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## Film Festivals towards a Hybrid Form: Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

Beginning after WWII film festivals have created their own network and ecosystem and they have proved themselves as vital nodes of the film industry. Although the systematic academic research on film festivals is at its early stage, the crisis of covid-19 posed new challenges to both organizers and researchers. The aim of this study is to document the reactions of festival organizers to that crisis, identify how digital technology contributed to that process and recognize factors that affect the process. Also, attention has been paid to the influence that hybrid form had on the film festival product, thus the atmosphere and the experience of a film festival. To answer these questions, six in-depth interviews with festival organizers were conducted. These organizers are involved in the management of seven different festivals, which also have been analysed through secondary data. The analysis has shown that internal factors had a significant influence on organizers reaction to the crisis, while external factors also determined to a high degree the strategy that festivals will follow. The necessity of digital technology introduction and hybridity in festivals' delivery didn't extinguish the festival atmosphere but created a different one. The study suggests that there are positive ramifications and opportunities of the hybrid form but, while the crisis is ongoing, it is yet to find out how the film festival industry will use the new know-how in a post-covid era.

Keywords: Film Festival, innovation, digital technology, hybrid event, crisis, covid-19

JEL classification:

M31: Marketing

L82: Entertainment, Media

Z19: Cultural Economics: Others





## Resumo

Após a 2ª Guerra Mundial, os festivais de films criaram-se e ao seu próprio network e ecossistema, demonstrando serem um núcleo vital da indústria de films. Embora a investigação relativa aos festivais de films esteja ainda numa fase embrionária, a crise do covid-19 trouxe novos desafios tanto a organizadores como a investigadores. Este estudo visa analisar as reacções dos organizadores dos festivais de filmes à crise Covid-19, identificando como a tecnologia digital contribuiu para este processo e quais os factores determinantes. Ainda, foi dada atenção à influência do formato híbrido no produto festival de filme, nomeadamente na atmosfera e experiência do festival. Para responder a estas questões de pesquisa, realizaram-se seis entrevistas em profundidade com os organizadores. Estes geriram sete diferentes festivais, cuja informação secundária foi também complementarmente analisada. A análise demonstrou que os factores internos influenciaram a reacção dos organizadores à crise pandémica, enquanto os factores externos também determinaram fortemente a estratégia a seguir pelo festival. A necessidade de ter tecnologia digital e a forma híbrida da prestação do serviço não eliminaram a atmosfera do festival, mas criaram uma outra diferente. O estudo sugere que há ramificações positivas e oportunidades pelo formato híbrido, mas, enquanto a crise persiste, é, contudo, preciso perceber como o sector de festivais de filmes usará o novo know-how na era post-covid.

Palavras-chave: Festival de Cinema, inovação, tecnologia digital, evento híbrido, crise, covid-19

Classificação JEL:

M31: Marketing

L82: Entretenimento, Mídia

Z19: Economia Cultural: Outros

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and importance of the study

The film festival is a phenomenon that developed in Europe due to the specific geopolitical situation after WWII and later expanded globally. They grew to be multi-layered and complex events that involve multiple stakeholders and play a key role in multiple areas. Film festivals as glamorous showcases for films and people, attract worldwide attention. They consist of a hub for developing and shaping film knowledge and film practices. Film festivals provide a platform for the different actors to engage and negotiate in diverse levels the relations of culture, power, and identity (Wong, 2011).

Film festivals are principal nodes of global film industries, and they operate beyond cinephilia. Business and fundings have become part of film festivals as they attract a wide range of film professionals from directors to producers and distributors, which are engaged in conversations, deals and negotiations in order to fulfil their goals. Correspondingly, film festivals create a public sphere that has an impact on the future of the industry.

Furthermore, film festivals could be perceived as a place of entertainment where people go to escape from their reality, exchange opinions, argue and discuss on a local and global scale. film festivals connect audiences, films, media and professionals crafting the ultimate environment from networking. However, film festivals are also tied with actual places and locations such as the city that hosts them. It seems that festivals define the cultural capital and the brand of the nation, region, or city they accommodate. Thus, the film festival research in terms of tourism and marketing appears to be dominant. However, scholars claim that a further and more systematic study of film festivals will provide a deep understanding and insightful information that go beyond the history of one selected film festival and investigate the complex relationships of film festival network and film industry (Wong, 2011, Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010, de Valck, 2006).

The outburst of the pandemic at the beginning of 2020, provoke an unpredictable crisis that put the film industry in a state of suspension and challenge the institutional and organizational logic of the film festivals. As de Valck and Damiens (2020) point out this crisis arise immediate challenges and severe risks, for those working in and for the film festival industry, while for scholars the crisis offers opportunities to reflect on their ways of thinking about the festival ecosystem.

Forced to refrain from social contact, film festivals pushed to operate in an online environment and redefine themselves. The discussion about the hybrid form of film festival took over the online panels and monopolized the interest and the focus of the film industry and film festival professionals. The debate on the simple binary of online and offline viewing became intensified.

In the editorial of the special “Nescus” issue, which is dedicated to film festivals and the first wave of COVID-19, de Valck and Damiens (2020) suggest that the current crisis may bring new opportunities and they claim that the documentation of the early responses of film festivals on the covid-19 crisis will underline the adaptability, and creativity of festival organisers and will encourage a discussion on the future of festivals.

This study aspires to contribute to the documentation of the ways that film festivals, in various geographic contexts, dealt with the COVID-19 crisis and how it impacted their product. The focus will be on film festivals organizers and their reactions to the crisis that is likely to mark the history of film festivals.

## 1.2 Research questions, objectives, and structure

This study aimed to address the following research questions:

- How digital technology renew and reinvent the Film Festival product?
- What factors contribute and counteract to that process? (Larson, 2011)
- How the status of Film Festivals as a hub of exchange (Iordanova, 2016) is affected by that process?

Having as a trigger the crisis of covid-19, the key objective of the study is to understand the film festival product innovation in terms of digital technology and how organizers react to that. The case studies will focus on festival organizations and their perceptions on the reinvention of film festival product. Key objectives are adapted from Larson’s study (2011) about innovation and creativity in festival organizations.

To fulfil these goals, the study will examine the relevant literature on festival and film festival studies. In the chapter on contextualization, an overview of the film festival sector will be presented. Then, the framework of the study, along with the research proposition, will be clarified. In the next chapter, the methodology will be present. In the data analysis sector, the main findings will be presented, while in the discussion part, there will be conclusions for each

proposition and a comparison with previous studies. In the conclusion, the main point will be presented alongside with limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 A brief history of film festivals and the rise of film festival studies

The year 1932, when first the Venice Film Festival opened, marked not only the origin of film festival but also laid the foundation of the annual international film festival, which considered “a very European institution” (Elsaesser, 2005). Since then, film festivals have been grown and developed in every direction. Having undergone many changes both technologically and socially (Rüling&Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010), until they become the events and the institutions, we know today, film festivals went through different phases, trying to define themselves and find their own space in the film industry and academia.

De Vlack (2007) distinguish three main phases of film festival evolution. The first phase arises with the establishment of the first recurring film festival in Venice and fades in the early 1970s. This period coincides with many political changes and turbulent times in Europe. Looking back at the origins of the first major film festivals in Europe namely the Venice International Film Festival and Festival of Cannes can be deduced that the art of cinema was not the main purpose of their launch. While the Cannes Festival was a response to Venice Film Festival, Wong (2011) identify economical and geopolitical points that led to their existence. Venice Film Festival was a creation of the Fascist Regime while Cannes Film Festival was presented as the anti-Fascist answer. Their hidden agenda included the restoration and the promotion of the national identity. Also, both of them wanted to lure Hollywood in order to mend their shattered film industry. Another point is that none of these two cities that host these A-list film festivals were ever film production centers. Rather, both cities are touristic destinations and film festivals have become assets in their tourism industry by enringing it during low seasons. In the post-war period, their paradigm was followed by many cities within Europe which established film festivals driven by economical, political and cultural reasons giving a platform to showcase films that not originated from United States (De Vlack, 2006). On one hand, film festivals were a barrier to slow down the domination of the American film industry in Europe, while on the other hand, they become a vehicle to promote the national film production of the country that were organized them.

Although some scholars argue that film festivals have been placing themselves as an opposition to Hollywood by prioritizing culture over commerce, some others suggest that European film festivals operate alongside with mainstream film industry and the Hollywood system (Dickison, 2014). De Vlack (2007) challenge the dipolar of the European versus

Hollywood festival model which is mirroring the commercial versus culture and arguing that festivals are balancing acrobatically between art, entertainment, and business.

The passage from the first to the second phase of film festival evolution was marked by the organizational changes that happened in Cannes festival between 1968, when Truffaut and Godar's protest against the removal of Langlois as head of the France Cinematheque, in combination with the events of May in Paris resulted in shutting down the festival (Elsaesser, 2005), and 1972. Having been accused of being too focused on glamorous star and prizes, Festival de Cannes added new sections, dedicated to new filmmakers and other showcases (De Vlack,2006, Elsaesser, 2005). However, the most influential change was the shift in the program selection process the responsibility of which moved from the national committees to the festival director (Elsaesser, 2005). That shift, followed without delay from many European festivals, was an ultimate move that transformed the initial film festival format and lead not only lead to institutional and organizational revolution but also the reevaluation of festivals profile and identity (De Valck,2006, Elsaesser, 2005). Also, it affected the way that European cinema is perceived.

During the third phase which is placed in the 1980s, the world witnessed a global proliferation of film festival and the creation of the international film festival circuit (De Vlack,2006). The festival became more professional and institutionalized. Alongside the A-list film festivals, numerous smaller festivals emerged, which play their significant role. These festivals having shaped with "more limited goals in mind" and focusing on many different themes from human rights to ecology, brought primarily changes in the festival landscape engaging different audience segment and bringing sometimes politics into the discussion (Wong, 2011).

Despite the long history and their strong ties with the film industry, politics and society, film festivals became the object of study six decades after their appearance in Europe. Dickinson (2014) points out that the first single-authored publication exclusively dedicated to the film festival is de Valck's book "Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia" published in 2007. Since then, film festivals gain increasingly the attention of researchers who came to realize that they are "a phenomenon in their own right" (Archibald and Miller, 2011). The developing field of film festival studies have found its place between film and media studies when the scholars from these two fields paid attention to the growing phenomenon of film festival and used their perspectives to analyze and explain it (Rüling&Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010).

While film festival research from the perspective of tourism and marketing and the impact of festivals on host cities was quite developed, in general, the field is in its initial stages. However, the growing body of scholars confirm the interest and boldly underline the need for theorization (Rüling&Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). Ruling and Strandgaard Pedersen (2010) try to draw the attention of organizational and management scholars by suggesting a rich researching agenda which present film festival as “arenas of emerge”.

Gradually, “histories and sociologies of festivals” make it evident that film festival is not only about films (Wong, 2011). The notion of them as “multifarious agents” have arisen (Dickison, 2014) since numerous studies have endeavoured to make festivals’ versatility understandable. Being on the crossroads of many disciplines, film festivals bring together various constituents and reflect a divergent set of values (Rüling&Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). Since the flourish of film festival studies, film festivals have been viewed and examined from different perspectives and multidisciplinary approaches. However, the very first question that early research put at the dawn of the still-emerging subject areas, is yet to be answered: *what a film festival actually is?* (Archibald and Miller, 2011)

## 2.2 Film festival: definitions and typologies

Despite and/or because of their recognition as a newly emerging phenomenon, as an integral part of European cinema and as complex entities, film festivals defy a single definition. There have been varying perspectives on what film festivals are, their intent, meaning, and importance in the larger film community and industry.

Van Vliet (cited in Geus, Richards&Toepoel, 2015) define festivals as a gathering of a relatively large group in a particular public area for a defined period of time, during which participants are given a unique, planned and arranged for a specific purpose, experience. This experience includes elements of transformation and plays which allow visitors to act and feel differently than in their everyday life. In the same spirit, Elsaesser (2005) admits that a festival, being moments of self-celebration of a community, requires an occasion, a place, and the presence of a crowd. Thus, film festival "as an annual gathering for the purpose of reflection and renewal partakes in the general function of festival" (Elsaesser, 2005).

From an anthropological perspective, as Dayan (1997) suggests, in film festivals all sorts of temporary communities are formed. Assuming that film festivals are collective performances in which specific scripts are followed and the participants supposedly accept and play their role, Dayan (1997) come to realize that in film festivals, regardless of their size, many layers interact, co-exist and contradict in parallel, thus the harmony is not guaranteed,



making the festival "the centre of divergent and sometimes scripts". Another feature of interest in Dayan research in Sundance Film Festival is the important role of the print. Borrowing the Barthe's term, Dayan talks about "the written festival" suggesting that a film festival is living "by the printed word". This indicates that a film festival is defined by the produced print rather than the films that are screened. Therefore, it is the media coverage that builds the significance and the importance of the film festivals.

Also, the film festival has been seen as a place of discovery of new filmmakers (Ostrowska, 2016) and as a hub of exchange (Iordanova, 2016). De Valck (2007) offer a quite strait definition of film festival suggesting that they "are temporary events of short duration where films are shown in an atmosphere of heightened expectation and festivity". Elaborating more, De Valck (2016) dissects film festivals saying that film festivals matters because of (a) the beautiful films that sometimes are exclusively screened on a festival, (b) the festival environment and (c) the prospect of sharing experience. She concludes, that in short festivals 3F's: films, festival and friend. Only recently De Valck (2020) added a fourth "F" for funds. The notion of friends is also mentioned in Dayan's work (1997) insinuating that film festivals are a collective and shared experience.

Regarding the role of film festivals, Harbord (2016) distinguishes four functions. Alongside the notion of discovery, film festival provides a platform for film cultures that otherwise would be utterly overshadowed by a dominant. Also, film festivals provide a secure environment for the films to be debated as part of the public culture. Then, festivals operate routes of distribution securing the circulation of films, which is significant especially for the non-English-speaking films. Finally, film festivals as events are closely tied with the place that are taken place and inseparable part of the local calendar. In the terms of tourism, a film festival contributes to the attractiveness of a place for both visitors and resident.

Driven from that, film festivals could be understood and described through their size and significance. According to these features, events are classified as mega-events, Hallmarks events, major and local events (Allen&McDonnell, 2002). Mega events receive global recognition and acclaim and have utterly contributed to the economy of the country and the cities that are held. They are oriented to attract a large amount of international audience and media, while their political role should not be ignored. Hallmark events are completely identified with the place where they are taking place and with the residents, significantly shaping the image of the city and generating income. Major events have the same characteristics as hallmark events, however, in the latter case, the location is a key adding value to the event and the opposite. Local events aimed mainly at the local population and

their purpose is limited to strengthen the relationship between the community and the entertainment.

Getz and Page (2007) having recognized the element of the authenticity and the quality on hallmarks events, make it possible for Getz at all (2012) to discuss about iconic events and cultural icons. According to them, cultural icons related to self-expression or personal identity which "leads to the importance of iconic events within specific communities of interest, or social world". These events, having a high symbolic value to those associated with a special interest, provide opportunities for communication, sharing and self-expression. That comes in line with "the writer festival" of Dayan, given that, as Elsaesser (2005) say, the print functions as "performative self-confirmation and reflexive self-definition".

The classification of film festivals by Elliot Grove (2009, 2018) which is slightly evolved within a decade, resemble closely the classification of events by Allen and McDonnell (2002). According to Grove, there are majors film festivals that lead the sector. In rank, these festivals are Cannes, Toronto, Sundance, Berlin, Rotterdam and Venice, each of them with its distinct role and energy. Then, the mini-majors festivals are also important events that attract both the industry and the audience, in this category fall Locarno and Karlo Vary. Other festivals which attract the attention of the audience and filmmakers, but lack industry presence are the city festival. These festivals, such as London's, are oriented to the local audience. Genre film festival form another type of festivals which cater to specific genres and thus both buyers and visitors are very specific-oriented. Then there are small festivals, with broader themes, usually run by a very extreme small team. These "mom and pop/Novelty" festivals are created only for the pleasure of cinema, and while they may attract some local press, usually the industry is completely absent.

The classification of Grove is primarily made based on the number of acquisition executives that attend a festival. Peranson (2008) taking into consideration more interest groups, sees the film festivals as political actors, and propose two ideal models (a) the "Business Festival" and the "Audience Festival".

