



 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Département fédéral de l'intérieur DFI
Office fédéral de la culture OFC

MEDIA^{DESK}
SUISSE

LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL

LOCARNO PRO

U30

Location: Residenza San Vittore 5

THE AUDIENCE OF THE FUTURE

NOTES FROM THE 5 SESSIONS

AN INTRODUCTION

Society is changing fast, and the arrival of a new generation of film professionals is going to have a huge impact on a film industry that has to deal with constant innovation, embrace new technologies, and find different ways to grab the attention of an audience who, in the age of streaming platforms, smartphones and social media, has radically changed its consumption habits, surrounded by tons of new distractions and forms of entertainment.

What only a couple of years ago was perceived by a few as a fascinating new world of unknown opportunities, and by most as a serious threat on a fragile eco-system, now it's simply a reality, and it's finally time that the film industry analyses this new landscape and faces the challenges it brings.

Exactly for this reason we envisioned this new program, and in the run-up to the event, we carried out a survey among the participants, asking a specific question: "What are the most critical aspects of the film industry that you feel must change in the near future?"

All the replies we received were extremely interesting, and despite the huge variety of issues cited - some mentioned the increasing difficulties for independent films to go beyond the festival circuit and find a theatrical release; others lamented the disconnection between production and distribution; others addressed the disruption and at the same time the opportunity represented by the global streaming platforms; and other stressed out the necessity for the industry to open up to more diverse contents, also in terms of cultural representation - they all had one thing in common: the need for independent cinema to find new strategies and a new approach in order to reach its audience. That's why we decided to make the keynote theme of the various U30 sessions "The Audience of the Future", in all its multiple perspectives.

During 4 sessions + a final wrap-up, the participants will discuss different aspects related to the main topic of the event: from theatrical distribution to marketing, from relations with content platforms to the role of film festivals and markets.

Each session will be moderated by a tutor, and will host a number of special guests from different branches of the industry, in order to offer a multi-faceted scenario, while a notetaker (chosen from the participants) will take notes of what's been discussed.

In the end, who is more entitled to speak about a new generation of audience than those who are part of this generation?

Marcello Paolillo
U30 Project Manager

FIRST SESSION

THE THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE: HOW TO BRING NEW GENERATIONS TO MOVIE THEATERS

Tutor:

Laura Houlgatte (International Union of Cinemas, CEO)

Special guests:

Carole Baraton (Charades, Co-Founder)

Karin Beyens (Diaphana, Head of Acquisitions)

Allison Gardner (Glasgow Film Theater, Programme Director & Festival Co-Director)

Vincent Quek (Anticipate Pictures, CEO)

Notetaker:

Sofia Eleftheriades, Lionsgate | International Sales Assistant

- Crucial questions we should address:
Who are we serving and why? Who is the audience?
What should change?
How can the festival model work better? What can cinemas do better?
Are there any alternative ways to entice less educated audiences (for arthouse films)?
How can platforms, distributors, sales agents and exhibitors collaborate for a win-win situation?

STATS

- Cinema going across EU has decreased significantly.
- Global BO in 2018 was \$41.4B.
- Industry consolidation: Combined market share approx. 29.4% across EU. 10 main cinema chains in the world. Independent cinemas numbers vary across EU – e.g. more independent chains in France, Switzerland, The Netherlands.
- Innovation in cinemas: Many of them experiment not only in regard to screening room, but also in other areas ticketing, marketing, loyalty subscription.
- It is often the case that cinema screens are monopolized by specific types of films (e.g. horror or family). Diversity of content can save admissions and cater for those untapped audiences.
- Lack of content for women
- Streaming war – how will the audience cope with streaming platforms?
- Disney/Fox merger – remains to be seen whether Disney will keep 'Fox' movies

QUESTIONS

What drives the audience to the cinema?

- Their desire is to be entertained, to be transported or to just kill time (the latter applies mainly to Asian markets). They want to screen something special, to be part of a communal experience which can afterwards spark discussions at the bars, or debates.
- We should not just focus on young people as we then lose the older audience.

Do we think that as an industry we put out the right type of content?

