Sustainability reporting in project-based industries
a European study with a focus on the motion picture industry

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“Sustainability reporting in project-based industries: a European study with a focus on the motion picture industry”
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Abstract

Project-based industries (PBIs) and more specifically the motion picture industry (MPI) are industries with fluid workflows composed of non-standardised routines. The constant and massive employment of resources on an industrial level (energy usage, waste production, ephemeral decors, food consumption, transportation) generates a considerable negative impact on the environment. These industries are not striving towards sustainable development due to their ever changing work processes but have still not suffered from consumers’ backlash as many others are currently experiencing (fast fashion).

Nonetheless, sustainability reporting (SR) is a rising phenomenon among MPIs due to an increased awareness about climate change and the need to shift business priorities towards a triple bottom line approach.

With the employment of the major theories traditionally used to explore sustainability reporting, this thesis analysed the current stage of sustainability reporting practices in project-based industries with a focus on the motion picture industries in Europe (UK, France, Italy and Sweden). To reach this purpose, a theoretical triptic supported the argumentation: the institutional theory, legitimacy theory and stakeholder theory were employed in synergy.

Eventually, researchers confirm that SR is a rising practice and that it is not harmonised among its users. Given the lack of tailored legislative framework, organisations adventure themselves into self-assessment and third-party assessment with incohesive methodologies. Overall the motivations behind such a transition mainly emanate from personal conviction for sustainability, rather than established institutional or social pressure. Lastly, collaboration and stakeholders considerations are a reality and contribute to a more genuine engagement of MPIs into SR.

Keywords: Sustainability Reporting, Institutional theory, Isomorphism, Homogeneity, Legitimacy theory, Stakeholder theory, Project-Based Industries, Motion Picture Industries
1. Introduction

In this section, the researchers frame the context of this research by describing the background of sustainability reporting and its scope in this context, with specifics in regards to project-based industries and the motion picture industry in particular.

1.1. Sustainability reporting: history and development

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as the “view that a corporation has a role in society to assume responsibilities to pursue goals and profit maximisation” (Werther & Chandler, 2016). Organisations have thus various levels of social responsibilities that incite them to more moral and harm-free behaviours. Bowen in 1953 gave one of the first definition of CSR and described it as “[. . .] the obligation of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (Bowen, 1953).

Beginning of the 19th century, economic growth and first environmental considerations started inciting companies to develop sustainability reporting (SR) practices (Christofi, Christofi & Sisaye, 2012). Sustainability reporting has recently been theorised and classified under the category of social and environmental accounting (Da Costa Tavares & Dias, 2018) and is often referred to as non-financial reporting.

In the late 1990s, series of scandals (Bhopal, Chernobyl, etc.) created defiance from the public opinion towards corporations and increased pressure on them, described to the public eye as irresponsible (Christofi et al., 2012). Large clusters of stakeholders such as NGOs and civil society started to openly express their dissatisfaction through the rise of cheaper communication channels: as a result, companies felt the need to be more transparent. Eventually, companies started to disclose more about their activities but limited this reporting to financial and quantitative elements (Al Amosh & Mansor, 2018). This new trend also illustrated a shift from closed and independent systems to more open systems (Tolbert & Hall, 2009), integrated in a globalised economy.

Through the creation of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in 1997, sustainability reporting became accessible to a larger array of organisations throughout the world. This period also corresponds to the rise of sustainability reporting in corporations (Buhr, Gray & Milne, 2014).

However, even with various existing international standards and frameworks, sustainability reporting is not always implemented. One explanation is that SR is not legally binding and is subjected to power relations within organisation (Brown & Degan, 2009). In other words, if managers are willing to introduce SR practices the whole organisations will follow suit. If managers don’t understand the business opportunity SR can represent, they are less likely to comply because they will consider it implies communicating bad news about their performance to the public (Pedersen, Neergaard, Pedersen & Gwozdz, 2013). Understanding the economic benefit that companies can generate from SR becomes a major stake for consistent reporting practices.

1.1.1. The emergence of international standards

As introduced above, companies are exposed to external pressures to report. In this context, and considering the emergence of the global economy, international standards had to be created in order to harmonise SR practices.
When evoking international standards in the field of sustainability reporting, one shall consider the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards. Indeed, the latter appear as the most world renowned standards in SR (Isaksson & Steimle, 2009). The GRI Standards were created in 1997 by the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). Initially, GRI Standards appeared in a period where voluntary sustainability reporting was already in place in some companies. The issue however was to make use of the results on an international scale. GRI Standards thus came with the objective of providing a general framework that would help standardise and increase the comparability of the reports between firms. The framework is based on five principles: inclusion of stakeholders, balanced global process, full use of communication technologies, transparency and efficiency (Lynch B., 2010).

Although GRI Standards are now a major tool to produce SR, some other frameworks shall be mentioned such as the UN Global Compact and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (Vigneau, Humphreys & Moon, 2015).

1.1.2. State of CSR legislation in Europe

Sustainability reporting has been covered in the EU legislation notably through the adoption of the Directive 2014/95/EU that is aimed at supporting the implementation of sustainability reporting in large companies. This Directive has been translated into currently adopted national legislation in some Member States.

Overall, the role of legislation has been proven to have a key effect on CSR disclosure: the European Union has been driving the attention to environmental issues since 1972 (UN, 1972). Since then, many are the regulations that have been implemented in the participant countries, with particular depth in regards to recycling and discharge, in order to foster sustainable innovation while minimizing the harm produced by the former (Delbard, 2008). Nonetheless, the private sphere has seen an increase in flexibility in CSR regulations, which, of voluntary nature, point towards vague indicators. Furthermore, a lack in law reinforcements has had a direct correspondence on the levels of coherency and depth of reporting among industry peers, who, in many cases, can feel free to report as little or as much information as they’d like to provide (Delbard, 2008). When sustainability legislation is loose, industries tend to feel “lost” and consequently, diverse and non-comparable standards are employed in the attempt to produce the required sustainability report.

A first assumption made by the researchers affirms that the legislative framework might not sufficiently ignite organisational change in MPIs towards the adoption of sustainable practices. This assumption is indeed later verified in this thesis.

Generally speaking, sustainability reporting is not a new idea and it is an accepted practice by many organisations of all kinds. The ever stronger concern regarding the need to preserve current and future generations, and for companies to generate positive impact, gives SR more and more relevance and legitimacy. Still, some companies seem to be missing the sustainability turn and undertake the shift at a slower pace.

1.2. Project-based industries (PBI): an antithesis to SR?

Project-based industries represent a very peculiar type of organisations, which consequently raises many different assets to take into consideration when analysing their approach towards sustainability reporting.
1.2.1. Non-standardised workflows

Although many newborn companies are now developing sustainably from the ground up, the implementation of sustainability policies, and consequent reporting, has been an enormous phenomenon hitting all sectors of the economy (Ceres Report, 2014).

It is however particularly challenging to report for sustainability in the case of project-based industries: flexibility and dynamism are at the heart of these organisations, which, working with non-standardized routines, have to adapt and thrive in unstable environments. (Abrantes & Figueiredoa, 2013). Aligning and auditing the workflow to sustainably conscious policies while managing tailored, unpredictable, workflows is a hard challenge that has been presented to project-based industries (PBIs).

This study therefore, focuses on exploring how the work of PBIs can be accounted for without fitting into a single, stagnant reporting framework, but could rather aim to develop a tailored, flexible framework, within the boundaries of benchmarked indicators in order to ensure cohesiveness and comparability.

1.2.2. A strong turnover

The strong turnover of material and human resources is a key characteristic of project-based industries, as the latter aim to provide tailored, one of a kind products: in the case of construction companies for example, each new building commission represents new structural and logistic challenges, which see the employment of specialists, new materials and development of techniques and one-off solutions (Özdemirici, 2015).

Furthermore, geographical nuances can influence the employment of different resources: again with the example of the construction industry, different materials and techniques might be employed depending on the weather, purpose, height and location of the commissioned building. At this point, human resources with the required skills will be employed.

In this regard, this research proceeds to highlight how the motion picture industry has similar turnover due to logistical and artistic needs and constraints. At the same time, it is also a case of communication: with every new project, comes the challenge to effectively communicate the organisation’s efforts and needs to a new set of stakeholders. Be it internal, such as employees and administrators, be it external to the firm such as financiers.

This requires to master all of the sustainability argumentations, including the moral and economical, to truly reflect the potential benefits of sustainable implementations and consequent accounting. Clearly, this is a difficulty in all fields, but it is especially relevant in PBIs as the aforementioned turnover is constant.

1.2.3. European indicators vs. specificity

When looking to tap into non-financial accounting, European project-based industries need to also take two aspects into consideration. Firstly, strict environmental regulations have been implemented by the EU in various industrial processes in recent years (Directive 2014/95/EU), but at the same time, very loose CSR guidelines are actually being given to organisations. This is undoubtedly linked with the broad and democratic nature of the European Union: although ruling over all of its state participants, its legislative and administrative powers are still formulating broad and generalised legislation in order to produce relevant and adaptable content for each and every European organisation.

At the same time however, the discrepancies that arise when comparing the employment of EU indicators, such as CO2 emission levels, with industry or regional specific indicators are undeniable.
One of the pillar principles of corporate social responsibility, is indeed the need for each organisation to formulate a CSR policy that truly reflects its work and impact, taking all of its internal and external processes into consideration (Werther & Chandler, 2011): this principle highlights the need for specificity in regards to industry-specific indicators when accounting for sustainability.

Once again, the non-standardized nature of PBIs adds an additional layer of complexity: not only do the indicators need to be industry specific, but it is advisable to tailor indicators and accounting processes to each and every project. Clearly this generates the concern of generalisability and comparability, so the fine balance between project-specific and comparable indicators has been kept into consideration when gathering insights from the data collection process of this study.

1.3. The case of the motion picture industry (MPI)

The motion picture industry, which is the focus of this research, represents a peculiar type of PBI: with a strong influence of both tradition and innovation, this industry has in recent years started to adopt sustainability reporting practices and protocols, but many are still the unclear elements in its implementations.

1.3.1. Big polluter

First and foremost, the MPI finds its biggest sustainability-related challenge in its great role as a polluter: among pre-production, shooting and post-production, this industry has little competition when it comes to carbon emissions, natural landscape exploitation and resource consumption. Studies from UCLA (Report 2006) have proved that many are the departments and actions that contribute to the pollution generated by the industry, although two main fields are always highlighted by researchers as being the most prominent: energy consumption and waste management. According to the UCLA report, the MPI is the largest contributor to air pollution in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, surpassing sectors such as aerospace, hotels and apparel. Although this data is not relevant to the scope of this research, it is only one example of many in which research, focusing on a specific geographical area, has proven the significant impact that productions can have on their grounds (Özdemirici, 2015).

In terms of energy consumption, similar data can be drawn from the Albert report, a yearly report produced by the UK’s frontrunners of sustainable development in the MPI, BAFTA: in 2017, the film and television industry in the UK consumed 150 million kWh of electricity, 7 million litres of diesel to fuel generators and 280 million km in air travel. These numbers are the equivalent of an industry which, in a one year span, produced power to light a bulb for half a million years, while filling 90,000 bath tubs with diesel and circumnavigating the globe 7,000 times with air travel. (Albert report, 2019).

1.3.2. An influential industry: leadership opportunities

From a different perspective than that described in the previous paragraph, the industry finds itself in an advantageous position: the general public is in fact highly exposed to its products and, although unaware of its processes, it has been made clear that audiences around the world are pushing for sustainable development (Le Temps, 20/05/19). With highly visible change agents, such as actors and directors, the filmmaking industry could be a catalyst for sustainable change due to its visibility and popularity: in this regard, it is therefore believed, that sustainability reporting alignment of the former could be at the forefront of development for many other PBIs in Europe (Victory, 2015).
Furthermore, the MPI could be of great influence amongst its peers and for new and traditional media thanks to its visibility: news about a film production can indeed easily make it into the news and could therefore exploit this advantage to become a front-runner and lead many other, less fashionable industries by example. Researchers Branco and Rodrigues (Branco & Rodrigues, 2008) have highlighted key factors influencing companies when disclosing information in regards to their actions: their claims refer to evidence showing that companies with higher visibility, consequently exhibit greater concern to improve corporate image. If framed in the context of the MPI, it is clear that a great leadership opportunity lays in this tension. Although this has paradoxically not been stressed thus far in this field, many of the informants of this research believe that indeed this is one of the biggest sustainability selling points for the industry going forward.

1.3.3. Plots vs. practices

A secondary, more immediate, paradox can be found in the discrepancy between plots and practices: whereas the contents of film have in recent years turned an eye to environmental and societal issues (Erin Brockovich 2000, Wall-e 2008, Avatar 2009), the same cannot be said for the attention given to their respective production practices. The synopsis are subject to constant scrutiny by media, peers and audiences, but the issues regarding industrial habits are left overlooked.

Much too frequently, the rare instances in which the two conversations merge are those of environmental documentaries (Our planet 2019): this is however only one very small portion of the industry and not even the most representative of its practices. While documentaries take a considerably smaller number of crew and resources, the production of fictional feature films requires, as highlighted above, to move a village (Bordwell & Thompson, 2011).

Therefore, another parameter analysed in this research is the apparent discrepancy in awareness and communication between the plot and production practices of the final products: interestingly enough, this also doesn’t seem to be a selling point for producers, who are choosing to not prioritize this discussion when promoting their films, as later presented in the analysis section of this study.

1.3.4. Absence of research and frameworks

In addition to what described in the paragraphs above, the MPI is globally lacking sustainability regulations and consequent reporting standards (CineRegio Report 2017).

Admittedly, various sustainable filmmaking protocols were put in place around the world in recent years: nonetheless, different laws and regulations alongside cultural and logistical differences among countries, have, as of now, made it impossible to unify these protocols under one trademarked domain (O’Brien 2014).