The Business Festival model includes the major festivals as they have described in Grove's typology. These events are on a high budget that comes from operating revenue, while they also attract major corporate sponsorships. They host mainly premiers, where the representatives of the films such as directors and actors are present and are involving in Q & As, press conferences and interviews. In Business Festivals the market and the business are also vividly present, the film funds are common as well as the Hollywood studio's involvement and they are running by a large staff. In these prestigious events, the majority of the films is

submitted, and the competition is high. Additionally, major festivals are always keen to expand.

On the other hand, Audience-centre festivals are not premier-oriented, and they do not host many guests. They are on a strict budget; thus, the staff resources are limited. The screened films are seen and picked from other festivals, while the competition is minor. As Wong (2011) points out film markets and formal competitions are hardly present in Audience Festival. That also explains the lack of investments in films and the absence of Hollywood studios. Also, this kind of film festival shows no alternation in their content within the years.

Another important feature in Paterson (2008) models is the categorization of groups of interest that are involved in a film festival and the evaluation of their importance regarding the two different types of festivals. The seven interest groups are Distributors, Sales Agent, Sponsors, Government, Audience, Critics and Filmmakers. For the Business Film Festival model, the three more important groups are Distributors, Sales Agents and Sponsors, while for the Audience Film festival model are Audience, Sponsors and Government. It is interesting that in both models' critics and filmmakers are occupied the sixth and seventh place of importance, respectively. Being in the tail end, it seems that filmmakers are attending business festivals as part of doing publicity while attending audience festivals is more like fun, socialization with other filmmakers and engagement with the audience, especially for younger filmmakers.

These two ideal models by Paterson incorporate, both typical characteristics for the operation of the film festival and the interest groups that affect the success of the festival. The pressure groups influence the types of films that are screened and the general content of the film festival. However, as Paterson (2008) suggest, the lines between these models are blurred since most film festivals fit somewhere in between.

### 2.3 Film Festival Experience as a product

Film festivals are multi-dimensional and complex events that have become a global phenomenon with a profound impact on film history and industry (Elsaesser, 2005). Film Festivals have been, also, well-analyzed from a tourism perspective, given that events are a key motivator for tourism, urban regeneration and an efficient enhancer of destination image (Quinn, 2009). Plenty of theories and concepts from tourism and travel research, especially those focused on travel motivation have been applied in events, endeavouring to conceptualize the event experience.

Morgan (2008) argues that "festivals provide space and time away from everyday life in which intense extraordinary experiences can be created and shared". Nordvall et al (2014) in their study about how the interaction between event visitors influences the individual's total event experience, found out that at Storsjöyran music festival the social motives, thus shared experience (to experience the social atmosphere, spend time with friends and meet new people) were the primary or secondary reason for attending the event. Regarding the festival goers' motives, Getz (1991), based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, claim that festival can cover physical, social and personal needs. Several studies have been identifying some common motives in attending festivals (Crompton and McKay, 1997, Baez and Devesa, 2017). The most important are escape (break from routine), novelty by means of new experiences, family togetherness, socialization and the festival itself. In the case of film festivals, where a variety of audience are attracted, several factors may cover diverse needs for diverse types of visitors (Park et al. 2011). Baez and Devesa (2017) identify three types of attendance motivation in a film festival. The first is related to leisure, the second with professional matters which present a compulsory aspect and the third the passion and the experience of cinema itself.

In film festival studies, several times have been mentioned that the uniqueness of these events lays -among others- to the vivid atmosphere that is created during the event \*. According to Bohme (1993), the atmosphere is the principal object of perception immediately felt, even before anything else, when entering a new place. In his words, "atmosphere is what relates objective factors and constellations of the environment with my bodily feeling in that environment. This means: "atmosphere is what is in between, what mediates the two sides." (Bohme, 2016). Thus, the atmosphere exists in the space in-between the person who experience (subject) it and the environment/space (the object) (Bohme, 1993). That has been said, Michels and Steyert (2017) suggest that atmosphere is the "connective factor" that keeps together multiple ambiguities. They also point out that atmosphere cannot be fully crafted because it is exposed to potentiality and the momentum that emerge through interaction. That is in line with Nordvall et al (2014) findings of the ways that others visitors can affect an individual's event experience and Dayans (1997) who found out that in film festivals preexisting scenarios cannot be followed.

De Molli, Mengis and van Marrewijk (2019) using the framework of Bohme and Michels and Steyert explored the atmosphere of the Locarno Film Festival. They revealed that the film festival creates its atmosphere with three main aesthetic practices: interrelating different

aesthetic codes and expressions; guiding aesthetic engagement through thresholds, interiors, and corridors; and creating a centre of the experience.

In their case study, De Molli, Mengis and van Marrewijk (2019) observed that organizers preferred to let the different aesthetic codes co-exist, preventing the homogeneity. By doing that, they reinforced the participation and the free expression of both locals and festivalgoers. However, in order to better guide the festival experience and carve the festival atmosphere festival organizers used thresholds, interiors, and corridors as an aesthetic simulation. Since the Locarno Film Festival is taking place in multiple locations within the city, the "thresholds" introduce the festivalgoers to the festival world (ex. the festival poster in the train station of the city), the interiors make festivalgoers feel that they dig into the comfort of cinema (ex. small alternation to the places that festival takes over), while the corridors make the transition from place-to-place part of the experience, and they guarantee a seamless festival experience. Finally, because of the variation of festival's locations, the existence of a centre of the experience is crucial to keep the rhythm and foster the unique atmosphere of the event.

Geus, Richards and Toepoel (2015) define event experiences as an interaction between the individual and the event environment, which is affected by expectation and motives. In this case, they suggest that the event environment can be interpreted as an experimental stage. From a business perspective, Pine and Gilmore (1999) define experience as "events that engage individuals in a personal way" and they propose a shift from the delivery service economy to a staged experience economy. This shifting up of the Progression of Economic Value means more than offering a memorable experience or enriching the existing ones because experiences are not about "entertaining costumes, it's about engaging them" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). In other words, an experience arises when a company deliberately uses services as the stage and the goods as a prop to engage customers in a way that creates a memorable event (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). In the case of film festivals, participants are more appealed and immersed by the unique atmosphere of the event rather than the physical characteristics (Park, Oh & Park, 2010)

An experience can be customer engaging in many ways. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggest an experience realm of four dimensions: entertainment, education, escape and aesthetic. In their concept, they also took into consideration customer's participation and the relationship with the environment that connects customers and the event. Regarding the participation that could be passive, when the customers do not directly influence the performance or active when the customer does have an impact on the event. On the other hand, when an experience

"going into" the customer, absorption occurs, whilst, when the customer "goes into" the experience, they are immersed.

With educational experience, the individual may increase their knowledge and skills and that could happen when mind and/or body are actively engaged. Education involves active participation, while the individual absorbs the events evolving before them. Entertainment is the most developed and common kind of experience, which is absorbed through the senses and requires passive participation. On the other side of entertainment, the escapist dimension involves active participation and greater immersion. In an escapist environment the customer becomes an actor, having a significant impact on the outcome of the event. During aesthetic experiences, individuals have passive participation, while they are getting immersed in the environment. They are not affecting the event or the environment but themselves don't remain untouched. In short, the educational experience is about learning, the escapist about doing, the entertainment about sensing and the aesthetic about being there.

The ultimate goal, according to Pine and Gilmore (1999) is to blur the boundaries between the four dimensions and exploring the possibilities of each realm, because a rich experience incorporates aspects of all above-mentioned dimensions, also referred to as "sweet spot".

Park, Oh and Park (2010) used the experience economy model as a conceptual and measurement framework to evaluate the experience economy of film festival participants. Their finding suggests that Pine and Gilmore's four experience realms can be a reliable measure for film festival experience. According to them, all the dimensions of the experience economy model are vividly present in the film festival experience and they positively contribute to the satisfaction and escape experience which leads to the behavioural intention, thus revisit. As a result, they suggest that a film festival can be perceived as a destination. They finally point out that the experience is not pre-framed by destination attributes, in this case, festival attributes, but it's rather a dynamic interplay between festival offerings.

## 2.4 Innovation in Film festival

The film festival product is interwoven with the notion of experience, which serves as the core product. Other elements that constitute a service product are the supplementary services which mainly support and enrich the core product and the delivery process, which is the way that core and supplementary services are delivered to the customers (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016).

Indeed, as Wirtz and Lovelock (2016) point out, from the point of view of the customer, services are experiences, while from the institutions' perspective, "services are the processes that are designed and managed to create the desired experience for customers."

The product life cycle is also a concept into which film festival as products are fit into. Derived from biology, this concept attempt to classify all the stage that a product goes through and have been implied in both tourism and cultural sector. Kotler and Keller (2015) suggest that a product have four distinct stages: introduction, growth, maturity and decline. In each stage that product has different development and sales rates. In the introduction, the sales are low as well as the profit because of the severe introductory expenses. In the next stage, the product's sales have a rapid climb while the first competitors enter the market. To maintain rapid market growth, the firm should invest in the improvement or/and enrichment of the main product. In the maturity stage, the product experience decreases in the rate of sales growth as the competition become more intense. To reverse the course, the company can adopt expansion strategies or innovation strategies. In the decline stage both sales and profit decline, for multiple reasons. In this last stage, the firm should decide they will sell or liquid the brand or they will renew their product to make it relevant.

In their research in festival in the Rhône-Alpes region, Berneman and Petit (2007) suggest that the concept of product life cycle remains applicable to this cultural product. In the introductory period, festivals consist of a limited number of events, usually around a specific theme (ex. music). In the growth stage, festivals are attracting more audience and they invest in the quality of their content, while also they expand their program by adding parallel events, such as masterclass or exhibitions. During this stage festivals form the strategies and establish the work processes that are going to follow irreversibly or with incremental changes in the maturity stage. In this stage, the innovation paradox can be observed. Larson (2011) points out that the innovation paradox is present in the event industry as it is an industry where projects show a repetitive form. Larson (2011) suggest that the innovation paradox in repetitive projects means that although the recurring project provides a great opportunity for experiment, development and redesign of the work process and therefore foster innovation, in the end, organizations prefer to stick to their methods and institutionalize the work. However, Berneman and Petit (2007) claim that in the decline stage of the festival life cycle, innovative ideas should be introduced, and changes must be done to extend the life of the festival or let it start a new one and engaged the audience.

Kotler and Keller (2015) from a theoretical approach and Berneman and Petit (2007) research results indicate that a life of a product and therefore of a festival can be prolonged

by using appropriate marketing strategies. In both works, the notion of renewing, rejuvenation and innovation are prominent and decisive.

Studies on product development and innovation follow the assumption that acts should be supported by a strategy that is established after a thorough examination of several dimensions (Larson 2009). However, Quinn (1985) claims that innovation is hardly the result of a formal planning system. Instead, he suggests that innovation is a developing process consisted of incremental actions, in which difficulties or obstacles that may appears resulted in unplanned innovations.

Festivals are recurring events that are developed to survive, and even though they are perceived as a sequence of designed and coordinated actions, unforeseeable events are always part of the game (Larson 2011, 2009). The oxymoron here is that one hand, that the long-term relationships that are developed in the context of a festival resulted in an increasingly organized product development (Larson, 2011), stagnation and lack of flexibility and innovation (Nooteboom, 2001). On the other, the high unpredictability of festivals can be assumed as improvisation (Larson, 2011). Larson (2011) suggest that improvisation can be seen as part of emerging innovation work in festival organizations.

Elsaesser (2005) says that film festivals are an organized chaos. Røling and Strandgaard Pedersen (2010) refer to film festivals as arenas of emergence which provide space for different forms of institutional entrepreneurship. They suggest that film festivals create room where innovation from both the core and periphery of the film industry can be showcased. Thus, the emergent innovation work that Larson (2011, 2009) suggested, is highly relevant with film festivals.

Larson's (2011) findings suggest that emergent work focuses on discovering in an uncertain or complex situation. The obtaining knowledge of one festival edition is transferred to the next. The emergent innovation process occurs "under time pressure and in a turbulent environment" when the involved actors react to changed circumstances (Larson, 2011, 2009).

Another important figure of innovation is that various interested groups involved to a great extent in that process. Larson (2009) found out that innovation happens to a great extent with the help of external individuals or organizations. In terms of innovation, festivals most of the times are getting inspired by other festivals (Larson 2009), in the same way, that film festivals expand as a response to another festival's expansion (Paterson, 2008).

Film festivals can be perceived as firms, which need to constantly improve and develop their services to be competitive. Wirtz and Lovelock (2016) suggest that innovation strategies, which can occur in different levels and intensity, in service development is essential to all



service industries. They, also, forecast that digitalization, new hardware and technologies will provide opportunities for service innovations, which will radically the customer experience, service quality, and productivity.

## 2.5 Film Festival, Hybridization, and Digital era

Although the hybrid form of film festival seems to be a hot topic due to the recent pandemic, the notion of hybridity is immersed in film festival nature in many and different ways long before the crises of Covid-19 explode. The emerging of new forms and the generation of film festival product began almost in parallel with the history of the film festival.

Rüling and Strandgaard Pedersen (2010) admit that film festivals are placed in the nexus of numerous institutional logics, namely art, economics, technology, culture, ideology, identity, and power. They serve different roles in the film industry and society in general. Film festivals are not exhausted in film screenings. They are "configuring events" and "ecologies of" learning" that foster the growth of professions, technologies, markets and industries (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010, Lampel & Meyer, 2008). Film Festivals, which also consist of places of power, host and nurture diverse, complex and often hidden relations between multiple stakeholders and participants (Peranson, 2008). That adds to the complexity of the event. No wonder why Harbord (2009) characterize film festival as "curiously intense, yet hybrid event".

Film festivals are multilayered and ever-expanding events that include numerous and diverse activities (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010), which sometimes derail from the narrow frame of films showcase or at least it does not seem that are firmly linked. The majority of film festivals nowadays offer a large program that includes multiple film genres and competitions. Other activities are masterclasses with important people of the industry, Q and As with actors and directors, press conferences, opening, closing and award ceremonies, interviews settings, workshops, markets for co-production, distribution, and recruitment, exhibitions and other social and entertainment events, such as networking meeting, parties, concerts and DJ sets.

However, except for the diverse content that supports the argument of the hybridity in film festivals, the context may also be another important pillar. All these multiple events are not taking place solely in the cinema. Various places host different events that are taking place within the film festival. A film festival is multiply located, and it takes place in a hybrid space (De Molli, Mengis & van Marrewijk, 2019). That fact could be clearer in the case of an urban

film festival, where the activities of the festival are spread within the city. The case of the Locarno Film Festival and the study of De Molli, Mengis and van Marrewijk (2019) is characteristic. Furthermore, it is very telling that film festivals have linked with urban regenerations (Fenwick, 2021), while the urban environment contributes to festival experience since they become inseparable (De Molli, Mengis & van Marrewijk, 2019).

Additionally, film festivals started to experiment, doubt, and investigate the limits of film viewing experience and the cinematic potentials of other arts. The initiative "Exploding Cinema" of the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in 1996, demonstrates a future in which the cinema theatre would represent no longer the only place for film exhibition (de Valck, 2008). That program put into discussion the digitalization and therefore the role of technological development in the film industry and film festivals.

The use of digital technology has significantly changed the organizational form of the film festival. Through digitalization, processes such as ticketing, registration and access control can provide festival organizations with useful data about the festivalgoers. Tracking of festival participants allows the optimization of sessions, seat contingents of the audience. The study of the provided data could also affect the design and the program of the next festival edition to fit the audience taste (Ruling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). However, these data as well as the festival's archives could be very insightful to curators, film historians and academics.

Also, it makes sense to take a look at the ways that films are screened in film festivals. The digital transformation changed the filmmaking and the post-production, it turned the movie theatres to digital and force film festivals to follow the same path (*De Valck & S Loist, 2016*). 35mm celluloid prints were replaced by Digital Cinema Prints (DCP). The image quality upgraded and unlike celluloid, DCP doesn't tear or scratched. Another assent is that duplicating digital prints is less expensive and the hard drivers can be reused. That allowed wider release and improve logistics since the hard drivers are moving easier from cinema to cinema (Film Distributors' Association, 2013), thus from festival to festival. According to De Valck (2008), that kind of digital development influenced festivals in many ways. It makes them embrace and articulate the emerging aesthetic trend of hybridity. Also, the process of programming has fundamentally changed due to the continually expanding quantity of films submitted. Thus, film festival markets must respond to "the demands of operating in an increasingly multimedia corporate environment" (De Valck, 2008).

