
The Polyglot Problem and Potential: some challenges and proposed solutions for foreign-language film in the UK

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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in London, one of the world's most cosmopolitan cultural centres, the relative lack of interest and engagement with non-English language films always surprised me. In contrast to mainland Europe, where films are distributed and consumed across the continent, foreign-language films generally make up less of the market in the United Kingdom (UK). This of course can be explained in part by a shared culture and language with the United States (US), which dominates the global film industry and is tied economically to the success of the UK's domestic industry. The first part of this report sets out this **context**.

There are, however, several other challenges that foreign-language films face in the UK, which have been compounded by the onset of the pandemic.¹ The second section of my report aims to examine these unique **challenges** – which are both cultural and financial – before suggesting a number of potential **solutions** in the third part. Throughout, I put 'a spotlight on...' a streaming platform, a touring film programme, and an award to demonstrate the original ways in which the industry is innovating to improve the accessibility of foreign-language films. At the heart of my hypothesis is the idea that it is only through improving access to a range of different films in different languages that the industry can thrive. Beyond my personal research, this study relies extensively on the insights of significant industry players, which help to contextualise the topics discussed.

My hope is that these findings can be used to identify ways in which to grow the foreign-language film market in the UK. This can become more urgent in the wake of two events that have shaken the industry: Brexit and the pandemic. One of the consequences of the UK's decision to leave the European Union is a retraction of funds that subsidised the release of European films in the UK. While new funds are being formed, such as the Global Screen Fund, I hope that my industry insights can feed into alternative ways of supporting the sector. Finally, foreign-language films have suffered the same drastic consequences as the wider film industry during the pandemic. At the same time, there has been growing interest in foreign-language films and TV series, which is no doubt related to the restrictions on travel imposed by successive stay-at-home orders in the UK. It is necessary to capitalise on this trend to counterbalance the pandemic-related financial distress, felt most acutely by small and independent cinemas in the UK that provide the lifeblood of foreign-language film distribution. The proposals made in this report are naturally subject to the difficulties wrought by the pandemic, and are intended not to solve this wider problem but rather the inherent issues of access and distribution.

Why is this important? Watching films from around the world and in different languages can break down prejudices and create new perspectives. The foreign-language film industry supports diversity, serves an educative function and can motivate language-learning. The status of foreign-language film as somehow distinct from their English-language counterparts needs to be dismantled. Jason Wood, Artistic Director at HOME in Manchester expresses the importance of being 'challenged and provoked' by non-English language cinema and that 'we've got to find new ways of encouraging people to make that mental leap or slowly year by year the audience for non-English language film will diminish'.²

¹ For the purpose of this report, a foreign-language film is a film where the dialogue is primarily in a language other than English, excluding Hindi so-called "Bollywood" films.

² Jason Wood, cited in Vincent Dowd 'How foreign-language films struggle for UK success' BBC Online, February 2015 <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-31585429>

CONTEXT

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FILM MARKET IN THE UK

Until March 2020 and the closure of cinemas due to the pandemic, the UK film market was generally in good shape, with 176.1 million cinema admissions in 2019, worth about £1.25bn at the box office, according to industry body Cinema First.³ According to statistics compiled by the British Film Institute (BFI), at the end of 2019 the UK was one of the largest film markets in the world – exceeded only by the US, China and Japan – with estimated revenues reaching £3.5 billion and domestic films accounting for approximately a third of those revenues across all platforms.⁴ The cinematic experience generated the most revenues within the wider film market, cementing its place as ‘the most significant component of the film value chain.’⁵

Of course, the government-mandated closure of cinemas has undoubtedly had a profound (and as yet untold) impact on the industry. With no theatrical releases possible, many films that were conceived for the big screen experience – such as the new Bond *No Time to Die* and Denis Villeneuve’s science fiction epic *Dune* – were delayed.⁶ Others were premiered on Video on Demand (VoD) platforms. The crisis has been even more acute for independent or arthouse cinemas that lack the resources of larger chains, although some have been able to substitute physical screenings with virtual at-home cinema, with varying degrees of success.

OUR ‘SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP’

The UK shares a language with the US and to a certain extent, a comfortable cultural connection. A great degree of the financial success of the UK film industry can be attributed to its reliance on Hollywood and the US, which accounts for nearly 35% of the world market.⁷ These economic ties pose a threat to the success of foreign-language films. Concerning the challenges of screening Italian cinema in the UK, for example, Martina Lovascio points out that industrial reasons are as crucial as cultural differences: ‘the country has a stronger bond with US studios than any other film industry in Europe – the production volume of the British film industry is worth on average 1 billion pounds a year, of which 70% is funded by the United States.’⁸ This focus on high-budget tentpole Hollywood blockbusters at key times of the year had, until the onset of Covid, been a lucrative strategy.

Mike Goodridge: We’re an imitation of the US in so many ways. We have become an add-on to the US in terms of our consumer habits.

Mark Cosgrove: We share the language with America and America is the dominant force in film production. And we know that Hollywood (and it’s not even American films in general, it’s specifically Hollywood) dominates the market.

3 Tim Dams ‘UK Cinema Admissions Hold Up in 2019 Despite Streaming Boom’ *Variety*, January 2020 <https://variety.com/2020/film/global/uk-cinema-admissions-cinema-first-2019-1203469103/>

4 BFI Industry Statistical Yearbook 2020: UK Film Market as a whole <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/statistical-yearbook>

5 Ibid.

6 BBC Online, ‘Covid: James Bond film No Time to Die delayed for third time’ BBC Online, January 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-55761211>

7 BFI Industry Statistical Yearbook 2020: UK Film Market as a whole <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/statistical-yearbook>

8 Martina Lovascio, ‘The Circulation of Italian Cinema in the UK: Challenges and Opportunities’ *Italian Cinema*, June 2019 <https://www.italiancinema.it/the-circulation-of-italian-cinema-in-the-uk-challenges-and-opportunities/>

To what extent is this dependence on the US film industry sustainable, or desirable? Viewing the experience of film purely through a financial lens, it is clear that Hollywood blockbusters generate the most revenue in the UK. As former Lionsgate UK and Europe CEO Zygi Kamasa states 'the growth of the box office is not reflective of the whole industry...it's reflective of the growing appetite for audiences to see those huge popcorn movies.'⁹ This dominance of the US studio is concerning because it puts pressure on the potential for foreign-language films – which are generally smaller in scope and size – to obtain funding. As a consequence, screenwriters, directors and producers are less inclined to propose films that do not fit the historic mould of commercial success. The danger is that the film industry as a whole becomes more homogenous, and less diversified.

