

Europa Cinemas

Network Review #36

December 2020



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Looking back at 2020
Europa Cinemas Awards

Europa Cinemas Network Review

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Graphic Design: Change is good, Paris.

Print: Intelligence Publishing.

Cover: Burg Kino, Vienna © David Ruggiero

Founded in 1992, Europa Cinemas is the first international film theatre network for the circulation of European films.

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The French version of the Network Review is available online at <https://www.europa-cinemas.org/publications>

4

Editorial

by Claude-Eric Poiroux

6

Moving online, staying still: Europa Cinemas Labs in the time of coronavirus

10

The cultural and social power of cinemas will see it survive and thrive

16

Longing for the Big Screen

27

Film Festivals' response to Covid-19 impacts film ecosystem

30

Europa Cinemas Awards

- 30 Innovation Prize
- 32 Best Programming
- 34 Best Young Audience Activities
- 36 Entrepreneur of the Year

38

European Arthouse Cinema Day 2020

39

European Cinema Night 2020

Austria

Burg Kino, Vienna

Belgium

Quai10, Charleroi

Croatia

Kino Mediteran

Czech Republic

Lucerna, Prague

Denmark

Grand Teatret, Copenhagen

France

Le Zola, Villeurbanne

Germany

Harmonie, Cinéma and Casino, Frankfurt
and Aschaffenburg

Greece

Danaos, Athens

Italy

Cinema Orione, Bologna

Latvia

Kino Bize, Riga

Malta

Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta

Poland

Kino Elektronik, Warsaw

Portugal

Cinema Ideal, Lisbon

Romania

Cinema Muzeul Taranului, Bucharest

Russia

Angleterre Cinema Lounge Kino&Teatr, Saint Petersburg

Slovenia

Mestni Kino Domzale, Domzale

Spain

Cines Renoir, Madrid and Barcelona

Sweden

Biografcentralen, Borås, Karlstad and Skövde

Switzerland

Cinélux, Geneva

United Kingdom

Queen's Film Theatre, Belfast

“What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger”*

* Expression adapted from: Nietzsche
“Twilight of the Idols” 1888.

2020, a year that is clearly intent on throwing obstacles in our path right to the very end, will undoubtedly also have one positive effect: that of strengthening our convictions and the practices we adopt as managers of our cinemas, which continue to exist even when closed.

Unfortunately, not all of them will emerge from this crisis unscathed. Many more vulnerable cinemas are already facing major financial difficulties, having had no income (admissions) for a number of months now, while still having to pay maintenance, rent and personnel costs that are jeopardising their financial stability. The reopening augured well for a promising recovery and the audience demonstrated its loyalty to our cinemas, appreciating their proximity and the diversity of their programming. However, the restart proved to be short-lived. Cashflow problems are getting worse again as cinemas shut their doors for a second time and could prove a fatal blow for businesses without public support. Creative Europe already recognised the scale of the problem in June by allowing an exceptional support of 5 million euros available to our network cinemas. However, national or regional support is essential if our cinemas, as cultural venues with deep roots in their local communities, are to be preserved. Just as we did with the Commission, we will ensure that the national authorities are made aware of situations that could prove critical for businesses that are currently under threat, but will be capable of supporting themselves financially once audiences are able to return. What they need is temporary support to avoid having to bring the curtain down for good on an essential activity, that of screening films for the public – an activity that has a role to play in the long term.

For several months now many of our cinemas have been demonstrating their ability not just to adapt to the constraints they are facing, but also to be innovative.



©Thierry Bonn et-Ville d'Angers

That is the subject of this Network Review: based on the experiences we have lived through in our own cinemas, sharing the lessons and good practices that have resulted from meeting this unprecedented challenge. We will continue to highlight initiatives that have been born out of the lockdown, but could now open up new horizons in our multiple relationships with the public. Remember, in the first half of the year we were not the only ones who left the confines of our closed venues and reached out to our audiences online: philharmonic orchestras, theatres and even museums took this step to maintain contact with the public and prepare for the moment when they can reopen their doors. We appreciated



illustration © J-Garrin

the fact that, in several countries, “cinema-friendly” platforms picked up the baton and piqued the curiosity of our audiences, who were locked down in their homes. We even organised virtual screenings and offered films at fixed times, often accompanied by online meetings with filmmakers. From behind the closed doors of our venues we have become ‘communicators’ and have developed the things at which we already excel in normal times, namely taking full advantage of social networks and digital media not only to disseminate messages, but also to present films that would ordinarily be shown

on our big screens. We will need all of these valuable stories to enrich our tools and practices and to successfully reclaim our place in the imagination and economy of European cinema; in other words, to remain exceptional spaces (well attended and with open doors), the only place where the desires of the audience and the artistic expression of creators and filmmakers genuinely come together: the film theatre.

Claude-Eric Poiroux

General Director of Europa Cinemas

Here are the **three Europa Cinemas Awards for 2020**, which are covered in the pages of this Network Review and will be presented soon in the reopened cinemas:

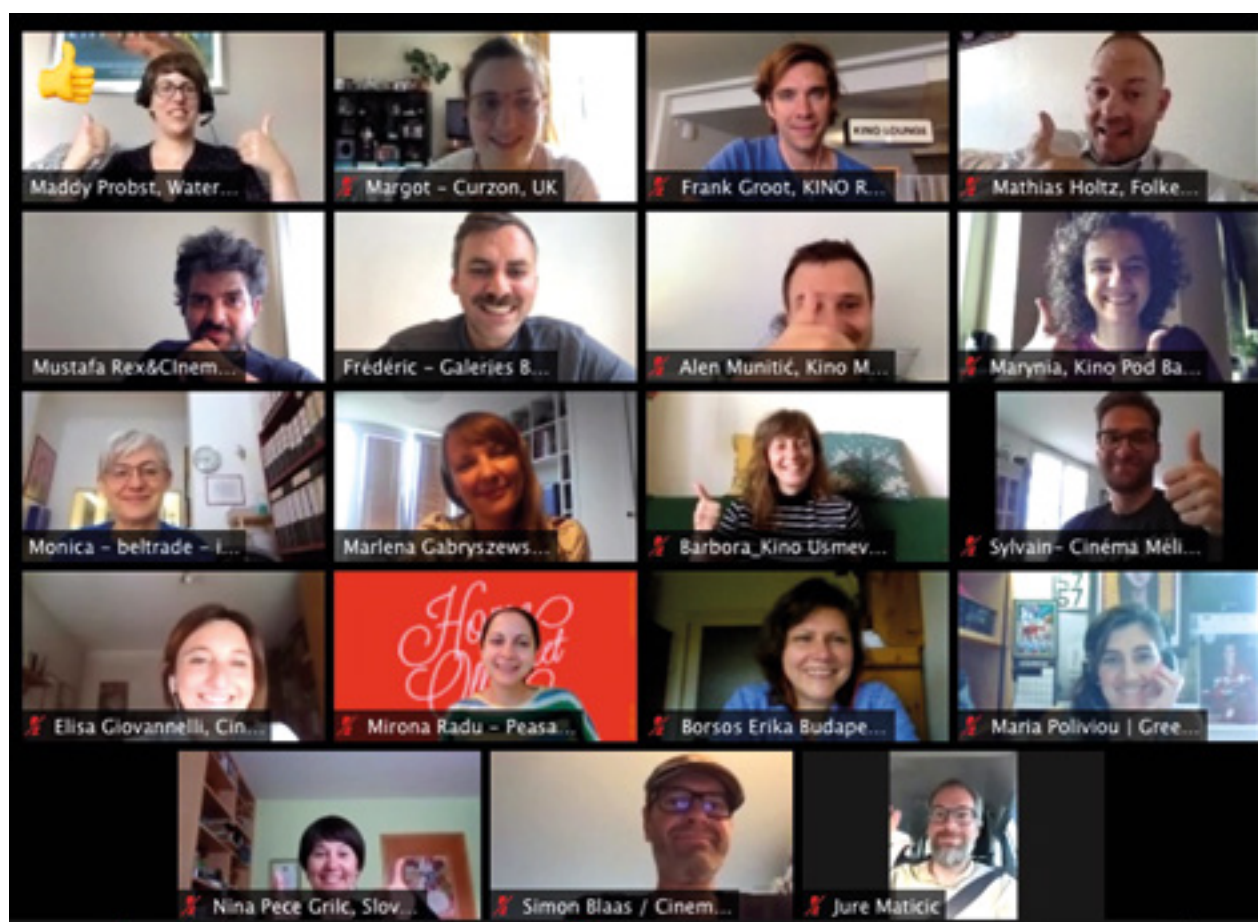
- Best Programming Award: Olympion Cinema and Warehouse 1, Thessaloniki, Greece
- Best Young Audience Activities Award: Cinema Panora, Malmö, Sweden
- Best Entrepreneur Award: Ramiro Ledo Cordeiro, Duplex Cinema, Ferrol, Spain

Well done and thank you to all three cinemas, your teams and your audiences!

Moving online, staying still:

Europa Cinemas Labs in the time of coronavirus

As film festivals and cinemas were forced to cancel and close, Europa Cinemas also needed to adapt the existing model for Labs, moving online for the first time. Running a pilot in the summer, to see if and how the format might work, the network set about doing what it does best: bringing people together to implement and iterate best practice in an ever-evolving industry ecology, defining and refining approaches for independent cinema exhibition.





Europa Cinemas Audience Development & Innovation Lab - Bologna 2019

To test learnings from the pilot edition of the online lab, Europa Cinemas invited participants who had already attended physical labs, so that format, structure, and engagement could be quantitatively and qualitatively measured against an existing model. In addition to the pilot lab, from June through to November, Europa Cinemas has organised another seven three-hour sessions online, with 134 participants from across 27 countries. The workshops were welcome and the feeling from exhibitors was a resounding, “We need this!” at a time of existential crisis for cinemas, where workshop facilitator, Maddy Probst, says, “All the points of reference had disappeared.”

“I don’t think you can replace the physical labs—personal interactions and deep connections,” Probst reflects, a sentiment echoed by workshop facilitators Javier Pachón, Irene Musumeci, and Frank Groot across subsequent labs, where smaller conversations over lunches, dinners, social events, and city walks would often lead to cementing collaborations from the more formal sessions, and what Pachón calls, “That coffee break that changes everything.”

But the online labs did provide positivity in a time of need. Connecting gave people a sense of hopefulness and a collaborative lifeline in uncertain waters. The mood in March was, for most, one of shock: cinemas were forced to find new ways to engage their audiences—whilst also having to find and nurture staff and community morale—and there was no road map out of it.

Musumeci says this made participants feel like pioneers, “Fighting for the life and existence of their cinema.” The summer labs focused on examples of how cinemas could still have a life, and connect with audiences, whether through hosting online watch parties, experimenting with outdoor screenings, or just in finding a shared perspective on the situation. For Groot, it was the release of a collective energy and the realisation that, “Everybody is quite resilient.” It was also, as Probst recalled, one of the network’s greatest strengths in the face of any industry wide challenge: “Realising that you’re not alone.”

Covid doesn’t differentiate between language or geography and, for exhibitors trying to stay afloat and recover against its forced closures, the questions it forces us to ask are the same across the network: how are we going to keep doing what we do? and, how are we going to change?

One bastion of cinematic hope came from Kino Rotterdam and their reminder that, although re-opening requires careful consideration around PPE (personal protective equipment), and sanitising and social distancing processes, it’s also about welcoming back the audience. Their “Yellow Brick Road”, a new route through the venue, to guide customers safely, also brought a sense of play and wonder to a serious situation—the kind that the end of the road, arriving at the big screen, promises. Another was early reassurance from Kinodvor in Ljubljana, who opened their doors first, giving a message of hope to everyone through their successful return



to business. In this way, the labs enabled an overview of the situation across Europe, helping individuals come out of their own contexts to gather a wider perspective.