- We need to work much harder and learn from this new reality.
- Per Allison Gardner (Glasgow Film Festival), it is significant to know your audience. In Glasgow FF there is something for everyone. They have introduced a 5GBP card for 15-25 audience to

- screen unlimited films. Also, *The Favorite* had a broader audience in terms of age.
- The panel highlighted the importance of curating between studios and indie distributors. The film industry needs to be highly cultivated to compete with rest of mass media. For instance, a social media campaign is key for younger audience, while traditional methods of advertisement (e.g. billboards, newspapers) are better suited for 40+ audience. Karin Beyens (Diaphana) shared with U30 group a success story of *Mid90s*, directed by Jonah Hill;
- Diaphana found a way to make this film relevant to both younger and older audiences and the result was of course a rewarding 50K admissions in France.
- Distributors are the 'bridge' between filmmakers and cinemas. One should ask themselves the following questions prior to acquiring a film: Who is the audience in my territory (per Karin Beyens)? Can I make people see this before the streamers OR can I convince myself first as distributor (Vincent Quek)? It is important to generate WOM. Vincent's success story is *Capernaum*, a film which has the feel good, must-see quality.

Are we communicating well enough the 'must-see' urgency for a film?

- It is important to learn from other successful initiatives and copy them to generate similar results.
- Representation is key, yet needs to be handled carefully. Local distributors need to have an extensive knowledge of their market. '*The Farewell*' was mentioned as an example of a film where the Asian American experience does not really reflect the Asian experience.
- Foreign cinema can reach younger audiences in a much more effective way. Netflix have a revolutionary model as they are breaking the language barrier with subtitles. Distributors should learn from Netflix and apply the same tactics to theatrical exhibition.
- Festivals help films to receive recognition and create the urgency to see films. However, festival economy does not finance the movies, regardless of the mass appeal. As soon as a festival ends, those smaller arthouse movies disappear from the industry map. Furthermore, there is no point in selling a film to a festival, unless they bring in filmmakers to create buzz around the film.
- Importance of hiring younger talent in influential positions – e.g. there are 2 people under 30 in the board of Glasgow FF.

Are cinemas expensive?

- In Europe and US many countries have adopted the subscription membership scheme, enabling younger audiences to access cinema for a lower price.
- How do you reach audiences as an indie filmmaker or smaller distributor?
- It is crucial to take more risks and even seek alternative methods of enticing audience – e.g. use social media as a cheaper method of marketing, collaborate with restaurants, bars, schools (depending on region) to screen smaller films, reach audience that do not know films via other platforms

What do cinemas do to differentiate the experience?

- Curzon model: 12GBP to screen a film at home
- Eventization is important. Several examples were inspiring –
 - Pop-up cinemas in Panama - they show films in unique locations, providing audiences with cultural experiences as well as context. They also encourage audiences to create their own short films and exhibit them for a small fee.
 - Pop-up cinemas in South Africa – admissions of arthouse films can rise up to 200-300 (compared to standard 30-40).
 - Glasgow FF Blair Witch event – screening in the woods.
 - 'Pay what you decide' initiative in Glasgow FF – takes away the pressure and risk and is perfect for data collection.
 - Screening of *Capernaum* in Chinese cinemas – they secretly filmed people's reactions to demonstrate the Chinese audience's sensitivity to this film

- Customised events can entice audiences and convince them there is a universal value to a foreign film – one they will relate to.
- Premium experience can have a different meaning for different audiences. For some, premium means: great staff, quality projection, clean and comfortable screens, not feeling judged. For others, inclining chairs (or beds), tables and good food and beverages elevate the cinema experience. Also, the values and ethos of a cinema chain can be an important factor – e.g. green policies, quality of food, great living wages etc. People go back to good experiences.

Is cinema a communal or personal experience?

- It is important to determine the right medium for your film and your company, on a case-by-case basis. Streaming platforms and cinemas will need to co-exist as they can be valuable for different types of films and audiences.

