

KIDS Regio: Building New Futures for Children's Film

Following the KIDS Regio Forum 2024, Anne Schultka (KIDS Regio Project Manager), Pantelis Panteloglou (ECFA President) and Becky Parry (Creative Learning Manager for Children's Capital of Culture) took time out to reflect on the debates and concerns that emerged. This discussion captures their thoughts on the outcomes of the forum, the importance of networking within the children's film industry and the strategies needed to promote children's films across Europe.

Who was there?

Anne Schultka: Compared to 2019, we invited more people from outside the children's film and media industry. While ECFA and KIDS Regio usually reach out to those within our networks who already understand the importance of children's film, this time we wanted to include voices unfamiliar with our work. Those were the ones whom we wanted to get on board to broaden our support base and encourage new perspectives.

Becky Parry: In my group I encountered people with very different

views and experiences. This was productively challenging!

Pantelis Panteloglou: Every participant left the forum with more knowledge than when they arrived. The tight schedule didn't allow for deep dives into every detail, but it was ideal for laying the groundwork for future lobbying efforts.

Was there a strategy behind the working groups?

Schultka: We aimed for a balanced mix of expertise in each group. During the preparation we used different colour codes to categorise participants according to their familiarity with the children's film industry, whether they had attended a forum before, their involvement with ECFA and other factors. Everybody came with a different set of brain cells, which was reflected in the composition of the groups. And I think we were successful. I can tell from the feedback that a number of people from outside our niche had never really thought about including children's films in their work, but will now be more aware of this part of the



industry. We have positively infected quite a few people with the children's film virus.

Panteloglou: Inside our bubble, we can sometimes find it difficult to see the bigger picture. Listening to others in the input sessions made me think about what we need to do in the future. The true measure of success for any meeting is not just the event itself, but what happens afterwards.

Parry: I was happily surprised to see

how people were receptive to having their assumptions challenged; it was useful to be collaborating with people whose values were different. It made me optimistic that our sector can win over others in positions of power.

You were involved in both the 2019 and 2024 edition, as organiser or as participant. What felt different this time?

Panteloglou: The enemy of a good thing is a better thing. The main dif-



ference between 2019 and 2024 was that there was much more space for creative discussion and participation. When discussing very specific challenges in the working groups, also people from outside our bubble showed themselves extremely committed. People often feel like our bubble is so small, but maybe it isn't so small once we all work together. For me this was one of the takeaways of the forum.

Schultka: That is so cool to hear! When you organise an event like this, you need a tangible outcome. The funders also want to see evidence of a certain outcome, which is difficult because the main purpose of the meeting is for people to network and possibly start projects together in the future, which is hard to track; people don't keep us informed about what they're doing all the time.

Is the forum a guiding element in setting ambitions for the future?

Schultka: The action plan of the 2019 forum carried the name of KIDS Regio, which led some to believe that it was our responsibility alone. However, achieving broader goals, such as getting film funds to allocate 15% of their budgets to young audiences,



requires collaboration with local institutions. I can't go to every European funding body and ask them nicely: could you please be more generous towards children's film production? A lot of tangible things came out of the forum that we think are really cool and doable but we can't put them on our own to-do list because we either don't have the time or resources or contacts. The greatest achievement would be if participants met people they'd like to work with and then took something back home. As you said, we may feel like we're a small part of the industry, but if we all find new allies and if everyone becomes a little more

active, we can achieve a lot.

Panteloglou: In the recent snapshot survey of ECFA members, one question was: what's the most important thing that ECFA offers to its members? Almost everyone replied: networking. Our bubble is a community in which you can lean on each other - this is our cornerstone. After the forum, I stressed to the ECFA Board the need for materials that members can use to lobby locally and nationally. We can't do everything, but we can provide strong arguments and support.

There is a strong belief in facts and

data. Is this a typical neoliberal approach, only to believe in numbers, or can we also use them more creatively?

Parry: For me, knowing how many films are produced in each country each year is not caving in to neoliberalism, but holding those in power to account.

Schultka: Facts and figures are crucial, especially when dealing with those who are unfamiliar with our industry. I talk to people who don't have the gut feeling that we have, because they don't work in our field every day. We need to present compact, data-driven information to make our case effectively. Over the past 15 years, ECFA and KIDS Regio have collaborated to refine the ECFA film database, using it to gather data on admissions through the European Audiovisual Observatory. However, we need to better categorise this data to avoid inflated figures that don't accurately reflect the reality of children's films. We don't want to shoot ourselves in the foot by publishing figures that look too optimistic but don't reflect reality.