Digital distribution and exhibition are turning points full of possibilities for film festivals. It is easy to say that digitalization and new technological developments allow the festivals to screen a film in unexpected places (ex. open-air, drives in, urban environment), but it goes

beyond that -probably swallow observation. Although the classic film festival format, aka theatrical projection, continue to dominate, an emerging generation of film festivals is about to rise (De Valck & S Loist, 2016). New forms of films, such as web films that attracted the attention of Sundance Film festivals, films shots with mobile phones (ex. the case of *Tangerine*, a Sean Baker's, which premiered at 2015 Sundance Film Festival and had an excellent run at film festivals around the worlds, is characteristic), virtual reality and online film festivals are part of the current of digitalization and definitely a thing within film and film festival industry.

Bekker (2015) in her study about early online festivals, tried to present the development of this phenomenon and analyze whether or not virtual can be perceived as space, the content of the online festivals and the business motivations behind online festivals. Bekker (2015) argue that the notion that a virtual location might foster new ways of interaction among the audience and create vivid communities online, proved unrealistic. On the other hand, Brunow (2020) argue that despite online viewing tend to be framed as an individual experience, a sense of community and communal view experience can be provided. To support his argument, he presented Carol Morley's Friday Film Club and the event "Come Together". They are two initiatives that rose during the first lockdown. The Friday Club was a suggestion on Twitter from the director Morley in order to entertain the isolation. That first call was a success and the Club lasted for almost 20 weeks. Every Friday a different movie by a female filmmaker or with a strong female lead were screened. The films were free in collaborations sometimes with different organizations, they were screened at the same time from the audience, which commended real-time on Twitter. Sometimes a discussion with filmmakers would be followed. "Come together" was initially planned as an offline workshop by the Swedish Archive for Queer Moving Images. It moved online because of the lockdown. In the "Come together" event the films would be seen at the same time, rather they were discussed in a scheduled zoom meeting. They managed to maintain the community feeling by using invitation and not promoting the event widely and by having a limited number of guests. It is interesting to highlight that both the initiative are addressed to a specific audience and try to turn the attention and reinforced specific groups, women on hand and Queer communities on the other. Although none of them are recurring film festivals, their example could be insightful in terms of inline curation and connection.

The main motivation behind the creation of the online film festival turned out to be the provision of a platform where web films and other digitally content would be exhibited. Online film festivals appeared to be the most suitable form to distribute these kinds of digital productions. Furthermore, Bekker (2015) seems to support De Valck (2008) argument about

the importance of festival space. Using as examples two online film festival, the American Media That Matters Film Festival and the Japanese CON-CAN Movie Festival, which started their running in early 00' De Valck (2008) suggest that both online festivals organize offline events in order to create credibility around their online event. CON-CAN had its offline award ceremony in Tokyo, while the American Media That Matters Film Festival held a festival-like event in New York, where celebrities are invited, to present the program. These offline events add value and attract the media attention, which will be unlike in virtual space (De Valck, 2008). On the other hand, Bekker (2015) used the cases of the South Korean Seoul Net Festival and FIFI Festival to underline that a solely virtual festival is not a feasible operation. The real-time events help the online festivals to be a media event, create a more festival-resemblance atmosphere, and provide trustworthiness (Bekker 2015, De Valck 2008). On the other hand, it seems that online events offer an alternative exhibition space and give access to a worldwide audience (Bekke, 2015). Bekker (2015) also brought into discussion a contemporary online film festival in order to examine if her findings are still relevant in a younger online film festival. My French Film Festival (MFFF) launched in 2011 and focuses on France. This initiative aims to promote the France-language filmmakers to an international audience. MFFF appears to be an offspring UniFrance, a government-funded organization of film professional, which promotes French film and AlloCine France's biggest online film directory. The director of the first declared that the creation of MFFF was a result of a decline of art house cinemas around the world, the decreased interest of the global market for France titles and the ageing of the audience that prefer arthouses France movies (Bekker, 2015). However, it is an interesting fact that nowadays the MFFF which is still running provides in-theatre screening in various countries (Presentation - MyFrenchFilmFestival, 2021), That, boldly underlines the finding of both above-mentioned academics that the combination of online and offline elements is inevitable because the festival space matter.

On the other hand, online and digital productions have attracted the attention of well-known and established film festival. International Film Festival of Rotterdam started exploring the new aesthetic trends from 1996 through the program "Exploding Cinema", while Sundance launched Sundance Online Film Festival (SOFF) in 2001. SOFF aimed to provide a platform and foster the web-only movie (Silverman, 2005). However, web-only films didn't develop in the way that Sundance programmers expected, on 2005 SOFF made a shift in its strategy by screening the same selections of short films being premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. That happened because as Cooper, Sundance chief programmer said, "there weren't that many new voices in web films" (Silverman, 2005).

In the following years, the SOFF faded out only to be replaced with an innovative collaboration between Sundance and YouTube. Since 2013 the two institutions have developed a close partnership. YouTube support is a presenting sponsor of Sundance Film Festival Short Film Program, host opening receptions for the directors of the program as well as the YouTube Audience Award which is awarded to the shorth movie that generates more views throughout the festival (Brouwer, 2016, Gutelle, 2015) Also, from 2016, YouTube present the Short Film Tour which takes place after the Sundance film festival and brings a selection of winning short films in cinemas around the US (Brouwer, 2016). Apart from that, this collaboration is constantly enriched and include multiple panels and sessions such as the “YouTube & The Rise of Virtual Reality Panel Discussion” in 2016, workshops such as Sundance Institute & YouTube New Voices Lab, online parties and DJ's sets as well as online yoga sessions (Brouwer, 2016Cohen, 2014). For the 2022 Sundance has already announced that the festival will take place in person and online in January (Sundance Film Festival | About, 2021). However, it seems that online is hardly a new practice for the festival as it was always experimenting with digital both in aesthetic and delivery process terms. That has been said it appears that Sundance had embraced a lot of forms of hybridity and constantly question the traditional form and content of the film festival.

### 3. Contextualization of film festival sector

Despite the constant development of film festivals, the last decades, and the increasing attention that academia shows to them, in general terms, film festivals are considered an under-researched sector of the film industry. Thus, due to the lack of relevant studies and research is challenging to define and present an accurate outline of the sector.

According to a Follows' article dated in 2013, more than 9.700 film festivals had at least one edition in the years between 1998-2013. Within the years 2011-2013 around 3.000 film festivals were active. From them, 69.7% are in North America, 18.1% in Europe, 6.2% in Asia, 3.4% in Oceania, 1.8% in South America and only 0.8% in Africa. However, film festivals are still considered a European phenomenon. The most important and long-lasting film festivals, which shape and lead the film festival industry are European, namely Cannes, Venice Film Festival and Berlinale. The country that hosts the most film festivals in the USA with 62.6%, followed by the United Kingdom and Canada with 5.5% each. Italy, France and Germany, which host the three biggest film festivals in the world have 1.7 % of the world's film festivals each.

Most of the film festivals were created after 2007 (Follows, 2013). The peak of the new festivals, creation was in 2009, while the worst year for new festivals, was 2012. According to Follows research (2013) half of the film festivals run for less than 7 days, while a large number of festivals (25.7%) that claims to run over 30 days could be explained due to year-round events and celebrations. Approximately, 56% of film festivals have any form of competition and 10% include film market events and activities. However, it's telling, that two out of three majors film markets are part of a film festival. The Cannes Film festival & Marche seems to be the most attended film market with more than 30.000 attendances, followed by European Film Market, which is linked with Berlinale, and American Film Market, which is a business-oriented event unattached to any film festival (Follows, 2017).

To understand more the film festival industry, it would be helpful to take a look at some numbers of some important festivals. After the "big three", Toronto International Film Festival is considered the fourth major film festival in the world, selling more tickets than any other film festival. In 2015 sold 530,000 tickets (Follows, 2016). The same year, the cost of TIFF was over \$42 million, while the income was around \$43 million (Follows, 2016). BFI London Film Festival is an important mini-major film festival and the biggest film festival in the UK. In 2012 the festival recorded 149.000 attendees, while in 2019, 178.789 attendees (BFI London Film Festival attendance 2012-2019 | Statista, 2019)

Another important feature is the increasing number of submissions to the largest film festivals. For instance, Raindance Film Festival in the UK had less than 1000 film submissions in 2010 while in 2015 had 4.000 (Follows, 2017). That, also related to the increased access to knowledge and technology, which has affected all the aspects of the film industry.

Furthermore, what makes the film festival sector difficult to define is its complexity. De Valck in his thesis (2006) describes and analyzes the development of the film festival phenomenon and the emerge of a global film festival network. According to her findings, film festivals have successfully established vital links, with various other actors, such as governments, Hollywood, the Avant-garde and city marketeers. As a result, film festivals have broadened their agendas and the number of people who benefits from these annual events multiplies. This strengthened the position of film festivals and lead to a global spread. The parts that form the film festival network are so intertwined that no one risk breaking the vital links and endanger the established system (De Valck, 2006). Moreover, De Valck (2006) suggests that film festival network is self-sustainable. Film festivals always work towards their survival, and to do that they need to redefine themselves as part of the larger festival network and adapt to transformations.

Regarding the complexity of the sector, Iordanova (2015) adds that film festivals are the place that film and people cross paths. Film festivals are the place that careers changes and strategies emerged, is the place where films are seen, but also developed. Thus, Iordanova argues that film festivals are film culture's principal node.

## 4. Framework and Research Propositions

In the literature review, different aspects of film festivals were examined through the length of different authors. The main aspects which set the framework of the study are related to the film festival experience which forms the product of a film festival, the notion of hybridity and innovation.

Regarding what consist of a film festival this study adopts De Valck's perspective (2016). She suggests that a film festival is about films, the festival environment and the shared experience. Regarding the film festival experience, the model of experience proposed by Pine and Gilmore, have been taken into consideration. Their model suggests the dissection of experience into four realms: education, esthetics, escapism and entertainment. It seems that this experience model is present direct or indirect in several studies regarding the film festival. De Valck definition of film festivals involves escapism and entertainment. Park, Oh and Park (2010) suggest that Pine and Gilmore's experience model is applicable in a film festival context. Also, esthetics are vital in the De Molli, Mengis and van Marrewijk (2019) study, where they explore the creation of the festival atmosphere in a hybrid space.

De Molli, Mengis and, van Marrewijk (2019) study also set a framework about the notion of hybridity. In their study, they research how the atmosphere is created in the different places that the film festival is taking place. They suggest that three main aesthetic practices craft the festival atmosphere, namely the use of different aesthetic codes and expressions; the guidance of aesthetic engagement; and the creation of a centre of the experience. However, because this study attempts to explore hybridity in terms of digital technology, thus de Valck's (2008) and Bekker's (2015) suggestions regarding online and offline events in film festivals have been taken into consideration. According to them, offline events expand the exhibition possibilities and the potential audience, while offline events add value and credibility to the festival.

Finally, the notion of innovation in the work of Larson (2011,2009) has been taken into consideration (2011,2009). She suggests that emergent innovation occurs under uncertainty, the pressure of time and a turbulent environment. Also, she proposes that innovation requires the collaboration of multiple actors and festivals are inspired by other festivals. Furthermore, in terms of innovation and digital technology, Wirtz and Lovelock (2016) point out that digitalization will bring plenty of opportunities in service innovation and will improve the customer experience.



The above-mentioned theoretical framework and particularly the notion of emerge innovation by Larson, form the following propositions.

P1: The crisis of Covid-19 fostered the digital transformation of film festivals.

P2: During the years 2020 and 2021, film Festivals found in a position to re-define themselves in a rapidly changing world.

P3: Digital technology helped film festivals reach multiple categories of audience and engage with them with different ways

P4: To deal with the crisis film festivals had to collaborate with different stakeholders.

P5: Film festivals will embrace digital technology and hybrid form even more in their delivery process

## 5. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to examine the hybridization in terms of digital technology from the perspective of the organizers. The goal of gathering insightful information about how the teams reacted to the forced hybridization of their festival was about to be pursued by developing the study as qualitative research using in-depth interviews. However, early on in the study, it became clear it would be insufficient and incomplete to interview the organizers without understanding in-depth the context in which they work, namely the film festival itself.

Thus, the dissertation has incorporated elements that resemble a qualitative case study, with the aim to explore the phenomenon of hybridization in film festivals and identify challenges and opportunities from the perspectives of organizers. A qualitative case study allows researchers to explore in-depth a phenomenon within a specific context (Rashid et al., 2019). In a case study, a real-time phenomenon is investigated within its natural context, given that the particular context will make a difference (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). This method permits the researcher to describe a phenomenon using a mixture of data sources, which ensure that the topic is explored through multiple aspects and lenses (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Baxter and Jack (2008) claim that the key approaches that guide case study methodology are based on constructivism. According to the constructivist paradigm, truth is relative and depends on an individual's perspective. The main benefit of the constructivist approach is that it allows the two parties (researcher and participant) to work closely together, while allows the participants to tell their stories. These stories narrate participants' views of reality and permit the researcher to better grasp their behaviours (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2003, cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) argue that there are four factors for which the case study method should be considered. First, when the study aims to answer why and how questions, secondly when the researcher is unable to control participants behaviour, third when the researcher thinks that the context should be covered within the study because is relevant to the phenomenon and forth when the borderline between phenomena and context is unclear.

The above-mentioned rationales of the qualitative case study approach were appropriate for this study. Following Baxter and Jack (2008), this research was performed as a multiple case study, because it looked at the same issue (hybridity), in different contexts (different film festivals). Also, for the development and the organizing of the research, The Rashid et al's (2019) framework of the case study method was taken into consideration.

Yin (2003, cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) says that multiple case studies are utilized to predict similar results or predict contrasting results but for predictable reasons. On the other,

Gummesson (1988, cited in Larson, 2011) suggests two types of case studies. The one that allows the researcher to draw general conclusions from a limited number of cases and the other that permits drawing certain conclusions from a particular case. This study follows the first type of Gummesson typology and examines seven film festivals that are organized from six different teams.

## 5.1 Sample and data collections

Within these two years, the film festival industry had the urge to discuss and exchange experiences and opinions about the challenges that the covid-19 posed. That resulted in multiple online discussion and panels where film industry and film festival professionals were present and were engaged in relevant discussions. Online talks series such as Screen Talks and CineLink Talks by the British film magazine Screen International (available on YouTube), and online panels such as “The Future of Hybrid and Digital Film Festivals” organized by the Pendance Film Festival (Available on YouTube) and the round table “WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE FILMS OF 2020?” by Doha Film Institute, invited film festivals and program for different festivals into a discussion about emerging issues. I attended these panels through the lens of a film festival professional. Having been part of film festivals in Greece and abroad, I interpreted these discussions having in-depth knowledge about the structure, the production and the delivery of a film festival. My personal experience alongside with the above-mentioned online panels and discussions, make me realise that film festivals followed different strategies to cope with pandemic’s restrictions. As de Vlack and Damiens (2020) claim, film festivals were not affected the same way by the crisis. The impact in every festival was not the same and not at the same time or scale. Thus, festivals’ organizers had to put in first-line their creativity and adaptability and made decisions. They had to find solutions that match their festival.

It was important to include in this study festivals that followed different strategies, so I could cover and explore different angles of the topic. For that reason, I found it essential to identify, to the highest possible degree, given the limitation of time, the main strategies that film festivals pursued.

I choose to take a closer look at the initiative “We Are One: A Global Film Festival”, which was organized by Tribeca Enterprises. The initiative was a team-up of various A-list and major film festivals around the world. We are One: A Global Film Festival was a free online festival, run from May 29 - June 7, 2020, exclusively on YouTube. This initiative aimed to gather and support the film community in times of crisis (We are one: A Global Film Festival, 2020). By

examining all the festivals that participated in this initiative through secondary data (festivals' websites and reports, online articles, social media), I identified five strategies.

- Cancellation: Film festivals that cancelled their edition during 2020, or even if they pull out some events, they didn't count it as their edition
- Hybrid Format: Film Festival that had both online and in-person present
- Fully Online: Film festivals transferred all of their activities online
- Two-parts festival: Film Festivals that split their editions into two parts which took place in a different month.
- In-person: Festivals that manage to host an in-person festival in accordance with official state and health directives. These festivals didn't or hardly sift some of their activities online

In the Appendices (Appendix A) there is the whole list of the festivals that participated in the initiative, categorized by the strategy that they applied. Each festival is followed by a brief description of its strategy.

