

Ale Kino!

REPORT OF ALE KINO'S ONLINE "YES, WE MADE IT!" MEETING

Throughout the year 2020 how have we experienced all those hybrid festivals and what lessons did we learn from them? And how much did we miss our old festival habits? The Ale Kino! festival looked for answers in an online festival meeting on 2 December, 2020 under the rightly triumphant title "Yes, we made it!".

This meeting was an attempt to learn from each other, and to reflect on future festival editions. The concept: 13 festivals (+ a few extra in the open forum) all had 4 minutes to answer 3 crucial questions:

- Can you describe the format of this year's festival edition?
- What were the biggest successes and challenges in organising the event under last year's difficult conditions?
- How will this experience influence the future of film festivals, including yours?

The meeting "Yes, we made it!" took place in the framework of "Ale Kino! Industry / Education Pro". In this report we will first share some general remarks and conclusions, based on all presentations, and then line up short resumes of every individual presentation.



General conclusions

*** If the biggest challenge was “how to recreate a specific festival atmosphere in an online environment?” all festivals found ways to do so. Like for instance:**

- pre-recorded or online Q&A's, live streams of panels and debates, live chatting, extra web content, video messages, reviews and opinions on social media, ... all help to create a community feeling.
- streaming a live award ceremony.
- an online audience poll about different festival elements.
- online voting for the audience award helps to make people feel part of the festival.

*** Online festivals can unleash powerful tendencies, like:**

- discovering that your regular audience is extremely engaged, committed, or loyal: *“Whatever the format will be in the future, we should never neglect our local audiences.”*
- with festival activities shifting to social media, you might end up with a growing number of online followers, and a more engaged online community.
- online discussions and young audience panels were often very intense, as if teenagers felt more at ease in their home environment, with the distance between artist and audience growing smaller.

*** Increasing the festival audience**

In many cases there was a significant increase in festival audiences, as was proven by surveys and statistics. Often these new participants came from small cities and villages, or from regions that were not covered within the festival's outreach. *“These are the people we want to keep in our future editions.”* It will be difficult to answer to everyone's needs and find the right balance so that no audience – locals nor newcomers – should feel neglected.

*** The difference between family screenings and school screenings**

“Having the cinemas closed was bad news, but the schools closing was even worse.” A mutual appreciation between the festivals and schools was expressed by many:

- *“There was a great appreciation from schools that we still organised screenings for them.”*
- *“We never had so much school attendance before.”* Or *“We finally reached out to those schools that are geographically located too far away to attend the festival.”*
- *“Schools are telling us that ‘we hope that you'll do it again next year, so that we can participate again’.”*
- *“We have the highest appreciation for teachers still organising screenings, even if schools were closed, as school screenings are a vital part of our festival.”*

But then on the other hand: *“We can reach the schools through our online platform, but we can't reach the family audiences nor the industry.”*

*** The team often comes out as a stronger unity**

- *“We discovered new competences in our team and grew closer together, in a shared atmosphere of finding solutions on the spot and fighting the same difficulties together.”*
- *“The team was simply fantastic, they gave such a huge amount of positive energy and we feel more united than ever. This nice feeling remained, even after the festival.”*

*** Almost every festival states that they will implement parts of the online festival in future editions**

Bringing the best of both worlds together is something most festivals want to maintain in the future. *“Even if the physical festival experience can't be replaced, we will maintain a hybrid part in next year's festival.”* Or *“We've tried out many things in this edition, and some of it I want to continue.”*

Other remarks

“The biggest success is that the festival actually took place.”

“The biggest success is that everyone remained healthy during the festival.”

- Questions were raised about the position of children’s film festivals within the film industry. How will sales agents react next year to this recent market shift? *“We should stand up and tell the screening platforms that we as festivals are in a rightful position.”*

- Problems might also occur with sponsors and funders: *“How to convince the many governmental organisations that their support is still needed?”*

- Every festival had to deal with specific rules in its own state or country. One solution is in finding the right locations: *“Organising screenings in more locations than usually, we provided enough space for everybody.”*

- *“Nobody seemed to care about the films, all we had to talk about was safety.”*

- We’re all missing the contact with our audiences. *“It didn’t feel like a festival if I didn’t see children queuing in front of the auditorium. Our young audience sees the cinema as ‘their space’ – ‘the cinema is ours’ – and this year we had none of that. There is a lot of things we can do online, but we can’t do without children in the cinema.”*

“My heart is with the cinemas, I have a strong belief that the cinema experience can’t be replaced by an online experience.”

“I don’t think we will ever go back to how it used to be.”



**Ale Kino! Industry /
Education Pro online**

2-5 grudnia 2020

Platforma spotkania i rozmowy o kinie
dla dzieci z udziałem środowisk filmowych
i pedagogicznych.

