

EUROPA CINEMAS INNOVATION DAY LAB REPORT

'How to reconnect with the audience and bring it back to the cinema?'

Mantua, 30th September – 1st October 2021

Europa Cinemas, in collaboration with the Italian Federation of Arthouse Cinemas (FICE), organised for the first time in Mantua an Innovation Day Lab, during the 21st edition of the Incontri del Cinema d'Essai (Arthouse Cinema Meetings). The seminar was led by **Rewan Jansen** (Marketing Manager of Cineville, Netherlands) and **Maeve Cooke** (Director of access>CINEMA, Ireland), and moderated by **Michele Crocchiola** (Director of Cinema Stensen, Florence).

Forty-one Italian exhibitors attended the Lab and actively contributed to the discussions. About 80% of them had never attended a Europa Cinemas Lab before and about half came to Mantua deliberately for the Innovation Day Lab.

DAY 1

OPENING

The Europa Cinemas staff and Michele Crocchiola, member of the Board of the Italian Federation of Arthouse Cinemas, welcomed the participants of this first edition of the Mantua Innovation Day Lab. After a short introduction of the Lab Leaders, Michele Crocchiola and Maeve Cooke started the conversation with the attendees of the Innovation Day Lab by defining the goals and challenges of this workshop focused on digital marketing, data, social media and young audiences.

SESSION 1: DIGITAL MARKETING & COLLECTING DATA

Maeve Cooke kicked off the first session with a general presentation of digital marketing for independent cinemas. Access Cinemas has 80 members all over Ireland with very diverse type of venues, audiences and needs (single-screen venues, film societies, volunteers-led film theatres - and some on them with a mixed programming, often with limited resources and staff).

Digital marketing doesn't include only social media, but also different technological channels to reach customers, online ads, website, newsletters and apps.

Maeve explained what brand marketing is for cinemas: trying to engage emotions of potential customers, which means curating the online content, being the voice and the brand of their venue. Exhibitors should think of the identity of their own cinema and transmit it to their audience (institutional, playful, young, etc). Google Analytics is a very powerful tool when used correctly: it shows important information on people consulting the website, for example: where do users come from, which webpage, desktop or mobile devices users, e-commerce tracking.

It is important to make a choice on which social media to focus, all of them might not be relevant for a cinema's activity, exhibitors should focus on where his customers or potential customers engage the most. It is important to define your voice and tone for each target, according to the social media platform and according to your goals.

Online surveys are very useful and practical with the current digital tools: collecting information and data about your audience.

Rewan Jansen explained how to use data in order to get useful information from your audience and adapt your activity. Cineville was founded in 2009 and it promotes an unlimited card to access 50 Dutch arthouse cinemas. In addition, they sell merchandising, organise live and online events, quizzes, they've launched a temporary VOD platform and develop a large range of marketing tools for member cinemas (newsletters, reviews, podcasts). Cineville currently has 50.000 subscribers and each subscriber use the card about 30 times per year on average (2.5 times per month). Some interesting figures shared on Cineville: subscribers attend cinemas 1.5 times more often than before and they tend to experiment more diverse film genres.

Rewan introduced a couple of practical examples of when they used data "as a magic mirror" to understand the audience attitude and change some of their marketing or programming strategies accordingly. For example, by analysing subscribers' data they realized that Sunday is a suitable day to promote films for young people in Amsterdam. Subsequently, they started putting film adds on digital billboards in nightlife areas on Saturday and Sunday, so that they would be more visible for youngsters, who would then be more likely to go to the movies from Sunday to Monday.

Marco Fortunato from Cinemazero (Pordenone) presented their membership scheme Cinemazero Card and their offers for the cinema reopening. This yearly card gives discount on every ticket, allows to benefit from special offers from Cinemazero's mediatheque and festivals. Analysing their admissions' data they realized that the number of card holders has decreased in the past year, but the current card holders are more engaged and active since they buy more 5-admissions subscriptions.

The Cinemazero card campaign for the reopening proposed four options, offering both economic benefits, extra tickets for an accompanying person, cross selling of other products or services and access to exclusive programmes/items to their loyal audience. Since the reopening in May Cinemazero has sold 1600 cards.

Through the subscriptions Cinemazero has managed to collect data about their audience: film tastes, habits, cinema visiting frequency in order to send targeted communication, but at the same time they have had to reassure their visitors that their personal data won't be exploited and they won't be overloaded by information on their personal devices.

In the open discussion several participants shared their experiences in digital marketing and the most effective tools to reach their audiences and promote their programming. Broadcast lists on Whatsapp (collective messages sent via Whatsapp to a specific lists of recipients) seem to be largely used and successful. Whatsapp is a more immediate and handy tool than newsletters, but it is important not to send messages to frequently (recommended once or twice a week).