From the identified strategies, only three of them could be included in the study to study further the phenomenon of hybridization from the perspective of organizers: the hybrid format, fully online and two-parts festival. Then, I created a list with film festivals around the world that could consist of an insightful paradigm of each strategy. I communicated with them mostly by email and I requested an interview. I sought one interview per festival with a person that had an active role in the preparation of the festival during the time of crisis. Wolcott (cited in Baker and Edwards, 2012) said that "for many qualitative studies one respondent is all you need- your person of interest". Some of the festivals asked for an interview guideline, while others didn't. Some festivals kindly refused to participate due to the high volume of requests, while others propose to have the interview later in September due to their tied schedule.

The final list of the participant is the following:

- Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF) and Thessaloniki Documentary Festival (TDF), Greece

Interview with Mrs Dimitra Nikolopoulou, Head of Communication

- Reykjavík International Film Festival (RIFF), Iceland

Interview with Mrs Auður Elísabet Jóhannsdóttir, Festival Producer

- BendFilm Festival, USA

Interview with Mr Todd Looby, Executive Director

- Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (POFF), Estonia

Interview with Mrs Tiina Lokk, Festival Director

- Singapore International Film Festival (SIFF), Singapore

Interview with Mrs Emily J. Hoe, Executive Director

- Glasgow Film Festival (GFF), UK

Interview with Mrs Sarah Emery, Festival Coordinator

The interviews were semi-structured and took place from the second half of May until July. The guideline of the interviews can be found in the Appendices (Appendix B). Five of the interviews were conducted in English and one in Greek. The interviews were conducted online through Zoom and lasted from 15 to 40 mins, they were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed.

## 5.2 Methodology of the Analysis

Before each interview, I examined the background, the profile and the strategy of the festival, so I would be able to make specific and relevant questions and gather deep information. These aspects were examined through secondary data. The festivals' official website, festivals' official reports, press releases, journalist articles and academic sources were used in that process. That helped the development of the interview as it allowed me to follow the interviewee and be able to add and ask for more information about specific issues.

Then the transcribed interviews were first analysed in the festival context because that could provide insightful information about the reason why each team acted, they did. In the Appendices (Appendix C) can be found an analysis of the festivals alongside the main point of the interviews. The festivals are presented in chronological order, from the one that held first in March 2020 to the one that held the last in February 2021. Then a thematic analysis was conducted in order to identify the common issues and patterns. These thematics are presented in the following chapter.

## 6. Data analysis

### 6.1 Strategies and the notion of hybridity

On multiple occasions, by multiple academic authors was pointed out that film festivals are not only about the exhibition (De Vlack, Kredell & Loist, 2016, Iordanova, 2015, Peranson, 2008, Elsaesser, 2005, Dayan, 1997). A great number of actors are involved in these events and film festivals have become those days multilayers events.

All the festivals that are included in this study include many and different events during their festivals. All of them have competitions, which in some cases foster the reputation and the validity of the festival. The Silver Screen Award by Singapore International Film Festival is one of these cases because is considered that the launch of the award in 1991 supported the local filmmakers presenting their work to a global audience. On the other hand, the newly introduced award of Glasgow Film Festival comes in line with the status of the festival, which is claimed to be an audience-centred one. Thus, GFF only award is determined solely by the audience. While in all the other festivals there are juries.

Except for the competition sections, festival host in their program other usually non-competitive sections, such as "Sound & Vision" by GFF, which is underline the strong link between music and cinema, the Virtual Reality sections from Thessaloniki International Film Festival, which explore the innovative technology in cinema art and the sub-program Fashion Cinema by POFF. These examples explore the connections of cinema with other kinds of arts.

Also, all the examined festivals host ceremonies such as opening and closing night, red carpets and reward ceremonies, which is a way to attract media attention and raise awareness towards their agenda. Their agenda most of the time includes the foster of local productivity and the support of local filmmakers. Thus, other essential parts of the festivals are their education activities and industry events. Most of them such as POFF, Thessaloniki International Film Festival, Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival, Reykjavik Film Festival and GFF have their industry events run in parallel to the festival. SGIFF's industry event used to be a separate event that is now attached to the festival. On the other hand, BendFilm seems that does not have a specific industry section, however the urban and relaxed atmosphere of the festival, the networking events, parties as well as the masterclasses and events such as First Feature Programme, in which alumni of the festival talk about their experience doing their first movie and discuss with younger filmmakers, allow the interactions between different

parties of the film industry. Also, festivals invest in the education of local youth, audience, and professionals by developing relevant programs.

Furthermore, these festivals are taking place in multiple locations and include events such as music concerts, art exhibitions and installations. Thus, it's evident that all the examined festivals had elements of hybridity long before the hit of Covid-19. However, the health restrictions that implement in every country due to the pandemic affected all the festivals, which try to re-design their programs and find the best possible solution.

Most of the interviewees admitted that their teams working on different possible scenarios. It is characteristic that Mrs Hoe from SGIFF, mentioned that their scenarios were spanned from the most optimistic, that was to host an in-person festival, to the most dramatic, or "apocalyptic" one, which was the cancellation of the festival. That last option was on their agenda only if all the other options were exhausted. Frankly, none of the interviewees actively thought of cancelling their editions. Most of the time the reason was linked with the local and film community. Mrs Nikolopoulou from TIFF mentioned that it was essential for them not to cancel their industry event because it was important for them to present and support projects that present a topicality. Also, their 2020's edition of the Documentary Film Festival was free of charge for the audience to support both the film industry and the people. A similar reaction had the BendFilm, which designed their steps during the pandemic having as main axes the community engagement and the independent films.

Every festival in this study may have followed strategies that have been already found while the initiative "we are one" was examined. However, because of the uniqueness of each festival every strategy except for the obvious similarities, appeared some unique points. One of the main similarities was the use of digital technology in order to transfer part of their activities online. The organizers used technological solutions to maintain contact between them, the film industry and the audience. In times of social restrictions, film festivals that are eminently social events had to find a way to exist and fulfil to the most possible degree their goals and missions.

From the interviews, it became obvious that all the festival teams valued first and foremost the physical version of the festival and all of them hoped and worked toward that direction, almost until the last minute. However, all of them had to oblige to specific circumstances and embrace hybridity once again, in different forms. It seems the decision of transferring online the educational and the industrial parts of the festivals came more easily than transferring online the audience-screenings.

The team of the Thessaloniki International Film Festival and Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival followed different strategies for each edition. The 22nd TDF moved online in no time in May of 2020, the same format applied for the 61st TIFF in November of 2020. However, having already organized two festivals online, the team decided to host an extended edition for the 23<sup>rd</sup> TDF by organizing online screenings and events on March of 2021 and a hybrid event with screening both online and in-person, organizing open air and indoors screenings, on June of the same year. That gave the change to the industry professional and the audience to meet again.

Reykjavík International Film Festival threw a hybrid event. The team shifted the majority of the activities online. However, they managed to have some of the industry events in person. Also, the educational programmes had to be adapted to the restrictions. Still, the RIFF had in-person screenings in cinemas and other places around the city, as well as drive-in screening, while the organizers had also the opportunity to focus more on the national community.

BendFilm Festival organized hybrid version included the virtual festival through the Eventive, online conversations, panels, Q & As and drive-in screenings. Before that, the team wanted to engage and be present for the community. Thus, the festival hosted a series of online events and during the summer they organized social socially distant screenings and drive-ins.

Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (POFF) was probably the festival that embraces hybridity with great enthusiasm. However, hosting a physical event was also of great importance. The festival had a hybrid offering both in-person and online screening, opening night and ceremonies were hosted in-person and have been broadcasted. However, the organizers chose to move fully online to their industry event. Additionally, they invested in online platforms and new online initiatives with the goal to expand their activities and impact.

Singapore International Film Festival, also host a hybrid event. Only some parts of the festival went online, while that main part was in-person, with social distancing ceremonies and screenings.

Glasgow Film Festival moved full online. The team organized a virtual festival that included, except the screening, Q & As -live of recorded-, Facebook lives, online DJ sets and parties and game nights. All the aspects of the festival from the industry to educational programs went online.

The factors which at seemed that to determine the reactions and the strategies of the festivals during the covid-19 crisis were the timing, the profile, and the background of each festival.



## 6.2 Festivals' timing

Every organizer team was seeking of hosting a festival as normal as possible. Their goal was to have in-person screenings and events. However, the spread of the novel virus was unpredictable. Festivals didn't know what to expect as the circumstances were changing every day. What all the team had in common was the feeling of uncertainty.

The examined festivals were taking place in different continents, countries, and times during the year. All these factors appeared to be important, while the teams were organized their next steps to deal with the new situation.

In March 2020, days before the first restrictions in Greece, TDF had to push the festival dates in order to come back with a new form. However, they went on with their industry event on their usual day, but they had no other option than to host an online event. Similarly, for 61st TIFF in November 2020, the team lost the small window of the restrictions' alleviation, since the country went to the second lockdown at the beginning of November. That left the team with no other option but the fully online version of the festival. Besides, the organizers had already the know-how. The case of GFF was alike. While the team was working towards a hybrid format, the UK went into a strict lockdown. Thus, the festival shifted all of its activities online.

Other festivals were luckier with the timing and manage to have a hybrid event. For some of them such as the SGIFF, the online part was limited. The producer of the RIFF admitted that they got lucky because they managed to throw a hybrid version of the festival just days before the country goes to the second lockdown.

Therefore, going fully online was a forced option since the festivals were already working in different scenarios. When a strict lockdown hit, the teams, frankly, had two options. The first was to cancel the whole event, which was something that they barely thought about, while the other was to organize a virtual version. At that point, the organizers had to think about the tools that they could use to deliver a high-quality online event. Regardless of the final format of the event, namely fully online or hybrid, the timing of the festival had a major effect on the availability of the relevant online tools, platforms, and know-how.

### 6.2.1 Availability of tools and know-how

While all the teams knew how to organize a "normal" in-person festival, none of them had any experience of delivering an online or hybrid festival. Mrs Emery talked about "blank

canvas" and none of the interviewees had certain expectations or plans about what is about to happen.

In annexes A where the festivals and the main points of the interviews are presenting, it can be observed how the timing of the festival played a crucial role regarding the availability of tools and the establishing of know-how. The festivals are presented in chronological order: from the TDF, which ran on March 2020, to GFF which took place at the end of February 2021. Within this period, the improvement of resources was remarkable, while all the involved parts became familiar with the new reality.

TDF was probably the first festival in Europe that had to make the decision to go online. Mrs Nikolopoulou characterized that process as "terra incognita". The team had no other example to follow. Also, by that time the festival team didn't know what tools to use. To find an effective way to host the "Agora" event, they communicated with different providers and try a lot of things before they found something that could at least cover their basic needs. On the other hand, GFF was one of the last festivals in Europe that took place in a pre-covid environment. One year later, when they were forced to adapt to the new circumstances, the team of GFF examined the strategies of other festivals. Initially, they copied the hybrid model of the BFI London Film Festival. However, as a backup the GFF had already started a collaboration with the platform Shift 72 because as Mrs Emery mentions is "a well-known platform. She mentioned "a lot of festivals, use them as their platform and we actually started using it".

Mr Todd from BendFilm Festival mentioned that within two weeks after the lockdown the development of online platforms that a festival could use boomed. Thus, small, and medium organizations were able to find reliable tools that could cover their needs and give them the freedom to curate an online program. That could be explained as he mentioned with the overnight increase in demand for content.

Different providers jumped in finding a solution to the needs that emerged from the new circumstance and thus cover the gap in the market. Eventive, the ticketing company that BentFilm Festival was collaborating the last six years, expand its services to include all the aspects of the film screening experience. The company is focused on the independent film industry. The BendFilm Festival explained the collaboration with the Eventive and became one of the first festivals that used that platform to screen online movies. The SGIFF chose to use the platform Projector Plus, which was developed by their current partner "The Projector". Initially, the company had venues, among them one of the SGIFF venues.

The team of POFF admitted that they have some time to time to adapt their upcoming editions to the new reality that emerged in spring 2020. Believing that it was not worthy to build its own platform from scratch, The team made extensive research on the available platforms and incorporate different features from each to cover their needs. They used elements from Shift72 and Elisa Stage. Shift72 seems to be the leading platform since three out of six festival teams mention that they use it (GFF, POFF, RIFF). More specifically Mrs Jóhannsdóttir, from RIFF, mentioned that they made a contract with Festival Scope Shift 72. Festival Scope is an industry event platform, which had been used by the TDF in order to screen some films before the festival launce its official edition and its own platform.

The event that forced the collaboration of Festival Scope and Shift 72 to join forces was the inability of the first to manage the heavy traffic and the demands of the online edition of Denmark's CPH: DOX. The Shift72 was called to create and set up a brand-new platform, which finally could steam 150 rather than 40, which was the initial deal between Festival Scope and CPH: DOX ("CPH DOX | Shift72", 2020). From the beginning of April, 2020 Festival Scope has become a sales partner of Shift72, covering a brand-new need. This event boldly underlines how time was crucial for the festival in their effort of adapting to the new reality and find appropriate solutions. The know-how and the technology that developed and became available was game-changing.

### 6.3 Festivals' profile and background

SGIFF and POFF are two festivals that applied a similar strategy during last year by hosting a hybrid festival. Both of them had award ceremonies, opening night, t in-person screenings "physical" and virtual Q&As, while they had an online part too. For both of the teams, the physical version of the festival was essential, and they are fortunate to have one. However, their approach of intergrading digital technology in their festival is quite different. SGIFF did have an online platform offering online screening. In terms of educational and industry events, their digitalization was exhausted to videos. On the other hand, POFF was very keen on incorporating digital technology in their festival, especially in educational and industry programs. Also, the POFF made a serious investment in digital development, which is about to expand even more the next year. It could be said that POFF is more in favour of digitalization than SGIFF.

POFF is an ever-expanding festival that makes stable steps and increases its impact and reinforces its reputation through the years. Also, since the beginning of its creation, POFF has

had the same motivated leader, that supervises every aspect of the festival. On the other hand, SGIFF went through a lot of financial and personnel difficulties in the last decade. After a hiatus of two years, the festival had to rebrand themselves and rebuilt their status and reputation in the international film festival landscape. Given that offline events add value, provide credibility and attract media (De Valck, 2008), it makes sense why SGIFF favoured a strategy that was focused on them, while POFF was more willing to give space on online events, too.

The importance of festival profile and background in decision making could be observed in the other two cases. The digital development and the initiatives that RIFF took, came in line with their goal of enhancing film culture in Iceland, foster film literacy and reach more people around the country. On the other, the decision to offer 22nd TDF screenings free of charge would be easier for the organizers since the festival is state-sponsored. The same decision would be impossible for other festivals.

### 6.3.1 Budget and logistics

The digitalization was for most of the festivals an act of emergency, that requested a reschedule of their budget and logistics.

Mrs Hoe mentioned that budget certainly makes a difference to the approach a festival takes and the program that they deliver. Regarding that, it seems that most festivals relocated their budget from other activities to digital. For example, the number of guests was significantly reduced in all the festivals. It seems that POFF was the festival that made the most important investment in developing online tools that would be used regardless of the outcome of the pandemic. In the case of RIFF, the team managed to find a sponsor to go along with their initiative “Cinema Bus”, which was an idea that came up during the pandemic, but it seems that had already become part of the festival and it came to stay.

Although the future plans of the teams will be discussed in a later section, it's worth mention here, that some of the interviewees mentioned the two different approaches that SGIFF and BendFilm Festival had about the costs. Mrs Hoe said that they found the recordings very useful and interesting online content, which attracted many views and became a repository. Even though they would like to continue offering this kind of online content in the future, Mrs Hoe said that they also should consider the budget. Because if they want to maintain a high quality, they should have the right equipment in order to record their guests on spot and manage their logistics better, because it could be difficult to install a shooting

setup in every venue. In contrast, in a similar question, Mr Looby said that budget it's not a consideration of going online, especially with the system that they use. The different approaches may lay on the profiles of the festivals. BendFilm Festival is a celebration of independent cinema renown for its relaxed atmosphere, which also has been named as one of the "Top 25 Coolest Film Festivals in the World" and it's taking place in a small town, on the contrary SGIFF is a more business-oriented festival and the longest-running film event in Singapore.