Similarly, academia has not put emphasis on analysing this industry under the lens selected by the researchers: much has been written in regards to social aspects of the craft, although once again mainly focusing on the content of the films, such as gender representation, inequalities and natural habitats exploitation. Very little, on the other hand, has been published in regards to the industrial nature of the MPI and even less in regards to its practices in the frame of sustainability: the researchers were not able to find any meaningful theoretical study or model framing the issue or giving structure to all of its tensions. Once again the researchers do not have a clear opinion on why this might be, but the overarching belief is that the entertainment industry as a whole, because of its leisurely nature, is still underrepresented and under-studied by academics.
1.3.5. Uneven development: self-reporting phenomenon

Furthermore, drawing from all of the aforementioned considerations, one very evident element of uneven development can be highlighted: the phenomenon of self-reporting. Once again, discrepancies run through the industry, with some bodies and organisations choosing to develop protocols and frameworks to aid their environmental reporting in partnership with environmental agencies and certifiers, and with others choosing to self-assess according to a self-established set of guidelines.

The researchers do not intend to express a preference toward either of the two, but it is relevant to notice that an initial hypothesis can be put forth: self-assessments can signify a learning experience and tool to give the power to its users and consequently instruct them and guide them through all of their sustainability-related issues, but it can be at the same time a weakness as it can lead to poor quality of data collection and confusion in the proper indicators to choose. Furthermore, as previously highlighted, this phenomenon has not been contributing to a harmonised integration of frameworks on a European level, leading once again different organisations to follow similar, but different paths in sustainability reporting.

1.4. Conclusions

In conclusion, project-based industries and the motion picture industry in particular, clearly present great challenges when facing the implementation of sustainability reporting. Nonetheless, the latter are immersed in a society where pressure is arising from both internal and external stakeholders and the need to comply, to become better corporate citizens is present. Furthermore, the lens of the MPI reveals a strong paradox where despite the strong influential potential, few are the reporting initiatives and none of the latter have yet contributed to a harmonised framework suitable for all.

Consequently, in the next sections, the authors question and analyse the reasons behind the discrepancies and paradoxes, to paint a holistic picture of the matter at hand.
2. Purpose and problem formulation

In this section, the researchers present the problem previously introduced, while framing the purpose of this study in relation to both theory and practice. Eventually the research questions are presented.

2.1. Problem formulation

The researchers have thus far highlighted how sustainability reporting is not a new concept in academia and that literature has documented the phenomenon broadly. Additionally, some existing global standards are available for organisations to implement sustainability reporting practices without being forced to produce new frameworks of their own. The work is being facilitated also by dense legislation that creates ever more justification for organisations to comply. Namely GRI Standards and regions such as the European Union have greatly contributed to making SR sore since the years 2000s.

However, some companies are still lagging behind due to the very nature of their industry: European project-based industries still have improvements to make and stages of development to go through before being able to report for sustainability and reclaim the valuable impact of their actions on society and on the planet. Moreover, such organisations rely on non-standardised working routines, rapid turnover of human and good resources. This study is therefore prompted by the researchers’ interest in understanding the reasons behind sustainability reporting for an industry such as the latter: non-standardized routines seem indeed incompatible with meticulous accounting, so why comply?

Furthermore, the motion picture industries in Europe are heavy polluters and so far research has not uncovered the dynamics of their production practices in academia.

Indeed, sustainability reporting in motion picture industries has been poorly documented in research although the level of impact of MPIs, especially determined by the level of pollution, energy consumption and waste, has already been documented (UCLA, 2006). Furthermore, the large consumption of plastic, chemicals, textiles, and other material resources required to execute a film production translates into a considerable negative impact on the environment.

It is however to be noticed that this industry, alongside being financially influential, with the capability to truly invest in sustainable development and consequent accounting, is equally influential on society, being able to shift mentalities in the public opinion through the content it produces: this is a strength that few PBIs can claim to have and it’s famous how, through their values and imagery, films have at times changed the face of history (Bordwell & Thompson, 2011). At the same time, the methods with which their content is produced are not consistent with the values transmitted in some of the most sustainably conscious sinopuses: in order to identify said discrepancies, this study aims to analyse the role of sustainability reporting in European motion picture industries.

2.1.1. Structure overview

Firstly, the aforementioned theoretical framework, in which the research questions are anchored, will be presented. Subsequently, methods of data collection will be exposed along with the methodology motivating the choice of the latter: a combination of semi-structured interviews and empirical data analysis will be employed to implement the interviewees’ contribution with the pre-existing material on the matter. This will be followed by an analysis of the results and conclusive discussion of the latter, where considerations about the feasibility of a holistic sustainability protocol for the EUMPI are advanced. Eventually, final recommendations and conclusions close this study.
2.2. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is therefore to explore the sustainability reporting practices in project-based industries, with a focus on the European motion picture industry using a theoretical triptic composed of the institutional theory, legitimacy theory and stakeholder theory. Meeting this purpose was also hypothesised to have practical implications: the elaboration of a holistic, modular sustainability reporting protocol for the European motion picture industry. This was not met due to later findings, but this research has nonetheless contributed towards the development of the latter, as explained in future sections of the study.

The novelty of this research resides in the combination of an integrated view of institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theory in the analysis of project-based industries in the act of social and environmental accounting.

2.3. Research questions

More specifically this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons for the lack of cohesion in sustainability reporting practices and protocols in the European Motion Picture Industry scene?

This research question aims to touch upon Europe’s CSR policy paradox and differences arising in legislative reinforcements.

2. How are social norms influencing the European motion picture industry scene towards sustainability reporting?

This research question aims to touch upon the type and intensity of pressures that MPIs are facing and legislation versus voluntary paradigm.

3. How do non-standardised industries such as MPI collaboratively work towards harmonised sustainability reporting practices?

This research question aims to touch upon the multi-stakeholder approach and industry tendencies to generate communities of practice.
3. Theoretical background

In this section, the authors draw a picture of the theoretical framework employed for this research: institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theory are individually explored and later declined in their contribution to sustainability reporting as an integrated trptic.

Lexicon disclaimer: unless otherwise specified, the researchers will employ the abbreviations of IT, LT and ST to respectively refer to Institutional, Legitimacy and Stakeholder theory.

3.1. Institutional theory (IT)

The institutional theory explains how organisations, pushed by social values and norms, tend to imitate each other, especially when being part of a same organisational field.

Bureaucracy and efficiency can no longer explain why organisations are more and more similar: new forms of harmonisation between companies have emerged out of different ways organisations structure themselves. It is true to say that organisations do not differ much from each other in the way they are structured and behave. This lack of variation has been theorised by DiMaggio and Powell in 1983 as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) also referred to as homogeneity. Once an industry is well established, the homogenisation of all organisations, including newcomers, is increased.

In such context, SR can be seen as an example of a harmonised practice towards an increased level of sustainability commitment within an organisation. This compliance to disclose information would be fueled by external pressures in relation to a greater awareness in the general public of sustainability having become a priority in the agenda.

Among the overall pressures any company might face, researcher Gauthier has identified two patterns in the adoption of sustainable practices: the determinant approach and the interactive approach (Gauthier, 2013). The researcher explains that organisations are framed by shared norms in a specific context that he names organisational field. Taking the example of increasing environmental norms in some states, companies are expected to comply and modulate their activity as well as their structure. This first category echoes DiMaggio’s concept of isomorphism that is further developed below. The interactive approach differs from the previous as it considers pressures emanating from groups rather than norms.

3.1.1. Isomorphism

Sustainability reporting (SR) is the practical outcome of companies’ will to be seen as responsible stewards of the Earth and society. Acknowledging that there are some pressures emanating from their environment, companies tend to seek security in the public opinion by adopting behaviours that are judged as being positive. Thus, their decisions do not appear from nowhere.

On the contrary, they are framed and grounded in a set of social norms produced by their environment (Da Costa Tavares et al. 2018). In order to appear as good corporate citizens and avoid scandals and loss of good reputation, organisations will imitate behaviours of their peers. This process is called isomorphism and is a concept pertaining to the field of institutional theory, in which this research is grounded (DiMaggio et al., 1983; Da Costa Tavares et al., 2018).
3.1.2. Three forms of isomorphism

Companies are now open-systems which means they are interdependent (Tolbert et al., 2009). The institutional theory generates from the idea that organisations are often very similar in the way they are structured (Di Maggio et al., 1983). In addition, DiMaggio and Powell identify three types of isomorphism: coercive, mimetic and normative. Coercive isomorphism can be related to more powerful and authoritative structures pressuring some others. One example of that are the legislative bodies that exert organisations to comply with newly adopted legal frameworks.

Mimetic isomorphism processes derive from the previous example and take place in times of uncertainty: for instance, in times of pressure to embrace and accelerate sustainable development, companies are more likely to copy the successful models of other organisations. This behaviour is at the intersection between pressure from the outside, and fear of the unknown. Organisations will then make improvements by pure imitation of what already exists in similar settings, although it can also be described as an opportunity to compete against peers from the same field.

Eventually, the normative process stems from greater professionalisation of labour. After 1908, the rapid spread of fordism as a new way to organise factory labour can be cited as an example of normative isomorphism. The latter is also stimulated by technological breakthroughs by competitors from the same industry.

3.1.3. Project-based industries and the institutional theory

Project-based industries (PBIs), and most specifically the motion picture industry, form an organisational field in and of themselves and are likely to adopt an isomorphic behaviour. By essence, PBIs are organisations where knowledge sharing and organisational learning are fostered.

Rousselière and Bouchard (2011) identified factors that foster isomorphism: funding sources, types of competition (public or private regulations) and goals of the organisation. Similarly, the European MPIs are highly homogeneous because their economy is fueled by film funds that are often public, bounded to the same regulations and comprising of the same objectives even though the products are one-off solutions and never identical (De Vinck, 2014).

In addition, the EU context has been greatly increasing the conditions for homogeneity in SR due to harmonised legislation (Directive 2014/95/EU). However, although valid for big corporations, the latter is yet to be applied in PBIs. On the other hand, given that MPIs are used to collaborating on transnational bases, hence increasing the heterogeneity of professionals on set, the industry has been calling for unified measures and practices to make collaboration feasible with efficiency (CineRegio, 2016).

These higher levels of interdependence demonstrate that PBIs are subject to constant assessment by their peers, underlying the existence of a very specific form of pressure. In addition, sustainability awareness is enhanced among the general public but also among professionals: in both categories, pioneers are currently starting to pressure MPIs to act towards sustainable development with the employment of best practices on and off screen. This is also a relevant connection with the legitimacy theory, which is later discussed in this section.

Given these elements, the institutional theory seems perfectly fitting in the ongoing conversation about sustainability reporting in the motion picture industry, as it sheds light on the behaviour adopted by MPIs as a consequence of both sustainability awareness and responses to pressure. This is however challenged by the later findings and discussion of this study.
3.2. Legitimacy theory (LT)

When organisations fail to comply to social value systems, they are perceived as harmful and lose credibility in the eyes of their stakeholders: they suffer from a loss in legitimacy.

Companies need to honor their social contract in order to be recognised as legitimate and achieve their objectives. Failing to do so, leads to a loss of their credibility and their reputation risks to sink in the eyes of the general public but, more importantly, of those of customers and partners. Furthermore, organisations also need to differentiate themselves from their competitors, in order to maintain novelty and legitimacy on the market. The legitimacy theory explains how organisations claim their uniqueness in order to convert their good deeds into increased profitability (Gray & Laughlin, 1995; Camodeca, Almici & Sagliaschi, 2018).

The aforementioned has also been described by researchers Chen and Roberts (2010) as an overarching theory of the institutional theory and the stakeholder theory: the authors claim that the institutional theory reinforces the value system that is comprised in the legitimacy of organisations and that the stakeholder theory, which is developed later in this section, changes that same value system. Legitimacy is thus directly influenced by these value systems, that are fluctuating in accordance to stakeholders and social patterns. Other researchers have distinguished a pragmatic legitimacy, closer to the stakeholder theory, and a moral legitimacy, similar to the institutional theory (Mahadeo, Oogarah-Hanumana & Soobaroyen, 2011). Similarly here, LT seems to be overlapping with both IT and ST.

What is more, Brown and Deegan (1998) have studied the correlation between good perception by the media and levels of disclosure in companies. But even when the LT is used to analyse the way organisations communicate their operations in order to gain legitimacy, it is necessary to highlight the limits of such correlation as researcher Craig Deegan (2002) suggests. He argues that LT still remains an under-developed theory:

There are many "gaps" in the literature which embraces legitimacy theory. For example, do legitimising activities actually work, and if so, which forms of disclosure media are more successful in changing community views about an organisation (...)?

Academic literature has failed to provide conceptual tools to help organisations implement LT: this might be an explanation for the various non-cohesive sustainability reporting practices that have emerged in the hope of filling the academic gap.

3.2.1. Sustainability reporting and the legitimacy theory

The legitimacy theory comes into consideration when translating an organisation’s commitment into practice. Indeed, literature has proven that legitimacy theory is relevant to provide a theoretical framework to social and environmental accounting theories, other denominations of sustainability reporting (Chen et al., 2010; Mahadeo et al., 2011; Gehen & Hassan, 2015; Da Costa Tavares et al., 2018). The latter comes into play as a disclosure instrument for organisations that wish to demonstrate their compliance with social norms (Brown et al., 2002).

Sustainability reporting thus constitutes a unique opportunity for organisations to display their good faith in their commitment to fit the social expectations of their environment (Brown et al., 2002). It can also represent a risk as the information disclosed will be open to the scrutiny of...
everyone, including competitors. When organisations manage to disclose consistent and reliable information, they are able to prove their full compliance to what is expected from them (labour conditions, environmental impact, values, supply chain, etc.). The more transparent an organisation, the greater its legitimacy to operate in its environment: yet, the adoption of SR practices even if motivated by a strive for more responsible corporate behaviour, is not an easy task. Researchers Beck and Dumay (2017) highlighted said process in any given company: they conclude that a proactive attitude is also necessary to meet strategic legitimacy objectives “rather than letting the guidelines [such as GRI] dictate reporting content and practice (…).”

Additionally, reoccurring reporting increases long-term strategic accuracy which can eventually prevent organisations from suffering from reputational crises. Logically, the acceptance level of any brand that wishes to set up in a new market will prioritise carefully curating its reputation in the latter. Similarly, predominant characteristics should not be overlooked in the attempt to focus on social and environmental indicators: when discussing corporations’ benefits, one cannot omit the direct economic impact the organisation will have on the market.

