

## EUROPA CINEMAS AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION LAB

“Moving forward - Reviewing old habits and exploring new models”

SOFIA, 22 – 25 MARCH 2023

### Final Report

In 2023, after three years of absence Europa Cinemas four day Innovation Lab was held as part of Sofia International Film Festival (Bulgaria) once again on location from 22 to 25 March 2023.

Europa Cinemas Sofia Innovation Lab was led by **Javier Pachón** (Executive Director and Head Programmer, CineCiutat, Palma de Majorca, Spain) together with **Marijana Bosniak** (Manager and Programmer, kino Urania, Osijek, Croatia).

30 cinema exhibitors from 15 countries gathered in this charming city during the Sofia Film Festival. Network members and European exhibitors came to the Cultural Centre G8 Cinema to discuss issues and share ideas and key learnings around the topic **“Moving forward - Reviewing old habits and exploring new models”**.

### SOFIA, DAY 1 – THE GOAL IS TO GET INSPIRED

Another edition of the Sofia Lab kicked off on Wednesday, 22 March 2023! All participants were welcomed by workshop leaders Javi Pachón (CineCiutat, Spain) and Marijana Bosniak (Kino Urania, Croatia). Marijana stated that the audience and programming are constantly changing and so if we want to survive as cinemas, we all have to learn new things and share our experiences.





Javi told the participants that there were three components structuring the next few days:

- 1 – Reflect on where we are now**
- 2 – Explore new ideas**
- 3 – Act on those ideas**



Important advice to all the participants: although participants may come from different backgrounds, which means the public support and the way things work in each country are different and where that might be true that some projects presented here won't work in other cinemas, the most important thing is to get inspired. Even if participants left the lab with just one new idea, a valuable goal would be reached. The important thing is to think in terms of possibilities. In the introductory session everyone was invited to shortly introduce themselves and share an old habit they want to change and a new action they would like to explore.



[illegible]

A large indoor courtyard with a glass roof, where students are gathered around food tables. A sign for "MEMENTO" is visible in the background.

## SOFIA, DAY 2 – CHANGING OUR MINDSET

**Javi Pachón** kicked off Thursday, 23 March saying that he didn't want to sound like an Instagram lifecouch, but nonetheless, we needed to talk about the need of resetting our mind-sets. We as cinemas need to learn new things in order to survive.



VOD platforms may have sky rocketed during the pandemic, but in the end we've learnt that a 'black box' containing all the films ever made is actually not the answer. "The abyss of infinity is not as nice as we thought". Curation has become very important, and that's where we as cinemas come in. We're part of an industry that pushes change and so we must adapt to the new reality. The challenge is to finding a balance in the way we go about it. We can run our cinemas as 'MacGyvers' and patch things up, or we can make a business plan and get access to funds, but the 3rd and new way might be to find a balance and find help with our plans, research, listen to our audience's wants and needs, but also our team's wishes. "



The first session of the day was focussed on how to create demand. **Kristi Porila** from Thule Kino in Estonia has worked in distribution and in a cinema, and suggests, that distributors and cinemas should



engage more in communicating with each other. For instance, if an exhibitor sees there are too many releases in one week, suggest other dates. A cinema should have an active role and see potential in certain films, and discuss the options with distributors.



**Alicia Nieto** from Cines Renoir, Madrid, presented the implementation of a new project. Podcasts are the hot new thing nowadays, that's why they started a collaboration with a podcast. This has proven to be an interesting and successful way to reach new audiences for certain films. The results: films have better exposure for films, they've created a better relationship with distributors and a nice bonus is that every party involved shares the podcast on their own (social media) platforms and websites .

In the second session it was time to get into the marketing and communication strategies of a few cinemas. **Ida Hauge Johannessen** from Vega Scene in Norway told us how they have built an audience from scratch. They noticed the weekdays were not the best days for screenings, and chose to make ticket prices cheaper on Mondays, which was the worst day, and now it has become the best day of the week. Their previews on Monday are always sold out and distributors even ask them to screen their films on these days.