Logistics were another issue mentioned by the organizers, mainly from those that hosted a hybrid festival. Both Mrs Lokk and Mrs Hoe mentioned that in their hybrid festival the logistics were a real challenge. Mrs Hoe said that was difficult to make sure that the hygiene rules have been followed. It's characteristic that for their opening night, they had spread their guest and audience in three different screenings, instead of one. Mrs Lokk, also, pointed out the difficulties in organizing the "physical" part of their festival, because a large number of screenings should be scheduled obeying certain rules, such as finishing at a different time to avert the crowds. On the other side, when Mr Looby said that the logistics were easier in the online version than in in-person, was mostly referring to the scheduling of Q & As, masterclasses, tables and speaking. He mentioned that the option of having several speakers online allowed them to be more flexible.

Mrs Emery shared the belief that running a hybrid festival is like running two different festivals at the same time. Although for now, it seems that hybrid format is a necessity, for the future that could be proved a real challenge for the festivals that are keen to integrate hybrid elements.

#### 6.4 Curatorial issues

Despite the complexity and the variety of event and activities that festival includes in their programs, film festivals have primarily about films. Curating an online program appeared to have multiple difficulties and became one of the main concerns of organizers. The film industry reacted to the pandemic by rescheduling the theatrical realize of major films and stall the film productions. That affected the program of the festivals, which had to be digitalized. The organizers could not predict if the directors, the agents and the distributors would allow the digital realize of the films.

Mrs Hoe from SGIFF said that they were relieved that they didn't have to make any curatorial compromises. The team was not sure if they would be allowed to stream online all

the films. SGIFF managed to host a hybrid festival, which means that it could offer the option of theatrical release. In case that someone didn't want to present its film online, Mrs Hoe said, they didn't try to convince them otherwise, as they should respect the vision of the artist. While the SGIFF had the luxury of giving the option to the directors (theatrical vs online realize, or both), it seems that this luxury was a matter of luck exactly because they manage to organize in-person screenings. The same fortune had the RIFF. Mrs Jóhannsdóttir mentioned that they were not sure if they could reach contracts for online screenings for the big feature, for example, she mentioned the movie *Nomadland*. However, RIFF managed to have around 65% of its catalogue available online.

On the other hand, GFF didn't have a hybrid format like SGIFF and RIFF. Mrs Emery believed that shifting the festival fully online would result in losing part of their program. But they proved wrong. GFF didn't lose any of the so-called big films, such as the film "Minari" which was their opening movie. Mrs Emery stated that during that period distributors and directors had no other option since cinemas were closed. Thus, they were willing to have their film online in the GFF. However, it can be detected that between the RIFF, where the organizer mentioned that they could not have deals for big films, and the GFF, where the distributors of big films agreed to online screening, there is a gap of three to four months (Reykjavík International Film Festival Sep 24, 2020 – Oct 4, 2020, vs Glasgow Film Festival Feb 24, 2021 – Mar 7, 2021). It could be assumed that timing played a key role again, by familiarizing the involved parties with the new reality and make them accept that things should be done differently.

However, it is not the aesthetical issues, the vision of the director or the demand for the theatrical experience that may delay the acceptance of online screenings. Film festivals and the whole film industry had to dive into a digital environment that was not well-regulated. In June 2020, the TIFF took an initiative to stop the weakening of the audiovisual sector. Since the use of digital technology is here to stay, the festival suggests that all the stakeholders should start a discussion and set rules in order to protect the ecosystem of the audiovisual industry and guarantee a healthy circulation and distribution of the films (TIFF, 2020). To further support their initiative, the TIFF promised that would apply geo-blocking for the audience to the online diffusion of national and international premieres and lose their rules on international premieres for films that have been recently premiered online. The plea is signed by several festivals and organizations, including POFF.

## 6.5 Communal experience and festival atmosphere

Undoubtedly, festival space and communal experience are important, and that statement was common in all interviews. Mrs Nikolopoulou admitted that the festival atmosphere, as we know it, is impossible to be transferred online. By adopting Bohme (2016) declaration that the atmosphere is what mediated two sides, what is in between, it can be derived that every festival has its own unique atmosphere. Thus, by shifting the same festival online, the created atmosphere is different because the sides, as well as the environment, changed.

That means that all the festivals had a festival atmosphere despite the format that they adopted. However, this atmosphere was different for each festival and in some cases much different from what the organizers were used to.

In Reykjavik, Mrs Jóhannsdóttir said they didn't feel less like a festival, because the city was decorated, with flags and posters the same way it used to be. Also, the RIFF had in-person screenings and events all around the city. That maintained in some degree the familiar festival atmosphere, even though there were no international visitors or guests. The team tried to involve people as much as possible. The directors and filmmakers were unable to come to the festival, send messages that were shown before or after the screening, whatever the screening was online or in cinemas. This solution, which followed in all festivals enhance somehow the festival atmosphere, as it attempted to connect the artist with the audience. Also, social media played an important role in connecting the audience with the festival and resemble or creating a new atmosphere. RIFF invited people to send them photos from their home screenings, how they organize their movie night. Mrs Jóhannsdóttir admitted that this campaign could have gone better, however, they want to do it again as the results were nice and fun.

On the contrary, GFF saw their social media channels break records. GFF had a fully online format, thus social media become a main communication channel with the audience. Mrs Emery said that that especially on Twitter the audience was eager to share film reviews, talk about the films they saw and engage. Probably that was their reaction on lockdown, they tried to create an online festival atmosphere and resemblance the communal experience. Mrs Emery continued that even the festival's Instagram account was popular this year, even though they didn't have a lot of content. For instance, they had no guests, red carpet, or moments from the cinemas to share, as the team managed the whole festival from their computers. Even though the audience got excited, and their enthusiasm and creativity surprised the festival's team. Mrs Emery mentioned that for the opening night, the audience

got dressed and enjoy the screening at home at their pace and they are willing to share that moment. In the case of GFF, the audience and the team manage to pull through the social distance and create an atmosphere. Except for the screenings, the team of GFF tried to alleviate digital fatigue on their industry event by using the app Gather Time. Using vintage graphics, this app allows you to bring your space into life and roam around with your avatar. This made online gathering more natural, humanized and fun.

Social media were central in TIFF and TDF virtual editions. Mrs Nikolopoulou mentioned that they tried to create an alternative atmosphere through social media campaigns and online events, where the audience had active participation. Also, the organizers transferred some of their installations to public spaces, so the audience could see them, while they were walking or exercising according to the restrictions of the Greek government. The festival's artistic interventions in public space were recorded and shared on social media as an effort to recreate part of the festival atmosphere. Furthermore, the TIFF used an iconic venue of the festival to make a statement. A symbolic closed-door screening of the opening film underlined the belief of the festival that cinemas are the natural space of the film, and the communal viewing will always be the essence of the festival. This event was recorded and shared online having a great impact on the audience.

## 6.6 Opportunities, initiatives, and innovation

Festivals are recurring event developed to survive (Larson, 2011) while film festival network is self-sustainable (de Valck, 2006). Thus, it came naturally that the majority of film festivals worked through that unpredictable crisis and tried to redefine themselves and adapt to the circumstances. Under time pressure and in a turbulent environment film festivals find a way to perform. Nevertheless, unpredictability was always part of film festivals. As Mrs Emery mentioned in these events always something can go wrong.

Taking into consideration the literature review, and most specifically Larson research (2011,2009) about innovation, it can be derived that film festivals organizers went through an emerging innovation process in order to deliver their events. The emerging innovation process occurs when the involved stakeholders react to changed circumstances. Also, Larson (2009) suggested that multiple external individuals and or organizations are taking part in the innovation process. Since the beginning of 2020, film festivals, alongside the rest of the world, have found themselves trapped in a twisted reality, that would not allow them to do things



the regular way. Therefore, they worked on finding alternatives ways and plausible solutions in order to keep existing.

Tree of the interviewees admitted that the pandemic crisis accelerated ideas and plans that they already had in their drawers. BendFilm Festival was tracking the careers and the progress of the festival's alumni and old participants by creating and regularly updating a database with links and sources, where the audience could see online their films. They made that to maintain and even foster the bond that had been created between the festival's audience and the filmmakers that presented their work on the BendFilm Festival. Mr Looby mentioned that they already planning to do more online programming. However, it seems that they were missing reliable tools. Mr Looby said that with two weeks, from the middle of March to the beginning of April, a wide range of online platforms popped up. These tools gave them curatorial flexibility to put their plans in motion.

The RIFF was positive about going online because this was a discussion even before COVID-19. Iceland had many towns and cities that they don't have movie theatres. Thus, finding a way to reach more people in the country was a constant demand for the festival team. The online platform Shift 72 allowed the festival to reach a larger audience and extent its program. The online platform gave them the flexibility to programme different films outside the festival dated and connect with the audience in a different way. Toward that direction and during the pandemic, the festival team came up with the initiative of "Cinema Bus", which also serves the purpose of reaching the audience in remote aeries of the country.

Being more digital was also a long-standing plan for the POFF. They wanted to expand their impact and 2020 gave them the opportunity to invest in online initiatives that they are about to develop even more in the next years. Their online investments go beyond online screenings. They aspire to create online hubs and gateways for film talent and film professionals. It could be said they laid the foundation for their future development.

All the other festivals mentioned that going online had unexpectedly positive results. They manage to expand their audience and penetrate new target groups. Mrs Nikolopoulou said some people attended the festivals, especial the DFT, for the first time. They were people that they had never visited the city of Thessaloniki and because the festival went online, they had the opportunity to attend and learn about it. These people are very keen to visit the festival in their physical space. GFF hit once again more than 41.000 viewers despite the fact their 2021 edition was fully online. At the same time, they experienced expansion on their social media. In 2020, BendFilm Festival had an audience from 37 different countries, while in the previous years their audience consisted of people from no more than three countries.

Despite the significant drop in physical attendances, 34.000 in 2020 compared to 70.000 in 2019, POFF announced the record number of 1600 accredited professionals across industry events and the film festival, which resulted in an estimated 101.833 physical and virtual attendances (POFF, 2021). This number also hit a new record for the festival. RIFF also experience a drop in attendance. However, Mrs Jóhannsdóttir mentioned that in 2020 the estimation of attendance was a difficult task, but the engagement with local communities was reinforced significantly. SFIFF was the most sceptical regarding the online presence of the festival, even though Mrs Hoe admitted that online content has great potential as a repository.

It is also worth mentioning that most of the festivals expanded their activities and program during the crisis. One of the reasons, that was mostly mentioned from Mrs Nikolopoulou and Mr Looby, was the urge of being close to the community and support them during the time of uncertainty. Drive-ins (BendFilm Festival, RIFF), year-round online cinemas (POFF), new sections (ex. Podcast section in TDF) are some examples.

#### 6.6.1 The paradox of going online

Going online had an impact on audience's and professionals' attendance. Regarding the audience screenings, most of the festivals had applied geo-blocking, which means that the films were available nationally. In parallel, because they were restrictions regarding travelling from country to country, most of the festival had no guests or international visitors. That fact made most of the festivals, local events instead of international events that attract visitors and professionals from all around the world. Mrs Jóhannsdóttir said that having such a local event with few and only local people, is something that they don't wish to do it again.

However, given that, hopefully, the restrictions will alleviate, it is yet to find out how the online presence of the festivals will affect the attraction of international audiences and guests, especially in smaller festivals.

#### 6.7 Future plan

Returning to cinemas and having physical gatherings is a constant demand and hope for all the interviewees.

Mrs Lökk, which seems to be the most enthusiastic supporter in integrating digital technology in film festivals, insists that physical event is essential to go on in the same way

that she is expressing her hope that film festivals will realize the importance of digitalization (Blaney, 2021, Rosser, 2020). At the same time, she declares that digital, at least for POFF, is here to stay. Everything that they have already done regarding the digital development of the festival, does not only apply for social distancing nor it's only because of 25<sup>th</sup> POFF and 20<sup>th</sup> Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event celebrations during 2021, it's a building up for the future that will affect the festival DNA. However, the festival will reinforce its presence in the city of Tallinn by creating the PÖFF Park, where trees planted will commemorate festival award-winners and famous filmmakers. That underlines, on one hand, the turn that the festival wants to take toward sustainability and harmonization with nature, a request that becomes imperative after the pandemic, and on the other, the close ties between the festival and the location.

For their upcoming edition, SGIFF is planning for a hybrid event, with any or few international guests. However, the online component would mostly be on the educational and industry sections of the festival. In long term, Mrs Hoe didn't express aspirations of embodied hybrid elements long term. GFF hopes to have a hybrid edition for 2022. However, if that wouldn't be possible Mrs Emery said they already have the know-how and the infrastructure to organize another virtual festival. In terms of hybridity in the film festival, she said that they see the value of online offering for certain target groups, however, she expresses the belief that the longevity of hybrid format will depend on audience demand.

Regarding their future plans, RIFF seems that they are no thinking of incorporating digital technology to a high degree. Although they will offer online screenings in their upcoming edition, they mostly working on extending the drive-in screening and organize better the tour of "Cinema Bus". A similar approach will follow the BendFilm Festival in its upcoming edition. They want to return to theatres and organize more drive-in screenings. However, they are keen on keeping their online presence. Nevertheless, Mr Lokk had already expressed in favour of the online present of the festival and the flexibility that it offers in scheduling Q & As and masterclass with notable guests. The organizers of TIFF and TDF are working in different scenarios for their upcoming editions, hoping they will be able to have in-person screenings and events. Mrs Nikolopoulou said what they are keeping from their experience during these years, is all the new knowledge and know-how, that in the future it would be probably useful in audience engagement.

## 7. Discussion

In this part, each of the research propositions will be discussed and it'll be associated with the thematics presented in the previous chapter. Furthermore, there will be an attempted to compare the propositions with previous studies.

P1: The crisis of Covid-19 fostered the digital transformation of film festivals. (6.1, 6.2, 6.6)

Indeed, the crisis of covid -19 forced film festivals to find alternative ways to perform their festival. Under significant pressure and constantly changing circumstances film festivals had to perform and survive. That process reflects Larson (2011) work about the emerging innovation process. Larson suggested that innovation occurs in a situation when the involved actors react to changed circumstances. This study revealed that film festival organizers had to modify their long followed, established strategies to adapt to the new circumstances. While some festivals were not pleased with that development, others managed to realise their long-standing plans, which were tied with digital technology. The integration of digital technology, although happened in different degree in each festival, it was inevitable and affected many different sections on the festival from screening to industrial events.

P2: During the years 2020 and 2021, film festivals found in a position to re-define themselves in a rapidly changing world. (6.3)

Although the crisis of covid-19 challenged the normality of film festivals and forced them to refrain from their typical operations, the study revealed that film festivals didn't try to re-define themselves. Internal factors of the festivals such as the profile and background define their strategies. Film festivals tried to perform and deliver the same festival in a different environment, namely the online environment. Despite the rapidly changing world, they endeavoured to maintain as much as possible the program and activities and adapted them to the new circumstances. The goals and character of the festivals remained the same.

P3: Digital technology helped film festivals reach multiple categories of audiences and engage with them in different ways (6.5, 6.6)

De Valck's (2008) and Bekker's (2015) suggested that online events on film festivals expand the exhibition and allow a festival to reach a global audience. This study revealed that the majority of the festivals experience an expansion of their audience. Festival organizers said that we're able to reach an audience that otherwise they could attend the festival (ex.

They live in a different city). Also in some cases, festivals managed to reach people they didn't know about the existence of the festivals. That expansion of the audience was not limited to screenings. Many organizers admitted that hybrid format increases and ease the participation of industry professionals.

Regarding the engagement with the audience, although Bekker (2015) concluded that the online environment cannot foster new ways of interaction and vibrant online communities. The finding of this study, tend to support Brunow (2020) claim that a sense of community can be created in an online environment. The festivals manage to find a suitable way to engage with their audience and the audience were keen to participate.

However, this study could not define adequately whether the aesthetic practices proposed by De Molli, Mengis and, van Marrewijk (2019) were followed in the hybrid or the online format of the festivals, it seems that most of the festivals could not define their centre of the experience. Even though, some festival manages to use the festival places and venues to create a festival atmosphere and therefore engage with their audience offline and online.

