

20–27 FEB 2020



Sustainability in Film and Television: How to tackle a 360° Challenge
BKM / BMU / EFM Sustainability Workshop
Friday, February 21st 2020 10am -12pm

About this workshop:

This year, the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), and the European Film Market of the Berlinale (EFM) co-hosted a workshop for a selected group of sustainability experts and industry pioneers leading change in film and television. This first edition of the workshop coincided with the announcement of the [EFM's Sustainability Manifesto](#), with twelve goals for transformation in resource use, energy, transport, working conditions and organizational culture.

Recognising that there are no silver bullet solutions for sustainability in the entertainment industry, this sustainability workshop explored the unique obstacles and new opportunities facing each industry branch through roundtable discussions on sustainable film production awards, public funding for sustainable media projects, sustainability for distribution and its tech, as well as strategies for sustainable events and festivals.

Roundtable Topics and Results

1. Funding Sustainability in Film and Television, hosted by Prof. Carl Bergengruen, Executive Director, MFG (Medien- und Filmgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg)



Funding systems influence the economic landscape of industrial sectors, the audio-visual sector being one of them. How can funding systems be used as incentives for long-lasting and perceptible ecological progress? To answer this question, this roundtable brought together participants interested in strengthening the funding landscape for sustainable

projects in entertainment, with a core focus on selection criteria, as well as key institutions and stakeholders, and best practices for funder-fundee relationships.

All participants agreed that funding bodies play a crucial role in the film and television industry's sustainable transition. While some funds already have a clear mission to support eco-friendly productions, and others don't, participants agreed that *all* funds have a responsibility to drive sustainable transformation.

Moreover, funding bodies should support sustainability in more than one way. Funds can provide frameworks and criteria for what counts as an environmentally friendly film production. They can also create and provide guidelines and training to help film professionals achieve high environmental standards. Finally, funds can take on an advocacy role to promote sustainability in their industry, and in the creative sector more broadly.



While funds should initially focus on their own regional context when embarking on this sustainable mission, developing a harmonized set of criteria and measures nationwide, and ultimately Europe-wide should be the ultimate goal. Working towards this goal may prove challenging, but it will ensure sustainable measures are easier to implement and more effective in the long run.

Should funds take on the role of 'green police', that is, as enforcers of environmental standards? Participants answered this question with a resounding yes, with further discussion needed on the question of enforcement methods. All agreed that in the case of public funding, taxpayer money should only be given to projects that abide by existing environmental regulations.

The relationship between voluntary and mandatory regulations was described as a 'journey', with the end of that journey arriving at mandatory regulations for environmentally friendly productions. While voluntary approaches have various benefits, they will not be sufficient to ensure the industry achieves widespread transformation. Representatives at the table from funds in different countries were all moving towards mandatory regulation, albeit at different paces, from 1-3 years.

Participants agreed that artistic freedom was, and would not be limited by environmental regulations.

Finally, participants called for a multi-faceted definition of sustainability that encompassed environmental, social, economic and cultural factors. The 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals offered a model for this conception of sustainability.

2. Green Awards for Environmentally Friendly Film Productions with Dirk Jepsen, Executive Director, Ökopool – Institute for Environmental Strategies

Public awards for environmentally friendly productions as well as other visible labelling or branding exercises are powerful tools to communicate efforts made and successes gained on increasing environmental friendliness of film production. However, many critical stakeholder groups challenge the validity of such “green claims”. This roundtable discussed the scope and goals of an award programme for sustainable film production and the key requirements and institutional settings that would make such an award credible and trustworthy. It also explored how to address complexities of designing selection criteria considering the diversity of film productions, and the aspects of sustainability, from environmental to social and economic.

This roundtable began by debating whether awards should go to entire productions, or to producers. Participants agreed that awarding productions would be the best approach, while still emphasising that producers play a systematic role in ensuring sustainability in film and television projects.

On the relationship between awards and certification programs, participants argued that certification should ensure a baseline of high environmental standards, while awards should celebrate and reward efforts that go above and beyond in terms of sustainability. In this way, awards should incentivize innovation, while certification schemes ensure common ground and basic standards for production.



Participants agreed that in addition to going above and beyond, winning films should also demonstrate their fulfillment of overall sustainability certification to apply for the award to secure its credibility. And, the innovative initiative itself should have transparent documentation, where relevant, empirical evidence of its effects, to allow jury members to make informed choices about winners.

When judging award entrants, the sheer diversity of different film and television productions might make it difficult to make fair comparisons. Rather than developing extensive categories and subcategories, participants

agreed that an award for sustainable productions should embrace this diversity by giving the award an 'open scope'.

Under this 'open scope' approach, innovative and ambitious ideas covering any aspect across the entire production pipeline could be celebrated and rewarded, from catering to waste to transport to energy and tech. Additionally, the bar set for the award should be raised progressively, ensuring increasingly innovative ideas are celebrated with each passing year.

The composition of the award jury should also be diverse, with stakeholders from different sectors in the film industry and from relevant federal ministries, as well as representatives from critical stakeholder groups such as NGOs and other civil society actors. This would again ensure the credibility of the award.

3. Festival Sustainability with Korina Gutsche, Founder, Bluechild Film

While the music sector presents a number of leading examples of initiatives and organisations, working together to make festivals and major events more sustainable, the film industry is now just beginning to acknowledge the importance of sustainable events. This roundtable focused on catalysing ecological change on the film festival circuit, discussing how to define sustainability for festivals and events, the key players and partners who can support efforts for sustainability on the festival circuit and other important success factors for greener festivals.

