

The Role of Film Festivals in Talent Management and Career Development

Towards a Sustainable Film Industry

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Master Thesis

June 13th, 2025

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ABSTRACT

When the word cinema is mentioned, one may think of the latest box-office hits that are shown at cinema venues. Behind this commercialized perspective of cinema, there is a universe called the film industry. Film festivals function as spaces of legitimacy, reputation and power. However, film festivals are not only a space for film exhibition. They are now involved in the early stages of film production and development of emerging talents.

Despite these new insights, the talent initiatives of film festivals remain underexplored. Therefore, the study formulates the research question: “What is the role of film festivals in talent management and career development regarding emerging talents in the film industry?”. The study aims to identify the mechanisms of talent management and the paths they might open towards sustainable film careers as well as provide an understanding on career precarity of the artistic labor market in the cultural and creative industries.

Through 11 semi-structured interviews with festival directors, talent and industry managers and film programmers, the research explores the function of film festivals in nurturing talent and how career uncertainty is reduced. Film festivals function as career gatekeepers, matchmakers and key players in shaping regional, national and international markets. They provide entrepreneurial and soft skills, function as spaces for connectivity and knowledge sharing and offer networking opportunities. Talent initiatives develop emerging talents’ artistic vision and personality in terms of determination and resilience. Therefore, they have the role of a cultural institution that invests in talent to secure its position in the industry and to provide meaningful stories to society.

The study concludes that despite their role in launching careers, uncertainty is not fully prevented, and emerging talents do not always acquire economic capital after participating in talent programs. There is no guaranteed success after making the first film and projects are often not realized due to excessive supply of emerging talents, absence of funding or collaborators, and luck. This study acknowledges the gap between emerging and post-emerging stages of a film career and calls for attention in strengthening festival structures towards talent and career development that can also inform studies in the cultural and creative industries.

KEYWORDS: talent management, cultural and creative industries, career uncertainty, film festivals, emerging talents

Word count: 21.456

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the Foundation for Education and European Culture (IPEP) for supporting me financially during my master's program. I would not have the chance to study abroad and continue my postgraduate studies without the precious contribution of IPEP.

I would also like to thank deeply my thesis supervisor, Janna Michael, for how helpful and understanding she was during this whole process.

I am deeply thanking all the film festival professionals that participated in the research. Without their precious insights, this study would not be possible.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank my parents, my sister and grandparents for supporting me from afar on this journey. I would like to dedicate my thesis to my beloved grandmother Artemis, who passed away a few weeks before I finished my master thesis. This thesis is in memory of her.

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1. Introduction

“The most difficult thing in the world is to reveal yourself, to express what you have to. As an artist, I feel that we must try many things – but above all we must dare to fail. You must be willing to risk everything to really express it all”, says the Greek-American film director John Cassavetes.

Careers in the film industry are rooted in risk. One of my interviewees from the Locarno Film Festival laughingly commented: “It’s a challenge to make cinema. It’s a crazy idea, you know. Why would you make movies? It’s such a pain”. Film festivals and filmmakers both accept this challenge of career uncertainty. Film festivals aim to safeguard artistic expression and vision by actively participating in managing talent and shaping career paths.

The term “film festival” for many people is connected with “prestige, glamour events, red carpets, cameras, paparazzi and journalists” as De Valck (2016) has described (De Valck et al., 2016, p. 1). Film festivals are not only a space of film exhibition and curatorship, but they are now involved in the pre-production and development stage of films that reflect the film market (Rastegar, 2012; Smits, 2019, p. 60). They have created parallel initiatives for talent development and do not only offer film screening opportunities for emerging talents. They have developed structural models of talent management in terms of providing training or script development programs and production funds (Falicov, 2016, p. 221). To show the importance of these talent programs within festivals, De Valck (2013) mentions that if emerging talents want to succeed in the film industry, they need access to the “postgraduate” system of film festivals (De Valck, 2013, p. 141).

Despite these new insights, the talent notion has not been researched sufficiently and Bosma (2015) states that there is a gap in researching film festivals through disciplines of sociology and management (p. 77). In addition, Stevens (2011) emphasizes that filmmakers attain recognition and cultural capital through festivals but continue to receive scarce earnings. This thesis is necessary, because systematic knowledge regarding how film festivals identify and support talent, what opportunities they provide and to what extent they develop sustainable careers, is lacking.

Therefore, the thesis addresses this gap by formulating the following main research question: “What is the role of film festivals in talent management and career

development regarding emerging talents in the film industry?”. In order to answer this question, two sub-questions have been formulated: “How are film festivals functioning as platforms of support and development for emerging talents?”, and secondly, “In what ways do film festivals reduce career uncertainty in the film industry?”.

The scope of the thesis is not to provide a historical overview of film festivals but to contribute new knowledge on their evolving nature as talent incubators. Considering the career uncertainty of the artistic labor market, the thesis provides empirical research on the structures of talent initiatives that contribute to understanding career sustainability. This is the first study that systematically examines talent initiatives by film festivals and identifies gaps, challenges and opportunities within the context of talent management. Both film festival practitioners and emerging talents of the film sector benefit from this study that reveals mechanisms of career support and institutional limitations.

With its interdisciplinary focus, the thesis offers a conceptual framework that uses strategic talent management approaches and applies them on non-corporate environments. Combining these approaches with cultural sociology to bridge the literature gap, the study conceptualizes film festivals as talent incubators that accumulate symbolic, social, cultural and economic capital. Studies on the precarity of the artistic labor market can benefit from this study which demonstrates new mechanisms of nurturing talent and their gaps that demand further investigation for a sustainable film sector.

I have organized my thesis in the following sections: Chapter 2 consists of the literature review and theoretical framework, where I begin by providing previous studies on artistic career trajectories in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). Drawing from Menger (1999) uncertainty is seen as driver of innovation through managing emerging talent. Because the film industry is in fact a business (Smits, 2019, p. 51), I used the human resources management (HRM) approaches of Collings and Mellahi (2009) and Thunnissen et al. (2013) to contextualize talent management. Then I used Bourdieu’s (1984) and Maguire and Matthews (2012) theories of cultural intermediaries, capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) as well as stakeholder theory by Andersson and Getz (2008) in order to understand the functions of film festivals. Lastly, I provide the concept of “career gatekeepers” by Hamman and Beljean (2019) and “sites of initiation” by De Valck (2013).

In Chapter 3, I will explain my methodology for the thesis. There, I explain my sample and sampling strategy, the procedure of data collection through semi-structured interviews, the operationalization of the research questions, and how data analysis took place, while also discussing the ethics, validity and reliability of the research. By taking the perspective of organizations, I interpret the thinking process of film festival professionals behind the structure of talent platforms, the objectives, goals and challenges they encounter.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of the study. I have divided this chapter into sub-sections following the themes I identified from the data analysis. Here I do not only present the findings but interpret them and discuss them. I introduce talent management mechanisms, selection processes and opportunities that talent platforms of film festivals provide. I finish this chapter by acknowledging the challenges film festivals face regarding talent management and sustainable career development.

In the final chapter of the conclusions of the research, I present the key takeaways of the thesis and synthesize the findings. In this way, I contribute new knowledge regarding film festivals both in an academic and an industry context. I also reflect on the limitations of the thesis, and I form new directions for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

The research deploys interdisciplinary approaches and previous studies to understand how film festivals operate as talent platforms. Relevant research for this study includes frameworks of artistic career trajectories, talent development and management, cultural intermediaries and stakeholder theory, as well as film festival studies. The literature review is guided by the main research question of the thesis: “What is the role of film festivals in talent management and career development regarding emerging talents in the film industry?”, and the two sub-questions: “How are film festivals functioning as platforms of support and development for emerging talents?”, and secondly, “In what ways do film festivals reduce career uncertainty in the film industry?”.

The importance of film festivals in the film market and industry can be observed by how film is approached in the context of European film and media policy. Film is seen as “an agent of social change and in particular in its distinct place as a bridge between high and popular art” (Kolokytha & Sarikakis, 2018, p. 71). Festivals are perceived in this instrumental light by being in the intersection of political, economic, cultural and social contexts and policies and are acknowledged as contributors to market growth of the cultural and creative industries (Krainhöfer, 2018, pp.12-16). Yet, what makes them function as such contributors and especially in the context of talent development, remains underexplored.

Film festivals have been researched by scholars from the perspective of marketing (Kerrigan, 2017), history, theory and practice (De Valck et al., 2016), organizational studies (Rüling & Pedersen, 2010), urban development and place branding (Grunwell & Ha, 2013, p. 204). However, Bosma (2015) shows the research gap on film festivals from sociological, business and management disciplines (p. 77). What these disciplines add to our understanding is the logic behind talent management and careers in a non-corporate environment where the accumulation and conversion of various capitals take place.

The first section of this chapter presents existing literature of artistic career trajectories mainly by Menger (1999) and the role of entrepreneurship for successful careers according to Bridgstock (2013), Thom (2016) and other scholars. The next section provides a conceptual framework for talent management in film festivals. More specifically, this section presents the strategic talent management frameworks of

Collings and Mellahi (2009) and Thunnissen et al. (2013) and secondly on knowledge management of Del Giudice and Cillo (2022). In the next section, capital theory, career gatekeeping and cultural intermediaries are shaped by Bourdieu (1984/1986) and Maguire and Matthews (2012). Lastly, the last section provides depth in understanding previous studies on film festivals' talent initiatives by De Valck (2013) and Falicov (2016).

2.1 Career trajectories in the CCIs

Career studies have been around in the literature since the 1930s (Mathieu, 2011, p. 5) while career sustainability has concerned scholars since society is evolving rapidly under unpredictable economic paths (De Vos et al., 2020). These economic paths are especially unstable in the artistic labor markets (Bridgstock, 2011; Menger, 1999). Uncertainty and ambiguity are two elements mentioned by scholars which make the artistic labor market different from other career trajectories (Bille & Jensen, 2018; Fillis et al., 2022; Haugsevje & Heian, 2024).

Scholars mention that pursuing a sustainable career path in creative labor is threatened by the excessive supply of artists and their low incomes (Abbing, 2002; Menger, 1999), while the principle of “nobody knows” characterizes career trajectories in the creative industries (Caves, 2006, p. 545). More specifically, by this principle Caves (2006) essentially means that decision-makers are not able to predict the outcomes of creative projects or artists due to the complexity and uncertainty of the output of creative products (p. 537). For this reason, talent and luck, although unmeasurable factors of success, hold great importance for careers in the CCIs (Bille & Jensen, 2018; Lingo & Tepper, 2013). The factors of “nobody knows” and luck are considered central mechanisms that control artistic careers, since forecasting a sustainable career path is uncertain, and they are also present in the film industry.

Next to these factors, Menger (1999) describes the arts and entertainment industries as highly influenced by market fluctuations of demand, competition and fragile reputation capital (p. 552). He continues by emphasizing that uncertainty affects not only early career stages but all stages of professional trajectories (p. 560). Success is not guaranteed for one's next film or creative work, and the only certainty is that creative work grapples with disruptions and shifting market needs (p. 560). This is why artistic career development heavily relies on strong connections with

gatekeepers and the principle of “who you know” (Bridgstock, 2011, p. 11; Fillis et al., 2022, p. 134). Therefore, the second sub-question of the study is addressed in this section by acknowledging that uncertainty is prevalent in artistic career trajectories and in the film industry.

Furthermore, Mathieu (2011) mentions a popular conceptualization of planned careers that grow through “training and skill development with corresponding increases in authority, prestige and remuneration” (p. 5). He continues by emphasizing that in less stable work environments the non-organizational concepts of “career agency” and “boundaryless careers” guide individuals into various activities and across networks to develop their careers against uncertainty. On this track, careers should not be seen as a linear process, but through a “cyclical” perspective where careers are open to various possibilities of evolving (De Vos et al., 2020, p. 2).

Scholars also focus on the impact of non-formal education for successful careers in the creative sectors (Alper & Wassall, 2006; Bille & Jensen, 2018). The dynamics between formal and non-formal education, meaning which one holds more significance in sustaining a career, are also seen in filmmaking, where aspiring talents are met with various options for their career development after graduating (Gilje & Groeng, 2015, p. 213). Regarding the argument of formal and non-formal education, research on cultural economics observes that there is no significant impact of formal arts education on artistic career trajectories and artists’ earnings because individual talent and luck are key factors for developing a career in the creative sector (Bille & Jensen, 2018, p. 24; Lingo & Tepper, 2013; Towse, 2006, p. 874). More specifically, Towse (2006) explains that, although formal education certification does not necessarily indicate an artist’s talent, creativity or reputation, empirical data have shown that talented artists have received some kind of formal education (p. 5). This shows that formal education holds a degree of significance in the artistic labor market, but it does not always lead to sustainable career development. The tension between non-formal and formal education will be explored more in depth in Section 2.4 of the theoretical framework.

Although careers in the CCIs and therefore in the film industry are described by uncertainty, previous studies suggest that entrepreneurial skills provided by organizations along with creativity and education open the path to innovation (Comunian et al., 2021, p. 10; Thom, 2016). In the case of this study, providing these skills can enhance career sustainability and safeguard innovation in advantage of the

organization that manages emerging talents. In this way, uncertainty which is both a condition and a threat for innovation is handled through talented individuals (Menger, 1999, p. 548).

Moreover, Bridgstock (2013) explains that arts entrepreneurship differs on its application from the business field: in the creative field it is about acquiring skills of “application, sharing and distribution of creative work” (p. 125). Consequently, this means being able to grasp the business logic within the promotion of artistic work. On the same track, Cobb et al. (2011) stress the need for artists to have managerial thinking by planning strategically their goals and objectives with business and finance knowledge. The most important entrepreneurial skill for creatives is that of managing business opportunities (Thom, 2016, p. 9).

Thom (2016) emphasizes that artists need a set of skills on business concepts, logistics, and finance (p. 10). For instance, this business logic is reflected in the common misconception for filmmakers that they need to market their films to the general audience instead of distributors and the industry (Parks, 2012, p. 65). Parks (2012) advises filmmakers to make campaigns and business plans for their films towards decision-makers, revealing that film is in fact multidisciplinary. However, as Bridgstock (2013) emphasizes, entrepreneurial skills in the arts differ from those when applied to business, since the arts are organized differently regarding their market, labor conditions, markets and demand mechanisms (p. 127).