**Jana Trnková** from Svetozor, Prague, took us through their social media strategies. The focus on Facebook and Instagram is to promote their own screenings of certain films and not the film itself. Facebook has proven to be perfect as an advertising space for the screenings, whereas Instagram is to show the feeling and vibe of the cinema space and people working there.

**Marijana Bosniak** explained the niche marketing of Kino Urania in Croatia and how they got to create an audience of young people up to 25 years for their cinema. The trick is not to focus on the film itself but using films to make tailor made programs. "Don't just expect the audience to come because you program a certain film, ask questions about your audience and give them a reason to come. Shift the focus to them instead of doing things from your own ideas of what people should come and see."

The most important marketing tool for KINO Rotterdam has proven to be their custom made trailers for their classic programming. However, there is no clear cut way to go about this creative process,

every program is different and deserves a different treatment. What if you hit a creative block? **Züleyha Azman** screens two different trailers that didn't work out and how they eventually threw out what they had and started over again. The result was a trailer that worked to reach the audiences and the creation of a few new marketing tools along the way.

**Andres Kauts** from Tartu Elektriteater in Estonia kicked off session 3 on *Optimizing our means and tools* with presenting an inspiring Collaborate to Innovate project in which they managed to create a ticketing software for themselves and to share with other smaller venues called Kinola. Good news, other venues can still join this initiative if they would want to.

**Éva Demeter** from Tisza Mozi, Hungary presented two case studies in which they funded special events in the cinema. Her advice was to dream big and to go for it. "If it doesn't work right away, adjust your plan and keep trying to find new ways and partners for your projects." This turned out to be the way to find a new audience for their cinema.

This session ended with **Javi Pachón** presenting tech sites and tools you already use in your cinema and give you all sorts of information, if you just use them differently, but also, tech apps and tools one might want to implement in a cinema. These were mostly focussed on making the day to day work easier, from cloud services to internal communication (goodbye to communicating with co-workers through Whatsapp and hello to using Slack) and from free graphic design apps to AI...

During the following mini-group discussions the attendees were asked to think about subjects that were discussed during the day:

- 1- programming strategies
- 2- marketing + communication
- 3- optimization

The results:

<p>1. on films vs. commercial</p> <p>2. limited resources</p> <p>3. where is our audience</p>		
Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<p>- easy to navigate - no</p> <p>- adjusting the prog.</p> <p>- to available audience</p> <p>- feel what they like</p>	<p>- don't rush the program</p> <p>- feedback from the audience (post it notes)</p> <p>- Q/A</p> <p>- time slot for audience (senior junior screenings)</p>	<p>- engaging with community</p> <p>- Q&amp;A surveys</p> <p>- community involvement,</p> <p>- volunteers promoting the cinemas every</p> <p>- marketing / SWOT (wishlist, overview)</p>

During the open slot session **Marta Innocenti** from Cinema Giotto inspired everyone with presenting their weekend events they host to attract groups who normally might not go to the cinema. Their goal is to rebuild the habit of going to the cinema. The result is that these audiences keep on coming back to their cinema, even though they struggle to book films as a small cinema in a rural area in Italy. For this spirit and pushing though, she has been awarded with the Pitch of the Day Award.

#### SOFIA, DAY 3 – RETHINKING THE CINEMA EXPERIENCE

What better way to start the Friday, 23 March, than visiting a cinema? Europa Cinemas' Alexandre Tchernookov and Lisa Püscher took the group of exhibitors to check out the Sofia Cinema House/Dom na kinoto in the morning. **Hristo Hristozov** told the story of how he started working here many years ago after spending so much time at this cinema as a visitor and went on to tell about the events they hosted, from screenings for young parents with babies to holding screenings for refugees. "Everyone should feel welcome in the cinema."



The fourth session was all about rethinking the cinema experience. **Éva Demeter** from Tisza mozi gave a presentation on the new mobile app they launched with the help of Europa Cinemas Next/Change programme. The app serves not only to sell tickets, but also to developing new ways to interact with their visitors. For instance, customers can decide on the programming and if more people join, the ticket price goes down.

**Balázs Nagy** from Corvin, Hungary, told about the augmented reality app they created for the Imperceptibles festival. With this app and game the audience could find the secret screenings spread all over the city of Budapest and Paris.





