

## REPORT – EUROPA CINEMAS AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION LAB

### **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & DESIGNING EXPERIENCES**

SOFIA, 16-19 MARCH 2017

SOFIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – SOFIA MEETINGS

#### **Day 1: Thursday 16th March**

##### **Introduction and opening of the Lab**

In March 2017, Europa Cinemas held its fourth Audience Development & Innovation Lab in Bulgaria as part of Sofia Meetings - the film industry event of Sofia International Film Festival. Sessions were led by Madeleine Probst (Vice-president of Europa Cinemas and Programme Producer at the Watershed in Bristol), with the assistance of Hrvoje Laurenta (Manager of Kino Europa, in Zagreb) and Sylvain Chevreton (Young Audiences Coordinator at Le Méliès in Saint-Etienne).

Martina Berger (Managing Director at Greenhouse Analytics, Germany) and Barbara Twist (coordinator of Arthouse Convergence, USA) joined them as guest speakers.

Thirty-eight participants from the exhibition sector, half of whom came from Central and Eastern Europe, attended four days of workshops on the theme “Building relationships & Designing experiences”. For a third year the event was held at the G8 Cinema, a cosy and welcoming venue, the most recent film theatre in the centre of Sofia.



##### **Who are we? How can we collaborate?**

Introduced by Madeleine Probst the Seminar was opened by the Artistic Director of Sofia International Film Festival Mira Staleva who welcomed the attendees and presented the industry section of the Sofia Film Festival.



Madeleine Probst introduced then the main themes of the Lab, stressing particularly on of the most important axes to be developed: the use of data for the purpose of audience building in cinema theatres. Each participant presented himself, stressing on its strengths, challenges and opportunities of collaboration.

The session ended with a presentation by Georgi Ivanov and Christo Dermendjiev from "Lucky" Home of cinema, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, who gave an overview on the Bulgarian exhibition and distribution market, with a particular accent on their own work as exhibitors and distributors at the same time. Their approach goes the opposite of the big circuits, as they opened already three cinemas in remote and depopulated areas, rather than in the dense urban areas.

Population: 7.1 million  
Households: 2.7 million  
Households with TV: 98.3%  
Households with Internet: 59%  
GDP per capita: 6,663 euro  
Average cinema ticket price: 4.3 euro

Year	Non-multiplex screens outside Sofia
2014	17
2015	27
2016	34

Share of major titles in admissions

Category	Share (%)
Indie	49
Major	51

Distribution major players

- "Alexandra" and "Forum Films" account for:
  - Owners of the two biggest cinema chains, "Arena" and "Cinema City"
  - 47% of all releases
  - 83% of the BO

The strategy has proved successful, as the cinemas not only function well, but start gradually attracting the audience towards the European films.

## Day 2 – Friday 17th March

### Building Relationships

The second day kicked off with a visit to the brand newly refurbished Kino Lumière, entirely financed by Lidl. Now rebranded as Lumière-Lidl for a two year period, the formerly important single-screen of the Bulgarian capital built in the apparatus style of the 70's, passed - thanks to its generous gradient architecture - from 350 to 375 seats, without any loss of comfort.





Back to the G8, the Lab continued with one of its main topics: LEADING THE DANCE WITH DATA.



**Martina Berger**, from the German start-up Greenlight Analytics, gave us some insights on the ways of motivating the audience through personalised messages sent to the potential customers, by breaking down the traditional marketing circle to a list of digital touchpoints, while separating each part of the process: before, during and after the cinema going, thus targeting a narrow

audience profiles at each step of the process. Among the most successful strategies to motivate the audience she mentioned adopting an individual approach, loyalty programmes with exclusive offers, special events, gamification and offer exclusive services. It is important to get to know the audience beyond demographics, but through their interests, needs and social habits.

**Leah Byrne**, from Picturehouse, United Kingdom, presented her company's audience development policy based on data collected from their numerous Membership schemes, free events, mailings and random questionnaires.



The next Session of case studies was named GIVE ME A REASON (to come to the cinema). Indeed, if you ask people about how they might decide to spend an evening, their motivation might not actually be picking the film. Therefore...



**Malgorzata Kuzdra**, from Kino Muza, Poznan, Poland, introduced us to two of her most successful initiatives. The first one was a screening with dogs. It was an experiment to try and attract a different audience of animal lovers. The experience proved successful, as the screening was sold out. The audience attended with their dogs and it was all a very pleasant and friendly event, with no fights, barking or any particular

problem. On this occasion, the cinema received its best advertisement ever, whether through official or social media. Her second initiative was a Filmic Speed Dating, organized as a side event to a festival held in the cinema. It was a true speed dating, meant to make people meet each other, with trailer screenings, free tickets etc... The publicity was however quite positive, as the event was later copied by a matrimonial agency.