The poster features a large, stylized eye graphic on the right side, with a realistic eye inside a circular frame. At the bottom left, there are small icons for a globe, a computer monitor, and a social media link.



Presentations per festival

Zlin Film Festival

Festival Opening: 4 September

Representative: Markéta Pášmová

1. The Zlin Film Festival (postponed from May to September) was the first physical festival after the first corona wave! For this reduced edition (7 days instead of 9) strict safety measures were taken in account, like registering all visitors, closed school screenings, no international guests, ...

2. Success: The festival's greatest achievement was the overwhelming amount of visitors. This proves how our event is strongly rooted in the hearts of the local community, expressing its loyalty through the people's presence and participation.

Challenge: Being the first ones on the calendar, there were no precedents. How to organise the registration? How to guarantee safety? Instead of celebrating our 60th anniversary (which was really a bummer), we had to invent new ways and methods.

3. This edition brings challenges for the future, in terms of logistics, security and technology.

Lukas – Int'l Festival für junge Filmfans

Festival Opening: 24 September

Representative: Julia Fleissig

1. The festival was organised as a hybrid event, as in the German state of Hessen schools were not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities. Even if Lukas was able to welcome limited audiences inside the cinema, many film programmes were made available online – 'Cinema on demand' was a particularly popular format. For educative programmes, ways needed to be found to combine physical and online.

2. Success: The biggest success is that the festival actually took place, being more accessible than ever before. Additional programmes required extra creativity, like screening a short film for a class in lockdown in Peru.

Challenge: Ways were found to maintain the festival atmosphere by organising a series of workshops, pre-recorded Q&A's with festival alumni, online Q&A's with filmmakers, etc. Other obstacles were the bad timing (how to address schools after the summer holidays?), the lack of personal contact, and how to convince sales agents.

3. We tried to bring together the best of both worlds, under emergency circumstances. Next year we want to do the same, without the emergency element.

Kino Dzieci

Festival Opening: 26 September

Representative: Maciej Jacubczyk

1. We went hybrid, with competition films screened simultaneously in Warsaw and other festival cities. We had the same amount of screenings, 98% of them being online. Parallel to the festival we organised the Kids Kino Industry event in an online format.

2. Success: we were able to very quickly develop our own platform, which we will keep on using for educational purposes. Moreover we discovered the power of the online event: our audience was extremely engaged, picking as well the popular titles as the more challenging ones. This was a powerful signal!

Challenge: Can you name one thing that wasn't challenging this year? A few examples:

- Sponsors and funders were less flexible with budgets.
- The team didn't know on which elements to focus their energy and creativity.
- With regulations changing regularly, our audience had become more cautious and less willing to buy tickets for a stationary event.

3. A survey made clear that 35 à 40% of our audience was new to the festival, coming from small cities and villages. Those are the ones we want to keep in future editions. Next year's most important question will be: how to merge online and stationary?

BUFF Malmö Film Festival

Festival Opening: 29 September

Representative: Julia Jarl

1. It was only one week before the festival when we had to decide about postponing, which was at the same time a very easy decision (the restrictions left us no other option) and a very difficult one – all money was already spent. We postponed the festival till late September, with multiple restrictions (like max. 50 people per screening). Except the ECFA jury (who watched films online) our national juries were represented in the festival.

2. Success: The biggest success was in the small things that we made happen, like the young audience finding it really cool to have a Q&A with a director in 'Melbourne by night', or having an award ceremony with a live show on stage with directors participating in a zoom meeting and diner. This was our hybrid way to show appreciation to the filmmakers. And there was a great enthusiasm from schools about organising screenings for them although we had no supervision on how they handled the material that we offered them.

Challenge: The biggest challenge was in the motivation to do it all again in September, for a second time. Also in marketing: BUFF is a well-established brand, so how to inform our audience about the change of dates? In terms of communication, that was challenging.

3. I'm happy about all the things we tried out, and some of them I want to maintain in the next 'normal' edition.

Schlingel

Festival Opening: 12 October

Representative: Michael Harbauer

1. We had a stationary festival, with 13,000 local visitors. Through extra screening locations, we ensured enough space for everybody. And we talked with the sponsors long beforehand.

2. Success: We would have never expected so much attention for the online award ceremony (over 2,500 have watched it by now). In the end the juries were the only strictly 'digital part of the festival'. We consider ourselves lucky that we could make it happen.
Challenge: Nobody seemed to care about the films, all they talked about was safety. We could as well have screened last year's programme, as long as we guaranteed safe cinemas (which wasn't easy as we had to keep kids and adults separated). Once the festival started ... everything changed! Which felt as an emotional victory for us and for the children.

3. This complicated market situation caused unforeseen problems with streaming platforms. We should stand up and tell them that we as festivals are among the legal right-holders.

