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## Contemporary Ukrainian Cinema into the European Context (2014-2019)

**Zoya Alforova**

Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, Kharkiv, Ukraine

**Serhii Marchenko**

Kyiv National I.K. Karpenko-Kary Theatre, Cinema and Television University, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Yuliia Shevchuk**

Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Svitlana Kotlyar**

Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Serhii Honcharuk**

Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Abstract**---The relevance of the study is conditioned by the fact that the development of Ukrainian art, including cinema, is becoming more popular every year. Since 2014, the Ukrainian film industry has been rapidly developing, and has also shown good results at European and other international film festivals. The purpose of the study is to analyse the position of Ukrainian cinema in the recent historical period, as well as to analyse the preconditions that were created for its development and introduction to the European cinema market. The methodological basis of this study is the combination of theoretical methods of cognition. Methods of data analysis and synthesis, dialectical method, historical and periodization method are used. In the course of writing this paper, the studies of Ukrainian and foreign researchers regarding the subject were studied and analyzed. The establishment and current state of the film industry are investigated. The preconditions for the development of Ukrainian cinema as well as factors that influenced its entrance to the European market are considered. Studying the history of Ukrainian cinema and the process of its commercial distribution, will help to analyse the stages of its establishment, as well as explore opportunities for industry development.

**Keywords**---cinematography, contemporary history, history of cinema, Ukrainian art, Ukrainian cinema.

## Introduction

The film-making has appeared on the territory of Ukraine in 1893. The chief mechanic of Imperial Novorossiysk University, Yosyp Tymchenko, constructed a prototype of a modern video camera and filmed horsemen and javelin throwers, these were the first Ukrainian films. They were unveiled at the France Hotel in Odessa and screened there from November 7 to December 20, 1893. In September 1896, Ukrainian photographer Alfred Fedetsky, while in Kharkiv, shot several chronicle films. In December of the same year, he began showing films at the Kharkiv Opera House. These events took place almost simultaneously with the first public screenings in Paris. In September of the same year, regular film screenings began in Hausman Passage in Lviv [Berest \(1962\)](#), in his research work wrote that the first full-length Ukrainian film was recorded and presented in the city of Dnipro in 1911; the picture came with the title “Zaporozhian Sich”, directed by Danylo Sakhnenko. In the 1900s, there was a tendency to film theatrical performances. The following performances were brought to screen: “Moskal-magician”, “Servant” and “Natalka Poltavka” ([Tay & Pashley, 2001](#); [Missemer, 2018](#)).

[Berest \(1962\)](#), indicated that in 1922, the All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration was founded, and in 1928 a Film Factory was founded in Kyiv, now it is the Kyiv Dovzhenko Film Studio. Alexander Dovzhenko made a significant contribution to the development of Ukrainian cinema, it is worth noting the films “Zvenigora” (1928), “Arsenal” (1929) and “Earth” (1930) ([Savchenko, 1930](#); [Paziura et al., 2021](#)). Dovzhenko’s works have taken Ukrainian cinema to a new level. In 1958, at the World’s Fair in Brussels, the film “Earth” (1930) was included in the list of the Best Films of all Time. [Berest \(1962\)](#), in his book outlines the main stages of Ukrainian cinema establishment before 1960. The author notes the period of prosperity of the Ukrainian film industry in the period from 1921 to 1932. He also notes a period of significant decline in cinematography, which occurred between 1932 and 1941. The development of Ukrainian cinema during the Second World War was also restrained, in the work of [Berest \(1962\)](#) it is noted that the gradual revival of Ukrainian cinema after the war took place 10 years later and made no advancement in the Soviet years ([Berlucchi, 2009](#); [Raoult et al., 2013](#)).