Panteloglou: With my background in social anthropology, I'm not afraid of data, that can be either quanti-



tative or qualitative. From a festival perspective, it's common to include films that are not specifically made for children (for instance, categories like teenage drama, films about children that are not primarily made to be seen by young audiences, wildlife documentaries,...). It's something most festivals do, intentionally, because we want to offer audiences something they would never see otherwise. Because it's about the art of cinema. We cannot say that Picasso is art for adults and refuse to show Guernica to children. This practice enriches the diversity offered to audiences, even if it makes it more difficult to categorise data. However, in terms of lobbying, we need to focus on supporting films specifically made for children.

There were some very intriguing taglines mentioned in the forum's resume. Like this one: Storytelling for politicians inspired by GAME OF THRONES.

Panteloglou: It's about creating a unified narrative. We need to structure our statistics and data into a compelling story that can be easily understood by those outside our bubble. The Game of Thrones reference was just a joke, because we're talking about politics.

Schultka: Throughout the forum, the idea of a cohesive narrative became a strategy that many participants adopted. When dealing with politicians and decision-makers, we need to present ourselves as professionals with strong facts and figures. Even if our field of work sometimes feels like a big playground, at some point we have to put on our 'big boy/girl trousers'. As Edita Bilaver, who comes from a more business-oriented background, often advises: "If we want to be taken seriously, we have to present ourselves in a serious way.

Parry: People remember stories, and this is how we help them become advocates for our work, but I'd happily drop the GOT references! We can choose a more apt reference.

Can a new generation help to find a balance between passion and competence?

Panteloglou: For many years, people in children's film and education worked out of passion, not for financial gain, and often struggled to make a living. But now a new generation with formal degrees and expertise is entering our field. This is the moment to think about professionalisation. Our community has thrived on com-



mitment and personal investment, but we need to find a way to sustain it as we inevitably lose some of those dedicated people. Balancing passion with professionalism is the key to sustaining our community.

Parry: Young people might value film, but don't necessarily value European film or watching films at the cinema. We urgently need to find ways to ensure that the existing expertise is passed on. It was exciting to meet delegates at KIDS Regio doing this work at [The Cross-Media School of Children's Fiction](#) in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Schultka: Many have dedicated their entire lives to the field and have become invaluable resources, like living encyclopaedia, being consulted all the time. With younger people now entering the workforce, who may change jobs frequently, we need to focus on preserving this wealth of knowledge. How do we create an archive of the expertise of those who have been in the industry for decades? We also need to think about professionalising our political efforts. The most influential associations often have a policy officer who understands the legislative process and has strong connections. As competition increases and





European funding decreases, having such a dedicated professional could be of great benefit to us.

The methods that you use to convince European policy makers, would they be the same as the methods you use to convince your regional or national politicians?

Schultka: The general narrative to convince policy makers is quite similar at all levels. Success at the European level often depends on local efforts, as regional and national governments play an important role in Europe. In smaller countries, it's easier to work

directly with ministries or national film institutes, which are often closely linked to the Ministry of Culture. When ECFA members across Europe, from Greece to Iceland, emphasise the importance of young audiences, it can have a wider European impact and that's the strength of this association. I'm beginning to understand better where we can influence agendas, but only because I've been doing this job for over five years now. At the beginning I had no idea where to start.

Panteloglou: At the forum, Pauline Durand-Vialle pointed out the imbalance in Brussels, where there are far

more lobbyists for big American companies than for the creative sector. It was a rather sad but useful piece of information. Her point was that it's good to do what you can in Brussels, but it's even more important to go back to your countries and make sure it's on the agenda of your local politicians. This underlines the importance of lobbying both in Brussels and at home. We need to equip our community with information that's easy to use at a local level or in a national context. If we do not have the resources to employ dedicated lobbyists, we must take matters into our own hands. When you don't see the bigger picture, you cannot act on a bigger picture and you can't convince anyone. Unless we broaden that picture for you.

There was another intriguing tagline from one of the forum's working groups: "With power comes a great responsibility for the next generation."

Panteloglou: The discussion about power is about deciding what kind of world we want to live in.

Parry: A colleague of mine, Professor Keri Facer, describes the importance of [storytelling in troubled times](#). We

have to ensure that remains a possibility for children and young people; that is a big responsibility.

Schultka: For those who have been elected into governments, how will you use the power given to you by the people you represent? Will you think of the youngest members of the society, who can't vote yet, but will live longest with the consequences of your decisions? The final question is how to move forward. We can sit at the forum for two days and have a great time, but it's what you do the day after that really counts. We have already hosted the first online session after the forum to keep the conversation going and are pleased to see that participants have already taken action. Things like reaching out to colleagues to share what they have learned, or even adapting their own event formats based on what they experienced at the forum. KIDS Regio itself will be publishing the forum report along with other resources on 31 October as part of the Cinekid for Professionals programme and will be hosting another Parliamentary Breakfast in Brussels on 19 November, among other things.