SECOND SESSION

SEARCHING FOR AN AUDIENCE: STRATEGIES IN THE WORLDWIDE PROMOTION OF INDEPENDENT FILMS

Tutor:

Mathias Noschis (Alphapanda, Film Marketing Strategist)

Special guests:

Diane Ferrandez (Rocket Science, International Sales)

Sandra Gómez Velásquez (Interior XIII, Founder)

Sonja Heinen (European Film Promotion, Managing Director)

Hania Mroue (Metropolis Art Cinema, Founder and Director)

Nguyet Nguyenová (Gruvi, Operations and CEE Account Manager)

Notetaker:

Gabriel Milagres | Independent Professional

Highlights:

1) Sonja Heinen:

EFP mission is to help European sales agents connect with different foreigners players in order to promote European film industry abroad; b2b approach; increase European visibility

a) the increase of number of productions versus the low capacity of absorption and consumption within national markets

b) the investment should equally privilege production and promotion. also, funds should be concerned in financing long term strategies inside a company, not only individual projects

c) curatorship and branding are key elements

d) co-prods as an indicative of potential in others markets

e) the amount of pressure upon sales agents due to their funding role

2) Diane Ferrandez

a) film distribution in our century: tailor made approach

b) the importance of festivals recognition for the launching path

c) 2 audiences once a film is produced: festival audiences and local audiences.

d) development process is essential and the financiers and audience perspective have to be considered in this stage

e) in sales, the importance of understanding your product and the particularities and needs of each territory.

f) worldwide streaming service are more and more going local in terms of content production

g) the role of sales agents: global network in a world more and more keen on diversified content.

3) Sandra Gomes

a) importance of events and new audience engagement strategies.

b) the role of local partnerships in order to promote and create awareness of the film.

c) the importance of partnerships between distributor regarding materials costs and rights acquisition, especially in Latin America context

d) branding of the distribution company as a strategy.

4) Hania Mroeu

a) art house exhibitor in Beirut since the past 13 years

b) while opening the cinema, the importance of the assumption that would have an audience out there

c) arthouse cinema as an effective audience building project

d) the importance of curatorship; we have to be able to deliver diversified content, respecting our audience.

e) marketing strategy: promotion the venue, not only the film, therefore you are able to construct trust in your relationship with audience. They will come back even if they hated the last film.

f) word of mouth as the most effective strategy

g) we are not only creating needs within the audience, but especially desire.

5) Nguyet Nguyenová

a) tech agency helping distributors map their audience through data

b) they are able to monitor the whole consumption path, starting from the ad impression on social media and ending in the online ticket acquisition.

c) google search can be captured, processed and converted to data in order to help distributors map their audience

d) the importance of understanding the conversion rate between online ad impact and actual ticket acquisition.

e) filtering audiences through interests and social media interaction.

f) audience as a mass of groups with shared interests.

THIRD SESSION

THEATRICAL VS. PLATFORMS: CAN THEATRICAL RELEASES AND STREAMING PLATFORMS COEXIST?

Tutor:

Susan Wendt (TrustNordisk, Managing Director)

Special guests:

Bob Berney (Marketing and Distribution Executive)

Carlo Dusi (Red Arrow Studios International, EVP Commercial Strategy, Scripted)

Jonathan Miller (Icarus Film / OVID, President)

Roberto Olla (Eurimages, Executive Director)

Notetaker:

Océane Portal | Under The Milky Way | Head of International Operations

We're in a transition period. Old rules still apply but it's not a 1 size fits all industry. There's a real need for adaptation as theatrical releases are costly, more and more films are being produced and there's not enough space for them all. We can also agree that not all films need a theatrical release to exist and prove successful. Curation is a key to filter the amount of films shown to large audiences.

Amazon & Netflix, big streamers that both uses theatrical distribution as a marketing tool / to gain access to academy awards but with different approaches

- When Amazon started its Prime service, directors didn't want to do only streaming. They disrupted their model (straight to digital) early on to allow for a shorten theatrical window. Results were disappointed so they agreed to work with traditional windows (Manchester by the Sea was their first acquisition to go through this model).
- Netflix would only do the minimum to qualify for academy awards and not invest time and energy in the release. Otherwise, for some films, they agree to give a 6-weeks window to set up a theatrical release, but it's up to the right-holder to organize and finance it.

Releasing a film with a streamer on a WW basis + in perpetuity rights VS going towards the traditional road for distribution: it's a balance of what you want for your film / what's best for it.