Today, Ukrainian cinema is recovering and entering the European market ([Yoo, 2015](#)). Ukrainian film studios, directors and actors unite with European colleagues and release films every year. In the last decade, Ukrainian films have received a number of awards at European film festivals, and have been recognised by European audience ([Brüveris, 2016](#)). In September 2018, several Ukrainian films were recognised at international film festivals. On September 1, 2018, the Ukrainian film “Myth” was recognised as the best film at the documentary festival Figueira Film Art in Portugal. On September 2 of the same year, the tragicomedy “Easy” received the Kineo Diamond Award at the Venice International Film Festival. This film is an achievement of cooperation between Ukrainian and Italian

film production (Morgner, 2016). The tragicomedy “Easy” also won the Audience Award at the American Film Festival in New Jersey in June 2018. Morgner (2016), indicated that in July 2019, the musical “Hutsulka Ksenya” was awarded the Grand Prix at the Japanese festival Mt. Fuji Atami International Film & VR Festival; in the same year, the film “My Thoughts are Silent” received a special jury award at the International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary (Halinen & Törnroos, 2005; Piel et al., 2013; Upatnieks et al., 2002).

The precondition for the rapid development of Ukrainian cinema was the increase of state funding and cooperation with European colleagues. In recent years, Ukraine has increased funding for the cultural sphere and Ukrainian cinema. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has adopted a number of laws, including the Law of Ukraine “On State Support of Cinematography in Ukraine”. Such actions on the part of the state have created proper funding conditions and started the process of film industry development. As of 2020, Ukrainian filmmakers, together with European colleagues, have started the production of fourteen films. Ukrainian film industry cooperates with France, Germany, Poland, Romania, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Spain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Croatia and Georgia (Lorenzen, 2008; Priadko et al., 2021). Films of completely different genres will be released, from documentaries to fantasy and tragicomedy (Ings, 2018; Darewych, 2013; Pratama, 2015).

## **Materials and Method**

This study considers the transformation of Ukrainian cinema, exploring it from its origin to revival and entry to the European market. The study of the subject matter is based on the study of the history of Ukrainian cinema, in particular the works of J. Savchenko “The birth of Ukrainian Soviet cinema” and the work of American film critic B. Berest “History of Ukrainian cinema”, which describes the stages of development and establishment of Ukrainian cinema. In the course of this study theoretical methods of scientific cognition were used. Using basic methods of cognition, the author considered the concept of cinema, its history in Ukraine, as well as its current state and stages of its development. The processes of financing Ukrainian cinema at public expense have been studied and analysed, as well as the preconditions for the rapid development of cinema that have been a result of the increase in the budget of the state film industry in recent years. In the process of research, the author used methods of analysis and synthesis of information regarding the participation of Ukrainian films in international festivals, screenings in European cinemas, cooperation with European colleagues. An analysis of information on the increase of state funding for Ukrainian cinema was conducted. The Law of Ukraine “On State Support of Cinematography in Ukraine” was considered and analysed, the adoption of this law increased funding, allowed to allocate public funds to finance television series and strengthened copyright protection of multimedia products.

The main research methods in this work are generally accepted methods of scientific knowledge, such as: dialectical method, historical, periodisation, method of synthesis and systematic analysis of data, estopsychological. Using general scientific theoretical methods of cognition, all stages of the ascent of Ukrainian cinema were studied and analysed, starting from the history of origin,

ending with the current state of the film industry and prospects for its development and entry to the international level. Using the historical method of research, the historical facts of the formation of Ukrainian cinema and the stages of its development to the present day were studied. This method traces the links between the financing of the film industry, the political situation in the country and the situation of the film industry. The method of periodisation is a method of scientific knowledge that studies the main stages of development of a phenomenon. In this paper, the method of periodisation was used to study the main stages of Ukrainian cinema formation.