**Valerio Carocci** from Cinema Troisi told the exhibitors about their shift from an illegal to a free, open and legit cinema. Their story started 12 years ago and the cinema they are running now with a group of 9 people, opened only a year ago. They have received support from sponsors and institutions, which one might not expect, seeing their history. The screenings they used to host in the open air were all free, but they now have to charge a ticket price for the screenings. It's been a long road, but they have won different legal, economic, cultural and political battles and the future looks bright. They are even planning on opening another cinema: an abandoned theatre they saved from turning into an apartment complex. The plan is to take over a lot more abandoned cinemas in Trastevere and become as powerful as the multiplex.

Session five also opened with **Valerio Carocci**. This time he presented different types of events they host in their brand new cinema. The reasoning behind these events? To get people reacquainted with the cinema place. The cinema building is open 24/7 and 365 days per year, this makes it a safe and a welcoming place to everyone. Their audience is quite young, 60% of the visitors is under 30 years of age. Programming wise, the focus is on premiere titles during the week and classics on weekends. Aside from films, they organize also other types of screening events, from screening the recent elections live, to playing games on the screen.

**Martyna Pałczyńska** from Gdynia in Poland told about their Fairy Tale mornings to bring young kids in the cinema, a great way to get children used to the cinema as a space. During these events, the kids are welcome everywhere in the building, to run around, discover and explore, because it's important they feel comfortable in the cinema.



**Christos Ringas** from Athinea, Greece has a great project they implement during the months the space is closed down: cinema with pets! When they were asked if visitors could come with their dogs, they didn't hesitate. It's a nice way to attract dog lovers who are not necessarily film lovers. Likeminded people get together, which creates lots of promo through word of mouth. This way they can give back to the community that supports them.



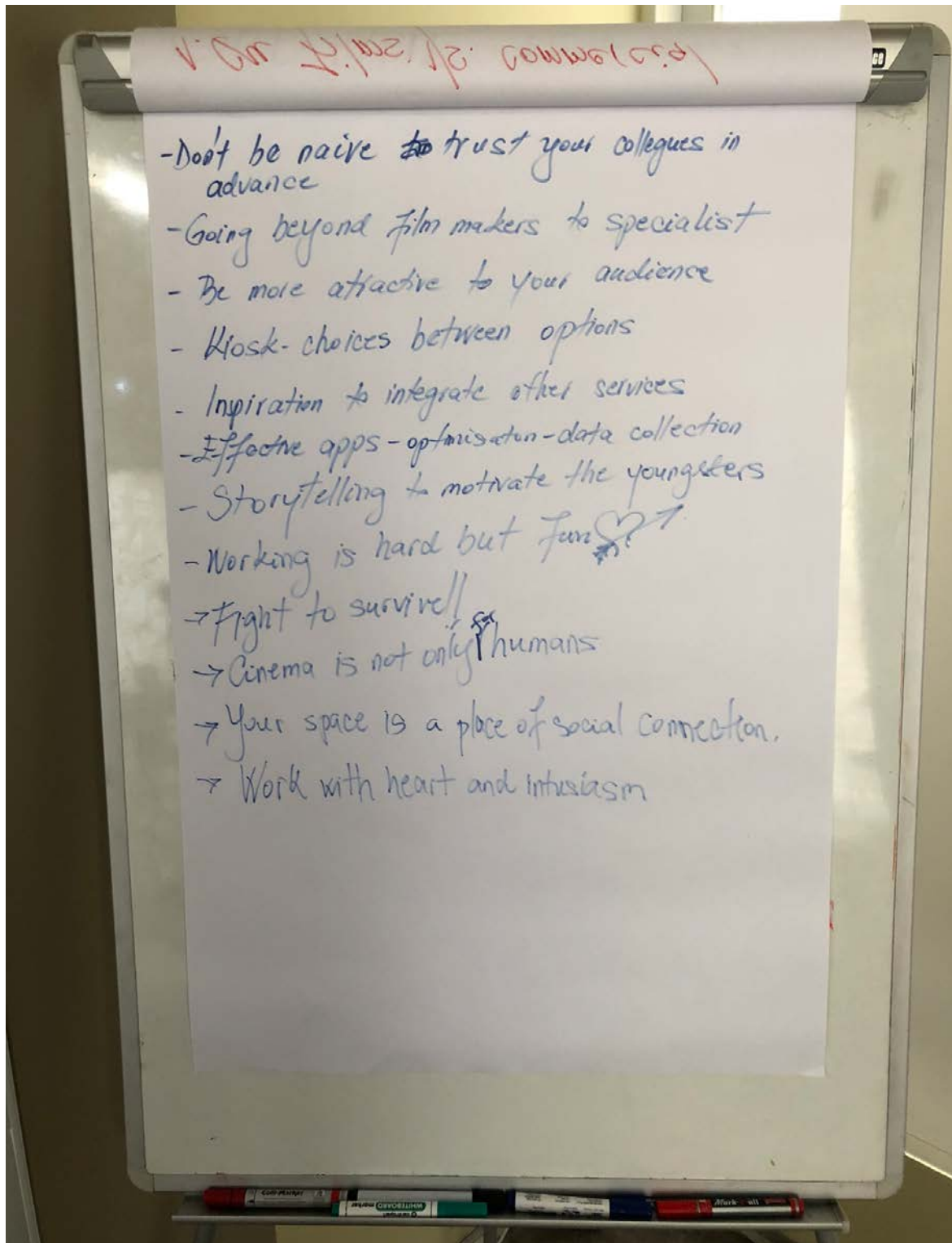
Session six was focused on Collaborate to Innovate projects supported by Europa Cinemas. **Alicia Nieto** talked about the challenges of coordinating their Viridiana project in Spain, meant to give more visibility to European cinema with 32 other likeminded cinemas. It's a joint paid preview screening of 11 films in total, from November 2021 till June 22, with one screening per month. They also launched a special website to promote these screenings.