While challenges varied between countries and regions, with some cinemas needing to engage audiences for literal financial survival and others doing so for perpetuity, the detail of re-opening was, in many instances, overwhelming. But those early examples provided much needed reassurance that, as Probst says, “Once you reopen, things fall back into place.” The one sure thing about exhibition, even amid a pandemic is, “You still have a purpose: of serving a community.”

Pachón notes that the labs have already, after only a few iterations, evolved into more productive and useful models, with early learnings from the pilot edition and first national lockdowns being implemented. Where the early labs were more structure driven, the later editions were able to focus more on topic, allowing a more open and participatory style of presentation and facilitation. Initially, Pachón said, “the process was very fast,” with “too much information and no space for it to land.” Groot also reflected on this efficiency of the online labs, and Zoom’s controlled limitations on conversation. Break-out rooms, he said, were especially important for feedback, where it was easier for people to speak freely. Both agreed that the pace of the online labs was condensed in this way; useful for immediacy and sharing amid the current crisis, but not as nourishing as their real-life counterparts where there is time to reflect and dig deeper.

In Spain and Italy, there were also national focused

labs, establishing mini networks within the wider network that could centre on specific regional challenges. These brought what Musumeci calls “a great sense of community and humbleness,” as Italian cinemas presented a full day of live streaming across Facebook for European Arthouse Cinema Day, and as some venues took the time to update their online presence, to physically improve or adapt their venues, and to find ticketing solutions as a matter of priority. A key takeaway was that if it didn’t cost too much, it was worth trying—unusual times call for an open approach. Both Musumeci and Pachón saw positive change and new partnerships grow within their cohorts.

Talking about the emotion in gathering together again, even with social distancing, at this year’s Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna, Musumeci recalls the solidarity and tears that returning to the big screen released, “The atmosphere was absolutely amazing, like a thaw from a really long winter.”

In Spain, the lab in Seville was very almost physical, but a last-minute return to lockdown meant pivoting once again to the now established online model that the network has endeavoured, revealing the strength and flexibility the network has to adapt and respond. Coinciding with the national launch of Spanish cinema network Promio, the vibe was one of determinism, not defeat.

Collaboration, finding partners, and a sense of solidarity from the labs helped many cinemas find their way, some returning with more sustainable models than before.



Europa Cinemas Audience Development & Innovation Lab – Bologna 2019

And while the online labs enabled access for some participants who would otherwise not have been able to attend, each iteration revealed the need and desire for exhibitors to gather together again, whenever we can. Perhaps some spotlight sessions or keynote speeches could go online in the future—more localised labs would also be welcome, and a hybrid offering could cast a wider net for both participants and perspectives—but the intensity and deep level of

collaboration that face-to-face encounters allow is also an absolute must. During the physical labs, participants would visit a Europa Cinemas member in the city, to watch a film. The collective act of viewing is our industry’s lifeblood, just as re-opening and attending our cinemas is an act of resilience, and of inspiration also.

Tara Judah, Cinema Producer Watershed



The cultural and social power of cinemas will see it survive and thrive

The Covid crisis has been a serious threat to the independent and arthouse venues in the Europa Cinemas network. Closure has also highlighted the unique value of cinemas across Europe — as engines of regeneration, cultural diversity and active communities. Uniting and collaborating around that shared mission can leave cinemas even stronger than before the crisis.



Cinema Puskin, Budapest, Hungary



Cinéma Katorza, Nantes, France

“Cinema Katorza has only been closed twice in 100 years, the first time when it was bombed during the war and now by Covid.” It was a tough year to mark the centenary of such an illustrious institution in the heart of the French city of Nantes, said director Caroline Grimault. But the history of the building is instructive, not just in terms of the individual theatre, but about the importance of cinemas to the communities they serve. The Katorza originally began as a fairground attraction, run by a Tunisian immigrant, before moving to the Rue Corneille in June 1920, where it still stands today.

It has survived occupation, liberation and huge social changes, including the occasional opposition of reactionary elements of the church. It has seen waves of both positive and disruptive innovation, from CinemaScope and 3D to the arrival of television and the Internet.

So, today's claims of a New Normal that will finish off cinema are just echoes from a century of such predictions. There never was an Old Normal.

The current crisis, however, ranks among the most serious faced by exhibitors because, like the virus itself, it has mutated. Initially, everyone was confined to their homes and businesses closed for what was expected to be a short, sharp shock.

When cinemas reopened, there was still cautious optimism, despite restrictions on visitor numbers, with the pain eased in most countries by support from government and industry bodies.

Then came a second wave of closures. It is hard to formulate long-term strategy with so many factors beyond one's control, including consumer confidence in health measures;

curfews, and the decision of distributors and studios on what films they will release and when.

There have been periods of history when there have been large-scale closures of cinemas, including the period following the end of the Communist Era in Central and Eastern Europe. The community strength of cinemas, their audience relationships, public support and cultural value should ensure that most avoid the worst-case scenario.

But some are now looking beyond survival and seeing the crisis as a chance to restate and renew their mission.

Cinemas are not the retail arm of the film industry: They have a social, cultural and economic role that is sometimes taken for granted.

“More than a theatre, opera house or museum, we can be, and need to be the most important place for diversity in terms of what we show from all around the world, the festivals we run and the themes we choose,” said Mustafa El MESAoudi.

“We are, and need to be, a great cultural place but also a societal place. We have to create this value.”

Moving Online

Europa Cinemas members recognise they increasingly operate in an ecosystem, where online viewing through Video On Demand is playing a bigger role. Many had already experimented to some extent before the pandemic.

Covid closures accelerated the building of an online presence. In countries with a developed and established VOD industry, there have been a range of in-house and external options available for creating what become known as Virtual Cinema.



Cinema Stensen, Florence, Italy



Those options have expanded. Michele Crocchiola, of Cinema Stensen in Florence said his cinema was offered an early online outlet to audiences during lockdown through Lucky Red's MioCinema platform. It then participated in the #iorestoinsala initiative, launched by a network of cinemas. Now it is involved in a third exhibitor-led plan to be launched shortly. All those VOD options retain and increase the visibility of the cinema brand, as well as offering access to films. They are intended to build on the strengths of the theatrical service, including audience relationships, community and curation.

Crocchiola's favourite example came from his colleagues at l'Arsenale in Pisa, who created a curated service based on free content they could link to from disparate sources, from YouTube to national broadcaster Rai, and then creating events around the talent behind the content. "It is the nearest thing to what we do in normal times, interpreting work for and with the audience in the most creative way possible."

Online relationships have been more challenging in other parts of Europe. Ioana Dragomirescu, of the Elvire Popesco cinema in Bucharest set up a streaming platform showing four films a week but finding content to show has been tough.

The cinema reopened for a short three-week window between the first and second shutdown (from mid-September), but even films already showing on the big screen during the reopening were not allowed to be transferred online. Online screening is restricted by a four-month release window, strongly supported by the country's biggest commercial cinema chain, which local distributors have struggled to successfully challenge.

The screenings have featured work by new film-makers, often without a distributor. Even then, said Dragomirescu, it was going to be difficult to find fresh content every week for online screening over the coming months.

A common pattern in the online strategies of different cinemas has been an attempt to replicate parts of the theatrical experience, including fixed screening times and Q&A events to support releases. The Elvire Popesco cinema, for example, matched the price for an online screening with that for a cinema ticket.

"Online screening are not really sustainable for us," said Dragomirescu, "We are only doing it to ensure our audience gets something, so that we remain visible. Because the cinema is run by the Institut Francais in Romania, it is a partially publicly-funded institution, which means we get some sponsorship from the French government."

The Bucharest cinema also found that its online audience was relatively small and rarely reached beyond its normal core city audience. Nonetheless, cinemas have recognised the necessity of embracing aspects of online business in order to keep their audiences connected. In that sense, VOD fits comfortably with their social media output, which has been essential during the lockdown.

Reopening

Online screenings unquestionably made an important during the crisis but the idea of "Virtual Cinema" is overstated.

VOD has strengths but it does not represent a replacement, economically, culturally or socially.

Reopening the physical venue is clearly the top priority—and not just for theatre owners. Distributors want and need the theatrical market to return as soon as possible. And towns and cities around Europe badly require the unique assets of a cinema presence.

Cinemas are engines of regeneration; they bring people into town centres during the day and, crucially, at night. Erika Borsos, Budapest Film is head of programming for a group of venues, each which has its own unique place in its respective community. She said the Pushkin cinema in the Hungarian capital, for example, offered a curated selection of films unavailable elsewhere. "We have built these trust relationships and people think we know everything about film."

At another of its Budapest venues—the Toldi Cinema—space is given over to young people to organise their own music concerts, related to films being screened. And they have encouraged art students to make short films to promote the cinema. Such events bring younger audiences into the cinema, said Borsos, but it is part



Rex Filmtheater, Wuppertal, Germany

of an ambitious and wide ranging programme to cater for a big range of demographics and community groups. Between them, the six venues ran between 700 and 750 festivals and events before lockdown.

Such diverse assets acquired a growing importance in town plans long before the pandemic, and cinema is now frequently an 'anchor' to retail and housing developments.

The need for those social spaces has only been increased by the Covid crisis with even well-established stores and shops closed or heading out of business with online retail becoming an onslaught.

The strength of cinemas as community institutions and social spaces has given them greater resilience than many retailers but the pandemic still represents a serious threat. In Sweden, for example, Mathias Holtz, cinema programmer at the Folkets Hus Och Parker network, said it may take a year for a full return to the pre-Covid period.

Sweden, having avoided an initial lockdown, is now imposing restrictions on venues. The government does not have the legal authority for a lockdown of shops, malls and restaurants but it can force measures on social spaces with crowds, and cinemas have been told they can only have a maximum of eight people per screening room.

"We are taking a blow for what is happening elsewhere," says Holtz.

Despite those tricky economics some cinemas have chosen to stay at least partially open, including the network's big arthouse venues in Gothenburg, Malmo and Helsingborg. "These are three of the biggest in our organisation and strict arthouse cinemas, who wanted to give people hope there was

still culture to be had if people trusted us to keep them safe.

"When you are open, you have something to say. When you are closed you can run out of things to communicate."

He said that same message had been communicated to smaller rural cinemas in the network struggling financially and "running on fumes". Letting people know you are still working and committed to a better future gives communities confidence.

There have been some initiatives to counteract the lack of product, including a Jukebox Cinema scheme in which audience members can rent the cinema to show a film of their choice and to bring along family or friends. Such approaches do not make a great deal of money but they keep the venues alive in the community and offer some employment.

But said Holtz, it is important to remember that "it is a quick process to close down but a long and tough one to reopen."

The feeling of a responsibility to the audience helps cement relationships with arthouse film lovers and cinema owners recognise that they often also represent a cultural lifeline for towns and cities. In some cases, even where the cinema owns its own property and its incentive to open is fairly low, they do so out of a sense of duty and community responsibility.

Those close ties to an active audience will be what gives many Europa Cinemas members an advantage over some of the multiplex chains and mid-range commercial multiplexes.

"Arthouse structures will probably be more prepared because of the closeness to the audience and the commitment to keeping contact through Facebook, streaming online, happenings and events, online Q&As," said Crocchiola, of Cinema Stensen.



Folkets Hus Och Parker, Sweden

“Some are even taking advantage of the lockdown to carry out improvements, meaning some arthouse venues may even be a little more beautiful when reopen than before.”

“My impression is that our structure is perceived as so powerful in this storm that the people are trustful that we will reopen.”

Events

Caroline Grimault, of Cinema Katorza said her venue’s centenary—and the fact that it has been the only theatrical complex open downtown in Nantes—meant it was still able to do about 70% of its usual business. “In summer in Nantes, no one really goes to the cinema, but people came very strongly in the first week just to say “we missed you”. They also keep on writing on Facebook and every time we post anything there are reactions.” What really struck her was that there was an appetite for events around films, as well as the films themselves.