The artistic labor market is not one and the same; careers differ by discipline as well as their markets (Menger, 1999, p. 552). While artistic careers and careers in the cultural and creative industries have gained scholarly attention, careers in the film industry, and mostly from the perspective of the film festivals, remain underexplored.

Career uncertainty and innovation are navigated through talent development and management (TM) which has been central to the thinking of policymakers, managers and agents in the creative economy (Boyle, 2018, p. 13). Creating structures of talent initiatives within film festivals ensures innovation at an organizational level and increases career sustainability for emerging talents who participate in these initiatives. This is an important indicator of success for filmmakers and thus it should be nurtured, as well as reputation and professionalism (Bille & Jensen, 2018, p. 26; Lingo & Tepper, 2013, p. 343; Towse, 2006). The next section will provide in depth a conceptualization of what talent management means in relation to film festivals.

2.2 Talent Development and Management

Talent was conceptualized as a factor for market and economic success within the creative economy and a factor of competition and innovation (Boyle, 2018, p. 2; Menger, 1999, pp. 570-571). Talented individuals have been identified as sources of economic and urban development through the three T's of technology, talent and tolerance by Florida (2005). Because the creative industries are operating across cultural and commercial environments, there is an enormous demand for "individual skill, talent and commitment" (Turok, 2003, p. 553). This is particularly true for film festivals that depend on new talents and trends to produce creative goods (De Valck, 2013, p. 142), where a high degree of specialization in skills and knowledge is needed for success (Turok, 2003, p. 553). In this section, talent management is framed by HRM and managerial studies in order to provide a framework for film festivals in the process of managing and developing emerging talent.

2.2.1 *The Talent Phenomenon*

Talent with its multidisciplinary nature evolves across fields including arts and entertainment (Tarique, 2022, p. 1). It varies between organizations and fields and therefore has no prescribed meaning since different fields assign their own criteria for what is considered talent (Tansley, 2011, p. 270). More specifically, Falicov (2017) provides an important description of who is accepted in training programs by film festivals: talents are characterized as filmmakers who show a promising profile during the application process and present a knowledge of the film industry with motivation to be part of the circuit, as well as having a strong portfolio of previous works or awards (p. 93).

Building upon *The Forms of Capital* by Bourdieu (1986), talent and successful careers can be interpreted as an accumulation of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Talent is translated as economic success through the input of film festivals as well as growth of one's social network and professional establishment in the field. This translation process is examined extensively in Section 2.3. For Sommerlund and Strandvad (2012) talent is seen from a performative aspect and closely relates to Bourdieu (1986) since it is manifested by various socio-material contexts where multiple actors interact (p. 181).

As suggested more recently by Dries (2013) and Farndale et al. (2010), talent is operationalized through four categories of capital: human, social, capital and cultural, through which Dries (2013) also identifies political and reputational capital (p. 275). Therefore, talent is embodied by individuals as an innate skill, however it is mobilized through different capitals in order to flourish. Those capitals operate at the level of the individual, organizational and societal level (Thunnissen et al., 2013). These approaches can inform our research topic by providing a model that can explain talent and careers in the film festival circuit.

2.2.2 Defining Talent Management

But how is talent managed? The concept of talent is located in highly skilled human capital (Glaeser, 1992; Lucas, 1988) and a knowledge-based economy (Chen and Nonaka, 2022; Drucker, 1999; Del Giudice & Cillo, 2022). Studies on knowledge management suggest that the exchange of internal and external knowledge can be seen as an asset in innovation strategy, which in our case complements the theoretical framework (Del Giudice & Cillo, 2022, p. 17).

To understand TM requires first to grasp the organization of knowledge transmission between groups and individuals: Del Guidice and Cillo (2022) propose the SECI model that they borrow and extend from Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), which includes socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (Del Guidice & Cillo, 2022, p. 18). The four phases describe how firstly tacit knowledge such as work experiences are shared between individuals and secondly how tacit converts to explicit knowledge through structured activities. Then, knowledge of both stages is combined and lastly internalized by individuals in order to foster innovation and engage in new practices. This process is seen by how film festivals allow knowledge-sharing between emerging talents and between them and professionals in formal and informal settings (Section 3.3). The model is important predominantly for its emphasis on interaction between organizations and employees as a condition for the transmission of knowledge and competitiveness. While this model applies to the film industry and frames interactions between film festivals and talents, it is not initially developed for the film sector and it is mainly used in fields of engineering or manufacturing (Del Guidice & Cillo, 2022, p. 25). The input of this approach informs

this study by explaining that talent management requires specific mechanisms of knowledge-sharing.

Moreover, human resources literature is extensive on the matter of TM (Boudreau & Ramdstad, 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen et al., 2013). Drawing from HRM and management literature, TM is characterized by activities of recruitment, selection, career development and management and talent pool (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Scholz, 2012, p. 864). This essentially means how organizations select assets from the wider network for the growth of the organization. Collings and Mellahi (2009) suggest a definition of strategic TM as “activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage” (p. 311), a concept that informs our research topic by examining how film festivals identify and manage talents to leverage their competitiveness in the film industry.

Recruiting applicants with the potential to succeed adds reputation to film festivals that ensure their continuation by attracting more talents each year to apply. Access to talent development programs is offered to talented individuals based on the criteria described by Falicov (2017) in order for film festivals to sustain their prestige and power. This shows the connecting link between strategic talent management approaches and the accumulation of different capitals based on capital theory by Bourdieu (1986).

In contradiction to the approach of Collings and Mellahi (2009), Thunnissen et al. (2013) point out that the TM literature is focusing solely on the competitive advantages of organizations (p. 333). For this reason, the authors propose a model for talent management that operates at an individual, organizational and societal level (p. 331). According to this model, the individual strives for economic rewards, job security and career development, the organization is characterized by legitimacy and reputation, and society is benefiting from talent management at a well-being level from the goods and services that are produced (p. 331). This approach can be applied as follows: emerging talents strive for a sustainable career, the organization acquires legitimacy and reputation in the industry and delivers meaningful and high-quality cultural products to audiences. This essentially connects TM literature with cultural studies and especially with capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) in the sense that talent management synthesizes and converts various capitals.

The model of Thunnissen et al. (2013) can be further conceptualized through the three phases of the talent phenomenon that Sommerlund and Strandvad (2012) propose: identification of talent by mediators, the phase of self-technology where the individuals are refining their skills through mentorship, and materialization where talent is translated to production of social and economic value (Sommerlund & Strandvad, 2012, p. 180). These three phases respond to the various capitals needed in the TM process.

To make the conceptualization clear: aspiring filmmakers and audiovisual professionals, who are described as emerging talents, are trained under film festivals who operate as mentors, and create economic and social value while creators are achieving a successful and sustainable career. Moreover, following the SECI model of Del Giudice and Cillo (2022) uncertainty could be reduced, and innovation could be promoted, since knowledge is transferred between talents and film festivals. Lastly, the implications of successful talent management include economic growth and societal well-being (Comunian et al., 2021, p. 10).

This section shows that, by applying managerial perspectives in festivals' talent initiatives, structural models can be strengthened and be more strategic and consistent. Furthermore, talent management in film festivals means their involvement in identifying, selecting and developing emerging talent, which is seen through the function of the career gatekeepers and cultural intermediaries that are analyzed next.

2.3 Film Festivals as Gatekeepers

Career development for workers of the CCIs depends to a great extent on gatekeepers who are categorized as “co-producers”, “tastemakers” and “selectors” (Foster et al., 2011, p. 248; Hamann & Beljean, 2019, p. 44). These gatekeepers are seeking for talent which they can develop, operating as “match-makers between artists and complementary inputs” (Caves, 2006, p. 534). In addition, they accumulate social capital through which creatives attain reputation and enter professional networks (Towse, 2006, p. 886).

Gatekeepers must come up with innovation by bridging art and entrepreneurship to prevent the prevalent uncertainty in the competitive environment of the creative industries (Foster et al., 2011, p. 250; Menger, 1999). Therefore, the gatekeepers of this study are called “career gatekeepers” since they allow or deny

access to networks (Hamann & Beljean, 2019, p. 45). For the gatekeeper to achieve success on a cultural, economic and societal level, there is a process of judging and selecting talents that will create those values (Caves, 2006, p. 538). Recognizing and recruiting talent in film festivals suggest that gatekeepers plan systematically those actions with specialized staff being responsible for the decision-making process (Negus, 2002, p. 510). Thus, to address the first sub-question, film festivals function as career gatekeepers through talent management processes.

Moreover, film festivals as institutions are creating value, competitive knowledge and innovation in the wider film industry (De Valck, 2013, p. 128; Falicov, 2016, p. 212; Krainhöfer, 2018, p. 52; Zemaityte et al., 2024, p. 3). Film festivals are perceived as what scholars describe as spaces of “cultural legitimization” and gather symbolic and cultural capital (Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 553; De Valck, 2016, p. 100). Based on the conversion of capitals and how legitimacy is assigned according to Bourdieu (1984/1986), film festivals assign value to films and filmmakers with funding, training or screening, mediating on the “what” and “who” hold legitimacy and significance (Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 552; Wioldemann & Krainhöfer, 2020, p. 391). For instance, a premiere in a legitimized film festival attributes value and recognition to the filmmaker (Falicov, 2017, p. 89). This becomes clearer through Fillis et al. (2022) who show that emerging talents ensure their reputation and recognition when they are attached to an institution (p. 139.).

The operational mechanisms of film festivals as gatekeepers can be understood through the capital theory of Bourdieu (1986) as it was introduced in Section 2.2. Cultural capital provided by the institution as an indication of educational competency assigns value and qualification to an individual to navigate the labor market on his field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 20). The accumulation of social capital also indicates that individuals gain access to networks through which they can profit both symbolically and economically (p. 22). For instance, it was observed that the principle of “who you know” and joining networks are important when pursuing a career in the artistic labor market (Section 2.1). This is confirmed by Towse (2006) who stressed the importance of social capital for developing a career in artistic career trajectories. Eventually, these capitals are converted to economic capital, ensuring financial earnings in the artistic labor market.

Consequently, this is the case for emerging talents in the film sector meaning that they gain value once they are accepted by festival talent initiatives. Film festivals

provide institutionalized legitimacy and operate as a connecting link between talents and professional networks. Emerging talents can eventually sustain a career in terms of economic stability by developing their skills and joining networks in the film industry through film festivals. In the case of the study, capital functions both ways for emerging talents and film festivals: When film festivals recruit successful talents, they gain importance as institutions in the industry.

2.3.1 Film Festivals as Cultural Intermediaries

The framework of Maguire and Matthews (2012) on cultural intermediaries is described through two dimensions: mediating the production and consumption process and secondly qualifying goods in the market of economic and cultural value (p. 551). Film festivals' mediating activities function on a pre-production level, with training and workshops initiatives, as well as on a production and post-production level by offering funding or co-production opportunities in the film market (Falicov, 2016, p. 210). Hence, this explains how film festivals mediate the production of films and development of talents to contribute to the film market by creating a series of values. Moreover, cultural intermediaries operate in a network of various agents such as managers or distributors (Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 555).

The film festival circuit reflects a business perspective in the creative field, operating as a "microcosm" where "film producers, scouts, sales agents, distributors, exhibitors, press and non-professional visitors gather" (Bosma, 2015, p. 69; Kredell et al., 2016, p. 52). This microcosm is a space of the intersection of culture and economics where value is created and promoted (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2022; Smits, 2019, p. 2). This explains the development of industry events within festivals for these professionals to meet as part of business activities (Smits, 2019, p. 51). In this way, film festivals do not just screen film selections but have integrated film markets within their operations (Rastegar, 2012; Smits, 2019, p. 60). Starting from scarce professional industry events of exhibiting new films, film festivals act now as an "alternative distribution circuit" (Kerrigan, 2017, p. 132). Mediating functions operate on various levels within the supply chain where film festivals stand as the "match-maker" between aspiring creators and sales agents, distribution channels and industry professionals (Caves, 2006, p. 534; Smits, 2019, p. 82). The ultimate goal of

filmmakers is to promote their film into these distribution and market channels (Falicov, 2017, p. 89).

2.3.2 Film Festivals and Stakeholders

Since many actors are involved in the film festival value chain (Granger, 2022, p. 8), stakeholder theory can provide a deeper knowledge on how film festivals are functioning in the wider network of cultural intermediaries. Stakeholder theory is described as a strategy for optimal management by organizations in terms of including interests of external business opportunities, values and resources in their operations (Fassin, 2009, p. 118; Freeman, 1984; Mahajan et al., 2023). Moreover, Andersson and Getz (2008) on their research regarding stakeholder management in festivals emphasize how they operate in a space where multiple actors are involved and can “affect or be affected by an organization’s actions” (p. 201).

Therefore, taking on a stakeholder theory approach is beneficial since film festivals fulfill a wide range of agency needs and explore the dynamics between artistic practice and the market in a regional and global level (De Valck, 2007, p. 18). This informs the study by acknowledging that when managing talents, film festivals are not acting individually but involve other stakeholders in the way they manage talent and support careers.

2.4 Film Festivals as Talent Incubators

Festivals have transitioned from just exhibiting films to incorporating commercial activities of the film industry (Falicov, 2016; Gore, 2004, p. 210; Kerrigan, 2017, p. 129, Smits, 2019). This is why De Valck (2013) emphasizes their transition from cultural gatekeepers for films as finished products to “sites of initiation” meaning that film festivals allow or refuse access to filmmakers to enter the film industry (p. 141). This is seen to be one of the essential functions of film festivals in the film industry.

The transition from being just career gatekeepers and cultural intermediaries to “sites of initiation” can be described through the gatekeeping dimensions of Maguire and Matthews (2012) and the ones by Caves (2006): there are the “promoters” who focus on promoting cultural products, and the “pickers” who focus on supporting and developing talent (Caves, 2006, p. 534). The second definition is what frames the

training programs fostered by film festivals (De Valck, 2013). They have been recognized for supporting careers in the short and long-term by providing access to the film market and balancing artistic and commercial success (Wieldmann & Krainhöfer, 2020, p. 390).