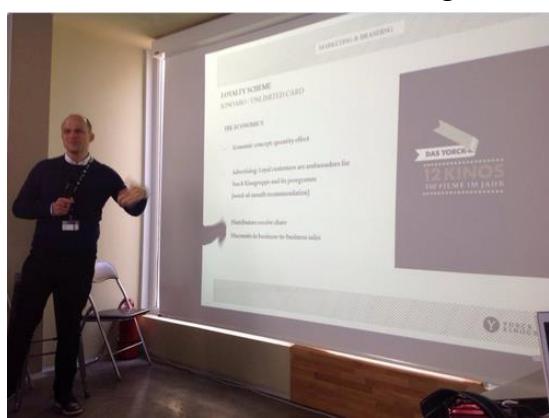
**Hrvoje Laurenta** from Kino Europa, Zagreb realised there were thousands of foreigners living in Zagreb, most of them students, not speaking Croatian. He set up a regular meeting in his cinema: Subtitled Tuesdays, offering films subtitled both in Croatian and English for the foreign audience. The usual attendance for the slot reaches regularly 70 or 80 persons. In summer time, the event became “subtitled T-days”, adding a Thursday screening, as the summer tourist audience proved quite interested as well.

**Madeleine Probst**, presented Watersheds’ “24 & Under” Campaign launched in 2015 after the proportion of young people had increased in the city. The 24 & Under initiative had positive results as over the six months since the launch, the Watershed has seen an average of 48% increase in sales of the students’ and under 24 tickets. More recent data analysis for year 2016 showed a 37% increase in new bookers.



This year’s Group Tasks were all centred on the idea of creating the perfect cinema concept. Each group’s composition remained the same all along, adding a new layer to the concept on each session. The first exercise followed the GIVE ME A REASON topic. The groups were given maps of the neighbourhood and were asked to go out and spot a venue for a future cinema. The task requested was: “How will you get to know more about potential audiences in the new neighbourhood you are planning to move into?”

The afternoon session of BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS started with the question WHEN ARE YOU COMING BACK? Our business models involves repeat customers – as of course it must – we are also in the business of building relationships.



**Christian Braüer** from Yorck Kinogruppe, Germany, presented the Kinoabo and Yorck-Karte – the group’s two membership programmes – the first aimed at frequent users, offering a free film every tenth visit, the second aimed at heavy users, offering an unlimited cinema attendance for a fixed monthly fee.

**Yvonne Smith** from Filmhouse, UK, presented their Loyalty card scheme. The cinema team realised their traditional free of charge unlimited in time Loyalty scheme was not really functioning

anymore, therefore they phased it out over a three months period, then introduced a new paid membership card, lasting a year only. The process resulted in a direct income generated from the paid Membership, increased number of Members and tickets sold, an up-to-date customer database which the cinema uses for its marketing purposes.

**Snežana Andrić**, from Kupina Bioskop, Serbia introduced their Young Ambassadors scheme. She emphasised the importance of developing initiatives directed at teenage audiences. Attendance at his cinema has increased significantly since he introduced a scheme for young ambassadors who are chosen by local schools and cultural institutions to watch films and promote them among their friendship groups.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS went on the INCLUDE ME topic.



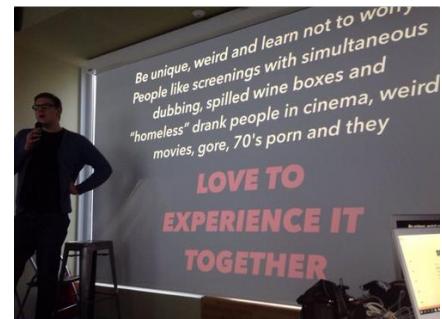
**Franky Devos** from Budascoop Cinema, Belgium showcased CineMAATjes – an initiative reaching out to children living in poverty, through screenings and workshops in partnerships with school, associations and authorities, which turned the Art Centre to an extremely lively place with children on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons.

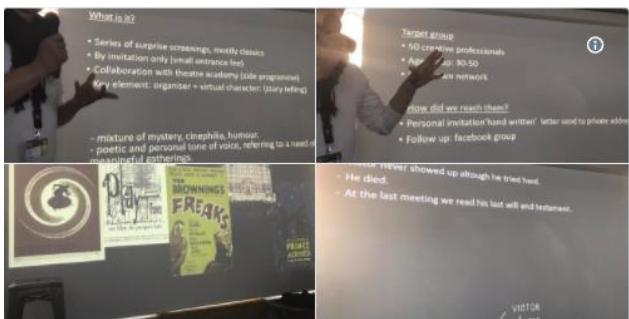
**Sylvain Chevreton** presented their social solidarity initiative called “Le ticket suspendu” (The suspended ticket). Inspired by the Italian “Caffé Sospeso”, it consists of donating a ticket to someone unknown who can’t afford one. A client buys a suspended ticket at the cash desk, where the number of available tickets is displayed. Another person comes and asks to benefit from a suspended ticket, then enters the film of his choice. Through this initiative, Le Méliès gathered not only a new audience but also a very positive outcome in the local media.

