

Ale Kino! Industry / Education Pro

online



Centrum Studiów
Europejskich
w Poznaniu



PILET
INSTITUTE
OF FILM
AND VIDEO



“WAS IT BUSINESS AS USUAL?”

AleKino! facilitates 2nd online meeting for festivals (3 December 2021)

If you can't come to the festival, the festival will come to you! And AleKino! knows exactly how. Based on last year's experience, an online meeting was organised in which festival representatives from around Europe and beyond exchanged their impressions on the difficult year 2021: “Was It Business As Usual? European Film Festivals for Children & Youth in The Second Pandemic Year”.

Festival director Jerzy Moszkowicz hosted the meeting with great flair, and started with a round of applause for his team, dear colleagues like Tatiana Kauczor, Joanna Stankiewicz, Marta Jodko and a group of technicians who enabled tonight's meeting. Jerzy Moszkowicz: *“We were ready to celebrate our return to the cinemas. The team kept up the good spirit when the bad news came on 18 November: the health authorities advised us to move back to the internet.”* From hybrid to strictly digital in one day ... again!

AleKino! offered an extra service: a keynote speech in which Aneta Ozorek adequately analysed last year's situation. As Artistic Director of the Kaboom Festival (Amsterdam) and member of many international film associations, she has a wide perspective on the festival landscape to share.

Aneta Ozorek: Are things still like they used to be?

During the pandemic we noticed three types of festivals:

1. Festivals **rejecting** the pandemic situation – as long as this situation will last, the festival will be cancelled (like La Guarimba, Italy).
2. Festivals **shifting** completely to an online format, now and in the future – this type of festival apparently doesn't exist yet, but is a possibility for the future.
3. Festivals **embracing** the situation, creating hybrid editions, with all its advantages (reaching out to new audiences). This means: more work for the team; it might feel like organising “two festivals”.

This last category (embracing the online reality) was the most common one, and might become “the new normal” for festivals. Therefore we have to learn a new vocabulary (“*nowadays everyone knows what hybrid means*”), face new problems, and embrace a different set of rules. Like ...

- Festivals might need to engage in **negotiations** twice (for big screen and online screening). What if distributors will calculate screening fees based on the number of online admissions? Distributors only allow festivals who are geo-blocking; even access for international professionals without geo-blocking is a topic of discussion.
- For **archive films**, the print fees were rising as soon as they went online. The approach towards archive films might change from now on.
- Festivals trying to **recreate a festival atmosphere** through an additional programme, have to rent professional studios, where the festival experience is created online.
- Festivals have underestimated **the amount of money** people are willing to spend on online content. On this competitive market (online art, VOD platforms, etc.), most festivals did set very low prices for online content; the audience might be willing to pay much more.

Time for a change

This is the time for re-thinking strategies, regarding...

- **Sustainability:** the Short Film Conference published a 'How to be green' guide, with recommendations for festivals regarding travel, energy, merchandise, printing, catering, guest management, waste management, streaming, etc. Download the guide on [this page](#).

- **Inclusion:** aiming for a "fully inclusive festival culture" a survey about gender representation in the short film industry was conducted (find the report [here](#)), offering a closer look on the diversity of themes, jurors, filmmakers, film programmes, etc.

- **Ethics:** together with several partners, the Short Film Conference published a [code of ethics](#), a tool to help approaching our new reality. It includes topics like geo-blocking, ticketing, screening fees, communication, distribution, security, fair festival experiences for filmmakers, etc.

- **Festival organisation structures:** collaboration is a must. It happens already in the children's film industry, but also other players have now realised the importance. We've seen collaboration on all levels, also among A-festivals. The EU Media funding system gave an incentive through their "network funding". Another topic is the ambition of festivals to create year-round online activity, which would go against the interest of VOD platforms. New bodies have been created in the media landscape for distributors, sales agents and festivals.

Rather than a conclusion Aneta Ozorek leaves the audience with a series of questions that need an in-depth discussion, like: What are the possibilities for hybrid festivals? How can the existing platforms collaborate with festivals? How will the audience react in 2022? What will the future of festivals look like?