Indeed, branding and image strongly depend on the legitimacy of an organisation. Notably, the more compliant the organisation, the better the image it will have in its customers’ minds (Da Costa Tavares et al., 2018).

3.2.2. Legitimacy theory and crisis avoidance

Another relevant application of the legitimacy theory lays in risk mitigation: the former can in fact help to manage crises in which the organisation is perceived as not genuinely committed to meeting social expectations. Researchers Seele and Gatti (2015) argue that greenwashing occurs in the context of pragmatic legitimacy: the latter was often found linked with the process of purposefully misleading stakeholders’ perceptions about corporate environmental and social actions. These processes employ a strategic approach to mishandle and manipulate information, leading to the misrepresentation of symbols to gain legitimacy from stakeholders.

As the negative impact on the environment rises, companies have to employ more resources and time to try and disclose extra information in order to prove their good faith. As a consequence, it is expected that organisations with lower negative environmental impact will disclose more positive information (Da Costa Tavares & Dias, 2018, Cho & Patten, 2006).

The legitimacy theory seeks to explain all processes aimed at repairing, defending and helping to face any threats related to a lack of legitimacy. Eventually LT is a valuable organisational attribute with which organisations can gain, extend and maintain their position on the market and to the eyes of their primary stakeholders (Da Costa Tavares et al., 2018).

Furthermore, LT is a key concern for organisations as it touches upon their reputation and their legitimacy to operate in a given environment, which provides the set of social norms that organisations have to comply with. According to Herold (2018), with an increase in sustainability awareness on a global scale, the importance of LT will proportionately rise and, altogether, sustainability reporting practices are going to increase from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.

So far, IT and LT have demonstrated that the influence over an organisation’s behaviour can come from the outside and from within, through various pressures, and be taken into concrete actions which include the case for sustainability reporting. This conversation continues with the last section of the theoretical triptic: the stakeholder theory.
3.3. Stakeholder theory (ST)

When organisations are structured in harmony with their industry’s practices and manage to comply with societal standards, they have successfully met their stakeholders’ expectations. Consequently, when stakeholders are satisfied, the latter will positively contribute to the organisation’s thriving in its environment.

When considering stakeholders as being any entity that affects or is affected by the operations of an organisation (Harrison & Freeman, 1999), the stakeholders of one single corporation may already be plethoric. Furthermore, stakeholders are closely related to the compliance level to social norms of the organisation on multiple perspectives.

3.3.1. Internal and external stakeholders’ influence

ST indicates that in order to fulfill the compliance process, an organisation has to consider its stakeholders’ opinion both externally and internally. Researchers Chiu and Wang (2015) determined a relation between sustainability disclosure quality and the consequent level of influence held by stakeholders. Internal stakeholders to an organisation are those contributing to its daily operations, mainly comprising of employees of the company. From a management perspective, stakeholders are included in the elaboration of strategies towards sustainability-compliant behaviours. As a consequence, top level managers do not hold the same level of influence, thus level of expectation, than a middle manager.

On a macro level, external stakeholders also detain a variable level of influence: be it an activist NGO, a customer association or a governmental body, each of these groups expects certain moral guarantees and standards from the organisation. These expectations will logically be depending on the information those stakeholders can be given access to. Literature also documents the notion of quality applied to stakeholders like Manetti (2011) who has demonstrated that the quality of stakeholders is critical to ensure consistent reporting with the core values of the organisations.

3.3.2. Sustainability reporting and the stakeholder theory

Various stakeholders imply different interests that the organisation has to meet. In order to satisfy those by increasing transparency, companies are incited to produce sustainability reports (Mierlo (Van) & Beers, 2018). Another reason for a company to produce SR, in relation to ST, is to reduce the information asymmetry (Herold, 2018; Mierlo, 2018) described as the “unequal dependence” of stakeholders to the released information.

Indeed, NGOs and other activist groups will seek different type of information compared to investors or governmental bodies. Sustainability reporting might thus appear as a solution, especially when complying with international standards.

Hence, the stakeholder theory proves its relevance when in relation to the study of SR in motion picture industries as it connects the influence of the industry with its need to increase and improve SR practices.
4. Methodology

In this section, the researchers identify their methodology, comprising of a relativist approach, with constructionist epistemology, inductive reasoning and a meso-level focus. Furthermore, reliability, validity and generalisability of this study are discussed.

4.1. Ontology and Epistemology

From an ontological perspective, this study has adopted a relativist approach, where the researchers recognise the existence of multiple truths, motivations and understandings of sustainability reporting and that these truths are, paradoxically, both characterised by strict rules and methods, as all accounting is, but at the same time, high subjectivity when put in dialogue with the different actors of the European MPI.

Moreover, different informers and protocols have highlighted different points of view in many areas of sustainability reporting, strengthening the researchers’ hypotheses described above; when analysing social and environmental responsibility for instance, the relativist approach grants a broader outlook on the landscape of the industry’s impact, with many indicators and equal sets of priorities to take into consideration.

Consequently, the epistemological lens for this research has been constructionist: indeed, organisations shape society, but the reverse is also true, as society is a reflection of how organisations behave. In this sense, sustainability reporting frameworks and legislations have direct correlations with the real world and the latter strongly influences the decision-making of the former on existing concerns and pressing issues to ensure a rise in quality of life on Earth.

Finally, the researchers’ study design is based on inductive reasoning: with the aid of a thorough literature review and the analysis of many industry reports and documents, the researchers have felt confident in advancing the hypotheses and research questions mentioned in previous sections and have therefore moved from those onwards into research and data collection. In some instances, the interviewed informers have questioned the researchers’ initial beliefs but the latter have not suffered considerable revolutions.

4.2. Research Design

The choice of topic of this study, sustainable reporting in the European MPI, has been selected because the researchers believe it to be information rich and illuminative. The study’s sampling is aimed at gathering insight into the specific phenomenon, resulting in a purposeful intention, as opposed to reaching for an empirical generalisation applicable to a larger sample of population.

Consequently, this research has been designed to explain the topic at hand on a meso level: the researchers aim to explain the interactions occurring between entities of the MPIs during their adoption of sustainability reporting, in order to highlight their synergies, motives and interplay with the theoretical framework of the institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theory.

Furthermore, the data collection is motivated by the following characteristics and interests: firstly, it is driven by previous personal experience as one of the researchers has had direct contact with the case at hand. The researcher’s experience in implementing sustainability on a film set and consequent insight gained from said experience, is an important foundation of the inquiry as the initial
understanding, observations and assumptions grounding this study come from fieldwork in the area of sustainability reporting for a European co-production feature film.

Secondly, the researchers have found great interest in the dynamic nature of the topic at hand: the former have indeed placed special attention to the process of sustainability reporting and are aware of the ever-evolving implementations and changes in the scope and target of interest of the latter. Whether coming from an informer’s interview or the review of industry documents, the researchers are mindful and attentive not only to the system itself, but also to its constant changes: this also includes current developments of the European social and environmental legislation, alongside a strong ongoing discourse about climate change and the rise of self-reporting trends among industry professionals.

All of the above therefore justify the choice of employing a qualitative approach, as the researchers aim to analyse and create an in-depth set of data about a complex, ever-changing environment that cannot be quantified as the sum of its parts.

Finally, data will be consequently gathered through semi-structured interviews, aided by the review of academic literature and coding of industry documents, to provide useful tools and reflections to the aforementioned methodology. Pre-assumptions and hypotheses from the researchers have been tested and revised by the answers of all interviewees; similarly, the discussion and conclusions have been shaped to reflect the findings of the data collection and analysis.

In conclusion, the researchers are reflective of their own voice and perspective: qualitative research is indeed closer to individuals’ perspectives and subjective outlooks by nature (Silverman, 2015), therefore the former aims to strike a balance between exploring and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while self-analytical in one’s consciousness.

4.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis has been conducted with a holistic perspective: the phenomenon of sustainability reporting is, in fact, a complex system, comprising of national and European legislation, network, knowledge sharing structures, organisational best practices and individual perspectives. Furthermore, the discipline of sustainability calls for a holistic approach in order to shine light on complex interdependencies and system dynamics that, in project-based industries especially, call for tailored and flexible solutions. Variables have therefore been framed within traditional sustainability models but it is also to be noted that the novelties of the data set have required additional outlooks.

The combination of interviews and industry documents review has been read and analysed with the employment of the institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theory: the researchers believe that, not only the latter are individually relevant to the matter at hand, but that furthermore, the interaction between the three has been able to provide true insight into the complex levels of sustainability reporting.

The institutional theory has been kept as foundational of this exploration as its premise, the fundamental tendency of organisations to imitate and interrelate with each other, is believed to be of key importance for the analysis of spontaneous reporting practices that have been happening in the field. Furthermore, the legitimacy theory has provided the lens of validity into the analysis: although the interviews’ outcomes differ on this point, it is undoubted that the desire to seek validation and accreditation in the field has led many companies to implement sustainability reporting.

Finally, the stakeholder theory has been a useful backbone throughout the entire study, as the cooperation among stakeholders has not only significantly shaped the current state of sustainability reporting in the European motion picture industry, but it has also been recognised, in unanimity by
all interviewees, as the priority to improve current practices and truly push the industry forward towards a deeper understanding, implementation and sharing of such practices.

The researchers also believe all three theories to be of crucial contribution for the practical outcome hypothesised in this study: the protocol discussed in the conclusions of this thesis would be of no use for professionals if it didn’t get institutionally recognised to be given validity for a broad set of colleagues and peers.

Consequently, the following paragraph will highlight the level of reliability, validity and generalisability of the methodology and theory outlined above.

4.4. Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

As previously described, this study has been conducted with a qualitative approach, mainly informed by semi-structured interviews. Although all of the questions asked have been shaped by the aforementioned theoretical framework, this study is still therefore dependant on the acquired responses: nonetheless, semi-structured interviews still guarantee the creation of a common ground for all informants, which can be comparable and generalised, to then allow for space to freely deepen the conversation into each individual’s experience, granting depth of scope. Therefore, although at different stages of awareness, the researchers believe that the data collected can be still considered as reliable.

Furthermore, the researchers trust that the same questions, asked to other European informants working in the motion picture industry, could attract similar results if proposed again within a reasonable span of time: it is indeed relevant to recognise that the questions are very time specific. In the next five years, as it was noticed in the last five years as well, many will be the regulations and protocols that will have evolved and the methods employed in this research would have to be revised. Similarly, the dynamic environment of Europe could lead to each member country to shift its level of awareness, legislation and sustainable development, consequently leading to a shift in the research outcomes. Nonetheless, consistency has been ensured in the framing of all questions, across different sectors and data is believed to be comparable because of the attention being placed on previous research and on national peculiarities.

As a consequence, the validity of the data has been confirmed: the latter’s quality and usability relies on consistency in methodology and methods, which are applied to a broad set of informers in the fields of work surrounding the European motion picture industry.

Furthermore, the quantity of the data collected also ensures validity: nine interviews have been conducted alongside the analysis of existing reporting frameworks, protocols and an academic literature review.

Finally, the strong grounds of this research can grant generalisability to the acquired outcomes: the synergy between the institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theory has been indeed researched in the past and this study aims to strengthen the latter’s applications for project-based industries: therefore, although through the distinct lens of the motion picture industry, the researchers believe the results to be applicable and of use to all future academics looking to take this research further and apply this theoretical frameworks to various project-based industries looking to venture into sustainability reporting.
5. Methods

In this section the authors address the scope, sample and methods for the data collection and analysis of this research. A comprehensive list of interviewees and protocols is presented.

5.1. The scope: geographical considerations

The aim of this research is to analyse the current sustainability reporting practices in the European motion picture industry. At the end of this first wave of research, the feasibility of a practical outcome, the elaboration of a holistic and modular sustainability reporting framework for the industry, is discussed. In order to achieve both of the aforementioned, a thorough understanding of the current level of sustainability reporting in the motion picture industry is needed.

The case has been therefore unfolded as follows: starting from the UK, country that the researchers hypothesised as being the most knowledgeable and data rich, the foundations of the study were set. Consequently, the research moved onto the two European countries that have been considered as in the midst of development in this field, France and Italy. Finally, this research finds closure in Sweden, which introduces this study to a paradoxical instance, to which the researchers from now on refer as the *nordic paradox*: although ranking high in all European sustainability reports and although arguably strongly *sustainability aware*, Sweden is currently not implementing any non-financial reporting practices in its national motion picture industry.

The choice of this progression was made on the premise that the United Kingdom was believed to be, as the data collected confirms, the frontrunner in the European region in regards to sustainability reporting in the industry: with it’s nation-wide accepted protocol Albert, this country has set a standard and example that the researchers believed important to highlight at the starting point of the research to inform all further data, setting the foundation of the legislation prerequisites and methodology for implementing cohesive sustainability reporting.

After the initial foundation, the research was stirred in the direction of France and Italy: as the majority of film productions in Europe consist of co-productions amongst its countries, the researchers found relevance in researching the next two biggest European players in the industry. This step is also validated by the level of inspiration that these two countries took from the UK when deciding to adopt sustainability reporting and is equally relevant due to the strong collaborations that these countries have engaged in recent years (CineRegio 2016): diverse, multilingual crews always meet on European film sets and, in order to unify sustainable behaviours and therefore give strength to the reporting frameworks, the researchers believed it important to focus on the two aforementioned countries.

Undoubtedly, France and Italy are at very different stages of development, but they are both characterised by a lack of legislation in regards to non-financial reporting, poor communication towards the benefits that the latter would bring and overshadowing scepticism about the whole matter.

Finally, Sweden’s *nordic paradox* is met when researching sustainability reporting in the industry: no protocol nor guidelines have yet been implemented, nor outlined to reach this purpose. Furthermore, the researchers found relevance in analysing Sweden due to their current residence in the country, but most importantly due to a past conversation (see Appendix nr. 3) had by one of the researchers and a key Swedish informant, who claimed that although working as the producer in the
most influential film fund of the country, major issues of lack of communication and collaboration amongst peers were still the biggest concern for the industry, leaving all conversations regarding sustainability reporting in the back rows.