From the perspective of organizational culture, a key factor in the success of sustainable festivals is the sense of *self-responsibility* felt by all involved, from the festival team, to attendees, to partners and other stakeholders. Success relies on cooperation and willing participation on all sides, rather than just toleration of measures for minimizing environmental impact.

Understanding is the foundation of this sense of self-responsibility, so festivals must focus on effectively communicating their sustainability goals and why they matter. Every event is different, and each festival should develop their own green policy or charter specific to their size, goals, programming, location, and other relevant factors.

In addition to aiding communications with team members, partners and sponsors, a clearly articulated green policy can also help build and maintain strong relationships with green vendors and NGOs. Finally, communications efforts should also continue after the festival to ensure all involved can reflect on their experience and gather key learnings for subsequent editions.



For festivals and events new to sustainability, participants advised starting small and taking a step-by-step approach with their green policy. Creating and communicating key priorities and goals the form of a list, as the EFM did this year with its manifesto, was recommended. Industry guidelines with recommendations and advice were also proposed by participants as a useful resource for sustainable festival organizers, such as the German Environment Agencies' (Umweltbundesamt's) [guideline](#) for sustainable events.

When discussing specific forms of environmental impacts, key factors discussed by participants were transportation and mobility, from ways to minimize the impact of flights as well as onsite shuttles, accommodation for guests, along with resources, energy and water use. Participants emphasized the importance of first avoiding and minimizing as much as possible, before seeking to compensate and offset impacts.

Participants also discussed the importance of making a festival's sustainability initiatives visible and prominent, as physical symbols and reminders for participants about their responsibilities. These visible reminders could include reusable cups, bins for waste separation and festival bicycle fleets. Festivals can also get creative with these reminders, like one film festival where film screenings were powered by participants on stationary bikes.

On the question of whether festivals should make use of external sustainability consultants, participants agreed it was a matter of the size of the festival. They emphasised that there are advantages to educating your team to build in-house knowledge and capacities for sustainability.

4. Sustainable Online Distribution with Manuel Badel, Founder Badel Media and Blockchain Working Group for Film

A truly sustainable transformation for film and entertainment should not just stop at production, but should also catalyse changes in the distribution field. This roundtable explored the status quo in sustainable distribution, discussing how to understand the often hidden environment impact of audiovisual streaming, new technologies to minimise this impact, and the next steps for cross-sector organising, collaboration and industry guidelines for greening distribution.

Focusing on VOD platforms, participants explored why the general public is typically not aware of the environmental impact of audiovisual streaming, even as the majority of online energy use can be attributed to video content. While [researchers and experts](#) have developed methods to document and calculate the impact of streaming, the sense of the internet as being 'dematerialized' and the absence of the its energy-intensive infrastructure such as data centers in our daily lives makes it easy to forget the very material impact of online audiovisual content.



Participants discussed ways to raise awareness among the general public about the environmental impact of audiovisual streaming, from using eye-opening comparative statistics (half an hour of Netflix browsing has the equivalent impact of manufacturing and shipping a DVD, the total yearly GHG emissions of VOD services are equivalent to those of a country like Chile, or the 1 million views of the Avatar trailer that emitted a total 54 million tonnes of CO₂); or through in-browser notifications or information about energy use as a form of digital 'ecolabel'. Of course, the burden should not (only) be placed on the end consumer, but on distribution companies.¹

Participants then compared possible leverage points and top-down strategies to push for more sustainable distribution. This could include pressuring streaming companies to use data centers powered by renewable energy, potentially through the involvement of investors, public funds and production studios committed to only working with distribution platforms using green infrastructure. [The German Environment Agency provides criteria for the most environmental friendly data centers and software through the German public voluntary eco-label „Blue Angel“](#). However, even when powered by renewable energy, excessive energy use can still be resource intensive and environmentally detrimental.

From this perspective, a simultaneous shift in the design of the user experience on streaming platforms may be necessary in addition to distribution's decarbonization. Currently platforms like Netflix are designed to be *addictive*, to ensure viewers watch as long and as frequently as possible, leading to increasing energy demand and in turn, environmental impact. To help users regulate their use of their platforms, and thereby reduce overall energy demand, it may be necessary to redesign platforms to encourage more conscious, mindful (and more enjoyable!) viewing experiences. This strategy may prove difficult in practice, as such redesigns may contradict the streaming platform's underlying growth-oriented business model.

Finally, the roundtable discussed the potential of blockchain or distributed ledger technology solutions for more sustainable online distribution. Generally speaking,

¹Source: The Shift Project / <https://theshiftproject.org/en/article/unsustainable-use-online-video/>

blockchain solutions can assist the measuring, reporting and verification of sustainable commitments in audiovisual distribution, as well as in other sectors of the film industry; and can also help finance green distribution projects, and incentivize and reward sustainable behaviour by companies and viewers. Decentralized energy production could be combined with renewables to offer a more efficient and resilient power supply. On the question of whether audiovisual streaming itself should take place on the blockchain or in a peer-to-peer system, participants emphasised that decentralized approaches may not necessarily be inherently 'greener'. Instead, blockchain and P2P should be seen as tools to achieve predefined goals, according to predefined protocols, in order to design systems that function in a sustainable manner.

While such industry goals and protocols for sustainability are currently missing in online distribution, this sector can learn from classical distribution (e.g. eco-friendly cinemas) and even from sustainable production to understand key components of an industry sustainability strategy—from research-backed goals and sustainability criteria, to certification, to incentives and awards, as well as networks tools to connect distributors with financial and professional support.



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