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FILM IN THE UK

The pressure imposed by US studio dominance is reflected in the financials. Whereas the UK film industry as a whole has achieved growth, the numbers for cinema admission in foreign-language films have been less healthy over the past decade. For example, between 2007 and 2013, of the 395 foreign-language European films released in the UK, a mere 13 sold more than 200,000 cinema tickets, the equivalent to earning £1 million or more at the UK box office and the industry's benchmark for a 'breakout' title.¹⁰ As Louisa Dent, Managing Director at UK arthouse distributor Curzon Artificial Eye notes, 'for foreign-language films, you really have to have something quite exceptional to break the £1m (\$1.3m) mark.'¹¹ Furthermore, the 13 films that did achieve this benchmark, constituted a mere 3.3% of European releases. Recent figures show little improvement; in 2019, although 45% of all theatrical releases were non-English language films, they made up a paltry 2% of total box office revenue.¹² These recent figures are corroborated by similar BFI statistics from 2015 to 2018.¹³

The success and strength of the foreign-language film industry cannot be measured purely through financial measurements or cinema admissions. However, these figures suggest that foreign-language films are not reaching UK audiences. This is confirmed by a BFI survey in 2011 which found that while half of British cinemagoers had seen a foreign-language film in that year, only 14% said that they enjoyed that film.¹⁴ What is behind this trend? The BFI survey suggests that there is a significant preference amongst British audiences for 'blockbusters with big-budget effects and a star cast', which 50% of those surveyed stated they watched most often. Conversely, although one in three respondents were of the opinion that there were too few non-English language films shown in the UK, only 2% of the survey gave foreign-language films as their primary choice. This suggests that while the demand for foreign-language films is high – and has been high for at least a decade – there are structural issues in the supply chain that make up the foreign-language film market in the UK. It is these issues that I have identified as challenges.

9 Andreas Wiseman, 'Why distributing films in the UK is "a growing challenge"' Screen Daily, October 2017 <https://www.screendaily.com/features/why-the-uks-indie-distributors-face-a-growing-challenge/5123146.article>

10 Huw David Jones, 'The box office performance of European films in the UK' 2017 p. 16 https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/415051/1/Author_accepted_manuscript.pdf

11 Charles Gant, 'Why foreign-language films are struggling in UK cinemas' Screen Daily, June 2017 <https://www.screendaily.com/features/why-foreign-language-films-are-struggling-in-uk-cinemas/5118664.article>

12 BFI Industry Statistical Yearbook 2020: The Box Office 2019 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/statistical-yearbook>

13 Ibid.

14 BFI Report by Northern Alliance and Ipsos MedicaCT, 'Opening our eyes: how film contributes to the culture of the UK' July 2011 https://www2.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-opening-our-eyes-2011-07_0.pdf

CHALLENGES

A CROWDED MARKETPLACE WITH DISTRIBUTION DIFFICULTIES

A lot of movies are being made! The Film Distributor's Association (FDA) reported that a record breaking 916 films were released in the UK in 2018, translating to 17 films per week.¹⁵ Foreign-language films thus face fierce competition from domestic alternatives. In parallel with a crowded marketplace is a high turnover rate; cinemas, as businesses themselves, are under pressure to select films that are most likely to be commercially successful. Foreign-language films are usually allotted on average a four-week run in cinemas, which leaves little time for valuable word-of-mouth recommendations.¹⁶ Some even are relegated to one-off screenings, usually at off-peak hours, or special slots, such as Picturehouse's 'Discover Tuesday.'¹⁷ Furthermore, the competition is fierce not only for screen-time but also for media coverage and film reviews of new releases.

Mike Goodridge: It's just the sheer volume of entertainment that's out there... it is overwhelming.

Robert Beeson: The big weekly film release tends to get quite a lot written about, while everything else gets a couple of paragraphs.

Compounding the problem of an overcrowded marketplace are issues within distribution. Foreign-language films suffer many of the same challenges that the broader, independent film sector faces, where control of the distribution network is concentrated in a consolidated market, dominated by the studio system and, more recently, online platforms. The figures speak for themselves. BFI statistics for 2019 reveal that foreign-language films accounted for an impressive 45% of UK releases, however, they only grossed 2% of the overall box office at £29 million, despite the 96 different distributors handling these titles.¹⁸ However, the top 10 distributors released the films that accounted for 59% of foreign-language films box office takings. The latter numbers are skewed because they include major distributors for Hindi, Punjabi and Tamil films. Breakout foreign-language films are usually distributed by major independent distributors or Hollywood Studios. Data from the European Audiovisual Observatory's LUMIERE database demonstrates that close to three-quarters (73.2%) of European films released in the UK between 2007 and 2012 were distributed by smaller outfits (for example, New Wave and Soda Pictures).¹⁹ In 2019, the Spanish title *Pain and Glory* was the only film to achieve breakout success, although this is unremarkable given it was directed by Pedro Almodóvar, featured international stars Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz, and distributed by 20th Century Fox.

¹⁵ Tom Grater, 'Record number of films released in UK cinemas last year, reports FDA' Screen Daily, February 2019 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/record-number-of-films-released-in-uk-cinemas-last-year-reports-fda/5137147.article>

¹⁶ Huw David Jones, 'Three reasons why foreign language cinema is struggling in the UK' June 2016 <https://theconversation.com/three-reasons-why-foreign-language-cinema-is-struggling-in-the-uk-59424>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ BFI Industry Statistical Yearbook 2020: The Box Office 2019 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/statistical-yearbook>

¹⁹ Huw David Jones, 'The box office performance of European films in the UK' 2017 p. 10

In 2005, Andre Alpar and Victor Henning described the problems facing the European feature film industry: 'weak distributors and low levels of vertical integration... Europe produces lots of low budget films that lack both the production values (in terms of stars or special effects) and the marketing and distribution clout to compete with Hollywood productions.'²⁰ There has been much improvement since then, with many European films achieving success that is comparable to US studio productions.

In the UK, one initiative that has helped improve distribution for foreign-language films is BFI Film Audience Network (BFI FAN), a collaboration of 8 film hubs managed around the UK. Its members include cinemas, festivals, multi-arts venues and community cinemas, with the aim of building 'more diverse audiences for UK and international film.'²¹ This decentralised network encourages collaboration across the different hubs and provides essential funding for independent and foreign-language films. Indeed, in 2016, BFI FAN introduced a £100,000 scheme to support the distribution of independent and foreign-language films.²² The funds are used to target specific audiences through regional preview screenings, events, online advertising and social media campaigns.

SUBTITLES AND DUBBING

It has long been suggested that many British cinemagoers balk at the idea of watching a film with subtitles because they are perceived as difficult to follow and require a substantial amount of concentration.

Joan Parsons: I think that British audiences have the perception that foreign-language film is a bit out there, or unfamiliar. For a long time, there was a massive reluctance to watch anything with subtitles. That's changing.