Naturally, the researchers acknowledge the national differences in context, as well as cultural characteristics: systems and dynamics are highly influenced by levels of bureaucracy and administrative rigidity for instance. Furthermore, certain countries might be more centralised, some have more flexibility on a regional scale. Some even might have a larger movie picture economy than others. As a consequence, these discrepancies have been taken into account when analysing data and elaborating this study, but the researchers believe the latter to be, nonetheless, of little relevance if compared with similarities across the sample, when working towards the refinement of a unified protocol.

5.1.1. Lexicon disclaimer: European region vs European Union

The researchers acknowledge that the current political state of the European Union might soon feature the exit of the United Kingdom. However, the latter is one of the analysed countries and, to the day of publication of this study, the researchers can still interchangeably employ the terms “European Union” and “European region” as synonyms.

5.2. The sample

In order to paint a holistic picture of the studied topic, the researchers selected a sample of diverse individuals: as mentioned above, different countries are also at different levels of development in the industry, so the latter have in the past years generated different job positions and roles to tackle sustainability reporting on productions. Therefore, the sample is comprising of producers, film commissions, certifiers and super partes, neutral organisations operating in the field of film production and distribution.

The first category selected for this research are producers: whether employed by a production company or working independently, producers plan, coordinate and oversee the whole process of film production, from script writing to post-production and distribution. They are also often responsible for finding funding for their productions and are ultimately the decision makers in terms of resource allocation (Bordwell & Thompson 2011). The researchers have interviewed two producers who have dealt with sustainability reporting and practice implementations on their sets: a production director of an Italian independent film production company which developed the first sustainability reporting protocol in the country, and a Swedish producer in charge of the sustainability programme developed by the country’s most prominent co-production film fund.

Secondly, the researchers gathered information from film commissions: located in most regions of Europe, film commissions are public, non profit organisations which are designed to aid productions looking to shoot on their grounds. They provide local crew professionals, specialists, legal and administrative support.

The researchers have interviewed two film commissions: firstly, an Italian FC which implemented a protocol with indicators and suggestions required to produce on the land and also allowing productions to enter competitive film grants with additional “green” credit. Secondly, the researchers also interviewed a representative from the European network which provides a platform for all European film commissions to meet, share knowledge, best practices and opportunities.

Furthermore, the researchers found that certain countries employed third party certifiers to assess the progress of their film productions: consequently, two French organisations were interviewed. The
first stands as the *de facto* eco-production tool provider working on a voluntary basis as a collective of multiple media institutions. The second is an established company which directly intervenes on set, with the presence of an eco-manager who implements sustainability measures and later collects data to produce a final protocol.

Moreover, as Sweden was found at the beginning stages in this field, an additional informant from a sustainability consultancy agency aiding organisations to implement relevant long-term sustainability processes and reporting practices was interviewed.

Finally, two neutral bodies were investigated: firstly, the head of industry sustainability of the most prominent British charitable academy of arts was interviewed. This organisation has been at the forefront of sustainability reporting in the television and film industry in Europe since 2010, when the first European carbon calculator tool was introduced and later demanded of all productions filmed or broadcasted on national channels. This tool has to this day been developed to be comprising of a nation-wide accepted calculator and certification, currently exported in various countries overseas.

### 5.3. Data collection methods

Researchers explain their data collection methods and the reasoning behind the choice of semi-structured interviewing and protocol coding.

#### 5.3.1. Semi-structured interviewing

In order to gather the aforementioned information and insight, the researchers adopted the method of semi-structured interviewing. This choice matches the researchers’ methodology as semi-structured interviewing is one of the most common research methods applied to qualitative research: this is because interviewing has “an interest in understanding experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013).

Specifically, the peculiarity of semi-structured interviews resides in the mediated nature of their relationships: interviewer and interviewee go through initial fixed questions, followed by probing, introspective and insightful follow-ups. The first allow the interviewer to cover pressing issues, dodging the risk of neglecting the needed data; the second, distinctive of a less structured style, allow to obtain unexpected but fortuitous information through a more conversational interaction (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

The researchers therefore employed this as their primary method of data collection, interviewing the aforementioned sample: the latter was interviewed remotely, via Skype or phone call and had one hour long recorded conversations with the interviewers. The choice of online communication was driven by logistic circumstances as almost all interviewees resided in a different country from that of the interviewers; either way, the researchers believe that this method provided a relaxed environment where interviewees felt free to express their insight and doubts related to the matter at hand. In this regard, all interviewees were also provided with a confidentiality form that ensured the trustworthiness of the researchers and reassured them in expressing their honest insight. The interview guide, the confidentiality forms can be found in the Appendix (nr.1/2). The transcription of relevant interview passages are available upon request.

All of the questions asked had the aim to distill the interviewees’ opinions and perceptions of the phenomenon of sustainability reporting in the motion picture industry in relation to the theoretical framework of the interaction between the institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theories. A table summarising the interviews conducted can be found below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Using SR?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABM</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Sustainability consultancy</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Yes (but not from MPI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Spokeswoman</td>
<td>European Film Commission Network</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Head of industry sustainability</td>
<td>Neutral body</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Yes (indicators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BK</td>
<td>Policy Officer</td>
<td>Environmental EU Agency</td>
<td>Eu</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Sustainability movie certifier</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Yes (indicators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Producer</td>
<td>Production company</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Yes (indicators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Spokesman</td>
<td>Film Commission</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Yes (guidelines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Project Manager and spokeswoman</td>
<td>Sustainability movie certifier</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Yes (indicators and guidelines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>Producer</td>
<td>Film Fund</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1**: interviewees’ roles and characteristics

5.3.2. *Industry documents review and coding*

To support the process of interviewing and obtain a holistic perspective, the researchers have also reviewed and coded the main protocols currently employed in the countries analysed. To do so, the researchers have gathered all of the information openly provided on the Internet and have also asked to have access to disclosed reporting procedures.

This process can be still considered of qualitative nature as it collects qualitative data regarding the protocols and allows for comparison between the latter, for intuitive understanding and quick referencing.

The criteria selected for coding were drawn from the main features of the protocols themselves, with special attention to Albert (UK), which, as previously mentioned, can be considered as the frontrunner for the industry.

The importance of this data and of its consequent analysis is deeply connected with the aim of this research: it is in fact the premise of this analysis to highlight the importance of correct structuring of the reporting of best practices. The implementation of the latter alone, accompanied by the perceptions and opinions of professionals would have lacked information and knowledge provided by the actual protocols that producers have access to: it was therefore believed essential to accompany interviews with the coding of industry documentation, in order to produce an informed and well-rounded discussion section.

A full table of the coded protocols can be found in the Appendix (nr.4) and considerations from the comparison between the latter is later presented in the analysis and discussion section.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Country or region of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Year of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>whether the protocol is employed nationwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislated</td>
<td>whether the protocol has been legislated or made mandatory by law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessing</td>
<td>whether the certification is based on self-assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certifier</td>
<td>if not the above, what organisation is responsible for certifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators or Guidelines</td>
<td>whether the protocol suggests guidelines or provides quantifiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>indicators with a points scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to norms and standards</td>
<td>whether the protocol refers to standards recognized beyond the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>industry (ISO, Ecolabel...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbon calculator tool</td>
<td>whether the protocols provide a tool to calculate the production’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit stakeholder integration</td>
<td>whether the protocol explicitly requires the production to make an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>effort in communicating the policies to internal and external</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attached toolkit</td>
<td>whether practical tools, spreadsheets and links are attached to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated over time</td>
<td>whether the protocol has been updated with industry benchmarking and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other consequences of its applications in the industry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**: the criteria selected for protocol coding and meanings

### 5.4. Data analysis methods

Finally, the researchers gathered all of the aforementioned data and employed theories to analyse it. The latter were used as a filter among all data in order to highlight main patterns in the findings and track common themes and limitations.

Mainly, the authors looked at institutional, legitimacy and stakeholder theory to properly sort and compare the data: based on these theories, also employed to produce the interview guide enclosed in the Appendix (nr.1), the researchers employed inductive reasoning to hypothesise the outcomes of the data collection process and concluded that the parameters for analysis should be the following.

This approach was based on the premise of grounded theory analysis (Silverman, 2015): the researchers indeed developed inductive analyses from an initial research, literature review and protocol coding, to subsequently shape their interview guide to gather further data towards the latter. In this instance, the purpose of grounded theory is met: the frames for analysis were constructed by this reasoning rather than described and deducted in a second time.

Naturally, some categories of analysis were not generated by pre-emptive grounding of their structure, but rather appeared secondly and were simply deducted by the findings.

In conclusion, the following parameters were selected to inform the interview process and to later provide clarity and structure, while also giving depth and relevance to the interviewees’ answers in the discussion of the synergy between theory and practice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Level of individual and organisational awareness towards SR practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Biggest difficulties in implementing SR in the industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Biggest difficulties and incentives in communicating SR to the internal and external stakeholders towards increasing sustainable development of SR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparability</td>
<td>Risk of lack thereof due to national/regional protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimation</td>
<td>Whether it is felt by those who implement SR or provided by peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>For implementing SR (if not above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>To conform: internal or external, whether SR was initiated because of it; caused by whom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Sources and types of resistance from implementing SR in the industry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

table 3: parameters for data analysis and meanings
6. Empirical Data Analysis

In this section, the authors present the research findings divided in main themes resulted from the interview process: the latter are critically discussed in integration with the theories selected for this study and the data resulting from the coding of the protocols.

6.1. Protocol Coding

The initial portion of data analysis consisted in the coding of four different protocols originated and employed in the countries of study. The following were coded to inform the discussions with the interviewees and obtain a well rounded framework to analyse the matter at hand. All of the following have been indeed discussed with at least one pertinent interviewee to gather information about their use, strengths and weaknesses.

As mentioned above, it is interesting to verify that indeed each country and organisation developed its tool from the ground up, resulting in a series of discrepancies and differences: the main resides in the choice to either frame the tool with quantifiable measures, often accompanied by carbon calculations, or to opt for cautious guidelines. Secondly, some of these tools have been developed in agreement and partnership with environmental agencies in order to ensure their compliance to the broader landscape of non-financial reporting, while others were developed from the inside, in accordance to the needs and requirements of professionals on set.

All of the latter have been summarised in the following table and also coded at length in a table found in the Appendix (nr.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ecomuvi</th>
<th>Ecoprod</th>
<th>T-green Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country (region)</td>
<td>UK (+more)</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislated</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External certifier</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>ICEA</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators-Guidelines</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Detailed guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to norms and standards</td>
<td>Yes (Industry benchmarks)</td>
<td>BS 8909 - UNI EN ISO 14001;2004 - UNI ISO 20121:2013</td>
<td>Ecolabel · Presta dd · LUCIE - ISO · Ecocert · Cosmetique · BIO · BDHI charther · AFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbon calculator tool</td>
<td>Albert Carbon calculator</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Carbon Clap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit stakeholder integration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advised and methods are suggested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attached toolkit</td>
<td>The whole tool is a toolkit + YT tutorial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (car pooling sheet, CO2 sheet, Km tracking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated over time with applications?</td>
<td>Yes, the industry has benchmarked itself</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: findings from protocol coding
6.2. Analysis of findings

In the upcoming sections, the researchers analyse the aforementioned findings, divided in the major common themes that were discovered among interviews and protocol coding.

6.2.1. Carbon calculation and offsetting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABM</th>
<th>AM</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>FA</th>
<th>LF</th>
<th>PG</th>
<th>RF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>very relevant</td>
<td>very relevant</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>very relevant</td>
<td>relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The extent to which the interviewees believe in the relevance of carbon calculation and offsetting

In majority, sustainability protocols focus on carbon calculation due to the urgency of taking action against climate change as several informants have expressed. Consequently, researchers have identified a gap in focus on other aspects of sustainability. Indeed the social and economic perspectives are most of the time, if not systematically, ignored by the MPI.

In addition to this emphasis on environmental criteria, informants highlight the need for scientific and quantitative indicators to successfully measure their impacts: this tendency towards data has been declared as ideal by all MPI informants, while ABM interestingly suggests that prioritising the latter has been seen as detrimental by professionals in other fields, as the social impact of industrial processes has been found to also play a crucial role in reporting. In this instance, the scientific approach adopted by MPIs can be seen by the researchers as unawareness, or refusal to address the social impact of the latter. As discussed later in the analysis, the MPI is a very traditional and know-how-based industry where changes are not motivated by the necessity of a change in processes, but rather by the necessity to serve an artistic vision.

Sometimes these priorities end up with an oversimplification of the areas of interest for the reporting. Furthermore, the accounting of such precise and dependant figures represents a complex challenge for the industry: informants indeed highlighted the time consuming and intimidating nature of this process, suggesting that its introduction could “scare professionals” away from accounting. Additionally, this complex set of data, once collected, needs to be treated: the whole process has been described by the informants as equally burdening. For small scale production companies, this cost shall be neutralised: this is where the role of an external body (see third party assessment and eco-manager sections), who would take charge of this responsibility, can enter into consideration in order to alleviate both workload and time management.

Connecting this data back to the theoretical framework employed in this study, results in an overall awareness of the need for sustainable practices by the informants representing countries with the largest film industry. As a result there is a form of latent pressure that professionals feel and yet, some act on it and implement new practices while others deliberately ignore these considerations. Not out of bad will, rather due to limited resources and because of the absence of mandatory legislation and frameworks.

Here the institutional theory proves its first limits: the pressure generated by peers from the same industry is perceptible, yet it does not play a decisive role in the action taking. Umbrella organisations and a set of relevant stakeholders are necessary players to turn this pressure into relevant actions. The institutional theory provides its fullest potential when accompanied by strong stakeholder considerations in implementing change. Both institutional and stakeholder theories work in synergy.

When interrogated on offsettings and ways to compensate emissions, a majority of informant have declared that such practices come as a complementary action to carbon calculation. Yet, it is perceived differently among the latter: AM has indicated that it represents a moral imperative and as such represents a type of extra pressure coming from within an organisation. Italian informants on the contrary, shared that it appears to them as a last resource option, alluding to little awareness and
knowledge about the inner workings and potential benefits of this practice. Overall it seemed clear to the researchers that offsetting is not perceived as an equivalent to direct carbon calculation. Another reason for that is that the legitimacy of the compensation “rules” are challenged: who will ensure the accuracy of the data? How do we know if the company has really operated the compensation? How should it work?

