SHORT FILM AS A LAUNCHPAD FOR YOUNG FILMMAKERS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVE FOR UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

As an accessible entry point into professional cinema we suggest considering short films which enable them to experiment with cinematic language, develop practical skills, show creative potential and gain access to professional networks. This article examines the role of short filmmaking and festivals in the development of young film talent with covering international examples with a focus on Uzbekistan. Through experiences of such filmmakers as Wes Anderson and Damien Chazelle we may see how short films can function as creative prototypes and lead to full length productions. Whereas the works of Joachim Trier showcase their value as a space for artistic experimentation. Meanwhile the Uzbek cases of Anvar Safaev and Umid Hamdamov exhibit the importance of short filmmaking for an early stage of professional development and festival circulation. The paper argues that short film festivals should be considered as mechanisms for talent identification, professional development, networking and global scaling and not only as exhibition events. It suggests the development of a stronger short film ecosystem in Uzbekistan combining competitions, festivals, mentoring, digital circulation and international partnerships. The development and presence of such ecosystem could contribute to the renewal and activation of Uzbekistan's wider film culture besides the development of emerging filmmakers.

Keywords: cultural innovation, creative industries, emerging talent, film festivals, film heritage, short film, young filmmakers, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Establishing a foothold in the film industry might be particularly challenging for young filmmakers. Significant financial resources, professional teams, technical infrastructure and access to distribution networks are required for full length filmmaking. Such preconditions might create hurdles for directors who posses creative potential without yet established a professional reputation. These challenges reflect wider characteristics of creative industries, where careers are often project-based and dependent on professional networks rather than predictable career structures (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

Short filmmaking might offer an alternative entry point with their relatively limited production scale allowing filmmakers to experiment with cinematography, directing, editing and storytelling without the financial and organisational requirements of a feature film. Concurrently, a completed short film may become a professional portfolio enabling a filmmaker to approach cultural institutions, festivals, international networks and producers.

This is important as the transition from film education to professional work involves more than technical skills. The research on film students and emerging screen practitioners demonstrates that professional development also depends on collaboration, networking, reputation-building and access to industry contacts (Mehta, 2017; Rossiter, 2023). Therefore the short film format should not be considered as a smaller version of feature cinema. Since it can function as a creative laboratory for experimentation, learning and professional development per se. For example, a director Joachim Trier described shirt filmmaking as an opportunity to build cinematic language and experiment without commercial expectations associated with feature film production (Festival de Cannes, 2014).

The purpose of this article is to explore short films as a mechanism for developing new filmmaking talent and examine festivals with a purpose of

strengthening this process in Uzbekistan. The core thesis is that a value of a short film comes from its integration into an ecosystem connecting production, education, festival circulation, mentoring, networking and further professional opportunities.

2. Short Film as a Pathway to Professional Filmmaking

One of the paramount advantages of short filmmaking is the opportunity to learn through practice. A young director has an opportunity to test a visual concept, work with actors and collaborators and experiment with narrative and editing without undertaking the financial and organisational commitment of a feature film.

The importance of this experience is far beyond the artistic development as at the same time as young professionals develop their creative skills, they need to build professional identities and relationships. The study on film education conducted by Mehta shows that networking and reputation-building are already part of the socialisation of aspiring filmmakers before they enter the professional industry (Mehta, 2017). Comparably Rossiter (2023) argues that emerging screen practitioners develop through a combination of practical experience, professional networks, confidence and resilience.

By producing a tangible demonstration of creative ability short films can support this transition: a completed film may function at the same time as portfolio, festival submission, networking tool and proof of director's ability to complete a project.

The ability to function as a proof of creative potential is one of the overriding advantages of short films, which is to be witnessed in a well-known example of Wes Anderson *Bottle Rocke*t. This 13 minute long short film attracted attention as Sundance and was subsequently developed into a feature project. Whereas Damien Chazelle's the *Whiplash* operated as a proof of concept for the feature helping demonstrate the project's creative potential (Sundance Institute, 2023).

The aforementioned cases should not be taken as evidence that short filmmaking automatically leads to a feature career. Instead, they demonstrate that the short format can become valuable when it is connected to wider professional

opportunities and ecosystem surrounding production: festivals, mentors, producers, funding opportunities and professional networks.

This distinction is particularly relevant for countries seeking to develop emerging filmmaking talent, as supporting production alone may not be sufficient. Young filmmakers also need mechanisms which enables connection to further opportunities and makes their work visible.

3. Film Festivals a Talent Development Platforms

The film festivals are of great worth as they can facilitate the connection of emerging filmmakers with audiences, critics, programmers, producers and other filmmakers. The academic research has expanded the understanding of festivals as purely exhibition events. For De Valck (2007) the festivals are considered to be *sites of passage* through which films and filmmakers enter the cultural recognition and professional exchange.