**Justė Vyšniauskaitė** from Kaunas cinema centre Romuva, Lithuania, told about their inspiring project "Rising Cinema": a new model of film education for people between 15 and 20 years. A special European film programme, completed with lectures on cinema history, meetings with professionals and workshops, ranging from writing reviews to creating podcasts.

**Mirona Radu** from Romania told about the project "Shifting Pictures", which they launched together with 3 other cinemas based in Belgrade, Amsterdam and Prague. The idea was to build partnerships with cinemas and third parties. She said it's important to collaborate, because one can share ideas and expertise. By doing so cinemas can use the same resources like funding, technology and talent. Of course there are also a few challenges, such as the large amount of paperwork, the changing timelines, how to agree on shared promotion and certain financial aspects.

Debrief of the day:



## SOFIA, DAY 4 – IDEAS ON SUSTAINABILITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

**Marijana Bosniak** kicked off session 7 on the last day of the Sofia Lab, which was focussed on how to run a sustainable venue. She pointed out how to keep track of multiple projects and events organized by a small team. An interesting topic, because one of the biggest struggles for most exhibitors seems to be multitasking and working in small teams. She and her co-workers have created different marketing materials for events throughout the years, such as posters. However, it is important to get help with cross-promotion when you host events. They do this by working together with local NGO's and other institutions, this way you combine goals and share in the marketing, by promoting events through your own channels.

**Javi Pachón** was the second speaker of the day and told the attendees about making the most of their teams, and balancing productivity and the team's passions. He went on talking about the organisation structures they implemented in the beginning, which was a horizontal structure, which meant no one could overrule anyone. Although it sounds great, it has proven to be quite stressful. The way they work now is a structure in which the goals to achieve are clearly defined. It helps, when it is very clear who does what and it gives space for every team member's passion. It can also be very useful to keep track of time management through the tech apps he mentioned before.



**Wojtek Kampa** from Kino Pod Baranami goes on to tell the attendees more about the reopening of their café with sustainability in mind. They partnered up with local cafés and learnt from their experiences, ranging from finding the right cups, to getting advice on building, or the right infrastructure for the café. Their idea is to get started and making it up as you go along. This way you can make a difference.