The alternative, dubbing, can distract from the cinematic experience, and the risk is that nuances in the dialogue are lost. Furthermore, dubbing has been executed poorly in the past, with voices out-of-sync with mouth movement – a phenomenon known as lip flapping. In the UK, dubbing is not popular compared to many of its European counterparts, such as Germany, Italy and France, with films usually watched with subtitles (see Image 1).²³ This is a cultural difference; writing recently in *The Spectator*, Flora Watkins opined: 'We aren't used to dubbing in this country. That's partly because of the hegemony of English, but also, because dubbing is considered naff — synonymous with martial arts movies and Spaghetti Westerns.'²⁴ Dubbing is also more expensive and time-consuming than subtitles.

20 Andre Alpar, Victor Henning 'Public aid mechanisms in feature film production: the EU MEDIA Plus Programme' *Media, Culture & Society*, 2005 <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1024.3780&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

21 'BFI Film Audience Network' <https://www.bfi.org.uk/get-funding-support/bring-film-wider-audience/bfi-film-audience-network>

22 BFI, 'BFI Film Audience Network boosts distribution for foreign language films' BFI, January 2016 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/announcements/bfi-film-audience-network-boosts-distribution-foreign-language>

23 Frank Jacob, 'Do you prefer subs or dubs? Here's a map for that' *Big Think*, June 2020 <https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/dubbing-map?rebelltitem=5#rebelltitem5>

24 Flora Watkins, 'The return of bad dubbing' *The Spectator*, February 2021 <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-return-of-bad-dubbing>

- Subtitles - Dubbing only for children
- Dubbing: Full-cast dubbing, both for films and for TV series
- Mixed: Occasionally using full-cast dubbing otherwise solely subtitles
- Voice-over: One or just a couple of voice actors whereas the original soundtrack persists.
- Countries with a separate official language that occasionally produce own dubbings but generally using dubbing versions of other countries due to a huge similarity in their language
- Belgium: Flemish-speaking regions occasionally produce own dialect dubbing versions otherwise solely with subtitles. The French-speaking region of Wallonia uses a full-cast French dubbing



Image 1 taken from reference 23

Robert Beeson: People always ask, 'why don't you dub?'. It's been tried once or twice but never worked. Because in Germany and Italy, people are used to seeing the Americans dubbed, so it doesn't really bother them one way or the other. They're brought up watching everything dubbed if it's not in their own native language, whereas here we're not.

However, recent improvements in dubbing allow for a better interpretation of scripts and a reduction in lip flap. Improving the quality of dubbing could make foreign-language films more attractive to a mainstream British audience. OTX Research, on behalf of the UK Film Council, concluded in a 2010 report on the reception of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* that dubbing was a more viable alternative.²⁵ However, it was also emphasised that giving viewers the choice is important, particularly as there is a sense that arthouse fans generally prefer to watch subtitled versions. While this raises some logistical juggling and expense, targeting audiences carefully is a potential strategy to build enthusiasm for foreign-language films.

Netflix's dubbing efforts seem to be converting many Americans to foreign TV series. Recent research from the tech company has found that most of its customers prefer to watch dubbed versions of content.²⁶ Over recent years, the streaming service has been actively involved in improving the quality of dubbing in a bid to win over more native English subscribers as well as boost viewing of Netflix's international content. A report by Natalie Sherman in the BBC partly attributed Netflix's stellar 2020 results to the fact that non-

²⁵ OTX Research, 'Subtitling Versus Dubbing: An OTX Case-Study Report to the UK Film Council' March 2010 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/uk-film-council-case-study-subtitling-vs-dubbing-the-girl-with-the-dragon-tattoo.pdf>

²⁶ Chris Newbould, 'Dubbed content is on the rise thanks to streaming services such as Netflix' The National News, August 2019 <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/television/dubbed-content-is-on-the-rise-thanks-to-streaming-services-such-as-netflix-1.900639>

Anglophone shows have been a major hit, increasingly breaking national and linguistic barriers.²⁷ With an increase in demand for localised content, Netflix now collaborates with 125 facilities around the globe.²⁸ This strategy makes sense; in its last quarter earnings, Netflix reported that most of its new subscribers hailed from non-English speaking countries. That said, there is still a long way to go before dubbing can reach the quality of an original film or TV show. Film critic Michael Phillips recently denounced the dubbed version of Netflix's hit French show 'Lupin,' writing in the Chicago Tribune that 'the words don't match the lip movement. We're in Paris, in the Louvre, or at a café, and it's French all the way, until the talking part.'²⁹

How can this challenge be addressed? New technology could be a game changer. Israeli start-up deepdub is working on voice recognition technology that uses deep learning and artificial intelligence (AI) to 'bridge the language barrier and cultural gap of entertainment experiences to international audiences,'³⁰ making the post-production process quick and widely accessible for all media formats. According to Chief Marketing Officer Oz Krakowski, deepdub can 'take a voice and add or take away an accent or alter it to give it emotions or make it sound younger or older. It gives us the ability to take a voice and apply it to a different language.' It also retains the sound of original actors in any given project.³¹ Another new and exciting tech initiative comes from London-based start-up Flawless, which also uses AI but with a different twist. Through collaboration with German researchers on facial digital recreation and editing, Flawless 'uses a neural network to study millions of visual data points within the film rushes... the technology strips actors' faces off, converting their visages into a 3D model... using an existing foreign-language recording of the dialogue, it studies the actor and generates a new 3D model per frame.'³² According to founders Scott Mann and Nick Lynes, another benefit is that the computational process takes place at the same time as production, which makes it cost and time effective.^{33 34}

*Bong Joon-ho: **Once you overcome the one-inch tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films.***

Subtitling, however, still remains an important part of the viewing process of world cinema that should not be disregarded. Once again, AI and machine learning is providing some interesting innovation. UK-based company FilmDoo (founded by Weerada Sucharitkul) has evolved from its roots as an innovative VoD platform to an AI and data analytics edtech which aims to

27 Natalie Sherman, 'Netflix: Four things which have driven its success' BBC Online, January 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-55723926>

28 Scott Roxborough, 'Netflix's Global Reach Sparks Dubbing Revolution' The Hollywood Reporter, August 2019 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/netflix-s-global-reach-sparks-dubbing-revolution-public-demands-it-1229761>

29 Michael Phillips, 'Memo to Netflix viewers: Let the actors speak for themselves. In any language' The Chicago Tribune, January 2021 <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/michael-phillips/ct-mov-dubbing-netflix-column-0113-20210113-iiicbw6tjdt5kfdokg55s6dw4-story.html>

30 Deep Dup, 'About' <https://deepdub.ai/about/#:~:text=deepdub%20is%20an%20Israeli%20startup,deep%20learning%20and%20AI%20algorithms>

31 Tyler Hersko, 'New Startup's Dubbing Tech Aims to Emulate the Voices of Famous Actors' IndieWire, January 2021 https://www.indiewire.com/2021/01/new-startup-deepdub-emulate-voices-interview-1234610164/?fbclid=IwAR0S3sXb3ymN7pKhEUcsmuCv97if19o_91-93XMkvbN5YsxCai2tn5UR2tw

32 Alistair Ryder, 'Movie dubbing sucks. One filmmaker is using AI to fix that' Input Mag, March 2021 <https://www.inputmag.com/culture/movie-dubbing-flawless-scott-mann-ai-neural-network>

33 Ibid.

34 Sandra E. Garcia, 'After 'Parasite,' Are Subtitles Still a One-Inch Barrier for Americans?' The New York Times, February 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/12/movies/movies-subtitles-parasite.html>

promote language and cultural learning through film.³⁵ While the company is not focusing on the commercial foreign-language films distribution market, it is an example of how such innovations could make foreign-language films more mainstream with a younger audience, beginning in a school environment.

