

REPORT – EUROPA CINEMAS AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION LAB

**MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR RESOURCES TO BUILD AUDIENCES**

SOFIA, 14-18 MARCH 2018

SOFIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – SOFIA MEETINGS

**Day 1: Wednesday 14th March**

In March 2018, Europa Cinemas held its fifth Audience Development & Innovation Lab in Bulgaria as part of Sofia Meetings – the film industry event of Sofia International Film Festival. This edition of the Sofia Innovation Lab lasted a day longer than the previous ones, now aligning its length with the two other Europa Cinemas Innovation Labs, in Bologna and Sevilla.

Thirty-one participants from the exhibition sector, half of whom came from Central and Eastern Europe, attended four days of workshops on the theme “*Making the Most of Your Resources to Build Audiences*”. Once again, the event was held at the G8 Cinema, the cosiest and most welcoming cinema venue in the centre of Sofia.

Sessions were led by **Madeleine Probst** (Vice-president of Europa Cinemas and Programme Producer at the Watershed in Bristol), with the assistance of **Javier Pachon** (President of Cineciutat and Cinearte, Palma de Mallorca, Spain) and **Erika Borsos** (Programmer, Budapest Film, Budapest, Hungary).

Introduced by Madeleine Probst, the Seminar opened with the Artistic Director of Sofia International Film Festival Mira Staleva who welcomed the attendees and presented the industry section of the Sofia Film Festival.

Claude-Eric Poiroux, General Director of Europa Cinemas, greeted the participants and introduced the background, the purposes and the goals of the Lab, within the larger scope of the Europa Cinemas action and raison d’être.



Madeleine Probst introduced then the main themes of the Lab, stressing particularly on of the headline topics, which included:

- **Building relationships;** from community design to data analysis and customer relationship management
- **Making the most of your resources** from organisational development to involving volunteers and fundraising
- **Better understanding barriers to engagement** from pricing, accessibility to discoverability issues.
- **Developing responsive and holistic communication and editorial strategies on and offline**



- Closer co-operation and exchange of practice between European cinemas and distributors
- Learning about/from the Bulgarian context; exploring the challenges and opportunities for small cinemas in a small country, dominated by big players

The rest of the afternoon was dedicated to introducing the participants to each other in order to identify one's needs and assets and foster creative bonds between people.

## Day 2: Thursday 15th March

The first session of the next day was dedicated to building up resources through community engagement. The presentations kicked off with an in-depth case study of **Rio Cinema** in London, which went through a large fundraising campaign to renovate the cinema and open an additional screen.



**Oliver Meek**, director of the cinema, explained how they cinema managed to raise 124 000 pounds through support from trusts and foundations, donations and a crowdfunding campaign on Spacehive.

**Javier Pachon** shared his experience of the community led fundraising campaign to reopen the old Renoir Cinema in Mallorca, subsequently named **Cineciutat** after the reopening. Their collective's main input was brought by a community driven approach to fundraising, where every citizen was invited to be part of the process of reinventing the venue.



The next presentations addressed different fidelity schemes, combined with data analysis, for an increased efficiency in attracting new audiences. **Madeleine Probst**

Madeleine Probst presented Watershed's "24 & Under" offer. Beyond the traditional special price deal this particular age group is subject of targeted networking events, debates, concerts, free screenings. Through these actions the Watershed aims at becoming a natural gathering place for local youth.

**Emil Simeonov** showcased the Veezi software and its possibilities of data analysis and programming adjustments, according to admissions results gathered in real time.



**Erika Borsos** presented the Budapest Film Card loyalty scheme, available in the Budapest theatres. She acknowledged the successes as much as the weak points of this scheme, designing the path to its improvement.

The relationships with the distributors are always a sensitive issue for the exhibitors, but **Barbora Tothova** from Kino Usmev (Slovakia), **Giedre Vysniauskaite** from Kino Pasaka (Lithuania) and Madeleine Probst shared with the participants their successful campaigns launched in collaboration with local distributors.

**Barbora Tothova** presented an original type of partnership in Slovakia, a distributor discount card working at the same time as a loyalty card.



**Giedre Vysniauskaite** gave us details about her cinemas partnership with Baltic distributor A one films. Through a common work on the release date, communication or marketing, both companies manage to increase the attendance to the titles released and screened in Kino Pasaka, Vilnius.



**Madeleine Probst** exemplified the BFI Film Audience Network initiative, in which a film is selected by a committee, then propelled forward to the audience through a large number of collaborations between the distributor, the BFI at a national level, and the cinemas,

at a local one.

The following session focused on collaboration with local partners to extend the community outreach, build inclusion and attract new audiences.

**Eef De Lombaerde** (Buda Kunstencentrum, Belgium), highlighted their way building partnerships to develop audiences for films through Buda's ambassador schemes, as well as open air event screenings on canoes in the river of her home town Kortrijk.