“Every time we had a premiere with directors, it was sold out, albeit at 50% capacity. In some cases demand was so strong we had to open another room, even with lesser-known directors.” That same hunger for cinematic experiences was replicated in many other cinemas around Europe. Europa Cinemas members often showed themselves masters of adaptation and improvisation during closure.

The relatively good weather during the Summer created an opportunity for many cinemas, who were able to move operations outside.

In Bucharest, for example, Elvire Popesco ran open-air screenings throughout the summer. Without access to a DCP, the cinema improvised two-screens, one a white wall and the other a screen on top of a van. The cinema was able to simultaneously use both screens with projectors and an HD disk, and with social spacing could accommodate 50 people. They also supplied some unconventional spaces with content, with screening in public spaces, such as museums and galleries.

Unfortunately, the weather also becomes a natural obstacle to such initiatives: The coming of winter stopped outdoor events and will also curtail festival plans. Most foresee a difficult few months ahead.

But each cinema has found ways to use social media to maintain some elements of connectivity and a mechanism for keeping film-makers connected to audiences. There is no substitute for actual physical events but at least cinemas are finding ways to build the appetites of their audiences.

The cinema mission

The social and cultural importance of cinema perhaps becomes clearer and more essential during times of crisis. Other dangers, including rising populism, narrow nationalism, social bubbles, personal facts were already apparent before Covid arrived.

In many ways, life contracted during lockdown but the mission of cinema has always been about bringing the world in all its diversity into communities. It would be



Elvire Popesco, Bucharest, Romania

understandable if cinemas, like most of the cultural industries were focused first on their own narrow business interest.

What stands out though in discussions during the pandemic, is that independent cinemas have been looking outwards and recognising a mission to bring people together at a time of rampant individualism.

“The biggest role of our cinemas, like all cinemas, is spreading culture,” says Erika Borsos, of Budapest Film in Hungary.

“The films they show in arthouse cinemas represent our shared European values and give us a sense of dignity.”

In challenging and less open political times, she suggested, “diverse programmes can give us different points of view.” Cinema, of course, can be a place for escapism but it also has a unique power to connect.

Mustafa El Mesaoudi, owner and executive director of the Rex FilmTheater suggested the lockdown was a moment for cinemas to reaffirm those values and to grasp the responsibilities they bring, and to take bigger risks.

“I think we need to do more than just putting on a film at 8pm. We need more competence in film as a cultural art form, we need to choose films better and put more content and concepts around those films.

“We need to change something about what we do. A lot actually.”

He used this period of pressure to put his thinking to the test. A strong example came between the first and second

lockdown with a series focusing on the theme of Black Lives Matter. The cinema curated 12 films offering insights into the origins and developments of the movement, supported with introductory podcasts and social media conversations and live Q&As. “With each film, the audience got more of an education and the conversations were pretty deep and intensive. We need to make this part of our strategy for the coming years.”

His argument is that cinema needs to fight to be socially relevant. There are dangers in being too focused on survival. Cinemas, he suggests, cannot afford to be on the defensive. It needs to drive forward with ambition to keep the art form relevant.

“In Germany, 25% of people still go to the cinema. We have to invest to reach maybe 5%-to-10% more people. Our job is to make people curious about cinema.”

Europa Cinemas are not looking backwards. During lockdown, they adapted to change and embraced innovation because that is what their audiences and their communities needed them to do. In truth, they have never enjoyed the luxury of standing still.

Lessons will be learned in this crisis that, when shared collectively, will strengthen the commitment to greater social relevance, sustainability and cultural reach across borders, generations and demographics. The world needs it.

Michael Gubbins, Partner SampoMedia



LONGING FOR THE BIG SCREEN



Austria Burg Kino, Vienna

As one of the remaining and most traditional independent cinemas in Vienna, we, too, have certainly faced major challenges due to the current situation.

Luckily, thanks to a surprisingly strong year in 2019, we were at least in a relatively stable position going into the first lockdown, with some reserves. Of course, the overall uncertainty was overwhelming at first. Public subsidies came with a delay, and initially involved a great deal of administrative effort, but eventually did help to avoid the worst. Part-time work, fixed-cost subsidies and even a partial revenue compensation made it possible to keep our employees and pay the bills. We took advantage of the lockdown period to paint our walls and carry out some renovations that were due.

To see the joy of our audience when they found our doors open again, from June to October, was incredibly gratifying for the whole team. Throughout the summer, we were able to keep operations running. With hardly any major releases available, we put extra effort into offering a diverse and interesting programme, with a broad range of



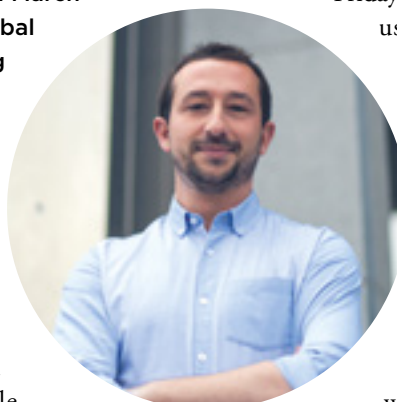
recent film releases, as well as special tributes to Federico Fellini and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. We are currently in our second lockdown and, as for everyone, we don't know when and if things will go back to 'normal'. We stay in contact with our audience through online campaigns like European Cinema Night and a new curated format of free short films. In addition to our social media channels, we have started using the prominent marquee at our main entrance to communicate with our community. The feedback and encouragement we have received gives us hope for a strong comeback in 2021. Of course, we are not without worry, as we observe the continuing trend towards streaming and home cinema, as well as the major upheavals in the cinema and distribution industry. Nevertheless, we are increasingly under the impression that, for once, especially small and dedicated arthouse cinemas, have a good chance of surviving the crisis well.

Stefan Schramek, Cinema Manager

Belgium Quai10, Charleroi

2020 was, in Belgium as in the rest of the world, particularly complicated for cinema exhibition. After January and February, which were relatively encouraging, exhibition had to stop suddenly, from March 15th until July 1st because of the global pandemic. In Belgium, a reopening was allowed from July 1st but cinemas closed again on October 29th. This second closure is expected to last until February 1st.

With only five months of opening out of the whole year, the stakes were high: we had to maintain the economic stability of our cinema as well as maintaining a connection with our audience. So, we decided to implement a series of measures to reach those two goals—with a team who were presently unemployed. A real headache! However, we succeeded, and we are really proud of the actions we've set up: we've joined a VOD platform called "Ciné chez vous" in collaboration with a Belgian film distributor; we've sold more than 1,000 subscriptions, available upon our reopening; we took part



in European Cinema Night; we created a special Christmas offer which can be gifted under the Christmas tree; and we are organizing special online family screenings every Friday night at 6pm. These actions have allowed us to exist and offer qualitative services dedicated to our audience during this difficult year, but the survival of our cinema depends on a quick return to normality in 2021. Indeed, due to the current crisis, we've recorded a decrease of 75% in our annual sales in 2020. During our summer reopening, we noticed that arthouse cinemas were less impacted by the crisis than multiplexes, but the figures were still poor, with 50% less viewers than between July and September in 2019, due to the lack of tentpole releases over this period. So, if we managed to survive until now, a quick reopening, coupled with the ability to acquire good and promising films is essential.

Matthieu Bakolas, Director

Croatia Kino Mediteran

Kino Mediteran is a project for cinema revitalization in small Croatian coastal towns and on the islands. 2019 was one of our best years: we reached over 60,000 admissions across approximately 800 screenings, a big number considering our cities have less than 5,000 inhabitants.

Our successful pandemic story started spontaneously. I saw a funny article saying Pornhub in Italy had made all its films free. On our Vimeo On Demand account, we had twenty films from our distribution catalogue, so my team and I agreed that we would give our audience these films for free. We quickly set it up and, in just a few hours, launched a funny post on Facebook: "If Pornhub can do it, we can do it as well—you can watch all our films for free during lockdown". In less than 24 hours, we went viral. Our web page crashed during the first weekend and every media outlet in Croatia was writing about us. We never expected such a positive reaction with 28,000 people watching the films. We were aware that part of our success is because we offered films for free. However, we realized it was a good move, not only because of the national



awareness it raised for Kino Mediteran, but also because it gave us a good base from which to start a serious VOD platform. In the meantime, lockdown ended and we started our open-air cinema season. We worked until the end of September and our results were 30% smaller compared with 2019.

Although the figures are negative, we are proud of them, especially since we have turned almost completely to independent films this year.

It seems that many years of our focus on programming independent films has 'paid back'. We used this lockdown story to apply for a grant from the Ministry of Culture for new business models and we've got the funds to develop our own VOD platform, using the Shift72 service, which will be released in December. Our VOD service is an opportunity to stay connected with our core audience and to raise awareness for independent cinema. Successful theatres have one thing in common: an audience who trusts their programming. In this sense, we expect our VOD audience will believe in our unique programming. Once these hard times pass, the audience will appreciate the big screen even more.

Alen Munitic, Director

Czech Republic Cinema Lucerna, Prague

Kino Lucerna in Prague is the oldest operating cinema in the country. On December 3rd, the cinema celebrated 111 years since its first opening. Even in our wildest dreams, we never could have imagined what 2020 had in store, and that we would celebrate this anniversary in such a dismal way, in an empty auditorium with no audience. Just like every other cinema in the Czech Republic, Lucerna closed temporarily, for two months, in spring—and then again in autumn.

The first closure came unexpectedly. One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival had just started—one of the biggest events of the season. However, it ended abruptly, as the whole country went into lockdown. The initial shock did not last long, though. Soon after the first closure, we worked on an initiative to move our screenings online. In collaboration with other cinemas in Czech Republic, we participated in the Vašekino project. Through this online cinema, we could keep in touch with our audience and try to move at least part of the film programme into their living rooms. Unfortunately, film distributors were cautious with online



releases so, eventually, the project was shut down. During the second closure, we monitored the development of individual online screenings platforms; their advantages and disadvantages, screening costs, and even securing screenings against downloading. We believe that we are ready

for the future and our cinema can provide entertainment for viewers who are not able to come to the cinema in person.

Lucerna is a festival venue, and with so many festivals taking place online, the need for these solutions is urgent.

Though we were sceptical at first, the audience returned soon after our first re-opening. Within a few weeks, we'd achieved the same numbers of attendances as before spring lockdown. At that moment, it felt like a little miracle. But in fact, it was proof of how loyal our audience is. For that, we are grateful and feel hopeful that our audience will find its way back again in the future.

Lucerna has been with us for 111 years—it survived both World Wars, global crisis, fascism, and later communism. It is going to out-live Covid, too.

Filip Schauer, Programmer

Denmark Grand Teatret, Copenhagen

2020 started beautifully. *Parasite*—coincidentally released by our own distribution company, Camera Film—had opened over Christmas and was proving that an artistic, demanding film could also be a commercially viable proposition. The best year in the history of our 107-year-old cinema was just around the corner.

Little did I know... On March 11th, lockdown was announced, but the authorities did not mention any support measures. And so, the first, bleak days were spent deciding how we could cover staff wages on our own. Then, when the measures were announced, we got on with understanding them and writing applications. Meanwhile, our fairly new VOD platform almost crashed under the sudden pressure from new customers. To keep it up and running turned out to be quite a task, but despite our revenue being multiplied by ten, we also learned our first, important Corona-lesson: secondary windows are purely the icing on the cake. And without theatrical, there is not even a cake. When we—overnight—were allowed to reopen in late May, we learned our



second lesson: the earlier you start, the quicker you will go back to normal (despite 'normal' being a 'new normal'). We were the first cinema to reopen in Copenhagen with restrictions (still enforced at the time of writing) allowing us roughly 40% of our normal capacity. We have hit back by extending our opening hours and starting with screenings at 9.30 in the morning—seven days a week. We have doubled (or even tripled) our number of events, and on top, we launched a book club as well as an art club—catering to the culturally inclined. Local films have also come to the rescue and have had a field day in the absence of competition from Hollywood. *Another Round* has surpassed 800,000 admissions (we have a total of 5.8 million inhabitants) and other titles are doing well, too. As for European films, our arthouse distributors have also been willing to take risks, releasing films into a shaky environment. But, at some point, the well will run dry, so please give us the vaccine! And bring on *Death on the Nile*, *The French Dispatch*, and all the other upmarket films that will make a difference.