PROs: films reach a WW audience // some well-known directors are able to get their films fully/partially financed whereas studios would not take the risk // sometimes the offer is big enough to break even production costs and allows to show immediate results to all the financiers that invested in the film.

CONs: 1st time director that get a deal with big streamers will never access the data and will have nothing to show when making their next film // festivals are a good way to test the interest (in terms of audience / sales) but after a deal is made, the film would no longer able to continue its festival run, which is fundamental for art house film & filmmakers // how to decide on what films to invest if you don't know the results.

Around the big players:

New big players (Disney+, Apple, Warner Media) won't need acquisitions as they will rely on in-house productions for as long as they can. And if they do acquire films/catalogues, it's often to fill in specific cases like genres films or from specific regions.

All of them work more and more with talents directly, because they're able to attract them through

lucrative deals and freedom in creation, which mean less intermediaries as no sale agents and/or distributors are needed.

Financial calculations are different for them. They don't think in terms of box office but in terms of subscribers (Amazon, for instance, will try to hook you to their service through the film and then have you order toothpaste with instant deliveries) whereas independent distributors can't think with the same terms as they have greater needs for results.

Landscape is really crowded, even in the digital scene, more and more distributors launched their own VOD platforms, especially in the US: Criterion, Film movement, Magnolia etc. Could also be through Amazon / Apple channels. So how to make your audience aware of the availability of the film? Audience will get tired of facing the choice of many options and this will give more room to AVOD platforms. Some will rely on global films/series that's free for consumers to then switch towards subscription to get advantages (access the content earlier, premium contents etc).
Re theatrical, how to make this experience worthwhile for today's audience? More generally, how to connect the audience to the space where they are? **There's an underlying paradox: not all films are accessible through legal offers and audience will turn to piracy to see the content.** This is partly a problem of education and even a generational one: people don't want to wait to see the film if they hear about it and it's not (yet) available.

Create an alternative space for arthouse films, e.g. MUBI does theatrical + SVOD through a day & date model for selected films. Theatrical doesn't recoup on its own but will help the other windows to perform better, so cross collateralizing the costs could help recoup overall costs.

It also means **curation is crucial**. This is done through festivals, through SA, through distributors. They will have to look for the audience and prepare the film for that specific audience. But we should also consider the fact that not all films deserve to be shown to broad audiences or go beyond their domestic territory.

When picking up a film, distributors and sales agents will need time to prepare the release (finding the audience, creating promotional assets, technical stuff etc), so a film might not be released when it's buzzing in festivals, but engagement is often proving to be better in the long run. Whereas streamers can do it quicker but there's the issue of transparency, and not having an idea of the results.

MISCELLEANOUS

Intro facts: Films from well-known directors circulate less than 1st/2nd time directors in terms of territories.

Some comments were made on documentaries: Netflix helped raised a broader interest on documentaries, giving an easy access to them BUT they put out of business several documentaries companies that were relying too much on Netflix buying their catalogues and when Netflix stopped buying to focus on Original Documentaries, some crashed.

* Amazon and Netflix, big streamers that both uses theatrical as a marketing tool / to gain access to academy award but with different approaches

* Releasing a film with a streamer on a WW basis with in perpetuity rights VS going for a traditional distribution scheme: it's a balance of what you want for the film and what's best for it.

* Education to avoid piracy / make people aware of art house cinema is important for both models (theatrical / streaming)

* Industry, and more specifically distributors + sale agents, need time to prepare a release: find the audience, prepare marketing asset, technical delays that sometimes will delay films from being released when they are buzzing in festivals where area streamers can do it quicker, but again that poses the issue of no transparency on results.

Conclusion of the discussion was that both worlds must co-exist, as no one is going away and they need each other. Festivals remain important to identify audiences, attract interests from both streamers and traditional distributors. We also have to accept the fact that we're not in an industry with a 1 size fits all model, that not all films deserve theatrical or even that not all films are meant to travel outside of their domestic territory

FOURTH SESSION

FILM FESTIVALS AND FILM MARKETS: HOW IS THEIR ROLE CHANGING?

