This can be interpreted as an indication that men continue to dominate the creative sector and are maybe even seen by some as the authoritative core of the film industry (Fontaine, 2024; Modalschl et al., 2024). This pattern could be found in all of the countries that were analyzed, which supports Engel's (2018) argument that the ability of women to define cinematic language is still limited. And these limitations in turn impact the visual and aural aesthetic of films, so their underrepresentation limits not only career opportunities but also the possibility of a diverse narrative and creative storytelling in films.

The stereotypical beliefs about gendered labor are subtly reinforced by the concentration of women in particular areas, as editing, where their representation approaches 30 % (Fontaine, 2024). Even though an editing process requires a lot of creative input, it is frequently viewed as a supporting rather than a commanding role in society and culture. This in turn perpetuates the gender segregation and the gendered hierarchies in the film industry and restricts women's overall creative autonomy and authority, even in cases where representation appears to be high, and are on par with Raveney et al. (2016) findings.

This is reinforced by their career trajectory, which shows that women encounter obstacles in their progression. For example, even though women now direct more than 30 % of first-time films in France, by the time they direct their third film and beyond, their representation drops to less than 20 % (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2018), which highlights impediments to sustaining long-term female. This supports Verhoeven et al.'s (2019) findings in which the

authors call for strong, ongoing mentoring and legislative changes to address more profound structural biases that impede career progression beyond the initial entry points into the industry.

Furthermore, this aligns closely with Mulvey's (1975) theory regarding the Male Gaze, which is now put in context with the age and gender visibility in cinematic contexts. Younger female filmmakers exhibit a sort of early prominence that is in line with society's value of young femininity, but as they get older, they are at a disadvantage – thereby decreasing their visibility and opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts. All of the countries studied exhibit this marginalization, which also implies that the long-term professional advancement of female directors is still unstable and susceptible to ingrained prejudices and enduring cultural stereotypes.

The visibility of women in festivals and awards circuits further accentuates the underrepresentation and acts as a sort of reinforcer of their already marginalized status. Female directors routinely make up less than 25 % of festival submissions and nominations, and their success rate in winning is even lower at major events like the Cannes Film Festival, the César Awards in France, and the Orły Awards in Poland (Brau et al., 2015; Lauzen, 2016; Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2023; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2024). This puts them in a sort of passive and in some sense secondary positioning within the film culture, which aligns closely with Mulvey's (1975) findings. Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure connects with those disparities and emphasizes the persistence of long-standing institutional biases. The marginalization of women in award contexts demonstrates an unwillingness to recognize them as authoritative auteurs, exemplified rather simply by the historical lack of female winners of the Palme d'Or, in which Jane Campion's was the only female winner for three decades in a festival where women typically make up less than 20 % of nominees (Lauzen, 2016).

Furthermore, feminist critiques argue that placing films made by women in non-competitive festival categories stifles a genuine recognition and career advancement and effectively maintains gender inequalities via both structural and artistic means (Simone 2019). According to Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality—the additional exclusion of women from underrepresented racial, ethnic, or LGBTQIA+ groups from professional film circles—exacerbates these hurdles. These exclusionary behaviors reinforce traditional masculine myths about excellent directing and keeping up the systemically marginalization of female-directed films, according to Butler's (2000) performative gender theory.

Despite the increases observed in some production jobs, this persistent difference suggests an imbalance in cultural recognition and further solidifies women's exclusion from positions that could influence the cultural capital in film.

The study reveals a strong gendered segregation within the sector with regards to the genre as well. About 33 % of documentaries and social-issue dramas are made by women filmmakers, with high concentrations, Poland (66.7%), and Spain (65%) who have had less policy interventions than the other countries (Cuenca Suárez, 2023; Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019, 2020).

On the other hand, women are still disproportionately underrepresented in action and thriller, which tend to have larger budgets, more commercial appeal in terms of theatergoers, budget and funding, and wider distribution networks (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2021). Throughout all countries this underrepresentation is commonly observed, underscoring systemic injustices that restrict women's access to mainstream, high-budget filmmaking.

The Social Role Theory by Eagly and Kite (1987) can be used to frame this genre segregation, as it has its roots in traditional gender roles. It places women filmmakers primarily in feminine or as softer, maybe more relaxed, perceived narrative – like drama and documentaries –, which center on identity, family dynamics, and social justice. As a result of ingrained cultural conventions around masculinity as well as leadership in creative professions, male filmmakers, on the other hand, predominate in commercially successful genres like action and thriller. Repetitively placing women in the softer narrative spaces, according to Butler's performative framework, perpetuates the idea that high-end, commercial filmmaking is still fundamentally masculine. To pull up again a previous point of interpretation, the findings from the analysis support the take on Engel (2018) – that women's creative power for developing a cinematic language and genre conventions is still limited and restricted, as well as their access to prominent cinematic venues. The findings from the analysis reflect that take. Female directors throughout all countries are disproportionately drawn to drama and documentaries and participate in only a few commercially viable genres, thus further restricting their success and exposure.

