

SCHLINGEL Industry Forum incl. ECFA Seminar

Hosted by

**SCHLINGEL International Film Festival for Children and Young Audience
Chemnitz 07 & 08 October 2019**



Premises of the European children's film conference

IFF SCHLINGEL director Michael Harbauer: "When putting the festival programme together, searching for the right films for our audience, we often wonder: what will happen to all these films once the festival is over? What role can festivals play to offer these films a longer life in cinema's? And which other industry players and market tools can help us to achieve that goal?"

Part 1 Panel Discussion

Members of the panel:

Sonja Ewers – Producer
Sebastian Grobler – Director, producer, professor
Torbjörn Jansson – Script author
Felix Vanginderhuysen – ECFA General Secretary
Michael Harbauer – Founder & director of the IFF SCHLINGEL
Silke Wilfinger – Moderator

Starting point of the first panel is the Weimar Declaration, that was decided upon during the 3rd KIDS Regio Forum (June 2019), drawing up a state of affairs of the children's film industry, with particular attention to strategic actions that should be instigated to give children's film more visibility and recognition. The participants of the Forum agreed on an agenda, summarized in the five focus points of the Weimar Declaration. The full version of the Weimar Declaration can be consulted [here](#).

These five focus point were the thread running through today's panel discussion.

1. Extend and improve Research & Data

Today's panel:

In addition to KIDS Regio Data were collected through two more recent studies:

- Study conducted on behalf of the Netherlands Film Fund
- Study conducted on behalf of the Thessaloniki Film Festival

These data will be presented during the Cinekid Festival, together with the final outcome of the Weimar Forum. This will be the right occasion to discuss the future follow-up. A crucial role might be given to: - ECFA (as information hub) - Universities (research)

An "Information Celebration" should be high on our priority list.



2. Emphasize Co-operations, Networks & Lobbying

Today's panel:

A few good practices were shared:

- European distributors sharing one server and organising common promotion campaigns.
- ECFA and KIDS Regio joining forces in lobbying initiatives.
- Sharing and co-operation is what actively happens during festival initiatives like in IFF SCHLINGEL. "What we're doing in SCHLINGEL is a perfect example of that."

3. Strengthen (Co-) Development & (Co-) Production

Today's panel:

Four main problems were brought up in today's discussion:

3.1. Budget

Production budgets are getting smaller. Which is a problem for children's films in particular because

- This audience is conservative (very much used to one specific type of cinema)
- This audience is used to high production values and big budget blockbusters.

3.2. How to invest the budget

Those in charge of budgets should carefully consider how to spend them.

Shouldn't we invest more in development? Since everything starts with a good story, investments could be made through development programmes such as the Cinekid Script Lab, the German Film Academy or the Kids Kino Lab.

3.3. Amount of productions

The ideal amount of films to be produced is the panel's main dilemma. Some countries don't produce children's films at all. What about countries like Germany? Do they have too many titles produced (divided attention) or can there never be enough titles on the market?

It seems easier to find co-production partners for animation films. Problems occur more often for live action features.

3.4. Language

For a young audience language barriers are more difficult to overcome.

4. Reinforce Distribution & Marketing

Today's panel:

4.1. Role of festivals in the marketing chain:

For several films, festivals are their only platform for visibility. This puts a certain pressure upon the festivals' shoulders.

4.2. Role of producers in the marketing chain:

Producers can be a big support for distributors (producing on-set snippets, social media clips, games, making of, etc.), but seldom find the time nor the budget (funding money can't be invested in marketing projects during the period of production) to fulfil that role.

Question: Who in general has the strongest belief in the product, the producer or the distributor?

4.3. Marketing per age group

Per age group, huge differences can be defined:

- Pre-schoolers don't decide for themselves. They're situated outside the regular promotion mechanisms.
- An 8+ audience doesn't decide for themselves, but might influence his/her parents' decision.
- An older audience will decide completely by themselves.

These inequalities ask for different approaches, different social media campaigns, different budgets.

4.4. Other marketing elements

- We need a pan-European label that guarantees 'quality' for children and grown-ups.
- Investing a few thousand Euro's in promotion doesn't make much of a difference. In the end, only extreme budgets can boost your campaign / result.
- Create a relationship with your audience.
- Find the core of a project and then snowball it.

5. Enhance Education & Access

Today's panel:

We can offer what the blockbusters can't!

Our major selling points: workshops, meeting the crew, intensification, etc.

- We can make it possible for distributors to 'survive' on school screenings.
- Traditional study guides are becoming old fashioned. We need more added value (new media installations, hands-on training, etc.).
- You need to make every screening a special event.



Part 2 Working in Discussion Groups

Participants gathered in small workshop groupings with approx. eight people to discuss a series of questions. Results will be shared in a later panel.