Session 8 on diversity and inclusion started with **Piotr Szczyszyk** giving a presentation on their “Cinema without barriers” project. The concept is to screen movies and make their cinema more accessible. These screenings include films with audio description and live sign language, as well as screenings with talks and workshops after the film. They also want to remove economical barriers, that's why the ticket to these screenings is only €1. The concept of removing barriers is widely applied: the building is accessible for people with disabilities. They found partner cinemas who will implement this concept as well, and they will hopefully be able to create a regular programme in the future.





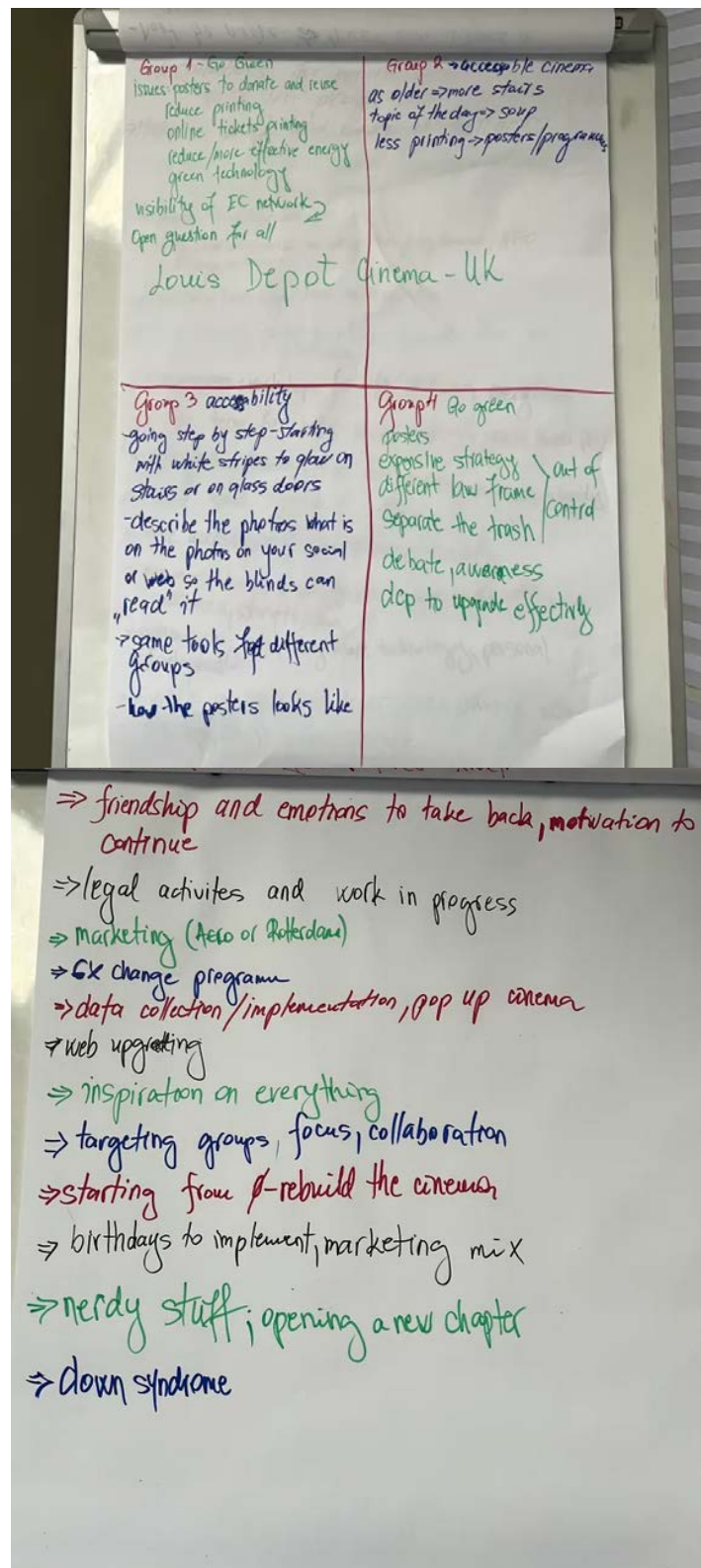
**Janeta Henzele** from Kino Bize presented their Black voices: diverse cinema stories programme, which had just started. They screen 3 films by black filmmakers, because they see a big gap in cinema, but also in culture and society. There's a lot of misrepresentation and they feel it's their duty to shed light on these blind spots. They also distribute these 3 films and hope other cinemas will follow and screen these films as well.

