

Cinema Together: Building Communities. Connecting Audience

Interview with Marius Balanescu, Cinema Victoria (Cluj Napoca)

by Vincent Le Leurch



© All Rights Reserved

Why did you choose to launch this project?

Last October, I witnessed the artistic director of the Transilvania International Film Festival (TIFF) mentioning what a huge impression it made on him when they organised a screening for people with visual impairment and thought few (if any) people would show up and, to his surprise, there was a gigantic queue in front of the cinema. I thought: 'Wow, there's an overlooked audience over there.' Secondly, there aren't many arthouse cinemas left in Romania and we don't tend to communicate too much between ourselves. I felt the need to get closer to my fellow colleagues and tried to see what it would be like if we could collaborate together and synchronise events that would benefit all parties involved. These elements, and wishing for our cinema to feel like a huge embrace to more than the established audience groups made it clear that a project like *Cinema Together* was needed.

Can you describe the project?

We partnered with two other arthouse cinemas from Romania (Cinema Arta by Cityplex in Sfantu Gheorghe and Cinema Ateneu in Iasi) and, as a side collaborator, Cinema Victoria from Timisoara, for a series of special screenings that engage new audiences, across disparate age groups, some overlooked -



© All Rights Reserved

giving them maybe a first chance to actually experience cinema, but the project will also help us and our partners to better serve existing audiences, too.

Cinema Together: Building Communities. Connecting Audience consists of five major parts: regular monthly screenings for people with visual impairment; a selection of recent European films of great artistic value, awarded or critically acclaimed, with no distribution in Romania, for people with a well-established taste in cinema - acquiring a minimum of 10 European films per year (recent titles include *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* and *Songs of Earth*) and hosting a minimum of 30 joint screenings; constant curation and screenings for the young audience - children whose parents are looking for the films that can strike a balance between a certain artistic sensibility and real educational value, some complemented by workshops (at least five in total) and a minimum of two workshops for young professionals training young cinema facilitators to work with young audiences; films for seniors (60+); and, finally, a selection of titles for the Hungarian minority.

What was the need for it in your country?

Approaching groups of people overlooked by what cinemas currently offer (such as those with visual impairment, special film events for seniors or workshops that train young cinema facilitators) were a must, but better serving arthouse cinema lovers is equally important - many quality titles released each year fail to find distribution in Romania.

What are your expectations?

One of the main expectations is to set a framework, not only in which Romanian arthouse cinemas can collaborate effectively, but also in which they are able to structure their programming so that they



© All Rights Reserved

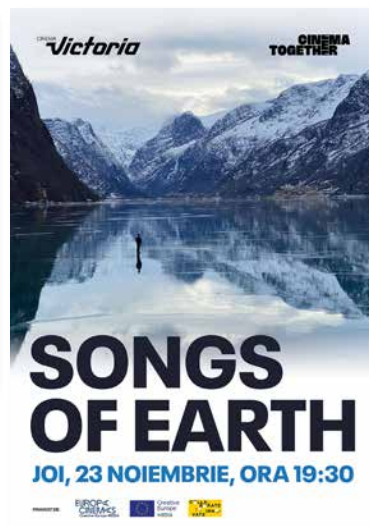


© All Rights Reserved

can address more, distinctive audiences types - perhaps some that they never considered before. That being said, we would like to set an example of best practice, backed up by numbers, of course, which brings me to our next expectation: clearly defined numbers to reach - after all, successful screenings will be measured by people attending and responding to our call. Luckily, we've already had sold-out screenings within the project.

What impact could it have at a local and national level?

National networking opportunities between cinemas are almost extinct and each cinema is struggling on its own, so this project aims to change the status quo. Sharing the expertise of cultural managers, film curators, accessibility experts, etc (including human resource



© All Rights Reserved

managers) and splitting costs between cinemas will greatly benefit the target audiences, by improving the organisational capacity of the cinemas. Also, bringing all of the above mentioned audiences together in our cinemas, while our creative and managerial efforts are collaborative across the country, is of great value not just to us, but in making a difference in the sector as a whole.

Partner cinemas:

Cinema Victoria, Cluj Napoca (Coordinator)

Cinema Ateneu, Iași

Cinema Arta, Sfantu Gheorghe