Tutor:

Matthijs Wouter Knol (European Film Market, Director)

Special guests:

Mike Goodridge (International Film Festival & Awards Macao, Artistic Director)

Rose Kuo (Festworks, President)

John Nein (Sundance Film Festival, Senior Programmer)

Pituka Ortega Heilbron (International Film Festival Panama, Executive Director)

Notetaker:

Olivia Tay | Singapore International Film Festival | Program Executive

How it'll be evolving over the years.

About the speakers:

Pituka Ortega Heilbron, IFF Panama: 8 years running.

- Not working as efficiently in trying to get people to see the films.
- Partnership with international airline in Panama - put the channel on in-flight entertainment.
- Work together to promote the films - goal to reach a million viewers by the end of 2020.
- Get data from the channel, understand the audience, and give it to distributors

John Nien, Senior programmer at Sundance FF

- It's always been difficult, constant evolution of the viability of film, of audiences, of their preferences, where and how to watch.
- Have to be creative and innovate and revise what it is to think

Rose Kuo, Festworks

- Questions about streaming vs. festivals

Mike Goodridge, IFFM

- Macao was a city with little film culture, so they had to nurture the audience, enable them to see films they wouldn't normally be able to.
- Mike used to work for Protagonist and is aware that some films have no audiences

What is the impression of certain festivals? How have they changed in the past couple of years?

- In the USA: more diverse, women and people of color in the selection
- South Africa: dealing with local representation, coupled with less and less festivals.
- The challenge is trying to get these kinds of films seen.
- Harder for filmmakers to apply, much more expensive to spread the films across the world
- Festivals focusing on the event, but what happens after? Does the film get screened and then forgotten?
- Diversifying and developing different initiatives to extend the lifespan of films
- India: People only want to watch films that have gotten recognition abroad
- How to best support the films that are made? Give the art form a chance to exist?

Role of the festivals

- Film markets affect viability of filmmakers
- Different roles - festivals act as a platform for emerging talents
- It's part of the system that is filtering talent for people who are investing in films.
- Litmus test for projects that are not seen as viable - if they're successful in a festival, it might be a springboard for bigger things.
- Films that are pushing boundaries that haven't been charted yet - explore certain kind of filmmaking that can prove viable to audiences.

Macao: Making a festival that fits the place

- Creating an appetite for the film, start the programme a bit more accessible, not Lav Diaz.
- The competition films have developed a following in Macao.
- Chinese cinema needs a bit more effort to promote in Macao
- Initiative to develop filmmaking - Macao doesn't have a filmmaking culture like HK has.
- Macao programming strategy is completely different from Sundance - not a world premiere festival.

Lincoln Center

- Film wasn't recognised as a true art film alongside performing arts etc in the past
- Audiences dwindling after the 2008 crisis - but pushed to build a state of the art facility
- Lincoln center didn't want to do a market focused festival - promotion of culture
- Had to rethink the programming to bring in younger audiences - streaming and small screens. Is creativity just limited to the big screen?
- Who are we serving and why?
- Filmmakers and film culture
- Experimented with screening Breaking Bad, gaming (Grand Theft Auto)
- The art of cinema doesn't really discriminate even if 5 people come in - those 5 people get a good experience.
- Sustained a lot by donors.
- Exhibitions, film academy, critics academy

Diversifying the festival

- The shape of festivals have changed with these programmes surrounding the films
 - Critics campus, development programmes
 - Works in progress
 - Film funds
 - Regional focus on Latin America - lost of rich and interesting films coming from the region
- What a film festival should be: something that develops and strengthens the audience, and also that will participate in the development of the filmmakers in the region, being the best curators
- Serving the audiences first, and the filmmakers

Evolutions

- Juggling the way things have been done for 50 years, and evolving with the time
- Imagining the ideal festival design in China
- The festival calendar is incredibly saturated
- Needs to have external awards validation before being able to be successful in China?
- Dig into the archives and screen older films
- Bypassing censorship regulations
- New films: capacity building in China - filmmakers coming to do masterclasses, talks attached to a film academy

- Really new films: programmed at the last minute
- Programmes for audiences, industry, not always the same thing