There is a growing cultural shift that has been accelerated by younger generations, who are more accommodating when it comes to subtitling. For subtitles, this can be attributed to the rise of TV and film memes on Twitter and Instagram; the combination of text and image is something that young consumers are already comfortable with. The TV regulator Ofcom has also stated that 'subtitle use has increased as the use of smart/mobile devices has increased, as more and more people watch programmes or videos on commutes.'³⁶ This move towards an acceptance of subtitles suggests that the linguistic barrier of foreign-language films is one that can be overcome.

STREAMING GIANTS AND THEIR DATA

We all know that online platforms have been on the rise, with the global pandemic offering an unexpected market advantage. The figures underscore a radical transformation in the entertainment sector. GlobalData estimates a doubling of UK VoD subscriptions from 22.4 million to 44.6 million in three years; this in parallel with a predicted doubling of market revenues from £1.5 billion in 2019 to £3 billion in 2024.³⁷ Though Netflix and Amazon Prime Video currently dominate the UK sector, competitors clearly believe the market is far from saturated and new entrants have emerged, such as Apple TV+ and Disney+, to name but a few. Netflix has opened up its doors to mainstream audiences engaging in non-English language content, however their curation is still a stumbling block. If foreign-films were struggling before streaming came into its own, they now can be likened to finding a needle in a haystack. As Martin Scorsese argues in an impassioned recent essay in Harper's Magazine, this is further underlined by the big players relying on algorithmic curation, rather than people: 'Curating isn't undemocratic or "elitist," a term that is now used so often that it's become meaningless. It's an act of generosity—you're sharing what you love and what has inspired you...Algorithms, by definition, are based on calculations that treat the viewer as a consumer and nothing else.'³⁸

Mike Goodridge: I found twelve films by Youssef Chahine on Netflix recently, which was a great pleasure, and I watched all 12 of them. But who knew they were there? That's the problem with non-curated sites; you just don't know what's on them.

³⁵ Liz Shackleton, 'Indie VOD service FilmDoo launches crowdfunding campaign' Screen Daily, September 2016 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/indie-vod-service-filmdoo-launches-crowdfunding-campaign/5109200.article>

³⁶ Hannah J Davies, 'Lights, camera, caption! Why subtitles are no longer just for the hard of hearing' The Guardian, July 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/jul/21/subtitles-tv-hearing-no-context-twitter-captions>

³⁷ Jonathan Easton, 'UK to double number of SVOD subscribers by 2024' Digital TV Europe, May 2020, <https://www.digitaltveurope.com/2020/05/18/uk-to-double-number-of-svod-subscribers-by-2024/>

³⁸ Martin Scorsese, 'Il Maestro: Federico Fellini and the lost magic of cinema' Harper's Magazine, March 2021 <https://harpers.org/archive/2021/03/il-maestro-federico-fellini-martin-scorsese/>

Furthermore, there is a lack of transparent and verifiable data from the streaming giants, which means no one knows how well foreign-language content is performing. This issue was recently raised by the UK government's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, who argue that broadcasters should be entitled to know how well or poorly their productions are performing.³⁹ Without this sort of transparency, it will be impossible to have a clear view of how the foreign-language film market performs online in the UK.

Jason Wood: There's a lack of transparency about how many of these films are actually being watched. None of these companies release any actual viewing figures. They put out press releases about the viewing platforms going to 300%, but that doesn't actually mean very much unless you know how many people were watching it beforehand.

Delphine Lievens: There needs to be wider evidence of digital streaming figures. If you've got a filmmaker who puts a debut film on Netflix and the streaming figures aren't shared, it's highly unlikely that a distributor is going to want to pick up a second film to release theatrically because they have no proof of that director having theatrical success.

BREXIT, FUNDING AND THE EU'S CREATIVE EUROPE PROGRAMME

When the UK formally left the European Union on the 31st December 2020, it also exited the EU's Creative Europe programme. This means the loss of vital funding sources and incentivised distribution and exhibition across EU member states, a disappointment given that the programme is not limited to members of the EU. Brexit also means that the UK will no longer form part of the Europa Cinema Network, which plays a vital role in subsidising the release of European films in the UK (and vice versa). At this time, it is unclear whether negotiations will see a new relationship established to fill this void. A new fund, the UK Global Screen Fund has been launched by the government to help address the issue. This, according to BFI Chief Executive Ben Roberts, will go some way to 'enable the industry to further grow international partnerships, build on export opportunities and increase our return on investment.'⁴⁰ However, the fund is limited to £7 million, and the greater loss is the international collaboration and reciprocal support between the EU and the UK that the Creative Europe programme encouraged.

Mike Goodridge: When we were in the EU, we had Creative Europe that supported the distribution of European films in different territories. A lot of the UK distributors were incentivised to take on French films or German films or Scandinavian films. I'm not sure the UK Government will replace that.

³⁹ Jake Kanter, 'Netflix & Amazon Should Be Legally Compelled To Share Viewing Data With UK Broadcasters, Lawmakers Argue' Deadline, March 2021 <https://deadline.com/2021/03/netflix-amazon-data-uk-broadcasters-digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee-1234721049/>

⁴⁰ Tom Grater, 'UK Government Confirms \$9.4m "Global Screen Fund" to Partially Replace Creative Europe MEDIA Money Post-Brexit' Deadline, November 2020 <https://deadline.com/2020/11/uk-government-confirms-9-4m-global-screen-fund-to-partially-replace-creative-europe-media-money-post-brexit-1234621816/>

Ian Wild: It's a bit disappointing because from what I understand, the Global Screen Fund seems to be developing into an export support agency that is not interested in exhibition or distribution. We are as an organisation committed to continuing to show as many European films as we can, but we need to have access to them. We don't know what the financial barriers will be in place.