Kim Foss, Cinema Manager

France Le Zola, Villeurbanne

Le Zola is the only cinema in Villeurbanne (150,000 inhabitants), almost 100 years old and, with a single screen, welcomed 83,000 viewers in 2019, including 30,000 school children.

Three festivals, highlighting European cinema, have energized the region over the last forty years, with great resonance on a national and international scale. The programming of independent films, powerful in style and content, sometimes without official release or rarely shown, engage debate, and help make Zola an area “not the same”, as we like to say in Villeurbanne.

With those broad outlines in mind, let's talk about this sweet year, 2020... We had to postpone two festivals, reduce our youth offer by 20,000 school children, all at half capacity, with mandatory mask-wearing in the auditorium, and then a curfew. But I do not believe that, at any time, the Zola team gave up their spirit.

When we closed, we offered viewers a VOD service, La Toile, which partially compensates movie theatres. At our reopening, with the whole team present, we organized



Zola Summer Camp, a unifying cinephile programme that attracted just as many viewers per screening as in previous years! When we closed for the second time, we launched a website, L'Emile (www.lemile-cinema.com), to talk about upcoming releases, show

short films, publish interviews, and more.

We had just been put back in the box, “non-essential commerce”, and wanted to prove the contrary, to defend the fact that cinema is for public health, and an extraordinary source of social connection.

With our united and creative team, the year 2020 allowed us to imagine, despite the unfavorable circumstances, the contours of the cinema that we want to defend in the years to come, and to continue to strengthen these very small threads that we weave in carefully choosing films for our viewers. It was necessary to remain coherent, humble in the face of the situation, and open, to transmit beauty and a little sunshine.

Olivier Calonnec, General Direction

Greece Danaos Cinema, Athens

2020 was a unique, unprecedented year, where the vast majority of cinema screens in the world went dark. Danaos Cinema closed on March 12th and, aside from fifteen days in October, it has been closed since. In challenging times, one can still find opportunities, and we found ours in May, when we acquired an open-air cinema in downtown Athens, nearby Danaos.

Our new open-air cinema, Anesis, opened in late June. Though there were no American blockbusters available, new European and independent arthouse films were being released. The daily running of the cinema and the opportunity to stay in touch with our audience gave us a sense of normality. Open-air cinemas, “summer cinemas” as we call them here in Greece, have operated for more than 100 years. They are a part of the culture and heritage of Greek society and, this year more than ever, people embraced the experience of watching a film under the stars.

The reassuring attitude of our audience restored our confi-

dence. We were reminded once again that no matter how many different options and ways people have to watch a film, cinemas are still the best way. We organized curated screenings, classic reruns, documentaries, and people supported our initiatives.

Despite the growing number of new platforms and online streaming possibilities, we decided not to offer the films in such a way. We believe that our core business is still to bring people to our cinema to watch films on the big screen, and not to encourage them to stay at home.

We choose to remain optimistic about our future and the future of our business.

TV, VHS, DVD, and online streaming were all regarded as cinema “killers”, but one

thing that history has taught us is that cinemas

will find a way to overcome crisis and thrive again.

Nothing beats the experience of watching a film in a collective way, on the big screen, and with the best quality sound and image.

Ilias Georgiopoulos, Cinema Manager



Germany Harmonie, Cinéma and Casino, Frankfurt and Aschaffenburg

By mid-March, our cinemas were, like all other cinemas, closed by the German government.

As it became increasingly clear that the first lockdown would be extended, we collected ideas and suggestions from our team and created an editorial calendar to take our customers through the pandemic. We published tips for creating the perfect film night at home on Facebook, Instagram and in our newsletter, and our staff joined the conversation by recommending their favourite films. Our call for a “solidarity voucher campaign”, whereby customers ordered vouchers that we then sent to them, including free popcorn vouchers and a personal thank you letter, was particularly successful. The response was incredible, and this meant we were able to safeguard solvency. The period after we reopened started very well: though we were only able to sell tickets for a mere 25% of our usual seating capacity, evening and weekend tickets were almost always sold out. As the second national lockdown for November was announced, the screenings we had already made public filled up quickly for four full days. So, what have we learned about our

cinemas, and, above all, our customers in lieu of the pandemic and its lockdowns? First, we realised the immense importance of having a close relationship with our audience. The

abundance of motivational messages we received

are indicative of the close relationship between

our customers and cinema staff. It is

this basis of trust, the venues’ atmosphere,

as well as our curated film selection that

has cemented our cinemas as such a fun-

damental part of the lives of our audiences.

It is, for the aforementioned reasons, that

competing against streaming services, that

have seen an increase in subscriptions during

the first lockdown, was not really a cause for concern.

The ability to enjoy a film with others in locations

that were specifically curated with this in mind, as an enjoyable

way to spend the evening, is and remains irreplaceable! That’s

why we are in high spirits about what the future holds for us. We

are optimistic that we will soon be able to, once again, offer the

experiences with which our audiences are familiar, experiences

which are quintessentially ‘cinema’.

Christopher Bausch, Cinema Manager



Italy Cinema Orione, Bologna

I've managed Cinema Teatro Orione for four years. The single-screen movie theatre is linked to a parish and is member of the Catholic Association of Cinema Exhibitors (ACEC). The theatre has played an important role in the Bologna city area for years.

With our DIS|CHIUSO (DIS|CLOSED) experience, from March 15th to June 2nd, we offered twelve intense weeks of free virtual screenings, via a streaming platform, to our e-newsletter subscribers: a 44-day programme, with 88 titles, the participation of twenty directors, a total of over 46,000 viewers and an extended newsletter base to 26,000 subscribers, thanks to the use of an IT platform provided by Jasango. As a contingency during those dramatic days this year, we gave life to an experiment. We wanted to focus on doing, acting from our ideals and values, so that the quality of those actions and the symbolic value of our work for the community could also be at the core of our experience. If the cinema, a physical place for congregation, was closed, DIS|CHIUSO was intended as a virtual square, to reinstate an opportunity to meet together, at the same time, sharing culture. We had no



desire to replace or supplant the magical and inseparable combination of art and physical place that is Cinema, we had only the need and the will to stay connected by making culture, in renewing and adapting the parameters of the cultural outposts that are suburban movie theatres. We continued our arthouse programming, in line with that of our theatre, using the technology available as a tool only. Cinema is not just an industry, but a “place” made by people for people; nothing on demand, therefore, but live streaming and the ritual of the moviegoer: a way to stay close, even when distant. All this was made possible thanks to Gruppo Montenegro, Alfasigma and Jasango, who recognized the value of our idea by investing resources and sharing their know-how, as well as thanks to the many independent distribution companies. The connection with our audience was nothing short of exciting and motivating. It was wonderful to have felt so close. Now, with all cinemas in Italy closed since the end of October and without a reopening date given, I'm returning to ideas of experimentation, to put into practice as soon as it is possible to resume our work.

Enzo Setteducati, Cinema Manager

Latvia Kino Bize, Riga

We opened Kino Bize in 2012 and have experienced steady improvement in all areas involved in running a small, private company in the cultural industry in Latvia. In 2019, we had our highest attendances, income, and most employees since opening the cinema.

Then, suddenly, in mid-March, rapid changes came into play. As abnormal as it was at that moment, it felt like Armageddon fell, in something like four days. After three months of lockdown, a lot of time and motivation, Kino Bize Home Cinema was launched, with a catalogue of more than fifty arthouse titles from all over the world. It involved exchanging e-mails between an upset user at home and busy technical support in different time zones, which seems to be the reality regardless of the online platform provider. You don't meet your audience and, instead, you see the numbers of user views and the overall attendance and income that has decreased by up to five times in comparison with the previous year. After a few open-air screenings, we gladly returned to daily operations in the cinema from August until November 8th. During this period, we had reasonable average attendances, and viewers were understanding, responsible, and friendly. During



our second lockdown, we moved the cinema events to Home Cinema as well, including children's mornings with workshops and film classics with film critic talks. The releases of recent Latvian films have been successful and this makes us one of the main online platforms in Latvia providing national and non-national arthouse titles. These months have thrown us out of our comfort zone, with our provisional income reduced by up to 70% when compared with the previous year. At the same time, the challenges brought back our fighting spirit, a search for new initiatives, and the capacity to adapt to whatever is thrown at you. We have tried to carry out our programming and projects without freezing salaries and financing, not to disappear, and to maintain communication with the public. The new initiatives have helped us expand our audiences, too. We receive photos of families watching films and engaging in children's workshops from various parts of Latvia. It is worth the constant struggle for development (or survival) just to come back to the beauty of the very basics—watching a film, together, with other people in the cinema. And I hope we can do that soon!

Maris Prombergers, Board Member

Malta Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta

Spazju Kreattiv was established in 2000. It is a multifaceted institution involving numerous creative projects including film, performing arts, visual arts, artists' residencies, and a programme aimed for children and young people.

Spazju Kreattiv Cinema is a single screen cinema with 105 seats and is the only art-house cinema in Malta. Our cinema programme features mainly recently released arthouse films and documentaries, as well as broadcasts of live operas, ballets, and theatre productions. 2020 is a special year for us as it marks our 20th anniversary. Due to the pandemic, we closed on March 13th and re-opened on July 22nd, with only 33 seats available. During this time, we took the opportunity to totally renovate our bathrooms, upgrade our projection room, and carry out maintenance work to improve the overall customer experience. Together with the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Malta, we organised a virtual film festival "Cinema Italia @Malta". The first edition of the festival, in 2019 was very successful so we wanted the 2020 edition to go ahead. We worked with the



distributor and customers could book their virtual seat and enjoy a free Italian film at home.

Whilst our doors were closed, we made sure to keep in touch with our audience on social media updating them with the renovation work we were doing in the venue. We worked with distributors like Curzon, National Theatre, and Metropolitan Opera to bring films into people's homes.

After the reopening, since content has been limited, we brought back popular operas, ballets, and theatre performances and these were well received. Audience numbers started slow, however customers trust that we are offering a safe environment. Our numbers are increasing and, from next month, we will add screenings to accommodate more customers.

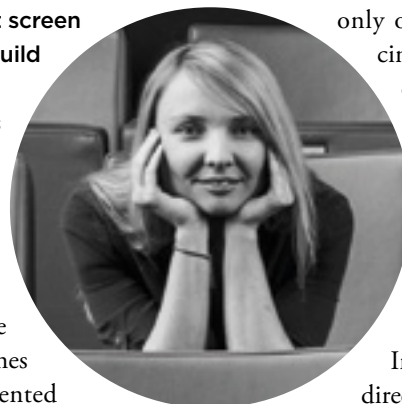
So far we have hosted two mini film festivals with the aim of keeping our audiences engaged. Even though our seating capacity is limited, it is very encouraging when all the available seats are booked. We cannot wait to offer our customers a full-house cinema experience once again!

Cathleen Tanti, Cinema Programme Executive

Poland Kino Elektronik, Warsaw

Cinema Elektronik was built in the 1960s but was closed from 2000 to 2015, when Warsaw Film School decided to renovate, bringing a new lease of life. We are a typically old-fashioned arthouse cinema, without popcorn or advertising, and we do not screen blockbusters, as our philosophy is to build a cinema society.