SESSION 2: SOCIAL MEDIA & COMMUNICATION

CASE STUDIES

The afternoon session focused on social media strategy and audience engagement online. The first speaker was a guest exhibitor of a multiplex in Modena, Cinema Victoria. **Jessica Andreola** is the cinema director and social media manager and has a very peculiar approach to social media, with a personalised voice and content. She realised that the visitors loved to see the “behind the scenes” of a film, with the daily life of the cinema operations. They are keen to see the human voice behind the Facebook page of a cinema. Jessica is active on the cinema social media 24/7 and always answers to comments or questions in a couple of minutes. They eventize every big film release, by customising the cinema spaces with the film theme. These contents turn out to be very successful for their followers. The daily social media communication even during the cinema closure facilitated the audience to come back from the first day of reopening. An interesting anecdote concerns the communication on the obligation to have a COVID pass to access the cinema. After the post announcing this news on Cinema Victoria Facebook page, a large number of negative and insulting comments were published, but the community following Cinema Victoria answered on its behalf supporting the venue.

The second speaker was **Gabriele Ciglia** from Cinema Nuovo (Varese) who spoke about a crowdfunding and social media campaign they had launched during the second lockdown in order to finance the upcoming renovation of the cinema. The main aim was to gather €30.000 and they reached it just before the donation period ended. Before they launched the crowdfunding campaign, they first did a successful [photo contest](#) on social media in order to make people follow their content and create a feeling of solidarity.



After that they announced the crowdfunding campaign during which their social media content staged the staff members and kept the donators frequently updated. They gave the possibility to give a free donation, but also offered a gift depending on the amount of the donation: a thank you card on social media, film posters, t-shirts, tote bags, a book or a documentary created to celebrate the 30th

anniversary of the cinema, events (a visit to the projection room, private screening) and also a name tag on a cinema seat.

Although the crowdfunding campaign was a success, Gabriele pointed out that there were some challenges that one should consider before launching a crowdfunding campaign. For instance, the communication on social media and answering the questions the potential donators had is time-consuming, and can be a challenge in a small cinema with a limited amount of staff members. Also, one should keep in mind that the work doesn't end when the campaign ends (for example distributing the compensation gifts takes time) and that the financial aspects should be calculated beforehand (paying the staff members but also paying the taxes out of the donations).

Rewan concluded that both presentations proved that although building a community is hard work, it pays off as once the community is set it can do a lot for the cinema.

Maeve pointed out that in the end the relationship Jessica has built with her audiences via social media does not differ that much of the close and personal relationship that small family-run cinemas have with their local audiences. She added that it is, of course, important to keep in mind that building a relationship with the audiences is always teamwork, and a diversification of the stories we tell and the means of communication we use is important.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The afternoon continued with groups discussions, where the participants were asked to come up with 3 short- or long-term solutions in order to improve communication, social media or data collection in one's cinema. Some of the ideas that came out of the discussions were:

- Starting to use Telegram and Whatsapp for weekly or occasional communication.
- Sending video newsletters where the staff or audience members discuss the upcoming films.
- Making the audience members more protagonist in the social media.
- Analyzing the social media activity for the past year to see what works and not, hiring professional help or engaging young volunteer workers to help and investing on real social media tools.
- Communicating beyond the weekly programming: diversifying and personalizing the social media communication, thriving towards the authenticity the arthouse audience seems to want.
- Hiring professional help for data collection and using the collected the data wisely.
- Creating an application for the cinema and giving discount for the application users.



DAY 2

The second day started with a short wrap-up of the previous day, and the participants had a possibility to share their take-aways from the first day. According to Maeve Cooke it was apparent that there is a need to additional training and central support on the area of communication and data collection. Michele Crocchiola found podcasts to promote cinema something that should be more implemented in Italy.

Giuliana Fantoni (Edera, Treviso) reflected on Jessica Andreola's presentation. She realized that her cinema currently had audience members of a certain age, and that if she wanted to draw in the young audiences she should perhaps start to familiarize herself with their world. She added that when trying to be coherent with their arthouse image, one often end up transmitting austerity towards the young public that doesn't relate with the arthouse cinema image.

SESSION 3: ATTRACTING YOUNG AUDIENCE

With the opening of the third session, Michele reminded that young audiences are often reached through schools or other institutions, and even though this is an effective way, cinemas should also explore other ways to reach the young audiences, both those who already have a pronounced interest towards arthouse cinema and those who don't.