This role is highly advantageous for short films as they are less frequently distributed through conventional commercial channels, and festivals can provide an important route to audiences and professional networks. The scale of international competition showcases the significance of the filed, for example, the 2014 Cannes Short Film Competition received 3,450 submissions from 128 production countries (Festival de Cannes, 2014).

De Valck, Kredell and Loist (2016) emphasize the multiple functions of contemporary festivals including their role in shaping professional and cultural networks. Since the festivals can extend beyond the screening and connect artistic production with professional learning through workshops, mentoring programmes, masterclasses, producer meetings and project-development activities.

Such an integrated model is of greater value for emerging filmmakers in comparison to a festival functioning solely as a competition. Since a screening provides visibility, whereas mentoring and networking can provide a pathway towards future work.

Therefore a specialised short film festival can be viewed as a form of creative industry infrastructure, where it helps young filmmakers to connect to the sources, knowledge and networks that are often difficult to access independently.

4. Uzbek Examples and the National Context

Uzbek cinema also provides examples of short filmmaking as an early stage of professional development.

Produced in 2010 a 28 minutes long Umid Hamdamov's *Nazar* (*The Look*), where he was a director and a screenwriter, represents an early stage in his development before his subsequent work in feature filmmaking. It illustrates how short film production can form part of a longer professional trajectory.

Anvar Safaev's *The Dog* (*Sobaka*), a 25 minutes short shot in 2013, was included in the short film competition programme of the Golden Guepard Tashkent International Film Forum (Afisha.uz, 2013). Its festival circulation demonstrates the importance of creating public and professional spaces in which locally produced short films can gain visibility.

These examples should not be viewed as direct evidence of a causal relationship between a particular short film and later professional success. Rather their significance lies in demonstration of their potential as one component of a broader professional pathway.

This opens up a bigger debate for Uzbekistan: how can environment surrounding young filmmakers be strengthened so that short film production leads to greater opportunities for learning, recognition and professional collaboration?

5. Developing a Short Film Ecosystem in Uzbekistan

By functioning not only as an annual screening event and by combining several complementary activities, a specialised national short film festival could provide one practical response. Based on the literature discussed above, the following framework is proposed for a specialised short-film festival in Uzbekistan:

Component	Function
National competition	Visibility and professional recognition
Mentoring and workshops	Development of directing, writing and production skills
Industry meetings	Contact with producers and cultural institutions
International partnerships	Exchange and access to international festival networks
Project development	Support for promising projects beyond short film stage
Digital distribution	Wider national and international audience access

Table 1. Proposed components of a short-film talent-development festival in Uzbekistan.

Source: Author's proposal based on de Valck (2007), de Valck et al. (2016), Mehta (2017) and Rossiter (2023).

According to de Valck, such a model would reflect the wider understanding of festivals as spaces of professional passage and network formation (de Valck, 2007). At the same time it would respond to the conditions of contemporary creative labour where professional development depends also on access to networks, opportunities and institutional support (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Rossiter, 2023).

In order to facilitate the connection of film education with professional practice the festival could be linked to film schools and universities enabling the participation of students and recent graduates in competitions and workshops. Whereas experienced Uzbek filmmakers could provide mentoring and international programmers and producers could contribute to juries and professional sessions. An additional opportunity lies in bringing together the contemporary filmmaking with Uzbekistan's film heritage. For instance, archival screenings could be presented alongside new short films allowing young filmmakers to encounter earlier national cinema while introducing historical works to new audiences. While digital platforms could further connect historical and contemporary materials.

From this standpoint the short film development can be linked to a broader cultural strategy, where film heritage is something to preserve and simultaneously a

resource through which new generations can develop creative knowledge and cultural identity.

6. Conclusion

A short filmmaking can play an important role in the professional development of emerging filmmakers due to their relatively manageable production role allowing experimentation and practical learning, while festival circulation can create opportunities for recognition, networking and further development.

The research on creative labour and screen careers showcases that emerging filmmakers require more than technical competence, meaning practical experience, confidence, reputation and access to networks (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Mehta, 2017; Rossiter, 2023). While the film festivals can contribute by functioning as sites of cultural recognition and professional exchange (de Valck, 2007).

Such international examples as *Bottle Rocket* and *Whiplash* demonstrate how short films can sometimes become bridges towards feature filmmaking, while the cases of Umid Hamdamov and Anvar Safaev illustrate the relevance of short film production within the Uzbek context.

Hence by combining competition with mentoring, professional networking, international cooperation and project development the festival could become a part of the infrastructure for discovering and developing new filmmaking talents. For Uzbekistan, the development of a specialised short film festival could therefore be more than a cultural initiative.

Moving forward the connection with film heritage is equally of high value. Such an approach as bringing historical cinema into a dialogue with new short films would position a short filmmaking within a wider cultural ecosystem linking education, heritage, digitalisation and creative industries. Since it could help ensure that preservation and contemporary production are not treated as separate processes.

The short film can therefore be understood as a launchpad - a relatively accessible space in which young filmmakers can experiment, develop professional

identities, enter networks and create projects that may contribute to the future of national cinema.

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