**Hrvoje Laurenta** talked about Kino Europa’s screenings free of charge for the Blind & visually impaired, organised with the support of the Croatian Health Ministry and the specific associations, a unique initiative of that kind in Croatia.

After the second Group Task dedicated to “Creating an accessible strand for a specific target group in your community”, the day went on with presentations about DESIGNING EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED EXPERIENCES.

**Kinga Krzeminska** from Kinokawiarnia Stacja Falenica, Poland spoke to us about the event Zombie Express - Express Yourself, created around the zombie genre Korean film Train to Busan. The cinema being located in a suburban train station, the organised the screening in partnership with a Korean bar, located in a nearby station, and the viewers, dressed like zombies had to take the train. The advertisement outcome was quite big. **Jakub Furst**, Kino Aero, Czech Republic, narrated their Shockproof Film Festival – an event bringing “the best of the worst films” every end of year, with a huge media coverage.





Madeleine Probst  
@MaddyProbst



David Fr/Lumiere Cinema on Mr Fantastic, an idea suggested b/audience members to create an uber personalised experience #ecscolab2017

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**David Deprez** from Lumière Cinema, Netherlands, presented the surprise posh screenings of Mister Fantastic, which, contrary to the traditional approach of highly inclusive events, was aimed at selected audience, only by invitation, in order to create a most personalized possible experience.

His presentation was followed by the third Group Task: Create an unexpected experience at your cinema or linked to your new cinema brand for 16 - 30 age group

### Day 3: Saturday 18th March

#### Europa Cinemas-Europa Distribution joint session

The third day kicked off with the joint session with the distributors from Europa Distribution, whose workshop was taking place as well during the Sofia Film Festival. Europa Cinemas and Europa Distribution have been collaborating for four consecutive years during the Sofia Film Festival with the aim of building a fruitful and continuous dialogue between these two essential sectors of the industry to build audience and momentum around a release. **Martin Blaney**, German correspondent of Screen International, moderated the discussion.

**Madeleine Probst** started off the panel presenting the BFI "**New Release Strategy**" Programme, designed to support foreign language films perceived as "challenging" in a market dominated by English spoken content. The initiative was conceived to help distributors (nationally) and exhibitors (locally) to extend the reach of their marketing campaigns on the 9 titles selected by the programme.

**Hrvoje Laurenta** shared his experience as exhibitor ten years ago when he felt forced to move also into distribution to have films to screen in his cinema. "Multiplexes were forcing distributors to only give us their films after they had been screening them for 1 month, a humiliating deal which Kino Europa always refused to take. In 2008 for an entire month we had only one film to screen in our cinema."

Bringing the experience of similarly sized market, **Ruta Svedkauskaite** (distributor and exhibitor from Kino Pasaka) shared the perspective of an independent distributor working in Lithuania, a country with only 5 arthouse cinemas. Proving the essential role played by venues and special screenings, Rūta presented one of the latest experiments of her company who last summer rented the open space of the National Museum to create a "Cinema Under the Stars" programme. The experiment succeeded, making 13.500 admissions in a season where people in Lithuania don't usually go to the cinema and also attracting a new audience, intrigued by the event and the location.

Moving to a much bigger market, **Joe Kreczak** presented some late projects of Curzon Artificial Eye in the UK. From a cinephile spirit more than a commercial thinking, the company raised the idea of bringing back to the cinema the films of Andrei Tarkovsky. After years of legal

negotiations for the rights and with the help of a BFI's fund, finally in 2016 the retrospective took place, bringing Tarkovsky to a new audience. Experts from different fields were involved in the presentation of the films that collectively made 17.000 admissions, encouraging Curzon to secure TV sales. Going from edible cinema screenings (*Our Little Sister*) to accessible versions for visual impaired of the film *Notes on Blindness*, Curzon, like many other European distributors and exhibitors is investing its energy on the added value of the cinematographic experience.