In 2020, it was very important for us that fans of arthouse cinema would still have access to film culture. To meet those needs, we decided, with the Arthouse Cinemas Association, to create the MOJEEKINO.pl project, a VOD platform connecting more than 40 arthouse cinemas, bringing cinema to viewers' homes across Poland. The project was implemented in just two weeks in May 2020 as a response to the closure of cinemas due to the coronavirus pandemic. There is no other platform like this in Poland, that both supports arthouse cinema during a pandemic and give audiences special content, unavailable on other platforms. It was important for operators to find new ways to reach their audiences remotely, and to attract new customers from around the country, as well as to monetize the service to



keep those cinemas going. This meant giving consumers access to the latest releases from the comfort of their homes on a pay-per-view basis. MOJEEKINO.pl offers easy access via web browsers and mobile devices to the titles that could

only otherwise be seen in arthouse and local cinemas. It has already been met with great enthusiasm from cinemas as well as viewers, so much so that it will continue to be available even after cinemas reopen, giving audiences another way to engage with the latest releases.

We are also hosting several special events including Europa Cinemas Night and European Arthouse Cinemas Day. In addition to the films, discussions with directors and other lectures are offered on the platform—the kinds of things that traditional film buffs love. We've also ensured there is provision for deaf and blind audiences.

MOJEEKINO.pl will remain alongside cinemas long after the pandemic eases. Traditional cinemas will always remain most important for us and for our viewers, I hope, but we cannot escape the virtual world any longer.

Marlena Gabryszewska, Cinema Manager

Portugal Cinema Ideal, Lisbon

The pandemic forced us to close Cinema Ideal on March 13th. We closed, announcing we would be back April 2nd. At that time, we were completely wrong about what was going to happen: a catastrophe of unknown proportions, a twelve week closure...

We re-opened the cinema on June 1st. We were the only cinema in Lisbon to reopen on that date, when all venues were authorized by the Government to reopen. Multiplexes in shopping malls remained closed, complaining and longing for *Tenet* and popcorn. How wrong and deluded they were... In June and July, despite the discomfort of new safety measures and health restrictions, people were very happy to come back to the cinema. Once again, we could share with our customers the pleasure and even enthusiasm that the experience of the cinema screen and watching films as a humanist and social experience allows. Some distributors took risks in releasing films where they knew results would not be as good as usual. Portuguese producers and directors were also very supportive. We therefore focused our programming on bolstering the releases of



Portuguese productions and independent and world cinema, more 'radical' than usual (Carlos Reygadas, Elia Suleiman, *Lo Que Arde, Bacurau, Benzinho*), and inviting a range of people to introduce films and host discussions.

We now know that we have just finished our first six months of hell or highwater, and that ahead of us there are still another six months to go before things will improve. We are now facing a decrease of around 50% in our attendances and sales (bar, DVD, bookshop). We've started development for an online platform of our cinema (CinemaIdealEmCasa), but wonder, is that a good idea? Or is it just the mood of the moment, and once the pandemic is over we should return to our usual ways of working, defending cinema screens against the assault of such platforms? "Irony of fate", as we say in Portuguese, we will be ending our year with the exclusive release of a film from one of these platforms, "David Byrne's American Utopia", by Spike Lee (distributed by HBO). Only time will tell what we should ultimately do, and now is simply the time for resilience and to keep moving.

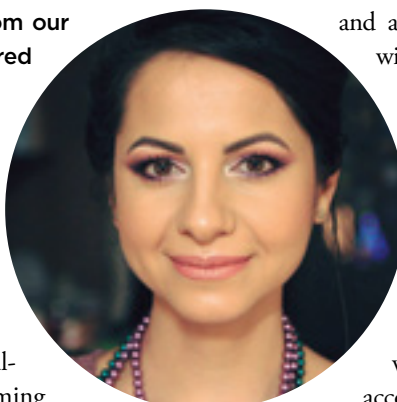
Pedro Borges, Director

Romania Cinema Muzeul Taranului, Bucharest

2020 was indeed a challenging year for us and our devoted audience. Its beginning was a strong and promising one, bringing full-house screenings, and passionate discussions with film critics and film crews, all received with enthusiasm and praise from our audience. Nothing could have prepared us for the following months.

Unfortunately, on March 11th, Cinema Muzeul Țăranului was unexpectedly closed in the first round of actions taken to limit the spread of coronavirus. We tried to maintain fresh communication with our audience across our social networks, encouraging them to stay strong and hopeful, and to feed their cultural needs by recommending films streaming on MUBI. We considered setting up a virtual cinema, however, after several discussions with Romanian distributors who decided to put their films on their own Vimeo accounts, and with other cinemas in Romania regarding the impossibility of limiting the stream through geo-blocking, we parked the idea.

After two months of lockdown, when the summer came, the threat of Covid seemed to diminish. At the same time,



our Government allowed outdoor screenings with a limited capacity. Therefore, on July 24th we restarted our outdoor screenings. The issue around programming new content in the cinema was solved through previews of Romanian films, and a few new releases followed by discussions with creative teams and film critics, as well as through festivals we hosted.

With attention focused on our public and their needs, we also organized Romania's first pet friendly screening.

At the same time, we started a campaign on our Facebook page named #WeShareTheSameLoveForCinema. Romanian film directors, actors, and film critics were invited to send a self-taped or written account of their very first memory at the cinema. The cinema is a social experience that cannot and must not be substituted with a virtual one. Spending valuable time with our loved ones, laughing and crying together, moved by the stories onscreen, enjoying and appreciating it in one immersive viewing—this is what makes the experience of watching a movie in a cinema charming and unique.

Mirona Radu, Programmer and Coordinator

Russia Angleterre Cinema Lounge Kino&Teatr, Saint Petersburg

Angleterre Cinema Lounge (Kino&Teatr) is located in the historic centre of Saint Petersburg. It is the only cinema in the city where films are shown exclusively in their original language with Russian subtitles. Our programming includes festivals, high-quality mainstream films, preview and premiere screenings, a special CineClub on Tuesdays, creative meetings, and takes place in a traditional cinema environment.

This year, our operations were completely suspended from the 19th March to the 12th September (special thanks to our partners Hotel Astoriya–Angleterre for their support during this difficult period). Our major challenge after the reopening remains programming, due to the postponement of many releases. However, before the pandemic, Kino&Teatr always supported young, aspiring, independent filmmakers and now they accessed additional opportunities during this difficult time with premieres, Q&As, and creative laboratories.



We've also programmed more retrospectives, which were previously limited to just one screen. Running parallel with a unique exhibition celebrating the centenary of Federico Fellini, brought over from Italy by the Theater Museum of St. Petersburg, Kino&Teatr hosted a large-scale retrospective of the master's films. I would also like to thank to all our partners for organizing and holding special events and festivals in our space during these difficult times. It was not easy, but we did it!

Finally, 2020 can be considered the year of the birth of a new tradition in St. Petersburg: «Summer Time Kino&Teatr Film Festival», an event we organized this summer, during the lockdown, in the historic Gostiny Dvor as a drive-in cinema.

Stanislav Ershov, Cinema Manager

Slovenia Mestni Kino Domžale, Domžale

When you imagine a cosy community cinema in a century old building, Mestni kino Domžale fits the bill perfectly. As a young cinema, we work in a venue with deep cinematic roots that span over fifty years.

A bustling 2019 was our most successful year to date, only to be followed by 2020, when everything turned upside down and we felt like we had to reinvent ourselves.

What does a cinema even do when it is closed? Well, we went online, tried to stay in touch with our audiences, shot videos—we even did Facebook Live screenings—but, most of all, we were brainstorming reopening strategies. The first thing we did in an uncertain and impulsive national reopening schedule was to take advantage of the nearby parking lot and put up a drive-in cinema. That was the beginning of an intensive open-air cinema season. We figured people would feel uncomfortable in closed spaces, so we kept the indoor screenings to a minimum and went for fresh air instead: first to our cinema's backyard, followed by a month-long residency in a nearby botanical garden with the screen set up on a lovely meadow.



Up until the second lockdown, things were looking better for indoor screenings, and even though the box-office numbers will be down by 2/3rds this year, we were better prepared, especially as an online outlet for school screenings and YA activities. It is important for us to maintain our position as a content provider, which has led to reconfiguring our web page to facilitate access to all the educational videos we have made during lockdown. We'll be doing live workshops and will, hopefully, be able to set up a cinema based VOD platform as part of the National Arthouse Cinema Association. As we expect our venue to be closed for the foreseeable future, we are learning how to project the feeling of cinema onto our audiences via different digital outlets. What the team has had to adapt to in the meantime is quick thinking, finding new solutions, constant learning and, most importantly, initiative. We know this will be more than a useful legacy once we are able to reopen and it will help us grow again.

Jure Matičič, Programmer and Cinema Manager

Spain Cines Renoir, Madrid and Barcelona

This is our story of the year 2020: not a year to forget, but a year to remember. This horrible pandemic has been a Masterclass on resilience for everyone and cinemas are no exception. Let's go back to March, when we were really confident, after a great year in 2019 for cinema admissions, and the first few months of 2020 boasting even better results. But with lockdown in mid-March we faced something new: closed cinemas.

The first thought for us was of our biggest asset, our loyal base of cinema lovers that crowded our screening rooms every week. We knew that it was vital to keep in touch with them. The mailing list from our "Club Renoir" loyalty card and our social media accounts were the tools we used to send our message. What was our message going to be? We love sharing good movies in our cinemas, but without this option we found a great friend in Charles Chaplin. We selected seven of the early short films by Chaplin that were available legally and for free to be streamed, we wrote an article and shared it with our Club Renoir members and



across our social media channels. Following the positive response we received, the coming weeks saw more friends, like Buster Keaton, 1920s avant-garde cinema, and a selection of documentaries...

At the same time, we held online quizzes related to the week's topic, launched our annual short story competition, and shared the 27 Times Cinema opportunity for our younger film lovers, among other things. The response was amazing, and we are really grateful to our community and for the force of films during these dark times.

June 2020, and we were finally reopening our cinemas, with a new website that we developed during lockdown. Security has been an absolute priority since reopening and communicating that cinemas are safe places has also been vital. Cinema screenings were back, and we wanted to greet our audience with great European and independent films. Probably the best lesson we've learned since reopening is to embrace Q&As, not via virtual platforms but having the film directors in cinema whenever possible. Long live cinemas!

Octavio Alzola, Programmer

Sweden Biografcentralen, Borås, Karlstad and Skövde

In Sweden, many arthouse cinemas, also members of Europa Cinemas, have been open all year, despite multiplexes and many other rural, independent cinemas deciding to close. Why?

Well, first, the authorities never executed a full lockdown in Sweden, rather a kind of soft lockdown from March until the end of the year. Second, there was a rather good range of arthouse films available, and exhibitors felt and performed a duty to their communities, despite the lack of audience during some of those months. Exhibitors are sharing stories where their audiences are praising them for the option to see films on the big screen despite the pandemic—the cinema has been a lighthouse in the dark!

But even if Swedish arthouse cinemas were fairly well-attended during 2020, there has been a real longing for the crowds of loud and excited school kids visiting cinemas. Almost every school screening has been cancelled, and we all need to take action from here to reclaim the cinema auditoriums for school groups, our future audiences. Maybe a



joint European initiative? In Sweden, we have had and still do receive good support from the government for cinemas and their lost revenue. It's easy to apply and money is in the bank a couple of weeks following the announcements.

From what I have seen this year, what cinemas should learn from is to breathe. Breathe and reflect before communicating. It is easy to copy the tabloid news of postponed films, closing messages and to try to elicit pity from followers. Instead, cinemas need to learn about crisis communication, how to stay positive and strong so that the audience will come back today and tomorrow. Biografcentralen as a national organization has seen an increased need for training. We now have over sixty cinemas and their staff attending our online training programme, Digital Marketing for Cinemas (in Swedish). We have, during this year, translated these forty-two lessons into English and will launch it internationally in 2021. This will be our contribution to the industry!

