

Dear Coleages

We have been witnessing very rapid changes in the realm of mass media for at least a decade: sudden development of the Internet, domination of television and continuously aggravating crisis of the paper press.

We know that the situation of journalists working in cultural sections, among them film critics, is getting worse every year. But how does it look in different countries? Is it global tendency? Who are we? Whom should we be? What do we think about current situation of film critics? And how do we see the future of film criticism? We wanted to have an objective look at these problems.

In such a situation we arranged the sociological survey. I have to stress that it was possible to do it fully professionally thanks to Polish Filmmakers Association, who helped us financially. The project was managed in Poland. We used the computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI). The respondent got a link and then followed a script provided in a website. This link was on our Facebook and on our website www.fipresci.org. It was also sent to our members in e-mails.

Approx. one thousand people took part in this survey. We received 851 fully completed questionnaires that were analysed. This is a very high response rate bearing in mind the fact that the questionnaires originated from several dozen countries. We received most responses from Germany (98), France (71), Canada (53), Italy (37), Poland (36) and India (31). 65% of responses came from Europe (45.2% from Western Europe, 20.4% from Eastern and Central Europe), 17.3% from America and 16.8% from Asia, Africa and Australia.

63% of the respondents were men. Approx. 30% of the respondents were people below 30 years of age and 24% were people above 60 years of age.

What was the level of education? 20% of the respondents have a Ph.D. degree, 44.4% have a master's degree, whereas 24.5% have a bachelor's degree; 10% completed their education in high school.

35% of our respondents have been practicing the profession of the critic for more than 25 years. Only 6.3% of Fipresci members have been working for less than 5 years, which also testifies to the fact that our organization requires extensive experience from its members.

Film criticism is the main profession for approx. 40% of our members. 19.2% of them have full-time jobs in the media, whereas 23% are full-time freelancers. Other respondents work as journalists, university lecturers and school teachers. 15% of the respondents simultaneously work in the film industry.

45% of the respondents publish their materials in the media at least once a week, whereas 21.5% two or three times a month. 88% write reviews, 66% conduct interviews and 55% prepare essays on film-related subjects; 30% provide news and information.

We are constantly analysing the characteristics of our profession. Today, among all respondents in our questionnaire, 30% work for newspapers, and almost 57% for Internet publications; approx. 18% for the radio, 12% for television. Obviously, many members combine work for various media. Simultaneously, the question whether bloggers should have the status of Fipresci members shows differing opinions: as many as 34% of the respondents said no and 27% had no opinion on this issue.

There is no doubt that we are pauperised as a professional group. We are not capable of sustaining ourselves by working as critics. The fact that criticism offers 90% of income for only 10% of us is

also quite telling about the situation of our profession. What is more, film criticism constitutes a half of income for only 25% of the respondents. These numbers show clearly that it is very difficult to sustain oneself on a satisfactory level from writing about the cinema.

The respondents travel to festivals often. 38.8% of the respondents participate in at least four film events annually; 37.9% in two or three. Costs of travel and stay at the festival are fully covered by employers only for 8% of the respondents and partially for 19.8% of the respondents.

On average, every fourth participant of festivals is assisted by organizers who provide e.g. hotel accommodation. Almost 40% of film critics declare that they cover all costs on their own. 6% of the respondents go to festivals as members of the Fipresci jury. Only 15% of our members take part in Fipresci work at least once a year, 20% once every two or three years and 55.7% less frequently. 9.3% of the respondents do not work as jurors.

What is the position of culture in the media? Contrary to the common opinion, only (or maybe as many as) 36% of the respondents declare that their medium devotes as much space for cultural information as several years ago. 36% of the respondents claim that the space is shrinking and 12% declare that it is increasing.

What do the respondents think about their profession? A vast majority, i.e. over three-fourths believe that film reviews exert certain impact on the choices of cinema goers. 10% claim that viewers are not guided by reviews, whereas 8% believe that viewers are significantly guided by film reviews.

Open questions provided interesting material for analysis. In general, this is a sad read which is, however, not surprising. Our colleagues write about the crisis of the profession. They say that it is difficult to make ends meet when working as a critic and that the number of full-time jobs for people writing about culture is decreasing in the media. Sheer information replaces criticism. They also say that the space for serious critical texts is being reduced and that the competition of bloggers is growing – these are frequently uneducated people, who are not properly prepared for the profession of a critic.

Among positive aspects, our respondents primarily mention emergence of a new generation of young journalists who can more easily find their place in the new media. Opinions about the future of film criticism are mostly pessimistic. In general, our members believe that today's trends will continue or even aggravate.

I hope that reliable diagnosis of the condition of FIPRESCI members will be helpful in making some important decisions that are ahead of us.

Barbara Hollender