Eventually, offsetting and compensation triggers scepticism in the eyes of the informants and suffers from a lack of legitimacy as a practice due to the unanswered questions surrounding its application.

6.2.2. Genesis: pressure or voluntary?

Surprisingly, none of the informants expressed to feel under direct pressure to report for sustainability, neither from peers, nor from investors. Still, it is interesting to signal that most of the initiatives to implement SR in this industry stem from personal conviction from top managers. Researchers have thus distinguished between direct pressure exerted by the industry itself (tough competition, selling point, etc.) and indirect pressure, rather inspiration initiated by a genuine will and commitment towards change coming from leaders of the industry. As a result, the institutional theory is here further challenged and does not seem to be explaining the movement behind the birth of SR practices in MPIs. Our informant from the UK, considered as the leader in the field of SR in the European MPI, stated that the genesis of his current protocol and carbon calculator stemmed from “curiosity”. In light of the awareness of the researchers in regards to the time and resource constraints of the industry, this position struck as interesting. Indeed, it is fascinating to encounter such a bold stance, when admittedly no direct pressure, no identified business need, many obstacles and no clear directives or legislation are currently in place for the initiative of sustainability reporting in the field. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the European Union has not put forth any directive to enhance the homogeneity of such practices.

The inspirational movement triggering SR practices therefore raises the question of whom is creating this inspiration: as mentioned earlier in this paragraph, the latter is not found in industry peers.

Still, actors are at times pushing for different and more responsible practices, out of personal belief: CG highlighted that some actors favour organic food and cruelty-free makeup while on set. Those requests, that cannot be defined as “pressure” per se, are nonetheless a way to evaluate the level of personal awareness which might influence their surroundings. However, as later discussed in relation to the influence paradox of MPIs, society has thus far not been able to do the same, as the level of awareness of the polluting nature of the industry remains null.

Furthermore, many interviewees agree on the difference that monetary rewards and pressure would make: all agree that it would be the most efficient solution to move towards sustainable development, but as the industry is not perceived as being a heavy polluter, such publicly funded actions fail to target MPIs. The Italian example of LF, responsible for the regional film commission economically rewarding sustainable productions, illustrates that money can be used as an incentive for the industry to enact and account for sustainable practices. However, the French example contradicts this idea: the industry is heavily subsidised by a centralised organisation attached to the Ministry of Culture and yet, no efforts to finance sustainable behaviour from MPIs through the use of SR have been implemented thus far. Here the monetary argument is not contingent to any positive initiative.

In conclusion, none of the protocols here analysed were born out of external pressure, but the latter, combined with internal motivation, is a key success factor of the future steps of the industry towards sustainable development.

6.2.3. Third party assessment
Crucial to the outcomes of reporting is the act of assessment: defined as the act of judging the amount, value, quantity and importance of something (Cambridge Dictionary), the latter has seen the interviewees divided. Specifically, the informers have expressed different opinions about the need for the industry to rely on third party assessment rather than self-assessment: the protocol coding has indeed highlighted the different requirements in this regard advanced by the different countries and entities analysed.

On one side, the two most developed protocols, and their correspondent informers don’t express a need for third party assessment: in the case of the UK, the network and establishment around the nation-wide protocol has ensured the presence of a community of professionals and peers to keep the calculator tool accountable. Similarly, in France, the lack of resources and perception of higher commodity, has led the industry into self-assessing practices through the use of the carbon calculator and guidelines.

Both these countries showcase an interesting approach: although most developed, they show signs that contradict the general perception of “better controls, best result”. The researchers can therefore conclude that in these instances a promise of legitimacy does not imply the adoption of isomorphism and homogeneity: the two parties adopt the view of “start with something as long as you start” and this is in direct contrast with Italy and Sweden. However, it is to be noted, that an interesting point was raised by ABM: self-assessment, although denying the guarantee of high quality data, remains a good tool for individual and organisational learning, advancing the workers’ understandings of the impact of their actions and therefore encouraging change by example in future instances and projects.

On the other side, all Italian professionals have expressed a strong preference for third party assessment: most likely due to the national cultural context, with the country featuring at 52/100 on the 2018 corruption index (Transparency International, 2018), Italian professionals agree that third party assessment grants legitimacy to the tool, comparability to the outcomes and consequent reliability of the sources. The protocols developed in this country both highly rely on the competencies of the agencies checking on their structure and processes, binding this phenomenon with a higher sense of professionalism and legitimacy in the industry; similarly, comparability is seen as crucial when matching sustainability indicators among peers. Finally, the ability to produce believable thresholds guarantees the realisation of what the institutional theory identifies as the key characteristic of organisations: the need for homogeneity and isomorphism in the field.

Nonetheless, it is again highlighted that third party assessment requires an expense of resources to develop a tool and keep flows of communication with the third party itself: this is however, in relation with the stakeholder theory, a clear indication of a clearer short and long term vision. In the short term, it is understood that all internal stakeholders will be able to execute their jobs with ease if aided by a third party, increasing time-saving processes and overall benefits for the production; secondly benchmarked standards and tools that refer to a third party agency are here perceived as a “one time investment” which provides long term legitimacy and return on investment.

In conclusion, the need or desire for third party assessment is highly dependant on the national context in which the protocol is embedded, with Italian professionals and protocols showcasing a traditional mistrust in institutions due to historic corruption, but also to the level of development of the tool itself: self proclaimed legitimacy is here gained with a higher quality tool, discarding the need for an external stakeholder to assess and ensure accountability. Finally, the employment of successful third party assessment is proven to be linked with savvy management of stakeholders: although this topic will be discussed later in this research, the authors can highlight that communication, engagement and delegation to and with stakeholders, are success factors when it comes to third party assessment.
6.2.4. The role of the Eco-manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABM</th>
<th>AM</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>FA</th>
<th>LF</th>
<th>PG</th>
<th>RF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>unsuitable</td>
<td>very relevant</td>
<td>very relevant</td>
<td>very relevant</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: the extent to which the interviewees believe in the relevance of the figure of the eco-manager

In order to aid the assessment and reporting procedures discussed above, the role of eco-manager (also called green manager and environmental steward) has been introduced in the industry. Due to the lack of harmony and binding environmental requirements of productions, the actual tasks and responsibilities of the latter remains vague: most specifically, the entity of the tasks, the location and time specifics of the job and its placement in the hierarchy of the production, remain arbitrary. This generates further complexity when analysing its potential benefits on set.

Various interpretations of this figure, not yet established on many sets, have led interviewees to various opinions about the latter: resistance mostly comes from the argument of integration of this figure on set. Film crews have indeed had fixed and defined roles on sets for decades and it is hard to believe for some interviewees that a new figure, introducing a whole new way of working and consequent expectations, would be integrated into the daily routine of a set. Moreover, their legitimacy is also threatened by the fact that decision-making on set heavily relies on the production department, especially on line producers and organisers: a person new to this field would inevitably clash with the needs and understanding of the latter, resulting in a feeling of imposition and waste of financial resources, as some interviewees also point out that the employment of a new person would also signify the expense of a considerable sum of money.

On the other side, many are the interviewees and protocols which demand the presence of an eco-manager on set: this role is mainly intended either for a person from production appointed to environmental surveillance or as a consultant, an external figure to monitor and gather data from afar. Both of these positions highlight the importance of this role as a key player to ensure legitimacy and understanding of the sustainability measures employed by the production and later reported by the latter.

It is interesting however to notice that the majority of those in favour of this figure has missed to highlight the time-saving benefits of employing one on set: while the business case for this role is somewhat accepted, the latter is clearly not seen as necessary, but rather as a plus, hence the lack of consideration for its time saving benefits. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice a lack of strategic thinking even in the most proactive of views, highlighting once again the difficulties for the motion picture industry to truly embrace change and transition out of outdated traditions and processes.

One original point of view has been in this regard provided by ABM who, not being directly involved in the MPI, but rather in sustainability reporting, has highlighted the possibility of peer-to-peer accountability: film professionals are indeed accustomed to high mobility across jobs, so a new practice could stem from professionals introducing virtuous practices and gaining new ones on each set, appointing a new surveilling individual on every new film set.

Finally, all of the interviewees and protocols agree on the importance of the eco-manager to be only an executor of a higher power: the producer is always seen as the figure to choose to embark in sustainability and consequent reporting. The latter is seen as the primary enforcer of this choice on set and the sole responsible for its effective application and legitimacy. This stance is once again reflective of the theoretical framework of this research, which has showcased the importance of “enlightened” leaders when implementing transparent and long-lasting sustainability reporting practices.
6.2.5. Legitimacy considerations

The argument for legitimacy, both of the tools and practices of sustainability reporting, has been foundational for this study: nonetheless, interviewees and protocols have showcased a number of points of view and understandings of the latter. First and foremost, the seek for legitimacy has been found to be only a marginal motive to employ sustainability reporting: none of the interviewees finds this to be yet of relevance, in accordance to the low level of development of the industry in this regard. Furthermore, many have declared it hard to identify: whether in the tools and protocols or in the legitimacy provided for those employing the latter, interviewees seem to find it hard to comprehend its scope. As previously mentioned, the choice to only calculate Co2 emissions for example, is a major point of discussion: alongside misinformation and scepticism, legitimacy has been partly related to the issue of self-assessing, ultimately resulting as a useful tool for those who are previously motivated. In the case of the latter, the protocols and guidelines currently in place, can grant numbers and data of meaningful nature, to kick start conversation and discussion among peers and suppliers. In this regard, in fact, the example of AM is enlightening: with a perfected tool providing large quantities of cohesive data in regards to the industry consumption and needs, legitimacy is gained in the eyes of suppliers. AM has indeed reached out to energy companies and was able to obtain the most advantageous deal on renewable energy for its clients on the market. This is a result of, not only a skillful set of professionals and tools, but also of their established legitimacy.

Nonetheless, many positive reporting endeavours still stem from individual motivation: as previously discussed, no pressure has come in the genesis of these practices. This is however counterproductive in regards to gaining legitimacy in the field: these individual beliefs and practices need to be translated into a holistic methodology employed by the industry. Taking this developmental step would in fact imply the establishment of feedback loops among peers, granting double loop learning (Tagg, 2007) for the organisations involved in these processes and ultimately a gain in legitimacy and coherence in the reporting practices. This has been seen as true and relevant in other industries as highlighted by ABM: many other fields spend vast amounts of money to gain legitimacy with their reports, this is especially true for industries which produce products or services directed at the final consumer. Although these considerations seem to apply to the MPI, this has indeed not happened and this paradox will be later discussed in this research.

Furthermore, what has been highlighted by interviewees is indeed the lack of true meaning behind sustainability reporting practices: many have showcased how a lack of holding environment (Heifetz, 1994) translates these practices into mere, empty bureaucracy; the latter is also finally connected with a seek of image boosting for brands which employ SR for untruthful marketing schemes. In this regard the researchers have found the occurrence a vicious cycle:

\[
\text{no tools in place} \rightarrow \text{no legitimacy and no data to show} \rightarrow \text{no (or empty) communication} \rightarrow \text{no awareness} \rightarrow \text{no interest} \rightarrow \text{no tools in place}
\]

In this regard, there is a clear connection with the individual motivation argument, which seems to suggest that only these highly driven individuals might be able to break this cycle.

In conclusion, the seek of legitimacy, contrary to the researchers’ hypothesis, has been identified as secondary to the matter at hand. The latter seems to be stagnant among two opposite forces: on one end, legitimacy seems to be gained by the simple recognition of a “green logo” provided by any certification, on the other the latter seems to be irrelevant due to the lack of awareness and interest for sustainability in the MPI field.
It is therefore to be hypothesized that the low level of development in the field of sustainable filmmaking, and consequently of sustainability reporting, is hindering the seek of legitimacy amongst professionals and will therefore be found in a later stage of development.

6.2.6. Stakeholder considerations

Stakeholders are key players in the work of MPIs, as the work of one actor of the industry is strongly contingent to constant collaboration, especially in the European setting, where co-productions among nations are the norm. This section will first cover the different types of stakeholders identified and their ways of interacting with each other. Later, the discussion will focus on two different means of communication, using stakeholder perspective.

First of all, internal stakeholders (employees, staff on the set) are the first who should embody the change and promote it throughout the structure. In that regard, the know-how of the profession is automatically respected along with the technical expertise and artistic vision of a given project. This notion of keeping the work done in the hands of professionals preserves from potential imposition of practices that are foreign to the industry: internal stakeholders thus guarantee that expertise and practices are respected. PG from France emphasised that a SR protocol on set has to be implemented by a staff team member as any other external participant (SR consultant) would be negatively perceived by internal stakeholders. When thinking of internal protocol users, one might also consider professional actors as a relevant source of mainstreaming of SR practices.

As aforementioned, CG from France indicated that some actors are demanding sustainable alternatives on set as directly motivated by personal sustainability concerns. Actors could indeed have a major role in increasing outward visibility of SR practices on a set; apart from CG, informants had very little to no knowledge of the potential of such promotion by actors. However, the exposure and visibility that the latter benefit from is deemed as crucial when trying to spread the word.

A way to spread sustainability best practices and tools has been encountered by the researchers in the presence of communities of practice by informants (Wenger, 1998). The French example of PG is an interesting one: her organisation is composed of authoritative and independent media institutions in France which freely allocate some of their time to develop SR tools. This organisation relies on contributions from a community of professionals also working full-time in their own media group: the structure works as a voluntary-based, nonprofit collective. Ideally, the community of practice they form would engage a series of stakeholders to exchange best practices and update each other’s knowledge on various matters. In reality, follow-up plans as well as long-term engagement with their protocol users are lacking, which could, at the end, have an impact on their level of legitimacy, according to the researchers: the lack of integration of those professionals into an integrated sustainable vision for change calls for stronger stakeholder management.