2.4.1 Talent Initiatives as Informal Education

Talent development opportunities by film festivals are framed within the context of non-formal education and most often by mentorship schemes. Previous studies on mentorship can enrich the study about the training programs of film festivals to understand how they operate towards talent management and career development. Haugsejve and Heian (2024) highlight the importance of mentoring that inform the research on career gatekeepers and intermediaries. Mentoring schemes, functioning as an apprenticeship model, accelerate careers through networking and developing artistic and entrepreneurial skills (Fillis et al., 2022; Hanson, 2020, p. 122; Haugsejve & Heian, 2024, p. 9). Literature on the impact of mentoring as an alternative form of formal education suggests that it can be used as a tool to manage artistic careers regarding income and work conditions as well as the development of an entrepreneurial identity (Hanson, 2020, p. 137; Haugsejve & Heian, 2024, p. 8).

With this context in mind, film festival trainings have been researched previously by De Valck (2013) who categorizes them into single or longer-period events, creative training and industry seminars such as developing “pitching” skills (p. 129). These initiatives have become an important part of the education of the filmmaker after graduation and talent training programmes are distinguished based on their “access, size, duration, training and costs” (De Valck, 2013, p. 133). Apart from the creative training, these programmes and events allow the filmmakers, audiovisual creators or producers to extend their network and gain recognition in the industry (p. 141). Therefore, the non-formal education framework in which film festivals are operating can suggest that talent initiatives aim to reduce career uncertainty by offering artistic, entrepreneurial and networking skills. Moreover, a non-formal education scheme aims to provide professional skills for continuous career development.

The practice of mentoring as non-formal education also suggests that formal education in the arts may not actually hold a great extent of impact for a successful

career as it was previously discussed (Bille & Jensen, 2018; Towse, 2006). More specifically, De Valck (2013) explains that previous experience as well as forming networks and having film industry knowledge is considered more essential than formal education degrees through film schools (p. 141). However, she adds that emerging talents participate in training programs of film festivals mostly after graduating film school, which shows that formal education remains important but not necessarily guaranteeing success (p. 141). In addition, filmmaking careers can be described as ‘figured worlds’ meaning the different paths in the creative labor market and learning environments that operate in the intersection on the formal and the informal under the ever-changing reflections of society and culture (Gilje & Groeng, 2015, p. 213).

The informal path in our case is the one of film festivals since the training of a filmmaker does not stop after graduating film school (De Valck, 2013, p. 127). Eventually, if filmmakers and audiovisual professionals want to succeed in this industry, De Valck (2013) advises that they should “gain access to the postgraduate level of festival talent development” (p. 141). Creators have then access to a number of resources and knowledge that they would not have through traditional learning environments (Hanson, 2020, p. 135; Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 3). It is then argued that film festivals operate as platforms for career development especially in the early stages of one’s career (Fillis et al., 2022, pp. 142-143).

2.4.2 Navigation of Uncertainty

De Valck (2013) informs the thesis’ topic by showing that film programming was the predominant focus for film festivals up until the evolving trend of training within the festival (p. 127). As discussed earlier, uncertainty is the main characteristic of creative industries but also a driver to innovation (Menger, 1999). This explains how and why film festivals have turned into nurturing talent; in the turbulent times of acquiring financing and stabilizing their economic capital, film festivals focus on emerging talent to prevent uncertainty and instability (De Valck, 2013, p. 128). This process indicates that film festivals safeguard both their own path to stability and innovation but also career certainty for emerging talents through their management structures.

Indeed, film festivals are investing early on to emerging talent as competition in the circuit is prevalent and film festivals need to sustain their prestige in the industry (Falicov, 2017, p. 92). They also engage the network of filmmakers, producers and other stakeholders into initiatives such as training, script development programs as well as production funds in order to provide new projects in a bottom-up organization of the industry (Falicov, 2016, p. 221). This shift of festivals being industry-oriented and developing their own funds to reduce uncertainty for talents is seen by the example of the first co-production market CineMart and the Hubert Bals Fund, both initiated by International Film Festival Rotterdam in the 1980s (De Valck, 2013, p. 128). This emerging trend has drawn the attention of film festival scholars that focus closely on the development of production funds within film festivals (Elsaesser, 2005; Stevens, 2011, p. 146). For this reason, Parks (2012) strongly advises emerging filmmakers to submit their films to several film festivals, since distributors are attending and seeking new talent, and this shows that the importance of film festivals in the industry is not acknowledged enough by emerging talents (p. 66).

Although production funds are an important contribution to the film production process, Stevens (2011) mentions how filmmakers receive little earnings and instead receive more cultural capital (p. 147). Filmmakers are often excluded from such funding opportunities due to social inequalities (Falicov, 2017; Kolokytha & Sarikakis, 2018). The position of film festivals remains underexplored in terms of understanding how artistic, economic and social dynamics take place in the film festival circuit (Bosma, 2015, p. 73; Di Chiara & Re, 2011).

In this literature review, previous studies were presented to address the main research question and sub-questions of the study. It is observed that uncertainty is prevalent in artistic labor markets. To understand how talents acquire skills through institutions to navigate uncertainty, theoretical approaches were drawn from management and HRM literature. Then, these approaches build an understanding of how talent is managed and how sustainable careers can be constructed in the film industry. The role of film festivals in talent management was demonstrated through the theories of capital, career gatekeepers and cultural intermediaries. Lastly, previous research on training programs by film festivals explained how they are developing careers. It is therefore concluded that the literature on this aspect of the film festivals

remains underexplored. The study contributes new knowledge on how film festivals play a pivotal role in the film industry and moreover explains how early film careers are developed through them.

3. Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss my methodology for the thesis. Firstly, I will discuss my sample and sampling strategy then present my operationalization process to address my research questions. Lastly, I will discuss the data collection and analysis as well as the ethics, validity and reliability of the thesis.

The methodology for the research topic deploys a qualitative research design that incorporates a case study methodology (Johansson, 2007). More specifically, for the scope of this study, Yin (2018) suggests that a case study design in qualitative research is suitable when forming research questions of “what” and “how” that include a sample of various cases (p. 67). This entails that I am focusing on what the roles of film festivals are and how they operationalize them towards talent management and career development. Moreover, the different festivals present the cases of the study. In addition, since I am researching talent development and careers in the artistic labor market and more specifically in the film industry, a case study methodology is suitable to address the research question that focuses on career trajectories in the film industry through film festivals but can inform similar fields in the cultural and creative industries.

3.1 Sample

For my study, the units of analysis were film festival professionals across different European festivals. The reason why I am choosing to position my research in a European context is due to the long history of the European film festival phenomenon and its opposition to Hollywood (De Valck, 2007, p. 14) but also to understand the transnational and international dimensions of film festivals. Through this perspective, stakeholder interests as well as artistic value and economic success are examined in talent support and development. Because each film festival has its own characteristics, I am focusing on how they operate in relation to developing talent and managing careers.

Purposive sampling was used as the sampling method (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 167) since the sample was selected based on which film festivals have talent development initiatives. In certain cases, *snowball sampling* was used when festivals were hard to reach at first-hand (Bryman, 2012, p. 424). More specifically, I planned that the sample would include festival directors, talent program managers and

coordinators, industry professionals, and film programmers. I selected these positions since these experts would offer relevant information that address the research questions. In addition, research on value creation, cultural production and consumption in CCIs has emphasized how there has been little focus to “actors who serve as co-producers, gatekeepers, brokers, tastemakers, curators” (Hracs et al., 2022, p. 8). For this reason, the study takes the perspective of the festivals to examine the notion and implications of talent management and career development.

Furthermore, my criteria for creating my sample were that the film festivals should foster talent development initiatives no matter the size or the prestige of the festival. A first criterion was based on De Valck (2007) who emphasizes that the “leading film festivals” are those of Cannes, Berlin and Venice due to their prestige, power and people (p. 37). The most common distinguishment between festivals is their different agendas; Turan (2002) lists festivals with business agendas, geopolitical or aesthetic agendas. Whereas some festivals hold historically great prestige, other niche festivals are also integrating training opportunities in their core activities (De Valck, 2013, p. 127). Therefore, the sample consists of A-list festivals, mid-size festivals, and niche festivals to ensure variance in how talent is managed.

3.2 Sampling strategy

The literature review revealed that there is currently no extended existing list of impactful film festivals on talent development. Therefore, I created an inventory of film festivals that incorporate talent development initiatives. There were different structures for these initiatives which are presented in detail in Appendix B. In the appendix, I present the talent initiatives offered by the interviewed film festivals.

Firstly, I created a sample frame and started contacting film festivals out of my sampling list. In the end, I had contacted around 22 festivals from which 11 responded for an interview within the thesis deadline time limit. Hence, my sample list, as seen in Table 1, consists of: Cannes Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Locarno Film Festival, San Sebastian Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, IndieLisboa Film Festival, New Horizons Film Festival, Göteborg Film Festival, Thessaloniki International Film Festival and Drama International Short Film Festival. In the findings, I refer to them only by their main name to avoid repetitiveness.

For the selection of the 7 festivals of the initial sampling frame, my selection process followed De Valck (2007) and the accreditation system of The International Federation of Film Producers association (FIAPF). Through FIAPF Cannes and Berlin have been accredited as an ‘A’ film festival (p. 41). Next comes Locarno Film Festival and Karlovy Vary selected out of the “competitive feature film festival” list by FIAPF (p. 42). Moreover, I continue with the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), which is a largely audience-based festival with international recognition as a specialized festival in avant-garde film and in talent support (p. 43). I have decided to include two more festivals that have been active in the talent development landscape; Thessaloniki and Drama. Thessaloniki Film Festival is said to be one of the most important Southeast European film festivals (Velisavljević, 2013, p. 371). Stevens (2011) mentions Thessaloniki as one of the several festivals that provide production funds to aspiring filmmakers through the Agora Film Market (p. 147). Lastly, I selected Drama International Short Film Festival in Greece because it fosters the annual Pitching Lab and promotes at a large extent promoting national and international student films.

The festivals of San Sebastian, IndieLisboa, Göteborg and New Horizons were examined for their contribution in talent management and career development. Because the process of the sample selection encountered obstacles in receiving responses from festivals, these four festivals were not in the original sample. I conducted further individual research on which festivals offer talent development initiatives or offer career development opportunities through film industry events running parallel to the festival period. In Table 1, I have provided the final sample list of my research, and I have included the central talent development initiatives that were mainly discussed during the interviews. The festivals often provide more than one talent program, and I describe the initiatives in Appendix B.

Moreover, I interviewed one person per festival apart from two cases. Two festivals, the names of which I am not mentioning due to ethical considerations, insisted that two people would join the interview, one head of the industry department and one film programmer. Their reason was that their activities and mindset were jointly developed and therefore they could not be interviewed without the support of the other person. Because of this requirement, I acknowledged their need and allowed two people for these cases. However, when I mention 11 participants, I am referring to the number of the festivals. Therefore, the final list consisted of professionals in

various roles as I originally had planned. That means that my interviewees were: 2 festival directors, 5 talent program managers and coordinators, 5 heads of industry departments and 2 film programmers.

Table 1. List of Units of Analysis

Name of festival	Talent Programs	Year of Establishment	Location	Running period (in days)
Berlin International Film Festival	Berlinale Talents	2003	Berlin	6
Cannes Film Festival	Short Film Corner Rendez-vous Industry Europe-Latin	2018	Cannes	4
San Sebastian Film Festival	America Co- Production Forum and industry events	2012	San Sebastian	Festival period
Göteborg Film Festival	Nordic Film Lab	2008	Gothenburg	Year-program
Karlovy Vary Film Festival	KVIFF Talents	2022	Karlovy Vary	Year-program
International Film Festival Rotterdam	Rotterdam Lab	2001	Rotterdam	5
Thessaloniki International Film Festival	Agora Film Market – Agora Works in Progress, Crossroads Co- production forum	1999	Thessaloniki	6
Locarno Film Festival	Filmmakers Academy	2010	Locarno	10

IndieLisboa				
International Film Festival	IndieLisboa Lab	2023	Lisboa	7
New Horizons International Film Festival	New Horizons Studio+	2017	Wrocław	4
Drama International Short Film Festival	Drama Pitching Lab	2013	Drama	5

3.3 Operationalization

The research topic was operationalized through the interviews that unpacked the strategies of how talent is managed and what opportunities talent initiatives offer towards career development. The semi-structured interviews are operating on an *exploratory* and *evaluative* degree (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 222) and are gathering insights into the festivals' function in the film industry regarding career trajectories. They are also addressing challenges and implications for talent development according to film industry professionals. To operationalize the main research question of the thesis: "What is the role of film festivals in talent management and career development regarding emerging talents in the film industry?", two sub-questions were formulated:

- 1) How are film festivals functioning as platforms of support and development for emerging talents?
- 2) In what ways do film festivals reduce career uncertainty in the film industry?

To address the first sub-question, the interview guide included questions on what opportunities film festivals offer to emerging talents and how they allow access to these opportunities. As discussed in the literature review (Section 2.4), film festivals provide various talent programs such as training workshops, script development programs or production funds (Falicov, 2016, p. 221). Interviewees were

asked about their procedures in selecting talents through questions like: “How does the festival uncover potential talent?”, focused on the selection process, and “Do you balance artistic quality with economic and market potential when selecting talents?”, “What are the selection criteria for selecting talents for the festival”, focused on the selection criteria and mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion in the programs. The full interview guide can be found in Appendix A. There were also follow-up questions on the topics of discussion. For instance, when participants went beyond answering the questions and discussed about relevant information for the study, such as how they define emerging talent, I would ask follow-up questions on the meaning of their insights.

The questions for the first sub-question derived from the literature review and were specifically formulated through the concepts of cultural intermediaries and career gatekeepers (Section 2.3). The literature informed the interview guide with questions regarding selection criteria in order to examine how gatekeeping processes take place in film festivals. Questions regarding balancing artistic quality and economic success reflect the conversion of economic capital by Bourdieu (1986). In addition, the strategic talent management concepts of Collings and Mellahi (2009), Thunnissen et al. (2013) were used in formulating questions such as how talent initiatives identify and recruit talents.