There are several noteworthy economic discrepancies that can be seen as a result of this genre-based disadvantage. According to Raveney et al. (2016), female directors generally receive

budgets 6–34 % lower, with less marketing assistance, and a more limited theatrical distribution, all of which lead to consistently lower box office receipts and fewer career chances. The country-specific research makes these structural differences clearer, with financing and earnings inequities as shown in nations like Belgium, Italy, and Greece. For instance, in Belgium, film projects led by men have traditionally received financing that is around 30 % more than those led by women; comparable or even larger differences have been seen in Spain and France (Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, 2023; Sepulchre et al., 2022).

In order to reduce the gender gap in filmmaking, some European nations have implemented legislative measures. For instance, bonuses like the gender-parity bonus have been introduced in public film financing by France's CNC as well as mentorship programs like the ProPro in Austria.

Through this, the countries hope to aid early-career advancement by governmental measures. The professional underrepresentation stands in contrast to the gender-equal graduation rates from film schools, which indicates that the problem is not a shortage of talented women but rather structural exclusion from industry networks and leadership positions. Finland, for example, has had better outcomes due to a comprehensive legislative framework that include gender-disaggregated data and clear financing criteria, with 34 % to 45 % of financed projects being for women (Le Lab Femme de Cinéma, 2016, 2017, 2021). According to Calderón-Sandoval & Jansson (2024) and Le Lab Femme de Cinéma (2023), Spain and France have likewise experienced substantial increases (from 14 % to over 29%).

In response, a fact that could be observed was that nations like Finland, which has led the way in the advancement of women in the film industry, also collect the most statistics on the subject. Growing public and academic interest encourages greater transparency, which in turn fuels a critical discourse that is sparked by the knowledge of this growing engagement. At the end of the day, this kind of transparency guarantees availability, which helps the field continue to grow. Nonetheless, the enduring disparity in long-term career sustainability highlights the fact that the efficacy of policies is frequently restricted to the early phases of development.

Still, Verhoeven et al. (2019) warn that programs that just address early-stage financing or training risk suggesting that women are to blame for their underrepresentation, rather than addressing the injustices ingrained in the industry's structure. Additionally, the research indicates that a more intersectional approach is required. Even though there have been

noticeable improvements due to policies in some nations, the underlying cultural and economic structures are still exclusionary. According to intersectional perspectives, which are emphasized by Liddy (2020) and Engel (2018), it is impossible to comprehend gender disparities without taking into account other axes of the marginalization process, such as race and class. It is also crucial to implement violence prevention strategies as well as larger diversity programs that promote safer workplaces because they may make it easier for women to continue their careers in a male-dominated field. The findings on policy interventions suggest that while legislative and funding measures have improved early-career opportunities, they have not yet dismantled the structural barriers that limit long-term career growth. This aligns with feminist critiques of performative gender initiatives, where policies address surface-level representation but fail to change the underlying power dynamics (Verhoeven et al., 2019). However, the persistent funding and career longevity gaps indicate that further structural changes – such as transparency in hiring, equal pay regulations, and industry-wide commitments to gender parity – are required for sustainable progress.

The success of countries with broader gender-based policy interventions across Europe reflects how structural barriers can be mitigated but not entirely removed through policy alone. The cases of Finland and Austria, where female representation is higher due to gender budgeting and mentoring programs, support Crenshaw's (1989) argument that targeted interventions can address specific barriers. However, the persistence of disparities even in progressive countries underscores that cultural shifts are necessary alongside policy changes. Loist (2018) emphasizes that while quotas and incentives help, true equality requires dismantling the male-dominated networks that control the industry.

6 Conclusion

This study has set out to examine the gender industry in the European film industry and how it evolved across Austria, France, Poland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Finland between 2000 and 2024, focusing on participation, recognition, and commercial success. Against the backdrop of the persistent gender disparities in film production, festival representation, and economic structures, the research examined data to comprehensively assess both the progress as well as the stagnation.

For that, the research question was the following:

How has gender distribution evolved in the film industry across Austria, France, Poland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Finland from 2000 to 2024, and what impact does gender have on participation, recognition, and commercial success in this sector?

The results support the main argument that was presented at the beginning of this paper, namely that the gender disparity in the film industry affects professional opportunities and even long-term career paths in addition to representation.

While male filmmakers continue to dominate award nominations and wins, which is in line with prior research that spans more globally, this indicates a divide in festival recognition. The underrepresentation of female-directed films in competitive sections, which is primarily reinforced by economic disparities in funding and marketing support, is being seen as a way to understand how the systemic barriers still curtail visibility and professional advancement. Furthermore, the genre distribution corroborates that while women are more frequently positioned within documentary and socially driven narratives, high-budget fiction films – a domain still largely monopolized by male directors – offer greater financial and professional leverage.