Beyond management, other qualities are missing when pushing for action. One answer to this dilemma can be found in the economic argument: LF clearly indicates that a solid economic structure to encourage SR would greatly contribute to strengthen stakeholder collaboration. Another example provided by ABM and RF emphasises the idea that investors might also find an interest, and be used as leverage, in sustainability reporting. Finally, RF also explains that there are some existing outsourcing issues where Swedish production companies find it less expensive to shoot abroad (eastern Europe) notably for tax advantages. This point also directly connects with the need for political engagement as part of the improvement of SR practices in MPIs. Indeed there seems to be a general political unawareness or resistance to facilitate MPIs sustainable activities. Those powerful external stakeholders are not part of the discussion at the moment, in none of the countries analysed in this research. Furthermore, on an EU level, the situation is no different as later highlighted in the discussion section of this thesis. It is therefore relevant to note that, while these countries were chosen for research precisely due to the very collaborative processes in the region, the findings seem to allude to the opposite.

From a theoretical perspective, stakeholders also have a key organisational role in supporting the communication for change. One of the most prominent showcases for MPIs when communicating
to peers, investors and the general public are festivals. The Cannes, Berlin and Venice film festivals not only create opportunities for filmmakers to display their art, but also allow for spaces and times where professionals can meet and discuss various topics. All informants confirm that the topic of sustainability is always present in at least one, if not more panel discussions during these festivals.

However, FA from Italy has expressed a certain discrepancy in communication during these international events: in other words, although it is an existing topic of discussion, the discourse is still superficial and only consists of either “let’s save the world” talk from actors, or vague and stagnant best practice sharing across professionals. This phenomenon was partly explained by LF: while producers might be enthusiastic about their sustainable endeavours, the communication during press events is filtered by a press agency first, later followed by a distribution agency: the two latter have no priority in communicating for sustainability and the strong leader motivation is lost in the message transmission, hindering further progress in the matter.

Logically, MPIs prove to be aware of the necessary sustainable change they, as an organisational field, have to undertake: a tremendous amount of platforms and opportunities are available for the industry to showcase its engagement and drive for the cause, utilising and strengthening its legitimacy, and yet few are the initiatives in this regard. Legitimacy in connection to implementing change proves here to be irrelevant, with festivals featuring as a big lost opportunity.

Festivals are yet only one of the ways for MPIs to benefit from media coverage. AM from the UK deplores the lack of strategy behind media coverage in regards to climate change: not only was the topic poorly covered on UK media platforms last year (Albert report, 2019), but the latter is also poorly related to business and industry procedures. In other words, the MPI is a business just like any other and, as a matter of fact, its concerns should be structured in the media just like any other. Indeed, despite a constant presence in the media, MPIs are barely reported as being heavy polluters, as highlighted by the introduction of this research. FA from Italy also argues that as long as there will be no political priority revolving around the topic, sustainability in the movie industry will not be covered as such. RF from Sweden shared with the researchers an initiative of a petition to encourage politicians to take action about climate change in the context of the Swedish filmmaking industry.

This was a first step towards a successful campaign that pushed other key players to foment media coverage about the matter. This exposure was soon followed by other actions put in place in order to increase visibility of the topic. As RF described, after the petition was launched “the whole machine started” and gave the opportunity to “scream as loud as [they] could”.

In conclusion, informants showcased that media attention and coverage towards the industrial processes of the motion picture industry, especially in relation to sustainability, remain scarce.

6.2.7. Legislative landscape

All informants declared that their operations are not embedded into a specific legislative frame. Researchers have also initiated this thesis knowing that there was a gap in Europe. The only motivation for interviewees to engage into sustainability thus relies on other forms of pressures (society, culture, traditions, personal commitment) as discussed in section 6.2.2. In this regard, the idea of having an overarching neutral body or super partes has arisen in the conversation with some informants. This neutral body would connect the MPIs with SR practices thus providing a tailored and fair evaluation system. However, the conditions for such establishment to become a reality are not gathered yet. Indeed, it was agreed among informers that the economy would here be the focal point of the discussion: with a shift in funding sources and schemes, the industry could afford to undergo a shift towards sustainable development and therefore consequently engage its stakeholders (customers, investors) in the process. In other words, as long as the audience and investors are not claiming for MPIs to be more compliant with SR, no move will be made: MPIs function on a profit-basis just like any other industry, which implies that the most prevalent and strong pressure will always remain embedded in the funding schemes of the latter.

Due to the absence of European legislation in the field of SR applied to MPIs, as the Directive 2014/95/EU only focuses on corporations disregarding SMEs, some of the informants explained that,
thus far, it has taken bold pioneers to create a mandate in their respective national industries. Such were notably the words from AM, who encourages his peers to take a leap into SR even if legislative frameworks are nonexistent or not perfect from the get go. This argument is related to the perceived urgency of the carbon challenge and climate change threat which is increasingly pressuring companies to take action.

Surprisingly, the climate change argument seems very present in informants’ mindsets overall even if SR cannot be said to be directly connected to it.

Either way, researchers have noticed that climate change is used as an umbrella term to verbally express individuals’ commitment and engagement for sustainability. AM also expressed that the MPI professionals should come together in a community to create their own standards and practices. What could sound as an actual community of practice would naturally also imply levels of peer-to-peer accountability that AM along with ABM, FA and PG are demanding as well. A different perspective has on the contrary been shared by PG who is in favour of a bonus/malus grading system in which the State (or a defined super partes body) would fine or reward an MPI according to its (mis)behaviour in regards to SR and consequent actions taken on set. A similar system has actually been occurring in Italy, where regional shooting (LF) is promoted through a financial reward scheme accounting for the environmental practices during production.

Thus far, SR has overall been proven to be a voluntary initiative in which protagonists might have difficulty identifying the proper methodology to employ: Should it be focusing on carbon emissions? which tools to use? what about the social aspects? Many questions still remain unanswered in face of the changemakers’ notable motivation to act.

In addition, levels of complexity of SR can represent an extra challenge. Indeed, RF from Sweden highlighted that some productions, due to their differences in size, might have more or less difficulties implementing SR. The informant then concludes, similarly to AM, that all MPIs involved should simply “try their best” even when not regulated nor rewarded by legal frameworks. Eventually, the general trend among informants leads to a rather voluntary type of approach seconded by an intrinsic will to act towards positive change. Legislation does not seem to be envisioned on an EU scale as many of the informants fear it would constrain creativity and install unfair requirements on countries at different levels of development. However an overarching body with neutral position could contribute to harmonising SR practices in the profession.

6.2.8. Scepticism and misinformation

As described in other sections, most of the informants are personally aware of the urgency to make a change in their field. Yet some doubts remain.

Researchers have identified different forms of misinformation and scepticism among informants. AM believes that professionals as well as people in general are not necessarily aware of sustainable challenges that the world is facing. In that regard, a pedagogical approach might be needed to raise awareness on a broader scale. This view is also shared by CG and PG who are both personally aware and engaged: both understand the social, environmental and financial opportunities that SR represents in MPI. However, their awareness does not necessarily translate into an understanding of the strategies and actions that should be taken to provoke a change on a larger scale. What is more, awareness does not provide them with authority to implement that sustainable change. Awareness differs from power of action.

A singular view was shared by FA from Italy: according to her, Italy doesn’t recognise cinema as an industry in and of itself. In contrast to all informants, this perception that the MPI is not regarded as a system with industrial processes and needs, might strongly impact the understanding of the informant on the situation and potential solutions to tackle the lack of SR awareness on a broad scale. In other words, this restricted vision also indicates a lack of national development strategies.
Overall, researchers have analysed that throughout the informant sample, despite different positions, backgrounds, experience in the industry, the only common point among all is a level of personal engagement and awareness. Simply put, if an individual is committed towards implementing change, especially if motivated by climate change related issues, it is likely that the immediate surroundings of that individual will be influenced in return. Yet, awareness is not contingent with a full understanding of the bigger picture.

6.2.9. Economic argument: profitability of sustainability reporting

Prompted by the foundational sustainability concept of the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997) (people, planet, profit), the researchers drew attention to the economic argument towards sustainable reporting. The main question was whether SR should be, or is, considered profitable and a selling point to investors and other stakeholders. Interestingly enough, the connection with direct benefit for the virtuous organisation was not clear to the informants and did not constitute an immediate solution. Yet, there is a clear business case for movie industries to engage in such activities, both in terms of immediate and long terms savings, and of marketing strategies when selling a sustainable film to markets and audiences (O’Brien, 2014).

Resistance was found on multiple fronts: firstly, SR has been framed by many interviewees as unprofitable on the short term, currently not able to provide return on investment and therefore seen as an ulterior expense rather than a gain. Two interviewees (RF, AM) framed the matter by showcasing their partial understanding of this investment by highlighting that it could be profitable in the long run, once a set of suppliers and agreements, costly in terms of time and money, would be arranged for all professionals to resource to.

Similarly, the conversations stirred towards a corollary obstacle: that of public money and investment. Many are the film productions in Europe relying on national, public funds: this signifies that a lack of political prioritisation towards sustainability, which is currently the case in many European countries, directly translates into the lack of prioritisation for these funds to reward virtuous productions. At the same time however, LF, who works with a financially rewarded system to encourage and implement SR in the MPI, has received much criticism in his choice of “paying public money for productions to go green”.

Nonetheless, real cost savings opportunities are obvious to most interviewees: simply cutting on old costly traditions that no longer serve a real purpose in the industry, would find the budget for sustainable implementations and reporting costs. Moreover, many are the incentives towards sustainable options, such as electric vehicles, granted harder to source depending on the country of shooting. Either way, European film productions have budgets running in the millions of Euros, hence not truly justifying the lack of investment in sustainable development: it is indeed a matter of short-term vision, where this opportunity is not identified and therefore seized, rather than actual resource scarceness.

Another peculiar point of view was advanced by RF: his hope partially lies in the future ability of countries to fully finance their films. Currently, almost all European film productions consist of co-productions among countries and organisations: this phenomenon sometimes results in the requirement to visit and shoot parts of the film in all of the former locations. RF’s hope is therefore that, by gaining full economic power, productions will be able to shoot on their own grounds, hence being fully accountable for the quality and quantity of resources employed. This seems to be a peculiar understanding of the matter however, because currently, co-productions are vital for the EU film industry as they allow for broader distribution within all of the partnering countries. Moreover, all of the biggest markets are to be found across the region (Cannes, Berlin, Venice) so it is highly
doubtful that a single country would have, even if fully financed, the resources to then distribute its products effectively, broadly and therefore get return on investment.

Finally, there was a common understanding among the interviewees who currently own a protocol: this tool shall not be sold, but rather freely shared across the industry. All interviewees agreed that it should not be the protocol to generate a cost for the production, but should rather be an aid to the latter’s intentions. Furthermore, AM highlights a solid opportunity to gain profit by an indirect use of a well established protocol: the aforementioned deal obtained by AM to supply the UK industry with clean energy at the lowest market price, provided by big amounts of cohesive and high quality data, resulted in considerable cost savings for the industry, thus signifying indirect profit.

In conclusion, the lack of awareness and understanding about the economic argument for sustainability, and consequently sustainability reporting, has been found to be hindering opportunity seeking for almost all of the informants and is believed to be still not perceived by the industry at large.

6.2.10. The comparability dilemma

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Table 8: The extent to which the interviewees believe in the relevance of comparability in SR

Comparability was one of the main criteria investigated by the researchers: in order to gain legitimacy and credibility on the market, it was therefore believed that each tool employed, and consequent certification gained, should find itself comparable to those of peers and competitors. It was hypothesised by the authors that comparability for legitimacy in the act of sustainability reporting would be a key component of the protocols coded: this however proved not to be true and saw the interviewees divided once again. The two dominant perceptions see comparability as a desirable goal not yet achievable, while the other considers many other priorities over the seek of the former.

In the first instance, the interviewees highlighted the lack of competencies in those assessing for sustainability, especially when self-assessing, expressing the need to have a more cohesive system in place to ensure fairness and homogeneity. On the note of fairness, RF also expressed a clear desire from the professionals of Sweden: although very sustainability aware, producers seem to ask for a reliable and comparable system for all productions before employing sustainability measures and reporting practices. This shines light on the lack of personal motivation encountered by RF in his field: it is in fact proven by other countries, and other interviewees, that a fair and comparable system is not always needed to kick start sustainable development on set, but rather a “bold move” from some of the top players in the field. Sweden in this context seems to adhere more to the principles of the institutional theory, suggesting the desire of homogeneity over entrepreneurial ventures into new habits.

On the other side however stands AM, who suggests that comparability is not important as long as one’s tool proves consistent. He believes that the main goal of a tool is to make change happen, to spark meaningful conversation rising from meaningful data provided by the latter. Here a mediated vision of comparability is advanced: AM advances the importance for internal consistency and relevance of the collected data, over any international comparison.
Finally, an interesting point was made by ABM, who faces the daily challenges of comparability in counselling for sustainable development: with the introduction of the GRI standards, many of her clients had a hope for a rise in comparability. This was however proved untrue as many are the areas to benchmark, not just in comparison with others, but also with an organisation’s past, and sustainability data, in this context, has been proven to be poorly treated. In comparison with financial reporting for example, sustainability data is collected and analysed with many assumptions, exceptions and approximations: with low quality data, the understanding and consequent comparability of tools and results seem to sink. In this instance, ABM raises a meaningful question: who needs comparability?. In her experience, she has found that it is much more effective to tell a meaningful story with the sustainability data collected, rather than striving for outer comparison.

In conclusion, the researchers believe that comparability might be soon granted in the national context of some of the interviewees, but that international comparability remains far: with such a low and uneven sustainable development currently taking place in the European MPI, it is early to consider meaningful comparisons. Moreover, with poorly handled data, the discussion seems to fall.

These are the reasons why institutional theory has proven to be still at early stages of development and implementation in the industry.

6.2.11. The Influence paradox

To round up this analysis, the researchers have identified a paradox in the way the industry has been shaping itself to internal stakeholders and the audience’s eyes: although a very prominent and trendy industry, which easily communicates with the hearts and minds of its consumers, the motion picture industry has not used this influence to transform its practices towards sustainability. Individual customers are nowadays more aware and demanding than ever, as the food or fashion industry can demonstrate, but the latter have yet to learn about the polluting nature of film production practices. As previously highlighted, the industry has in recent years shifted towards sustainability inclusive sinopses (Erin Brockovich, Wall-e, Avatar) but the same cannot be said of its practices.

