

Streaming technology in movies theatres, Spain

Interview with Xavier Bachs, CineBaix

by Jesus Silva Vilas

We talked to Xavier Bachs, who shared with us their experience in the field of innovation and the particularities of their project, focusing on implementing streaming technology in film theatres.

What is the history of CineBaix and its innovative approach towards film exhibition?

We are a recovered cinema. In 2003, this theatre closed because it could not compete with the commercial multiplexes that started operating in the city centre. This caused a citizen movement that, after a lot of pressure, convinced the city council to buy the building. The local citizen's platform turned into an association and took over CineBaix. They expected us to last three months, but we have been running for sixteen years. We survived an important crisis with the digital revolution in the late 2000s, which caused the closing of 700 theatres in Spain. Being a non-profit organization, supported by a cooperative of ethical and solidarity financial services (Coop57), we could ask for loans to gradually restore all our screens. The current project will be our second stage of digitisation.

Why did you decide to launch this project?

Its origin was in the closing of cinemas due to the pandemic. Just before lockdown, we were about to

celebrate our Latin American film festival, which we produce ourselves. At that stage, we had already booked and programmed everything, so we decided to launch a virtual platform. This allowed us to carry on with the festival and even to increase audience numbers from the previous year. As such, we decided to continue with the platform in order to keep in touch with our audience.

On the other hand, we had embraced the idea that our cinema shouldn't only be a "receptor" for the premieres and distribution calendar. We wanted to be more proactive and multi-purpose. We already had a specific programme aimed at schools, as well as four self-produced festivals in the theatre, and we saw that all these activities could be improved with new technologies. For this reason, when Collaborate to Innovate was announced, we decided to add value to this experience and share it with other network cinemas across the territory.

Could you briefly explain how it works?

Essentially, this project has three legs: One is the VOD



CineBaix, Sant Feliu de Llobregat



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platform we started during the pandemic. We have been working on it for a year-and-a-half, despite the difficulties, including distributor relationships, exhibition windows, etc. But it is functioning now.

The second is what we call CINEBAIX.LIVE. We used to broadcast operas and other shows in our theatres. What we want to do now is stream the events we organize here. For example, if we host a film screening with the director present, we can broadcast it for audiences at home. We have installed high-definition cameras that allow us to operate as a small TV studio. The technology enables other cinemas in the network to follow what we are doing in CineBaix, and vice versa.

The third, which might have the greatest impact, is that we have started to screen our films via streaming. We had to adapt to special servers that can work with cheaper projectors, which meant a substantial saving. It's no longer necessary to bring DCPs to the cinema, as we don't need to download, store, or return the files. We have already installed the system, and we are now testing it.

What are the next steps?

Now, the remaining cinemas in the project need to set it up, so we can enter the collaborative stage: connecting with each other and sharing films and events. The funding from Europa Cinemas has allowed us to include five other independent cinemas in the project (Rambla De L'art-Cambrils Aie, Duplex Cinema, Cinema Truffaut, Zumzeig, and Cineciutat). We will all employ these technologies together, to make them work in a sustainable, effective, and collaborative way. The goal is to collaborate, not only in the acquisition of films, but also in broadcasting. Each of us with our own programming and editorial line, but negotiating together with the distributors and organizing events and festivals in a cooperative way. We are already in contact

with many distributors to provide us with the content for this project.

What are your expectations? What could the impact be at a local and national level?

Given that, during digitisation, more than 700 cinemas had to close, I believe that, with more affordable and suitable technology, the possibility to reopen more cinemas is attainable. Thus far, we are delighted because we were able to keep in touch with our audiences at a critical time. The response from the public has been more than accepting, even enthusiastic in some instances. This encouraged us to submit our proposal to Europa Cinemas.

On the other hand, before the pandemic, the cinemas in the network were selling 8 million tickets: 26% from European non-national cinema, and 16% from other nationalities—almost 3 million in total. The potential is tremendous. With this technology, we could recover the space that has been absorbed by other platforms and reduce costs for the distribution of European cinema. This would also encourage a change of model, which is something I have mentioned previously: we can't be mere receptors of content. We should be active programmers, turning cinemas into cultural centres.

Partner cinemas:

CineBaix (Sant Feliu de Llobregat)
 Rambla De L'art-Cambrils Aie (Cambrils)
 Duplex Cinema (Ferrol)
 Cinema Truffaut (Girona)
 Zumzeig (Barcelona)
 Cineciutat (Palma De Mallorca)