

## SOFA – SCHOOL OF FILM AGENTS 2016

### Strengthening the regional film culture effectively: SOFA – School of Film Agents 2016 in review

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In its 4<sup>th</sup> edition, from August 19<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2016, SOFA – School of Film Agents has given eight exceptionally promising young cultural managers the possibility to develop their own film structure projects with the help of expert tutors. Realizing these projects will lead to an effective and sustainable strengthening of the film landscape in the participants' home countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region, where unstable political and economic conditions have led to an underdeveloped film industry. This focus on cultural management and film agents, instead of producers and directors, is what makes SOFA a unique workshop in the international advanced training landscape.

#### The programme

Those eight film agents and their renowned tutors had days of intensive workshops to further develop their projects towards submitting them to funding institutions committees and ultimately towards realization. In their conversations with some of the European film industry's most experienced figures they were able to assess strengths and weaknesses, visit panel discussions and lectures about central themes and challenges of the industry, and conduct intensive one on one discussions.

#### The 2016 film agents and their projects



©SOFA: The 2016 participants with project director Nikolaj Nikitin)

The eight participants and their projects had been selected from more than one hundred applications. Most of the projects developed at SOFA are united in their goal to strengthen the domestic film culture and industry and grant access to film education and production to young film enthusiasts.

For example, with her project **Belarus Empowerment Lab: Cinema** Belorussian participant **Lisaveta Bobrykava** wants to create a space for networking, exchange of ideas and workshops in order to bring the Belorussian film scene closer together and strengthen it, and in the long run establish the first independent film

foundation in Belarus.

Georgian participant **Tekla Machavariani** with her project **Nushi** aims to strengthen local film culture and industry by producing informational material that up to now scarcely exists about it. As a print media package **Nushi** will promote Georgian films and the national film industry, while at the same time providing social media platforms beyond the print edition, where young filmmakers can network.

In the centre of Moldovan participant **Dumitru Marian's** project **Chisinau. Hub for European Films (CHEF)** is the modernization of a theatre on Chisinau, where European art-house films can be shown, which usually are hardly ever screened in Moldova at all. The plan is to also establish that theatre as a meeting place for local filmmakers with their Western and East European colleagues.

With her project **The Albanian Cinemateque** Albanian participant **Iris Elezie** also works towards creating a space where cinephiles and filmmakers can watch European and international art-house films as well as attend workshops, international exchange programmes and seminars. Among this institution's further activities are research and publications about the hitherto almost

invisible Albanian film history. Iris' participation has had an immediate international echo, so that she was able to meet the Albanian Secretary for Culture right after the SOA workshop, who pledged her support for the future steps of this programme.

Establishing the first Czech film museum is what **Terezie Krizkovska** is planning with her project **NaFilm – National Film Museum**. As a place of learning and experiencing cinema and its history, that museum's focus is to be set on interactive exhibitions addressing an engaged and active public, instead of passive watchers. After a very successful exhibition opening in the Museum Montanelli in Prague, Terezie and her team are now searching for a suitable location for their film museum.

With her project **Ukrainian Film Promotion** Ukrainian participant **Julia Sinkevych** plans to heighten the visibility of Ukrainian cinema at home and abroad. Her home country has increased its annual output of films in the last couple of years, and some of them have made their way to international film festivals (e.g. THE TRIBE), but they are still lagging way behind their potential.

Lithuanian participant **Inesa Ivanova** also tries to broaden the international perception of local filmmaking beyond the domestic market with her project **Baltic View**. As a distribution initiative for Baltic cinema is plans a strategy of screenings in European cities and VoD platforms to maximise the visibility of Baltic films.

Visibility – in this case of female filmmakers – is also the key to Polish participant **Magdalena Puzmujniak**'s project **Full Spectrum – International Film Festival**. This festival will highlight the outstanding achievements of female filmmakers, thus counteracting the film industry's „gender inequality“. As the first festival of its kind in Poland it explicitly provides a stage for female film talents while at the same time not excluding their male colleagues.

### **The tutors**

Each of the eight participants had their personal tutor at their side, giving feedback to their projects from his or her unique perspective. The tutors this year were: Heike Melba Fendel (Barbarella Entertainment, Cologne/Berlin), Katarzyna Mazurkiewicz (Polish Film Institute, Warsaw), Silke Johanna Rübiger (Dortmund|Cologne International Women's Film Festival, Cologne), Dr. Rainer Rother (Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin), Katriel Schory (Israel Film Fund, Tel Aviv), Tamara Tatishvili (Georgian National Film Center, Tbilisi), Joanna Tereszczuk (ONET, Warsaw) und Koen Van Daele (Kinodvor, Ljubljana).

Additionally, there were also four more experts at hand as an integral part of the SOFA team, who accompanied the participants continuously from the first to the last day of the workshop: Renaud Redien-Collot (Novancia Business School, Paris) helped them develop a marketing strategy individually designed for their projects. Pitching expert Sibylle Kurz (Frankfurt) helped them towards a confident and poised presentation in front of both industry people and audience. And also on hand were Oliver Baumgarten (Programme Director, Max Ophüls Preis, Saarbrücken) and Oscar winner Ewa Puszczyńska (Opus Film, Lodz) who helped the participants in individual feedback sessions to sharpen their concept presentation papers in regard to both style and content and work out a realistic time frame and an appropriate budget for their projects. The tutors will remain available to the participants and their projects for guidance in the coming months.

SOFA director Nikolaj Nikitin: „We would like to thank all our partners and long-time supporters that helped make SOFA possible and bring it to life. I'd also like to extend my personal gratitude to mayor Rafał Dutkiewicz, who welcomed us with open arms in Wrocław in 2013 after the initial support of the PISF. We are very grateful to all of them. We wish the city a great finale to its „reign“ as European Capital of Culture and a resounding spectacle with the European Film Awards on December 10<sup>th</sup>, which came to Wrocław with a little help from SOFA. Since almost all national and international partners and sponsors have already pledged their support for the coming years we are very much hoping to keep our workshop in the pulsating city of Wrocław in the future.“

**SOFA – School of Film Agents** is a joint venture of the Filmplus gUG (Cologne) and the Fundacja Filmplus (Warsaw), together with the city of Wrocław and the Polish Film Institute; support comes from the German Federal Foreign Office, the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation, the Goethe-Institut Central and Eastern Europe, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, the Film Commission Poland and the Wrocław Film Commission as well as by EAVE – European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs.

**SOFA – School of Film Agents (19.-28.8. 2016) in Wrocław/ Poland**

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