Jens Lanestrand, CEO

Switzerland Cinélux, Geneva

The shock from the abrupt closure of our cinema, mid-March this year, was followed by the enormous joy of reopening, after months of inactivity, in June.

For the occasion, we washed walls, carpets and windows, taped and numbered each seat, adapted our cash desk and ticketing system, and played with the new standards of floor markings for social distancing by transforming our cinema into the set of *Dogville* by Lars von Trier. We then launched an e-news competition for our audience—to guess the title of our inspirational movie: a fun way to get back in touch!

Public screenings resumed and, from the very start, when we reopened, we were fortunate enough to welcome several filmmakers—who happily reconnected with their audiences. We achieved success with most of our special events, even in the midst of summer, when competing with beaches and the sun. Social distancing still allowed us to spend intense and joyful evenings with our guests and audience—including an exceptional performance from the Sova Gospel Choir for the premiere of the film *Ar-*



tha Franklin—Amazing Grace. What we feared the most did not happen. The number of viewers allowed to attend our screenings has certainly been reduced by official restrictions, but they came back! Our screenings with debates and guests were animated, full of questions, and renewed dialogue, just as before. In October, attendance was once again optimal.

During lockdown, maintaining a connection through regular e-newsletters and promoting arthouse films available via streaming platforms did support us, but we still believe that the physical experience of watching a film in a theatre is irreplaceable. The essence of our neighbourhood cinema—a direct form of contact, inviting exchange and sharing with others through the art of cinema—is still justified despite the progress of digitisation and the reification of our societies. We are still alive!

Well, we've actually closed again, as of November, still unsure of our reopening date... But we'll fight till the end! Long live cinema!

Giuditta Ricci, Director

United Kingdom Queen's Film Theatre, Belfast

At the beginning of 2020, cinema was flying high. QFT was enjoying record breaking success and it was clear that *Parasite* was a game changer film, one that can reach beyond the traditional audiences for Korean, or even arthouse, film and was well on the way to its modern cult status.

However, the situation quickly and dramatically changed following the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom and the forced closure of the cinema in March. This challenge was clearly a global one and affecting everyone, but the impact on cinemas was swift and painful with almost a full closure of cinemas across the world. After the initial shock, both professionally and personally, it was clear that this was not a time for me to spend too long in recovery but more a time for action.

The whole team at QFT was incredible at adapting and supporting each other. I decided early on that we needed to keep working as much as possible to maintain a relationship with the audiences and ensure that the QFT remained open in people's minds.



Key to our plans to maintain audience engagement was the introduction of our online platform QFT Player. Using industry research and speedy innovation from the team, the QFT Player was up and running within three weeks of the beginning of lockdown. Since this time, it has proved to be a vital tool in our communications and culture arsenal and I am sure that QFT will continue to develop this work in the future.

What has 2020 taught me? The power of a good professional network—I've not spent this long in the same place for years, without travel and meetings, I was seriously worried that I would feel professionally isolated. I could not have been more wrong. Our industry is full of some of the most fantastic, inspirational people you could ever want to know, and the strength of my network has enabled me to keep connected and working effectively. Cinemas have adapted before, and will again. Looking at how so many cinemas have reacted to the situation is truly inspiring and I cannot wait to see what they do next.

Joan Parsons, Head of QFT

Film Festivals' response to Covid-19 impacts film ecosystem

Human beings are social animals — and that's no more evident than at the film festivals held around the globe each year.



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These gatherings provide a platform for film industry professionals to come together to present their new films to the market; serve as a launchpad for new young filmmakers and groundbreaking trends in filmmaking; and engage in a dialogue with the assembled film critics and the festival's loyal and enthusiastic audiences.

The resulting promotional “buzz” afforded to a film following its selection to one of the leading international film festivals can be especially valuable for those smaller arthouse titles looking to attract the attention of distributors and cinema-owners on the lookout for new films which could appeal to their audiences.

However, 2020 has seen the role of film festivals and their role in the whole film ecosystem turned completely upside

down with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic from mid-March—only days after the 70th Berlinale had come to an end.

Festivals responded to the growing crisis and the lockdown restrictions imposed by their respective national and regional health authorities in various ways: total cancellation, postponement to new dates later in the year, and hybrid presentation formats of on-site screenings in cinemas with restricted seating capacity coupled with a dedicated VOD streaming service of either all of a festival programme or selected titles.

“During the first lockdown from March to June, Europa International, Europa Distribution and Europa Cinemas had weekly telephone conference calls to discuss the state of the industry,” Jean-Christophe Simon, CEO of the



La Mobilière with Locarno Film Festival. Realisation: Studio Achermann

Berlin-based sales company Films Boutique and President of Europa International, recalls. “From the outset, the sales agents and distributors felt that the cinemas were the ones most at stake and whatever happened to them would have an impact on the whole industry.”

In fact, some of those festivals which were able to actually have physical screenings of films from their programme sought to support their colleagues in the independent cinema sector with demonstrations of solidarity.

The Locarno Film Festival, for instance, joined forces with its partner la Mobilière to launch the Closer to Life initiative supporting 78 independent cinemas in Switzerland by purchasing more than 10,000 admissions which were made available to the public free of charge.

Film-goers were invited to take part in an online competition to obtain a voucher valid for two tickets which would guarantee admission at a participating cinema for any screening between October and the end of December 2020. As Locarno’s then artistic director Lili Hinstin explained; “our duty as a festival is to support auteur filmmaking, and the independent cinemas that help to disseminate it and which give the public the possibility to watch such films on the big screen.”

Like many of his European exhibitor colleagues, Koen Van Daele, assistant director at Ljubljana’s city cinema Kinodvor, had not been able to travel to any film festivals since the Berlinale to discover the newest films in a cinema setting.

“A minor advantage of the ‘laptop festivals’ was that I was able to see and assess more films than I usually do,” he explains. “What did have serious consequences for our cinema was that the ‘official selections’ of these festivals did not contain many of the films we expected to see there. To give but one example: even before Thierry Frémaux announced his selection, it was clear that many of the titles we expected to perform well in the third and fourth quarter, had been moved to the 2021—like Verhoeven [*Benedetta*] or Moretti [*Tre Piani*], to name just two of them.”

“In other words: the fact that a lot of titles were missing from the Cannes or Toronto line-up had a profound impact on our autumn/winter line-up,” he says.

Moreover, the coronavirus pandemic had a serious impact on Kinodvor’s role serving as the venue for several local film festivals ranging from Festival of Migrant Film and the Isola Cinema Film Festival through the Ljubljana LGBT Film

Festival to the Ljubljana International Film Festival and the Genre Film Festival Kurja Polt.

“We had to move them, their programmes had to be reduced, some of them went hybrid, some entirely online,” Van Daele recalls. “They had serious logistic, organisational and financial problems because of the pandemic. But still, we were glad that we were able to work out alternative ways of presenting their programmes and that—in the end—none of the festivals had to be cancelled.”

While distributors and exhibitors have had to keep reacting accordingly following the introduction of lockdowns or other restrictions to the public screening of films in cinemas, the absence of the bigger more mainstream titles offered an unexpected “window of opportunity” for arthouse distributors to have a wider release of films when the screens could start operating again.

Norwegian distributor Frank Stavik of Fidalgo recalls that, when the cinemas were allowed to re-open there in mid-May, his company “actively offered” their releases of *Corpus Christi*, *Lara* and *How To be a Good Wife* “to all the exhibitors that wanted or needed titles, even though quite rigid restrictions were in place.”

“This worked in the sense that we received quite a lot more bookings than we normally do,” he reports.

However, he admits that “online fatigue set in very fast” when he was attending the virtual festivals and markets during this year on the lookout for new films to acquire.





Kinodvor, Ljubljana, Slovenia

“To me, the lockdown has more than anything shown how important physical festivals and markets are to what we do,” he suggests. “It is not only about watching films, it is also about meeting colleagues from all aspects of the industry. It’s about seeing films with an audience, getting recommendations and warnings, exchanging information, and chasing possibly good deals—all the little things that together make a festival or market so valuable and necessary.”

Meanwhile, the jury is still out on whether the online versions of festivals will become a permanent feature of the film industry’s in the future, with the next edition of the Berlinale in February 2021 resolutely holding onto plans to only screen its festival programme in cinemas while the virtual option will be adopted for many of its European Film Market’s activities.

“It has been quite challenging for us sales agents to manage the requests from festivals for online screenings of our films,” Films Boutique’s Jean-Christophe Simon explains. “There are questions like how many screenings, how many countries, is it a premiere or not? What happens if the festival premiere is cancelled and another presentation is then planned in the same country?”

“There are also a lot of implications for holdbacks and the films’ media chronology and whether the cinemas would still be prepared to screen the films once they have been shown in online versions of the festivals. Similarly, it could be a different situation for VOD platforms wishing to acquire films if they see that they have already been streamed by a festival.”

“Clearly, 2020 has been a very difficult year to launch films,” adds Xavier Henry-Rashid, head of sales at Film Republic.

“Online festivals do not (yet) offer the weight to market new films in the way that physical festivals do and this impacts on the choices distributor make. Although with cinemas remaining closed or poorly attended, sellers need to consider other income streams beyond the traditional cinema sales.”

Festival directors Marcin Pieńkowski (Wrocław’s New Horizons IFF) and Algirdas Ramaska (Vilnius FF) were both forced at short notice to move the bulk of their festival programme online when cinemas were obliged to shut their doors.

While the 2020 edition of New Horizons had an estimated audience of over 120,000 (compared to around 110,00 admissions for the physical version), Vilnius’ film programme was streamed 56,000 times, equivalent to 112,000 admissions based on two viewers per screening.

“Even the best virtual edition won’t replace watching films together at the festival,” Pieńkowski stresses. “And we are sure that our viewers will come back to the cinemas. But, at the same time, we believe that the online extension of the festival is a chance for additional viewers”.

“I am absolutely optimistic about the future of cinema-going once the pandemic is over!” Ramaska adds. “Of course, for now, we need to adapt and find ways to provide content for the audience where it is convenient and safe for them to watch. VoD content should be available, but the focus should be on the cinema experience, of course, with all the safety measures in place. Safety is the top priority!”

Martin Blaney



Innovation Prize

The Irish Film Institute (Dublin, Ireland)

What does it mean to innovate? In this pandemic year, with cinemas across Europe closed more than open, we have all been looking to innovate—to try new ways of reaching audiences, and keeping them connected. Innovation in cinema can take many forms, whether in the area of projection, technology, programming, audience development or the nature of cultural engagement. At the Irish Film Institute, we endeavoured to combine all of these in the Europa Cinemas Innovation Prize, 2020

The IFI is Ireland's national cultural institute for film, operating a three-screen arthouse cinema from the heart of Dublin city. With a remit to Exhibit, Preserve and Educate, the IFI shows the finest independent, Irish and international cinema, preserves Ireland's moving image heritage at the IFI Irish Film Archive, and encourages critical encounters with film through its various educational programmes.

The focus for the Innovation Prize was the 2019 implementation period of the Accessible Cinema project, which we had piloted at IFI between 2016 and 2018. It stemmed from a partnership between IFI, the Arts Council of Ireland and Arts Disability Ireland and originated in a piece of research into the viability of making cultural cinema accessible, through the provision of Open Captions (OC) for audiences who are deaf/hard of hearing and Audio Description (AD) for audiences who are blind/vision impaired. The introduction of digital

cinema allowed for the easier provision of these extra files and while not every film released had these options, there were sufficient titles to make a trial worthwhile. AD would be available on all shows of a particular title, through use of a headset, while OC would be available on designated shows.