Festival Round Table

This is the concept: every festival representative answers briefly to 3 crucial questions:

1. Under what form did your festival take place last year?
2. What was the biggest success / failure / obstacle faced by your festival last year?
3. How did the experience of the first pandemic year influence this year's edition?

These answers should create a kind of panoramic map of what has happened throughout the last 12 months.

(note: to describe the "physical event" the acronym IRP – In Real Person will be used)

Thoughts and ideas from the floor

Here a series of general thoughts and ideas is summarized that came out of the 15 festival presentations. Further in this report, you'll find a summary of every individual presentation.

First and foremost conclusion: Festivals wanted to act like "good citizens". The question "how to behave responsibly" has been on the mind of every organiser, with a great respect towards health and safety regulations.

The biggest problem often was that decisions needed to be made quickly, according to rules that were changing quickly and constantly. A great flexibility was required to adapt to the situation.

Other findings:

- Festivals have learned from last year's experience (for instance: creating and refining screening platforms and portals), and from each other. Was there a structured platform for this learning exchange to happen?
- Several tools and solutions were found to recreate the festival atmosphere online or in the private home environment: a festival box, an online café, daily talk shows, pre-recorded content, online Q&A's, creating extra user comfort (like a voice acting system) or improving the festival's accessibility (use of sign language, etc.).

- A safe environment for the audience can be created in different ways: including more venues, an open air media lab, establishing connections with libraries, youth centres, etc.
- Sustainability has become a big issue. Many festivals will reconsider their habits regarding traveling, inviting foreign guests, etc. More festivals will strive for a CO2 neutral status.
- The biggest challenge might have been (still): informing the audience about what is happening, where it is happening, and how.
- Opposite audience strategies were used by different festivals, like: online screenings exclusively for school classes – versus – only school classes allowed in the cinema – versus – cinema screenings exclusively for community viewing.
- There was an extra challenge in how to get volunteers and interns organised within the festival, and make it a worthwhile experience for them.
- Going hybrid actually means: organising two different festivals! This might have an impact on how festivals will be structured in the future, and on the workload of the team.
- Attracting new audiences happened in different ways: expanding to other cities, Embassies and consulates promoting films among expats or buying online access, a stronger representation on social media networks, examples of successful and well-attended (often pre-recorded) industry events, ...
- We've seen contrasting approaches towards ticketing: "We gave up on the box office, rather did we give away tickets" – versus – "We underestimated what people were willing to pay."

15 Individual presentations

JEF – Europees Jeugdfilmfestival Vlaanderen

Representative: Iris Verhoeven

1. In 2020 JEF was one of the very last IRP festivals – organised one week before the lockdown came, this was our most successful edition ever! 2021 gave us a whole year to learn from other festivals’ experiences. The screenings and media lab went online, but an Open Air Media Lab (an augmented reality installation out on the street) created extra visibility.

2. Obstacle: finding the collective energy. Solution: every night we had the JEF café with online cooking, online yoga, online quiz, etc.

Success: launching “the festival box”, that allowed families to create a festival atmosphere at home.

Success: we divided the team in small groups and developed a “design thinking” concept to tackle problems. This concept is still in use throughout JEF as an organisation.

3. We’re currently preparing the next edition, ignoring the Covid crisis. Up till the end of December, we can still make the switch towards an online event... if needed.

FIFEM Montreal International Children's Film Festival

Representative: Jo-Anne Blouin

1. We had a 100% online edition. What we first saw as an obstacle, later came with possibilities and benefits: additional content, making less accessible films available online, ... Embassies and consulates helped us to promote the network and sometimes bought viewing access.

2. Success: a viewing platform reaching out to 19 regions in Quebec and 8 provinces in Canada.

3. Let’s hope... back into the venues + part of the programme online available.

BUFF Filmfestival

Representative: Julia Jarl

1. In 2020 the lockdown came one week before the festival. Now we had a whole year to build a platform; all screenings (except jury screenings) and some workshops and

seminars went online, there was the BUFF daily talk show, lots of material was pre-recorded.

2. Success: we reached out to audiences all around Sweden.

Missing: live feedback, meeting the audience, ...

Missing: the energy from the team.