Hopes for the future

- Building a network of regional festivals, instead of silo thinking. Connection and collaboration
 - Will the projects and films be repeated in the region?
 - Sustainability of festivals in the region, and building that trust between organisations
- Colombia: being inclusive and giving access to the public, education
- Making people fall in love with films - seeing things that speak to them, that have nothing to do with their reality. The profound moving experience of films.
- Creating the audience - doing fringe events all year round
- Brand identity - tackling the market conundrum about the film. A single film is hard to sell, but a package of films from a festival can be positioned in a certain way.
 - Promotion and curation of a festival
 - Build up the identity of a festival such that people are willing to see the films just based on the festival.
- Asia: there's a healthy amount of competition and collaboration between certain festivals.
 - premiere status: superficial and doesn't help films

Film Markets

- Films are already bought when they come into the market, or streamers pick it up so quickly.
- Buyers are bringing less people to markets - expensive, can see the streaming links
- TV and streaming offerings are still attractive and important - need to have them in the lineup
- Macao played Okja even after it was on Netflix, and it was a full house of 550 people
- Sundance - be completely open to different formats
- Artists who are just working on different mediums
- There are different ways which culture is filtered e.g live music vs subscription based radio
- Festivals don't have to be the solutions to everything - letting audiences discover things on different platforms
- Festivals becoming distribution: problematic but not impossible?

Economic issues in festivals

- Free tickets in Karlovy Vary
- AFI film festival - financial issues "if you make it free, the press won't talk about how it's bad" - Went to every studio and asked for partnership - underwrite half the screening, sell VIP tickets for half the hall, the rest were free

Streaming competition

- Cable networks - build an appetite for non-fiction broadcasts, documentaries
- Experimental films: exist in a niche, always a space in the programme for x number of films
 - Biggest different between distributors and film festivals
 - Space for films that most probably are not viable for distribution

Minority representation

- Native program at Sundance
- Having a diverse programming staff
- Opening to different perspectives
- But also have to be dangerous to expect the minority to be the gatekeeper for their "segment"
- Make those goals public

- Change in mindset - select a good film, but what is a good film
- Term limit on festival directors? How to keep yourself vital?
 - Gets a bit stale after a while
 - Healthy to keep it going in a natural way

Carbon footprint

- What would be ways for the festival to encourage people to e.g travel in certain ways?
- Panama: water bottles, green programme - adopt certain policies with ticketing etc (but not super successful), printed 40% of the catalogue
- Sundance: given out reusable water bottle
- Can't cut down on flights - the people are the lifeblood of the festival
- Planning the guests' stay such that they don't need to fly in and out of the country

FINAL SESSION

WRAP-UP AND CONCLUSIONS

Tutor:

Chiara Marañon (MUBI | Director of Programming)

Wrap-up Speakers:

Sofia Eleftheriades (Lionsgate | International Sales Assistant)

Gabriel Milagres (Independent Professional)

Océane Portal (Under The Milky Way | Head of International Operations)

Olivia Tay (Singapore International Film Festival | Program Executive)

Notetaker:

Shapath Das (Arthouse Asia Film Festival | Festival Director)

The sessions start with a very vital question from the moderator Chiara Marañon:

Do you guys think, is there are too many films made?

The U30 participants anonymously answered, Yes.

Is there something that needs to be solved? If that is a problem, how every organisations should act on it?

The entire process of film distribution is based on the principle of curation, to get the right film out for the audience everyone is curating, and that is the only way to solve the issue. We have to rely on the choices of the gate keepers like film festivals, sales agents, distributors, exhibitors, not every time the decisions will be correct but that is the only way.

Is that a problem that films screened at the festival it will not travel beyond festival circuit?

First of all, the filmmakers must understand that what they want from the film, not every film is for theatrical release, a festival selection is a great recognition for a filmmaker, after that if the film didn't get distributed through any media still it is a great recognition and the film will have a place in history.

Festivals are important because it educates filmmakers, festival is where the filmmaker gets a reality check. Everyone wants to have a theatrical release of their film, the festival can give them the understanding of the market. When a filmmaker gets a better exposure it helps them to understand the thought process of sales agents, they are the people responsible for the sales of the film.