P4: To deal with the crisis film festivals had to collaborate with different stakeholders. (6.2, 6.4, 6.5)

In order to deliver their product festival organizers, they came up with innovative solutions that they may have never be able to execute without the contribution of other actors. Without the development of relevant online tools, namely online screening platforms that provide flexibility, film festivals probably won't be able to embrace hybrid or fully online strategies. As Larson (2009) suggested the innovation process in festivals required the cooperation of different stakeholders. This study pointed out that the collaboration of film festivals with companies that provide online streaming platforms lead to the development of film festival hybrid form. However, the study also revealed that multiple collaborations occurred within the festival network during the crisis.

Film festivals had to collaborate with directors and distributions agencies to stream the films online. In those terms, film festivals also had to collaborate with each other to foster a discussion about setting new regulations in the audio-visual sector regarding the use of digital technology and online streaming. Furthermore, festivals interact with the audience and with other film festival professionals to create a festival atmosphere and deliver many of their activities online.

Also, as both Larson (2009) and Peranson (2008) film festivals found inspirations for innovation on other festivals. They looked at the strategies and tools that other similar festivals used in order to define what is better for their case.

P5: Film festivals will embrace digital technology and hybrid form even more in their delivery process (6.7)

Although Wirtz and Lovelock (2016) suggested that new technology will offer new opportunities in service innovation and will improve customers' experience, in the context of film festivals, the study indicates that film festivals that were already keen on going online and integrating technology in their delivery process, even before covid, is more possible to keep the hybrid element in their festivals. The others are still sceptical, or they simply don't know yet. Even though all the festivals had positive outcomes from integrating digital technology and hybrid elements in their editions, apparently, it is too early for this proposition to be answered clearly.

All the film festivals are about to return to their normality whenever that will be possible. Organizing a physical festival is a constant demand and festivals are hoping for that. The festival space, as De Valck (2008) suggested, is still vital for film festivals and offline events add value to the festival.



## 8. Conclusion

With the crisis of covid-19 being still on is yet to know how deeply the film festival industry will be affected and how permanent the effect will be. This study attempted to take a gander into the strategies that festivals followed, reflect the reactions of film festivals organized in terms of incorporating digital technology in their events and identify challenges and potential opportunities. The in-depth interviews with festival organizers allowed the collection of rich data.

To the present moment, most of the film festivals around the world are preparing their second or even their third edition in the Covid-19 era. Having passed through the first wave of crisis, film festivals are now used to the uncertainty, and they learned to design their activities recognising uncertainty as their main constant. Being armed with brand new know-how and tools, which is expected to make the hybridization process easier in the future, film festivals work towards multiple scenarios to ensure that their editions will be released.

However, the current study revealed that it is not only the external factors that impact the process of hybridization of film festivals, thought digital technology, namely the availability of tools, know-how and timing. The internal environment of film festivals plays a key role in integrating digital technology and, to an extent, maintaining hybrid elements in the festival. The reactions of organizers in the crisis and the solutions that they choose, reflected, to some degree, the profile, the history and the goals of the festival.

Although the study endeavoured to draw general conclusions from a limited number of film festivals, it seems that the uniqueness of each festival took over. Every festival has a unique atmosphere which is determined by multiple factors. Despite the similarities in strategies and tools, each festival maintains its uniqueness in an online environment and finds its own ways to connect with the audience and, sometimes, as the study showed, with the physical location itself.

Pandemic acted as a catalyst for innovation, cooperation, and creativity. In some cases, the crisis accelerated long-standing plans that film festivals had, while other festivals were more sceptical and conservative regarding digital technology. However, according to this study, all the examined organizers experienced, to some degree, the positive ramifications of hybrid form. As Wirtz and Lovelock (2016) suggested the digital technology bring opportunities to the customers' experience. Also, the online exhibitions expanded in most of the cases the audience of the festivals, as de Valck's (2008) and Bekker's (2015) indicated. Nonetheless, not all the festival organizers are comfortable with incorporating hybrid



elements in long term. This is a discussion that is about to open once and if the crisis is over. Because, for now, it seems that hybrid form is a necessity. The film festivals need to exist in both online and offline environments, despite the favouritism for the first and the vivid contrast between them. Nevertheless, de Valck's (2008) and Bekker's (2015) have already insinuated that online and offline events in film festivals are complementary.

Accordingly, the study suggests the perception of digitalization of film festivals in terms of digital present and online screening as an extension of film festival activities. It seems that the dipole between online and offline is still strong. However, by analysing the strategies of the festivals, the dipole is not exhausted in online vs offline screening, but it extended into the broad concept of virtual and "physical" experience. The festivals transferred online not only their – or part of their- screenings but also a plethora of other activities that are mostly industry and education-oriented. Since festival organizers insist that in-person experience is irreplaceable, it seems anticlimactic to assert the binary of analogue vs digital. Instead, it is relevant to discuss about different or complimentary experiences rather than opposites. Thus, the hybrid form should be perceived as an expansion of film festivals and an alternative way of engagement.

## 8.1 Further research

The hybrid form of film festival arises as a response to the pandemic, thus there are a number of gaps in our knowledge around the implementation is that form and the perceptions of different stockholders. It would be interesting to further research audience perception on the hybrid format. Market research will help festivals to better design their online products and identify their target groups. Similarly, it would be interesting to investigate the professional perspectives on the digital expansion of film festivals. How are the directors and the distributors affected by this development? Are the fundings of film festivals (ex. sponsorships) affected by hybrid form?

Furthermore, since the online environment is relatively new for the film festivals it would be interesting a study that would focus on the online experience and how that product could add value to the film festival. Also, it would be interesting to use the framework of De Molli, Mengis and, van Marrewijk (2019) and explore who the atmosphere is created in an online environment.

Also, regarding the longevity of hybrid form and how this crisis affected the film festivals, it would be interesting to return to the same festivals after several years and investigate how

their format changed. What hybrid elements are incorporated and how did this experience change their perception and their working process?

## 8.2 Limitations

### 8.2.1 Sample Size

Although the study tried to include film festivals from all over the world, some areas were not represented, such as Africa and Australia. Also, the number of examined film festivals is limited to seven. A broader sample may have resulted in more enriched data and conclusions. Furthermore, each organizational team were represented by one interview. More interviews may have added different perspectives from the same strategy.

### 8.2.2 Time

Another limitation of the research was the short time period available for the interviewing process. In order to communicate with the person of interest for each festival takes time, while the scheduling of the interview is set up mainly according to the availability of the interviewee. That had also an impact on the number of interviews that had been taken from each festival.

### 8.2.3 Data Collection Process

Since the data analysis started elaborately after the last interview, which took place at the end of June, the margin for follow up questions was significantly limited. Also, some festivals do not publish final reports for their editions nor reveal detailed information regarding matters, such as investments, audiences' attendance, social media etc.

### 8.2.4 Lack of previous research studies

Although film festivals as an academic topic are developed rapidly, the topic of hybridity, as it popped up during the crisis of covid-19, is new. The problems that film festivals had to overcome during the pandemic were novel and, thus, the researchers didn't have an adequate number of examples and data.

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## Appendices

### A. We are one: A Global Film Festival

<b>Canceled</b>	<b>Film festivals that canceled their edition during 2020, or even if they pull out some events, they didn't count their edition.</b>
<b>Annecy Film festival</b>	Annecy 2020 was an online version however they'll celebrate their 60 <sup>th</sup> edition in 2021 instead of 2020
<b>Festival de Cannes</b>	In 2020 the festival canceled hosting only some events in collaboration with the Cannes City Hall in October. In 2021, the festival pushed the dates and took place in July in-person, instead of May
<b>Marrakech International Film Festival</b>	It cancelled its festival component and moved its industry-focused Atlas Workshops online
<b>Mumbai Film festival</b>	They postponed 2020's edition for to 2021. However, they announced their official selection, and they continue their digital platforms
<b>Karlovy Vary International Film Festival</b>	They hosted a shortened event scheduled for 18–21 November, which will not be counted as an official edition of the festival (being promoted as the 54th and-a-half edition)
<b>Tribeca</b>	They cancelled their 19 <sup>th</sup> edition, and they hosted some digital events throughout the year.
<b>Hybrid Format</b>	<b>Film Festival that had both online and in-person present</b>
<b>BFI London film festival</b>	Hybrid event with screening in cinemas across the country

<b>Locarno Film Festival</b>	They named their special hybrid event “For the Future of Films”.
<b>New York Film Festival</b>	They hosted virtual and drive-in screenings.
<b>Guadalajara Film Fest</b>	It went hybrid
<b>Sundance</b>	The edition of 2020 took place pre-covid. The edition of 2021 was hybrid with screening in a lot of cities.
<b>Toronto international film festival</b>	hybrid event with physical screenings and drive-ins, digital screenings, virtual red carpets, press conferences, and industry talks
<b>Fully Online</b>	<b>Film festivals transferred all of their activities online</b>
<b>International Film Festival of Macao</b>	The 5 <sup>th</sup> edition of the festival moved online with the platform shift 72
<b>Sarajevo Film Festival</b>	Moved online the last minutes
<b>Two-parts festival</b>	<b>Film Festivals that split their editions into two parts which took place in different month.</b>
<b>Rotterdam Film festival</b>	The edition of 2020 was pre-covid. The edition of 2021 was a hybrid event that took place in two parts. The first in February and the second in June.
<b>In-person</b>	<b>Festivals that manage to host an inperson festival in accordance with official state and health directives. These festivals didn’t or hardly sift some of their activities online</b>
<b>Jerusalem Film Festival</b>	They push the dates
<b>San Sebastian Film festival</b>	Their edition cannot be considered as hybrid because their hardly moved any of their activities online.
<b>Tokyo International Film Festival</b>	It pushed the dates to host host physical screenings in Tokyo theatres
<b>Venice Film festival</b>	They manage to host a physical event, however the festival offer online screening through their platform many years.

## B. Interview Guideline

# FILM FESTIVAL TOWARDS A HYBRID FORM CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Eleni Papadopoulou Melea  
University of Glasgow, University of Malta, ISCTE –  
Lisbon University Institute

Semi-structured interview outline for X Film Festival

1. How did your team manage to go through last year crisis and the restrictions because of the covid?
2. Do you think that the crisis and the challenges that you faced, have brought innovative/creative ideas on how to deliver the film festival?
3. Were you positive about the possibility of an online/hybrid film festival edition? What was your main concern regarding a hybrid film festival?
4. What was different in your hybrid/online edition?
5. Do you think that the hybrid format of the film festival contaminated the film festival experience? From your recent experience do you believe the film festival atmosphere can be maintained online?
6. What went the best and what was the biggest challenge when you went hybrid/fully online?
7. Overall, your hybrid edition went better or worst than you expected?
8. Did you learn something from your hybrid edition that you are going to follow in the future?
9. Do you think that the 2020's crisis fostered a regeneration of the film festival product?
10. What is your plan for the upcoming edition?

## C. Data analysis: Presentation of the Festivals

## C.1. Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF) and Thessaloniki Documentary Festival (TDF), Greece

### Interview with Mrs Dimitra Nikolopoulou, Head of Communication

Thessaloniki International Film Festival is organized by the Thessaloniki film festival organization, and it is Greece's main state-sponsored film festival. Founded in 1960 run for six editions as "Greek Cinema Week" as a national event to foster the Greek cinema. De Valck (2007) already recognize that national consideration was prominent in European Festivals until 1968. TIFF entered into international film festival circuits in 1992 by firmly establishing a strong international competition. Papadimitriou (2016) breaks down the long and turbulent history of TIFF into four periods. The first is until 1966 where the festival started more as a Greek-focuses event to end with the first feature-length international competition. Then, it was the years of dictatorship where cancellations and alternations occurred. The third period was, once again, nation-focused and led to the post-1992 period, where international competition gradually dominated the national one.

In 1999 Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, administrated by Thessaloniki International Film Festival, was launched. TDF is one of the leading festivals globally and part of the Documentary Feature Qualifying Festival List of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The TDF aims to promote and introduce the most important documentary production from all around the world and provide an international platform for networking, exhibition and discussion of emerging trends.

Both festivals host competitions sections, national and international, they welcome plenty of guests, they organize a plethora of industrial events and events for professionals, as well as masterclasses, open discussions, art exhibitions, socializing events and parties. Both festivals are taking place in the city of Thessaloniki in Greece, TIFF takes place ten days at the end of November, while TDF ten days at the end of March.

That means that 22th TDF was one of the first European film festivals, or events globally, that had to deal with the unexpected circumstances that Covid brought. At the beginning of March 2020, weeks before the official opening of the festival TDF announce that it push days, prioritizing the public health and the safety of all involved parts.

However, Mrs Nikolopoulou, Head of Communication of the festivals, pointed out that it was essential to maintain the "Agora" part as it was. The "Agora" is an international meeting and trading event, which focus on the countries of Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean region. The team believed that the projects that are about to be presented

and supported at the Agora section carried a topicality that should be ignored or passed by. They decided to move the whole event online in no time. While the screenings and the artistic part of the festival were postponed for the May of 2020, the development part of the festival took place as usual and, 22nd TDF became probably the very first film festival that hosted film market and professional events fully online (TIFF, 2020).

Mrs Nikolopoulou describes all this process of altering the initial plans as *terra incognita* because by that time no other film festival in Europe and probably in the world had this kind of dilemma, by this time, no other festival had decided not to hold a physical event because of the Covid. There was no other example to follow and, that according to Mrs Nikolopoulou, was a challenge. Other challenge and concerns that the team had to deal with was: “How can we move the festival, as we know it, online without missing a beat”, “How on the online format can we bring the audience, which follows and support the festival for many years, close to the festival as usual?”, “How can we engage with the audience, the professionals and the artists?”. The other challenge was what tools should be used. Since the TDF was coincident with the first wave of the pandemic in Europe and in Greece, the variety of tools, that now are widespread, were limited. When I asked Mrs Nikolopoulou about that, her answer was honest as she admitted that because it was something completely novel to them, they searched a lot, and they tried everything to find out what works better. They communicated with platforms, and they reinforced and enriched their YouTube channel. While the team was trying to find a proper way to deliver a film festival online, Greece went into hard lockdown. That triggered the team to move fast and organize online events and actions to motivate and cheer up the audience. They collaborate with Festival Scope by having free screening and, they invited directors, Greek and foreigners, to create a short film in their home, submitting their cinematic commentary on the unprecedented situation we are experiencing.

The first online of 22nd TDF was free and the films were available only from Greece. The team chose to offer the program of the festival out of charge to support both the culture and the people, that went through an unprecedented situation in a changing world.

For the 61st TIFF in November 2020, the team had several scenarios ready hoping for some kind of physical screening. However, the window was small, and all the parts of the festival went online. The team had already the know-how and the reflexes. However, the festival team decided to interact and connect with the audience in the public space by respecting the government's restrictions. It was the period when residence had to send text messages to a hotline whenever they leave their homes. Small walks and exercises around

your home were allowed, so the festival transferred some of the events and exhibitions in the public space through installations and banners.

The outcome of both 22th TDF and 61th TIFF was successful according to the organizers, who did not know what to expect. The professionals even from the beginning of this situation were willing to participate in the online events and none of the guests cancelled their participation. Also, the response of the audience was, according to the organizers overwhelming. The majority of screenings were sold out, while all the masterclass and the sections such as “Meet the Future” were perceived with great enthusiasm. That proves, according to the organizers, that these kinds of actions and events were much needed.

Regarding if and/or how the festival atmosphere can be preserved in an online environment Mrs Nikolopoulos, said that the festival atmosphere, as we know, cannot be maintained online as it is. However, she suggests that it is possible to simulate and create a festival atmosphere in the virtual environment. For TDF and TIFF, the alternative was to be active on social media and launch large social media campaigns. They created content from different occasions such as the events and the installations on the public space and they share it online, trying to recreate part of the festival atmosphere. Also, the live chat on YouTube events engaged the audience as well as the online workshops.

Although the team of the TIFF and TDF strongly believe that the natural space of films is the cinemas, they never occur to them to cancel any edition of any festivals. The moto of the 61st TIFF was “Cinema in every way” and while the organizers remained faithful to that (by going online and not letting the movies go unseen), they didn’t miss the opportunity to make a statement that contributed to the (online) festival atmosphere, engaged the audience and remained that cinemas and communal viewing will always be the essence of the festivals. In the opening of the 61st TIFF a symbolic closed-door screening of the opening film, with no audience has been taken place. That event had a great impact on the audience.