For this purpose, the interviewees and researchers reflected on what this analysis will refer to as the influence paradox: this relies on the missed opportunity to use the industry’s influence to reinforce sustainable behaviours and consequent accounting. Interestingly, most interviewees agreed with this concept and furthermore highlighted that they had used this argument in the past to motivate the introduction of a protocol in their region: this would in fact, some suggest, became legally required in the years to come so that a proactive approach to the matter could guarantee better image payoff, stronger results, longer learning time and finally, higher financial benefits.

All interviewees found it hard to identify the reason for this likely positive scenario to not have occurred: in the case of Italy, both interviewees agree that the matter is not currently high in the political agenda, audiences consequently have little awareness about sustainability practices, concluding that the State still struggles to comprehend and treat the MPI as a real “industry”.

Furthermore, AM reflects on the true nature of the field: the MPI is indeed “just” an industry like many others, it might have peculiar reasons behind its needs, but the latter remain industry-like nonetheless. Renting efficient vehicles, smart transportation, conscious energy consumption are only some of the many mundane needs that this industry showcases. It is in this instance then, that films can set themselves apart from other industrial products. It is in the capabilities of the motion picture industry to communicate a new climate narrative for example. Furthermore, RF interestingly suggests that, while “politicians talk to the minds”, cinema “talks to the hearts”. This defines the opportunity of the field: storytellers to aid politics in transforming conversations and shifting mindsets.
In conclusion, the researchers understand that this missed opportunity is determined by the current low level of awareness, urgency and understanding of the motion picture industry as a full-time, polluting activity prompted by industrial processes. Nonetheless, the researchers and interviewees agree on the belief that this conversation will eventually rise to media attention and individuals’ minds, although hard to tell when and by the hand of which bold professional: institutional and societal pressures have seemingly low impact in the way the industry shapes itself and its behaviours. Indeed, its heavy traditions embedded in artistic visions and know-how have been hindering development and will stop being seen as an obstacle, but rather as an opportunity, only in later stages of its sustainability development.
7. Discussion

In this section, the researchers, now enlightened by the findings, relate all of the collected and analysed data to the initial hypothesis and frameworks while answering the research questions and connecting theory and practice at last.

7.1. Geographical perspectives

The regional hypotheses of the researchers have been met: the United Kingdom, although still undergoing a learning curve and still struggling to transform its endeavours into a decrease in emissions, can be considered the front runner in the industry, showcasing great understanding of the matter, holistic methods and an integrated communication and educational structure allowing organisations for double-loop learning and improvement. Furthermore, out of the countries analysed, the UK is the only one which has been benchmarking its results, generating ever-growing tailored criteria, allowing the protocol to thrive, grow and gain legitimacy in the field.

France and Italy, have, similarly, met expectations: both are currently undergoing sustainable development with the aid of environmental protocols. However, France shows a higher level of homogeneity, as one main tool has been accepted by the industry nationwide, but the latter is lacking in accountability and methodology. The employment of the tool in question is not assessed by any organisation and, similarly, the industry results cannot be accounted for. The carbon calculator and guidelines are left at individuals discretion, missing to produce meaningful data.

On the other hand, Italy has seen the rise of many quantitative protocols, therefore lacking in homogeneity, but providing more accountability, with traceable results and scientific methodology. In both instances, stakeholder engagement and management fluctuate, never truly guaranteeing long-term development and effective communication.

Finally, Sweden has been found very likely to engage in SR practices, but is still in its early stages, learning and testing different tools and criteria, showcasing extreme caution in times of urgency.

It is however most relevant to discuss the possibility and advancement of a holistic European protocol, in light of the insight provided by the two last informers of this thesis: BK, a policy officer for the DG Environment attached to the European Commission and AC, the spokesperson for the European Film Commission Network (EUFCN).

7.1.1. European considerations

Prompted by the question regarding a potential unified European protocol, informers and industry documents paint a divisive image of the matter at hand. Many different areas of this region are still unaware of sustainable production practices, thus not having any perception or receptiveness towards sustainability reporting. Furthermore, the biggest issue with a unified protocol lays in its double nature: on one hand broad enough to be inclusive of everybody’s needs, while detailed enough to be tailored to each project on the other. This, which is seen as an “almost impossible” task (AC), has framed the problem of actually advancing what was initially presented as an optimal, holistic tool.

Nonetheless, many informers agree on the desire to gain a unified protocol in the region: some informers agree with AM in believing that “there’s no reason why this couldn’t exist, the only barrier is collaboration”. Others, on the other hand, identify great regional and national differences hindering its development.

To this argument, relevant is the contribution of AC: she highlights how, although Europe and its Union shall be perceived as a neutral body, many are the items of competition among its film commissions (FCs). Pertaining to a public office, the tasks of FCs are indeed those of sustaining and encouraging productions to shoot on their grounds, which has in recent years meant the initiation of a ruthless tax reduction war, losing all collaboration amongst each other.
Sustainability is once again seen as a time and resource investment rather than a gain, increasing the chances of civil society’s motivation to shift the paradigm and kick start sustainable development in the industry.

Moreover, there is still confusion in regards to what entity or neutral body could and should initiate the change: AC for example suggests that her organisation could easily collect the needs of professionals in the region, but would not hold enough legislative and administrative power to implement it. This is only one example of many instances where informers proved to wish for the tool to be provided by the industry, but would rather see some other organisation as the fittest to develop it.

Finally, many are the interesting insights provided by BK who, with her role of policy officer, confirmed the hypothesis of the researchers: the European Directive (Directive 2014/95/UE) does not take SMEs into consideration, but is rather allowing big corporations to take steps forward. Furthermore, the European Union body and its corollary offices and organisations, are characterised by extreme slowness and compartmentalisation: this signifies that, although stakeholder involvement and management are highly regarded in this institution, the latter is unlikely to be impacted by external pressures, but is rather used to slow and steady progress. This is of course one of the strengths of this body and its purpose was indeed designed to include these qualities, but it is also to be considered that the rate at which communication, awareness and development rise, might cause stagnation.

In conclusion, the researchers, who initially advanced the proposition of a holistic protocol, have been questioned in their intent: many were indeed the supporting and opposing factors towards the elaboration of a unified European tool and, in this regard, the researchers remain disconcerted about its optimal use and outcomes. Further research might be needed to firstly understand its true long-lasting potential, and secondly its structure and requirements.

7.2 Theoretical perspectives

In this section, the researchers reflect back on the theoretical framework in light of the findings: for this purpose, the latter have divided this section in three paragraphs, answering one research question at a time.

7.2.1. Discrepancy considerations (RQ1)

Current EU legislation does not apply to the motion picture industry nor to SMEs at large; the aforementioned Directive 2014/95/EU, only targets big companies and corporations and, even in those instances, its content is not always translated into national regulation. This leaves it indeed as a directive rather than administrative reinforcement. As a consequence, even if the Directive were targeting MPIs, its enforcement, and thus actual effectiveness, would remain questionable.

Each entity in the MPI industry has been left alone and doubtful about how to proceed: this has led to self-organising. The latter in itself is a synonym of confusion and lack of homogeneity. And on top of that, poor use of the existing networks was found by the researchers: although many platforms and occasions for knowledge sharing exist, almost none of the players chose to consult others when initially drafting a protocol, but rather shared the finished product and tried to implement it.

This also means that the current protocols lie on very different bases and foundational premises: some employ scientific quantitative methods, such as Co2 calculations, some don’t.

The outcome has been unharmonized trends, mainly divided in the scientific approach of quantifiable indicators and cautious guidelines. The main reason for the second was agreed on by many informers, who declared that the industry does not seem ready for such high levels of detail in SR, hence risking to “scare the professionals” demanded to fulfill this task.

As previously defined, the IT explains the tendency of organisations to imitate each other in order to conform to norms that are exerting pressures upon them. It now seems clear to the researchers that
these pressures are existing but are not directly pushing MPIs towards any regular and harmonised use of SR. Indeed, their genesis is likely to be connected to personal engagement of influential leaders in the field. The organisational pressures and strive for homogeneity have not been proven. Each entity of the European MPI interrogated is seeking to achieve different goals using SR and developing different methods to achieve them. Contrary to what literature greatly documents, homogeneity is not necessarily an explanation for the reason why organisations of one same organisational field engage simultaneously into SR: it is rather related to personal motivation, influenced by external societal pressures in a context of general acknowledgment of urgency. Moreover, homogeneity does not necessarily translate into actions being taken to fit and obey to social norms and pressures as the theory initially suggests (DiMaggio et al., 1983).

One way to support this is twofold: actions taken are not fuelled to drive towards homogeneity, hence the difficulty to compare data; on the other hand, when comparability seems to exist it does not necessarily imply that coherent and accountable actions are being taken. In other words, for what researchers could attest, focusing on the homogeneity dimension of a field does not explain SR behaviours of the field thereof. Furthermore, there are varied opinions about isomorphism: while some wish to develop towards cohesive tools and approaches, others emphasize the priority to quickly start engaging in reporting, even if only to the best of their capacities.

In conclusion, the institutional theory is here challenged and fails to provide a full picture of the behaviour of MPIs when engaging in SR. However, the IT does show relevance when integrated in a theoretical tritrophic, notably in synergy with the upcoming legitimacy theory and later with the stakeholder theory.

7.2.2. Social norms considerations (RQ2)

All of the informants, research and documents analysed report a clear common point: no pressure is currently influencing the MPIs to move towards sustainable development and reporting. Nonetheless, the researchers identified some underlying pressures and tensions in the interviewees’ replies: although not outspoken, many interviewees went indeed into depths to describe their feelings about peer or industry sources of inspiration. Some of the most common findings include the realisation of being behind other countries in the matter at hand, the feeling of the carbon challenge to be urgent and finally the reflection on many other project-based industries which already feature advanced SR regulations, such as the construction industry.

Therefore, although no legislative nor political pressure was said to be in place, this might be argued to be a faulted perception.

This environment has led the industry professionals to move towards voluntary decision-making and acting. In this instance, the researchers once again find conflicting explanations: on one hand, this has been interpreted as a positive outcome of a constricting environment, because it generated constructive opportunities for organisational learning. On the other hand however, this phenomenon prompted the industry to reinvent the wheel, causing the employment of many resources which might have been saved by initial development in collaboration with external stakeholders.

Furthermore, in this instance the researchers have identified an additional underlying paradox: although almost all informers agree on the wish to receive guidance and demand from above, all of the former agree on the lack of understanding and reliability of the political environment in regards to sustainability reporting for the industry. The question is therefore raised: in the desire to be ruled, but in the detachment from the rulers, who shall be legitimised to produce the rules?

Therefore, in relation to the LT, many are the considerations to be had. Firstly, the researchers verified that the presence of sustainability awareness does not grant legitimacy in the field. Secondly, legitimacy cannot be granted by accountability as the different tools analysed have different ways of working, therefore hindering these uneven practices from being legitimised outside of their region of use. Thirdly, authority does not imply legitimacy: the premise that these protocols are advanced by authoritative bodies, see the case of a powerful conglomerate such as Ecoprod for example, has not been proved powerful enough to grant their legitimacy either.
In conclusion, the researchers have found that the only apparent way to gather legitimacy in the field relies on stakeholder considerations: communication, collaboration and management among stakeholders have been found to be the key success factors leading to true and long-lasting legitimacy.

7.2.3. Collaboration considerations (RQ3)

First of all, researchers acknowledge that the European region is very prolific in terms of collaboration among professionals and actors of the MPIs, hence the tradition, and economic need, to co-produce. There are many stakeholders involved and plenty of opportunities to connect and generate meaningful conversation (festivals, awards, markets, press events): these are however missed opportunities, as the discourse is never centered around sustainability, thus not about SR, and even when it is, it has been proved to be merely empty communication with no real development nor value.

From an internal perspective, MPIs usually benefit from a dense environment of professionals who are used to working together, sharing practices, resources and influencing each other. These dense networks of peers are likely to foster the creation of communities of practice: these are platforms or groups of professionals from one specific organisational field who share, collaborate and create knowledge. All informants acknowledge the existence of partnerships with other European stakeholders, whether through direct co-productions as mentioned above, or through more private social activities, as well as through participation to international festivals. These various occasions, coupled with an already existing tendency to collaborate, could favour the engagement towards SR.

Indeed, SR has been proven to be beneficial for internal stakeholders if well structured and measured. Firstly, with the example of AM, it has been proven that the relationships with suppliers can be fortified and informed by meaningful collected data, expanding the reciprocal understanding of sustainability and thus striving towards collective sustainable development. Secondly, SR systems can be used to educate and train the staff towards change not only in their daily practices (production carbon literacy trainings), but also on the outer organisational and societal environment around them (climate change). Overall, stakeholders are very much part of the good functioning of the industry as a whole.

On an institutional perspective, traditional media platforms and political authorities don’t make SR a priority: until this changes, although powerful, the stakeholder approach will remain undervalued and underused. An illustration of that can be found in the influence paradox of MPIs: despite tremendous influence potential, public opinion barely knows about the polluting aspect of the industry, which once again illustrates the latter’s poor communication outreach.

In conclusion, the stakeholder approach provides consistency on two levels; firstly in terms of individual alignment of values and engagement: if one truly wants to engage in SR, they will gladly engage with stakeholders; secondly, it ensures true and long-lasting change in the industry and can therefore encourage pioneer spirit.

7.3. Research limitations and further recommendations

The limitations of this study firstly rely on the lack of previous research done on this topic: whereas sustainability reporting has been investigated by academia, its employment in project-based industries is scarce. Moreover, studies on the industrial processes of cinema are few, hence the choice to integrate industry documents in this thesis.

Furthermore, the researchers agree that time constraints didn’t allow for additional countries and protocols to be included in the sample. This is indeed strongly recommended for further research.