The second sub-question was addressed according to Menger (1999) on the matter of precarious work in artistic labor markets. The interview guide included questions that examine career uncertainty such as: “What skills do emerging talents acquire through talent programs?”, “How does the festival ensure a sustainable career in the long-term for emerging talents?”, and “What challenges do you believe an emerging talent encounters in the film industry?”. As we know from existing literature, despite the phenomenon of talent and career development programs, uncertainty persists. Because Stevens (2011) had mentioned that filmmakers, even though they are offered credibility they continue to receive little earnings, the questions aim to examine this career instability. This reflects the capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) and the questions aim to find what kind of capital is that film festivals eventually provide.

Through these questions the theme of uncertainty was addressed according to previous studies on artistic career trajectories (see Section 2.1). Questions regarding the opportunities and development activities to reduce uncertainty within talent

initiatives followed the studies on mentorship schemes and non-formal education through Mathieu (2011) and Haugsejve and Heian (2024) and the entrepreneurial training in artistic labor market by Bridgstock (2013) and Thom (2016). While these concepts address the second sub-question, the mechanisms to reduce career uncertainty can be also identified as another function that film festivals acquire in the film industry.

Moreover, the research provides an understanding on the complexity of developing a career in the film industry but also the challenges that festivals encounter when organizing these talent initiatives. Therefore, questions included asking festival professionals what kind of challenges they encounter and what positions their festival holds on the circuit. Eventually, as closing questions, it was insightful to ask participants what they believe about having fresh voices in the festival. Secondly, they were asked to provide their opinion on the future of the European film festival territory as well as for their own festival.

The last question specifically challenged the interviewees. Most of them considered it very broad and hard to answer. In that case, I would refine the question and ask them what their vision was about the next steps of the festival regarding managing emerging talents and developing sustainable careers. Through the two last broad questions, it was shown how resilient and impactful the sector can be against challenges and risks and bring out optimistic plans and opportunities for the future of cinema.

3.4 Data collection

The data collection was realized through conducting semi-structured interviews. I chose this research design since no previous research has deployed qualitative interviews with film festival experts on the topic of talent development. Considering that the thesis connects the gap between disciplines of culture and management on film festivals, the methodology of this study contributes new knowledge by directly gathering insights from film festival experts at first-hand. In this way, I was able to understand deeply how film festivals manage talent and develop careers than examining, for instance, at their websites or other online information. As my interviewees stated, film festivals are about human connection,

and the data collection should include this element in order to understand in depth the experts' insights on how they manage talent and develop careers.

Semi-structured interviews allowed also for a more natural discussion with interviewees and allowed me to tailor the questions of the interview guide in a suitable and appropriate way for each interviewee (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 221). In this way, participants could express their concerns, challenges and share laughs. For this reason, this method of collecting data was useful to understand the shared information by participants but also how they approach their experiences and strategies towards the research topic (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 221).

All the interviews took place through online meetings since the film festivals are based in different countries. The interviews had a duration from approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. I conducted all interviews in English, except from the two Greek festivals, where the interviews were conducted in Greek. I made sure to translate all the quotes that I used for my analysis. The interviews were audio recorded and were transcribed by an online AI transcription tool. However, I went edited all transcripts myself, since I listened to them again to edit the text. The tool was used since transcribing can be a time-consuming process in qualitative research. In the next section, I will explain the process of my data analysis.

3.5 Data analysis

To be able to interpret the data, conducting thematic analysis on the interviews was a suitable method for the exploration of the data through the software of Atlas.ti: identifying themes in interviews and looking for the relationships between the data facilitated to address the research questions effectively (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 374). In addition, thematic analysis allowed to interpret the data in the sense of understanding the explanations, stories and words of the interviewees (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 373). I decided to use thematic analysis in order to identify themes between the interviewed festivals and focus on their activities in a broader sense. Since there is no previous study that examines systematically a robust sample of talent initiatives, the thesis contributes to providing a conceptual framework on how these initiatives operate.

The process followed the phases of thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke (2006) have described: firstly, familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial

codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming them and finally producing the report (p. 87). The process started with open coding and creating research-driven codes based on the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Following Braun and Clarke (2006), a deductive approach was predominantly conducted regarding the coding process with codes such as “Gatekeeping mechanisms”, “Career uncertainty”, “Gaining reputation through festival”. Additionally, in many cases I created in-vivo codes that were based on the exact words by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261).

Moreover, coding was a continuous back and forth process between creating codes and reviewing them, which allowed for a deeper understanding and synthesis of the coded data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 257). The analytic process that I followed involved a lot of memos that gradually guided me to form my initial themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 258). After the phase of initial coding, following Charmaz (2014) I continued with axial coding by synthesizing and sorting overarching wider themes and sub-themes (p. 60).

In certain parts, the approach to coding became more data-driven to make sense of the interviewees’ views on sustainable careers in the film industry. Therefore, I aimed to interpret the data further than just describing what kind of opportunities are provided for emerging talents. For instance, when interviewees stated how emerging talents form long-lasting relationships with each other and work together in future projects, I coded this as not just networking. Here, I used the in-vivo code of “Talent programs bring human connection because making a film can be a lonely job”, which highlighted how talent programs strive for community-building and human connection in the sector. More examples of codes that emerged from the data include: “Managing talents means taking risks in selecting non-commercial film projects”, “Cinema as culture to prevent crisis and foster true innovation” or “Being resilient as an emerging talent”.

Therefore, following predominantly a deductive approach and then a more data-driven aspect allowed to put the codes into sub-themes and then develop overarching themes that address the research questions. By observing recurring themes among festivals, five overarching themes were developed and are presented in Chapter 4. Moreover, although I am considering film festivals as case studies, I analyzed the data based on recurring themes that were identified in interviews regardless of the slight differences in the structure of talent programs among festivals.

As there are no previous studies that use an inventory of talent initiatives among film festivals, the data analysis provides an understanding of their mechanisms holistically.

For this reason, film festivals are not treated individually through their respective talent initiatives. This would lead to a lengthy summary and description of the talent initiatives and not an interpretation of what the actual role of film festivals is. An overview of the talent initiatives and their structure is provided in Appendix B. The analysis generalizes knowledge in talent management and career development in the film industry and it will be discussed in the next section along with ethics, validity and reliability.

3.6 Ethics, Validity and Reliability

The nature of my research cannot completely anonymize the film festivals that are going to be examined, thus ethics should be considered. Interviewees for this research remained anonymous in the report of the research findings. Interviewees are informed about the purpose of the research and sample questions from the interview guide before the interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 140). Informed consents were provided to participants prior to the interview. The interviewees have the right not to answer certain questions due to confidentiality restrictions. In order to ensure participants about ethics of the study, they were informed beforehand about the topic and purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 215).

Although interviewees are pseudonymized, they still represent their festival. Interviewees were informed that their festival could not stay anonymous and gave their consent towards this. Besides the name of the festival, no other information about the interviewees is provided, since they could be identifiable. Therefore, their position in the festival, age or gender are not included. Regarding the positions of the festival professionals, I have mentioned their roles in the sample section. However, I am not connecting the roles to the participating festivals since this is also a sign of identification.

In addition, because the interviews are conducted with one person that represents the festival, questions of validity and reliability can be raised. The interviews were conducted with carefully selected film festival experts that offered empirical insights through their experience. The analysis of interviews was also conducted with consistency by revising codes and cross-checking information with

data and therefore the findings are reliable (Kvale, 2007, p. 122). Using triangulation to test and maximize this validity, as Golafshani (2003) proposes, the sample and interviews were planned according to existing literature regarding credibility of festivals and also by examining activities of each festival towards talent development practices through their online presence.

According to Strauss and Corbin (2008) regarding applicability of results, the findings of this study offer new insights on talent management and career development in film festivals, and they are able to develop film festival practices as well as practices in other sectors of the CCIs. As suggested by Kvale (2007) about analytical generalization, the knowledge of the findings can be transferable. Although I interviewed specific cases, I analyzed the findings in a way that it can be applicable to other creative sectors. By not focusing on each talent initiative individually, but researching talent management and career development overall, the findings can be generalized among the different cases and provide insights on how the film industry works holistically (Flick, 2009, p. 41).

In my research, I am showing how film festivals support careers in the film industry and how the chosen methodology of interviewing experts contributes to new knowledge, potentially informing talent and career management strategies in the film industry but also in the cultural and creative sector. The semi-structured interviews reveal insights and experiences of experts on the talent topic that have not been previously examined through this kind of research design. Therefore, the experts' knowledge that is communicated through the interviews can be transferred to other sectors in the creative industries regarding career sustainability and management of talent (Kvale, 2007, p. 126).

4. Results

In this chapter, I am going to present the results of the 11 interviews I conducted with film festival professionals. By conducting thematic analysis, I examine the different roles of film festivals in supporting and managing emerging talents but also in developing sustainable careers in the film industry. The findings are divided into sections based on the themes that were developed through the interviews with representatives of IFFR, San Sebastian, IndieLisboa, Karlovy-Vary, Göteborg, Drama, Thessaloniki, New Horizons, Locarno, Cannes and Berlinale. The talent initiatives of each festival include networking opportunities, mentorship and know-how on development of film projects. Although each initiative may differ slightly from one another, I have examined the central core of their activities. A full overview of the talent initiatives can be found in Appendix B. I have identified themes of talent management and selection processes, development of skills, film festivals as spaces of connectivity, career development and uncertainty, and challenges for film festivals.

In the first section, I am analyzing how interviewees responded to managing talent within their respective festivals. This includes the mechanisms of selection processes, selection criteria and how gatekeeping practices are taking place. Secondly, the section of development of skills examines how festivals through talent programs offer a wide range of diverse skills to emerging talents. In the third section, networking and connectivity, participants' responses are reported on how talent platforms and festivals function as spaces of human connection in relation to career development. In the fourth theme of career development and uncertainty, mechanisms on how festivals sustain their talents' careers are examined as well as why uncertainty persists. Lastly, limitations, challenges and risks that festivals are facing in the film industry are presented.

4.1 Talent Management and Career Gatekeeping

This section focuses on the mechanisms of how talents are identified, selected and managed and examines the pre-selection phase of emerging talents. It addresses the first and second sub-questions regarding what the functions of the film festival are and how they prevent career uncertainty.

As discussed in the literature review (Section 2.3), talent management in film festivals begins from the pre-production and development stage of a film and focus on

the filmmaker as an individual in order for the festival to gain competitive advantages (Falicov, 2016, p. 210). Using the framework of Bourdieu (1984) and Maguire and Matthews (2012) of cultural intermediaries, it is observed that talent management starts with the selection process of aspiring creators.

The process of strategic talent management was contextualized in the theory section through activities of recruitment, selection, career development and management and talent pool (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Scholz, 2012, p. 864). Therefore, festival talent platforms follow a structure of identifying, selecting and supporting emerging talents. TM in festival talent platforms takes place as the HRM literature proposes that an organization needs talented and motivated individuals to succeed.

Usually, recruitment processes happen through open-call applications or internal invitations according to the interviewees. Festival representatives mentioned that it is vital to conduct research by visiting other markets and festivals and actively identify and recruit talents for their platforms and programs. This implies that having other festivals and markets as collaborators and partners influences the selection process and thus a cooperative framework maximizes knowledge sharing and innovation across talent platforms. In Figure 1 the structure of the talent management process of participating film festivals is illustrated.

Participants also reported that sometimes the selection is conducted partly by funding partners or collaborators that nominate participants, such as film schools or institutes, as two interviewees explained. The selection process and management of talents aligns with what Andersson and Getz (2008) observed through their research regarding stakeholder management: festivals function in a space where multiple actors are involved and can “affect or be affected by an organization’s actions” (p. 201). Therefore, effective management that encourages innovation comes from knowledge sharing and including external opportunities in internal operations (Fassin, 2009; Freeman, 1984, p. 118; Mahajan et al., 2023).

The selection process is the first point of talent management and will be examined closely. The selection criteria are a tool to operationalize talent management in the pre-selection phase and reduce career uncertainty by filtering in or out applicants. In this way, talent initiatives ensure both success for emerging talents and the festivals themselves.

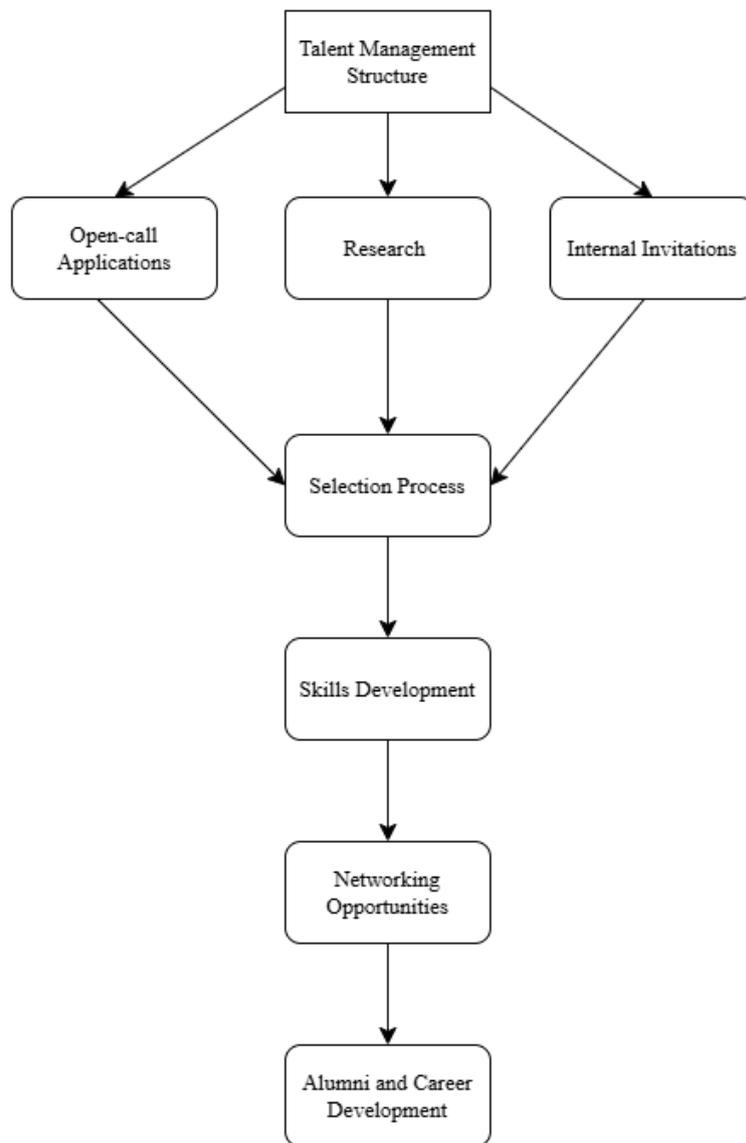


Figure 1. Talent Management Structure Chart

4.1.1 Selection Process

The theme of this section addresses the first sub-question and reflects the principle of the career gatekeepers that allow or deny access within networks and ecosystems as it was discussed in the literature review (Section 2.3). When asking interviewees about their selection criteria during selection process, it was prevalent how they use mechanisms of exclusion or inclusion based on direct and indirect

criteria which are presented below. The selection criteria section with its sub-themes is key in understanding the selection mechanisms on how talent initiatives manage talent. The requirements for access showcase the qualities of individuals that are needed in order for talents to flourish.