**Zak Ioannidis** (Cine Paradisos, Greece), told his way of building solidarity & inclusion through introducing alternative and solidarity fares, as well as through outreach screenings in prisons  
**Frederic Cornet** (Cinema Galeries, Belgium) insisted on the benefits of pop-up happenings to build new audiences and enhance his cinema's identity and trade mark.

**Erika Borsos** shared the positive experience of their collaborations with the Moholy Nagy university in Budapest. The cinemas screen short films and trailers directed by students before the main screenings. A "please turn off your phones" campaign at the pre-show was particularly successful, as it was remarkably well crafted and welcomed.



### **Day 3: Friday 16th March**

Friday started with a session dedicated to space resources. The participants visited Lidl Lumiere cinema, a big venue just next to the Palace of Culture, which has been recently renovated and technologically improved thanks to the private sponsorship of Lidl Bulgaria. The cinema Marketing Manager, in charge of the defining the partnership with Lidl, explained the main deals of the partnership and how the new image of the cinema had a very positive impact on the audience and on the perception of the brand. Back to the G8 Cinema, some participants shared their space-related challenges and then discussed in groups how to optimize their space resources. **Madeleine Probst** explained how the modernisation of the box office, from a formal bank-like desk with a separation glass into a more welcoming and children and disabled friendly lobby, changed the feeling of the audience in accessing Watershed; **Nina Ukmar** from Koselov Dom in Slovenia shared her issue with the huge entrance hall of the cinema, too big, uninviting and cold and listened to the other participants' opinions about how to make it more welcoming.



Afterwards **Javier Pachon** introduced the session about building effective communication strategies, followed by the case studies of **Erika Borsos**, **Konstantina Antonakou** and **Angelika Fekete**. Javier explained how exhibitors should get to know better their existing and new audiences, think about how much people value their free time, take the time to know where and how to reach them, give them what they are looking for. The main tips emerging from the group discussion about how to build an effective communication strategy were: not give too much information, optimize the cinema's presence on the social media to better show its activities, build a content plan, create a storytelling.

#### **Day 4: Saturday 17th March**

Saturday was dedicated to human resources management in a cinema theatre. **Javier Pachon** opened with a presentation on the decision-making process in a non-vertical organisation, such as the one operating his cinema. The ideal organisation should be based on a *Sociocracy*: a collaborative organisation with distributed authority and inclusive decision making. **Madeleine Probst** gave her insight on the connections and workflows, applied to a much larger structure, such as the Watershed (over 80 employees). **Olga Svitakova** (Bio Oko, Czech Republic) shared her practical experience of delegating tasks within the staff of a small independent cinema. Among the main highlights there were the need to improve the communication flow, use the communication tool which better suits the tasks and the team; change the way to organise meetings, in a more interactive, informal and effective way; try to get to know staff members, their qualities and interests, their motivations.



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A second round of presentations included **Madeleine Probst** explaining about how Watershed increased the diversity of the staff and worked more intensely on building inclusion, through overcoming the unconscious bias: prejudices coming from one's background impacting the work environment and the relations with colleagues. **Erika Borsos** unveiled her company's Team Building initiatives: role plays, film quizzes and contests – helping to maintain a good team spirit and efficient work mood. **Javier Pachon** presented the concept of internal clients in the cinema: the projectionist is seen as the internal client of the programmer and viceversa. Each has to work for and satisfy one's colleague for a specific task, as if s/he an actual client. This approach helps people taking responsibility and being reliable towards other staff members.

Saturday ended with three open slots from participants wishing to pitch their recent projects or their initiative for an upcoming project. **Alen Munitic** from Croatia explained the activity, missions and results of the recently born travelling cinema Kino Mediteran; **Zak Ioannidis** from Greece shared the community sensitive initiatives that Cine Paradisos in Koridallios develops, like the screenings in the jails; **Dario Ferrer** from Spain wished to launch a travelling cinema/festival all around Europe and invited the participants interested in this project to join him in the organisation.



The traditional Debrief & Return Strategy offered a scope of the most relevant ideas and practices the participants learned from the Lab, which included: organising a team building activity; giving clearer written tasks and communications; involve the team in problem solving, asking them solutions, defining clear responsibilities and job descriptions; ask the team's opinion on what they like and what they would change in the cinema spaces; research and communicate the story of the cinema (storytelling to engage the audience); diversify the financial resources and supports of your cinema; optimize the social media presence of the cinema; conduct a youth-led programming; DIY trailers for the pre-show; anniversary campaign (like the 20 years anniversary of the Thessaloniki Film Festival); re-energise your team when you go back to your cinema; pop-up screenings in unusual locations (like those organised by Cinema Galleries, in Brussels).

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**Day 5: Saturday 18th March**



On Sunday some of the participants enjoyed a visit of the Nu Boyana Production Studios, just out of Sofia city centre. The guided visit allowed us to better understand the behind-the-scenes of famous European and American film productions.

**Sonia Ragone, Alexandre Tchernookov**