3. We have learned a lot, like the success of online Q&A's (we'll do more in the future). In terms of sustainability, we will re-consider our habits regarding traveling and inviting guests. As much as we want to go back to the cinemas, we are ready to re-think our habits.

KICFF Kristiansand International Children's Film Festival

Representative: Marion Heimlund

1. In 2020 we were all prepared for a normal edition when the lockdown came. That experience taught us a lot about how to do a digital festival. In 2021 it was the other way around: we planned a hybrid / digital festival, but one week before the festival suddenly an IRP audience was allowed; we opened up for school classes and evening audiences. Our digital (mainly pre-recorded) industry portal was the biggest one we did so far.

2. Obstacle: Ignorance. "What will happen? Which plans will we have to change? How can we behave responsibly?"

Success: Reaching out to a new audience.

Opportunity: regardless the geo-blocking, our industry portal was 'worldwide'.

3. We're preparing an IRP edition, but having the digital platform available, we're always ready to make the shift. That is why we negotiated physical and digital rights with sales agents. We're celebrating our 25th edition, which makes it extra exciting.

Zlín Film Festival, International Festival for Children and Youth

Representative: Markéta Pášmová & Jaroslava Hynstova

1. In 2021 we organised 2 festivals; one online event (May) + one IRP (September).
Online event: we've successfully expanded to other Czech cities; IRP event: difficult to bring together juries, guests and (young) audiences. What we learned from last year's experience: targeting our communication, implementing rules & prescriptions.

2. Challenge: Demanding for us as a team.

3. Even with the extra time to develop our festival format, we want to go back to the May tradition.

Kids Kino International Film Festival

Representative: Maciej Jacubczyk & Kamila Tomkiel

1. We started the festival in the cinema's + after a 3-days-break continued online for 18 days. All together this was a one-month-festival. Our Industry programme went hybrid.

2. Challenge: promotion & communication, informing the audience what is happening and how.

Success: we almost doubled our number of viewers, with 30% more Industry-attendance.

3. We have learned to treat our online event like a true festival, not like a Plan B. The comfort of our online users is very important for us.

Lucas – International Festival for Young Film Lovers

Representative: Wilke Bitter

1. Online screenings were exclusively for school classes, youth centres, etc.; cinema screenings were for community viewing. With 4 cinemas in 3 cities, we've reclaimed the cinema space! We developed some pandemic-proof formats in media education and participation.

2. Challenge: Doing voice-overs – these technical issues multiply and mutate.

Challenge: how to get volunteers and interns organised and make it a worthwhile experience for them?

Success: positive comments from a happy cinema audience.

3. Our new catchphrase: “not all that is online is golden!” And we want to further strengthen the local connections that were made with libraries, youth centres, etc.

Schlingel – International Film Festival for Children and Young Audience

Representative: Michael Harbauer

1. This year we returned to the cinemas more comfortably than last year. The difference: 12,000 visitors versus 17,000 visitors; 10 foreign guests versus 90 foreign guests. Our solution: including more venues for a better spreading of audiences.

2. Challenge: decisions needed to be made very quickly, as rules were changing quickly and constantly.

Success: Our best decision was to have the adult audience eventually watching online (like in the hybrid industry events), but not the children.

3. I’m looking forward to having the ECFA meeting organised during the Berlinale!

Cinekid - International Film, Television and New Media Festival for Children and Young People

Representative: Heleen Rouw

1. Our 2020 edition went all online, like a rushed experiment into digital transformation. This year we focussed more on the IRP event, although we have our online platform available: “The Container” is a joint platform (Cinekid, IDFA, IFFR & Netherlands Film Festival), created to enhance the festival experience. We combined all activities as much as possible in one (new) location. We attracted a record-breaking amount of students.

2. Challenge: higher costs.

Success: the amount of educational visitors.

3. Our audience might be completely fed up with online events. We should reflect about their desire to return to IRP cinema screenings.

Discovery Film Festival – Scotland's International Film Festival for Young Audiences

Representative: Mike Tait

1. We went 2 times hybrid: with a small programme (2020) and a full programme (2021). This year we didn't have a programme; we listed all films, and teachers told us what they wanted, which strengthened their feeling of "co-ownership": this is "our festival".

