

Ecofilm: Sustainable Cinema and the Schull Film Festival

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Issues of sustainability, which occupy today a position of absolute centrality within political and scientific agendas, are beginning to generate specific responses to ecological concerns within the film industry. The impact of the film industry on the environment is, in fact, far from insignificant; recent research suggests, for instance, that in the Los Angeles area the film industry, as reported by *The Independent*, has “made a larger contribution, in relation to its size, to air pollution than most major industries, including aerospace manufacturing, clothing, and the hotel industry”.

The discourse on ecology and/in film is not new; since the late 1990s, ecocriticism has attracted our attention to the modalities of the representation of the environment in the cinema, focusing on specific films, directors and genres. Furthermore, in Europe, in the context of the crisis experienced since the 1980s by the film industries of many countries, as well as in light of the struggles of the cinemas of small nations to survive on a globalised market, notions of sustainability have been explored in terms of policies, of economic systems and of industrial practices relating to film.

This paper does not engage with broad policies or with filmic representations of the environment, however, but with how the concept of sustainability is impacting on practices. In particular, it concerns itself with the development of a consciousness about the ways in which the cinema can and should respond to the ecological questions of today. It does so in a way that is intellectually responsive to an ecosystem which is posing formidable questions about our future, and that aims to contribute to recent scholarship intent on shaping a new field of inquiry.

The paper, thus, gives account of the emerging awareness of sustainability issues within the film industry and film practice, as seen in examples such as the Edison Green Movie protocol for production companies, which proposes solutions to reduce the environmental impact of film-making. Originated from Italian Edison (which, founded in 1884, is Europe’s oldest energy company), the Edison Green Movie protocol certifies the environmental impact of the production of a film, based on the application of a protocol that includes the use of recycled materials in the building of sets, of new generators that reduce the energy consumption, all the way down to the food provided to the cast and crew.

Against the background of the growing sensitivity concerning the impact of the film industry on the environment, the paper will then focus on the case study of a local film festival which, I argue, is in the vanguard of new ideas of sustainability in the film industry. The Corona Fastnet Short Film Festival based in Schull, Ireland, is, as its website explains, “an independent festival dedicated to bringing together established and first-time filmmakers in a forum to celebrate the short film”. Established in 2009, after its first two years the festival lost its main venue, the Harbour View Hotel in Schull, which cost €10m to build in 2007, and closed down in 2011. Because the village has no cinema, the films are shown in alternative venues, including a village hall, a horsebox and a cycling cinema. The organisers created ‘Distributed Cinema’, an intranet

thanks to which films are screened within the confines of the Main Street and can be viewed by the public on laptops, tablets, smart phones. Since 2012, live events are also screened via the web, thus opening an important global window on to the festival. The lack of a large venue did not hinder the festival, and indeed ultimately turned into a point of strength. In particular, it facilitated the festival's sustainable development, in a way that does not have a lasting negative impact on the small, beautiful coastal village. Rather than building structures that are only used once a year, and remain empty or underutilised for the rest of the time, the festival thrives in the communal spaces of the resort, which are taken over and turned into sites for viewing films, exchanging opinions, engage in discussion, meeting people and participating in workshops and events.

The paper will discuss this development as the response of a rural community to cultural centralization. It will also read it in the context of recent theories that detect deep connections between the disappearance of material resources and the emergence of digital media and of the digitization of film.