Rewan Jansen explained how to involve youth in the creative process, and attract them towards the cinemas by doing so. He presented the *Scenes in Cineville* campaign where they had involved young directors by giving them the possibility to shoot scenes they had always dreamed to shoot. One director had an idea of an ice-cream shop, and together they decided to involve a young influencer (with 1 million followers) to be the lead actress – a strategy that proved to be effective as the [clip](#) has been viewed more than 214,000 times, mainly by young people (18-24 years old). Rewan also encouraged cinemas to collaborate with institutions that have the same goals than they do. As an example, he mentioned a soon-to-be-launched collaboration with the Van Gogh Museum to attract young audiences both to cinema and to the museum. He added that they are preparing a launching event, and involving young people in the preparation too.

Maeve Cooke discussed how innovations can be used to attract young audiences (from very young audiences to adults in their early thirties). She presented a project called *Cinnovate* in which access>CINEMA participates and which benefited from a financial support from the European Commission call "Cinemas as innovation hubs". The project aims to create an additional platform that will complement the cinema theatrical experience: cinema-powered VOD, event cinema offers online, gaming and VR in cinemas, Jukebox cinemas & virtual film literacy offers.

The idea is to embrace the digital not as a replacement but as a complementary tool to the existing cinema activity, in order to increase and diversify the offer and to include more diverse audiences (e.g. young audiences). Young audiences are reached with the means they use (digital consumption) but the ultimate aim is to the encourage them to go back to cinema.

Some cinemas pointed out that they had experiences of involving the youngster, but that the results had been unsatisfying. The fear of losing the essence of an arthouse cinema if one was to add too many other elements in it, was also expressed.

Many agreed that there is a necessity to collaborate with other realities and local actors, especially the ones that work well with reach young audiences in order to learn from them.

CASE STUDIES

Giuliana Fantoni (Cinema Edera, Treviso) presented *Edera Film Festival*, an event held in summer, organized by young audiences to young audiences, since 2018. The cinema involved young people who already came to the cinema in all organizational aspects of the festival: technical staff, artistic staff (graphics, trailer, photos, communication) and the volunteer workers during the week, all the interviews, etc.

The main idea has been to give young people the necessary tools and then the freedom to use their creativity. The main challenge they had faced was finding the young volunteers and then finding the young audiences – as the main motivation has been to make young people work and give young directors a platform, the results have sometimes been somewhat “home-made” and not necessarily the type of content that pleases young audiences.

The second difficulty mentioned was finding the financing. Maeve suggested that the cinema could involve youngsters also in finding the funding for the festival, and seeing if creative ideas come out of it.

Laura Ledda (Circuito Cinema Bologna) presented an initiative that took place during the cinema closure. With the help of an association, the cinema reached out to primary school children and asked them to do posters with the theme ‘what is cinema’. These posters were then hung outside the cinema, and in the end an exhibition took place. They also reached out to children from secondary school, and asked them to decorate their popcorn buckets in creative ways. This project resulted in sharing creativity but also education, as small children were able to familiarize with the cinema, and Laura believed this will pay off in long term too.



GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The sessions and case studies were followed by group discussions, where the participants were invited to come up with concrete ideas they could take back to their venue in order to attract young audiences. The main ideas that came out of these discussions were:

- 1) Giving the youngest ones their first cinema *experience* with different tools, such as event projections, cultural passport where they can get a stamp for different destinations (related to the film they will see), organizing activities in the cinema before the film (for example before Pokémon film, playing with the stickers).
- 2) Encouraging high schoolers to come see films and engaging them to give short reviews of the films (in Whatsapp or social media) or organizing (secret) events screenings.
- 3) Involving high schoolers and university students in the daily operational life of the cinema and attributing responsibilities for them.

The main consensus seemed to be that it is important to find out how the cinema can adapt to the needs of the youngsters and make them *protagonists* of the actions designated to them. The challenge being to find captivating subjects and tasks in order to evoke enthusiasm, and to create a community. It was also agreed upon that the staff members involved in these projects should be used to working with young people.

CONCLUSIONS

Both lab leaders thanked warmly the participants and their input, and their generosity in terms of sharing ideas and inspiration and their open-minded attitude about learning new ideas and facing new ways of doing.

Maeve reminded that although cinema is the core of all of us and in a way sacred, in order to continue to exist (and remain sacred) it will also have to change and evolve.

Sonia Ragone (EC team) highlighted that although it is not possible to take away all the ideas tossed these two days, Europa Cinemas hopes all participants can take away knowledge and new ideas that are feasible in their particular context and continue the dialogue. Michele Crocchiola found that the pandemic situation had brought something good in the Italian cinema landscape: networking, connection, collaboration and solidarity between the exhibitors, and that these ideas and synergy should be used to create content together.

Sonia Ragone
Miila Norros