Looking with lens of commercial viability, does experimental films do have an audience? There is an audience of course, every film has a different kind of audience who behaves differently, during the first session how to bring the new audience to future we have addressed that point. With lots of initiative and constant curation process we can bring audience to the theatre, exhibitor and distributor

may take a big role in maintaining the audience.

Who is the audience, while scripting a film is it a good habit to think about the audience the film is made for?

In the beginning every filmmaker thinks that they have a wider audience, slowly they understand when different experts come onboard to sell the film, and audience get narrowed down. It is good to have clarity regarding the film's business.

How can the festival model work better? What can cinema do better?

There is a UK based company called Secret Cinema, they are very successful and generating millions of dollars in box office, by doing re-run of Classic films, every summer. The cheapest ticket price is GBP 35. They keep the location secret, and makes it a very premium quality event. They reveal the location only a few days before and decorate the event space in the same theme of the film and even provides a dress code for the event.

They also have a different version of this event called Secret Cinema X, which is for the new releases, the recent films.

What is the marketing strategy of Secret Cinema?

Marketing of the secret cinema is in terms of the experience, during the Moulin Rouge screening the entire venue was decorated in the same theme, they market this unique rare experience, and creates a FOMO perception around it. Taking photos inside is not allowed so everyone enjoys the moment and has a great experience. They even give costumes for each screening. Like watching star wars dressing like star trippers.

Are there any alternative ways to entice less educated audience in terms of arthouse independent cinema?

Yes. But who are the audience, cinephiles? It is true that the majority of the film audience or population in total don't care about what we are doing.

How can VODs, distributor, sales, exhibitor collaborate with each other in terms of data sharing, cost sharing?

To do this we have to put innovation on the whole chain.

It is very clear that innovative projects get more traction, so it is important to encourage and allow innovations in the system at every level.

Do you guys have particular ideas about collaboration?

Collaboration is a must. Sundance is a good example regarding the collaboration, in Sundance distributor, sales agent, and VOD platforms work parallelly and that helps a film to get more visibility. VOD Platforms provide a limited day window to distributor to do theatrical release and that helps the film when it became available on the platform.

Disney, Warner Brothers, will not need a distributor or a sales agent but in the future Netflix for few films will need distributor as they make films to premiere at festivals and do release it in theatre, like ROMA. The film did a commendable business through theatrical release, for similar kind of movies with similar ambitions Netflix will need distributors.

But for Indie art film NETFLIX don't spend much on promotion, that is why to create a career a filmmaker needs distributor and theatrical sales. Exhibitor collaboration with distributor can be a new way, VOD platforms are also exhibitors, they should provide a theatrical release window and collaboration with them can cut costs on both sides.

Taking India as an example.

There is no point in fighting with Star Wars, but we have to keep innovating new ways to find new audiences for our films. For example in India, the threat of Hollywood is increasing everyday, even now an AVENGER ENDGAME gets a wide release, but Bollywood is always winning this battle as they stay true to their genre of cinema and keep offering the audience with diverse contents.

Inside India every commercial film studios are competitors but collectively throughout the year they make films to popular the genre of Bollywood style of filmmaking.

On the world stage we the arthouse independent film distributors, festival, and sales agents needs to do the same for the genre of arthouse, it must be a world wide co-operation.

Every year we also witness steady increment on the number of people attending film festivals. That proves the demand for curated content is increasing steadily. To develop new audience we have to focus on curated content.

How the future looks like in terms of collaboration between theatrical exhibitors and VOD platforms?

For an independent filmmaker offer by a steaming platform is more logical and likervative. The streaming platforms provides more cash in hand compared to festival and theatrical distribution initially, on the day of the premiere of a film at leading film festival that makes a filmmaker confusing and also for theatrical distributor it is a tough battle to fight,

But the catch is when a film exhibited in cinemas and when it was on a streaming platform the types of audience it gets in both the cases are different. So the filmmaker actually misses a set of traditional cinephiles who are the regular audience at the theatre.

In terms of collaboration theatrical exhibitors and VOD platforms can collaborate to share real time data mutually to see how the film is received.

The role of Marketing?