These online editions led up to the 23rd Thessaloniki Documentary Festival that took place as an extended edition. On March 2021, the festival’s original dates, some online screenings and events were hosted, while at the end of June, the festival managed to host a hybrid event with screening both online and in-person, organizing open air and indoors screenings. Also, the Agora section took place during summer as a hybrid event. Mrs Nikolopoulou mentioned that the festival even managed to expand its program by adding a podcast section, which received acclaim from the audience and attract many participants.

For the 62nd TIFF, which is imminent, the organized hope for an in-person edition, because the need for the in-person connectivity and celebration is internal. However, the

team is already experienced and has developed know-how that allows them to be adaptable. This knowledge will be used in the future, as Mrs Nikolopoulo mentioned, to reach different target groups of the audience (ex. groups that are not in the city or for some reason they cannot participate physically). The organizers observed straight from the beginning, that the online versions attracted people that they never heard before about Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, and because of their positive online experience, have put TDF on their list.

## C.2. Reykjavík International Film Festival (RIFF), Iceland

Interview with Mrs Auður Elísabet Jóhannsdóttir, Festival Producer

Reykjavík International Film Festival is Iceland's major annual film event which takes place from the end of September to the beginning of October over the span of 11 days. Launched in 2004, the festival has expanded through the years. RIFF is an independent non-profit organization, founded by a small group of film professionals and film enthusiasts, with the aim of showcasing progressive films, encouraging filmmaking innovation, fostering social and cultural dialogue, and developing global networking among professionals (The History - RIFF, n.d.)

Nowadays, RIFF includes around 100 titles, with a focus on innovative, independent, and arthouse work. It also highlights the work of young and emerging moviemakers by presenting their first/second works in the category New Vision. The festival is divided into many categories, which underlines the large and diverse program that presents each year. RIFF's program also includes panels, lectures, debates, exhibitions and parties. RIFF each year host many notable guests and receives international visitors.

Other important parts of the festival are the educational programs and the Industry Days.

The educational programs include the Children & Youth Program that offers students a free children's program consisting of European short films, which are divided into categories for children of different ages, from 4 to 16 years old. Each category contains several short videos as well as supplementary material to aid the supervisor's conversation with the students. Girls Film! Is a week-long course that aims to fill the genre gap that there is in the film industry that appears the girls to be less film educated and adventurous. The program, which is addressed to the young girls and those who identify themselves as girls (ages 14-15), had already been held three times (2015, 2016, and 2020). Mrs Jóhannsdóttir, Producer of the RIFF, during our interview was pleased that they manage to secure a grand and therefore

they'll be able to offer this empowering workshop to more girls around the country. Last two years, RIFF has also teamed up with junior colleges in Reykjavik and they give the students an opportunity to take an active part in the film industry, under the guidance of experts in the field. RIFF and Reykjavik Talent lab aims to foster youth filmmaking, creativity and connectivity. The latter did not been held during the 17th edition of the festival, while the first went online and hosted many international mentors (Educational Programs - RIFF, nd)

RIFF Industry Days is a series of events where professionals and emerging talents connect, come together and exchange knowledge, experience, and ideas. Industry Days which include events such as RIFF Talks, Producers Day, A Hub for Youth Talents, Work in Progress showcase (WIP), Nordic Panels and The Icelandic Market Forum (IMF) (Industry days - RIFF, n.d.)aim to foster networking and promote of the Icelandic film industry. During 2020, the Industries Days took place in a hybrid form involving both online and on-site activities in Nordic House. Mrs Jóhannsdóttir estimates that around 35 professionals participated in the in-person events. However, the majority of the events was live-streamed on the festival's media channels, mostly Facebook.

However, the industry event was not the only part of the festival that underwent alterations in order to meet the restrictions of the pandemic. The 17th RIFF that took place from September 24th to October 4th went hybrid and, the team was very positive about that. The 17th still hosted some in-person screenings at Bíó Paradís and the Nordic House. Also, it hosted some special screenings in places such as the Icelandic Phallogological Museum because, as Msr Jóhannsdóttir said, sometimes films choose where they will be screened. In parallel, the festival offered the majority of its program online, through the platform Festival Scope. While the first contract was for only three months, they decided to prolong it for a whole year and, that help them extend their online presence. The reason they could offer their total program online was that distributors of big films such as Nomandland opted for a theatrical release. In that case, the festival followed the initial agreement.

Part of the educational programs also went online last year. Film literacy is one of the core missions of the festival as Mrs Jóhannsdóttir admitted and is probably the part they want to develop more. For that reason, they tried and succeeded to increase the found of the Film Girl! Initiative.

Regarding, the Children & Youth Program in previous festival's editions the classes used to come to the theatre. That was limited to the capital. During the 17th edition the organizers uploaded the short movies on Vimeo with a password and along with some educational materials were accessible to the teachers to use in the class. The festival systematically



promoted that program to schools all over the country and, the result was to reach a great number of schools and students.

Another initiative that developed and came to a realization, during 2020, was the Cinema Bus. The Cinema Bus is a well-equipped vehicle that travels all over the country and allows outdoors and drive-in screenings. That initiative comes in line with the willingness of the festival to reach more children and families in their hometowns. Plus, Cinema Bus promotes equal access to high-quality art and contribute to enhancing film culture all over the country and foster film literacy. The bus used to make three screenings per day. In the morning, it was screening the children's program at schools. Students could walk on the bus see movies and have some talk. In the afternoon it was parked in town centres for people to hang out after work in a family-friendly screening. In the evening, the bus was set for a drive-in. In its first tour around Iceland, that bus made stops in seven towns and the response of the local community was encouraging.

It is worth mentioning that from the conception of the idea of "Cinema Bus" until the set up only took eight weeks. Mrs Jóhannsdóttir said that they didn't have the budget, but their designers manage to create designs that attract the interest of sponsors.

RIFF is also a festival very attached to the city. As the organizers say RIFF has become one of the cornerstones of international film festivals and visitors come among others to experience the unique landscape. When the festival went hybrid, I wonder how the festival atmosphere was affected.

Mrs Jóhannsdóttir said that the biggest difference that 17th editions had compared to the previous ones was the absence of foreign guests. It was a decision that the festival deliberately made. However, because the festival hosted some in-person events and screenings, the festival atmosphere on location was there. The city was decorated and evidence of the festival such as flags and signatures letters were spread all over. Also, bars were open, however, the event became primary local because of the lack of international guests and visitors.

Regarding the virtual part of the festival, the organizers made an effort to maintain the communication channel between the audience and the international guests open. They made all the Q & As remotely and they make them available to the public. Also, directors have been asked to introduce their film or send a message to the audience, so they could involve and engage to the maximum degree. Furthermore, the festival suggested the people who use the online platform organize a movie night in every way they want and motivated them to share their online festival experience on social media. Mrs Jóhannsdóttir admitted that this initiative

could be bigger, however, the outcome was endearing, as people shared how they set up their screenings at home or how they manage to make the drive-in experience more memorable and comfortable by bringing pillows and other stuff. That shows that the audience tried to create its atmosphere and also had the need to share by contributing to a general online atmosphere.

The crisis of Covid allowed RIFF to focus on something they have been discussed for a long time, how to reach people that do not live in the capital, how they can expand their audience and bring the festival in town and cities that do not operate a theatre, how they can reach, teach and motivate as many children as possible. Their collaboration with Festival Scope gave them the flexibility to bring movies to people houses, Cinema bus initiative allowed them to bring the festival atmosphere and program to all over the country and the grand they receive permit them to expand their educational programs.

Their plan for the future and their upcoming edition is to go through a festival and having 11 days full of in-person screening and events. However, they want to maintain and even expand all the initiatives that developed during the covid crisis. Although they consider the 17th edition successful and insightful, they wish for a more international event in future. The local character of the previous editions, although could be avoided at the current time, is something that deliberately, will avoid in the future.

### C.3. BendFilm Festival, USA

#### Interview with Mr Todd Looby, Executive Director

BendFilm Festival is a non-profit film festival specializing in an independent film that during 2021 will launch its 18th edition. This independent Oregon film festival is located in the town of Bend and occurs for four days every October; however, it hosts year-round events and operates a microcinema. In a typical year, 6.000 individuals and more than 120 guests attend the festival, which is spread all over the city and hosted in several local theatres including a historic movie theatre downtown, a state-of-the-art cinema and inside a craft brewery.

BendFilm Festival is an annual urban event that engages the city to the maximum degree and has a strong sense of community. Although the festival does not have a specific market film section, attracts many professionals and provides a platform to showcase films from emerging filmmakers and make valuable industry connections with powerful distributors, producers, programmers, and critics. Furthermore, the festival hosts the initiative First

Feature. In the First Feature program, notable movie makers present their very first movies, talk about the trials and tribulations of creating their first feature and lead a discussion with festival filmmakers who are presenting their first films at the BendFilm Festival that year (News - BENDFILM, 2021).

The "Movie Maker" magazine talks about "the laid-back vibe of BendFilm" (Ralske, Weed and MM Editors, 2019) mentioning that the small size of the festival allows the first-time moviemakers to socialize and hang out with the more established in a way that big festivals do not. The same source in another article points out that BendFilm Festival has been a hybrid festival since 2016 (Coleman, 2021). When I asked Todd Looby, executive director of BendFilm Festival, he said that that was not quite accurate. They are positive about the possibilities that online provides, they have done a lot of things online and they were interested in online programming even before Covid hit.

One of the things that the festival team used to do is keep track of the festival alumni and create a database with links from YouTube, Vimeo even Netflix and Amazon. That database was distributed to the fans of the festival to be able to see online the films, and the general development of the filmmakers that were loved, learned and got connect throughout the BendFilm Festival. The purpose was to preserve and develop the bond between the festival's audience and the moviemakers.

The first wave of Covid, in early March 2020, found the team of BendFilm finalizing the new event—the Indie Womxn Film Festival (Ristow, 2020). However, after the first shock, the team manage to find again their step and take action having in the centre of their planning the community engagement and the independent films. Ms Todd says that when Covid hit and the demand for the different online content increased considerably overnight, in parallel the gap of reliable platforms that can support online events and streaming became evident. Within weeks different platforms developed that allowed small and medium-sized organizations to put films online. The BentFilm Festival had already a multi-year collaboration with the ticketing platform Eventive, which offer specialized solutions and try to empower the indie film ecosystem. Eventive expanded its service by offering virtual cinema solutions and, BendFilm Festival became the second festival that used their platform.

A series of online events, that are triggered by topicality, such as George Floyd's death, engage the community. During the summer, when the economy gradually reopened, the festival managed to host socially distant screenings and drive-ins. These led up to the hybrid version of the 17th BendFilm Festival in October. The hybrid version included the virtual festival through the Eventive, online conversations, panels, Q & As and drive-in screenings.

Since BendFilm Festival is an urban festival, tied with its locations, I asked how and at what point the team managed to preserve the festival atmosphere during the hybrid edition. Mr Todd admitted that “was the important part” and that they had to “make it exciting”. The BendFilm Festival focused on increasing the amount of Q and A's they host. Mr Todd pointed out that usually approximately 70 of the films are represented during the festival, while now with technology and since the filmmakers don't have to travel, it was possible to schedule the Q&A's whenever it was more convenient. That fact also allowed the festival to invite notable professionals to take part in their panels. These people usually had tied schedules and, it was impossible to travel for the whole weekend in the festival. The online possibility redefines their availability. That allowed BendFilm Festival to expand its workshop and educational programs. According to Mr Todd, the logistics were easier than doing an in-person version. In parallel, he believes that an online version does not have a budget consideration. At least that was the case for their festival.

Exempt from the logistics, another part that went better than expected during the hybrid edition was the audience expansion. Usually, the festival audience consisted of people from 35 states and no more than three countries, while during 2020 they reach people from more than 40 states and 37 countries. Furthermore, because of the online rental library that the festival created, where conversations and recorded panels also can be found, the audience continues interacting with the festival.

For their upcoming edition in October 2021, BendFilm Festival want to return to the theatres. Probably this year venues would be less than in a typical. However, the online and the drive-in remain. Even though the festival count on social interactions, since it is one of their main characteristics, Mr Todd told with enthusiasm about the potential of hosting from now on the workshops online. Because that could reinforce both the audience and professionals' engagement and participation.

The case of the BendFilm festival was very interesting because it chose to remain optimistic and took the opportunity to realize some of its backburning plans. The team always wanted to put the festival online and reach a greater amount of audience, however, it seems they were lacking tools. Covid accelerated the development of relevant platforms, such as the Eventive, and organizations such as BendFilm Festival seize the opportunity.

#### C.4. Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (POFF), Estonia

Interview with Mrs Tiina Loka, Festival Director

Tallinn Black Night Film Festival, also known as PÖFF, is an annual film festival held, usually, in November and last two weeks. Launched in 1997, PÖFF has grown into one of the biggest film festivals in Northern Europe. When the festival was started by Tiina Lokk, the Estonian film sector was practically non-existing. The country had just regained its independence and, the reform in all aspects of the country had already begun. However, the cinema sector had fallen into decay. The only remaining cinemas in the country only screened U.S. blockbusters or Chinese Kung Fu fighting films (Roxborough, 2021).

Under these circumstances, Black Nights was Lokk's last attempt to regenerate cinema culture in Estonia, which was considered as a "shutting up shop". In the first edition of the festival, 28 films were screened mostly Scandinavian films, with some French and German titles. The festival was more like a celebration of off-Hollywood cinema, and the goal was to nurture the audience appetite for international cinema and a better cinema experience in theatres (Roxborough, 2021). Regardless of the first suspicions and doubts, especially from the city government and ministry of culture, the audience, and the film fans, which were longing for this kind of cinema, embraced the initiative that grown to the same level with major European film festivals, such as Venice, Cannes and Berlin. In 2014, PÖFF was recognised as one of the 15 A-category film festivals by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations FIAPF.

Thought the years the core mission of the festival remains the same. The introduction of European and international cinema to Estonian viewers and therefore foster the art of cinema in Estonia is the essence of the festival. However, PÖFF put in its agenda the promotion of Estonian productions and the encouragement of international dialogue and networking of cinema professionals. To meet these goals, the festival developed its program by adding a plethora of side events and sections. In parallel with the acclaimed main festival, which includes plenty of thematic programs and competitions, such as the international main competitions and the Estonian film competitions, two sub-festivals are taking place. PÖFF Shorts is one of the biggest international short film and animation festivals in the Nordic region. It is an Academy Award and Bafta qualifying festival and member of the European Film Academy. However, the biggest sub-festival of PÖFF is the Youth and Children's Film Festival Just Film. Focusing on the age group 13–25-year-olds, Just Film aims to show kids diverse aspect of society and help become more understanding, tolerant and empathic. Towards that, Just Film collaborates closely with schools and teachers in Estonia, by providing educational materials and quality films.

Alongside the main and the sub festivals, the team of POFF organizes some side-festivals: the POFF Tartu, where a selection of the main and sub festivals are screened in art houses and cinemas in Tartu, which is the second biggest city in Estonia, the Haapsalu Horror & Fantasy Film Festival (HÖFF) is an independent gender film festival that takes place every August in Tallinn.

However, one of the most important and ever-expanding sections of the POFF is the Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event. Introduced some years after the first edition of the festival the Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event is a multi-day event that takes place during the POFF. It aims to serve as a business platform for the global audiovisual industry. According to the POFF reports, Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event has increased its popularity in the last few years. The event has increased both its numbers and its program, by 25% year-on-year (POFF,2021). In the years 2020 and 2021 the development of the industry activities of the festival did not stop, despite the shift to virtual.

Since the POFF take place in November, the organizers had some time to adapt their upcoming editions to the new reality that emerged in spring 2020. Even though a physical event was essential to go on, according to Mrs Lokk, festival director of POFF, the team was very positive in integrating digital technology into their festival. Mrs Lokk admits that incorporating online tools in the festival and especially into the educational initiatives was a long-term goal. Given that, in the case of POFF, the virus challenged the team to think out of the box, accelerated plans that have been kept in the drawer, and put them in motion.

The 24th POFF that was held in November 2020, managed to have a hybrid format, just before the second wave of the pandemic hit Estonia. The festival hosted physical screenings, opening night and award ceremonies, which also broadcast online. Several Q and As went online, while many directors prepared virtual video greetings to introduce their films. The festival provided online screenings. Mrs Lokk mentioned that there was no need to build from scratch their platform. Instead, the team made extensive research on all kinds of online platforms that were already developed and available in the market. To cover their needs, POFF connected different features from different platforms to create a virtual environment that responded perfectly to their demands. Shift72 and Elisa Stage platforms were some of the online digital platforms that integrated into the hybrid POFF (POFF,2021).