The synthesis method involves combining all the components of a phenomenon or problem. In this work, the method was used to synthesise data and information about art, namely cinema. Using the method of synthesis, papers by foreign authors on the development of art in Europe and in the world were analysed. This method allowed us to study a wide range of data and develop our own ideas about the development of cinema in modern history. The following is the estopsychological method of research. Estopsychological method is a special method of studying works of art. It assumes that each work of art, in this case a film, is considered from three points of view: aesthetic, psychological and sociological. This method allowed us to look from the other side on Ukrainian films that took part in festivals. This method allows to evaluate the work of art from an aesthetic point of view, to identify what emotions the film evokes, as well as to find out and understand the relationship between the film and society (Indiani & Suda, 2018).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Renaissance of Ukrainian cinema**

Ukrainian cinema is in the process of revival. Researchers note that as of 2020, there is a renaissance of the Ukrainian film industry taking place. The beginning of the Renaissance period for Ukrainian cinema can be considered the Revolution of Dignity. O' Shaughnessy (2019), wrote that in 2014, Pylyp Ilyenko became the head of the State Cinema. This year was the beginning of active funding for the art industry, the state began to actively allocate funds to finance new projects in the industry. Ukrainian films have started to be released, such a rapid development can be considered a significant event for domestic film distribution.

O' Shaughnessy (2019), in his research work indicated that one of the films that was released in 2014 and was a success with moviegoers was a project by Mikhail Ilyenko, entitled "Firecrosser". The film was in theatrical distribution for five weeks, the box office was 1.4 million UAH, and according to the information provided by the Ukrainian State Film Agency, the film was viewed by more than sixty thousand viewers. In 2014, several more successful films were released on the big screen. Roman Balayan released the film "Birds of Paradise", the audience watched the social drama "Ordinary Business", directed by Valentin Vasyanovych. It is worth noting the work of Eva Naiman "House with a Turret" and "Haytarma", a film by Akhtem Seitablaiev (O' Shaughnessy, 2019).

The restoration and development of cinema began to gain momentum and rapidly release new products because of social and political events that took place in Ukraine in 2013-2014. [Papadimitriou \(2018\)](#), wrote that an outstanding event and a new stage for Ukrainian cinema was creation of the “Babylon-13” studio. Studio “Babylon-13” was founded by Volodymyr Tykhy. All young filmmakers aspiring to create new films and restore the Ukrainian film industry gathered under Tykhy’s leadership. [Papadimitriou \(2018\)](#), indicated that the “Babylon-13” studio has released a number of iconic Ukrainian films, including “Euromaidan. Rough Cut” by Volodymyr Tykhy, “Maidan” by Serhiy Loznytsia, “Winter on Fire” and “Heavenly Hundred” by Yulia Gontaruk and Roman Lyuby. Experts and film critics have identified the most successful films of 2015 and 2016 ([Papadimitriou, 2018](#)).

[O’ Shaughnessy \(2019\)](#), wrote that the most successful works with the biggest box office are considered to be the film “Battle for Sevastopol” by Sergey Mokritskiy and the comedy film “8 Best Dates” by Maryus Vaysberg. Taras Tkachenko’s film “The Nest of the Turtledove” deserves special attention of the public and critics. In this film, directors and screenwriters drew attention to a common problem in Ukrainian society, namely, the mass emigration of Ukrainians abroad in search of a better life. The film was widely acclaimed by the audience, as well as received significant box office receipts. 2017 was marked by the release of several more defining pictures. [O’ Shaughnessy \(2019\)](#), indicated that Akhtem Seitablaiev’s historical-dramatic film “87 Children”, Zaza Buadze’s historical film “Red”, Oleksiy Shaparev’s sports and dramatic film “The Fight Rules” and Yuri Kovalev’s adventure fantasy film “Watchtower” were released. A significant event for Ukrainian cinema, which took place in December 2017, is the release of the film “Cyborgs”. This picture was filmed by director Akhtem Seitablaiev. This piece of work covers the events that took place in eastern Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as is dedicated to the defenders of Donetsk airport ([Papadimitriou, 2018](#)).