From an economic point of view, the study shows that gender affects commercial viability and also income potential. Despite their creative and critical success, female-led films still struggle to attain equivalent box office success as men, receive proportionally less financial backing, and have fewer distribution options. In addition, it is also society's way to limit their own creative variety in the industry in a cycle that perpetuates exclusion, which in turn prevents long-term female participation at the top levels.

In the end, this study not only shows that gender gaps still exist, but it also emphasizes how urgent structural change is. It urges a change from representation measurements to a fundamental restructuring of economics, accessibility, and institutional recognition by tracking the changing landscape of gender distribution in the film industry business. By implementing long-term structural transformation, the industry can only progress toward a more inclusive, fair, and creatively vibrant future.

6.1 Limitations and Delimitations

In conducting this research on gender distribution in the European film industry, several limitations that arose in the process must be acknowledged as well as limitations for the implications this study might have. These constraints affect the scope, generalizability, and interpretative depth of the findings. While the study provides insights into gender disparities in the film sector, the following methodological and structural challenges should be considered.

A central limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary data sources. This dependence constrains the ability to ensure consistency, completeness, and reliability across different sources and countries. Data collection methods of the used sources have varied from retrospective studies to still ongoing longitudinal studies, and vary significantly over time and across national contexts, which could lead to potential inconsistencies in the operationalization of the variables. Furthermore, shifts in industry practices may compromise the comparability of data spanning the twenty-four-year period. While a lot of effort has been taken to cross-validate the information, the inherent limitations of working with pre-existing datasets have to be acknowledged. As the research was of descriptive nature, it provides data and thoughts into the findings, but while providing statistical insights, may overlook quantitative and qualitative factors such as personal experiences, cultural nuances, as well as empirical and statistical connections that influence gender dynamics in the film industry.

As the methodological approach this study employed allows for a nuanced interpretation of gender representations, it still is inherently influenced by subjective coding and categorization. Even though the study followed a systematic framework, the interpretative nature of the content analysis is open to the possibility of researcher bias. Additionally, the selection of the theoretical frameworks may have led to an analytical focus that prioritized certain aspects of gender disparities while potentially underemphasizing others. This necessitates a certain caution in drawing definitive conclusions, as these findings are shaped by the chosen way of analysis.

Given that the study examined eight different European countries, variations in national policies, cultural norms, and industry structures posed a significant challenge. The own definitions of key industry roles, the mechanisms of funding allocation, and the criteria for festival selection differ across countries, which can make direct comparisons difficult. Furthermore, a consistent evaluation of gender dynamics is made more difficult by language and cultural differences in how gender is portrayed in films. The complexities of gendered experiences within particular industry contexts cannot be adequately captured by cross-country comparisons, despite the fact that they offer insightful macro-level information.

The study's time frame offers a long-term perspective on gender trends in the European film industry, however, the rapidly evolving nature of film production, particularly in the digital era, presents challenges in fully capturing the emerging trends. The rise of streaming platforms shifts in audience engagement, and evolving funding mechanisms reshape industry dynamics in ways that may not be reflected in the data.

Additionally, the literature solely emphasis the off-screen representation than speaking-roles, actresses, or screen time by gender. Despite having a strong theoretical foundation in gender studies and feminist cinema theory, the study's analytical reach may be limited by this concentration. Although they are not fully covered in this study, intersectional factors including ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation are important in determining gendered experiences in the film business. Furthermore, other explanatory frameworks, such institutional or economic theories, could shed more light on the structural elements causing gender inequality. A more comprehensive theoretical integration that takes into account many aspects of inequality may be helpful for future studies.

6.2 Outlook

The findings of this study may offer ramifications for governments and industry stakeholders, as gender representation can be improved by initiatives like mentorship programs, gender-parity bonuses, and open financing procedures. Finland is an example of how a systematic strategy incorporating mentorship programs, incentive-driven gender quotas, and financing transparency can result in improvements. This emphasizes the need for consistent, research-based approaches to combat the rooted prejudices that still influence the film industry.

In the future, this study may provide the groundwork for more research on how gender intersects with other social categories that are still understudied, such as race, class, and sexual orientation. A deeper awareness of how various types of discrimination interact to influence career paths within the sector could result from broadening the research to encompass the wider implications of intersectionality. Comparative research conducted in various cultural and national settings could shed light on the global variations in industrial structures, financing sources, and role definitions. This approach would provide a more thorough understanding of how different forms of discrimination affect career pathways. Economic modeling might also look at the relationship between creative innovation, wider audience appeal, and better financial success with diverse production teams. This kind of research would assist in closing the gap between quantifiable economic gains and industry improvements.

For that, in-depth interviews and surveys might offer a better understanding of gatekeeping mechanisms and the structural issues that affect career length. The relationship between individual experiences and industry-wide trends might be further demonstrated through case studies of certain filmmakers or productions.

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