These questions were on the table for further discussion:

1. How do you see the position /standing of the Children Film Festivals within the chain of exploitation for children's films and
 - What role do / can the Festivals realistically fulfil (function)
 - Which functions do / can they not fulfil?
2. What expectations / demands do you have in regard to Children Film festivals?
3. In your opinion, what function do the festivals already fulfil?
4. What function do / can the Children Festivals not fulfil yet, where do we have still deficits, fractures, problems with networking to other areas of the business: what is still missing, what do you want / need perspectively in the future
5. How can the individual fields / departments of the industry be better linked to festival exploitation? Where do we have need for action?
6. Please formulate and address your own questions, needs and interests on this topic, which shall be discussed in your group.
7. Own Questions / discussion points of the group participants

Part 3 Case study

Lilian Klages (Dreamin' Dolphin Film GmbH) spoke in detail about the production of her new film **LATTE AND THE MAGIC WATERSTONE** (by Regina Welker & Nina Wels) and shared with the audience her general impressions about 'the art of being a producer'. *"One of my co-production partners once said: Co-producing is like a marriage without kissing. While working together on a project for several years, you need to be able to communicate, to fight, to forgive and to understand."*

Part 4 Presentation of conclusions from workshop groups

In every workshop group a 'speaker' was assigned. They're the ones presenting the individual results of all the groups on stage. Most results from the workshop groups had several elements in common. We selected a few specific wordings for every group.

Group 1 (speaker: Nicola Jones)

Festivals are at the centre! They have many roles to play both in a B2B as B2C environment, like:

- act as a guide (for programmers, distributors, other festivals, etc.)
- act as a communication platform (professionals exchange, discussion, etc.)
- create visibility for films, bringing the films out there to different types of audiences.

Festivals are brands. We should be more proud about that, and actively lobby for ourselves. *"We can't raise the importance given to our work, if we don't tell the world how important it is."* One way to emphasize that, is by guaranteeing our co-workers a decent salary.

Group 2 (speaker: Nicole Kellerhals)

What can we share?

- Festivals can cooperate on a practical level, for instance in overcoming language problems (sharing dubbing costs, dialogue lists, translations, etc.)
- Festivals can share their workshop experiences. The ultimate goal would be to have a 'workshop market' to inspire each other. This could be in the form of a database, or even in the form of a physical market, a seminar entirely dedicated to workshops, with active participation of all guests.

The 'Lux Film Prize' (given out by the European Parliament) could also open up to children's films.

Group 3 (speaker: Adrien Bodson)

The importance of branding and positioning the children's film genre! Branding affects lobbying, it affects how festivals are perceived, it affects the entire production chain.

This industry should rethink the way we are branding ourselves, by using stronger language, more powerful words. (For example: don't say *"festivals are an alternate path for distribution"*, say *"festivals are a unique curated experience of showing exceptional movies."*)

Be proud of what you do! We're doing necessary work; we're offering a possibility of a life-changing experience. Other festivals don't have that effect on the world, we should take more pride in that.

Comment from the audience: *"We're not asking for favours, we're claiming our rights."*

Group 4 (speaker: Uros Živanović)

The main friction: festivals versus cinema's

- Festival distribution can focus on local audiences, but should not aspire to take over the role of national distributors.
- *"Forget about children, focus on teachers!"* Working on the edge of the audio-visual industry and the education sector, one should look for specialized mechanisms to integrate teachers in the world of film.
- Festivals can establish a better connection between professional filmmakers and children, enabling them to find inspiration in their target audience.
- Lobby: on a national scale, each small festival should be as present and as vocal as the big festivals. Be loud about what you do and what you need!

Festivals should label themselves in terms of what industry they serve, not only in terms of what films they programme.

Group 5 (speaker: Margret Albers)

A festival's *raison d'être* is to create a unique and shared experience among (young) audiences.

Right-holders / filmmakers and festivals should be supportive partners in the same exploitation chain. We need strategies, fair deals and an open communication between those two stakeholders. For instance, about the purpose of eventual awards in cash. To whom should the money go? Therefore, clear regulations are needed.

Make better use of the creative potential gathering at festivals:

- get them in touch with each other (facilitate 'mix and mingle' among professionals)
- get the professionals in touch with their target audience.

When looking for partnerships, think out-of-the-box and try to find new, unforeseen partnerships.

Group 6 (speaker: Martina Lassacher)

Festival can't be held year-round – a part of the festival concept is in being designated to a certain moment in time, the "festival period". Organising year-round spin-offs is a matter of priorities and (human and financial) resources.

More attention could be given to the socio-political role of festivals, in terms of creating diversity and awareness, getting children involved, etc.

When cooperating, be aware of the gap between 'privileged' countries where a lot of film production is going on, and less experienced countries where the level of children's film production is 'zero'. This sometimes makes it difficult to work together.

Group 7 (speaker: Jesper Möller)

Festival can create a buzz about upcoming films (premiers, buyers, press, etc.) but they can also stigmatize a film as 'not-for-a-popcorn-audience'.