Similarly, more interviewees from different sides of the business could have been consulted to gather a more rounded picture of the situation: one example resides in United States professionals. Considering that many of the protocols and regulations currently in place in the European region have been inspired by the actions of the Producers’ Guild of America and organisations such as Earth Angel, gathering insights from the latter could have also been beneficial for this study.
Moreover, further steps in the data collection process could have been employed to strengthen some arguments: for example, in the case of the influence paradox, additional qualitative research in the form of a survey could have been done among audiences to verify this perception. Finally, although very limited, personal biases of the researcher who had previous work experience in the field might shine through at times.

As mentioned above, further research is recommended in order to expand the current sample: other countries in the European region could be added to the four selected in order to envision a broader picture of the matter at hand. In this regard, researchers may recommend to expand the sample by including other territories such as Belgium and Germany which are also providing interesting material to explore. The level of hierarchy of MPI informants can also be worked on with the following foundational interrogation: is the size of a national/regional MPI influencing its engagement with SR?

Relying on such a broader sample might also contribute to creating a holistic protocol if deemed relevant by future researchers. Moreover, investigating the relationship between MPIs and SR could also be scrutinised through a different perspective: consumers’ behaviours have been scarcely covered by literature in this field but would yet help to understand their relation to sustainable films, marketed as such, in order to inform the current study. Eventually, as suggested by some informants, the latter might also be investigated from a screenwriting perspective: how could the integration of sustainability in the screenwriting process shift the consequent production practices towards sustainable development? And how would this influence the industry engagement towards sustainability reporting?
8. Conclusions

The researchers have found that two main obstacles hinder the further development of sustainability reporting practices in the European motion picture industry. Both furthermore are fuelling discrepancies in methodologies and outcomes, resulting in a divided and depleted environment.

The first obstacle lays its foundations among professionals, internally: the industry is still sceptical about sustainable development and consequential reporting. Data highlights misinformation among professionals, who are not prompted to resolve confusion by communication nor co-operation: although the industry makes for plenty of knowledge-sharing opportunities, these are seldom taken advantage of.

Furthermore, this scepticism reaches its highest point in the perception of the majority of informers: the latter suggest that professionals would be intimidated by the introduction of auditing practices on set and some of the former also believe that the creative nature of the industry should not be undermined by sustainable practices. More specifically, some imply that the former could impede the choices made towards the central artistic vision in order to prioritise industrial needs. More specifically, some imply that the former could impede the choices made towards the central artistic vision in the act of prioritising industrial needs. This is a clear indicator of the low understanding and fear of change rather than actual informed concerns, because successful examples of fruitful balance between creativity and sustainability do exist in the industry. Finally, this vision ties with the heavy traditionalism of the field, which prioritises the maintenance of old fashioned practices, which are no longer actual, in spite of good sense.

Secondly, an external obstacle is also found: the political environment does not see sustainability reporting, especially in the MPI, and to some extent in PBIs, as a priority. This directly translates into the reluctance to establish financial systems to aid and reward sustainable productions, lowering the chances of companies to take these practices into action out of good heart.

This can be said to be in direct correlation also with the high standards of commodity encountered in the industry: many are the comforts that are justified by tradition rather than required by practicality. In this instance it is interesting to notice that films with lower budgets have been found to present more economic common sense, in the struggle to save on budget, which directly translates in many polluting activities being consequently dropped.

In conclusion, European MPs generally demonstrate a genuine will to improve their practices against all obstacles, challenging their partially hindering environment to reach new highs. Still, researchers believe that greater achievements are yet to come.
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Legend
SR = Sustainability Reporting
PBIs = Project-Based Industries
MPI = Motion Picture Industry
EC = European Commission

Interview type I:

FILM COMMISSIONS and PRODUCERS engaging in SR

Understand the current situation of sus. reporting

- **Analyse the organisations’ behaviour following the IT**
  - Do you feel any pressure to engage in sustainability reporting, if yes, can you identify them? From peers? From whom? *(investigate if internal or external pressures)*
  - Do you tend to look at other similar organisations when implementing new SR practices related to sustainability? *(investigate on isomorphism)*
  - On a scale going from 1 to 5, how strong are you influenced by society’s or customers’ expectations? *(rate the level of external pressure)*
    - 1: no pressure, no stakeholder communication
    - 2: pressure, but avoidable
    - 3: pressure is concerning
    - 4: pressure is creating a high priority
    - 5: pressure is so strong that it needs to be tackled for survival

- **Assess sustainability awareness of the informant**
  - Is sustainability a prior issue for you personally? For your organisation? *(managers influence the organisation’s direction)*
  - why do you think reporting is important?
  - Do you believe it can be profitable? *(managers engage in SR only if they see an economic relevance there)*
  - Is it a selling point? / Why is it a competitive advantage for you to have it, compared to other regions?
  - If you already believe it is relevant, does it represent a big investment for you?

- **Analyse the SR activity of the informant’s organisation**
  - what are the biggest challenges of reporting for MPI? / What are the strengths and weaknesses of your protocol?
  - Do you rather use legally recognized protocol, do you have your own framework or do you delegate to another external certifying company? And Why?
  - Would legal requirements make a difference? Would you want them and why?
  - Lack of comparability is it endangering the whole point of reporting?
- Do you find added value in having a tailored one to your region or would you benefit from an increase in comparability?
- Do you compensate? And if so, why?
- Do you sense an openness to use it in your region?
- Have you noticed an increase in workflow since you launched it? Is it attracting clients?
- What would be the biggest incentive in doing it systematically? / Do you get financial benefits from applying it? If not, wouldn’t that be an incentive?

**Legitimacy provided by SR:**

- Do you feel that your SR activity is providing you better legitimacy in your work?
  - *In other words:* Do you feel like your organisation is a good corporate citizen/shows good social and environmental behaviour?
- Do you feel more transparent to your partners, public thanks to SR specifically?
- Has your brand and image improved since you started engaging in SR according to you?
- Do you see a conducive environment in festivals etc to start talking about it?
- What about having a person do it on set “eco.manager”?

**Collaborative work**

1. **Stakeholders as communication helpers**
   - How do you communicate your results/performance to the outside? to other regions? *(identify if any stakeholders are involved in some point of the disclosing process)*
   - *If they do not communicate:* Why don’t you communicate? Lack of resources? Don’t see the point? Didn’t think about it?
   - What do actors say about it? Do they communicate it to the outside?
   - Does the media cover it enough? How would you like that to see highlighted?

2. **Stakeholders as taking part of the strategy**
   - What are the biggest challenges in explaining SR to other professionals?
   - Who are your main partners? How do you work with them regarding sustainability?
   - Do you have any interaction with other actors of MPIs that do similar work?
   - Same question for policy-makers
   - Do you think such conversations would help standardise protocols?
   - How could you be aided by a third party in implementing it more? and who would that be?

**Recommendations for the framework we want to elaborate**

- Would you be willing to review our framework once it is done?
- What are the major aspects that should be covered according to you? *(identify if all three aspects of sustainability are brought up: environment, social and economic)*

**Closing**

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Could we come back to you if we need your opinion on the protocol we are designing through this research?
Interview type II:

CERTIFIERS engaged in SR

Understand the current situation of sus. reporting

- Are you able to explain why your customers feel the need to engage in SR (investigate if internal or external pressures)
- How often do you report for MPIs? / What do MPIs represent (percentage) of your customer base?
- Are you familiar with reporting for PBIs?
  - To what extent are you currently reporting? Could it go further?
- what are the biggest challenges of reporting for MPI? / What are the strengths and weaknesses of your protocol?
- is it a big investment? (because they need new criteria? Time-consuming? Understanding phase? Too expensive for their clients?)
- (If asking GRI) What is the current state of implementation of sustainability legislation directives and what are the hinders to it on a national level?
- Lack of comparability is it endangering the whole point of reporting?

Social norms influence

- What would be the best incentive to make MPIs report on a regular basis?
- How is legislation helping set the direction for reporting?
- What about having a person do it on set “eco.manager”?

Collaborative work

- Do you have any interaction with other actors of MPIs that do similar work?
  - Same question for policy-makers
  - Do you think such conversations would help standardise protocols?
- How could you be aided by a third party in implementing it more? and who would that be?

Recommendations for the framework we want to elaborate

- Would you be willing to review our framework once it is done?
- What are the major aspects that should be covered according to you?

Closing

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Could we come back to you if we need your opinion on the protocol we are designing through this research?
LEGISLATORS engaged in sustainability

1. Do you see any rising trends in SR practices around EU countries? Tell us more about them.
   - *If not:* Do you feel like you are lacking the bigger picture of SR reporting, or do you consider that it is not your role? *(Make them explain why they don’t see any trends)*

2. To what extent are you familiar with GRI/CSR Europe frameworks?
   - *If not:* To what extent are you familiar with SR anyway?

3. Do you feel like there is enough understanding of how to implement those frameworks?
   - *If yes:* What is your action towards that end? Any way to measure your impact?
   - *If not:* How can you figure this out? Any plan to improve the practical implementation of SR?

- **Analyse the organisations’ behaviour following the IT**
  - PBI and MPI - related legislation, how do you hit these targets?
  - Should there be two sets of rules according to standardised and non-standardised industries?
  - Which one should come first? The directive or the generalised practice?
  - Do you feel any pressure to engage in sustainability reporting or, if yes, can you identify them? From peers? From whom? *(investigate if internal or external pressures)*
  - How much should the EU be involved in the harmonisation of SR frameworks, as opposed to leaving this responsibility to national bodies according to you?

- **Assess sustainability awareness of the informant**
  - Is sustainability a prior issue for you personally? For the European Commission? *(managers influence the organisation’s direction)*
  - why do you think reporting is important?
    - If you already believe it is relevant, does it represent a big investment for you?
  - Do you believe it can be profitable for EC? *(managers engage in SR only if they see an economic relevance there)*

- **Analyse the SR activity of the informant’s organisation**
  - To what extent do you collaborate with people from the field of MPI when formulating reporting legislation?
    - *If they don’t have anyone, who would they look for?*
  - what are the biggest challenges of reporting for PBIs?
  - Would legal requirements make a difference?
  - Lack of comparability is it endangering the whole point of reporting?
  - To what extent do you think you should legislate SR in PBIs? And within the boundaries of freedom each organisations’ indicators what should not be missing from you?
    - According to you, what would be the ideal way to do harmonised SR without undermining organisations’ specificities and different national contexts?

- **Legitimacy provided by SR:**
  - Do you feel that your SR legislation would be granting legitimacy to those who use it? To the EC?
- *In other words:* Do you feel like your organisation is a good corporate citizen/shows good social and environmental behaviour?
- How would you ensure transparency in SR for PBIs?
- What about having a mandated team on behalf of the EC to go on the field and track sustainability progress and use of SR? (For our context, it would be going on the set and ensure good implementation or something similar).

**Collaborative work**

3. **Stakeholders as communication helpers**
   - How do you communicate your results/performance to the outside? to other regions of the world? *(identify if any stakeholders are involved in some point of the disclosing process)*
   - *If they do not communicate:* Why don’t you communicate? Lack of resources? Don’t see the point? Didn’t think about it?

4. **Stakeholders as taking part of the strategy**
   - What are the biggest challenges in legislating for SR?
   - Who are your main partners? How do you work with them regarding sustainability?
   - How could you be aided by a third party in implementing it more? and who would that be?

**Recommendations for the framework we want to elaborate**

- Would you be willing to review our framework once it is done?
- What are the major aspects that should be covered according to you? *(identify if all three aspects of sustainability are brought: environment, social and economic)*

**Closing**

- *Is there anything you would like to add?*
- *Could we come back to you if we need your opinion on the protocol we are designing through this research?*
Appendix 2. Consent form template

Hereunder is the consent form researchers used to conduct their interviews. Signed forms have been excluded for privacy reasons but remain available upon request.

Interviews went as follows:

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Participants Consent Form

**Title of research study:**

*Sustainability reporting in project-based industries: a European study with a focus on the motion picture industry*

**Researchers:** Ludovica Chiarini - Nadia Khedachi

The researcher has informed me about the following:

1. The purpose of the study.
2. I can withdraw from the study. If so, I don’t have to give a reason for that.
3. All information the researcher gets from me is kept confidential.
4. My name and the name of my organization will be treated with strict confidentiality.

__________________________________________
Signature and date

__________________________________________
Printed name
Appendix 3. Previous email conversation with RF

Da: Ronny Fritsche ronny@zentropasweden.com
Oggetto: Re: Italian Sustainable Cinema - Ludovica Chiarini
Data: 9 luglio 2018 11:04
A: Ludovica Chiarini ludovica@chiarini.eu

Hello Ludovica. Sorry for my late reply, I had some vacation :) I’m glad that you are contacting me regarding this. It always makes me very proud when other people are talking about the work with sustainability I have done so far here in Sweden. To be honest, I think that the Swedish film industry is also way behind with this. We have a lot for free because Sweden, in general, is a good country to live in when it comes to inventions, energy sources, and recycling, but there is much more to do, and the film industry here hasn’t been taking any responsibility yet. Beside my work as a producer here at Zentropa I was hired of the biggest film fund in Sweden (Film I väst) 2016 to take a look at the environmental aspect of the industry. Now i running education for the industry here. It’s a one day free workshop for producers, directors and crew.

I can tell you more about this work if you want, maybe over a coffee in Malmö or Gothenburg where i live, this fall.

“Happy as Lazzaro” interesting. Unfortunately, I haven’t seen that movie yet, Always interesting for me to hear about international examples of recently produced movies and the practices undertaken. Was Trentino film fund a part of the financing? I have heard that they have money incentives which I think is a very interesting action by a film fund. We don’t have anything like that here in Sweden yet, so there we have something to learn from Italy. This could be something you could tell me more about if you know about this. One of the hard question is how we can motivate the producers, so i would love to hear why the producers of ”Happy as Lazzaro” was motivated.

Still, we don’t have any certification for the film industry in Sweden. This is something we discuss and try to find a national model. Before we find a model for certification we believe that we need a model for calculation, this must also be a model that works on a national, and preferably on a European level. We are looking at UK/Albert now, And France/Ecoprod and testing the calculating system they have. Here is more work to do before we find they way forward.

Write me back and tell me when are you moving to Malmö??

best / Ronny
Appendix 4. Protocol coding full table

The full table is available in PDF upon request to the researchers.