Discovery – Scotland's Int'l Film Festival for Young Audiences

Festival Opening: 19 October

Representative: Mike Tait

1. Because of the timing of summer holidays, we needed to make a decision already in June, which felt very early. Finally 95% of the festival programme went online and we had 6 screenings for families, with only 20 people in a 200 seats auditorium.

2. Success: Our biggest success was that we managed, without any experience, to set up a platform that everybody could engage in.

Challenge: It doesn't feel like a festival if I don't see children queuing in front of the auditorium. Our young audience sees the cinema as 'their space', and this year we had none of that. Our team of young programmers never had this feeling that "the cinema is ours". We don't know how films were appreciated - everything was beyond control. Moreover, 80% of our budget comes from ticket sales.

3. This leaning towards "we might as well have an online festival again next year", makes me nervous. We can do many things online, but we can't do without children in the cinema.

Kristiansand Int'l Children's Film Festival

Festival Opening: 26 October

Representative: Stina Ask Mikkelsen

1. We were fully prepared for the April edition, but one day before the national lockdown we decided to postpone the festival till autumn. Then new problems occurred: the cinema was rented out till December, one of the sponsors left, some events had to be spread over a longer period of time, ... All this forced us to further develop our online platform.

2. Success: We never had as many schools attending as this year. There was a new audience who never came to the festival before, because of geographical boundaries. Schools booked films every day and actually had a festival at school, with popcorn and everything. Pre-recorded Q&A's brought the film experience into the classrooms, and we had 'workshops on tour' visiting schools – we never organised as many workshops as this year.

Challenge: The biggest challenge is inherent to our success: all those schools telling me that "*we hope that you'll continue doing it like this next year, so that we can attend the festival again*". For me this is a very conflictual idea.

3. We can reach the schools through our online platform, but we can't reach the family audiences nor the industry. This we should remember for future editions.

Filem'On – Brussels Children's Film Festival

Festival Opening: 28 October

Representative: Hilde Steenssens

1. We had to make the switch from physical to online twice, first for our location in Brussels, then for the entire country. As we were naively hoping for a physical festival edition, our Plan B was not very well developed.

2. Success: We discovered new competences and responsibilities within our team, and grew closer together in a shared atmosphere of fighting difficulties together. Through zoom meetings, we had interviews with every single director, and the discussions were much more intense, as if teenagers might feel more relaxed in their own home environment. The lack of distance between directors and audience resulted in better discussions. Schools in general were a big fan of the online concept, we reached more schools than ever, with a wider geographical spreading.

Challenge: Working with an external VOD platform, not integrated in our website, made it quite difficult to reach out. Another challenge was in convincing the many governmental organisations that their support was still useful and necessary.

3. We might be preparing another hybrid edition, but my heart is with the cinemas, it is my devotion and belief that the cinema experience can't be replaced by an online experience.

Juniorfest

Festival Opening: 6 November

Representative: Judita Soukupová

1. We were planning a partly online Juniorfest anyway (already before the Covid crises) as a next step in the festival's evolution. As cinemas were closed, we only had a few screenings and stationary workshops, but our main activities were in the Juniorfest Film Studio: 7 days of live broadcasting with workshops, games, short interviews with actors and directors, live chatting with children, etc. There was plenty of interaction, it almost felt like a live event.

2. Success: Many things were prepared in advance: dubbings, teaching material, etc. We had a new cooperation with Czech public TV, focussed on the new Czech film THE HUNGRY BEAR TALES. And we reached out to children not only in our own region, but throughout the entire country.



3. We will take some of these new experiences with us to the next edition.

Festival Int'l del Cinema Giovane "Castellinaria"

Festival Opening: 11 November

Representative: Cristiana Giaccardi

1. We took an early decision on having the school programme online and the family programme in the cinemas, and granted the schools extra time to organise their classroom screenings. One week before the festival the government decided that the maximum amount of visitors per cinema would be 5 per screening! The 'Castellinaria on the road' programme is postponed till the spring season.

2. Success: We reached many schools far away from our festival city, that never attended the festival before. We had quite some media coverage, often with positive reviews. And enhancing our digital skills resulted in a better communication (and more followers). The team was simply fantastic, they invested such a huge amount of positive energy and we feel more united than ever before. This feeling has stayed with us ever since.

Challenge: In our multi-lingual country we found it complicated to offer films for the youngest audience online with the right voice-over.

3. I don't think we will ever go back to the situation we had before. New ideas that proved themselves successful will be maintained in the festival.

Oulu Int'l Children's Film Festival

Festival Opening: 16 November

Representative: Mikka Anttolainen

1. We didn't have screenings in multiplexes, only in the cultural centre where we are based. Except for one local director, there were no festival guests, the children and youngsters juries had private screenings, the ECFA jury watched online.