### **Prerequisites for the rapid development of the film industry and entry into the European market**

The main precondition for the rapid development of the film industry, as already mentioned, was the increase in funding for the State Cinema. However, one of the biggest steps towards the revival of Ukrainian cinema was Ukraine’s membership in the European Fund for Joint Production and Distribution of Cinematographic and Audiovisual Works – Eurimages. At the beginning of 2000, the first talks began among Ukrainian film critics and cultural figures about the need to join the European Eurimages Foundation. Politicians and art critics have been actively discussing Ukraine’s accession. In 2018, the issue of Ukraine’s accession to Eurimages was submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, but during the voting this draft did not have enough votes. The Law on Ukraine’s Accession to Eurimages was finally adopted on December 19, 2019, thanks to the deputies of the ninth convocation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. An important role in the adoption of this bill was played by the support of deputies and employees of the film industry, who developed and submitted it for consideration.

Eurimages is a fund that supports joint film production and rental of films and multimedia works (Elgamal, 2014). The fund was established in 1988 under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The purpose of the fund is to assist participating countries in the production of quality and independent films, animation and documentaries. The Foundation encourages and promotes coordinated cooperation between countries, in particular, the Foundation assists in the creation of film productions, supports the screening of films, partially reimburses the costs of transferring films into digital format, and promotes international distribution of films (Damien, 2018). In this way, Eurimages encourages countries to cooperate and co-produce film. The member countries of the fund are 38 of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, as well as associate members Argentina and Canada.

The main reason for the cooperation of countries, including Ukraine, with Eurimages is the financial support of the fund. The fund's budget for the year is over 25 million EUR. The decision of the Verkhovna Rada was very important for the development of Ukrainian cinema, because funds for the production of films are allocated exclusively to members of the fund (Gott & Schilt, 2015). Moreover, the fund not only provides financial assistance to member countries during the film production stage, but also provides support during the advertising campaign stage. Also, the fund helps in resolving issues of international film distribution. Eurimages is a powerful European system that provides filmmakers with financial, administrative and legal guarantees (Vichi, 2014). As for the state support of cinema, as already mentioned, there are positive trends. Table 1 shows information on public funding of the Ukrainian film industry in the period from 2016 to 2018, as well as the number of state funded film projects.

Table 1  
State funding of the film industry and the total number of funded projects.

Year	Public financing	Total number of projects
2016	State Cinema: 256 million UAH.	109
2017	State Cinema: 513 million UAH.	208
2018	State Cinema: 518 million UAH.	State Cinema: 148
	Ministry of Culture: 500 million UAH.	Ministry of Culture: 69
	Ukrainian Cultural Foundation: 42 million UAH.	Ukrainian Cultural Foundation: 75

In 2016, the budget of the State Cinema amounted to 256 million UAH, as of 2017 it doubled to 513 million UAH, but in 2018 it remained at the same level – 518 million UAH (an increase of 1% in the national currency). In 2018, the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine held a competition of projects, patriotic themes, at the expense of funds allocated from the state budget of Ukraine. The state budget in the amount of 500 million UAH was distributed among the winners (Peter, 2019). This budget was designed to produce 69 films. Thus, with the participation of the Ministry of Culture, funding for Ukrainian cinema increased to 1 billion UAH, which is an increase of 98% compared to 2017. In total, the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation for the first time supported the Ukrainian cinema systematically, namely, supported the production of 36 films and TV series.



### **Ukrainian cinema on the European market**

The main change and key turning point for Ukrainian film production is the reorientation to European partners and the creation of joint projects with the involvement of European directors, actors and other participants in the process of creating a film project. In recent years, the Ukrainian film industry, in cooperation with foreign colleagues, has created many worthy films. Among them: the crime drama "The Line" by Peter Bebjak, "Frost" by Šarūnas Bartas (Lithuania, Ukraine, France, Poland), "Easy" by Andrea Magnani (Ukraine, Italy), "Ugly" by Yuri Rechynsky (Ukraine, Austria) (Marechal & Karamath, 2017).