There is also a cultural imperative to fill this void and to learn from other European countries who benefit from a more collaborative, diverse, and financially sustainable film industry. One example is the *compte de soutien* programme in France, where taxes on profits made by cinema owners or television companies are directly reinvested into the industry.⁴¹ Since 2010, Canal+ has made a commitment to invest €4 million every year into cinema distribution.⁴² In the Netherlands, a public film fund provides a cash rebate on production costs spent domestically; in 2021, this programme had a budget of €19.25 million.⁴³ The Netherlands also has co-production treaties with Canada, France, South Africa and the French Community of Belgium.

What are some comparable programmes in the UK? A recently completed four-year research project by Dr Peter Merrington at The University of Glasgow concluded that art-house and foreign-language film viewers are likely to be based in key cities (London, Manchester, Bristol, Newcastle, Sheffield and Leeds), under the age of 55, earn £30,000+ per annum and hold a university degree or higher qualification.⁴⁴ The report, titled 'Beyond the Multiplex' also found that outside these areas, opportunities for independent and foreign-language films rely largely on whether a cinephile volunteer community exists or public funding for venues.⁴⁵ An example of the latter would be The Maltings in Berwick Upon Tweed, which is primarily funded by Arts Council England and Northumberland County Council. It hosts over 200 live events every year but also describes itself as one of the North East's leading 'independent digital cinemas, screening around 200 film titles per year.'⁴⁶ Initiatives like the Maltings are crucial to address accessibility of foreign-film in marginalised communities or under-served rural areas.

However, much more needs to be done. The £7 million commitment in the Global Screen Fund is a start, but greater investment is needed, and cinemas should be included as part of the UK government's levelling-up agenda.

Allison Gardner: Watershed, Home in Manchester and DCA in Dundee. We need to give them financial support so they can develop the audience and appetite for foreign-language films without being held to account for bums on seats all the time. We need to make sure they have enough to broaden the appetite amongst the younger generation for subtitled films.

41 Sarah Walkley, 'Cultural Diversity in the French Film Industry: Defending the Cultural Exception in the Digital Age' 2018, Palgrave McMillan, p. 72

42 Ibid.

43 Netherlands Film Fund – Filmfonds 'About the Film Fund' <https://www.filmfonds.nl/page/2902/welcome>

44 Dr Peter Merrington, 'Beyond the Multiplex: Audiences for Specialised Film in English Regions' the University of Glasgow https://www.beyondthemultiplex.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2019/03/Diagonale_Presentation_web.pdf

45 Ibid.

46 The Maltings: Building / Spaces <https://www.maltingsberwick.co.uk/about/building-spaces>

SOLUTIONS

IMPROVED PLATFORM CURATION

Jason Wood: MUBI just had a Fellini season. So, for young people that want to gain access to these films, I think online is a godsend. And forward-thinking progressive curators should think of online as an effective way to introduce a whole new world of world cinema to a receptive audience.

One of the primary ways to broaden access to foreign-language films is to solve the problem of curation. It is encouraging to see that the need for better curation is already being addressed, with the establishment of new platforms that directly address the issue. One innovative example is Cultpix, a newly established streaming VoD platform that focuses on international classics and vintage cult films and TV shows. Another is Shudder, which caters exclusively to the horror market and has a well-stocked international section of foreign-language films. And it gets even more specific; for fans of the monarchy, streaming platform True Royalty TV is dedicated to programming content about royal families around the world.

The success (or even existence!) of these platforms demonstrates that there is demand even in the most niche sections of the film industry. Audiences are eager to consume content that is suited to their interests, and well-market curation can go a long way. The foreign-language film industry must build on the examples of MUBI, Curzon Home Cinema and BFI Player throughout the pandemic. These platforms offer awareness and access to a vast world of non-English language cinema. For example, MUBI's marketing approach is to offer 'hand-picked cinema' and an opportunity to join 'the world's biggest community of film lovers.'⁴⁷ This inclusive and personalised strategy helps to connect audiences to films which, because of the language barrier, may feel opaque.

A SPOTLIGHT ON... MUBI

What is it? An arthouse-oriented streaming platform.

Whose idea? Brainchild of Efe Cakarel, a Turkish entrepreneur and self-proclaimed cinephile.

Where is it available? 170 countries, including the UK.

What do I get? Carefully curated, hand-picked cinema from around the world, and a new film released every day!

Anything else? Yes, access to an incredible film library hailing from every corner of the globe and 'Notebook', MUBI's own digital film publication.

That sounds expensive. Cheaper than a cinema ticket at £9.99/month.

Is there more? Yes! Upgrade to £14.99/month and you get access to MUBI GO.

What's that? An add-on app, giving subscribers a weekly cinema ticket.

Is there a catch? Sort of...there are over 170 cinemas across the UK where you can use your ticket, but MUBI chooses the film that you see.

Why's that? According to MUBI, it's a cinephile saying 'I think you should watch this'.

Any other reasons? Yes, to support the industry. Exhibitors get paid for tickets they wouldn't sell, while distributors get a boost in their box office for independent and foreign-language films. This is a prime example of how cinemas, distributors and streaming platforms can coexist and support each other.

Any future plans? There is talk of greater expansion into production and distribution.



GREATER RISK TAKING IN PROGRAMMING

Despite a strong (pre-pandemic) film market across the UK, multiplex cinemas – which account for 82% of all cinema screens – show fewer foreign-language films compared with a decade ago.⁴⁸ Non-mainstream, ‘specialised’ programming, which includes non-English language films, are shown at only 7% of screens with a major concentration in London and the South East.⁴⁹ Furthermore, cinemas that audiences used to rely on for foreign-language films now increasingly showcase mainstream and tentpole films. Indeed, over the past 5 to 10 years, there has also been a residual decline in the commitment to programming foreign-language films in the art-house circuit.

Jason Wood: I would possibly go as far to describe it as a dereliction of duty on behalf of certain cinema programmers.

Simply put, foreign-language films need to be shown in UK cinemas so they can be seen by an audience. Cinema has the responsibility to bring diversity, new fresh voices and ideas, and engage with young audiences that will shape the future of independent cinema.

Ian Wild: You can't simply expect people to flood and see a really good foreign-film, if you haven't had a consistency in exhibiting that type of cinema.

Joan Parsons: There is potential, but it has to be carefully balanced so that we don't end up throwing full blown European art-house content onto screens that have never played anything beyond James Bond and Marvel movies.

