

The Future of European Children's Film | 1st KIDS Regio Forum

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Erfurt Declaration

Following the need for an exchange of experiences and expectations and for the development of partnerships and co-operations, a conference – the 1st KIDS Regio Forum – has been initiated, giving the different players in this particular branch of the filmmaking industry a platform to meet and jointly analyse the situation of European children's film, compare their experiences, and develop ideas and strategies to meet the challenges.

In 2008 according to Eurostat the 27 States of the EU had 497.5 million inhabitants, of which 15.7% were younger than 15 years. The European Audiovisual Observatory lists 878 fiction feature films produced in the EU.

How many of these were live action films made for children can only be estimated roughly: Considering data provided by the European Children's Film Association (ECFA) and different European Children's Film Festivals there has been an average of around 30 titles per year since 2000. For 2008 this would mean a percentage of 3.4 %.

In response to diverse existing concepts of "children's film", the initiators of the 1st KIDS Regio Forum agreed on a definition that includes films mainly aimed at children up to 12 years of age.

The focus was put on live action feature films for children.

There is a consensus among the 98 professionals from 17 countries that the support of live action features for children is necessary because:

These films form an essential part of the concept of cultural diversity and, furthermore, valuable means in terms of media literacy and cultural and personal education.

Children are the audience of today: they have a right to see films that take them and their stage of development seriously. They deserve films that find the right, convincing tone.

Children are the audience of tomorrow: if they don't have the possibility to become familiar with the full variety of genres, subjects and styles, it is unlikely that they will develop a taste for this variety as adults.

The need for original stories grows when children's films are doing better in the market. While the thriving films are usually spin-offs of famous books, they do not automatically increase diversity.

Market pressure suppresses a sufficient national and especially international exploitation of these films and hence impairs conditions for financing and developing.

Based on these principal conclusions, the participants of the 1st KIDS Regio Forum agree on an agenda of 5 points, aiming at a strengthening of the live action feature film for children:

1. Research & Controlling
 - a) Children's film tag at the European Audiovisual Observatory
 - b) Audience research (children's needs and expectations, admissions)

2. Financing
 - a) Special European, national and regional schemes which support children's film from development to distribution
 - b) Stimulation of co-production – not as a makeshift solution but as an opportunity to exchange knowledge and to enhance the possibility for the films to travel better
 - c) Simplification of funding regulations

3. Specialised platforms for network & exchange
 - a) Strengthening of existing networks
 - b) Establishing of one European online platform

4. Film literacy should be part of education in European Countries. Children's films have to be firmly established within film education.

5. Support for new and experimental marketing and distribution strategies aimed at children (e.g. based on the assumption that children are early adopters of new technologies)

The participants of the 1st KIDS Regio Forum are committed to offer children a wide variety of stories genres and styles.

Working on this agenda will enable films for children to become more visible and more successful on the way to a situation in which making feature films for children is a natural and self-evident part of the European film culture and industry.

We – the professionals of the European children’s film industry – make among others the following proposals:

- EU: a live action children’s feature film should receive an automatic MEDIA grant within the Selective Support Scheme, if 5 EU distributors have picked it up for distribution.
- EBU should promote and implement an EU children’s films Award Ceremony (like the Eurovision) and the European Film Awards should have a children’s film category; this could coincide with a Europe-wide children’s film day.
- Cinema as the 7th art should be introduced and recommended as part of the Curriculum and this proposal should be put on the agenda of the next meeting for European Ministers of Education.
- ECFA should be the site used to build a virtual network for EU children’s film professionals and adequate funding should be provided for this.
- Publicly funded broadcasters should have proper time-slots for children’s feature films.

Erfurt, June 25th 2009