4.1.2 Supporting unlikely successes

It was found that selection criteria and processes are influenced by various factors such as balancing artistic vision with market success, gaining credibility as a festival, and selecting based on which filmmakers need the most help on developing their projects and careers. The last point was made by Cannes and Locarno:

I mean, if we are part of people who try to help people to get on the saddle, if you see someone that is already like, okay, this guy anyway is going to make it, because he got all education, he's got all the connections. So, what am I doing here, you know? What is my role? I'm just showing off, if I get these people.

(Locarno representative)

This essentially means that the role of the talent initiative is not about finding the perfect film project, but the project that makes one think: “Why is this not working out?”. This is the point where the talent platform steps in as a place where talents grow both as a person and as an artist. The aim when identifying talents is not to select the best talents to show off the festival’s success (Locarno) or find the Oscar-winning film project that is already at a completed stage (IndieLisboa) but help the emerging talents who have the potential to follow a successful path.

In other cases, when balancing artistic vision with other factors, interviewees emphasized how talent selection is also based on the festival audience and its taste. For instance, Thessaloniki and Göteborg representatives acknowledged audience engagement as a criterion for their selection, as well as the potential for commercial success of film projects.

In addition, regional and national oriented platforms give priority to projects from national and regional filmmakers and producers. Managing talent in this context essentially means considering regional and national needs to gain visibility in the international circuit as five interviewees. Therefore, the selection process also

includes considering demographic profiles and cultural backgrounds that strengthen the festival identity and its position in the film market.

Below I will explain the sub-themes that occurred within interviews regarding more specific selection criteria.

4.1.3 Originality

The criterion of originality was explicitly mentioned by 9 out of the 11 interviewed festivals meaning that they identify talents based on their uniqueness and original ideas. It was reported that in some cases the submitted projects need to align with the original identity of the festival as seen through IFFR, San Sebastian and IndieLisboa, while Karlovy Vary indicated that the Czech market does not always take into account identity alignment with the festival. This differs from festival to festival based on the identity of the organization, and other interviewees stated that they consider whether the project is interesting more than if it completely aligns with the festival's identity.

Because originality was coming up a lot during the interviews, interviewees were asked to define what an original story means for them. Two interviewees mentioned how filmmakers that stand out are those who succeed in depicting narratives of human connection and create emotional bonds. More specifically, the interviewee of IndieLisboa mentioned: "We try to have as much as possible narratives that don't look for stereotypes", showing how original ideas are part of a festival's identity, since IndieLisboa reflects an alternative and diverse film programming. Karlovy Vary stated how important it is for filmmakers to present their work in an original way and how the talent platform provides skills of film project development to avoid possible shallowness or commerciality:

You need to do much more work on, you know, digging in those ideas to present something that can be convincing and original, but also touching the human soul and sometimes this shallowness [laughs] is, we come across quite a lot in the selection process, so you know in some cases you can help with that.

(Karlovy Vary representative)

Having original ideas can also mean that ordinary narratives are told in a fresh and innovative way. The representative of Cannes stated how it is important that visions are “different, quite edgy or bold”, while the IFFR representative emphasized that an idea “doesn’t have to be new to be fresh”, meaning that a different perspective on a mainstream narrative can be impactful during selection process. Moreover, the New Horizons representative reported how the Polish film market contains various psychological and social dramas, however what is crucial is “the style of the project and the way it’s going to be actually made and shot”, a point highlighted by Drama too.

Originality and authenticity were alternatively mentioned as crafting diverse narratives that excite the selection committee, the decision makers such as distributors or sales agents, and the audience. The representative of New Horizons stated how being original is a market and industry need, as well as Göteborg representatives who added that they strive for diversity of film projects since they aim to appeal to a wide audience and showcase variety. Thessaloniki noted that they notice each project’s target audience in the selection process, but balance industry and audience needs.

Eventually, being unique and having an original idea can be very difficult to achieve if one considers how selecting process is happening. Uniqueness was identified as a challenge because competition is too high and standing out is not an easy task. The representative of Locarno provided a suitable example for explaining how it is to judge projects:

I start at 8 in the morning, and I keep watching short movies until 11 at night and we take a break of half an hour at lunch and at dinner just to walk, you know. [...] And what is interesting about it is that if you are a filmmaker and you see movies like that, suddenly you realize that your great personality, your great uniqueness, is just nothing in front of this huge, huge amount.

(Locarno representative)

4.1.4 Motivation

Another recurring theme that addresses film festivals’ function in identifying talent was the motivation of film creators. Selection criteria dive deeper into the

talents' personality apart from the work that they present. At this stage, talent platforms judge the candidates based on who shows that is going to “take the most out of it”, as IFFR stated. The sub-theme of motivation also appeared whenever interviewees mentioned that they search for talents who are curious, proactive and determined. As Locarno representative put it in a direct way:

Sometimes people write me and say, oh, yeah, but what is the motivational letter for? And I say, okay, it's already done. It's like, no, if you have no idea what a motivational letter is, yeah, I can honestly say just give up and come when you have a motivation [laughs].

(Locarno representative)

The representatives mentioned how they take very seriously the application process of candidates for talent platforms. IndieLisboa delved deeper into the psychological aspects of spotting motivation in the selection process by emphasizing the “enormous urgency” of an aspiring creator to tell a story as an important element of motivation. In a similar light, New Horizons stated how in the film industry “the more determined you are and the more you show it, the bigger the chances you have to make a film”. The representative of Cannes also pointed out that when there are no strong intentions, professionals are most likely not going to select or support the vision of the filmmaker. This essentially means that emerging talents who apply to talent development programs need to show originality and authenticity not only through their submitted project, but through their personality as well.

Consequently, the motivation letter is not just about presenting the desire to be part of the talent platform but it highlights who someone really is and what they have at stake. Showing that one is willing to learn and take every opportunity the festival provides means that there are higher chances to stand out and get selected. This is the case also for Berlinale who commented on why aspiring talents may get excluded from the selection process:

Obviously, a big reason for rejection is if we have the feeling, even though it's a great example that you showed to us a great film clip, we do not feel that you're super interested in coming to us because you did not spend much time on the questionnaire where we asked for this self-reflection.

(Berlinale Talents representative)

Interviewees mentioned repeatedly how talents need to be convincing when presenting their project. Being convincing about a film project comes from individual motivation and commitment towards one's career by essentially showing that a filmmaker is willing to develop and realize this project. This means that talents need to show that they are serious about their work to get selected. One mechanism that festivals use to check on the motivation of applicants is by contacting them directly. Interviewees mentioned how they always make sure that talents are well prepared, know themselves and project well enough, and are committed to working in a team for the talent program to be fruitful.

Therefore, selecting talented individuals means investing in creators that will excel and will assign credibility to festivals with their success. According to capital theory by Bourdieu (1986), this shows how film festivals accumulate symbolic capital and strive for their legitimacy in the industry.

4.1.5 Previous work and experience

All interviewees mentioned that they look at applicants' previous work and experience in order to examine the potentiality of emerging talents. In most cases, talents are also in different stages of their career, and therefore a talent is not necessarily a beginner or a recent film graduate. It may be a first- or second-time director as well as more established. As discussed in the theory section, Falicov (2017) defined talents as filmmakers who are motivated and show potential during the application process by having knowledge of the film industry and an interesting portfolio of previous works (p. 93). However, previous works do not always show the full potential of a film creator and therefore it is very subjective during the selection process.

The principle of a portfolio career is prevalent but not always necessary, meaning that having exceptional previous works can have a more positive impact during selection process. For instance, the Karlovy Vary representative that creators can evolve and reinvent themselves from their previous works and present fresh original ideas. The Berlinale representative added that they look for openness in applicants, meaning how open they are into trying new ideas and perspectives. It was

also reported by Berlinale that sometimes an applicant may be overqualified for the talent program. Two other interviewees mentioned as well that they look at previous work in order to determine how much support and help applicants need at this stage of their career. This confirms how festival talent programs are functioning as career gatekeepers by allowing or rejecting access in the program (Hamann & Beljean, 2019, p. 45).

In other instances, previous work can also provide information about the personality and expertise of the emerging talent behind the application and reveal whether or not they are suitable for talent programs and industry events. This is reflected in what San Sebastian's representative mentioned:

When I want to invite someone on or not, what I do is I look at the line up and see what they have produced, what kind of things they produced, if they have produced, for example, only horror movies, B movies... I'm not going to invite you, but if you want to come, you're more than welcome.

(San Sebastian representative)

4.1.6 Feasibility

A topic that was also discussed in the process of identifying talent was the balance between the artistic quality and potential economic success of a submitted film project, but also its feasibility. This was not the same for all festivals, however more or less the budget for the film is taken into consideration during the selection. For instance, IFFR's representative explained that there are a mix of factors when selecting talents that have to do with how the artistic vision and financial structure are aligning:

So the feasibility of the project has to do a lot with the producers, but also with the team in general and with their financial structure and how they are planning to work with this film and that the vision and the structure are matching.

(IFFR representative)

Selecting films based on their financial structure is also an organizational parameter of managing talent in festival platforms. This essentially means that, as participants reported, they tend to select film with different budgets such as IFFR and San Sebastian. Mixing budgets and therefore different levels of expertise is a structural element in the selection and recruitment process that allows for knowledge sharing between emerging and more established filmmakers and producers.

In this stage, it was revealed that it is very important for creators to have knowledge on crafting a coherent financing plan of their film project during applications. This reflects Thom's (2016) perspective on how artists need to have a grasp of logistics and finance (p. 10). Creating a film financing plan is a tool for selection committees to understand if a candidate knows their project and what its needs are, as Thessaloniki reported. Hence, the feasibility of a project shows the potential of the film being realized and minimizes uncertainty.

However, representatives mentioned that feasibility is always a challenge and a risk during selecting projects, since projects are not always realized as Karlovy Vary and New Horizons stated. Therefore, the talent identification process requires a lot of risk management from the perspective of festival platforms.

4.2 Development of Skills

As discussed in the literature review, film festivals were defined as “sites of initiation” (De Valck, 2013, p. 141) through which careers are supported and developed. The findings in this post-selection phase indicate how film festival talent platforms are functioning as incubators for career development of emerging talents. Handling career uncertainty is approached through acquiring entrepreneurial skills and training (Section 2.1). Therefore, this section addresses the first sub-question on how talent initiatives function as incubators and the second sub-question on how career uncertainty is prevented in the film industry.

According to Sommerlund and Strandvad (2012) regarding the phases of the talent phenomenon, this theme reflects the phase of self-technology where talents acquire and refine their skills through mentorship and continue by translating talent to social and economic values (Sommerlund & Strandvad, 2012, p. 180). The content of training programs and other non-formal education modes differ from one festival to another as was seen in Section 3.1. These formats include talent programs structured

as labs, workshops, script development programs, masterclasses or networking industry events. It was observed that talent platforms provide mentoring schemes within a non-formal education context that develops artistic and entrepreneurial skills (Fillis et al., 2022; Hanson, 2020, p. 122; Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 9). Based on interviewees' insights, the skills and knowledge that festivals offer through their initiatives reflect are preparing emerging talents on how to sustain a career in the film industry.

As Karlovy Vary noted: “platforms are there to encourage people to have something to lean on”, while San Sebastian highlighted that “the festival is a market and not a school”. This means that the role of the festival is to shape filmmakers as professionals in the industry. Festival platforms offer knowledge of industry navigation and encourage newcoming talents to explore structures of film distribution, sales and co-production forums. Therefore, three main categories have been identified with skills that talent initiatives provide to emerging talents.

Table 1. Development of Skills within Talent Programs

Categories of Skills	Types of Skills
Entrepreneurial skills	Marketing PR Self-branding Pitching Financing Strategic planning Industry knowledge
Collaboration skills	Cross-cultural communication Networking
Self-management skills	Stress & management Creative crisis management Resilience Emotional endurance Confidence Acknowledging responsibility Socialization Proactiveness Flexibility Openness

4.2.1 Entrepreneurial skills

The findings indicate that most talent platforms of the sample incorporate schemes for entrepreneurial skills that emerging talents should be equipped with. The

platforms that have a specific focus towards these skills are IFFR, Karlovy Vary, New Horizons, Thessaloniki and Drama. While these festivals offer more structured entrepreneurial skills, like pitching consultancy, all festivals of the sample consider it important for emerging talents to know how to present their works. It is especially indicated by San Sebastian that a filmmaker is not only an artist but should be in touch with the industry side of film. For instance, Rotterdam Lab by IFFR offers sessions of marketing and PR for participating producers to understand how to “best present their film” (IFFR representative). In the same Lab, producers are offered knowledge on how film financing takes place, while at Karlovy Vary participants are involved in the audience design of their films and how to make their ideas marketable. Having business and finance knowledge as an artist is essential in order to handle career uncertainty, as discussed in the theory section by Thom (2016) and Cobb et al. (2011).

The interviewees mentioned above reported that they provide pitching sessions and consultancy for emerging talents. “Pitching” refers to the ability of filmmakers to present the idea of their film project in a few sentences to possible collaborators and decision-makers. Therefore, festivals pay attention to how storytelling is done within a business context that requires strong presentation skills. It was mentioned that an effective and strategic way to connect with professionals is for talents to know their film project in depth and be prepared to brand themselves. This was especially highlighted by the representative of Drama, which has its own Pitching Lab as a festival. Pitching happens during the programs but also during networking events or even after the completion of the program by attending other festivals or contacting film professionals as a follow-up.

