

CALL FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Animation in Business/Business in Animation:

Intellectual Property, Partnerships and Discoverability

20-22 September 2026, Syros-Ermoupolis, University of the Aegean.

Animation is at the nexus of creativity, technology and entrepreneurship. The animation industry is multi-layered in its complexity. This is evident in its creative processes, business models and value chain, all of which operate in an ecosystem influenced by the interdependence and ever-expanding interaction of cultural, economic, business, technological and legal factors.

In this sense, benchmarking best practices in the world of business leads inevitably to the world of animation. The production storyboard invented in Disney Studios is commonly integrated in testing entrepreneurship concepts and advertising campaigns. The same company invented the transmedia exploitation of intellectual property in merchandising and entertainment parks. The recent venture on Artificial Intelligence (AI) production reminds us of the numerous production pipelines based on technological advances and used in Disney's franchises.

In parallel with Disney's holistic studio approach, Animation productions in Europe developed co-production mechanisms to share risks and better distribute their content to European and global networks (theatres, TV broadcasters, video-on-demand (VOD) services and online video sharing platforms). Supported by growing institutional ecosystems (grants and funds, festivals, cash rebate and tax relief schemes), Animation in Europe is an important part of the Audiovisual-cultural landscape and is developing synergies with Games and Transmedia industries. In this growing effort, new concepts, creative processing, talented designers and original narrative solutions are motivating investments and secure return on investment. Pitching an idea requires a well scheduled design process, and thorough thinking is needed to decide the festival run path of the finished project.

As such, animation, as an original work of authorship, constitutes a copyright-protected intellectual creation, which serves as an effective tool to generate income for its author and revenues for other stakeholders involved in the chain of licensing and marketing. These phenomena inform, govern and often challenge the creation, production and distribution phases of the animation lifecycle. At the same time, the move toward platform-based distribution, especially on VOD services and online video sharing platforms,

enhances the accessibility and consumption of creative content, but may also negatively impact its diversity, since their business model and bargaining power heavily interfere with market actors' behaviours and lead to often narrow market trends in content creation. These phenomena urge a more thorough understanding of the importance and role played by the protection and management of intellectual property in the creation, production and distribution phases of the animation lifecycle.

At the same time, the rush towards the omnipresence of content in various media channels brings a new difficulty: discoverability of animated audiovisual works. Platformisation has improved the availability of larger quantities of animated audiovisual works and, with it, its variety and convenience of access. However, audiences need to discover animated audiovisual works which is difficult in a saturated market. As platforms give access to content volume far beyond human consumption capacity, there are clear limitations in users' attention. Here, algorithmic gatekeepers can be seen as enablers for content discovery. Interestingly, audiovisual discoverability has also become a policy issue at the European level and elsewhere (Canada, Australia). As such, a special focus should be paid on the technological, economic and market aspects that influence the ways in which audiences discover and watch animated audiovisual works, and the cultural contexts within which content is preferred, chosen or suggested.

The symposium **Animation in Business/Business in Animation: Intellectual Property, Partnerships and Discoverability** seeks to examine ongoing transformations in animation processes and practices, with particular attention to industrial, creative, organisational, and policy-related dimensions. Organised by the stakeholders of the *Aegean Animation Hub* in collaboration with the consortium of the HORIZON Europe project *ANIMA MUNDI*, it will take place in Syros, the capital of Cycladic islands, during the Animasyros International Animation festival (September 2026). It is the second symposium after the inaugural act in September 2023, held also in Syros. The symposium will be structured around three complementary and closely interconnected sessions:

The symposium coincides with the celebrations of 80 years of Greek Animation, and 200 years from the foundation of Ermoupolis, the historical city of Syros. In this sense, a first session will be dedicated to the Greek Animation ecosystem and the institutional developments that integrated Greece into the European context during the last 45 years of membership of the EU. The symposium is a tribute in memory of Spyros Papadopoulos, Professor of the University of Thessaly who contributed in opening communication roads between educational institutions and animation festivals in Greece by organizing every year in Volos the event "And so it moves..."

The second session of the symposium will explore the challenges and opportunities facing the animation industry in Europe and globally, with a particular focus on the management of intellectual property throughout the stages of creation, production, and

distribution. It will also address the governance of discoverability of animated audiovisual works on video-on-demand services and online video-sharing platforms. The session aims to analyse questions of intellectual property and discoverability within the evolving geopolitical, regulatory, and economic context currently shaping the sector. The session will also study changes in European co-production ecosystems via case studies on networking, financing, and marketing all kinds of animation co-productions, from short films and features to animated documentaries and web/TV series.

A third session will be dedicated to the relations between creativity and business in advertising, examining the delivery of original animation concepts under pressure and hard deadlines. Besides, the introduction of generative AI tools in production pipelines will be questioned. The session will also deal with the technological and creative impact of transmedia projects in designing, producing and distributing mixed media animations, especially using IMAGINE (Interactive Media, Animation, Games, Interactive Networked Environments) platforms.