Why make cinema accessible?

As a thriving public venue, with 184,000 admissions in 2019, it behoves us to reach out and develop new audiences and to make our venue and our activities inclusive. Of all art forms, cinema through the universality of its language can be the most accessible. However, its dependence on image and sound to communicate narrative makes it prohibitive to large numbers of people who are deaf/blind, hard of hearing or vision impaired. Making culture accessible is not only about developing audiences, it is also about human rights. It is enshrined in Irish law under the Disability Act and Equal Status legislation and is encompassed in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Findings from the pilot phase gathered through audience feedback, focus groups, box office attendance and the increasing number of titles with accessible features motivated us to integrate the accessible screenings into our regular operations in 2019 and in this small way, to make IFI accessible.



Some feedback

“Being hard of hearing/deaf is fairly isolating so it’s wonderful to do an activity with other people and be under no pressure. Just sit there in company with an audience and share an experience.”

“Open captions are a lifeline.”

In the course of this project, it became increasingly clear that making cinema accessible was about much more than watching films. This will of course be no surprise to anyone on the Europa Cinemas network, where the important role of venues in the lives of our audiences is recognised. People love cinema, but they also enjoy the shared experience in a space they enjoy visiting. For the audience attending the OC or AD screenings, they came to the IFI to watch a whole range of films, but to socialise too. From feedback we learnt that people welcomed a choice of screenings; they wanted films in the afternoon and evening, and a range of titles. They did not want to be segregated to off-peak slots. During 2019, some of the titles with accessible features included box office winners such as *The Irishman*, *The Favourite* and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, but it also included smaller titles such as *The White Crow* and *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

“To have the opportunity to attend recent ‘Blockbuster’ movies like *The Sister Brothers* and *The Favourite* was an



The Favourite, Yorgos Lanthimos

absolute joy, as the captions allowed me to follow the storylines comfortably and happily...” – Kathryn

How to measure success?

Where audience development actions may typically offer easy metrics in box office by which to measure success, the accessible cinema project proves to be more complex. In terms of quantity, we can look to an increase in attendance figures for OC shows to 1349, or an increase in accessible titles to 29. However, this does not accurately reflect the enthusiasm of the audience for engaging with IFI, the personal impact of that engagement, or the growing audience expectation that film formats will be available to them. Through 2019, attendances ranged from the person who attended every OC show, to the audience member who said “When I go to a film and it has Audio description I feel so happy, it makes me feel that I can experience the whole film and know for sure what is happening in the scenes.”

For an audience who has been excluded from cultural cinema, having a programme and a venue accessible—whether they choose to engage with it or not—is a qualitative outcome that goes some way to making our activities inclusive.

Alicia McGivern, Head of Education





"Olympion" theatre during the closing ceremony of the anniversary 60th Thessaloniki International Film Festival, in November 2019.

Best Programming

Olympion & Warehouse 1 (Thessaloniki, Greece)

Located in the heart of Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, Olympion is a lively cinema hub, housed in a landmark six-floor building complex. Designed in the 1950s by French architect Jacques Mosset and renovated in 1997 when Thessaloniki was the European Capital of Culture, it is one of the most iconic venues in the city.

Olympion is managed by the Thessaloniki Film Festival, for which it has been the headquarters since 1998. The cinema houses two auditoriums: "Olympion" (676 seats), and "Pavlos Zannas" (192 seats).

Olympion offers quality films from all over the world and a wide variety of cinematic experiences all year round; engaging tributes, special events, workshops, morning school screenings, presentations, etc. It also hosts the Thessaloniki International Film Festival, which is held in November, as well as the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, held in March.

The two screens at Olympion have been part of the Europa Cinemas network since 2000. Nearby venue, Warehouse 1, with its named auditoriums, "John Cassavetes" and "Stavros Tornos", is also operated by the Thessaloniki Film Festival, and became part of the network in 2016. Together, with our Cinema Museum, Cinema Library, and Cinematheque, the

festival's theatres comprise a highly dynamic cinema-oriented cultural complex.

Our challenges involve developing new ways of attracting a younger audience and building stronger relations with existing audiences. Our initiatives towards this include the Olympion's 20th anniversary campaign, offering free admission to 20-year-olds for a whole year. More than 3,800 free tickets were issued in 2018 as part of this initiative, encouraging a generation of young people born in 1998 to choose the movie theatre and bring their friends along with them. Thus, we reached a much wider audience of younger people who became better acquainted with cinema culture. Another important initiative which strengthened the relation with our audience was the renovation of the Olympion's seating through a crowdfunding campaign, successfully completed in May 2020.

Our motto is "Festival all year round" and our intention is to offer, with every film screening, the exceptional cinematic experience usually associated with a film festival. Our strategy and initiatives expand our theatres' dynamics by connecting cinema with social events as well as other art forms—visual arts, literature, comics, photography, etc. Our Cinematheque focuses on European directors and film movements through



Spectators keeping distances for the new COVID-19 safety protocols at Olympion theater in the fall of 2020.

dynamic tributes that unveil the complexity of cinematic art in a contemporary way. Recent tributes focused on classics like Melville and Bergman, among others, while we also invited film students to choose their beloved films, and to present and discuss them with an audience.

In October 2019, we welcomed legendary costume designer Anthea Sylbert, and in December that same year, we hosted the 2nd European Cinema Night by screening *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* by Christian Mungiu, followed by a Q&A with the actress Laura Vasiliu. Among the most successful first-run films for us from 2019–2020 were: *Cold War*, *Parasite*, and *About Endlessness*.

Every year, when our venues close for the summer (like all winter cinemas in Greece), Olympion's spirit goes open air. In 2019, we hosted two successful free admission open-air screenings: North by Northwest at the Thessaloniki Port and Cinema Paradiso in Aristotelous square, each attracting more than 2,500 spectators. From July to September we also organized open-air screenings on the breathtaking terrace of the Thessaloniki Concert Hall.

One of our main goals is to pass on our love for films to new generations of filmgoers through special educational programmes, screenings, and workshops. As such, every Sunday, we present “Kids Love Cinema” screenings at Olympion, which include films and documentaries for children of all ages. Children's workshops and summer camp activities are also organized in our Cinema Museum.

Despite the harsh reality of crisis in the ongoing pandemic, the Thessaloniki Film Festival was one of the first cultural institutions to offer art during lockdown. Our lockdown initiatives aimed to maintain an uninterrupted dialogue with our audience.

We invited filmmakers from Greece and beyond (Jia Zhang-ke, Ildikó Enyedi, Albert Serra, Teona Strugar

Mitevaska, Nanouk Leopold, Radu Jude, Syllas Tzoumerkas, Marianna Economou, and others) to create short films inspired by their lockdown experience. The result was a series called “Spaces”, still available to watch on our YouTube channel, that received enormous support from our audience (the project has more than 102,000 views so far) and attracted interest from media, educational institutions, and festival programmers from all over the world. We also launched children's activities such as script writing and directing competitions in an attempt to maintain a creative cinematic spirit for kids in lockdown. We organized online screenings, among them the 3rd European Cinema Night, in November 2020. Free tickets for *The Audition* “sold out” in a matter of minutes.

In the wake of the pandemic, our challenges are numerous: we are focusing on making people feel safe in cinemas by investing in sanitary equipment, adapting our schedule, changing our protocols, training our team, developing a contactless experience (with the help of our newly launched app), and communicating to our audience—in a playful and entertaining way—all of the details of these safety protocols.

Another challenge will unfold in the following months as we will fully evaluate the impact of the pandemic on film production and distribution. The ecosystem might change drastically, and we believe that, even if our role as a cinema remains the same, we will have to adjust to a new media chronology, new players and new economic models. Overall, we believe that our strategy “festival all year round” is, now, more relevant than ever, in order to keep offering our audience quality cinema with a focus on European, national, and arthouse productions.

Elise Jalladeau, Director



The director of the TIFF, Elise Jalladeau © Aris Rammos



© Simon Bendroth



© Simon Johnson

Best Young Audience Activities

Panora (Malmö, Sweden)

We are very honoured and grateful for this award, and consider it proof that our work on film cultural activities for children and young people has been fruitful.

Folkets Bio Malmö who runs Panora was established in 1973 and is an independent branch of the nationwide association Folkets Bio, one of Sweden's premier distributors of arthouse film. We opened our first cinema in 1983, with one screen, a café, and an art gallery. In 2011, our property lease expired and a determined fight to gain support from the City of Malmö to establish a new cinema began.

In February 2015, we opened the new Panora—the largest arthouse cinema in the South of Sweden and the premier event and festival cinema in the region, now with three screens, a large foyer, and a gallery. Absolutely key in getting the City of Malmö to agree to build a cinema, much larger than the one we left behind, was our decision to make it “The Children’s Cinema”. Panora, at this stage, grew into Juniöra, for children of up to 13 years of age, and Young Panora, for children and youth over age 13.

The development of Juniöra exceeded expectations, though it was harder to reach the teenage target group of Young Panora. So, early on, we decided to prioritize establishing Juniöra. Right from the start, Juniöra had its own website,

graphic profile, and independent social media channels. Our strategy has been to work in an inclusive way, to find as wide a target audience as possible and to trial various projects, for example; school holiday cinema, themed events, anime, premiere events, director Q&As, additional activities, special screenings, children’s parties, and more. We have also focused on collaborations with other organisations to gain access to wider networks, contacts, and audience target groups. We work in an interdisciplinary way to include other art forms alongside film and have a mobile outreach programme to reach places in Malmö outside of the cinema circuit.

One of our most prominent projects in recent years was a five-month retrospective of the work of animator Per Åhlin, in collaboration with Serieförändring and the Swedish Film Institute. The project included 56 screenings with 17 titles—of which five were on 35mm—a director’s talk, lectures, animation workshops, book signings, and exhibitions with guided tours.

Panora is of crucial significance to the film culture infrastructure of the city of Malmö today, and an obvious arena for film festivals focusing on children and young people, such as BUFF International Film Festival, Nordic Kids Media Festival, Nordisk Panorama’s Young Nordic section, and more.



© Jenny E Olsson

We've also run our own film festival, SMUFF (Små Ungars Film Festival = translated Small Kids Film Festival) for twenty years now. It's a festival for Malmö's youngest cinephiles (2-5-year-olds) where, every year, the screenings are usually completely full.

When we opened the new Panorama and Juniora we had a person employed full-time who spent three-and-a-half years developing the children's programme. Unfortunately, this became unsustainable economically and their employment came to an end in 2018. The biggest challenge today is to secure the funds so we can reappoint someone to work with Juniora, as it has great potential for further development. Another challenge we are faced with is to create a restaurant in the upper foyer, which must have children's needs in mind, to strengthen Panorama as a meeting place, and to attract new audiences to the cinema. A third challenge is to attract more teenagers to come to our cinema.

Over the six years since the new Panorama opened, we have established a vast network and embarked on great collaborations with different schools, ranging from pre-school and kindergarten to universities. This is where some of our most important work is done, where children and youth can enjoy quality films in a cinema early in life, to experience film screenings as part of a wider context, and often with an accompanying discussion afterwards.

Overall, in 2019, we had 167 screenings for primary, secondary, and high school students, of which 64 were in collaboration with the City of Malmö. One of our recurring and most important collaborations is with ARE, The Anti-Racism Film Days, who curate around thirty film screenings with accompanying discussions or lectures based around

human rights each year. This collaboration has been sustained for over twenty years now.

Our work on children's cinema has been successful, since we have held on stubbornly to our overall mission – every person's right to culture: that children and young people should have a natural place in the cinema and access to quality film culture. In our very first year as new Panorama we received the prize for Children's Cinema of the Year in Sweden, and now, six years later, we've received the European equivalent. The future looks bright for Panorama and Juniora, and we look forward to building our restaurant, increasing our opening hours, and reappointing someone to run the children's section who, together with the rest of the team, can take Juniora to new heights.