The need for consistency and balance is paramount. However, programmers need to have more confidence in their choices, which will facilitate more risk-taking with foreign-language film content. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on initiatives encouraging the youth market. The independent film sector benefits from initiatives such as the Young Film Programmer's Group (YFPG), which allows young people in the UK to explore independent film and organise screenings. While the YFPG will often include non-English language films, a similar type of initiative could be established by

48 BFI Industry Statistical Yearbook 2020: The Box Office 2019 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/statistical-yearbook>

49 Ibid.

stakeholders exclusively in foreign cinema. There is a pressing need for this as technology facilitates communication in younger generations. As the BFI 2022 Plan 'Supporting UK Film' notes, 'audiences at this age are making an increasing number of independent choices and building the tastes that will inform their behaviour for the rest of their lives. It's crucial that we reach out to them on their terms and where they gather, and offer an opportunity for them to see themselves, their heritage and their future.'⁵⁰

50 BFI, 'Supporting UK Film, BFI Plan 2017 - 2022' https://www2.bfi.org.uk/2022/downloads/bfi2022_EN.pdf

A SPOTLIGHT ON... PARASITE

Parasite is an example of a serendipitous encounter. It's fantastic buzz, critical acclaim, and prestigious festival and award wins saw it become the highest-grossing non-English language film in the UK, earning £11.5 million at the box office.⁵¹ Is it an exception, or has it now set a trend that will continue? Of course, *Parasite* is a fantastic movie, but why did this particular foreign-language film become a commercial success in a nation that tends to snub world cinema?

Key UK Dates:

May 2019:	6 th January 2020:	2 nd February 2020:	7 th February 2020:	10 th February 2020:	14 th February 2020:
World Premiere at Cannes Film Festival: Won The Palme d'Or; Licensed for the UK and Ireland by Curzon Artificial Eye.	Golden Globes: 3 nominations; 1 win best foreign-language film.	BAFTAs: 4 nominations; 2 wins, including best foreign-language film and original screenplay.	Released theatrically in the UK at 136 venues.	Academy Awards: 6 nominations; 4 wins, including best picture, director and original screenplay.	Expanded into over 400 sites across the UK and Ireland.

There are several contributing factors to why certain foreign-language films prove popular amongst a wider British audience. Past BFI cinema exit polls have highlighted that the top three 'baits to attendance' were usually a clear storyline, genre and reviews.⁵² However, foreign-language films can also 'breakout' if they have familiar cultural elements with British cinemagoers, known as 'pre-sold' elements. Examples of the latter include the director, subject matter or source material.⁵³ In *Parasite's* case, Korean cinema saw a surge in the UK during the 90s.⁵⁴ The director, Bong Joon-Ho, and his early work, may be a familiar territory to British cinephiles and Korean-film fans. However, it was *The Host* in 2006 that garnered him international and commercial success.⁵⁵ Joon-Ho went on to create more mainstream English-language films using both Korean and Hollywood actors. As a result, before *Parasite*, Bong was already an established director in Britain. There was also a more recent resurgence in Korean-made films; in 2018, director Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* became the first Korean film to be nominated and win a BAFTA.⁵⁶ That same year, Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* was the first Korean film shortlisted for an Oscar.⁵⁷ Furthermore, *Parasite's* genre and plot chronicle the modern-day upstairs-downstairs class divide, which has strongly resonated with British audiences for decades and is relevant to various aspects of our society today. The introduction of The British New

51 Ben Dalton, "Onward" tops UK box office as "Parasite" breaks non-English language record' Screen Daily, March 2020 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/onward-tops-uk-box-office-as-parasite-breaks-non-english-language-record/5147935.article>

52 Huw David Jones, 'The box office performance of European films in the UK' 2017 p. 10

53 Ibid.

54 John Berra, '10 Great Modern South Korean films' BFI, January 2019 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-modern-south-korean-films>

55 Ben Nicholson, 'Where to begin with Bong Joon Ho' BFI, January 2020 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/where-begin-bong-joon-ho>

56 Agatha Lulkowska, 'An Oscar for Parasite? The global rise of South Korean film' The Conversation, January 2020, <https://theconversation.com/an-oscar-for-parasite-the-global-rise-of-south-korean-film-128595>

57 Lee Hyo-Won, 'Oscars: South Korea fails to get first foreign-language nom with "Burning"' The Hollywood Reporter, January 2019 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/oscars-south-korea-fails-get-first-foreign-language-nomination-1177837>



Wave and 'kitchen sink dramas' in the late 1950s paved the way for the popularity of this genre that focused on class division, particularly between the North and South of England.⁵⁸

Mark Cosgrove: It's just genius filmmaking. It's something that Alfred Hitchcock would have loved in terms of the precision of the filmmaking. Of course, it had something to say about rich and poor, upstairs and downstairs, but it was also hugely entertaining. It really hit the sweet spot of foreign-language film making.

A breakout foreign-language film's success is owed not only to its content but also to its commercial factors. *Parasite* was backed by world cinema and art-house film champions Curzon Artificial Eye. The major independent distributor acquired the UK and Ireland rights at Cannes in 2019, where the film won the top prize.⁵⁹ The UK was one of the last territories to release the film, so the distributor could analyse the film's box office performance in other countries. Their release date gamble meant it benefited from the BAFTA and Oscar wins, with Curzon having '£1m or £2m worth of media spend through free publicity because of the Oscars.'⁶⁰ The distributor was also able to 'motor the publicity with rocket fuel in a way that we couldn't afford to pay with media spend in traditional marketing.'⁶¹ Finally, Curzon created a highly effective marketing campaign, which leveraged the early festival success, social media buzz and critical acclaim.

The film's commercial elements meant that it would likely work in multiplexes, so Curzon decided to proceed with a 16-week theatrical window. The opening weekend in the UK recorded a breakthrough for a foreign-language movie at the opening box office. It was screened at 136 sites (including previews) and brought in £1.4 million, expanding to 579 cinemas across the country.⁶² It was able to reach a wide-range mainstream British audience because many of the new screening locations were multiplexes, which do not tend to programme foreign-language films.⁶³

It is unfortunate, because of the onset of Covid so soon after the release of *Parasite*, that it is unclear whether the film's success could have translated into wider participation with foreign-language content. However, *Parasite's* achievement has confirmed that non-English language films can reach a larger UK audience, punching through into the mainstream. Hopefully, the film will pave the way for more foreign-language films to be shown at more locations across the UK, especially within multiplexes. *Parasite* demonstrates that films in languages other than English have the potential to be successful both critically and commercially. As Philip Knatchbull, the Curzon CEO has stated, 'it feels like something has shifted.'⁶⁴ That said, the pandemic recession may cause distributors and exhibitors to rely on the studio blockbusters that typically attract people to cinema halls. Yet *Parasite* is an example where taking a risk can pay off. The foreign-language film arena is rich in diversity, and there is so much more for audiences to discover.