However, an interesting finding was that of the Locarno representative, who talked about how the Locarno Filmmakers Academy is totally against the approach of the pitching model. The representative stated that the Academy places more importance in artistic and personal growth rather than incorporating business logic in the program. This alternative approach seems to challenge dynamics between festivals and questions the idea of cinema as an industry.

Although the mentioned festivals in this section offer self-branding and pitching skills, entrepreneurial training does not appear in a strategic and systematic way in talent programs. The short period of the talent programs does not allow for the full development of these skills. It is proposed that talent initiatives should develop

more sustainable models and incorporate these skills in a consistent way to develop talent and therefore a sustainable career. Therefore, emerging talents are in fact acquiring more symbolic capital to navigate their careers (Bourdieu, 1986; Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 553). This is reflected by the words of New Horizons:

Of course, it's a big help, you know, participating in this programs, it's already a big opportunity and help because, of course, it's like a stamp participating in this industry programs, because again it's a sign that somebody already believed in the potential or trusted filmmakers, you know, they can manage this difficult task of making a film and so on.

(New Horizons representative)

4.2.2 Collaboration skills

Collaboration skills are required since films are not made only by a filmmaker, but with a team. Working with fellow filmmakers or producers in talent platforms offers talents the opportunity to exchange ideas and form collaborations as all interviewed festivals mentioned. As Göteborg representatives commented:

[...] Finding collaborators to succeed as a filmmaker today. You need collaborators. You need to find someone that is working for you or that you could work with very closely. Both in regard to finding finance for a project, but also to find the confidence in yourself and your ideas.

(Göteborg representative)

Collaboration was not a skill that interviewees directly mentioned. It was interpreted as an implicit skill during talent programs. Most of the talent platforms of the sample function on an international basis meaning that talents with different cultural backgrounds meet and collaborate. Thus, the festival provides a space for cross-cultural dynamics in a creative environment where dialogue and interpersonal communication take place. In the case of a more regional context within platforms, talents with similar cultural characteristics and values are collaborating to strengthen regional and national identity. That was also the case for Karlovy Vary, Göteborg,

New Horizons, IndieLisboa, Locarno, Drama and Thessaloniki. These platforms offer a space for national emerging talents to connect with the international circuit.

Eventually, collaboration was identified as a driver of forward thinking and innovation. It is not only reflected in the collaboration of emerging talents, but also in the film industry and in the structure of talent platforms through partnerships and collaborations on shaping development programs and exchanging their alumni. However, collaboration skills are not directly taught but are encouraged through group works within talent initiatives.

4.2.3 Self-management skills

Talent platforms launch soft skills for talents to navigate career uncertainty, as reported by the New Horizons representative. The representative discussed how the New Horizons talent initiatives offer insights into stress, time and creative crisis management. The findings indicate that the festivals provide, again implicitly, skills of emotional endurance and the know-how of self-management. Being proactive, curious and resilient are strengthened through talent programs.

Moreover, the representative of Drama added that taking responsibility as a creator for your film project is an important soft skill. The interviewee continued by commenting that acknowledging this responsibility as a creator is a “procedure of coming of age”. Throughout the talent program the emerging talents figure out the way they want to work in the industry and challenge it, as the Berlinale representative mentioned. For Berlinale it is important that their participants should cultivate themselves through the program to remain open and test new perspectives and to not come to the talent program with fixed ideas.

Building individual confidence was considered key for effective communication and collaboration, since it was reported that there are cases where aspiring creators may be introverted. The New Horizons representative especially mentioned that being an introvert is an obstacle to overcome:

[...] I think, it's about self-care also. I mean, to do this job, you need to work on that and be able to, yeah, to go out and talk to people sometimes [laughs], because otherwise, you won't be successful.

(New Horizons representative)

However, Thessaloniki representatives mentioned that shy and introverted filmmakers or producers can also attract attention from decision-makers and possible collaborations. This contradiction creates tensions on how festival platforms manage talent and what skills are important for each one of them. In the end, developing emotional and professional resilience in the film industry is considered an important aspect of sustaining a career trajectory. As IndieLisboa articulated:

I think you need to be very courageous to be a director or film director, because this is normally a long process and also not always rewarding in terms of economic payment.

(IndieLisboa representative)

On the other hand, Locarno discussed how cinema should not be a career plan. It was observed that cinema is a culture that reflects society, and aspiring creators have a responsibility towards society beyond building a career. In the case of cinema as culture, talent platforms cater to the idea of emerging talents providing valuable stories to society. This reflected both during selection criteria regarding narratives, but it is also an element that is provided through talent programs. They do not solely promote entrepreneurial thinking, but they offer soft skills and think along with societal values. Festivals provide operate as cultural intermediaries who balance market and cultural needs and values (Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 551). The role of the festival is to create cross-cultural communication, foster collaboration and personal growth, and be able to include diverse voices to represent the wide spectrum of society. Talent management is realized through the framework of Thunnissen et al. (2013) and functions at the level of the individual, organizational and societal level (p. 331). Hence, aspiring film creators have a responsibility towards themselves and society, while festival platforms empower thinking of one's individual characteristics as a path of continuous growth and coming of age as an artist.

Eventually, apart from obvious entrepreneurial skills that talent platforms provide, there are implicit skills that were mentioned. Therefore, film festivals function as initiators of such implicit soft skills that individuals should be able to pick up and develop. This function also contributes to reducing career uncertainty.

4.3 Spaces of Connectivity

When interviewees were asked, “What kind of opportunities does the festival give to emerging talents?”, almost always the first thing all interviewees responded was networking. The findings indicate that it stands nearly impossible to develop a career without connecting with professionals. As discussed in the literature review, the principle of “who you know” is the predominant element in developing and sustaining a career in the film industry (Bridgstock, 2011, p. 11; Fillis et al., 2022, p. 134). Therefore, having better opportunities in the labor market depends on the conversion of social to economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Film festivals accumulate and distribute social capital and function as spaces of connectivity, while they reduce career uncertainty by providing networking opportunities. They serve as a meeting point for professionals, facilitating the process of meeting and connecting within the microcosm of a business framework (Bosma, 2015, p. 69; Kredell et al., 2016, p. 52). The talent platforms use two qualities of networking: formal and informal, which are explained below.

4.3.1 Formal networking

Formal networking takes place in the structured sessions of the talent programs and industry activities such as co-production forums where professionals meet. Here, the San Sebastian representative mentioned how selected projects in co-production forums have scheduled meetings with professionals. These forums are specifically designed as meeting places for professionals in order to network and seek collaborators. This is a common structural element in the film market that each festival holds. The prevalent strategy is to form one-to-one meetings of the selected film projects with key stakeholders. Hence, festival platforms take the role of the matchmaker: it was reported from other interviewees such as Cannes and Karlovy Vary that their strategy is to connect film creators and producers, distributors, financiers and other professionals based on the needs of each film project. Managing talent means connecting the talents with the right stakeholders at the right time. This way of structured networking provides insights into the quality of formal networking.

Furthermore, incorporating a personalized experience for each participant, tailored to their project’s needs and interests appears as a structural element and function of festival platforms. However, the festival platform does not go beyond the

matchmaking role; the aspiring creators are then in charge of making the most out of this opportunity. This is why it was emphasized by interviewees that selected candidates need to have strong motivation and determination. As the Cannes representative mentioned:

So sometimes it's like also like... that is a role to find the good mentor, the good person to speak to every project. So of course it's not easy, but yeah, we need to be matchmakers. They [filmmakers] need to make the work.

(Cannes representative)

On the other hand, newcomers do not necessarily know how to navigate industry networking events of the talent platforms as five interviewees indicated. More specifically, the industry side of each festival informs participants about networking events and the professionals that attend, as Cannes, Thessaloniki and San Sebastian specifically reported. Preparation before events was noted by interviewees as a very important element that every aspiring creator should do before networking events. For instance, Cannes mentioned:

I feel the first chance is that being a filmmaker means that you are so drawn into the creative process that sometimes you are not aware of the industry ropes and the energy that it takes to really spark the right encounters and to catch the good opportunities. So I feel that also you need to be well-surrounded.

(Cannes representative)

This finding indicates that networking is a tool to manage career uncertainty, however emerging talents are not fully implementing it in their career strategy. Although film festivals do offer this opportunity, it may not always be effective for every emerging talent.

4.3.2 Informal networking

Talent platforms offer events such as dinners, lunches, coffee breaks, drinks and other activities in which stakeholders can engage with each other. Aspiring

filmmakers can present their projects in this relaxed atmosphere to potential collaborators and receive their feedback. This casual proximity is what differentiates formal from informal networking. In both formal and informal networking, the festival functions as the facilitator, however potential informal connections between talents and professionals are not controlled by the festival. In smaller and mid-size festivals and markets of the sample, this kind of networking is easier to take place. For instance, Thessaloniki mentioned how their festival provides strong networking opportunities due to its middle size in the circuit of festivals. Also, the IFFR representative mentioned how connections happen outside the business context. Adding to this, the New Horizons representative mentioned that “festivals created always this more relaxed, friendly atmosphere to approach some of well-established filmmakers or decision-makers”. This environment establishes a space of numerous possibilities for emerging talents.

On the other hand, two interviewees noted that informal networking gatherings receive a lot of attention from filmmakers who seem to have no interest in the workshops, panels or masterclasses of the talent programs. It was indicated that talents with more privileged backgrounds attend more the informal gatherings without placing attention to panels or non-networking activities. This raises questions on who eventually gets accepted in the programs since interviewees noted that they select participants who will get the most out of the program activities.

An important function in this space of connection is that festivals often collaborate with one another and host each other’s participants to network with each other such as the Smart7 network between New Horizons, IndieLisboa, Thessaloniki and four more European locations. In addition, Thessaloniki mentioned the “Launchpad” initiative between them, Locarno, Karlovy Vary, Rotterdam and Tallinn that allows connectivity between the five festivals. Hence, festivals collaborate to maximize innovation and knowledge sharing since they exchange talents from their programs and allow entry to each other’s film markets. It is observed that although competition between festivals is prevalent, they also aim to build a community that reflects various cultural and social values. For this reason, connecting is not only a market need, but the intrinsic sense and value of belonging to a community. Therefore, the sense of belonging is one function that festival talent platforms perform.

4.3.3 Community-building and human connection

It was considered important to highlight the quality of the informal networking by this sub-theme. Networking is not only about one-to-one meetings with stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that festivals with their talent platforms and industry meetings operate as a space of human connection. Talent platforms are functioning as a community of knowledge sharing through human connection that allows emerging talents to grow their social circle. Connectivity takes place specifically through what Del Guidice and Cillo (2022) described with their SECI model about the importance of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization that characterize the process of knowledge exchange (p. 18). For instance, the Göteborg representatives mentioned:

And I think that is huge, very important for if you want to succeed like a film creator, to have a networking, to collaborate with people that is close to you and that you understand, that you could communicate within a good level. And that is mainly what we are trying to create through our talent program. It's like to get them, the talents to meet each other, to get to know each other and maybe work together in the future.

(Göteborg representatives)

This framework of meeting other talents and sharing knowledge, acquiring inspiration and making meaningful connections shows a qualitative aspect of networking. It is interpreted that the talent platform functions as a reflection of society where human bonds take place. Observing the language that the interviewees used to describe talent platforms was useful for analysis to interpret how networking structures function. They used wording such as safe space to describe the talent programs, where emerging talents feel less lonely in the creative process. This became prevalent when the IFFR representative mentioned that the Rotterdam Lab fosters a sense of community-building between participants that continues to grow after the talents become alumni. Respectively, Karlovy Vary defined the festival as a “living organism” meaning that it reflects a community that demands human connections to continue growing. The Göteborg representatives added how they take their Nordic talents into the intimate environment of their “little festival house”. It was also observed that this space of human connection has psychological effects as well; the

Cannes representative mentioned how important it is to be well-surrounded during the path of being an emerging talent:

It's a great opportunity for the filmmakers not to be depressed in a way because otherwise the life of the filmmaker would be making films and submitting them to festivals and being refused most of the time.

(Cannes representative)

Therefore, talent support mechanisms expand through the context of emotional support and through connectivity that festival platforms provide. The Locarno representative, when talking about the Locarno Filmmakers Academy, emphasized the idea of the community of cinema instead of the industry of cinema. The representative mentioned how talents connect through talking about their projects and ideas that speak to them as creators and humans. Festival platforms aim for building long-last relationships with their emerging talents after the completion of the programs. The emerging talents that become alumni of the platforms gain access to numerous opportunities since they are provided with credibility to continue their journey in the film industry.

Eventually, networking is used through structured and unstructured forms to allow for the intersection of emotional and artistic connectivity between professionals in the industry. It is a tool to connect emotionally and artistically with think-alike creators without always being opportunistic. It can be interpreted that securing a sustainable career is about learning, inspiring and being inspired through non business-oriented interactions.

4.4 Career Development and Uncertainty

This section addresses the second sub-question and examines the crossing from talent management to developing sustainable careers. After the completion of talent development programs or participating in film industry events during festival circuits, talents may be guaranteed access to other markets, residency programs and festivals on an international level. For instance, Thessaloniki mentioned how the participants in their different talent programs have access afterwards to partner-festival platforms such as Cannes and Berlinale. As Karlovy Vary explained as well:

“Sustainability will essentially come with success, with its box office success, or whether it's a festival success”. In this case, the festival talent platform functions as a career accelerator as Karlovy Vary added. Based on the capital theory by Bourdieu (1986), emerging talents are awarded with symbolic capital and are assigned with value and legitimacy. This capital is then converted to the “box-office success” and financial earnings or in Bourdieu’s (1986) terms, economic capital. In addition, IndieLisboa mentioned:

They probably start looking at this, not like “Ah this is a very strange film. This will never work”. If they see it mingled in the context of the festival and that the festival is supporting already maybe they are a little bit more open to receive this.

(IndieLisboa representative)

These opportunities for career growth including credibility, fostering valuable connections and acquiring individual and professional skills may reduce uncertainty at an important degree. When talents are successful, then the festival attains credibility and therefore symbolic capital and prestige as well, possibly leading to converting to economic capital and power. This is especially shown by Cannes:

If you are the first to witness the voices of this filmmaker and that this filmmaker gets selected in very good festivals or very interesting places, or if the film goes to the theatrical release, well, it acknowledges that actually your festival is quite good in having an artistic vision that is bold and that is supporting emerging talents.

