

# Anne Schultka (KIDS Regio) & Nicola Jones (Golden Sparrow) about the 3rd KIDS Regio Forum

“Cultural success means that a film has an impact”



Anne Schultka

Nicola Jones

“A forum where the most important players will gather to discuss the state of affairs.” It sounds like Davos, but we’re talking Weimar in Thuringia. That’s where KIDS Regio on 26-28 June will invite around 90 key personalities from the world of European children’s film and media education for the 3rd KIDS Regio Forum. With this high-profile Think Tank, tracks will be laid down to follow towards the future. Anne Schultka (KIDS Regio) knows all about it. But at the same time we want to unravel the entire children’s film and media construction in the German state of Thur-

ingia. We asked Nicola Jones (Golden Sparrow) to help us climb up that big tree, to get a better overview on all the roots and branches.

Anne Schultka (KIDS Regio): At the 3rd KIDS Regio Forum in June we’ll be discussing the current state of affairs: What has happened since the first forum in 2009? What have we set in motion? How can we get updated about specific situations in every European country? We know what is going on in Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Poland but in many Eastern, Central and Southern European countries the right connections still have to be made. We don’t know enough about what is going on there yet.

## Is that among the tasks of KIDS Regio?

Schultka: The most important task for KIDS Regio is to collect and share information and data, so that we can learn from each other. I’m sure that

there’s interesting and inspiring programmes going on that we don’t know about yet. That is a goal to achieve with the Forum, connecting people and developing a network. Although I prefer to use the word ‘community’. Because it’s not only about grabbing and using, but about giving and sharing, like what happens in the ECFA community.

## Networking goes with grabbing, community goes with sharing?

Schultka: People should take this inspiration with them to their country, like KIDS Regio ambassadors, and make things happen right there on the spot. We need people who really want to engage with the topic, and we want to keep them on board for the next five years.

## Can you feel how the situation in some specific European regions is changing?

Schultka: Actually, yes. Apparently a

kids  regio



lot of things seem to be happening in Greece and in the entire Balkan region these days. I was also very much impressed by the Centennial movement in the Baltic states (*read about it in the ECFA Journal 4/2018*). That project was very relevant for Baltic audiences, and helped children to get a better understanding of their own history. It was a great domestic achievement, but also effective on an international level.

## Attending the Forum is “by invitation only”. Is it KIDS Regio making the selection?

Schultka: That authority is with the organising committee. Last summer we installed a co-creation team, in which we invited experts to join us: Margret Albers (ECFA President), Viola Gabrielli (former KIDS Regio project manager), Signe Zeilich-Jensen (Dutch Film Fund), Annette Brejner (Financing Forum for Kids Content), Maciej Jakubczyk (Financing Forum,





Warsaw), and Charlotte Appelgren (CineRegio). We took an experienced conference designer on board, who is preparing an interactive, dynamic conference concept, that will be revealed on the first day of the Forum.

#### How do you select your invited guests?

Schultka: We discuss people's profiles with the team. The key words to our work are: children's film, live action, original screenplay. But we also want to include experts from outside the children's film industry to enrich our discussion. When travelling and meeting people, we're on the lookout for new faces. It's a long process, and in

the end we have to narrow down the list.

#### In organising the Forum, KIDS Regio is backed up by several organisations. Golden Sparrow is like a labyrinth, a big tree with many different roots and branches.

Schultka: It is hard to explain to an outsider how these organisations fit together, because we're so strongly entwined with each other.

#### Can you sketch me a structure?

Nicola Jones: First of all there is the Förderverein Deutscher Kinderfilm, which is the German Children's Film Association. Their work is essential

for the situation of German children's cinema. Their most important projects are:

- Organising the *Besondere Kinderfilm* (Outstanding Films for Children) funding model.
- Running the Academy for Children's Media, which is a scholarship and script lab for authors.
- Running the 'Formats from Thuringia' development trajectory for TV-series.

Their expertise is in facilitating the development and production of stories and scripts for a young audience.

#### Then there is the Golden Sparrow Foundation.

Jones: The Foundation's main purpose is to organise the Golden Sparrow Festival. I am the director of the festival, but also the CEO of the Golden Sparrow Foundation. Furthermore we're responsible for organising the EFA Audience Award for Best Children's Film, of which the award ceremony is held in Erfurt. And we're hosting the Cinema School Week in November, for which my team prepares a special programme of panels, film talks, seminars etc.