58 Neil Mitchell, 'Where to begin with kitchen sink drama' BFI, August 2016 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/where-begin-kitchen-sink-dramas>

59 Tom Grater, 'Bong Joon-ho's Cannes titles "Parasite" lands UK deal' Screen Daily, May 2019 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/bong-joon-hos-cannes-title-parasite-lands-uk-deal-exclusive/5139778.article>

60 Michael Rosser, 'Curzon CEO Philip Knatchbull talks 'Parasite' UK release strategy' Screen Daily, February 2020 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/curzon-ceo-philip-knatchbull-talks-parasite-uk-release-strategy-exclusive/5147204.article>

61 Ibid.

62 Andrew Pulver, 'Parasite overtakes The Passion of Christ as biggest ever foreign-language film in the UK' The Guardian, March 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/mar/09/parasite-overtakes-the-passion-of-the-christ-as-biggest-ever-foreign-language-film-in-the-uk>

63 Sheena Scott, "'Parasite' has the biggest post-Oscars boost in UK box office' Forbes, February 2020 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sheenascott/2020/02/19/parasite-has-the-biggest-post-oscar-boost-in-uk-box-office/?sh=f18be6b3f3d8>

64 Michael Rosser, 'Curzon CEO Philip Knatchbull talks 'Parasite' UK release strategy' Screen Daily, February 2020 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/curzon-ceo-philip-knatchbull-talks-parasite-uk-release-strategy-exclusive/5147204.article>

Joan Parsons: It felt like there were audiences coming to see it who had never seen a Korean film before, and almost certainly hadn't seen a foreign-language film before. Also, a really young audience...I really hope that Korean cinema continues to enjoy wild successes with UK audiences. But hopefully it also can level up other cinemas, within East Asia, but beyond as well.

Maeve Cooke: It would have been quite interesting to speak to the people who saw Parasite but don't typically see foreign-language films, and to ask them 'why did you decide to go to this film? Did you know it had won the Palme d'Or? Was it the fact that it won the Oscar? Or the big campaigns? Or a cumulative effect?'

INNOVATIVE MARKETING

Independent and foreign-film have much lower prints and advertising budgets, so greater emphasis should be placed on building audiences through a creative social media presence. Of course, the more traditional film marketing strategies – hook-filled trailers, movie reviews, star interviews, film festivals and director Q&As – should not be ignored, but foreign-language films have to engage much more aggressively with alternative digital strategies that require less industry infrastructure.

By leveraging the potential of big data and predictive analytics, more efficient, cost-effective marketing strategies can be implemented to analyse customer preferences, consumption trends and of course to target audience segments appropriately. Today, social media is inextricably linked with the growing power of influencer marketing, which can allow for more powerful access to new viewer communities.

There is also an increasing need to address younger age groups. In 2018, ages 7-24 made up 42% of the general UK cinematic audience, and the age category 7-14 is steadily growing.⁶⁵ For example, embracing apps such as TikTok is likely to engage younger audiences. This could be as simply as tapping into users who have adopted groups such as 'Film TikTok', self-styled as 'Gen Z's latest hub for film appreciation.'⁶⁶ Indeed, even London's National Gallery is turning its marketing attention to a younger audience via TikTok.⁶⁷ The potential is evident from Florence's Uffizi Gallery which has seen a doubling in its number of young visitors after embracing the app, as well as using influencers to promote Renaissance art.⁶⁸ Speaking on this trend in the 2021 Nostradamus Report, the producer and consultant Brian Newman saw reasons to be hopeful: 'I am most excited right now by the number of young people making TikToks and other kinds of content. We see that as amateur; they see themselves as building an audience and becoming more professional. People thinking of themselves as filmmakers will also lead to

65 BFI Report, 'Audiences' 2019 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-statistical-yearbook-audiences-2019.pdf>

66 Kikikrazed, 'The Rise of Film TikTok' YouTube, November 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqajurNSp1Q>

67 Hannah McGivern, 'TikTok and masterpieces on tour: London's National Gallery reveals plans leading up to 200th birthday in 2024' The Art Newspaper, April 2021 <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/national-gallery-strategic-plan-anniversary>

68 James Imam, 'As US blocks TikTok, Italy's Uffizi claims the platform has doubled its number of young visitors' The Art Newspaper, September 2020 <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/tiktok-uffizi>

them exploring the classics and foreign cinema. It's a great opportunity for us to tap into new audiences. The answer is not for us to make more TikTok films, it's to engage with our audience in a way that lets them do that on their own.⁶⁹

Foreign-language films could benefit from being a part of a broader 'cultural' event, highlighting the country and its origins, cuisine, or travel opportunities. An example of this is Manchester's Home's ¡Viva! Festival, which combines film, food, talks and workshops focusing exclusively on Spanish and Latin American culture. Generally speaking, foreign-film exhibitors need to be more innovative and form alliances with other businesses. For example, by collaborating with food delivery services, travel agencies and fashion companies with events that correspond to what foreign-language films are being programmed. James King, Director of Koenig Pictures, notes that there is more to do to create a more collaborative cinematic community: 'We need to be forward-thinking to recreate a "cinophile spirit", working with institutions like the BFI and cooperating with exhibitors, as well as film clubs and collectives, creating events and bringing talent to meet the audience.'⁷⁰ Foreign-language film stakeholders would do well to look at Adventure Cinema's touring film and food festival, which combines screenings in the open-air with street food and drink.⁷¹

Another example of an innovative and community-centre programme is We Are Parable, an exhibition company that focuses on 'creating unique experiences for Black audiences.'⁷² We Are Parable is known especially for pushing the boundaries of cinema exhibition, organising not only screenings but poetry and music performances, street parties and themed talks. Over the last two years, the company has toured its seasons to different venues around the UK and hosted Spike Lee in 2017 following a retrospective of his work.

Mark Cosgrove: We do this event, Conversations About Cinema - Thoughts in Action. It's a partnership with the University of West England's philosophy and politics department, Watershed and MUBI. We put together a programme of films under the theme of colonialism, which was made available on MUBI, and we organised a panel discussion online... one of the speakers was live from Buenos Aires, another from Madrid...It was absolutely brilliant.

Consistency is key, after all, don't we expect Glastonbury to happen every year? Stakeholders have a responsibility to convince funding bodies of the cultural and social values of touring programmes, which are excellent ways of building exposure and developing wider audiences.

69 Johanna Koljonen, 'Nostradamus Report: Transforming Storytelling Together' 2021 <https://goteborgfilmfestival.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GFF21-nostradamus-web-pages-210204-2.pdf>

70 Isabella Weber, 'Focus on the UK' Europa Distribution, July 2017 <https://www.europa-distribution.org/focus-on-the-uk/>

71 Emma Simmonds, 'Film & Food Fest 2021 is coming to 15 UK city locations this summer' List, March 2021 <https://www.list.co.uk/article/124692-film-and-food-fest-2021-is-coming-to-15-uk-city-locations-this-summer/>

72 We Are Parable 'About us' <http://www.weareparable.com/about-us/>

A SPOTLIGHT ON... THE JAPAN FOUNDATION TOURING FILM PROGRAMME

What is it? An annual Japanese film programme founded in 2004 by the Japan Foundation in London.

Who by? Junko Takekawa, Senior Arts Programme Officer at the Japanese Foundation, London is behind the programme from its onset, programming and delivering the contents. Takekawa was one of the guest curators for The Times and The Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival in 2018 and was appointed as the programmer for the 21st century section of BFI's Japan 2020 season (which was unfortunately later cancelled).