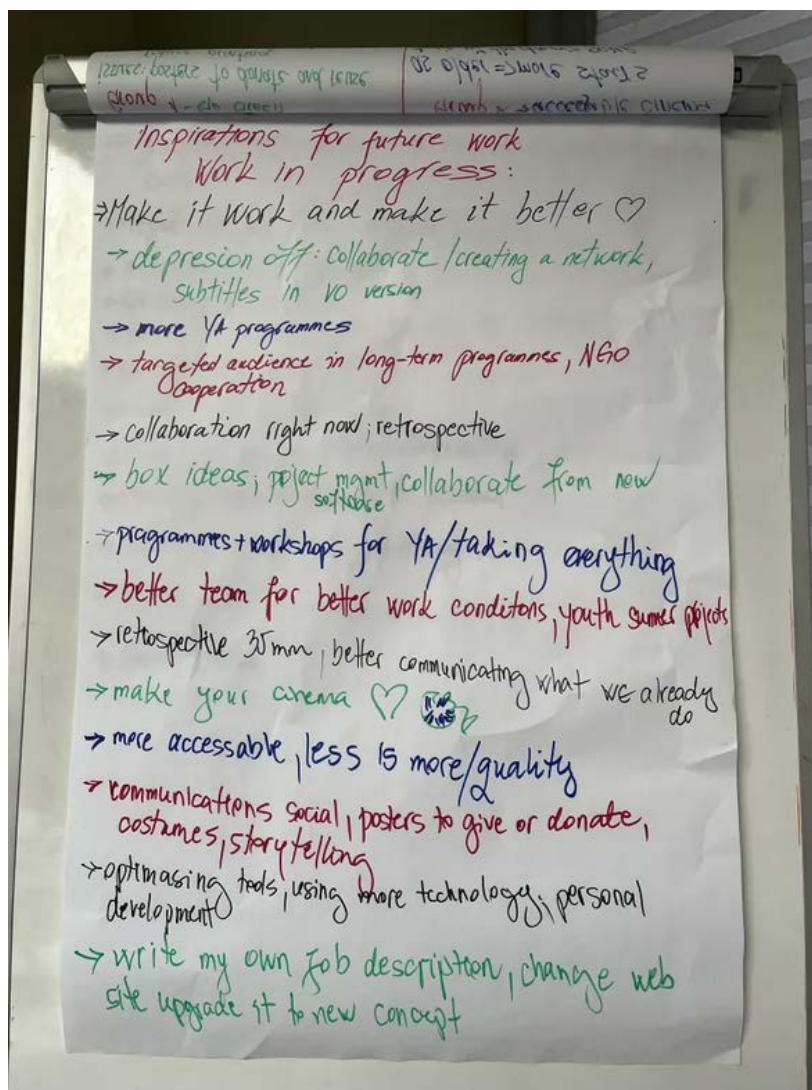


**Ophelia Hertel** from Broadway Filmtheater in Trier told us about their "Mimoplus" screenings for senior audiences. They host these special screenings once a month and work together with the Senior Citizens Office. These are mostly European films and the idea is that it turns the screening into a sociable event because after the film they offer snacks and it becomes more of a get together. The goal is to be more accessible and connecting the elderly.

During the group discussion the Europa Cinemas charters were introduced and the exhibitors were asked to split up in groups and think about the subjects of sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and present a few ideas afterwards. The results:

Session 9 was the closing of the Sofia Innovation Lab, the attendees were asked what they would take back to their cinema or even what they wouldn't want to do anymore. After 4 days of the Lab, everyone seemed quite inspired, energized and recharged, and ready to put everything they've learnt to use. A few of the things we've heard:





What stood out this edition of the Innovation Lab in Sofia was the good connection between attendees and the effort everybody put in, many exhibitors were ready to collaborate with other cinemas and use the resources Europa Cinemas offers to make this happen.