(Cannes representative)

When interviewees were asked what they think about how a sustainable film career develops in the industry, it was mentioned that the hopeful scenario is that film projects are realized after participating in talent platforms. The opportunities include having valuable and established mentors, finding producers or co-producers, funding and distribution. In addition, an acknowledged success for talent alumni is to return to the festival with a film in the selection of the official program.

However, the artistic labor market holds great uncertainty and ambiguity in how career trajectories develop (Bille & Jensen, 2018; Fillis et al., 2022; Haugsevje &

Heian, 2024). Interviewees such as Drama, IFFR and Berlinale mentioned how it is necessary most of the time to work in different positions within the film industry, which also means to make yourself known to stakeholders. The next sub-themes were central in interviews as well as the factors mentioned in Table 2 that address both structural and individual factors which stand as obstacles to having a sustainable career.

Table 2. Development of Skills within Talent Programs

Factors of Career Uncertainty

Lack of industry knowledge

Lack of motivation

Excessive supply of films

Competition

Absence of funding

Absence of collaborators

Luck

4.4.1 Excessive supply of talents

Interviewees mentioned how success is not guaranteed after the completion of talent programs. As six representatives reported, this uncertainty relies on the fact that there is an overproduction of films and many emerging talents coming to talent platforms with the risk of their project not being realized. As discussed in the theory section, the excessive supply of artists along with their low incomes is a characteristic of career trajectories in the CCIs (Abbing, 2002; Menger, 1999). Therefore, there is an imbalance between offer and demand. As the IFFR representative put it:

[...] There are a lot of places and platforms to present your project, like a lot of markets and labs and trainings and development spaces but the thing is then, when people want to look for projects, they have such a huge offer that is hard to have the spotlight and to present your project on an unique way or in having like a spot for you because you are surrounded by a lot of other projects.

(IFFR representative)

Moreover, on larger talent platforms the festival cannot always match filmmakers with possible producers or collaborators as the Cannes representative commented. In fact, interviewees reported that there are many parameters that affect the continuation or not of film projects. That could mean that talents did not manage to find funding, distributors, producers or collaborators. Lack of industry knowledge to find key partners from the side of emerging talents was indicated as another factor. In the case of the challenge of funding, Karlovy Vary offers emerging talents a grant when entering the talent program, so they can focus on developing their projects instead of having parallel jobs to sustain themselves. However, this is not consistent among talent programs. Using Bourdieu's (1986) theory again, the findings showcase that accumulation of economic capital is not a guaranteed outcome.

Furthermore, the overproduction of aspiring creators is challenging talent platforms due to their inability to provide personalized feedback in case of rejection in the pre-selection phase. As the Locarno representative pointed out:

Can you imagine if I had to speak with 900 people, explaining them why it doesn't work? It's just not manageable. But then I thought, but definitely this is also a great opportunity for the festival to think if so many people kind of put a trust or an ambition with you, are you so bad that the only thing you can give back is like a rejection letter? As nicely as you can write it, but this is really what you can... That's it? You can't do any more than that?

(Locarno representative)

Talent platforms are rethinking their purposes of supporting and nurturing emerging talent, since for Locarno a letter of rejection does not seem representative of the values of the talent platform. It was suggested that rejection should be tracked with each application and look for its progress this year.

Another challenge for emerging talents addressed by IndieLisboa, New Horizons and Berlinale were gender and social inequalities in cinema and how, for instance, there are less opportunities for female filmmakers in the industry. Therefore, the trajectory of film projects cannot be fully predicted by festival talent platforms, because it depends on economic, social, political and cultural shifts and implications.

4.4.2 Luck and Success Stories

Already from the fourth interview, it was prevalent that career sustainability remains questionable, and it is usually attached to luck as mentioned by five interviewees. It was reported that luck holds great importance in how career trajectories are shaped and how film projects succeed. Luck was defined as an unmeasurable factor of success in the CCIs (Bille & Jensen, 2018; Lingo & Tepper, 2013). The element of luck led conversations with interviewees to success stories. More specifically, success stories were acknowledged by interviewees as an exception in career trajectories. Thessaloniki especially mentioned that success stories are important for festivals in order to prove their credibility and importance in the film industry landscape and attract more film projects for development by their platforms.

However, succeeding in the film industry as an emerging talent is tied to the right timing and collaborators. The Cannes representative especially mentioned: “It's not because you're selected one time in a good industry platform or in a great festival, that it will be a success every time”. Uncertainty demonstrates the limitations of festival platforms to be able to develop sustainable careers in the long run and careers in the film industry are not linear. Although talent is constantly nurtured, this instability draws attention to the need for structures that provide longer-term strategy on talent management and career development.

Moreover, the crucial point that comes after the discussion of success stories is the non-predictable path of a second or a third film from emerging talents. Most of the interviewees such as New Horizons, Thessaloniki, Locarno and Cannes mentioned that making the second film is, in fact, more difficult than making the first. Having a successful first film raises expectations and standards for the continuation of a filmmaking career. As IndieLisboa also mentioned making a feature film takes a long time to be realized and therefore it is harder for a filmmaker to maintain contact with film festivals and make a living. In addition, the findings indicate that there are many structures for accelerating emerging talent careers for first- and second-time directors. The film industry seeks out predominantly the fresh and the emerging, while there are fewer or no opportunities for creators who are not in their early career stage and still may need institutional support. The New Horizons representative mentioned how there are post-emerging directors who face difficulties getting into the circuit:

[...] In a way there are more opportunities for young filmmakers sometimes [laughs], but for older, because of course, if somebody is well established in the market, they don't have access to many possibilities, just because they are too established [laughs].

(New Horizons representative)

The unequal accessibility to talent development programs creates tension between nurturing young talent and more established talent. While interviewees emphasized the importance of incorporating young voices in the festival, it is observed that even established directors face challenges of visibility and remaining relevant in the industry. As the film industry trends and needs constantly evolve, learning and acquiring skills as well as connecting and growing should be a long-term process in all career stages.

This gap between the emerging and post-emerging career stage calls for attention regarding developing more consistent structures through festival platforms that promote career durability and offer support schemes in different phases of a filmmaking and audiovisual career. Although there are alumni networks where talent platforms are following up their alumni's paths, this activity remains within those who already succeeded in participating in a talent program. The role of film festivals as talent incubators and career accelerators is challenged by their capacity to support a large number of emerging talents. The problem of career durability, along with the precarity of success stories and the unpredictable effects of luck, shows the need for stronger institutional models that function beyond just launching and accelerating careers in their early stage.

4.5 Challenges of Talent Initiatives

The limitations of festival talent platforms in offering support to talents are rooted in organizational and managerial challenges. Therefore, their role in nurturing talent should be addressed while acknowledging the risks and restrictions. Although not directly addressing the research questions, the challenges reflect their position and importance in the wider film industry landscape.

When asking the interviewees: "What kind of challenges do you encounter when organizing talent development initiatives?", the responses were focused on

financial instability and lack of funding and budget. This shows that it is not only filmmakers who struggle to convert their accumulated capital into an economic one. Film festivals are need of economic capital in order to be able to translate into talent development activities. For instance, Drama commented that for the festival to stay relevant in the international circuit there is a need for money and managerial structures. Most importantly, festivals need to actively convince funders or sponsors and prove their impact in the industry, but also to society. Karlovy Vary specifically mentioned:

[...] It's always linked also to money and to convince, you know, that the selection of the specific projects will be fruitful and successful. Internally, you need to convince a lot of people who always feel maybe the money could be used for something else. Finding the sponsors, finding the people that are, you know, willing to support you.

(Karlovy Vary representative)

Hence, the selection process is connected to creating an impactful and meaningful talent program that can contribute to the industry and society. Festivals are met with the responsibility of providing values and quality to audiences as well as presenting and supporting projects that reflect this goal. Lack of funding was reported by interviewees such as IFFR, Göteborg, Cannes, Thessaloniki, Drama and Berlinale as a challenge that is linked to geopolitical implications. Political changes that come within shifts in cultural policy affect extensively the vitality of film festivals and impact talent development initiatives. Four participants mentioned that budget cuts in the cultural sector influence the film sector too. The scarcity of public and alternative financing, lack of human resources and administrative obstacles are preventing festival professionals from focusing exclusively on the creative process as interviewees mentioned.

Table 3. Challenges of Talent Initiatives for Film Festivals

Types of Challenges

Lack of public and alternative funding and budget

Excessive supply of talent programs

Competition and fragmentation

Lack of human resources

Administrative obstacles

Ethical implications

Geopolitical shifts

Another challenge is the excessive supply of talent platforms that create competition and hence fragmentation among the sector. The interviewee of IndieLisboa specifically mentioned that it stands as a problem to have so many platforms offering the same activities:

[...] More or less all the festivals are doing the same, and this is a problem, because the market is already with lots of films that are currently working and wanting to get a spot in a festival... If you increase this industry with more projects that are not done and are also being shown and are also being discussed and are also being worked. So you have an enormous quantity of projects that you don't know in time what you have seen, you don't remember anymore [...]

(IndieLisboa representative)

Therefore, competition between festivals is also prevalent since they follow similar objectives and goals. Even with the existence of talent development programs, it is uncertain whether film projects will find their path in the film market or not. And that is a challenge and a restriction for festival talent platforms. The risk of nurturing a lot of emerging talent across festivals can undermine career sustainability due to high competition.

In addition, the extensive number of applications initiates discussion about ethical aspects of talent management. The Berlinale representative added to this argument that as a festival they always need to: “reflect on our criteria, and how they might block people from being part of our community”. Talent platforms are battling with the idea of being career gatekeepers by reflecting on their meaning of actions.

Locarno's quote from Section 4.4 sheds light on the process of inclusion or exclusion of talents and finding meaningful mechanisms that reflect the values of talent support.

Another challenge that was reported was staying true to the festival's identity but also adjust talent programs to current industry trends in order to stay relevant and competitive. A concern expressed by Thessaloniki was the challenge of balancing the need to preserve the identity of a mid-size festival and the need to get bigger in terms of recognition in the festival circuit. Other challenges mentioned by two interviewees were AI and new technologies that may interfere with the creative process of filmmaking.

Eventually, film festivals' talent initiatives are met with organizational challenges that indicate risks and threats in talent management and career development that talent programs offer.

5. Conclusion

This thesis interpreted the notion of film festivals that foster talent development initiatives and how they support and nurture emerging talent. Their role was researched in sustaining career trajectories in the film industry. Through the findings, the main research question is answered effectively and critically: “What is the role of film festivals in talent management and career development regarding emerging talents in the film industry?”, by forming two sub-questions: “How are film festivals functioning as platforms of support and development for emerging talents?” and secondly, “In what ways do film festivals reduce career uncertainty in the film industry?”.

To reduce the uncertainty and precarity that describes creative labor, there is an ongoing trend of creating talent and career development opportunities that promote entrepreneurial skills and the ability to network (Bridgstock, 2011, p. 11; Fillis et al., 2022, p. 134). That is also the case for film festivals who foster these opportunities, and the study contributes to previous studies of film festivals functioning as talent incubators. On a theoretical level, the original contribution of this study is that it synthesizes cultural studies and strategic talent management approaches from business environments in order to examine how film festivals operate in terms of identifying, training and developing emerging talent.

Regarding the first sub-question, talent programs of film festivals follow the structure of strategic talent management that Collings and Mellahi (2009) describe as “activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage” (p. 311). However, talent programs do not function solely for the competitive advantage of the festival. According to Thunnissen et al. (2013), talent management at film festivals is taking place within individual, organizational and societal parameters (p. 333). The findings partly confirm this approach since talent initiatives aim at the growth of emerging talents, their own development as institutions through these emerging talents, and eventually creating impact through delivering meaningful cultural products to audiences. The alignment of TM literature with capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) show how film festivals manage talent by essentially managing capitals. Still, as shown in the findings, film festivals continue to

have competitive advantages in order remain as an authority in the film industry, which confirms the approach of Collings and Mellahi (2009).

Film festivals were approached as institutions who assign legitimacy and value, share knowledge and promote innovation in the film industry (De Valck, 2013, p. 128; Falicov, 2016, p. 212; Krainhöfer, 2018, p. 52; Zemaityte et al., 2024, p. 3). This framework addresses the first sub-question that was approached through the themes of talent management and selection processes, spaces of connectivity but also through the challenges of talent initiatives. The findings confirm that film festivals are cultural and career gatekeepers that allow or refuse access to the wider network of the film industry, as Hamman and Beljean (2019) suggest. Secondly, they function as match-makers between emerging talents and film industry professionals as Caves (2006) also stated. The role of the gatekeeper is evident and is described by the section of the selection process, where various selection criteria are considered when selecting talents. This essentially confirms that film festivals gather and assign symbolic and cultural capital and mediate in the process of career development. The findings indicate that lack of funding challenges film festivals to structure their talent activities, an insight that demonstrates how economic capital is essential in order to generate cultural, social and symbolic capital according to the capital theory by Bourdieu (1986).

In addition, as reported by the participants, there is a balance between cultural and economic values, meaning that cinema is seen as a culture but still operates within a business context (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2022; Smits, 2019, p. 2;). Film festivals with their talent initiatives are functioning as key players in shaping regional, national and international markets by sustaining the film supply chain (De Valck, 2007, p. 18). In order to sustain their significance and prestige in these markets, economic capital holds in fact great importance in shaping activities by talent initiatives.

The study also shows that talent initiatives are functioning as spaces of connection beyond a business framework. They are seen as environments of community building between emerging talents that promote emotional and human bonds. The informal setting of human connection and communication is important for fostering collaborations and maturing as an artist and individual. Developing one's personality apart from an artistic vision is what talent platforms offer to emerging talents.

Furthermore, regarding the second sub-question, it was observed how talent platforms within film festivals provide various skills and opportunities in a non-formal education environment to prevent career uncertainty. As explained in the theory section, mentoring schemes in festivals provide artistic and entrepreneurial skills and connect talents and professionals (Fillis et al., 2022; Hanson, 2020, p. 122; Haugsevje & Heian, 2024, p. 9). More specifically, Thom (2016) explained that entrepreneurial skills such as managerial thinking and business logic are necessary for creatives if they want to attain a sustainable career (p. 9). However, the findings extend this theory since talent programs do not just transmit entrepreneurial skills; they create spaces of connectivity where knowledge sharing is taking place and launch soft skills. Talent programs encourage creators to find their own voice within the industry, stay curious, motivated and inspired. This is seen through the cultivation of the artistic vision and personality of emerging filmmakers by the function of talent programs as accelerators towards determination and resilience.