Let us consider in more detail the movie "The Line". It is directed by Peter Bebjak, was presented to the audience in the summer of 2017. The plot of the film takes place on the border between Ukraine and Slovakia, namely the life of the smuggler's family. Marechal & Karamath (2017), wrote that the director of the film P. Bebjak describes the film as follows: "It brings closer the realities of everyday border life of Ukrainians and Slovaks, where a fine line is built between human dignity and betrayal, home and abroad." The Ukrainian-Slovak film received the award for best directorial work at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2017. Slovakia has nominated film "The Line" for Academy Award in Best International Feature Film. A joint film of Lithuania, France, Poland and Ukraine "Frost", which was presented to the audience in March 2017, and participated in the program "Directors' Fortnight" at the Cannes International Film Festival. The plot of the film revolves around a trip of a Lithuanian volunteer to Ukraine, namely, deep into the anti-terrorist operation zone. The protagonist is given the task to deliver humanitarian aid to the village in the anti-terrorist operation zone. The hero goes on a journey with his girlfriend. The authors of the picture break romantic notions of war and demonstrate a cruel reality. This is the idea promoted by the director that war is not an abstract phenomenon, the authors of the film wanted to reflect the realities and convey to the audience that people are dying here and now (Marechal & Karamath, 2017).

The tragicomedy "Easy" is a joint project of Ukraine and Italy, which was presented to the audience in September 2017. The film "Easy" was awarded the prize of the Ministry of Culture of Italy. This project was a participant of the 70th International Film Festival in Locarno. The plot of the film revolves around the Italian's journey to Ukraine, in order to deliver the coffin with the body of a Ukrainian worker. The film reveals the hero during the plot, and he finds his own path. The film "Ugly" was created in collaboration of Austrian and Ukrainian film production. The director of this work Yuri Rechynsky characterises this picture as a new vision in Ukrainian cinema (Marechal & Karamath, 2017). The film premiered at the 2017 Rotterdam International Film Festival. The project was filmed in Ukraine and Austria, in particular in Kryvyi Rih and Vienna. The picture is divided into two story lines. The first tells the story of a young couple who are experiencing the consequences of a serious car accident. The second tells the story of the main character's mother, who tries to preserve her identity fighting Alzheimer's disease (Marechal & Karamath, 2017).

## Conclusion

In general, Ukrainian cinema is undergoing a stage of revival and establishment, both for the Ukrainian audience and for the European market. The development and establishment of the contemporary Ukrainian cinema began to take place after the tragic events of the Revolution of Dignity and the change of government in Ukraine. This launched a process of increasing funding for Ukrainian art, including cinema, and provided an opportunity for closer cooperation with foreign colleagues in the film industry. At this stage of development of the film industry in Ukraine, cinema needs even greater support from the Ministry of Culture, the State Cinema and the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation. In general, today we can observe positive trends on the part of the state and as a result a large number of successful films released in Ukrainian and European cinemas (Peter, 2019).

Today, Ukrainian film production is ready to work together with European partners in the production of joint film projects. This was made possible by a number of preconditions created by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by adopting the Law on Ukraine's Accession to Eurimages, thanks to people who are involved in the field of film production and are ready to revive Ukrainian art and cinema. One of the decisive factors in the readiness of European film production to cooperate with Ukraine is the quality of film projects produced in Ukraine every year. In the future, cooperation with Eurimages provides even greater prospects for Ukrainian directors and actors, and for Ukrainian film production it means the release of films in European and international distribution and involvement of international investment.

At present, we can observe a revival of Ukrainian cinema, as evidenced by the many films that have been released in Ukrainian and European distribution. The participation and recognition of the works of Ukrainian directors at film festivals in Europe and the world is also a determining factor that testifies to the success and revival of the Ukrainian film industry. Such successes of Ukrainian cinema in 2014-2018 are the merit of the state and the constant increase in funding, as well as talented actors and directors who participate in the production of new Ukrainian cinema.

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