Where does it tour? Everywhere in the UK. The programme works in close collaboration with distinguished film venues and programme advisors around the country.

What kind of films are shown? All kinds! It can range from newly released contemporary films to classic anime. Each year the programme chooses a theme to highlight trends in Japanese society and cinema, showcasing the uniqueness of its filmmakers.

Can you tour in a pandemic? Sadly not. But the programme launched a highly successful online special edition this spring, offering screenings nationwide for free!

Any highlights? This season's theme was on place and belonging. A personal highlight was *Soiree* by Bunji Sotoyama, which renders well the loneliness and out of placeness of younger people in a remote area in Japan.

Junko Takekawa: I tend to consciously try to pick something not necessarily in the international market or international style, but something overlooked despite its quality or that could go down well with tons of people...you can't just take a handful of people, you have to research, you have to have a different segment of target audiences rather than genre... that is my approach and I think it's a good approach because you're tapping into various types of people.



VIRTUAL CINEMA SCREENS

Around the world, independent cinemas have been quick to adapt to the challenges of losing their in-house audience during the pandemic lockdowns, particularly through offering virtual cinema. However, the desire for physical screenings and a collective cinematic experience cannot be fully replaced by an online cinema environment, so it is likely that in the future the two will co-exist. Indeed, an April 2021 survey commissioned by the BFI found that 59% of respondents cited cinemagoing as the activity they missed the most, with 49% expecting to return to the cinema in the first few weeks of lifted restrictions.⁷³

*Joan Parsons: **There's certainly ways to be innovative at the moment, as the technology develops, that could really benefit foreign-language film. There is potential for those smaller titles, foreign-language titles, to have a longer tail.***

This synergy provides an excellent opportunity for foreign-language films to be accessed by a wider audience. The digital distribution shift means that cinemas are able to take greater risks with online offerings of less mainstream foreign-language films, perhaps through an additional screen, which would also allow for a longer online shelf life.

What are some examples of this? Clearly, Curzon Home Cinema, which launched back in 2010, is an innovation that has allowed the Curzon Group to bring cinema to audiences despite the closures. But other examples have thrived too, such as Glasgow Film at Home. For Allison Gardner, CEO of Glasgow Film, the streaming platform is 'going to be our fourth screen... we are constantly looking at different innovative ways to keep the audience engaged in titles that we have curated and are behind.'

*Robert Beeson: **If virtual cinema does take off, then obviously foreign-language films are no longer subjected to the tyranny of Monday mornings where you get taken off because there's no way your films are going to compete with a more mass-market movie. Virtual cinema is one hope if the public actually respond to it.***

⁷³ Michael Rosser, 'UK audience appetite for cinema return revealed' Screen Daily, April 2021 <https://www.screendaily.com/news/uk-audience-appetite-for-cinema-return-revealed/5158693.article>

A SPOTLIGHT ON... THE MOTHER TONGUES AWARD

What is it? An award for feature film projects by UK filmmakers, set mainly in the UK, but where the dialogue is not in English.

Whose idea? The award was founded in 2020 by Manon Ardisson, Jack Tarling and Chiara Ventura.

Why? The 2021 shortlist features films that span a whopping 11 languages plus British Sign Language! The purpose is to encourage more authentic cinema that reflects and showcases the broad, multicultural communities that exist across the UK.

What do they offer? Shortlisted filmmakers attend an industry workshop and are in line for a £10,000 development award.

Are there any other stakeholders? Charades (a French sales agency) and Curzon get first-look rights for international markets and the UK, respectively. Intermission Film, an international creative agency, is also set to join.

Any highlights? One of the 2021 winners, 'Mothers' written by Mohamed Ahmed. The logline: 'Amina is a pillar of her community and seemingly the perfect Somali wife. But when the glass ceiling, once placed over her, is put over her daughter's ambition of attending Cambridge, Amina is forced to choose between the life she knows and her daughter's future.' The proposal won the £10,000 script price and the producing team is looking to attach a director.



CONCLUSION

Like any industry, film needs to constantly re-evaluate its business models, engage with innovation and technology, and question the way that it functions. The UK film industry – and specifically the cinema sector – was growing dependent on large Hollywood blockbusters. This dependence could be viewed a financial liability, in the way that any non-diversified economy is at-risk. But it also has the potential to create a cultural vacuum, with many foreign-language films denied the opportunity to succeed with UK audiences.

The pandemic, coupled with the success of *Parasite* just beforehand, has changed this state-of-play. There is an increasing interest from the UK film public in foreign-language films and the industry is beginning to recognise the potential for non-English films to resonate and bring audiences back to the cinema. The stereotype that UK film audiences reject films in languages other than in English is gradually being dismantled.

Jason Wood: One of the things that this lockdown has taught us is that culture is important, that arts venues are not just businesses but also hubs for the community. Culture is still one of the things which brings people together to have a civilised debate with different points of view. And people are going to want to go back to an environment where they can commune with culture. And that's why I'm really optimistic about the future.

Improving access and distribution of foreign-language films is imperative because it encourages diversity across society in a broader sense. The status quo is being challenged across all areas of the industry. And yet: 'Film industry professionals belonging to marginalized groups continue to grapple with structural, systemic and institutional barriers and exclusions as well as mechanisms of marginalization that hinder their progression, deeply affect their wellbeing and place limitations on their economic standing. Inequity, inequalities and differential treatment continue to characterize the experiences of film professionals who are non-white, dark-skinned, women, non-binary and gender non-conforming, TSLGTQIA+, people with disabilities or those who hail from disenfranchised socio-economic backgrounds.'⁷⁴

74 European Film Market Online 'Reflecting, Rethinking, and Resetting: The Industry in Flux' 2021 https://www.efm-berlinale.de/media/pdf_word/efm/71_efm/efm2021_reflectingrethinkingresetting_reportthinktanks.pdf

Cinema should reflect the diversity of backgrounds, viewpoints and languages that characterise our society. My hope is that the challenges I have described in report can be overcome by the solutions I propose, together with a general shift towards a fully diversified cultural sector. The starting point is always how we programme, distribute and discuss foreign-language films.

Jason Wood: We need more films by directors of different ethnicities. We need more films by LGBTQ+ filmmakers. We need films that better represent the broader fabric of society. Now I would argue that films that do that are not necessarily going to come out of Hollywood. They're going to come from the independent sector; they're going to come from foreign-language filmmakers. So there needs to be a stronger consideration of a commitment to those type of films.

Allison Gardner: Cinemas that opened during lockdown, the independent cinemas like HOME in Manchester, really excelled. We need to look at those new models and give space to great independent cinemas. I think those models will change, maybe even for the smaller independent exhibitors.