2. Success: Everyone remained healthy during the festival. That's the biggest success.

3. Festivals will keep on organising online programmes, I suppose, but I think the situation might be different for feature films than for other formats.

Olympia Int'l Filmfestival for Children

Festival Opening: 28 November

Representative: Pantelis Panteloglou

1. I could almost had the festival organised in slippers, as I seldom had to leave home to get things done. It was a gradual decision, taken step by step: a local event, partly online, no international guests, ... Initially we planned to have stationary school screenings, but since we're having another national lockdown and curfew, we stick to the online programme.

2. Success: With 24,000 unique users and 31,000 reservations, the online platform is a huge success. We have online juries (even an international youth jury) and the level of discussion among the young people is amazing. Screenings are (as always) for free. Statistics prove that quite a large part of the online audience is new to the festival.

Challenge: You can only survive if you're willing to let go of the things that you've been doing for 25 years, which is not easy.

3. Next year we need to find an answer to everyone's needs, so that no audience will feel neglected, not the local audience nor the new ones that we are reaching now, elsewhere in the country. As a 'physical festival by heart', that seems like a conflictual situation.

Ale Kino!

Festival Opening: 29 November

Representative: Marta Jodko

1. We were prepared for a hybrid festival edition, but then the lockdown came and we had to go fully online (all screenings, workshops, the industry part, ...). We built a new website, implemented a player, and reduced the programme a tiny bit.

2. Success: On the platform we tried to recreate the atmosphere with video messages and interviews, the audience could vote for the audience award, which helped them to feel part of the festival. We had more educational material and more website content, the festival community shifted to social media where people shared pictures, reviews, opinions, etc. Even our merchandise was sold there, and there was a poll where the audience could let us know which elements did work and which ones didn't.

Challenge: It was difficult to implement all those new technologies, for instance voice overs, translating video interviews, geo-blocking, etc. Having the cinemas closed was bad news, but the schools closing was even worse. We have the highest appreciation for teachers who still organised screenings (they found a way for pupils to watch together in their own homes), as school screenings are a vital part of our festival.

3. Even if the physical experience can't be replaced, we will maintain a hybrid section in the festival for those who can't be reached physically.

Open forum for festivals

Cinemira

September – October

Representative: Nora Lakos

By the end of September we had a local forum with pitches for professionals, which was organised physically (with great success); both the sponsors and participants were pleased. Even the festival was done physically in October, 2 weeks before the national lockdown, with interviews and panels streamed live. We were somehow lucky with our timing, but meanwhile also tried out new online formats for schools and kindergartens outside the city centre.

Doxs! Festival

November

Representative: Tanja Tlatlik

Only 2 days before the opening, all cinemas closed. Doxs has a tradition of live moderation with the audiences, which now had to be transferred to an online environment. Feedback from the schools was often very positive: even in video conferences we were able to make a true connection with pupils. Every video conference was different, with different obstacles to overcome. It felt like planning several festivals at the same time

Kookies Festival

November

Representative: Monica Koshka Stein

We have a tiny team and a tiny budget; 80% of our budget comes from ticket sales. We decided for an online festival in an early phase, and made it look as cool as possible: children should still feel welcome and represented. We hired a small cinema, filmed the moderations and reached several schools that usually can't visit our festival in the far outskirts of Berlin. After this demanding festival edition it is a great relief to share these experiences all together; this session is like a festival group therapy.

Conclusions by Margret Albers (ECFA President)

Among all the options that we heard today, one option was never taken by any festival: the option to cancel the event. The heading of today's event was rightly chosen: "Yes, we made it!". This meeting was a great proof of inventiveness, bravery, and resilience among European film festivals!

Here's a few remarkable achievements:

- *Discovering new spaces*: taking festivals into schools, exploring new venues, discovering new online possibilities, ...
- *Overcoming the fear for the online*: scepticism and fear turned into a strong belief in the immense power of the festivals.
- *Finding a balance between analogue and digital*
- *Developing new competences*, often due to hugely devoted festival teams.
- *The awareness that the physical experience is not replaceable.*

Closing speech by Jerzy Moszkowicz (Ale Kino! Director)

One thing we learned this year in our many zoom meetings: information can be shared easily. What is much more difficult is transmitting true feelings of togetherness and solidarity. This was one great achievement of Jerzy Moszkowicz, director of Ale Kino! and today's excellent moderator. His main message was transcending the level of pure professionalism: *"Even if times were hard, in this industry we are together as friends and collaborators. This meeting was not only the extension of a professional situation, it was also an exchange of personal feelings, like true friendship."*



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38.	Ale Kino!
Międzynarodowy Festiwal Filmów Młodego Widza	

