

# Hybrid futures for European cinema, The Netherlands

## Interview with Pien Houthoff, Cinema Lux

by **Geoffrey Macnab**

The Cinema Lux in Nijmegen is the largest arthouse venue in the Netherlands – and is considered by many to be the most beautiful. It hosts events, Q&As, and musical performances as well as showing films. During the pandemic, working with streaming platform Picl, the venue expanded its online offering. Under its manager Pien Houthoff, the Lux is now introducing the joint project “Hybrid Futures for European cinemas,” for which it has strong support from Europa Cinemas through the Collaborate to Innovate support scheme.

Lux is leading the way in a project combining online offerings with physical screenings. Other venues across the Netherlands, from LantarenVenster in Rotterdam to the EYE in Amsterdam are also part of the initiative, which will use the Container, (a platform enabling hybrid streaming and online ticketing).

### Why did you choose to launch this project?

Lux is a big theatre, home not only to film, but music and theatre, too. It has seven screens for film, and one more for theatre and debate. Over the last year-and-a-half, we have launched many online programmes due to lockdown. We were looking for a tool to combine ticketing and all the different platforms on our website. While we were doing that, we discovered the Container [the platform that gives arthouse cinemas a way of organising streaming and online ticketing], and we thought it would be a good idea to start it – not just for Lux, but for the other theatres, too – so we could combine our content. The idea behind the Container is that it is adapted to your own website, and it looks like your own programme, but it can also be initiated by

another film theatre. We organise many film discussions and courses – we can offer that online or hybrid – not only here in Nijmegen but in other cities in Holland, too. As such, we asked the Association of Dutch Film Theatres if there were other theatres interested in this idea and 15 of the 25 theatres were very enthusiastic. So that’s why we started this initiative.

### What was the need for it?

During the pandemic, people have been a bit scared to go back to live meetings with others, sitting next to each other. This is a bridge between the pandemic period and (I hope) a period in the future where we can forget about those restrictions. In general, people have less time. I think film theatres have to look to the future. There are [now] many online platforms, such as Netflix and HBO, that are expanding rapidly. We must make changes for the future. “Hybrid content” is, partially, a way to expand our audience. You can build communities and attract people to your film theatre. You can build a better relationship [with the audience] so they feel at home online as well as in venue.





Cinema Lux, Nijmegen

### What are your expectations?

The collaboration between the 15 film theatres is very unique, so I hope we can participate in events together. In the long term, I hope we can extend it not only across Holland but also Europe, where we can secure Q&As and red carpet events, as well as film discussions and courses.

### What could be its impact at local and national level?

Why this is a good idea, and why Picl also works so well, is because the film theatres have a big local and regional audience. They can reach the audience better than a national platform can. That's why I think, for the local and regional public, it will expand the programmes we offer. Also, it's a chance to be part of a wider community. A large segment of our audience are film-loving, which means they really like communicating with other film-loving people, not only in Nijmegen but in other cities. That's why it's interesting to be part of a wider community, in Holland or Europe.

Nationally, we can get a bigger audience. It will open possibilities for more people to be part of these events. If you don't live near a film theatre, it's still possible to join the chat and ask questions.

The Container was started by the four film festivals in the Netherlands, IDFA, IFFR, The Netherlands Film Festival and Cinekid. For us, this project is a good way to ensure better interaction with film festivals because they are already using it, and we are now adapting it for the film theatres, too.

### What is the timeframe for this?

At this moment, we are integrating the system at five of the theatres. I think the first online content available will be around January. By March, we will all be participating.

### Will this appeal to younger cinemagoers?

Our audience is mixed. We have an older audience, as all the film theatres do, but also attract a student, and younger audience. Specifically, the younger viewers are very keen on online offerings. I think it will be very interesting for us in expanding our younger audience.

### Would you have been able to push ahead with the programme without Europa Cinemas support?

No, not at this rate. We would still have started this initiative, but it would have taken years for us to be at the point where will be within half a year, thanks to the Collaborate to Innovate support.

#### Partner cinemas:

Lux (Nijmegen)  
 Filmschuur (Haarlem)  
 Ketelhuis (Amsterdam)  
 LantarenVenster (Rotterdam)  
 Chassé (Breda)  
 De Lieve Vrouw (Amersfoort)  
 EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam)  
 Concordia (Enschede)  
 MIMIK (Deventer)  
 VerkadeFabriek (Den Bosch)  
 't Hoogt (Utrecht)  
 Filmhuis Den Haag (Den Haag)  
 Groninger Forum (Groningen)  
 Rialto (Amsterdam)  
 De Fabriek (Zaandam)