Anders Helmerius, Panorama Manager





© Alicia Secane

Entrepreneur of the Year

Ramiro Ledo Cordeiro

(Duplex Cinema, Ferrol, Spain)

The Dúplex Cinema in Ferrol was founded in 1996 by the Álvarez Rodríguez family in a working-class neighbourhood, two minutes from the city centre. Back then, the city had a population of around 83,000, considerably more than the 68,000 remaining in 2019, reflecting a steady population decline resulting from the dismantling of the naval sector since the 1990s.

In the spring of 2019, the cinema's Proprietor and Managing Director notified me of its imminent closure and of an offer to transfer the premises. I shared this news with my associates at NUMAX but, after considering the different possibilities, the NUMAX cooperative decided not involve itself in taking over management of the former Dúplex Cinema.

From a personal point of view, I felt I had sufficient energy to give to this project, and the benefit of the experience I had gained in recent years from the conception, development, and construction of NUMAX in Santiago de Compostela. So, I decided to take on the refurbishment and reopening of the only cinema still operating in Ferrol on my own.

An independent cinema with a varied programme is a significant instrument for social cohesion and cultural

stimulation and, for this very reason, I do not think it is something any medium-sized city can afford to lose. Cinema-going is still a major player in development and is a clear indicator of quality of life in local communities. In every city I have lived in or visited, going to an independent cinema has always been one of the first things I do, and it builds up my relationship with each place. How could I sit by and watch one of Galicia's main cities, my community, lose its film theatre?

The NUMAX experience in Santiago de Compostela has been of primary importance in consolidating the cinema sector in Galicia, leading directly to the creation of a new cinema in Lugo (Codex Cinema, 2018) and, of course, the Duplex Cinema in Ferrol in 2019. Today, these three cities form a network where, five years ago, there was none. NUMAX has also contributed to raising the profile of independent and arthouse cinema, and subtitled original version films, throughout the region.

Based on an idea which I proposed to a group of close friends in 2013—to combine our professional skills in cinema, bookselling, video and graphic design to build a cinema in

Santiago de Compostela—three of us (Carlos Hidalgo, Irma Amado, and I) set up a non-profit organisation in February 2014. By the time we opened in 2015 there were five of us, and today our cooperative is comprised of ten working partners and three employees, all working in different areas. I recently stepped down from the project, in September of this year.

NUMAX, a non-profit workers' cooperative in a newly constructed building, housing a 70-seat film theatre, a film distributor (until 2018), a bookstore, and a video, graphics and communication laboratory—which opened in the heart of a city of fewer than 100,000 people, at a time when all other the cinemas in the area had closed—is today a well-established project, known throughout Spain. It was the first cinema in Galicia to join Europa Cinemas, in 2016.

In 2019, the NUMAX Cinema logged its best ever annual attendance figures with a record 44,000 viewers, topped by an audience of 8,000 for *Fire Will Come*, which reached an overall audience of 100,000 people in Spain. *Fire Will Come*, directed by Oliver Laxe, which won the Jury Prize in the *Un Certain Regard* category at the Cannes Film Festival, was distributed (under the NUMAX Distribution label) by the company Nocturama SL, which I set up in January 2019.

Over the last decade, attendance at the old Dúplex Cinema (two screens, seating 142 and 107 respectively) had consistently reached between 8,000 and 11,000 people annually, audience levels that were barely sustainable for the cinema.

After redesigning the interior cinema space, introducing new fittings, completely renovating the air conditioning, restoring the seats, and reducing capacity in order to guarantee a good view of the screen from all vantage points, updating the optics of the projectors, digitising the box office and reinventing ourselves with a new, updated corporate identity, we managed to more than double earlier audience numbers

in our first five months of operation (before our imposed closure in March), thanks to the fantastic work of the team made led by Victor Paz and Eva Seoane.

80% of our programme is screened in original languages, which includes blockbuster film premieres, although the majority of our films are independent and local. We also show spotlights and retrospectives on leading filmmakers, films presented by their directors, films from the festival circuit on limited release, and films for younger audiences.

Throughout our pandemic-induced closure, our priority has been to keep in touch with our audience and to let them know how grateful we are for their excellent support. We have extended the duration of our loyalty scheme at no additional cost, offered members a free subscription to MUBI, and developed the *DUPLEX at home* initiative, with a new film each week to view at home. In this way, we have redirected our programming away from the big screen into the virtual world, maintaining our programme of new releases, catalogue films, films for younger audiences, festival films, all of which has kept us in contact with our audience.

At the most recent Seville Festival, a group of independent Spanish cinemas introduced “Promio, network of independent cinemas”, an association of which I have the privilege of being President, and whose main objective is to promote cinematic diversity. Today we number almost twenty cinemas across Spain, hoping to gain recognition and protection for independent and arthouse cinema, allowing us to continue to strive for excellence in our chosen model. Every day, we bring the best independent European and international cinema to our local audiences and show them in the best possible way: at the cinema.

Ramiro Ledo Cordeiro, President of Nocturama SL
(Duplex Cinema & NUMAX Distribution)



© Tamara de la Fuente



© Alicia Seoane

European Arthouse Cinema Day 2020

Highlighting arthouse film theatres' commitment to European cinema



Europa Cinemas and CICAIE (International Confederation of Arthouse Cinemas) teamed up once again, on November 8th, to celebrate the 5th European Arthouse Cinema Day. Despite the pandemic, arthouse theatres all over the world responded to this invitation to celebrate the best of European arthouse cinema with their audiences. Of around 700 registered theatres, more than 200 managed to participate in the event, physically or virtually.

This joint initiative highlights arthouse film theatre engagement with European cultural diversity through varied, curated, and exclusive programmes. This year, its ambassadors were film directors Lucas Belvaux, Agnieszka Holland, and Caroline Link. Artist Lorenzo Mattotti (*The Bears' Famous Invasion in Sicily*) created the event's artworks. Europa Cinemas produced a 53-second trailer made from some of the best European films of 2020, free to download in DCP format by cinemas to promote their participation to their audience. Each cinema was free to set up its own programme around European arthouse films, with its own focus: previews, children films, film marathon, etc...

This 5th edition faced challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic, as many countries were facing a second lockdown and movie theatres had to close their door once again. But some exhibitors experimented with new ways to connect with their audiences nevertheless, including Facebook Live events and virtual screenings. Let's look back.

A group of thirty-three passionate, independent Italian exhibitors joined forces in a collective initiative titled, "Nuvole in viaggio", sharing a Facebook Live broadcast, and welcoming their audience, albeit virtually, to their cinemas. They talked with guest speakers and screened a special programme of short and medium-length Italian films.

The collective digital screening project #ioresto in SALA,

launched by Anteo in Milano, Cineteca di Bologna, Visionario in Udine and Circuito Cinema Genova in May, included an exclusive screening of *O Mercy!* by Arnaud Desplechin.

In Bucharest, Cinéma Elvire Popesco of the Institut Français also went live with a digital screening of *Cyrano, My Love* via the ticketing platform Event Book and in the framework of its digital screenings offer "Elvire chez vous".

In France, the Café des Images curated a programme focused on powerful women with six films available via La Toile, the French VOD platform for movie theatres: *Speak Up*, *Proxima*, *Toni Erdmann*, *The Young Lady*, *Volter* and *Woman At War* were featured.

And, of course, the lucky cinemas still open and able to celebrate with their audience, in person, also planned exciting events. At Tisza Mozi (Szolnok, Hungary), cinemagoers had the pleasure of enjoying fine mulled wine in the cosy foyer at a charity event featuring a live concert. Donations will fund Advent cinema for children.

Kino Urania (Osijek, Croatia) offered a highly enjoyable full-day programme: films from almost every genre, including the documentary *Honeyland*, and a children's film matinee. Some Spanish cinemas, including Cines Golem Madrid, collaborated with Seville European Film Festival for the simultaneous premiere screening of *Delete History* by Benoît Delépine and Gustave Kervern, followed by a live streamed Q&A with both directors.

Even in a particularly complex context, European Arthouse Cinema Day 2020 highlighted the exhibitors' commitment to offering their audiences of all ages and from all social backgrounds the best of European cinema, in all its diversity and richness.

Raphaëlle Gondry

European Cinema Night 2020

Celebrating the richness and diversity of European film culture and cinemas



Creative Europe MEDIA, in collaboration with Europa Cinemas, organised the third edition of this unique outreach event to take place between November 16th and 20th, with the objective of honouring the richness and cultural diversity of European cinema.

In this unprecedented year, the European Cinema Night has offered, now more than ever, a great opportunity to highlight the essential role of cinemas in the circulation and visibility of European films, and has shown audiences the richness and cultural diversity of European cinema, raising public awareness of how MEDIA supports Europe's film industry and culture, as well as film theatres.

This year, the event was planned to take place physically, in 75 network cinemas all over Europe. Due to the current crisis and widespread cinema closures across Europe, it was shifted in part online, with cinemas organising virtual screenings. As such, 64 network cinemas across Europe participated in the event, representing 64 cities and 28 countries.

Altogether, 43 different European non national MEDIA-supported films were selected and screened by exhibitors this year, according to the knowledge of their respective audiences. These free screenings were followed, where possible, by a discussion or Q&A about the film, and the European Commission's support for the film.

Virtual screenings were aligned to the cinema-going experience, with films only visible at specific dates and times, accessible to a limited number of viewers and, sometimes, geo-blocked around the cinema's catchment area. Live debates and discussions facilitated an exchange with the audience, which gave these online events an interactive dynamic.

The 2020 edition's highlights include the online screening of *La Virgen De Agosto* by Jonas Trueba, organized in collaboration with three cinemas in France—Le Méliès (Montreuil), LUX (Caen), Arvor (Rennes)—and one in Belgium—Quairo (Charleroi)—via the French online screening platform “La Vingt-Cinquième Heure”. An estimated 1200 people watched the film, followed by a 90-minute conversation that included a Q&A with the director Joan Trueba and lead actress Itsaso Arana, hosted by Stéphane Goudet, Artistic Director at Le Méliès. Fatih Akin introduced the European Cinema Night online event at Zeise Kinos (Hamburg, Germany) by emphasising the importance of European movies in our neighbourhood cinemas. French cinema L'Atalante (Bayonne, France) organized a video introduction from director Alexander Nanau to present the virtual screening of his movie *Collectiv*. And Kinodvor (Ljubljana, Slovenia) invited director Christos Nikou to introduce his movie *Apples*.

These 64 events were well covered by local press and media, giving greater visibility to the participating cinemas by highlighting their flexibility and creativity in these particularly challenging times.

This unusual edition has given us the opportunity to witness the incredible ability of film theatres to quickly adapt to these new scenarios and find innovative solutions to keep the lights on and continue showing the best of European cinema, even if their doors are temporarily closed.

By connecting cinemagoers in numerous cities across Europe, the European Cinema Night aims to strengthen our shared European identity, rooted in our cultural diversity and values, hence bringing EU policies closer to their everyday lives.

Sonia Ragone and Lisa Püscher



EUROPA CINEMAS LABEL WINNERS 2020



FOR 17 YEARS, NETWORK EXHIBITORS HAVE BEEN AWARDING THE EUROPA CINEMAS LABEL TO THE BEST EUROPEAN FILMS AT MAJOR EUROPEAN FESTIVALS. THE EUROPA CINEMAS LABEL AIMS TO ENHANCE THE PROMOTION, CIRCULATION AND BOX-OFFICE RUNS OF EUROPEAN AWARD-WINNING FILMS ON THE SCREENS OF MEMBER CINEMAS ACROSS EUROPE.



43 countries / 744 cities / 1,230 cinemas / 3,093 screens

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Co-funded by the
European Union

