

UK Film Council submission to the
European Commission in relation
to the Digital Europe public
consultation

October 2009

The UK Film Council is the strategic agency established by the UK government to devise and implement policies about film. It played an active part in the European Commission's Film Online Charter, an initiative of the Commissioner for the Information Society. It is currently contributing to the high-level group on on-line piracy. It also established the Media Literacy Task Force in the UK and helped develop media literacy initiatives at the European level. The UK Film Council, through the British Film Institute, is responsible for the UK's national film and television archive and it oversees the implementation of the UK's Screen Heritage Strategy, a central strand of which is delivering digital access. It set up the Digital Screen Network, more than two hundred digital cinemas across the UK. It has examined closely the development of on-demand services. It is exploring with the other national film agencies across Europe, the MEDIA Programme (on the management committee of which it represents the United Kingdom), with DG Infosoc and DG Competition, the approaches to be taken with regard to the digitisation of Europe's cinemas

We are making this submission rather than going through the Digital Europe questionnaire, our interest being in the achievement of the greatest possible coherence between different aspects of the European policy towards the challenges and opportunities represented by digital technology. We realise that the Digital Europe is mainly concerned with the future of the i2010 Programme but it inevitably touches on issues such as the circulation of European works, the preservation of Europe's cultural heritage, the encouragement of media literacy and initiatives to ensure the creation of content online. In these ways, Digital Europe is crucial to cultural diversity which, in turn, is the hallmark of UK and European film policy.

In its public consultation for Digital Europe, the European Commission in the nine questions it poses focuses on the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their contribution to the achievement of the Lisbon agenda for European competitiveness and jobs, to a more sustainable low carbon economy, to improved quality of life for EU citizens by unlocking the storehouses of cultural heritage by bringing them on-line and by putting ICT at the centre of citizens' life? These issues are at the core of UK film policy, which has recently engaged with questions of environmental sustainability, low carbon economy and climate change, and, as mentioned above, is deeply engaged with the questions around digital archives. We therefore would mention some other themes we consider Digital Europe needs to address – themes which, in common with the other aspects of Digital Europe – extend to areas also covered by other parts of DG Information Society and of the Commission.

We would want to add to the agenda for Digital Europe the need for and benefits of having a better evidence case for audio-visual/Digital Europe. We note that the European Audiovisual Observatory, with the support of the European Commission as well as that of member states, has been struggling to put in place the resources so that it can effectively cover markets beyond traditional cinema and television, for example DVDs and on-line, areas that are not covered at all by Eurostat. If we are to see the emergence of new business models for content in Digital Europe, we need to overcome the current lack of market data about the supply and take-up of digital content and services.

We note the passing reference in the documentation compiled by the Commission as part of its Digital Europe initiative to Europe's film industry and the MEDIA Programme:

“ A Single Market for Europe’s film industry: When it comes to international film awards, the Commission’s film support – the EU’s MEDIA programme, renewed for 2007 to 2013 with a total budget of € 755 million – has a lot to be proud of. **Many EU films that have won global fame (“La Vie en Rose” “Das Leben der Anderen”, “Die Fälscher”, “Gomorra”, “Slumdog Millionaire”)** would simply not have left their country of production without European support (IP/09/284). Europe’s added value is not just to make possible these artistic productions which would not otherwise find funding because they cannot immediately gather big audiences, but also to bring European life and culture to a wide international audience by making European films travel across borders in Europe and later also to third countries: nine out of ten feature films in Europe distributed outside their home country received MEDIA support every year.”

We do not think this is adequate: the link between the Digital Europe objectives and those for Europe’s film industry is not drawn. In the same way, the link to the other major theme of the Commission’s policy for content in the digital future – the need to reform intellectual property rules, notably in relation to orphan works and the making available of content online and across borders – is not articulated. The UK Film Council would also emphasise the role of online more both in delivering content and in enabling people to find, search, talk about and share such content.

Therefore the UK Film Council – which is deeply committed to developing and applying policies that enable European citizens to seize the opportunities presented by a digital Europe notably as these relate to access – urges the Commission and member states as well as industry and civil society – to approach the questions of how to create Digital Europe in a way that draws together the fundamental themes of creativity, access and informed engagement with digital technologies and their applications.

One particularly pressing example of how these themes need to be worked out – already evoked above – is the digitisation of Europe’s cinemas: an enterprise that involves close co-operation between players across industry as well as concerted public intervention. Digitisation of cinemas could result in much greater public access to a much broader range of content, enhancing social interactions within and between communities, educational possibilities and improved quality of life. Or it could produce the diametric opposite outcomes.

Two other topics that Digital Europe should embrace are skills training and the development of multi-platform and cross-platform content. The notable example from the UK is The WeVee project supported by UKFCs Digital Film Archive Fund via one of the Regional Screen Agencies, Screen West Midlands which is creating an online interactive site where people can create new content about themselves, their background, locality, community, by accessing rights free moving image archive content and music content. The archive clips can be played with and re cut into new content which is then shared via social networking sites.

The UK Film Council would like to see Digital Europe and related initiatives at the European, member states’ and regional/local levels, rise to the challenge of wedding the initiatives narrowly-associated with European ICT with the broader efforts to adapt European society to the promise and the challenges of a digital Europe.

In summary, the UK Film Council considers that it is vital that the Commission – through Digital Europe and other initiatives being undertaken by DG Infosoc and by other Directorate Generals – ensure that it makes proper connections between the different policy challenges and the different initiatives being adopted in response to those challenges.