The morning continues with a more practical session dedicated to how to create healthy online communities and some practical tips of "dos and don'ts" to build a successful web presence. Thanks to the useful presentation of **Barbara Twist** from Arthouse Convergence who shared the best practices on the web in some American arthouse cinemas, we summed up some key learnings about the website and social media: using Facebook analytics to check the reach and success of the posts; using Facebook paying ads (or make distributors pay for them) to widen the reach of your target audience given that the return on investment with a larger target will pay off; personalize the communication for every different social media; segment the target of the social media posts by interest area. Some useful tips for an efficient and effective use of the website were the following: Wordpress is a user-friendly and accessible CMS also for non-web design experts; Canvas is a free online software to easily improve the web design of a DIY website; in case you don't have enough resources to invest in the development of a website, make a call for web developers among your audience (students, interns who are willing to contribute to the website to build their experience and portfolio or ask for donors to finance your website refurbishment). Other useful tools include Google grants, which is a fund for no-profit organizations provided by Google to implement Google Adwords for free. **Sylvain Chevreton** showed the DIY promotional trailers of Le Melies.

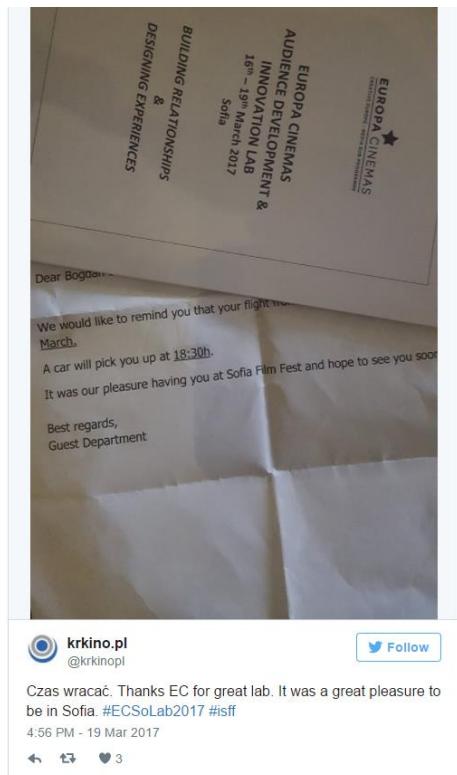
The afternoon session focused more on building the staff capacity for cinemas, training and motivating the personnel. **Sylvain Chevreton** presented the daily challenges at Melies, which counts only 9 staff members, with no specific role division. Nonetheless he considers this type of organisation enriching and fulfilling both from a personal perspective and for the cinema business, because every employee has developed a close relationship with the audience and has versatile skills. **Hrvoje Laurenta** explained the structure of Kino Europa with about 30 staff members, including interns, and a more structured task organization. As a manager he leaves his employees full responsibility of their tasks and tends to decentralize the duties and decisional power. **Madeleine Probst** represents the case of a more complex and multifunctional venue, with its 70 staff members working on different time schedules and multiple locations. Operations are of course more complicated, with a cinema, a café, conferences and offshore art performances. where a fundraising campaign has been set up. Since public funding in UK is decreasing, they set up a fundraising strategy where the aim was to tell Watershed's stories as a campaign launch for personal donations.

The third day ended up with the presentation of the group projects: each team had to show photos, slides and various material of their “ideal cinema” in the neighborhood of Sofia, with a specific promotional strategy, an unexpected experience to attract their target audience.

## **Day 4: Sunday 19th March**

### **Conclusions and debrief**

Sunday morning was dedicated to drawing the conclusions of what has been said and shared in the past days and to present to the rest of the group what each one will bring home and try to implement in his/her venue.



Here some of the main outcomes about social media/website/data analysis:

- Hire or identify in the staff a dedicated person for social media, video making, Google Analytics
- AB testing to check the impact of newsletters, implementing a strategy for analytics, using Mailchimp
- Advocacy to build capacity to analyse data, collecting data from the loyalty card members
- Collect information about where the paper fliers are landing
- Useful suggestions to make the website more mobile-friendly and attractive
- Develop a more specific and structured Facebook strategy
- Launch an Instagram take-over, to give some engaged viewer the chance to post from the cinema's account
- Improve the newsletter system
- Create DIY promotional video, like those of Le Melies

Some useful insight concerned staff development:

- Ask staff member to help with things you struggle with, share the why we are doing things, make the staff feel included (especially if you have personnel only dealing with the café/bar/restaurant and the front office staff)
- Working with staff to make the ambiance funnier and more collaborative
- Apply for a sponsorship to help the finances of the cinema
- More meetings with the staff, have a less administrative management

Other participants shared diverse ideas that they would “steal” by the others:

- Solidarity ticket
- Mr Fantastic or a similar type of secret cinema initiative
- Cinema for blind and visual impaired people
- Donation programme
- Flat-rate ticket offer

**Sonia Ragone, Alexandre Tchernookov**