For all visitors, the festival should be a special experience, the "cinema experience". But what about the audience that is not able to attend a festival (children in hospitals, schools in isolated villages, etc.)? *"If you can't bring the audience to the festival, bring the festival to the audience. And bring it to where they already are."* We can turn a 'physical event' into an online festival, and serve the unserved audience, eventually on a shared platform where every festival can emphasize its own identity. Maybe the request for an analogue experience is on demand from the parents, while for children a festival could as well be a digital experience.

Festivals will seldom be able to boost a film's attendance outside the festival. Festival awards don't help the distributor in attracting an audience to the cinemas.

Special focus point: short film festivals

- Some shorts build their career exclusively upon festival screenings.
- Festivals can programme short film compilations with a well-thought emotional balance. In that way, a short film programme can be presented as 'an experience'. Festivals should be good at that.
- Interesting experiment: cutting a feature film into short snippets, like the DFI recently did with great success. This way kids watch a film that they normally would never watch, because it is disguised as a series of short films. (Reaction from the directors: *"We would hate that!"*)

Group 8 (speaker: Tanja Tlatlik)

Each festival can brand its own identity.

If festivals are a window to the world, sometimes you have to take that window with you to places where children don't have access to cinema so easily.

Festivals can be mediators on a local level, making connections with social groups.

Do not only invite directors. There are so much more members of a film crew to invite. Make them talk about specific aspects of filmmaking.

Film awards can be used as a tool for exploitation, for instance in terms of prize money that can be spent in different ways.

Group 9 (speaker: Becky Parry)

Festivals are enabling nations to put into practice Unicef's convention on the Rights of the Child, and should be recognized as such.

We want to acknowledge and nurture the teachers, as they are a hugely important element. We can make more efforts to shape them as the 'critical mass' and even link them to their national or international colleagues.

There should be a stronger exchange between the people developing and the people showing the films – film creatives and festival people. The enormous expertise of festival people could offer film creatives a better understanding of their target audience, their needs and preferences. Since there is such a request for data, statistics and research, more data can be generated from the festivals, eventually by using international templates for quality data collection.

Objectives to lobby for:

- Making film education policies a part of the Cultural Government strategies.
- National film agencies and institutes to show more interest in children's film.



10 SCHLINGEL Festival Focus Points 2019

Distilled from the discussions in the workshop groups, here are 10 advices for festivals that came up regularly in all presentations:

1. Festival should facilitate **exchange among professionals**, in seminars and forums, but also by cooperating on a practical level (sharing dubbing costs, dialogue lists, translations, etc.).
2. Festivals should share their workshop experiences in a '**workshop market**' in the form of an online database or (ultimately) in a seminar dedicated to hands-on practical workshop experiences.
3. A plea was made for festivals to position themselves more strongly through **branding**. We should use more powerful words and be vocal. *"We can't raise the importance given to our work, if we don't tell the world how important it is."* Branding will affect every step in the exploitation chain, from film production to lobbying. Be proud and be loud!
4. Festivals should **support the industry**, both in marketing and distribution. The festival's own distribution can focus on a local, not on a national audience. One way to support the industry is by clearly defining how / by whom awards in cash should be spent. Clear industry strategies, fair deals and an open communication should mark the contacts between all stakeholders.
5. *"Forget about children, **focus on teachers!**"* Festivals can integrate teachers in the world of film, acknowledge them, and link them with colleagues on a national and / or international level.
6. Festivals can facilitate **meetings between filmmakers and their target audience**. Make better use of the creative potential gathered at festivals, not only with professionals experts but also with the children (or festival programmers), through which film makers can get a better understanding of their audience, and their particular needs and preferences.
7. **Lobby** on a national scale. Be loud about what you do, and about what you need!
8. Festivals can take up a **socio-political role** by acting as mediators on a local level, connecting with various social groups.
9. **Serve the unserved audience**. *"If you can't bring the audience to the festival, bring the festival to the audience. And bring it to where they already are."* What if children don't have access to a big screen? Some say festivals could take the shape of 'purely digital events', but not everybody agrees on that.
10. Festivals could become a platform for **data collection**, as the need for adequate data and statistics in our industry is strong. Make your festival an Information Celebration.

Loose ends & suggestions:

- Invite politicians to festivals together with their families. This will help you to make an impact.
- Do not only invite directors. There are so much more members of a film crew to invite. Make them talk about specific aspects of filmmaking.
- When looking for partnerships, think out-of-the-box and try to find new, unforeseen partnerships.
- The 'Lux Film Prize' (given out by the European Parliament) could also open up to children's films.
- Be aware of the gap between 'privileged' countries where a lot of film production is going on, and less experienced countries where the level of children's film production is 'zero'.
- The European model is not the only one possible. Festivals on other continents can create an identity that suits them best.
- Festivals are enabling nations to put into practice Unicef's convention on the Rights of the Child, and we should be recognized as such.

For further informations and questions please contact:

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The SCHLINGEL Industry Forum 2019 offered additional program items as Coming Soon and International Project Presentations.

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