Indicative Topics of Interest

80 years of Greek Animation

Cartoon Forum Syros 1998, TV for children summit 2003, Animasyros 2008-now, ASIFA Hellas 2008-now, Educational Institutions and Festivals Relationships, Emile Awards, CIFEJ Media Literacy Initiatives, Fresh Greek Animation, EKKOMED Funding opportunities.

Animated Creativity in Business (Advertising)

Corporate Animation Awards in Festivals (Annecy), Creativity versus deadlines/pressure, Human versus AI Creativity, Benchmarking Disney.

Management of Intellectual Property in creation, production and distribution of animated audiovisual works

Assessment of the public regulatory sources informing and governing the European Animation Industry's activities and the identification of the areas that require legal intervention (e.g., better harmonisation across Europe, enactment of new rules, amendment of current legislative norms); insights to the private regulatory sources (e.g., co-production agreements, distribution agreements, cross-border licensing agreements) and their implications on the European Animation Industry; IP management processes across the animation value chain; the omnipresence of generative AI and its impact on the copyright-related aspects of animation-making in Europe; empirical mapping on existing legal, economic and business frameworks to import/export in non-European markets.

Discoverability/Distribution of animated audiovisual works

Youth and children preferences regarding animated audiovisual works, notably produced in Europe; the role of VOD services and online video-sharing platforms in the circulation and discoverability of animated works; an exploration of innovative strategies which could facilitate the distribution of European animated audiovisual works; power dynamics in distribution and how they affect the commercial performance of animated audiovisual works; focus on large animation film festivals to map diachronically the profiles of animation films that have been selected and awarded.

Social reality implications of “doing business” in animation industry

‘Business as usual’ however is not always the optimal way towards growth financially and socially. From research into the creative and culture industries, it is known that inequalities and demographic markers such as gender, age, ethnicity or heritage play a role in chances given, opportunities landed and access to the industry and markets. These factors are not associated with skills, but rather with cultural prejudices and ways of ‘doing business’ that reinforce prohibitive and hostile environments. We want to draw attention to factors that are under-researched, yet part of the biography of creators in the industry, especially with reference to distribution of works and their discoverability. Here we would like to shed light on shortcomings in the animation industry, consisting of gender inequality and uncritical views of the restricting role of IP for non (yet) professional experimentation and innovation, limiting wide democratically-based reach, outreach and access of cultural content in the form of animation; identify persistent and under-reported obstacles to circulation of animated audiovisual works by women and/or young people in the animation industry.

Audiovisual Co-production and Animation

Best Practices in Financing, Networking, Marketing, Production pipelines, Distribution concerns, Archive and IP issues, European Policy framework, Adaptation to different formats (Animated Documentaries, Short and feature films, Web/TV series, etc.).

The Era of Transmedia

IMAGINE production pipelines, Transmedia Design, Transmedia Workshops, Database Narratives, Transmedia Storytelling, AI Pipelines.

Dates to consider

May 4: Submission of Abstracts in English (up to 500 words including five keywords)

Early June: Information on Acceptance/Rejection

September 15: Submission of Conference Papers (up to 3500 words)

September 20-22: Presentation of Accepted Papers to the Animation in Business/Business in Animation Conference

How to submit

All submissions will be received via email. Please send your contributions to animation_hub@aegean.gr

Conference Location

University of the Aegean, School of Engineering

Future Lab, Syros-Ermoupolis, Greece

Co-organised by the Aegean Animation Hub and ANIMA MUNDI consortium with Intellect Books

Panagiotis (Takis) Kyriakoulakos (University of the Aegean, Greece) and Antonios Vlassis (Universite de Liège, Belgium) respectively representing the Aegean Animation Hub, a venture between EKKOMED, ASIFA Hellas, Animasyros, and the University of the Aegean, and ANIMA MUNDI, a HORIZON Consortium funded by the EU and composed by 13 academic and industry partners. Eleni Mouri (University of the West of Attica, Greece) and Tassos Theodoropoulos (University of the Peloponnese, Greece) supervise the Greek Animation Ecosystem session.

Selected papers of the conference will be published to a special issue of ***International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*** (Intellect Books, Editor Katharine Sarikakis) on **Animation: creativity, technology, audiences**.

Other publishing opportunities include *Animation Practice, Process and Production* (A3P, Intellect Books) and the online scientific journals *Animation, Film, and Interactive Media in Education and Culture* (AFIMEC) and *ASIFA Magazine Academic Edition*.

A book on the Greek Animation Ecosystem will be published by Aegean Animation Hub based on the contributions received for the conference.

Scientific Committee

Irini Andriopoulou (EKKOMED, Greece)

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