

Involving the local community in the Olympia Festival

The Olympia Film Festival for Children & Young People in Pyrgos, Greece is at a pivotal point in its development. With the building of a European Centre for Audio-Visual Creation, the festival aspires to a crucial place in the international chain of festivals. But this project only has a *raison d'être* if it is anchored in the local community, says Deputy artistic director Pantelis Panteloglou.

Pantelis Panteloglou: With the festival we want to contribute to the European children's film community by creating a favourable environment for quality children films in Greece. Five years ago we launched a pitching lab as a way to promote children's film production in the country. This year there will be the presence of film critic Alain Bergala, author of *The Cinema Hypothesis* that we admire and that we are publishing in Greek to celebrate the 25th edition of the festival.

All your ambitions for the future find each other in one place: the Raisin Factory.

Panteloglou: In 2018 we convinced the central government of the need to

create 'a European Centre for Youth Audiovisual Creation' in an abandoned raisin factory, an empty space in the heart of the city of Pyrgos. The regional government has outlined the project according to our proposal and now is very close to a public tender for the actual construction. When this plan becomes reality - which according to the current timeline should be in approx. three years - we want to be ready from day one.

For which the involvement of the local industry is needed?

Panteloglou: One essential part of the plan is the building of a permanent film set, approx. 600 square metres big, for film or TV productions. There's plenty of international film production in Greece lately, also lots of international co-productions, making use of the tax-rebate incentives set by the Greek government, and we want to welcome them. One of the partners in this discussion is EKOME, the institution operating the cash-rebate scheme on a national level (and member of ECFA).

Your ambition is to have an impact

on the region?

Panteloglou: We want to involve the entire local ecosystem: restaurants, hotels, local companies... We know from experiences in other Greek regions that there is a lack of specialised technical staff. Our education for film technicians is simply insufficient. A related discussion on how to prepare students for a job in the film industry is going on in the Greek Ministry of Education. We want the crew working on this platform to be local and the factory to be active around the year as a film education and a film production facility. This should be a long term discussion, not a sprint but a marathon. When talking about public money and investments, we need to act responsibly.

Why does this region need it so desperately?

Panteloglou: Cities like Pyrgos and even Patras in Western Greece have among the lowest welfare scores in the country. When people turn 18 years old, they leave such places to study and never return. We need to create a reason for them to come back. Our infrastructure - even for the



festival - has always been insufficient, but now we're talking about a different level of infrastructure, designed for different types of activity.

—
Gert Hermans