The role of marketing in the business is huge, the data driven marketing are more popular nowadays as it shows more tangible results. But misleading marketing is a worldwide trend, but it is a problem, it left the audience feeling cheated but sometimes it works. Sometimes it creates an opportunity for a new audience to watch the film. But it is not a best practice.

What festival can do for first time filmmaker?

For First time filmmakers, it is almost impossible to know who are their audience. That is why they need a distributor, because distributor can identify their audience and it helps them throughout their career, it is very important for a filmmaker to know their audience. There are many funds available for first time filmmakers who gets funded by the state but don't know what to do after the film is done, festivals play a key role in educating them.

But who are these audience? Do they have any behavioral patterns?

In some cases audiences are like a ghost story, they come to watch a film during the festival screening but during a theatrical release they are invisible. So during film festival they come to attend the festival as an event not necessarily to find a new film, that leads to a different point of joy of communal engagement.

In some cases festivals are disconnected from the mass, they don't know what their audience wants. Festival curates with a perception that they know their audience, and with an increasing number of delegate registration it is very difficult to understand if they are just coming for a "event" or actually festivals are creating/inspiring new audience.

Exceptions exist, in Brazil, there are arthouse cinemas in localities, students watch good films in school but still they are not interested, incidentally the number of arthouse audience is not growing considering the amount of exposure and facilities they have.

It is true that the majority of the film audience or population in total don't care about what we are doing.

What if the film gets its festival premiere and digital premiere within few days?

When a film is getting released on VOD platform, same day when it premieres at the festival at festival, while the expectations are very high but the actual business it has done in few cases are not at all encourageable. Mainly the film releases on Europe and North American territory, and the group agreed upon we have to do these releases for international audience and promote it well to actually understand if it is working or not.

Distributor can study the success story of MUBI, how they are growing as an international cinematheque. Mubi maps people's interest, to identify its audience.

Does gatekeepers slow down the process?

In some cases sales agents and distributor slow down the process of distribution, many times post film festival the film stays idle and the buzz it has created during its festival premiere diluted slowly. Though the sales agents and distributor on the group does not agree on that point. Their argument was, there are many factors work before releasing a film, and that takes time, and also not every week is available for the release, PR publicity audience building takes time, which are the traditional steps before releasing a film.

What is the changing role of the festival?

Also the role of the festival is also debatable, in the era of digital distribution, how a festival will redesign itself to be relevant. The purpose of the festival is to promote its total curation not a single film.

They are also like an event, people come for festival, not for films, there are so many people who come to do meetings not films.

Does in this new scenario a festival should also take up job of distributor? The group shows a mix reaction.

How many film school teaches distribution sales?

Not many film school teaches sales and distribution, but it is indeed an integral part of the process of

filmmaking. Then how a filmmaker should know it? It will be best to include it in a filmmaking curriculum, specially in the course of producing and direction.

- Funds only support certain kind of film that is why the films are getting funded by the state body are lacking diversity. Content of the film is a major thing it has to be presented
- Carbon foot print is not a big issue compare to funding and development of project in the current the scenario but keeping the future in mind we have to address the issue but certainly we cannot take any major step.

Marcello asked the same question we answered in the survey before the program started, to see if we developed different answers:

“What is the most urgent issue to address right now?”

The common point among all the sessions was the war between Theatrical vs VOD platform. But we concluded on a note that the fight is good but the films do need a home they need to co-exist. Eventually through innovation we will find a better way to help each other. Sometime few project hold on its exhibition and waits for a theatrical release, some time that kills the potential of that film, if you dont sell a film on time the film get devalued.

Even a limited release is good but it will be better to release the film right after that for a VOD platform as every films need a home, even if it will be viewed by a thousand audience still it needs a home.

We discussed not fairy fairy ideas but actual ways which can be implemented and change will happen soon.

The big mergers are more concerning than the Theatrical vs VOD fight, and also the rise of short form content they are the future threat, we have to focus on quality curation to develop an audience.

Our future as small community as an art film cinephiles is more interesting than the big fights, as it will never end, some new threat will be there again in the next decade or even sooner.

The good news is all of us, are passionate about what we do and we will do it forever.