Hence, talent is managed by providing emotional support to emerging talents. Because talent programs function as a safe meeting space for growth according to film festival experts, emerging talents explore their identity and develop leadership and networking skills. These are also the tools that can reduce uncertainty in film career trajectories that the second sub-question addresses. In brief, talent programs do not only function as project-based entities but acquire a holistic view of an individual's career. Film festivals do not only see themselves as identifiers and curators of talent but as developers and initiators that can improve the industry as a whole.

However, considering the second sub-question, I observed that uncertainty in the film industry cannot fully be prevented through film festivals despite their role in launching careers and nurturing emerging talent. Although they incorporate support and mentorship schemes and function as career accelerators (Haugsevje & Heian, 2024), mentorship does not always lead to career development. Festivals offer tools and knowledge, but their role does not go further than supporting the talents. It is the talents' responsibility to be able to grow as artists, network with professionals and seek out opportunities. The skills that they provide are not organized in a systematic way and the short period of the programs does not allow for further strengthening of these skills.

Furthermore, film projects, even after the completion of talent programs, may not be realized due to lack of motivation and industry knowledge, excessive oversupply of films and competition, absence of funding and key connections. These factors confirm Stevens' (2011) argument that filmmakers continue to receive little earnings and have an unstable career, even though they gather symbolic and cultural capital (p. 147). This means that career sustainability in terms of financial compensation remains ambiguous and uncertain and the acquired capitals by participating in talent initiatives do not necessarily convert to economic capital. Like other artistic career trajectories, having a career in the film sector is inevitably a risk.

In the case of the first film project having success, it was reported that it is then more difficult for creators to make their second or third film. There is no guaranteed success after the first film as reported by interviewees. Therefore, as De Valck (2013) described, it is true that film festivals nurture talents at the early career stage to invest in them from early on and secure their own prestige in the industry (p. 128). Still, I observed that uncertainty persists, and talent initiatives risk their prestige with non-realized projects.

In addition, the film market is too focused on uncovering young and emerging talents. It is more difficult for post-emerging talents and older directors to stay relevant in the industry and claim their spot in the market for economic stability. It is usual that post-emerging filmmakers have no longer support since existing talent programs are more focused on first- and second-time directors or on their own alumni, therefore they remain excluded and cannot join the circuit with ease. Yet, as the market constantly evolves and industry needs are changing, there should be more opportunities for creators of different career stages to have access in long-term learning and growing. Also, although festival platforms aim to build longer-term relationships with their alumni, sustaining their careers is not ensured. Therefore, festival platforms are able to postpone uncertainty but not fully prevent it.

This thesis contributed to acknowledge that there is a gap between the emerging and post-emerging stages of a film career. The absence of consistent structural models for career durability was evident through findings. Careers are launched, but projects may fail to be realized, and careers are not always sustained in the long term. This is a risk for film festivals who aim to safeguard their reputation and recognition in the film industry. In addition, film festivals encounter their own challenges that affect their activities and impact in relation to talent management and

career development. Film festivals are objected to lack of funding, competition with other talent initiatives and fragmentation, geopolitical shifts and administrative burdens. What practitioners can learn from this study is the impact of talent initiatives and their potential to grow as well as the strengths and weaknesses that arise and call for change of actions.

Lastly, an important finding that addresses the main research question is the approach of Thunnissen et al. (2013) on how talent management has societal reflections. The findings show that cinema should be seen also as a culture and community. Film festivals have the role of a cultural institution that reflects societal values and provides forward-thinking for the development of society. The responsibility of the film festival is to provide meaningful stories and narratives that challenge current views and trends and shape communities. This responsibility is reflected in the way talent programs are structured and in how filmmakers should develop a strong vision and personality beyond their entrepreneurial skills. For these reasons, film festivals play a vital role in the film industry by developing and distributing talent.

In conclusion, this study contributes new knowledge into an underexplored side of film festivals. It is the first study that introduces a sampling frame of film festivals with talent initiatives and critically interprets their practices. It also is the first study to track systematically selection criteria by talent initiatives. The thesis made explicit how institutional support operates towards talent and what is lacking. By critically assessing and interpreting the structures of talent platforms, this thesis calls for attention to film festivals and their importance as talent incubators in the film industry.

The outcomes regarding the notion of talent development can be applicable not only in the film sector but in other creative and cultural fields too. This study expands current research regarding career precarity in artistic labor markets by showing how talent can be nurtured effectively and what the next steps are for scholars and practitioners. Finally, insights from festival experts can be used by emerging talents to learn how to navigate the film industry. Being resilient, having industry knowledge, a wide range of entrepreneurial and soft skills and authenticity in personality and artistic vision can be factors that reduce career uncertainty in the film sector, but again not fully prevent it.

5.1 Limitations, Reflections and Future Research

The central limitation of the study is that it does not include the perspective of filmmakers and other roles such as producers, screenwriters or directors of photography. There are many more positions within the creative process of filmmaking and each role could have different challenges regarding career development. The study was predominantly focused on emerging talents that are filmmakers. Another limitation is that this study focuses on a European context and therefore future research can use the findings to expand research to non-European territories.

To reflect on the process of collecting and analyzing the data, I learned that there is a lot of tacit knowledge on the navigation of the film industry which is not often shared to outsiders of the sector or newcomers. The film festival representatives expressed their expectations towards emerging talents and what they want to see coming to their festival through their selection criteria. Based on the experts' insights, these expectations can be a guide for aspiring creators in order to refine their skills before joining the circuit.

With that said, further research could use the findings of this study regarding experts' insights on talent management and career development and examine how young or more established filmmakers and audiovisual professionals perceive talent opportunities by film festivals. Regarding qualitative research, the experience of filmmakers themselves can evaluate deeper the condition of talent initiatives and provide further knowledge on their strengths and weaknesses. This could be possible through interviews with emerging talents but also by conducting observational fieldnotes during the period of talent initiatives.

Another key research based on this study would be to examine in a comparative framework the contribution of talent initiatives of film festivals in relation to other educational structures in the film industry such as training institutes or film schools. There was a gap identified between graduating film school and entering the film festival circuit. Because it was indicated that young filmmakers lack industry knowledge, further research could look into how film schools are organized and how they equip them for a sustainable career path.

Since professionals mentioned the factors of a successful career in the film industry, this study can function as basis for quantitative research. More specifically, I propose that quantitative research should examine what the variables are for

developing a sustainable career. In addition, the background of filmmakers could be researched and analyzed to demonstrate what individual characteristics contribute to a sustainable career. For instance, this could contribute to understanding how to maximize motivation of emerging talents for the efficiency of talent platforms.

Eventually, the findings largely confirmed that emerging talents are acquiring more symbolic capital to navigate their careers (Bourdieu, 1986; Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 553). Yet it was observed that experts invest in talent for economic opportunities and also participating talents strive for securing economic capital as well. Suggestions for professionals and further research should include seeking sustainable models of talent programs in order to function for a longer period of time as well as having a consistent and systematic strategy towards providing skills. This is possible with the approaches of TM literature. Applying theories of strategic talent management could be beneficial for strengthening existing structures of film festivals. By researching film festival structures towards talent, it is possible that innovation and sustainability in the film industry are enhanced.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide

Interview guide for film festival professionals.

Steps of Preparation for Interview

- Thank the professionals for their participation
- Inform professionals about research topic and purpose of the study
- Revise informed consent form
- Inform about anonymity of results
- Ask for extra oral consent

Introduction

I would like to thank you for participating in this research. In this research I am observing the role of film festivals in managing talent and developing careers. As far as I know from reviewing the literature, there is little information on the development of filmmaking careers and the possibilities that are out there. I am therefore trying to put everything together and make comprehensive research on the vital role of film festivals in these career trajectories according to their development as talent incubators in recent years. If you don't want to answer any question, that is totally alright. Although I will use pseudonyms for the research and you won't be identifiable, I will still have to mention the name of the festival as part of the research like other festivals as well. Do I have your oral consent to include the name of the festival in the research? Do I have your consent to record the interview?

Interview Guide

Introductory questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and describe your position at the festival? What are your tasks?
2. Can you describe the position of the festival within the larger film industry?
3. What kind of opportunities does the festival provide for emerging talents?
 - How do these initiatives align with industry trends?
 - Are there special training programmes?

- Are there masterclasses or mentorships?
- Is there a specific grant or fund for filmmaking projects?
- Are there networking chances for emerging talents?

Main questions

4. How does the festival uncover potential talent?
 - How do you detect possible talent for your festival? From talent campuses, workshops, applications etc.
5. What are the selection criteria for selecting talents for the festival?
 - Do you take into account balancing artistic quality with economic and market potential when selecting talents?
 - How do you define a filmmaker or film professional as emerging?
6. (If there are training programs), what is the content of the training programs or masterclasses?
 - What kind of skills do creators/participants acquire through the process?
 - Who is in the role of the mentor?
 - Are there structured programs for networking opportunities?
 - Do these programs consist of knowledge on financing, distribution and self-branding strategies for creators?
7. After the completion of these programs, what are the expected results? What are the next steps for creatives?
8. What challenges do you believe a young filmmaker or an aspiring creator in film encounters in the film industry? And then during the selection process?
9. What skills should an aspiring film creator have?
 - Is the festival providing these skills?
 - Is it tackling these challenges?
10. How do industry events take place within festivals and how are talents benefiting from them?
11. Are there challenges for the festival when organizing talent programs?
 - Is funding provided for festivals to organize such initiatives?
12. How does the festival ensure a sustainable career in the long term for creators?
13. How does a career of a film creator develop based on examples from your experience?
 - How do you ensure a successful career path after a filmmaker/audiovisual professional has been selected by your festival?

- What kind of initiatives are there to support filmmaking careers after the film festival circuit?
 - Are the filmmakers welcome on the next versions of the festival?
14. How is the success of talents measured after participating in your festival?
- Is there a post-festival follow up?

Closing questions

15. Why is it important to have fresh voices at a festival and in the industry in general?
16. What do you believe is the future of the European film festival territory?

Appendix B. Film Festivals Overview

Brief overview and description of the main talent programs of film festivals (targeted primarily to filmmakers, producers or scriptwriters) retrieved from their official websites.

<p>Cannes Film Festival</p>	<p><i>Cinéma de Demain</i> <i>The Résidence</i> Residency program dedicated to young filmmakers that are first- or second- time directors on fiction feature films. Includes writing their screenplay, group work and meeting film industry professionals.</p> <p><i>SFC Rendez-vous Industry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus WiP ○ Focus Script ○ Focus Copro <p>The Creative Programs encourage emerging talents to present and pitch their works to film industry professionals. They provide sessions for accelerating post-production process of short film and mentoring sessions with professionals.</p>
<p>Berlin International Film Festival</p>	<p><i>Berlinale Talents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summit ○ Talent Labs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doc Station - Short Form Station - Script Station - Talent Project Market <p>Talent Labs accept project submissions and offer mentoring sessions, support emerging talents into developing their ideas and scripts and find the right collaborators to accelerate their project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Workshops per discipline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studios for: Directors, Producers, Acting, Camera, Editing, Market, Production Design, Sound and Talent Press <p>Studios provide knowledge on specific areas of film and encourage participants to explore roles and connect with other</p>

	emerging talents.
San Sebastian Film Festival	<p><i>Industry activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe-Latin America Co-Production Forum • Ikusmira Berriak • WIP Europa • WIP Latam <p>The industry programs foster the development of film and audiovisual projects, enhance collaboration between filmmakers and professionals and offer networking opportunities.</p>
Gothenburg Film Festival	<p><i>Nordic Film Lab</i></p> <p>The Lab focuses on providing networking opportunities for Scandinavian emerging talents in filmmaking. Provides space for meeting other talents and film industry professionals.</p>
Karlovy Vary Film Festival	<p><i>KVIFF Talents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feature Pool ○ Creative Pool <p>The program provides financial support for the development of film projects from Czech Republic and Slovakia. It also provides pitching consultancy and meetings with professionals, short-term residencies, and preparation of presenting film projects.</p>
International Film Festival Rotterdam	<p><i>IFFR Pro</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CineMart • Pro Hub • Darkroom • Rotterdam Lab <p>Along with the co-production market, the festival provides talent development programs such as Rotterdam Lab. This initiative provides panels, roundtables, networking opportunities, and guidance to refining producing projects of producers.</p>
Thessaloniki International Film Festival	<p><i>TIFF AGORA</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crossroads Co-production forum • AGORA Works in Progress • AGORA Series • AGORA Short Film Lab

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thessaloniki Locarno Industry Academy <p>The different programs of TIFF provide mainly networking opportunities and meetings of filmmakers with financiers, co-producers and industry professionals. Workshops include pitching training, personalized feedback on projects, masterclasses and talks.</p>
Locarno Film Festival	<p><i>Open Doors</i></p> <p><i>Locarno Factory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Locarno Residency ○ Locarno Academy – Filmmakers Academy <p>The program of Filmmakers Academy provides knowledge exchange between emerging talents, networking opportunities, meetings with professionals and more.</p>
IndieLisboa International Film Festival	<p><i>IndieLisboa Lab</i></p> <p>The Lab is a mentoring workshop for Portuguese-language film projects. Provides guidance on the development of scripts and meetings with producers and decision-makers in the film industry.</p>
New Horizons Film Festival	<p><i>New Horizons Studio+</i></p> <p>The program is dedicated to first and second-time directors and producers. It offers workshops and lectures on film development. It focuses on PR and marketing as well as pitching and industry knowledge.</p> <p><i>Screenwriters on the horizon – Partnership with Netflix</i></p> <p>Workshops dedicated to film ideas script development by female screenwriters. It provides group sessions and individual guidance.</p>
Drama International Film Festival	<p><i>Pitching Lab</i></p> <p>Provides training for emerging talents into pitching methods. Also provides opportunities to present film projects to funders and network with film industry professionals.</p>