#### And then there is KIDS Regio

Jones: Which is our international

branch, convincing the world about the importance of children's film through networking and lobbying activities.

Schultka: KIDS Regio is also connected to CineRegio (representing all European regional film funds), the MDM (Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung), and The State Chancellery of Thuringia, which are our biggest funders. Together with The Golden Sparrow and the German Children's Film Association, we are all – literally – at the same desk. We're separate organisations, but always working in close cooperation. We are ambassadors for each other's work, which is the foundation of our strength.

#### It is no coincidence that all this is happening in the state of Thuringia.

Schultka: Thuringia gave themselves a label: the Federal Children's Media and Film State! Their support is at the base of everything we do.

#### What do we need to know about the Golden Sparrow Festival?

Jones: It was founded in the days of GDR, 40 years ago, and from the early beginning the topic of children's film was taken very serious. The GDR government invested a crucial amount of money in the production and promo-



tion of children's films to be showcased in the festival. When reading the festival archive documents, you'd be surprised to see how serious children's film issues were already discussed. At the same time it was also a successful audience festival. In 1989, after the German unification process, nobody knew who should put the money on the table to continue the festival, as DEFA, the DDR film industry, disappeared more or less off the radar. Until the idea for the Golden Sparrow Foundation came up. Ever since, the focus on children's film became even stronger. In our jury we bring together children from all over Germany and from German speaking communities in our neighbouring countries.



Over the last years the profile of German children's cinema has drastically changed. After the success of Scandinavian and Dutch children's films, it feels like the attention

nowadays is shifting towards Germany.

Jones: Children's films have always done pretty well at the national market. There's about 25 German children's films per year to be released rather successfully. But many of them didn't travel. They did very well in terms of tickets sold, but not in terms of content and diversity, it was all based on books and brands and sequels and franchises. It was time for a change. That's why the Outstanding Films for Children fund became so important

Schultka: The initiative started six years ago, and you can't deny that original screenplays have been booming in Germany ever since. We started with live action films but nowadays animation and documentaries are included. This project opened the eyes of the German film industry and made them realise there is a real need for diverse children's content to keep European arthouse cinema alive.

Recent German titles seem to be much more visible on the international level, they're so much more "out there".

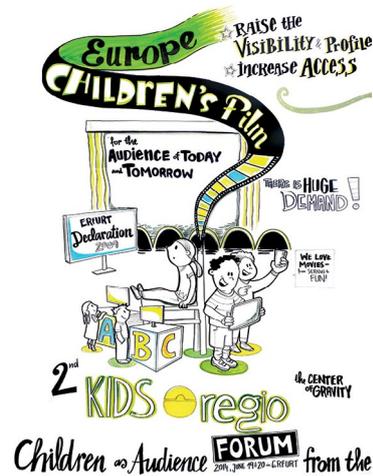
Jones: With all partners involved we are putting a stronger focus on children's films. They are much more visible in festivals nowadays, they're

gaining attention, they bring a different colour to the screen. These titles still struggle on the national market if you're only counting in numbers to define what is a success. But more important is what these films actually have achieved. AT EYE LEVEL and MOUNTAIN MIRACLE were "culturally the most successful films" in 2017 in terms of festival nominations and awards. Cultural success means that a film has an impact, it can be used in schools to learn about the world, it can be a mind-changing experience for the audience. Which is much harder to measure than counting tickets. From my position as a festival director, I want to show my audience a wide variety of formats, and this has become much more easy with the current market situation.

**Is this something the industry realises as well?**

Schultka: There is still a long way to go, but the sentence "we're currently working on a children's film and afterwards we'll do a real film again" is less and less to be heard these days.

Jones: The most important things missing are cultural awareness and recognition. A children's film will still not be nominated for the national Best Director award. Some directors are even still scared off by that label.



So yes, things are changing, but at the end of the day children's films are still not treated as equals. That will be one of the themes at the KIDS Regio Forum: How can we make sure that children's films get the importance they deserve? How can we make ourselves heard when screaming out loud that what we do is important?

—  
Gert Hermans

Photos & graphic from 2nd KIDS Regio Forum, 2014