2. Challenge: since we have no external funding, it is all about ticket sales. We underestimated what people were willing to pay. We should try to engage in a different way in ticket pricing.

Success: an increased number of visitors, and the pleasure of getting people back into the auditorium.

3. We need to have a serious conversation! Going hybrid actually means: organising two different festivals! This might have an impact on how we structure the festival.

Filem'On – Brussels Children's Film Festival

Representative: Hilde Steenssens

1. For our audience the IRP event is important. Last year the lockdown came one week before the festival; this year we were much better prepared, using our own VOD platform Sooner.

2. Challenge: reaching our audience online. Our audience is not very well informed, and not very well vaccinated.

3. I'll be looking forward to our return to the cinemas! But this new situation might help us in striving for one of our goals: organising a green, CO2 neutral festival.

Castellinaria Festival del cinema giovane

Representative: Giancarlo Zappoli

1. In this year's hybrid edition, films were screened both online and IRP. The programme for the very young audience was screened completely IRP. Overall we had a better attendance than the last few years.

2. Challenge: obtaining rights for films, especially for those titles that had a national distribution.

Success: sharing cinematographic emotions with 500 children IRP, and sharing concerns with festival representatives in an online meeting, or with festival guests – apparently a number of people felt an urge strong enough to come visit us.

3. We have successfully improved our online presence on social networks, with a highly increased amount of followers. In the future we will benefit from this achievement.

JuniorFest - International Festival for Children and Youth

Representative: Judita Soukupová

1. Last year we divided the online festival in 2 parts: a) our own TV studio with a daily children's programme (with workshops, hosts, feedback from children,...) and b) online streaming films for schools. This year we went IRP, but we continued our online streaming. We gave up on foreign guests, but invited Czech professionals. Right after the festival, a new lockdown came.

2. Success: We created our own voice acting system, with the help of professional voice actors.

Challenge: getting the schools into the cinema. And we gave up on the box office – rather we gave away tickets as a price.

3. We discovered the power of an online festival and even found a way to include educational material.

Olympia International Film Festival for Children and Young People

Representative: Pantelis Panteloglou

1. We're having a 2 weeks IRP festival + 1 week online. The return to cinemas came with issues. We have missed a part of the school audiences (schools couldn't mix; our educators went into the schools with workshops) and we have missed a part of the cinema audiences.

2. Success: The nice, true cinema atmosphere.

3. Online is here to stay – the hardest part is now lying behind us. And the big screen is here to stay. We're optimistically working on one-year-round smaller events, besides the highlight of the festival week.

International Young Audience Film Festival Ale Kino!

Representative: Marta Jodko

1. Just like last year: we waited till the last moment but finally had to cancel the IRP part. Distributors showed their understanding and renegotiated; the audience showed their understanding too.

2. Success: we've improved the festival's accessibility (for instance: use of sign language,...)

Challenge: making the decision as responsible organisers.

Challenge: even if schools remain open, many classes are under quarantine.

3. We are now better prepared, more flexible, and ready to re-think our position.

Summary by Margret Albers (ECFA President)

Was this business as usual? Not at all! Therefore a great resilience was required from the festival teams, and they have been coping with the situation in an impressive way, at the cost of a massive amount of energy. Congratulations!

Massive changes are taking place in the festival circuit, the learning process is still going on, and we need to show our flexibility. New questions come up: How can we create more sustainability? How much should we be rooted in our own city or region?

We're happy and proud that you are all keeping up the spirits. You adapted quickly to the situation and created new formats. And you have been willing to share these experiences with others. Thanks a lot for that! We're looking forward to meet you all again soon in Berlin.

Last words by Jerzy Moszkowicz

This meeting came from a personal concern. After having been working in this industry for 30 years, I have never felt as uncertain as I have felt last year. What we needed was extra energy and a strong team spirit. But none of you gave up!

Quotes to put on a kitchen tile

“We have learned to treat our online event like a true festival, not like a Plan B.”

“Our new catchphrase: “not all that is online is golden!””

“Decisions needed to be made very quickly, as rules were changing quickly and constantly.”

“We underestimated what people were willing to pay.”

“Our audience is not very well informed, and not very well vaccinated.”

“Online is here to stay – the hardest part is now lying behind us.”