Regarding the logistics, Mrs Lokk said that was complicated for multiple reasons. The schedule of social distance physical screenings and the program of the guests, that managed to arrive in the country were difficult tasks. Especially, the latter proved to be a real challenge, because the list of the guest was changeable because of the restrictions. Also, the festival had

set a strict protocol of safety for foreign guests. The hybrid format felt like organizing two festivals in two different environments: physical and virtual. And while the team is familiar with the physical environment, the virtual was new territory and the challenge laid on how they can transfer the physical festival experience to the virtual environment and how they would meet the expectations of multiple actors, from professionals to the audience.

Despite the hybrid format of the main festival, the organizers decided to move the Industry@Tallinn and Baltic Event completely online. That was a decision that as Mrs Loka revealed didn't regret. In 2019 the event attracted more than 600 accredited participants from 54, while in 2020 the event was attended by 880 online participants from 62 countries. The festival invested 75.000€ in the online development of Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event.

The last two years were considered as years of development for the POFF, especially for market and industry sections. In 2021, the POFF industry program participated and presented projects for the first time in Marché du Film 2021 at the Cannes festival under the program Goes To Cannes (POFF, 2021). Also, the festival rebranded and enhanced its educational programs under the Black Nights Discovery Campus, which brings together different aspects of the film and creative industries. The Black Nights Discovery Campus is consisting of online courses, live events, workshops and masterclasses by well-known, talented and awarded film professionals during the Black Nights Film Festival. However, in 2021 year-round online classes were launched which include interactive videos and one to one zoom meetings. Additionally, during 2020, the festival introduced another innovative project, the CREATIVE GATE or X-Road for films. The CREATIVE GATE or X-Road for films is an online place that connects and promote different kinds of services. The CREATIVE GATE or X-Road for films aspires to become a gateway for anyone interested in shooting in Estonia, by connecting existed databases.

For 2021-2022, the POFF plans to foster even more the market and industry sections' online development. Their estimated budget for the further development of Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event and Creative Gate is around 135,000€. This coincident with the anniversary of the 25th Black Night Film Festival and the 20th Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event. However, despite the online extension and development of the festival, the in-person experience in the theatres and the present in the city remains vital. For the 25th edition, the festival had agreed with the Tallinn city government, to establish an official PÖFF Park in the city, where every year trees planted will commemorate festival award-winners and famous filmmakers. This action also reflects the shift that festivals do towards organizing an environmentally friendly and sustainable event. That strategy will be followed in other aspects of the festival, such as in merchandising.

In various cases, Mrs Lokk has expressed her belief that virtual, at least for POFF, is here to stay. Their plans boldly underline that statement. As a film professional, she expresses the hope that, festivals will keep some of the activities and showcases online. In parallel, she believes that the physical event and the physical communication won't get overshadowed.

#### C.5. Singapore International Film Festival (SGIFF), Singapore

Interview with Mrs Emily J. Hoe, Executive Director

The Singapore International Film Festival is the largest and the longest established film event in Singapore. Founded in 1987 by Geoffrey Malone and L. Leland Whitney, the aim of SIFF is to provide a platform that encourage local filmmakers and a showcase for world and Asia cinema. The SIFF aim to provide access to international and local productions and foster film literacy for both films and film making process.

At the beginning the festival was designed as a biannual event with a focus on American productions. However, right from the second edition in 1989 the SIFF stated to shape a new identity as a annual event with strong strong Asian focus (Udhe & Udhe, 2010). The SGIFF became the first Asian international film festival to establish a competition section for Asian feature films and Singapore short films. The Silver Screen Award, which launched in 1991, was an effort to enhance the status of regional filmmakers by introduce and exposing their work to a global audience (Udhe & Udhe, 2010).

Over the years, the SGIFF has played an important role in the growth of the local film industry, the discovery of new talent and the raise of interest in Singapore's film history. The Silver Screen Award was considered as pivotal to that process, because it screens Singapore new short films, featutes, documentaries as well as retrospective films produced at the pinnacle of of Singapore's studio era in the 1940s to the 1970s (Udhe & Udhe, 2010). However, the history and the present of SGIFF was not smooth and constant all these years.

The Singapore International Film Festival did not release during 2012 and 2013 "due to financial and personnel woes" (CHAN, 2014). The festival previously known as SIFF, rebranded as SGIFF and introduced again in 2014 as part of the umbrella event, Singapore Media Festival, alongside ScreenSingapore, the Asia Television Forum and Market and the Asian Television Awards (CHAN, 2014). After a hiatus of two years, the Silver Screen Award re-introduced and formed three categories: for Asian feature films and South-east Asian and Singapore short films. The goal of the rebranded festival was to build up the legacy of the festival and regain the festival's status in the international film festival landscape. The building of international



relationship and network, the creation, and the education of a new generation of audience became core pillars of the festival, which except from screenings also organizes master classes, fringe events, industry discussions and awards ceremonies (History | Singapore International Film Festival, n.d.).

Zhang Wenjie , a former director of SIFF, who rejoined the festival team after its relaunch in 2014 declared in an article that to build an institution that last “it starts with a strong team” (CHAN, 2014). The last decade the SGIFF has suffered some difficulties, including the resignations of key persons, while it was trying to rebuild its reputation.

Emily J. Hoe, the executive director of SGIFF joined the team in April 2020, just before the circuit-breaker lockdown implied in country and everything go online in response to the coronavirus outbreak. She found herself trying to fit in a new team, establishing a rhythm and force a culture in an online environment. Plus, the team was constantly modified with people coming and go. Under these circumstances, the festival had to deliver plausible plans and alternatives for the organizations of the festival. The plans varied form, throwing a “normal”, in person festival, which soon became clear it was not possible, to cancel the festival at all, which also was the worst-case scenario.

Finally, the team decided in favour of a hybrid model, with in person screenings and event and partially online form. The program of the festival was downsized, including 70 films, instead of around 90. The aim of the organizers according to Mrs Hoe was to deliver a festival, that despite the conformation will echo the spirit and the ethos of the SGIFF. The main concern of the team was whether they would be able to create a program without any curatorial compromise. Mrs Hoe explained that when the festival announced the open call for entries, they were not sure about the outcome, because the local and international productions were also affected by the covid crisis. Also films from big productions houses kept pushing their release dates, trying to have their premier in theatres. That was also another issue that the festival had to deal with. They were not sure if the filmmakers, the agencies, and the distributors would allow only online, or both physical and online screenings. They directors having put a lot of effort of their film, they have envisioned their film to be screened in the theatres, in that cinematic environment and sound system. They want the audience to have this kind of experience, thus they were not willing to compromise with online exposition of their film. SGIFF having respect of the artistic vision of the filmmakers, never tried to change their mind.

However, one of the reasons that SGIFF could be faithful to the artistic vision of some directors and to the demands of distributors was the right timing. SGIFF was able to host

organise in person screenings, even with reduced capacity. They also manage to host opening night ceremony, that was divided into three screenings that run almost in parallel. The festival could throw a red carpet, even if that it was not as glorious as in previous editions. Despite the restrictions, the physical elements of the festival crafted for the audience, which in some cases had been in theatre for months, the notion of festival atmosphere.

Regarding the online part of the festival, the SGIFF extended the collaboration with the company the Projector, which has physical venues. The company developed the Projector Plus platform which offer the online screenings for the SGIFF. The online festival atmosphere, according to Mrs Hoe was much different and the outcome was not as the team expected. The organizers observed that the consumers behaviour was different when it came to online. In the case of SGIFF, the online audience tended to buy their tickets in last moment, driven by the belief that the tickets in a virtual screening are unlimited.

The part of festival that went mostly online, was the Film Academy, which is most industry oriented. The Film Academy is an initiative that aim on training and support Southeast Asian film talents, through workshops, programs, mentorship, and film literacy. One of the program academy's program, the Youth Jury & Critics Programme went hybrid as all the participance were in Singapore gathered in the same room, while the mentor was abroad and zoomed all the sessions. A lot of talks, session and panels were recorder and uploaded in festival YouTube channel. The award ceremonies were recorded, too. Also, Q & As were recorder.

For the next upcoming edition, the SGIFF is planning for a hybrid event. However, the hybrid form will mostly apply to Film Academy. Given that in the first hybrid edition, the organizers were not satisfied with the outcome of the online screenings, I asked if they expect any change in the customers behaviour. Do they believe that the audience will be familiar with the online screenings? Mrs Hoe estimated that probably the online fatigue will take over the audience that would yearn for social interaction as well as for the whole ritual of getting prepared a night in the cinema.

However, the festival team found that the recordings could hold a value as a repository of content. The creation of an online library could be useful for researched and the audience that would like to go deeper. The recording is something that the festival would like to continue, however that would be also matter of logistics and budget. Because, as Mrs Hoe claim, the recording itself would be easy, however in the post covid era when the Q & As would be in theatres, it is imperative to have the right equipment in every single venue.

## C.6. Glasgow Film Festival (GFF), UK

### Interview with Mrs Sarah Emery, Festival Coordinator

Glasgow Film Festival is an annual film festival that takes place in Glasgow, usually at the end of February, and lasts approximately ten days. The festival is part of Glasgow Film, a national centre for film and moving image media. Under the umbrella of Glasgow Film are, except GFF, Glasgow Film Theatre, the Glasgow Youth Film Festival, the Film Hub Scotland and Glasgow Film's Learning and Engagement programmes. Although GFF's main venue is Glasgow Film Theater, special festival events are spread all in urban venues around the city, such as in art galleries and at Glasgow Science Centre Planetarium. The festival aims to present new talent to the audience, showcase the best of Scottish film and offer a wide-ranging program that represents every corner of world cinema.

Established in 2005, the GFF has seen its attendances growing steadily thought-out the years. From 6000 attendances in their first edition, the festival scores figures above 40.00 since 2014 (Miller, 2014). The year 2021, when the festival went online, was not an exemption (GFF, 2021). Such a development has increased festival visibility and reputation and has placed it into the top three film festivals in the UK.

The GFF identify themselves as the "friendliest film festival on the planet" and their ultimate goal is to become one of the European major audience-oriented film festivals by building their reputation for an international programme of the world's best films. Audience and audiences experience is the core principle of the festival and the centre of the creative process. In 2015, the GFF introduced its first and only award that it is decided the audience of the festival. Through the award, the festival aims to support emerging filmmakers and help them present their first or second films to a wider audience.

One year after the launch of the Audience Award, the GFF introduced the GFF Industry Focus, which represent another important pillar of the festival. Industry Focus initiatives have developed through the years, and their activities are year-round. The aim is to create a hub, which is not limited to the festival, and establish connections and foster new ideas and talent. On the other hand, the GFF itself doesn't seem to have many educational programmes that addressed the youth, children, and schools. That could be explained, by the fact that the Glasgow Film has relevant educational programmes and the Glasgow Youth Film Festival. However, GFF tries to enhance its educational activity and, in 2020, it launched the initiative Young Selectors Programme, where young people aged 18-21 years old, are working behind

the scenes and learn about curation, potential careers in the film industry and content creation (Young Selectors | Glasgow Film Theatre, 2021).

The team of GFF has admitted that the festival has direct influences from Toronto International Film Festival and SXSW. From the first one, they appreciate its partnership approach, its support for grassroots movements and its focus on the audience, from the second are inspired by the fact that the event enhances Austin's cultural reputation, an area that was considered as a cultural outsider, and grow to become one of the coolest events in cultural calendar and one of the most important meetings for both music and film industry (History - Glasgow Film Festival | Glasgow Film Theatre, n.d.)

Given that, it does not come as a surprise, that when the restrictions became stricter, the organizers looked for inspirations in the strategies that other festivals followed. Sarah Emery, the Festival Coordinator of GFF, said that they looked at the form that other festivals, such BFI London Film Festival, implemented.

GFF was probably one of the last festivals that took place in person during 2020, just before the outburst of the pandemic. When they were planning their next editions, initially they were going for a hybrid edition, that would include screenings in their home cinema, at the Glasgow Film Theatre as well as in theatres all over the country. That version was similar to the model that BFI London Film Festival followed during 2020 and is about to follow in their next edition also. However, GFF wanted to have also an online platform, for two specific reasons. First, the capacity in cinemas would be reduced so they wanted to allow more audiences to see the movies, second, they needed a backup plan.

By the end of January 2021 due to the strict lockdown that the UK implemented, the organizers of GFF decided to go fully online. As Mrs Emery said, that although the team was disappointed by the development at the same time it was a relief, because now they had solid plans instead of uncertainty, and they could work towards that, so they can offer they can deliver the best possible version of the festival. One of their first concerns when they turned online, was that they may lose a lot of film from their program. However, Mrs Emery admitted they somehow got lucky. Because of the given circumstances, where the closure of cinemas gave no other options, directors were willing to allow their films to be part of an online festival.

GFF collaborated with the platform Shift 72, as they saw that it has been used by many festivals. GFF launched an online played in November, with a small selection of films. That trial session allowed both them and the audience to get familiar with that new settlement. Also, that rehearsal permitted the GFF team to experience how the platform works as well as the customers' journey on it. To offer a flawless experience to the audience, the team paid extra

attention to the technical issues that people at home may face. They created a beta video for the audience to check their setup before they buy a ticket. The team also set up an email address, which provided help and advice to customers that experience technical difficulties. That helped people feel more comfortable, as Mrs Emery said it was a handholding.

The GFF presented online a program of approximately 70 movies, and more than have of them had attached a Q & As. More than 70 filmmakers, producers and actors participated in them. Most of them were recorded through zoom. Other side events that were created around the films also gained audience attention (GFF, 2021). Some of them are the team-up of the festival with The Stayin Inn, a Glasgow based initiative that was created during the pandemic in March 2020 and run online events quizzes and the digital afterparty with Glasgow based DJ Nightwave, who featured in the documentary Underplayed. Regarding the Industry Days, Mrs Emery said that some parts weres live, while others were pre-recorded. The challenge, in this case, was how they would reproduce the networking and the chatting atmosphere that usually dominate this kind of event, in an online format. The organizers, choose to use the Gather Time app. This app, designed as an old version of a video game, allowed the host to create an environment that resembles your office or event space. The participants choose their avatar and browsing around. Whenever they are close to other people, their faces appeared on the screen and live conversations are unable. This format added an element of fun.

Social media channels were another part of the festival that bloomed during the online edition. According to Mrs Emery, although social media were always a core part of the communication of the festival and are constantly growing during the years, the numbers during 2021 were huge, especially on Twitter. On one hand, the festival used social media to engage and communicate with the audience, especially under these circumstances. On the other, the audience wanted to talk, engage, and share their experience through social media. People were sharing on Twitter and on Instagram, which also gained popularity during the online edition-although there weren't a lot of content from the festival's site, what they are doing, what they are watching and their film reviews. Also, the live Facebook event was popular, and people engaged. GFF was one of the first cultural events that took place, even remotely, at the beginning of the year and, Mrs Emery reckons that the audience was looking for something to take part in. That is why they were so active, enthusiastic, and creative on social media by creating an online community eager to get involved. An example is that for the opening night, a lot of people got dressed. They recreated and experienced the opening night at their own pace, and they shared it online. That was great motivation for the festival

team that it did not have any hunch about how this fully online edition will go and how the people will react to that.

However, it was not only the audience that had an altered experience of the festival. For the organizers was the first time they had to deliver a festival from their room, by sitting solely behind their computer. According to Mrs Emery, although that experience felt strange, the stress and intensity were the same. The team was diving into the unknown and, although the response of the audience was overwhelming, the cold reality is that in a festival, never everything is perfect. Mrs Emery recalled an incident that happened just before the closing night. It was a problem with the internet provider, and they felt unable of doing anything more than waiting for someone else to fix it. The total independence of the technology was one of the biggest challenges for the team.

For their next edition, GFF is hoping for a hybrid format, offering audience screenings in their home cinema and cinemas across the country. Their online platform, Glasgow Film at Home will continue in 2022 alongside a return the cinemas. What is still uncertain, according to Mrs Emery, is whether they can welcome guests or not in their upcoming edition. The organizers of GFF admit that there are positives from the online exposition, and many people have appreciated the online offering. However, Mrs Emery believes that the longevity of the hybrid format on a film festival will depend on the audience's demand and the availability of films. Regarding the logistics, Mrs Emery said that the hybrid model is like you run two festivals at the same time because physical and online are two different things. And that could be quite a challenge.